

# THE INDIGENOUS PEASANT FAMILY IN CENTRAL MEXICO: AN ANALYSIS OF ITS LIFE CYCLE AND SOCIAL REPRODUCTION

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## Background:

While the study of families in poverty and their reproduction has long been object of substantial debate and analysis, it is following the publishing of Oscar Lewis's (1964) work *The children of Sánchez* that the social conditions of these families evolves into an object of closer scrutiny. Such studies tended to focus on identifying the strategies used by urban poor families to meet their needs. In this respect, a number of dominant sociological approaches have turned their gaze toward migration and the diversification of family economic strategies (Lomnitz 1998; Gonzalez Cataño 1986; Cuéllar 1994; Arizpe 1985). Social anthropology in Mexico, on the other hand, has engaged in the analysis of the reproduction and survival strategies of rural poor families.

With a view to contribute to this debate, this work presents three cases studies of indigenous peasant families belonging to the *Nahua* ethno linguistic group and residing in the state of Tlaxcala, located in the socio-cultural area of Central Mexico. It is believed that a number of socio-cultural elements enable these families to proceed through their social reproduction cycle; such elements will be identified and studied in this work. The empirical information used in this work is based on fieldwork conducted in the area since 2000. There have been some pauses in this fieldwork, which has otherwise continued until 2013. Of all the ethnographic data obtained to date, two elements have been selected to support the conclusions of this work. It is believed that the exchanges of both work and mutual help (*ayuda mutua*) among the members of nuclear and extended families act as enablers for the Mesoamerican indigenous peasant family to transit through the different stages of its social reproduction cycle.

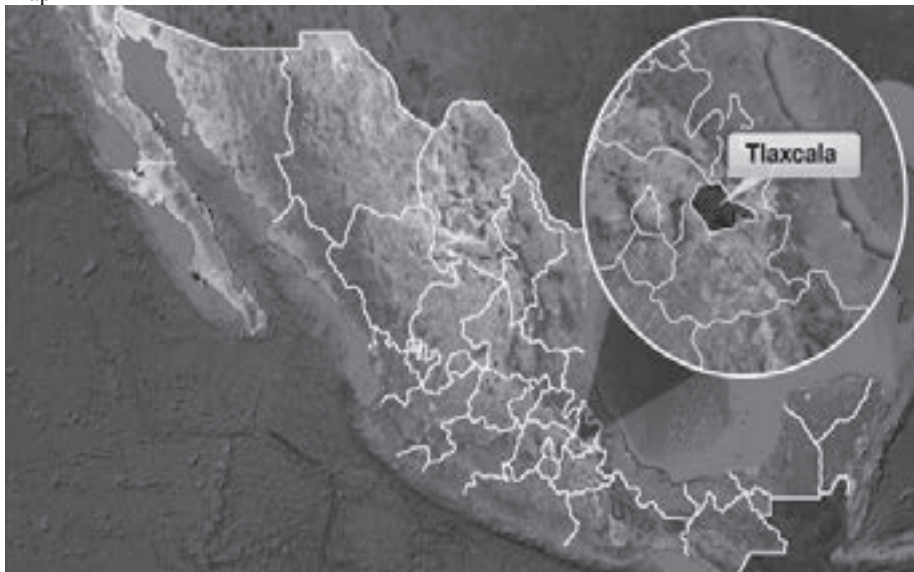
## The contemporary indigenous peasant family

The pace at which sociocultural changes are taking place makes it difficult to determine what factors contribute, to a wider or lesser extent, to the reproduction of poor families in rural or urban environments. This pace of change, which may have been thought impossible in the past, is characterized by fast flows of information, goods and people (Moctezuma 2013). Historically, the *mestizo* and peasant family of Central Mexico has been in continuous contact with Mexico City. This contact has either been through commercial exchanges, for *mestizo* or landowner families; or

through temporary or permanent labor migration for poorer families. In the latter case, younger family members have travelled to work in different areas of the urban informal economy.

In the case of the families selected for this work, the focus of my work will be on the development of their individual and collective work lives, with a view to understand how the exchange of their combined work enables the reproduction of the families in the community where this fieldwork was undertaken. The history of these families is centered on the *Nahua* community of San Pedro Tlalcuapan, located in the central area in the Mexican state of Tlaxcala. As mentioned above, the gathering of information in which this work is based started 13 years ago, utilizing a classical approach to anthropologic fieldwork. Following a number of pauses and return trips to the community, the distance and passing of time has allowed me to witness relevant moments in the process of reproduction of the peasant family.

Map 1



Source: Google Maps. This map shows the location of state of Tlaxcala, Santa Ana Chiautempan, Municipality and San Pedro Tlalcuapan, village.

During the course of this work, the first theoretical / empirical difficulty I encountered was that of properly defining the *Nahua* family group; to illustrate this difficulty it was observed that the consumption units did not always match the production units. In view of that it was decided to utilize *emic*<sup>1</sup> concepts, that is, the way in which things are named locally, regardless of whether the words are in Spanish, Nahua or the local dialect. These concepts have been reclaimed as a guide to identify what elements of their culture were most relevant to the people studied in this ethnographic work. Considering that the *Nahua* family is part of the Mesoamerican socio-cultural area, the

<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this study, the *emic* categories are understood as the concepts, meanings and words used by the social agents -or informants- to categorize, define and name things from their own cultural particularity. Therefore, it is in order to reclaim their own local categories to explain the way in which kinship is lived in Tlalcuapan, that this ethnographic tool is used. Thus, the *emic* words used in the community to refer to kinship will be displayed in italics.

characterization of the development cycle of domestic units in the Mesoamerican kinship system<sup>2</sup> by Robichaux (2000) has been used for this study.

