

# The 0.5 Generation: What Children Know about International Migration

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## ABSTRACT

This paper presents an analysis of 179 interviews with children who lived in the United States and then returned to Mexico following various itineraries. This article seeks to discover the knowledge children accumulate about international migration—i.e., what do they know about migration? All the interviewed children received part of their education in the United States; that is why this article classifies them as members of the *0.5 generation*. This definition allows the formulation of the question in a clearer manner: What knowledge of everyday life have children developed about international migration movements?

*Keywords:* 1. Mexico/U.S. migration, 2. migrant children, 3. deportation, 4. national affiliations, 5. return migration.

## La generación 0.5: lo que los niños saben sobre la migración internacional

### RESUMEN

El artículo presenta el análisis de 179 entrevistas a niños y niñas migrantes que vivieron en Estados Unidos y se encontraban en México habiendo seguido distintos itinerarios. El análisis busca responder a la pregunta: ¿qué saben los niños migrantes sobre la migración internacional? Por el hecho de que los niños llevaron a cabo una parte de su educación en Estados Unidos, nos referiremos a ellos como la *generación 0.5*. Tomando en consideración esta precisión, la pregunta a la que se consagra el análisis se formula de la siguiente manera: ¿cuáles son los contenidos del saber cotidiano de los niños miembros de la *generación 0.5* sobre la migración internacional?

*Palabras clave:* 1. migración México/Estados Unidos, 2. niños migrantes, 3. deportación, 4. afiliaciones nacionales, 5. migración de retorno.

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## *Introduction*

Child migrants are absent from the research and debate about international migration between Mexico and the United States—and many other areas of the world—despite the substantial amount of data recently contributed by demographic studies. The numbers speak louder than words and indicate that the children and adolescents are international migrants, the same label given the adults. We'll start on the Mexican side. Escobar Latapí, Lowell, and Martin (2013), using data from the 2010 Population and Housing Census, showed that 6.5 percent of the children and young people resident in Mexico had participated in international migration in the five years previous to the census, which, in absolute terms, represented 2.7 million individuals between ages 0 and 19. This figure combines two types of circumstances; on the one hand there are the minors who participated directly in Mexico-U.S.-Mexico migration, and, on the other hand, there are those who were exposed to international migration because their parents or siblings had migrated to the United States in the period referred to. This demographic estimation responds suitably to the perspective of historians such as Paula S. Fass: “Our vision of globalization will be very much enhanced if we understand that migration affects not only those who move but those who stay” (Fass, 2007, p. 225).

That said, Giorguli and Gutiérrez (2011), dealing exclusively with minors who migrated from the United States to Mexico, estimated based on the 2010 census samples that a million people returned to Mexico from the United States, and that one of four of those was a minor. That is, during the five years before the census, a little more than 250 000 children and adolescents migrated from the United States to Mexico.

On the U.S. side (referring exclusively to the Mexicans who reside in that country), Batalova (2008) arrives at the following calculations: In 2006 11.5 million Mexicans resided there, 10.1 percent of them under 18; that is, in that year, about 1.2 million children and adolescents born in Mexico had migrated to the United States and were in that country.

Despite the demographic importance of children in the Mexico-U.S. migratory flows, the children were absent from the literature. A first explanation of this paradoxical absence comes from Rendall and Torr (2008), who say there is a divorce of sorts between migration studies and research about the future of the second generation (children of migrants born in the country of destination). The authors say, “While the literature on migration indicates a very high prevalence of return migration (e.g., Durand, Massey and Zenteno, 2001), the literature on the childhood outcomes of second-generation Mexican-Americans assumes that a negligible amount of this return migration includes the parents of children born in the U.S. with those children (e.g., Farley and Alba, 2002)” (Rendall and Torr, 2008, p. 1). In other words, the scholars of the second generation of migrants (Rumbaut & Portes, 2001; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Kasinitz, Mollenkopf, Waters, & Holdaway, 2008) assume, without proof, that the children of immigrants do not migrate; that is, that they stay in the United States. Going against this notion, the estimates made by Rendall and Torr (2008) for the cohorts 1985-1990 and 1995-2000 show that one in 10 children born in the United States who were the children of Mexican mothers spent their childhoods in Mexico.

A second explanation of this gap in the literature about migration between Mexico and the United States is made by Batalova and Fix (2010). The authors say that throughout the history of the United States, *immigrant* has been synonymous with *working-age-men*, and that debate and migration policies have centered their attention almost exclusively on the economic impacts and contributions of migrants on the receiving society. Accordingly, the children are not migrants but rather satellite elements in international migration.

The purpose of this article is to help bridge the gaps in the literature about international migration, centering our attention on one question: What do migrant children know about international migration? In our case, the question is limited to the universe of the children we have been talking with from 2004 to date. They are minors who lived part of their lives in the United States but were in Mexico when they were interviewed. Some were born in the United States, others in Mexico. Those born in the United States are called members of the “second generation” (Portes, 1996). Those born in Mexico

came to the United States at a young age, which is why they are called the “1.5 generation” (Rumbaut, 2004). As can be seen, this typology combines two components: the age of arrival to the United States and the country of birth. Questions about integration, assimilation, adaptation, social mobility, etc., vary depending from one generation to the other. The processes get more complex if an additional criterium is added: the migratory status of the children born outside the United States (Gonzales, 2011).

Where do we situate these children who spent part of their early years in the United States and now are in Mexico? Following the logic of the typology presented, they would belong to the *0.5 generation*. The *0.5* part invokes the migratory mobility of these children. While living in Mexico, they are *migrants* in the strict sense of the word, and at the same time are full-fledged Mexicans, independently of the country of their birth. The *zero* part brings up the question in the initial point and brings with it the question: Who are these children, and who will they be in their adult lives? What category will accommodate them? Taking into consideration these distinctions, the question this work seeks to answer is actually the following: What do the children of the *0.5 generation* know about international migration? We seek to answer this question following the theoretical perspectives and methodological procedures detailed in the following two sections.

### *Theoretical-Analytical Perspective*

Our starting point—the migrant children who are absent from the literature about migration—is not new. The work of Orellana, Thorne, Chee, and Eva Lam (2001) and Parreñas Salazar (2005) is required reading in this field of study. In particular, Orellana et al. (2001) show that children have been considered, in the best of cases, as part of the baggage of the adult migrants. The baggage metaphor invokes the idea that the children are things that are transported and lack feelings, ideas, and suggestions about the processes in which they participate. Starting with the work of these authors, studies have been taking place that deal in a direct way with the reality of the migrant children themselves or as part of migrant families. With respect to these studies, Dobson (2009) makes an important distinction: First,

there is research that responds to the anxieties we feel when young migrants are victims, such as being subjects of abuse, maltreatment, or trafficking. In such cases, the migrant children are a highly vulnerable population that needs protecting. Examples of this perspective are found in Mancillas Bazán (2010), Villaseñor and Moreno (2006), and Ensor and Gozdziaik (2010). In these studies, it is the children's condition of suffering that attracts scholars, not the children's role as migrants. Second, Dobson says there is the work of researchers who want to overcome the adult-centric perspectives about migration and seek to bring to the forefront the migrant children as agents; that is, as migrants. This occurs in at least three ways:

- 1) The definition of *success* or of *economic failure* of the international migration of the adults is intimately associated with what happens to their children, independently of whether they accompany the parents on the migration or stay in the country of origin (Willis & Yeoh, 2000; Dreby, 2010).
- 2) The decisions that the adults take throughout the migration process are frequently influenced by the considerations they make about their children or by the positions the children express and defend (Ní Laoire, White, Tyrrel, & Carpena-Méndez, 2012). Indeed, recent studies show that the adult migrants take into consideration the well-being (and the perspectives) of the children as one of the important motives for moving within the country of destination (Hernández-León & Zúñiga, 2003) or to return to the country of origin (Zúñiga & Hamann, 2015).
- 3) The children and adolescents frequently perform important roles in contexts in which the adults are involved, such as their own homes, medical centers, churches, educational institutions, neighborhoods, etc.; the minors are active as translators, intermediaries, interpreters, and defenders (Orellana et al., 2001; Valdés, 2003).

This article falls within these last perspectives: The minors are migrants in the same sense that their parents, older siblings, aunts, uncles, and grandparents are. At the same time, this work explicitly responds to the invitation of Dobson (2009) to “unpack children in migration studies.” To contribute to the *unpacking* of migrant children,

we conducted an inductive exercise to identify some of the knowledge of everyday life of the children. This exercise assumes that the children *know*, and that they know because they effectively participate in the migratory movements.

When we say that the children *know* we echo the theoretical developments of Agnes Heller (1977) about the *knowledge of everyday life*. What the children know does not correspond to specialized knowledge—produced by the social division of work or the unequal distribution of knowledge—but rather knowledge that is being acquired and developed in the tapestry of everyday life. Heller says: “We understand through the expression ‘content of knowledge of everyday life’ the sum of our knowledge about reality; in daily life, we use this knowledge effectively in the most heterogeneous way (as a guide for actions, as topics for conversation, etc.)” (Heller, 1977, p. 317). In terms of this “sum of our knowledge about reality,” the author makes two important points for our objectives:

We must underscore the existence of a certain minimum of knowledge of everyday life: the total knowledge that every subject must interiorize in order to exist and move about in his or her environment ... In terms of the content of knowledge of everyday life, ‘knowing what’ and ‘knowing how’ are equally important and often inseparable from the other. ‘Knowing what’ tends to be the preparation for ‘knowing how’ (Heller, 1977, pp. 317-319).

As paradoxical as it seems, ruptures are an essential part of the everyday life of international migrant children (Coe, Reynolds, Boehm, Hess, & Rae-Espinoza, 2011). As Boehm, Hess, Coe, Rae-Espinoza, and Reynolds (2011) say:

Migration is inherently characterized by rupture—a break, change, distance, division—and it necessarily includes the everyday: even in, during, or perhaps because of cases of acute disruption, social life persists. Paradoxically, rupture is often situated within or occurs alongside the mundane ... The theme of “everyday ruptures,” then, captures the seemingly contradictory processes shaped by, on the one hand, disjunctures and breaks, and, on the other, the consistency that accompanies everyday life (Boehm et al., 2011, p. 1).