For a better identification of the features that differentiate the Mesoamerican family from other Western family systems, I quote the following. “A pattern has been found whereas the newly-weds live in the house of the husband’s parents until they save enough money to build their own house”. Robichaux (1977) explains that this co-residency is usually virilocal due to the overall patrilineal bent of the Mesoamerican family system. That is, after the wedding, the new wife moves to her husband’s house. However, the newly-weds may live uxori-locality if the new wife has few or no brothers and the new husband has many brothers; in other words it is possible that the husband moves to the wife’s house. When the couple has saved enough money they build their new house in a nearby or adjacent lot given to them by the husband’s parents. However, in some cases, it can be built in a lot inherited from the wife’s parents (Robichaux 1997: 156).

The *ultimo geniture* refers to the practice that the youngest son, known as the *xocoyote*, stays in his parents’ house with his wife and children. He will look after the parents in their old age and inherit the house when the parents die. While the house is inherited by the *xocoyote*, the land inheritance is “divided equally among all the men, with some participation of the women in the inheritance” (Robichaux 1997:161).

The families observed for these case studies mostly conform to the characteristics mentioned before. They are made up of one or more nuclear families transiting through the different stages of the development cycle of the domestic group. Nonetheless, as the case studies of the families studied will show, an evident feature was that the groups of production, consumption and residence did not coincide. The study of the stages of the development cycle of family groups is based on the argument proposed by Chanayov (1981:67), who states that families go through moments of crucial change when processes and transformations are experienced throughout time; the following case studies illustrate the process perfectly.

This work will, however, place its emphasis on the micro-processes enabling the group to move from one stage on to the next one by means of their individual and collective behavior when sharing the products of their labor and *ayuda*. As we will see the nuclear and extended families create social relationships as they move along their development stages; thus, the individual or the group can rely on such relationships in times of need. From a wider perspective, such relationships constitute a social capital, which is useful for the effects of social reproduction. It is not the intent of this work to produce a theoretical reflection on the concept of social capital; it is, however, important to clarify that is seen as opposed to the economic capital. In this context, the concept of social capital is used as a non-economic resource, which is, nonetheless, able to accumulate through exchanges of trust, favors and mutual help and which can be ‘collected’ at a moment agreed by the participating individuals.

### **The indigenous peasant *Nahua* family**

It is important to clarify that although only 3 families from San Pedro Tlalcuapan have been selected for this work, the relationships described are thought to correspond to others families I met during the course of my fieldwork. This statement is supported by my decade-long anthropological work in the community. The families were selected because they are considered to be representative of the community and present variations in terms of age, gender, number of family members, ways to contribute to the domestic group, phases of the family development cycle,

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<sup>2</sup> Robichaux proposes that the key characteristics of this system are: (a) the initial virilocal residency, (b) the patrilineal *ultimo geniture* for the inheritance of the house, (c) the formation of extended families based on the patrilineal or agnatic kin, and (d) predominantly, but not exclusive, male ownership of the land.

number of family members sharing the place of residence, income, material resources available, parents' occupation, education, spare time activities, age and sources of income of the offspring.

These cases illustrate processes of family formation as well as features of the distinct phases of the development cycle highlighted by authors such as Fortes (1970), Chayanov (1981), Cuéllar & Muñiz (1988) and Robichaux (2001). In these phases, one can observe some of the activities undertaken by family members in order to guarantee the biological and social reproduction of their group. The ethnographic data shows the histories of work and *ayuda* shared by the members of the different families regardless of their economic status; demonstrating that the exchange of family work and *ayuda* are not exclusively limited to poverty. These exchanges are then a way to build family and social relationships that integrate the community as a whole, while at the same time building the *persona*. It is worthwhile noting that for the purposes of this document, the names of the families have been changed. Each of the cases starts with a brief description of each of the family member, their labor and family cooperation (*ayuda*) histories and finally a more detailed analysis of the family group.

### The Arteaga family

In 2000 the Arteaga family was made up of 10 members, a married elderly couple, their married youngest son and his wife and their 7 children. The children's ages ranged from 3 to 16 at that time and they were all single. The grandmother and the grandfather passed away in 2010 and 2012 respectively. Nowadays, three out of the four sons and the oldest daughter have married. The third son migrated to the United States six years ago; he and the youngest daughter, who is now 16, are single. Their house is in the center of the town close to the church of the patron saint. The structure of the house is similar to what it was 11 years ago. Now that the grandparents have passed away, the adobe-built rooms where they used to live will be demolished to make way for new rooms. Other old structures have been demolished.

The house has two floors, with four rooms; two of the rooms are made with adobe and two others with block and concrete ceilings. The four rooms were used as bedrooms where the three available beds were placed. They had a "*cocina de humo*" (firewood kitchen), a '*temazcal*' (steam bath), two patios, sewage, power and running water. Eleven years ago, the family owned poultry and cattle; now they don't keep any. The house had a 4 x 5 meters patch (family home garden) where they grow vegetables and medicinal herbs used for domestic remedies. They also had a piece of land at the back of the house and a *milpa* plot (corn cultivation system) of half a hectare in front of the house. Those plots have now been divided among the sons so that they can build their houses and even the single son received a piece of land.

The grandfather was 75 when he died in December 2012. He had studied five years of primary education in Santa Ana Chiautempan, the main town of the municipality and his father was a peasant and lumberjack. He started working as a child, gathering and selling firewood. Later on he worked in the manufacture of *pulque* (*Agave* beverage). The sale of firewood produces money to him, which would go directly to his mother, he would not keep any. He worked until making *pulque* and selling it in the nearby towns until approximately 2005. That activity resulted in an approximate weekly income of \$200 Mexican pesos, given that the sales were always subject to the rainy season and people's consumption. The grandfather was also available for hire as a ploughman, aided by his older grandchildren, and aged 15 and 16 at the time. The money earned was used to buy food for their farm animals. He would also save for medical expenses for himself and his wife and other purchases they may wish to do.

His wife (the grandmother), died at 73 years of age in 2010. She studied just a few months of the first year of primary school. She worked as a laundress for other people in the town. She started helping her mother when she was 5 or 6. When she was ten she started working as babysitter for

other families, her salary was 3 pesos a month and would go directly to her mother. In her later years, she would stay at home to look after the animals and her youngest granddaughter while her daughter-in-law worked in the fields. Sometimes she would also help with other tasks not requiring great physical efforts. Her husband would give her \$40 or \$50 pesos every 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> day; this money was used to buy food for their animals or for medical expenses. On occasions, the couple would sell or kill one of their farm animals. For this work, they would ask their grandchildren for help, either for the slaughtering of the animal or for the processing and sale of the meat. The family would normally get some meat in exchange while the grandparents would keep the money, which in turn would be used for fertilizer, animal feed or other inputs for the yearly planting in their land.

The couple's youngest son, Luis, was 38 years old in 2000. He had agreed to look after his parents when all his other brothers got married. That meant that he would care for them and provide for their material needs. He was also expected to maintain the house and the farm animals. In return, he would inherit his parents' house and most of their land. She started running errands for neighbors when he was 6, his payment for those jobs would go directly to the family income pool. He graduated from high school. Currently he works as a bricklayer, musician as well as in the fields. When bricklaying jobs are scarce he gathers firewood in the countryside and sells it. The money he earns through these various activities is handed over to his wife, so that she manages the incomes and expenses of the household. The main expenses are food and school supplies; this is what he considers "providing for the family".

Since his parents passing, he has become the 'grandfather' of the house but he keeps on working. Given that, according to his children, he was not a very good father, they do not look after him much. He sleeps by himself in one of the rooms and is hardly able to exercise any authority over his children. His older sons now take most of the decisions. Luis' wife, Socorro, is his same age. She completed her primary school studies and has worked since she was 10 years old. First, she worked sorting fabric, later did paid housework and when she was older she worked as a laborer in a factory. Her salaries were kept by her father and would become part of the family income.

When I met her she worked in the house and on the fields while raising her children as well. She worked extremely long hours, up to 17 hours a day, seven days a week. Sometimes she would do agricultural work for other neighbors along with her two older sons, for that work they would receive around \$80 pesos a day. Her income-generating activities became more diversified and all her income would be added to the common pool. Since her mother-in-law died, and to the present day, she has become the 'grandmother' of the house and is financially supported by her married sons and daughters-in-law. She has stopped doing physically demanding work. It is the opinion of all the members of the family that she has given so much work to the family that it is her turn to rest and eventually look after some of her grandchildren.

Their oldest son, Jose (Pepe), was 16 years old in 2000. He is now married and has two sons aged 5 and 7. Pepe is a bricklayer and musician; he learned both trades from his father. Back in 2000 he studied high school as well as music, but neither course was completed. Since his childhood, he would help his father daily and his monetary income was kept by his father and used for family expenses. His parents explain that in exchange for the work and *ayuda* he provided when he was single, they paid for his wedding party. He has said that all the jobs he did as a child were for everyone's benefit. He currently lives in a small house built in a piece of land given to him by his parents. It is him, who along with his wife, are in charge of looking after his mother as his youngest brother did not want to act as *xocoyote*.

Francisco (Paco), the second son, was 15 years old when I met him in 2000. He is currently married and has 2 sons; he lives with his family in a house he built in the land given to him by his parents. Paco and his wife also help looking after his mother and youngest sister. Since he was very young he helped working in the fields, raising the cattle and taking care of his younger brothers. He

would join his father to collect firewood and for bricklaying jobs. At home he would undertake maintenance work and repairs. He was in charge of driving the family's truck. Since he was eight, he started running errands for relatives and neighbors. He looked after farm animals and would receive food or money for that work. At 13, he started working as a field hand in nearby communities. His salary was kept by his mother and added to the pool for house expenses.

Marco, the third son, was 13 in 2000. He is still single and migrated to the United States in 2009; he has settled in California and sends money for his mother and youngest sister. He has built a house, where he plans to live once he comes back to Mexico and gets married. When I met him he was studying the third year of secondary school and music in Puebla City. He would often work for a friend of the family that raised pigs. His salary was handed to his mother. In exchange he would receive money for his studies, clothes and public transport fees. He would also help when his father was particularly busy, either in bricklaying jobs or in the fields. During harvest time, Marco would also work as a field hand for others; his salary would go directly to his mother. He also helped his grandparents tend for their farm animals, but most of his time was devoted to his secondary school and conservatory studies.

In the year 2000 Ignacio (Nacho), the fourth son, was 12. He is now married and has two sons and a younger daughter. He lives in a house he built in the land he inherited from his parents. He completed his primary studies and started secondary school without finishing. He learned to play music from his father. According to his parents, he was too short and thin for construction and agricultural work; therefore he had to study more than his siblings. That is the reason why he would help his mother more than his brothers and would occasionally cook. He would also work cleaning neighbors' houses and with his uncle, a baker, selling bread. His salary was added to the family's income pool. He stated that the purpose of all these activities was to help the family. During school holidays, he would have more activities than the rest of the year. Most of the money he earned was given to her mother in order to buy soap, sugar or bread. He was also hired to play the *huehue* (a type of drum) at religious festivities. He would use part of his salary to pay for his computing classes and would give the rest to his mother to contribute to the family expenses.

Refugio (Cuco), the fifth son, was eleven years old in 2000. Currently, he lives in a de facto relationship with a young woman from Mexico City and they have a young daughter. He lives in a small house he built in land given to him by his parents. He finished primary school and learned to play the trumpet; he helped his grandparents to raise their farm animals. Sometimes he would sell bread with her uncles; when he grew up he was replaced by another one of his brothers. He used to help his uncles in the fields and his grandfather in the manufacture of *pulque*. He would work intensively in the fields for around 3 or 4 hours, starting at 4 or 5 in the morning. After that, they would drink a bit of coffee and go to school. On Sundays, he would receive some money from his father. That money was spent on sweets; in return his parents would pay for his food and schooling. At 9 years of age, his neighbors started to hire him to cut fodder after the harvest. His salary would go straight to his mother and would be used for household expenses.