Among recently studied ruptures we find the following: the transient condition of children (Hamann, 2001); the construction and dissolution of friendship networks (Bunnell, Yea, Peake, Skelton, & Smith, 2012); the familiarity with geographic dislocations (Smith, 1994, p. 17, writes that they “are neither ‘here’ nor ‘there’ but at once *both* ‘here’ and ‘there’”); the transformations of the typical roles within families (Shepler, 2011; Coe, 2011) as the product of temporary separation—sometimes very prolonged—of the members of the nuclear or extended family (Dreby, 2010; Zúñiga, 2015); the fragmentations in institutional trajectories (Reese, 2002; Quiroz, 2001; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2002; Hamann & Zúñiga, 2011); the ambiguities in and transformations of national and group affiliations (Vandeyar & Vandeyar, 2011); and linguistic disruptions (Panait, 2011). The daily ruptures that accompany international migration are the axes on which the knowledge of everyday life of the international migrant children is built, in the two dimensions identified by Heller (1977): “knowing what” and “knowing how.”

To respond to this question, we draw upon the empirical material we had available and that we have been gathering since December 2004 to date through interviews with international migrant children who were living—or live—in Nuevo León, Zacatecas, Puebla, and Jalisco states. The transcripts of the interviews constitute a “database” that we analyzed following a methodology that is described in the following section.

### *Source of Data and Methodology*

In December 2004 we conducted a study about the international migration of children and adolescents who were living in Nuevo León. To do that, we selected a representative sample of students enrolled in primary and middle schools—both public and private—in the state. The selection of the sample followed a two-step procedure. First, the stratified schools (173 of 3 310) were selected following two criteria: 1) an index of the migratory intensity of the municipality, and 2) the size of the population of the locality. The stratification allowed us to have, in the sample, schools from municipalities with high, medium, and low migratory intensity, as well as schools

from rural and urban localities. Second, a group of students from each grade (except in schools where there was only one group per grade) was selected at random. Once the groups were selected, a questionnaire was given to all students present in the classroom (14 473 surveyed). Also, children who had lived in the United States were asked to respond to questions about their migratory journey and their school experience, both in the United States and Mexico. At the end of the questionnaire, the students who had lived in the United States were asked if they were willing to be interviewed later. These interviews took place between January and March of 2005.

In the case of Nuevo León (2004), the most relevant estimates were the following: About 17 000 children and adolescents had migrated from the United States to Mexico, which represented 2.5 percent of the total number of students enrolled in the primary and middle schools in the state. Half of them had lived in Texas. In 2005, we interviewed 63 children and adolescents with international migration experience, residents in the following municipalities: Apodaca, Cadereyta, Cerralvo, China, Vallecillo, Santiago, Escobedo, Guadalupe, Monterrey, Parás, Galeana, San Nicolás, Allende, Rayones, and Montemorelos.

In December 2005, we repeated this survey in the state of Zacatecas. Using the same procedure, 218 schools were selected (out of a total of 4 830). There were 11 258 children and adolescents surveyed. Using the survey results, we were able to estimate that around 9 000 children and adolescents in Zacatecas had international migration experience; this represented 3.3 percent of the total number of students enrolled in the primary and middle schools of the state. A third of the children with international experience had lived in California before arriving in Zacatecas.

Between January and March 2006, we interviewed 78 children and adolescents from Zacatecas in the following municipalities: Apozol, Benito Juárez, Francisco R. Murguía, Fresnillo, Jerez, Juchipila, Trinidad García de la Cadena, Villanueva, Ojocaliente, Jalpa, Valparaíso, Sombrerete, and Zacatecas.

The study was repeated in December 2009 in the state of Puebla, using the same methodology. The stratified and representative school sample included 214 primary and middle schools in which we surveyed

18 829 students. After examining the results, we estimated that 12 000 children and adolescents enrolled in the schools of the state had international migratory experience, representing 1.2 percent of the total of students enrolled in Puebla schools. A fifth of the students with international migratory experience had lived in California and a similar proportion in the state of New York.

In Puebla we interviewed 33 children between January and March 2010. Because of time and budget restraints, we were not able to interview all those who expressed their willingness, in the survey, to be interviewed. The children we interviewed lived in the following municipalities: Atencingo, Atlixco, Atzala, Jolalpan, Izúcar de Matamoros, and Xicotepec.

In Jalisco, the survey took place in December 2010 and the interviews were conducted in March 2011. The stratified and representative sample involved 200 schools where 11 479 students were surveyed. The results allowed us to estimate that 64 000 children and adolescents in Jalisco had migratory experience (4.7 % of the total of students enrolled in primary and middle schools in the state). A majority of the migrant children in Jalisco had lived in California (58 %). For mainly budgetary reasons, we only conducted five interviews with children in Jalisco; they lived in the municipality of Lagos de Moreno.

*Table 1:* Summary of interviews with migrant children conducted in four states of the republic (2005-2011)

<i>State</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Number of interviews</i>
Nuevo León	2005	63
Zacatecas	2006	78
Puebla	2010	33
Jalisco	2011	5
<i>Total</i>		<i>179</i>

*Source:* Author's calculation.

The vast majority of the children and adolescents whom we interviewed were between ages 9 and 15, although sometimes we spoke with younger children; 53 percent were boys and 47 percent girls. Generally the interviews were conducted individually, although in

some cases we spoke with two or three children at the same time. All of the interviews were conducted in the schools in which the children were enrolled and the interviews lasted 45 minutes on average. These were conducted in the language of the interviewee's choosing. Most of the boys and girls spoke with us in Spanish. Some openly preferred to be interviewed in English, and it was not uncommon for the children to alternate from one language to the other depending on the issue being addressed. The interview protocol that we used had just five topics—always flexible and adaptable to the interests of those interviewed. They were: 1) their life in the United States, 2) the *return* to Mexico, 3) the schools in the United States and Mexico, 4) their ties with people who continue to live in the United States, and 5) their vision of the future.

The analysis of the *database* (transcripts of all the interviews) took place using the following procedure: Three members of the research team read all the interviews and, independently, sought to answer the following question: What is it that children know about migration? That is, what is the content of this knowledge of everyday life? Subsequently, each of us selected the content that recurred the most, the issues that presented themselves with the greatest frequency. At the end of this individual exercise, we combined the results of our studies and selected three areas of childhood knowledge content, which are presented in this article.

It is important to say that the children have a broad knowledge about migration that is not reflected in this article. We present below a selection of the areas of content that were repeated in almost all the interviews. For each one of these areas, we made a second selection: the stories that we would present (for space reasons, it is not possible to present the stories of all 179 boys and girls). Because of that, we decided to present those stories that most eloquently illustrate childhood knowledge about migration.

### *Limitations*

The methodology utilized presents two limitations. The first limitation results from the fact that we obtained the samples of the migrant children in the schools; our meta-universe discards all the boy, girl,

and adolescent international migrants who left school or never enrolled in school upon arriving in Mexico. The second limitation is that our methodology does not capture the dynamics of the children's experiences and the form in which their stories change following the cycles of their lives and the time spent in Mexico (or their eventual return to the United States). In this article we present stories that are the equivalent of instant photos taken at the moment we visited the migrant children in their schools. This exercise puts all these *instant shots* into a box; in doing this, the childhood views and perspectives built during various moments of the migratory cycle of each child wind up being mixed together.

We now know, thanks to a longitudinal study we are conducting in the state of Morelos, that the content of knowledge of everyday life about international migration slowly changes, although not in a linear fashion, during the time of their stay in Mexico (or their return to the United States) and that the children continue to age. As would be expected, their stories tend to emphasize the distress, nostalgia, disagreements, fractures, discomfort, and rejection they faced in the first months after their return to or arrival in Mexico. As time passes and the children grow older, their versions become more nuanced and their view of their own migration becomes more complex and open to the future. Similarly, thanks to the study in Morelos, we now know that it is not uncommon for international migrant children to quit school, temporarily or permanently, due to the inability of Mexican schools to suitably integrate them. Finally, we now know that some of the international migrant children who come to Mexico later return to the United States, principally those who possess dual nationality. All these circumstances—dropping out of school, returning to the United States—substantially modify their views about migration and contribute new knowledge about the consequences involved in being a migrant. These variants and shadings are not reflected in the data we present in this article.

*Some Content About the Knowledge of Everyday Life  
of the Children of the 0.5 Generation*

*The Children Know that the State Machinery Displaces Them  
Territorially and that the Borders Serve to Divide*

In La Ceja, a locality in the municipality of Trinidad García de la Cadena, Zacatecas, we met Javier when he was 13. He studied in the *telesecundaria* (a rural middle school where many lessons are given over television) of the locality when we interviewed him in November 2005. Javier had been born, like two of his siblings, in La Ceja, while “the oldest was born over there in the United States.”\* Javier, despite his young age, knew details about border controls and how his parents, his two brothers born in Mexico, and he himself were subject to deportation from the United States. He arrived in California at age 1 and had returned to Zacatecas four years before our encounter with him.

During the eight years he lived in California (during the interview he did not remember the name of the locality where they lived: “It was a town, there was a preschool, kinder and primary school”\*). There he attended his first four years of school and had vivid memories of his teachers and schoolmates. Throughout these years of his life, his parents “worked in the *field*, picking grapes and other such work in the *field*.”\* He had to return to Zacatecas—becoming part of the children of the 0.5 generation—because his parents were deported. What he remembers with precision is the notice the family got: “Migration [authorities] there told us we had to come over here,”\* “A letter arrived that said they wanted us here (Mexico).”\* The only member of his family who stayed in California was his older sister, “who has papers,”\* who “comes every year.”\* According to Javier, the sister stayed in California because she was about to have a child and because her husband, originally from Michoacán, was in jail “because they found him in a van drinking a beer.”\* Had it been otherwise, Javier said, his older sister also would have returned to La Ceja with the rest of the family.

\* Javier, personal communication, Zacatecas, 2005.

By the date of the interview, the other two older siblings had returned to California, first Yolanda, and, “like years follow each other,”\* René. Thus, in November 2005, the only family members living in La Ceja were Javier and his parents.