Sonia is the sixth child in the family; she was 9 years old in 2000. According to his parents, her husband would support financially when she married, therefore it was decided that it was not very important for her to study. By 2013, she had married and had a son. She lives in her mother-in-law's house in a different town. Given that she moved there, she did not inherit land from her parents. Her husband is not the youngest or the oldest of his siblings; therefore he did not inherit land either. Nonetheless, when she was a young girl, she would do most of the household chores and sometimes would go into the countryside to look after her grandparents' farm animals. Her main duties were to look after her siblings and the farm animals. She would clean the house and the animals' pen. Sometimes she would receive some money to buy sweets. In spite of the amount and variety of the duties she performed she used to say that she enjoyed helping her parents, as they fed her and paid for her schooling.

Nena is the seventh child in the family, when I met her in 2000 she was 3 years old. Nowadays she is still single and works babysitting the daughter of a dentist in the community. She devotes 6 hours a day to this work and keeps her salary. She does not devote much time to household chores. When she was a child she would perform simple tasks such as tending to poultry, helping clean the kitchen and threshing corn in preparation to make *tortillas*. She would only play until she was 2 years old. Her grandfather would point at her and say, "At that age we are already useful, and she should help". Her mother would refuse to take her to work to the fields. Her siblings and her father would say she was the spoiled one in the house. On Sunday, she would receive one peso. Her parents used to say that she "was receiving more than anyone". When asked for clarification they would say "because she doesn't work much and yet she is given food, clothes and sweets". Her parents and siblings consider that she should enjoy life a bit more and not work in the fields. Her single and married siblings support her financially.

### **About the Arteaga family**

When I met this family in 2000 they were a well-rounded group; they all contributed with work and *ayuda* to the household. As detailed in the accounts of their individual members all of them stated they provided *ayuda*, work and money to the family and then received food, clothing, education, care and land in exchange. These series of exchanges taking place over a decade allowed the growth of the group and the reproduction of its members, as found on my later visits in 2013. The passing of the grandparents marked a moment of readjustment. The *xocoyote* and his wife became the grandparents replacing the ones that had died. As a result, the then daughter-in-law in 2000 was able to get some rest after a long work life that started when she was a child and worked for her birth family. In this case study one thing called my attention; the youngest son, who was meant to become the *xocoyote* and therefore look after his parents, was not able to become a good son. His constant quarrels and separations from his wife from Mexico City prevented him from having the life stability necessary to look after his elderly parents.

In view of this situation, his parents talked to him and he renounced the rights and duties connected with being the *xocoyote*. It was then decided that they would ask the oldest son to act as the *xocoyote* and inherit the house and most of the land in return. That was the agreement as of the winter of 2013. The changes taking place in the group through these 14 years are notable. The renewal and reproduction of the family can be observed at multiple levels. The "new grandmother" is determined to demolish the old rooms that belonged to her parents-in-law and replace them with others built with more durable materials. She has cut and dyed her hair. She does not cook, grind corn or make tamales as much as she used to; and spends her time resting and looking after her youngest daughter. Furthermore, her brothers-in-law, sisters-in-law and children are of the view that she should inherit the house given that she was a remarkably good daughter-in-law; this is in spite of the fact that she was not a birth daughter. Her husband, on the other hand, should settle for having one room of the house and no more; this is due to him not having been a very good son.

As this case illustrates, in this moment of renewal and expansion this domestic group has entered new stages, some of its members have died and others have been born. The properties, both houses and plots, have changed hands but one factor is both the constant and what enables the renewal and the presence of its members -the exchange of work and mutual help. In my opinion, this factor allows the renewal of the peasant family.

## The Dominguez family

I met the Dominguez family one year after I started my field work in this town, approximately in the summer of 2001. At that point the family was made up of 11 members, mother, father and 9 children – five sons and four daughters. In 2001 their ages ranged between 7 and 27 and they were all still single; five of them lived and worked in the United States. By 2013, there were six of them in the United States. Their parents and siblings related the lives of the children who have migrated to me. The parents say that the children that work in the United States send money every month to cover the family expenses and buy land and other goods administered by the mother. Until the year 2003 they would also send money to their younger siblings who were still living in the community. This was done, on the condition that they study and not marry. On account of maintaining the relationship with the family and providing help, the migrant siblings were given authority by their parents to reprimand and advise the younger siblings on how to behave.

The first son went to the United States to work in 1991 and the rest migrated afterwards. I was told that in 2007 one of the daughters migrated to California. Even though they have lived abroad for around two decades, all of the older sons have held religious *cargos* in the community by 2002. They would send money to the town and travel back to fulfill the duties of the *cargo*. When the latter was not all possible, the mother would do what was needed to fulfill the duties on behalf of her children. During an interview held in 2001, the parents said they consider theirs a true family because the 11 members cooperate for everything.

The family house is located in the main avenue, in the center of Tlalcuapan. The house has a yard at the front and another one at the back, with the main building in the middle. In the left side there is a large room built with block and divided in two parts; the first one is the room where all the family sleeps and the second one is used as a kitchen and dining room. In the right there are two large rooms, one of them is set up as a living room. The second room is always locked and is used to store new beds, electronic appliances, televisions, cameras and video recorders belonging to the children that work in the United States. Nowadays, the house has not changed much, only two small rooms have been added and they are used as bedrooms for the younger daughters. The house has had sewage, telephone, power and running water for more than a decade.

At the back of the property, there is still a stable for cattle and a pen for chickens and other fowl. This family, in contrast to the Arteaga and many other families in the town, still keep a sizeable number of farm animals, including horses, which are not common in the town. The animals belong to the parents and are used for consumption of the family and any remaining meat is sold. In spite of their relative wealth, by 2001 they still kept and used the *humo* kitchen. This kitchen is located close to the area where a sports car, belonging to one of the sons working abroad, was parked. Now a new truck has taken its place. A tarpaulin always covered both vehicles. The goods sent by the older children are not used, they are kept for them to use when they return to visit their parents. The family has a half a hectare farming plot close to the house. They used to grow corn and broad beans there, but nowadays the lot is not as intensively used. It was the mother, with the help of a neighbor and occasionally one of the sons, who worked this land. A list of the family members follows.

Don Manuel was 60 years old in 2001. He studied four years of primary school and worked all of this life as a peasant and bricklayer. His father was also a bricklayer, peasant and carpenter. He says that when he was six, he started working helping his father to make *adobe* bricks. He did not receive payment for that work. He explains his father did not have to pay him as the product of his work was used to feed the family. He did not have a mother, so he had to start work very early. When he was 10, he worked dyeing textiles. His salary was handed to his father and was used for household expenses. In 1995, he would earn approximately \$10 pesos a day; he would use that



money to buy food and for his sisters' needs. Nowadays, as an elderly man, he feels happy to see that his children do not have to work as hard as he did, but what makes him happier is that they all keep contributing to the family. In his words, that is what makes them family. Nowadays, he keeps on working in the fields, the countryside and raising farm animals. His motivation, though, is not necessarily the money anymore.

Doña Lucha, the mother of this family, was 48 years old when I met her. She studied two years of primary school. Since she was eight, she worked harvesting corn, collecting firewood, embroidering and selling capes. The salary she received would go directly to her mother and was included in the family's money pool. She was an orphan so her uncle and aunt mainly raised her on her mother's side. She has worked since then and her salary would be used for the expenses at her relatives' household. In 2001, she worked preparing food for parties and as a field hand. She devoted a great deal of her time to political activities for the PRI (acronym in Spanish for the Institutional Revolutionary Party). In spite of all the jobs she has performed since 2001, she has managed to fulfill a number of religious and civil service position.

In 2010 she was the first woman to become a Municipal agent. Now, as in the past, she helps her neighbor who has a married son and a single daughter in the United States but only receives money from the daughter. The two women have formed a notable work team and alternate working each other's farming plot.

Antonio (Toño) is the eldest son of this family; he was single and 27 years old in 2001. As soon as he finished primary school he advised his parents he wanted to go to the United States and he did so. They had an uncle there and he lives with them in the Costa Mesa County in California. He is still single and says that his only concern is working. He has always worked in restaurants. He started washing dishes but is now a chef. One of his sisters told me that he does not intend to return. Currently he lives with his five other siblings that have migrated, they rent a house together. He has never told his family how much he earns, but even when he was the only one abroad he was in charge of sending money, clothes and electronic appliances. He still sends money every 2 or 4 weeks. He used to have a bank account in Tlaxcala and his mother was responsible of administering. He does not send money to that personal account anymore, but does send it to his family. Nineteen years ago, for example, he purchased a truck for his parents to use for their agricultural work. He has told them that all his things in Mexico belong to the family as he cannot use them himself.

The second son in the Dominguez family is Lucas, who was 26 years old in 2001. He studied until the last semester of high school, but did not graduate. He went to Costa Mesa when he was 21. He started working as a waiter in the same business as his older brother. His parents say he has been the quietest and calmest of all their children; but that he left for the United States because he wanted to help the family. He has received a promotion at work and now works in the kitchen. He also sends money to the family and has a bank account in Mexico.

Sergio is the third son and was 25 years old in 2001; he had been in the United States for one year then. Since he moved there he has worked as a dishwasher in the same restaurant as his brother. Her sisters say he is most troublesome of the brothers. He studied until the last semester of high school, he failed a course and stopped going to school. Even before leaving for the United States he had little communication with his parents. His mother says he went only to compete with his brothers. His sisters say he would like to come back soon and does not want to send money to the family; his brothers, however, force him to contribute sending money. In 2013 he was still living in California and his sisters say that the experience of working away from home and the pressure from his brothers have helped him to change.

Celia is the fourth sibling in the family and was 21 years old in 2001. She moved to California in 2008 and now lives and works there. She studied in Santa Ana Chiautempan and obtained a technical qualification as a secretary. Since she arrived in the United States she has

worked as a cashier. She is the only one that has been excused from sending money to the family. Her mother says: "As she is a woman, from the beginning I told her to keep the money for herself and she says she has a bank account there." She migrated because she did not find work in Tlaxcala. She had a boyfriend in the United States, and even though her brothers did not approve of the relationship, she married him. She never sent money because she wanted to save for the time she would come back to Mexico.

Carlos is the fifth sibling in the family, and he was 19 in 2000. He studied secondary school, had a few jobs in the town but considered he was not making enough money. In 1999 he migrated to the United States. He has worked washing dishes in the same restaurant as his brothers and has also been promoted to a better job in the kitchen. All of them work different shifts. When he lived in San Pedro Tlalcuapan was the one that helped the family the most and everyone liked him a lot. He had a sports car in the town, which he replaced with a truck in one of his visits. He purchased a number of things planning for his marriage and the set-up of his own house. In order to prepare for the future, he opened a bank account in Tlaxcala. His wish was to return soon and get married because his girlfriend lived in the community. Besides the money he sent for the family, he would also send a separate amount for his mother only. She has always been extremely proud of her son. Eventually, he took his girlfriend with him and they both now live in California. He still sends money to his mother.