Javier knew what he had to do to enter the United States without permission; this knowledge came not as a result of his own experience (when he crossed the border, Javier only was 1) but through that of his siblings and parents. To cross illegally, the services of a *coyote* are needed, described as “a person who gets people across the border with false papers ... sometimes they can lend you a document, crossing card or something like that, the ID.”\* He also knew that you can enter via the desert, without needing false papers, but he did not recommend this route to us: “You can cross through the desert, but it is very dangerous.”\*

Javier also knew that deportation could be avoided, but that meeting the requirements for this did not depend on either him or his parents. There are individuals who have specialized knowledge to achieve this objective: “We had talked with lawyers and many things [but] no, we had to come [here].”\* Javier knows that his parents tried to regularize their migratory status in the United States but that their efforts did not produce the desired results. Throughout the interview, he reiterated on various occasions his intention and desire to return to California and continue his studies (“I like it better there, everything about it”\*). Nevertheless, he knows that this personal project depends on paperwork his parents had begun to get the necessary visas for themselves and Javier (“They are going to arrange it, I think for December”\*).

Gaby was a young girl of 13 enrolled in middle school. She had just arrived in Monterrey in 2004—joining the 0.5 generation—and had lived in Chicago until she saw the deportation machinery cut short her father’s plans, and, consequently, those of the entire family. When we asked why they had returned to Monterrey, she answered:

Because my dad was seized by migration authorities; I say that it was all planned that way, because they did not take everyone, my father says that there was a list and that they seized everyone on the list who

\* Javier, personal communication, Zacatecas, 2005.

was there and took them away. I think that if that day had not occurred, this would not have happened, because that day, he was late for work, he was late, I think that if he had only stayed [home] ... but as he did not like to miss work, it did not matter if he arrived late; he did not like to not show up for work. He says that they were already waiting there, not just for him but for all those who were arriving and that they had been given the times when everyone would arrive (Gaby, personal communication, Monterrey, 2004).

Gaby not only knows that they deported her father, but also that the deportation machinery is deployed in a selective manner.

Gaby also discovered that an event of such importance for her life involved the intervention of institutional actors who normally do not appear in the menu of options of a 13-year-old adolescent: the Mexican Consulate in Chicago, U.S. judges, and the media:

It was on August 26, we had just entered school ... Later my mother came and the woman told her what had happened. After a while my father called ... I don't know, [to say] that migration had seized him, but for us not to worry, that everything was OK, but from that moment we began to talk with the Mexican Consulate there. He sought a hearing with the judge, so they gave him one, and he went to the court, and the judge told him that he was not going to punish him, but that he had to leave the country, and they told him when and everything, but my father said he did not want to go by plane and the judge told him that it did not matter how, but that he had to leave. That was on TV, that seizure (Gaby, personal communication, Monterrey, 2004)

As in the interviews with Gaby and Javier, we documented stories that show the in-depth knowledge children of the 0.5 generation have about the legal and police machinery that hangs over them and the members of their families.

Erick was enrolled in a primary school in Izúcar de Matamoros in February 2010 when he told us:

But my grandfather in Mexico got sick, because he drank a lot, so they called my mom and she had to go and for that reason we came, well, I came, we came with my sister from Mexico. My father stayed there,

but then they deported him because he did not have papers, they sent him to Tijuana. And he had to stay there some days or months (Erick, personal communication, Izúcar de Matamoros, 2010).

Anabel, a native of Pomona, California, was an adolescent of 15 when we interviewed her in Villanueva, Zacatecas, in February 2005. When we asked her the reason they had moved to Mexico, she answered: “My mother spent five years in jail and they suspended five years. Oh, the rights! But we could then leave again” (Anabel, personal communication, Zacatecas, 2005).

*The Children Know that they Are Building Different Forms of Family in a Dispersion of Spaces and Time and That, Because of Migration Authorities, Families Become Disarranged and Have to be Rearranged in Some Way*

We got to know Juan Carlos in November 2005, when he was an 11-year-old sixth-grader in a primary school in the city of Zacatecas. When he was 3, his life changed due to the divorce of his parents and because, according to his story, his mother decided to migrate to Seattle as a result of the divorce. Some months later, he and his sister also traveled by plane to Seattle and began living in a house belonging to some of his mother’s friends. Three years later—when Juan Carlos was 6—he returned with his mother and sister to Zacatecas for a period of two years, after which they returned to Seattle, where he re-enrolled in school. After about a year, Juan Carlos and his sister, accompanied by their mother, returned to Zacatecas. Juan Carlos was now 9 and he enrolled in second grade. A few days after this second return to Zacatecas, his mother *disappeared*:

We came back and *I don’t know why* but waking up one day, I asked for my mother and they told me she had left on an errand, and then I found out she had gone to ... what is it called? Well, another state from over there. [We insisted in the interview that Juan Carlos remember the place where his mother was and he ended by saying:] She went somewhere else that I don’t remember what it is called now ... I think it was Houston, some place like that, I don’t know (Juan Carlos, personal communication, Zacatecas, 2005).

These fragments of the interview with Juan Carlos shows us that he knows what he does not know, like many other children of this generation; he openly said in the interview that he did not know why they had moved to Seattle, and that he also did not know why they had returned to Zacatecas, or why they had later returned to Seattle. He also did not know why his mother decided to move to Houston, or why she left without giving his sister and him an explanation. Migration, at his age, is an enigma. But what he did know is that these international movements ended by *disarranging* his family. He was living with his grandparents, who visited Juan Carlos' mother periodically. At the end of these visits, the mother would send gifts and photos to her children. At the end of the interview, Juan Carlos was asked whether he wanted to move to the United States, and he answered:

Yes, to see my mother, but not to stay there forever. [He did not want to settle in the United States] because my family is here and only my mother there. [We continued to ask whether he wanted to study in the United States, but Juan Carlos replied] No , I would be going far away and I would miss them, I would not like that ... (I would really miss) the family here (Juan Carlos, personal communication, Zacatecas, 2005).

Juan Carlos is not an atypical child. Many children in Zacatecas have had very similar experiences to those of Juan Carlos. In December 2005, the data from our survey—answered by 9 217 children and adolescents enrolled in primary and middle schools—showed that almost 16 percent were living in Zacatecas while their fathers were in the United States, while almost 2 percent said their mothers were living in the United States, 17 percent said a sibling was there, and almost 10 percent said one or more of their grandparents were there.

The children know that the legal rules involving citizenship and migration, along with labor market forces, hang over the dynamics of their families. The dispersion and reunification of families, the children know, is a subproduct of the structural conditions that guide their fates. The role that family members—adults and children—can play is predominantly defensive, and, in some cases, strategic (preventing risks). It is enough that one of the family members runs the risk of

being deported, winds up unemployed, commits an infraction, or has a dispute with his or her employer to the point that a decision is made to disperse territorially, some in Mexico and others in the United States. Also, the children know that they play a central role in maintaining the unity of the most important grouping of their lives.

This is the case of Ramón, who was born in North Carolina and spent his childhood in Denver, Colorado. We interviewed him in the locality of Huachinantla, Jolalpan, on February 24, 2010. For reasons we do not know, his mother returned to Huachinantla and Ramón stayed to live with his three older siblings in Denver. For nine years he was separated from his mother, except for visits she made during some summers. That is, until he took the decision to *arrange* things differently. When we met Ramón he was 13 and it had been six months since he had taken a *happy and difficult* decision: to continue to live in Jolalpan with his mother instead of returning to live with his siblings:

I returned because, well, I had not seen my mom, she wanted me to come here and I did, too, and later she asked, “Do you want to come visit or do you want to come stay here?” And she left the decision to me, and I wanted to stay here. [A girl who was participating in the conversation then asked him: “For a while or always?” Ramón replied] We’ll see if always. [Joy and difficulties combined in this way:] When I came it was hard because my siblings were there by themselves and I came here, and I left my things there [he said. However, at the same time] I was happy because I was going to see my grandparents, and well, after getting here now one has died, my grandmother. And well, that grandmother, I loved her a lot, and that made me happy. I was saying, ‘Hey, I am finally going to see my grandmother’ (Ramón, personal communication, Puebla, 2010).

The choice Ramón had was not an option for Brenda at age 14. She was forced to reorganize her family relationships with some imagination, given the distance in time and space from her mother. We interviewed Brenda in Xicotepéc, where she lived with her paternal grandfather, her aunt, and her two brothers (one age 13 and the other age 7, who has epilepsy). Her older sister lives with her mother in the United States; Brenda had not seen them for six years. The re-

relationship she has with her mother has changed and this was evident when we asked about the communication she has with her mother:

Sometimes every two days, sometimes every third day, but now I have not been in contact with them, as I had a problem with my sister. [She added:] As for my mom, we hardly see each other, it's difficult for me to know how to talk with her, it seems strange to me that I see her and I say to her, 'Mom.' In general I call her Roma, that is her name ... [short for] Romualda, but I call her Roma, I never say Mom. As for my grandmother, as she is the age she is, I call her Grandma or I forget and I call her Mommy (Brenda, personal communication, Xicotepec, 2010).

When we met Brenda, Ramón, and Juan Carlos, the three were reinventing their family ties in the framework of territorial dispersal. This, nevertheless, is not always possible. The case of Ángel (age 15, Jerez, Zacatecas, November 2015), illustrates the situation of an adolescent of the 0.5 generation who does not appear to have an out. Ángel arrived in the United States when he was 9 months old, accompanied by his parents. They crossed the border without permission. After a while, they settled in St. Louis, Missouri, where Ángel had his first seven years of schooling (kindergarten through sixth grade). In that city, they bought a house and Ángel's sister was born. When he was in sixth grade, his mother died of cancer. Also, his father has severe diabetes. The father's difficulties in caring for his two children, as well as Ángel's migratory status, brought about the decision to separate the family and reorganize it in terms of location. The father and the sister stayed in St. Louis, one of the father's sisters (Ángel's aunt) migrated to Missouri to take care of her brother, and Ángel moved to Jerez to live with a much-older cousin. At the time of the interview, Ángel narrates a dead end:

He cannot return to "his house" and his father does not want to move to Jerez [because] well, he is sick and if he comes he will not be able to leave, and he has his car there, his house, he has all his stuff there, and say he does come, then he would not be able to go back (Ángel, personal communication, Zacatecas, 2015).