Liz is the sixth sibling of this family; I met her when she was 16. She is currently married and has taken her husband to live in her parents' house as she considers it is her responsibility to be there as most of her siblings live in the United States. She studied high school. Her duties have always been help with the household chores, cook and look after her younger siblings. She used to work with her mother preparing food for parties. In contrast with the members of the group described before, she kept all the money she earned. She is aware that herself and some of her siblings have not had to work as other children in the town and that is the reason she tries to be grateful for the work of her migrant siblings. As she helped her parents her siblings would send her money, which was saved to deal with any unexpected expense. Even now that she has married she pays attention to and follows the instructions of her siblings as she considers they work as a team.

Eduardo (Lalo) is the seventh children of the Dominguez; in 2001 he was 14 years old. At that point she was studying the third year of secondary school and helped his father play some traditional musical instruments in the religious celebrations of the community. His father would give him half of the payment received. Even though he devoted considerable time as a musician, he considered he did not work, "I only help my father" he used to say. He kept all the money he earned and decided what to do with it. Since he was 10 he raised the animal farms belonging to the family. He would not help working in the fields; his parents would say "his job is to go to school, this is the way he is going to help us". He was always eager to go to the United States and did not want to keep on studying; he eventually migrated five years ago. Nowadays, he sends money and that is his way to help the family.

Maria is the eighth sibling; she was eleven in the year 2001. She was studying the first year of secondary school. Her duty has always been helping with the household chores and look after the farm animals. Her parents would not allow her to work in the fields, as it was their preference that she studied. Her brothers told their mother that given they were working hard abroad; the younger siblings should not do agricultural work. Thus, her siblings sent money for her clothing, schooling and all her needs. She also wanted to migrate to the United States but eventually married in the community and now she lives in her parents' house as well. They take care of the things their brothers have bought. Her and her husband cultivate a small piece of land and have set up a small grocery store. Her brothers told her that somebody had to take care of their parents and that she did not need to leave the town as they provided for everything.

Mimi is the youngest daughter, the ninth children in the family. In 2001 she was seven years old and studied the second year of primary school. In the morning she would feed the poultry and sometimes she would go to the family plot, only to bring food for her parents. Her duty was to help her sisters to do the domestic chores. In reality, however, she devoted more time to play. She was very happy to say that her siblings would send money so that “she always has money to spend”. Unlike other children in the town, she really had a considerable amount of clothes and toys gifted by the older members of the family. She is currently single and works babysitting other children in the town. She keeps the money she earns and makes her own decisions on how to spend it. Her duties and responsibilities in the house have increased but not by much compared to other single women in the community.

### **About the Dominguez family**

When I returned to San Pedro Tlalcuapan in 2013 I had the opportunity to verify important matters and data with this group. Firstly, there was one thing that stood out, the fact that the members of this group have not always lived in the same residence, but have worked for two decades for its consolidation. This has always allowed the expansion of the family. In other words, the fact that the older children migrated allowed their parents to have more children. This, in turn, enabled the family to accumulate considerable social and financial capital; the mother’s tenure as a municipal agent can illustrate it. She has also been able to get involved in political activities with the PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party) at estate level. Another important fact about the expansion of this family is that few children have married but the ones that have, still contribute to the domestic and will continue to do so.

When I met them 12 years ago, they were experiencing an important moment. They have found that migration was an effective way to meet their needs and generate a surplus, which permitted savings. As we have observed, distance was never an obstacle to continue this family’s work and cooperation. It is also worth noting that the family members still residing in the town kept working for their family and for others even after the family’s income became considerable. That is, their increased income did not determine the work and *ayuda* carried out. What changed was the frequency and intensity of such work. As discussed in the previous section, the activities performed by the single children did not change with their age or the distance.

According to the mother’s statement, the properties would be split and distributed among the children once they get married. Nonetheless, in 2013 I did not note any division in the properties, in fact some more land had been acquired and they have opened a small grocery store. This is because the majority of the children are still in the United States. The eventual division of the properties among the children is not expected to put an end to the family’s cooperation exchanges, but would only take this constant to a different level. Most noticeably for this case study, the growth and development of the family group, does not necessarily depend on the parents, as it is assumed in the Western World. Quite contrary, in San Pedro, and particularly in the cases studied, it is evident that it is thanks to collective work and the children’s contribution that the group developed. Finally, it is important noting that the behavior of this group changed due to experience of migration; even though the income of the group increased, this translated in the parents being able to provide more work and *ayuda* to their neighbors, friends and the community.

## The Esparza family

When I met this family in the year 2000, it was made up of 7 members, the father, the mother, the oldest son, his wife and the young couple's first son as well as single son and a single daughter. The family has grown since then; the youngest daughter married and has a small son now. They have always run a small grocery store in the front part of their property. The products for sale were only the most basic ones: salt, soap, sugar, soup, candles, batteries and eggs. Just behind the store they had a bakery, which was a modest operation but had all the tools needed to make bread. Bread is produced in two shifts; the first one in the small hours of the morning, this bread is to be sold in the mornings. A second shift takes place in the afternoon and that bread would be sold in the evenings. Now, the same as 14 years ago, they carry the bread in a large basket, by foot or on a bicycle, and sell it door-to-door. The father is responsible for making the bread and the second son sells it; the third son of the family in the first case study helps with the sale.

The store is tended by the mother and daughter –in-law. In a small area right in front of the bakery they have set up a table and a fire where they produce hand-made *tortillas*. The daughter is in charge of making and selling the tortillas among the neighbors. The married son is the only one who after getting married looked for and found a job in another town. All these economic activities take place in a single house, the same residence that is still shared by all the members of the family, with their spouses and own children. The house is located in the main street, towards the upper end of the town. Nowadays, is a two-story house built with cement block and roof made with concrete. They have built two large rooms at the back of the house, which are used as kitchen and dining room.