At the end of the interview, we had the following dialogue with Ángel:

“Where would you like to be now?”

“Now? I don’t know ... There in the United States.”

“Why would you like to be there?”

“Because there I have my things, the house, everything.”

“And do you have a way to get there?”

“Well, no.”

(Ángel, personal communication, Zacatecas, 2015).

Ángel knows that the facts of his recent life lead to a fateful conclusion: His family is dispersed and will continue to be dispersed. The death of his mother, the illness of his father, and the difference in his and his sister’s migratory status will inevitably keep them separated.

### *The Children Know that International Migration Produces Societal Limbo*

We asked Nanys (age 15, Huachinantla, Jolalpan, February 2010): “Do you feel Mexican or American?” Nanys replied:

I feel a little bit of both, but here I’ve become more Mexican because *he convivido* [I have coexisted] more with their culture and it’s really helped me to bring out what I call my Mexicanism. [She also made reference to her “Americanism,” saying it is] how I speak English, what I know about the culture and what they celebrate and what I studied over there (Nanys, personal communication, Puebla, 2010).

At this point in the interview one of us sought a clarification of what she had meant:

I’m just picking two words you used, when you said Mexicanism, you said Mexicans, I mean “they,” and when you said Americans also “they.” In both cases they were sort of “different from me.” [Nanys responded] *I’m like in between* both of them because I can’t really ... There is one poem my teacher showed us over there by ... I forgot his name, but it says like, “When you’re in America people look at you and

say you may be from here but you don't look like me and when you're in Mexico they say you look like me but you're not like me" (Nanys, personal communication, Puebla, 2010).

Nanys is part of the 0.5 generation of adolescents who have dual nationality. She was born in Los Angeles, California, and received almost all of her schooling in that city. She had a good knowledge of her rights to live, study, and work—entering adult life—in both countries. Her dual nationality is a substantial part of her image of herself. Nevertheless, these objective components of her experience do not lead to an identifiable subjective reference. The category *Mexican-American* does not appear to adequately cover her personal experience. Perhaps this category would be effective in an inter-ethnic context of a city such as Los Angeles, but such is not the case in the locality of Huachinantla. There, she is simply an adolescent resident; nevertheless, she is not exactly that because, like many members of her generation, her first language is English and she is imagining her adult life as being in the United States. Nanys, consequently, sees herself as belonging to a society that does not exist (one in limbo) or that is partially beginning to exist (in an embryonic state): a society of children and adolescents born in the United States, educated there during their early years, and later educated in Mexico in the areas their parents and grandparents are from. She, like many other hundreds of thousands of children of this generation who are being educated in Mexican schools, constitute—in Mexico—the first generation of Mexicans with U.S. nationality living in Mexico in our history.<sup>1</sup> From a U.S. standpoint, these children are Americans—full-fledged ones—who are being educated in Mexican schools, and, thus, members of the 0.5 generation. The answer that gives meaning to these new syntheses was found by Nanys in a poem that teaches us about the divergence between what these children know about themselves and what *others* see in them.

The form in which Jazmín (age 13, Jerez, Zacatecas, November 2005) relates her experience appears to coincide with that of Nanys: she knows she is *someone who is between two extremes*. When asked

<sup>1</sup> The “non-forfeiture of nationality” law was enacted in Mexico in 1996.

about her affiliations, she said that when she was living in the San Valley area of Los Angeles County,

I *felt* like I was both [Mexican and American], [but] now that I have my Mexican documents, I am neither from here nor from there, I am from both sides ... I was born there, I was there until I was 6, later I came this way. They called me *gringa* in the beginning, but I knew that if my parents were Mexicans, well, I was not a *gringa*, and then later this began to dawn on them and they stopped calling me that (Jazmín, personal communication, Zacatecas, 2005).

Jazmín makes a comparison between the two contexts in which she has lived. In Sun Valley she felt Mexican and American at the same time, while in Jerez these certainties vanished because she now is *neither from here, nor from there*, nor a mix of both. Only one certainty—the same we observed in the interview with Estefanía (below)—appeared in her narration: She is not a *gringa*. With this identification discarded, now she knows that her life story is at a point, not yet defined, where she is possibly in a symbolic space situated between two extremes. What is certain is that we investigators also do not know: Again, the labels Mexican-American or American-Mexican do not appear to adequately translate a life story such as Jazmín's.

Estefanía was born in Chicago and later moved to Marietta, Georgia, until her parents divorced. She was 12 when we met her in Lagos de Moreno, Jalisco, when she was in sixth grade in primary school (the same grade she had already studied in the United States). She is like Jazmín in that she defended herself against the labels some school companions gave her:

Sometimes they just only kid me, calling me *gringa*, but no, it's just that they are great kidders here, *na*, but they only say it every once in a while but ... no, to me, when they tell me 'You're a *gringa*' [and I respond that] I am not, that I am Chicana, that my parents are from Mexico, and that while I come from over there, I am Mexican (Estefanía, personal communication, Jalisco, 2005).