Years ago, the youngest son used to sleep in the grocery store room, where he had a small TV set and would watch it until late at night. Nowadays, they have built a firewood oven at the back of the property and have moved the bakery there. Twelve years ago they only had two rooms, the parents and the younger single daughter slept in one and the married son slept in the other with his wife and baby. As said before, the youngest son used to sleep in the grocery store room.

The house has had a number of extensions since then. The first floor has 3 rooms, the one facing the front is the parents' room. Now that the daughter is married she lives in the same house as she took her husband to live with them. The oldest son, his wife and two children live in some rooms built at the back of the property. The youngest son, his wife and two children live in the second story of the house.

Hugo, the father, was 42 years old when I met him in 2000. He completed primary school. He is originally from Saint Bartholomew, a nearby town. He has been a baker since he was 10 and learned the trade from his father. He also learned to do agricultural work and some basics of bricklaying. Since I met him, he would work exclusively in the bakery. This would take around 13 hours of his day and, when there were special orders, that could go for longer. In spite of having working for 13 years in this business he said he did not make profits, arguing that he only "turn the money around". That meant that the income from the bakery did not allow for any savings, only to make and sell more bread and a small surplus used for food. Since the time they moved to the community they have not worked in agriculture much because the land inherited by his wife was only 200 square meters. About 20 years ago he inherited some land in Saint Bartholomew, but he immediately passed onto his sons.

Guadalupe (Lupe) is Hugo's wife and she was forty in 2000. She completed primary school and started a short qualification as a nurse but could not finish it as her father did not allow her to. She remembers doing domestic chores in the houses where she has lived since she was five years old. When she turned 6, she started going to the countryside to look after farm animals both during the day and night. When she was 12, she and her sisters would work embroidering capes in a workshop in the municipality's main town. This work was by piecework; their earnings went

directly to her parents and would be added to the family's budget. She explains in her own words that in fact the money was used mainly for food, because she does not remember her parents buying clothes or shoes for her. This money was also used to buy more land, which they inherited once they got married. She says that as far back as she can remember she has helped her family, she says she does not know another way to live.

The first son is called Martin; he married in 2001 when he was 19 years old. He studied to be a car mechanic. When he was 7 he started working on the textile mill in the town, since 2000 he has worked as a mechanic in nearby towns. Sometimes when he is between jobs he helps in their bakery or grocery store; in return, his parents feed his family during those times. He has always been aware that he is not the *xocoyote* and, therefore, he will not inherit the house or the majority of the land from his parents. Nonetheless, since he started working he has given money to his parents and keeps on helping them as much as he can. Since the birth of his second son, he hands his salary to his wife. He occasionally shares work and food with his parents and they still help him when he requests it. He says that his parents help him because he has a good marriage and has been a good son. He still lives in his parents' house but is building his own house in his father's town.

Celia is the first daughter-in-law in the family; she was 17 when she married Martin in 2000. They had their first child one year after they married. Now they have two children. She completed primary school and is originally from the same town as his father-in-law. She started to work in a clothing manufacture workshop when she was 11. At 13 she worked as a babysitter. When she turned 14 she worked as sales assistant in a clothing store and would clean her employer's house on the weekends. At home, she would help to raise the cattle and poultry her parents owned. She would study at night or during the evenings. In each of these jobs, she would hand her salary to her parents or use it to pay for public transport fees. Since she married, she has worked less but now she raises her children and helps her in-law family; she supports them, as they are now the family that looks after her.

Pedro is the second and youngest son. In 2001, he was 17 years old. He completed secondary school. He is now married and has 2 children. He has helped his father since he was a teenager, either making or selling bread. His workday would go for about 11 hours. At the beginning he did not receive any payment for this work because his father would say that this son would inherit everything when he is old. After some time, he started receiving a small amount of money he would spend on his own needs. When his brother announced he was getting married, he stopped receiving this money. He stated that was not an issue as it is the parents' duty to pay for their children's wedding in return for all the *ayuda* that children provide to the family. He would also say that his only obligation was to help his family, as this was the place where he would always find support. Now that he is married, he lives in his parents' house and they support him whenever is needed.

Carmela is the third children; she was 14 and single when I first met her. She finished secondary school. She started working in the family's grocery store since she was very young. She started selling bread when she turned 11 and at 12 she became responsible for producing the hand-made *tortillas*. After a year and a half of work in the *tortilla* business, her parents allowed her to keep the earnings for Sundays' sales. When she turned 14, she started working in the fields, as she was now able to weed. At the same time, she was in charge of the household chores and cooking. Only when her sister-in-law moved in, she took Carmela's place doing the cooking. Now that she is married, she performs almost the same activities and looks after her own child. Her husband helps in the bakery. She says she keeps on helping her parents because in return she can receive all the help she will ever need from them. For instance, she has inherited land from them, they help her with advice on child rearing and with any other favor she may need.

## About the Esparza family

The case just described illustrates some of the many ways by which domestic groups are formed in this community. It is worthwhile noting the logic followed by this family to fulfill their goals, whereby they choose strategies they consider most effective. The most self-evident strategies are for members of the family to get married, access education and set up a business. Other strategies that are not so evident, but that are present in their discourse, are to provide and receive *ayuda*, be a good child or be a good parent. We can then observe that, in order to meet their aspirations, the family organizes its available material resources, social connections as well as the strength, age and gender of its members. It could also be seen that in this group the residence and the production group coincide but the consumption groups do not. The latter come together in times of economic scarcity, but separate again when everyone has ways to meet their needs.

The logic enabling this flexibility is based in the fact that during the childhood years, a series of exchanges started among parents, children and siblings. This way of helping each other is something that is expected from a good son / daughter and from a good parent. In other words, the *ayuda* that parents provide to children, and which would have not been possible without the work of their single children, takes place in the first moment of family expansion, when the first of the children gets married.

At that point, which happened 15 years ago, the *ayuda* and the different paid and non-paid jobs of the single children have allowed the parents to save and pay for the wedding and the savings of the newly-weds helped to build their future house. In my conversations with the family in 2013, I enquired about the weddings of the two other children and the stories coincided. However, in those cases, the married siblings contributed to the new marriage. In a similar way to the other families studied, it was basically the work of the single children that enabled the growth and expansion of the domestic groups.

As observed before, the strategies that allowed the social reproduction of the families were based on the work and *ayuda* that the children provided to their family. Ultimately, the siblings agree with the division of labor and goods because they know that a certain moment, they will receive help. In this case the parents have started returning the *ayuda* that their child provided to his family during his childhood. The contribution of the children to the group is not merely material as it also resulted in personal and social well-being. The fact that the parents pay for their children's wedding party includes protection, recognition and visible support, which is not the case when a family member leaves the residence of the group.

Not unlike the other two cases studies, this third case shows a regular sequence of help exchanges between parents and children throughout time. The exchange of work and *ayuda* provides a compass to determine what is right and what is wrong, and therefore, what is expected from individual members of the family. This emotional dimension binds together the separate acts of giving and receiving together, regardless of their separation in time. At the end of the oldest son's wedding party, the father told me "You can't imagine the spend we had, I do not know how I can repay the favors done to me to help me have this party. A big party is how I imagined it for him, because he has been a good son". This exchange of favors and help that the family received for the wedding party started a new series of *ayuda* relationships, this time between the family as a group and its support networks within and outside the community.

## Conclusions

The ethnographic reconstruction presented so far makes it possible to highlight some characteristics of the strategies used by the domestic groups in a *Nahua* society in Central Mexico to achieve their reproduction within a context of relative economic scarcity. The analysis of the said strategies used by the 3 families studied shows that throughout time all the groups have organized their available material and non-material resources in the way they consider most effective. These resources range from physical strength, age, gender, favors, and relationship of trust, *ayuda*, and money earned in different types of work. What is surprising is that in this peasant community, it appears that agricultural work is largely absent as a contributor to the livelihood of these families. In a similar way, the value granted to formal education is minimal. In other words, the families do not consider education as a way to “progress or move forward”, an idea which is otherwise widely extended in Latin American societies.

Notwithstanding, both the discourse and the practices of these groups markedly point to activities that do not result directly in an economic output, but rather they strengthen the exchange of help and favors, thus reinforcing the social fabric. Such actions and strategies will take place repeatedly throughout the different stages of the reproduction cycle of the domestic group. Given that agriculture has ceased to be at the center of their economy, the inhabitants of this community have searched for alternative activities to satisfy their needs. In this town migration and the remittances from migrants have become the center of the economy, providing a relative increase in its quality of life.

There are two reasons for not including references to the government subsidies granted to this community between 2000 and 2010 in this work. First of all, the amount of subsidies granted was minimal and did not impact significantly the quality of life of the local families. Secondly, it was considered that the inclusion of this topic would be a distraction from the discussion on social capital. To further clarify this point, a subsidy establishes a relationship between the individual and the State, either at local or national level. The relationships analyzed in this work, on the other hand, are those who constitute the social capital, which are not merely economic and allow the reproduction of the community.

Therefore, in the context of these case studies, the work and *ayuda* shared by the members of the domestic group creates a social capital that money itself would not provide to a member of the San Pedro Tlalcuapan community. This social capital is useful in that it contributes to the construction of someone's *persona*, generating the social recognition that arises from being a good person, good child, good brother, good father or good husband. Another key characteristic is that the families are not organized according to the pattern described for European or Western-influenced families. This would be the family pattern of dominant *mestizo* societies of Latin America, where the parents are responsible for providing their children with all the material goods necessary for their development and are the only ones that have a responsibility for driving the development cycle of the family. In the family system described in this work, it is the children that, through their work, make it possible for the family to expand, grow and transit through its different cycles. Another feature is that the groups of residence, production and consumption do not coincide. In spite of that, and by means of a large number of arrangements, the families strive for equilibrium. This equilibrium is achieved through a constant flow of effort, help and work.

The family system is based on the assumption that all the members will cooperate in one way or another, according to their age and levels of energy. This way they can trust that at some point in time they will receive an adequate return for their contribution. Inevitably, this search for equilibrium brings about conflict, tensions and inequality; as illustrated in the case of the oldest daughter of the Arteaga family. The group would, in any case, look for a quick solution to the conflict. Further research will focus on the type of arrangements used by families to resolve these

tensions; from an anthropological perspective only a long-term study would enable to observe those family negotiations.

The descriptions presented so far aim to contribute to the discussion of the modalities of social reproduction, a discussion that should include the cultural dimension. Even though this work is a case study linked to a specific socio-cultural context, that of the *Nahua* peasant family, it could inform possible research topics on the family in Latin America. It can especially shed light on matters related to how the peasant family works and what factors influence the practice of inheritance among other key questions.

Finally this document suggests a number of methodological elements that could serve as examples of how socio-cultural anthropology can contribute to these topics. That is, the ethnographic practice and the long-term case study observation. This work is the result of an ethnographic practice beginning 15 years ago, since the year 2000 it has followed these families in particular, and their community in general, using a diversity of channels and anthropological methods. This has allowed me to build an anthropological narrative that brings together their histories full of work events and their present, which makes them able to identify that their present moment is a result of a series of exchanges, favors, support and acts of solidarity that can only be registered utilizing the ethnographic method.

This methodology allows us to pinpoint, among other things, the coherence between their discourses, built around local concepts, and their actions. The long-term observation and follow up of their life histories permits the identification, from an anthropological viewpoint, of strategies enabling their reproduction in times of need by means of a system based on non-economic arrangements. As we have seen the ethnographic record lets us bring together a number of diverse qualitative research methods that provide relevant contributions to the study of the family.

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