Her defense posture is clear yet ambiguous at the same time. What is clear is that Estefanía does not accept that she is classified as a *gringa*, but at the same time she is unable to come up with a

precise, appropriate identification for herself, nor for the social group she belongs to. First she is *Chicana* (because “I come from over there”) and later in the same sentence she proclaims herself *Mexican* (because “my parents are from Mexico”). Synthesis is not achieved, but she is sure about one thing: The category *gringa* does not correspond with her own experience, nor is it in her life story.

The responses and stories of Omar (age 12, New York native, resident of Izúcar de Matamoros, February 2010) differ substantially from the previous ones because Omar is very pragmatic and finds a geographic solution to the state of limbo involved in the narratives of Nanys and Estefanía. One of us asked: “How do you identify yourself? American, Mexican, Mexican-American, Chicano?”

I don't know, New Yorker? [Omar did not want to get into a big discussion and so he replied:] Well, I always say that I'm Mexican-American because I was born over there. I'm not going to make a big deal about who I am, but I obviously am Mexican because of my parents' heritage. I've learned Spanish since I was born, when I went to school I learned English, but when I started I only spoke Spanish (Omar, personal communication, Izúcar de Matamoros, 2010).

Later, Omar told us his solution for bridging these subjective and objective fragments that make up his life story:

I really want to live in United States because I want to help my parents. They work hard for my future and also I want to live here, I want to have a house, I want to do stuff here. I want to help my parents [from] over there. [At this point, one of us asked: So you want to live there and here? And he firmly responded:] Yeah, I want to do stuff here (Omar, personal communication, Izúcar de Matamoros, 2010).

The true sense of the geographical accommodation of Omar is this: I am—and will be in my adult life—a New Yorker who lives—and will live—in Izúcar, while I work in New York. In effect, Omar is building a binational space that does not objectively exist because the national borders are fragmenting. Nevertheless, for him—and he knows it—there exists the binational territorial continuity; it exists in the sense that his dual nationality status allows him to freely come and go.

What happens with the children born in Mexico? They know they are not U.S. citizens. They know, many of them, that they do not have permission to live in the United States. Nevertheless, like children born in the United States, they often have the experience of dealing with uncertainties and know well the symbolic creations characteristic of binational children. For example, David (age 12, native of Atlixco, February 2010) lived three years in Michigan because his father took him there while his mother and siblings stayed in Atlixco. He arrived in Michigan when he was 7 years old and lived with his father, his grandmother, his two aunts, an uncle, and his cousins. When we asked him about his affiliations, he answered: “Here I feel more Mexican ... [When I was there] I felt more like I was both” (David, personal communication, Puebla, 2010). David’s brief responses are more symbolic, whereas those of Andrea (age 14, a native of Jerez) are more properly geographic.

Andrea arrived in Wichita when he she was 4 and had years of schooling in that city (from kindergarten through seventh grade). This is the part of the interview in which she thinks about what she will do with her life:

“Andrea, do you think you will return to Wichita or not?”

“Yeah.”

“Yeah? You want to?”

“Yes, I am and I want to. I want to stay here and over there at the same time.”

“Same time?”

“Yes.”

“Can you repeat this: I want to stay here and return at the same time, can you explain why you have, you wish to stay here and you want to return?”

“I want to return because of my friends, the mall, the shopping, the *diversiones* [entertainment], the people and I want to stay here *por lo* same, the people, the *diversiones*, and all that; especially here for the *libertad* [freedom]

(Andrea, personal communication, Jerez, 2010).

### Conclusions

As the literature points out, international migration inevitably involves fractures, discontinuities, bifurcations, that is, daily ruptures. All these accumulate in the *sum* of knowledge about the reality of the migrant children. Our data show that the children are particularly sensitive to the events that separate their families or that require them to reunite in another country. In a certain way it can be said that they are specialists in ruptures—geographic, affective, linguistic, etc.—at the same time they go about turning into expert searchers for what will allow them to unite these discontinuous pieces of their unique life stories.

In this search to make sense of their life stories, the children of the 0.5 generation appear to be innovating symbolically and emotionally, making use of their knowledge of everyday life. In this regard, the *limbo* metaphor allows us to propose that there is something that is still undetermined and that we must wait to find out about, which is what will happen to these thousands of children who lived in the United States and now are in Mexico. Particularly those thousands of children who, for the first time in the history of Mexico, have dual nationality and are being educated in Mexico. The embryo metaphor invokes something that is now gestating: children who are educated in Mexico and imagine their future as adults in one, the other, or both countries.

These children possess the knowledge of what to do and are discovering the *knowing how* in a complex context in which legal, symbolic, police, and labor forces deterritorialize them, expel them, and deny their rights. Police and judges deport or jail their parents, their families disperse, obligating them to reinvent family ties—when this is possible—their school colleagues on occasion call them *gringos* or *gringas*, Mexican institutions do not recognize them, and many of them are waiting for their parents to *fix their papers* (as Andrea told us in Jerez). In the midst of their adverse circumstances, they are sculpting their *knowing how*.

This knowledge accumulated by migrant boys and girls can be incorporated into the *corpus juris* of the human rights of the boys, girls, and adolescents, thus enriching what the Inter-American Commission

on Human Rights, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (Interamerican Commission on Human Rights, 2013) has proposed in this area. The knowledge of the migrant children should be present in this *corpus*, particularly with regard to the *right to family*.

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