

Understanding how Higher Education aspirations are shaped amongst Mexican high school students

Claudia Yvonne Liñan Segura

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Thesis Abstract

Young people's higher education aspirations are a prominent topic within global higher education policy debates. However, discussions are often framed in terms of holding poor young people responsible for lacking aspirations or attributing this to working-class failure (Sellar and Storan 2013). This research explores the higher education aspirations of Mexican young people (age 17-27) living in poverty and adds to the critique of neoliberal understandings which frame aspirations as a homogenous resource that young people have in 'high' or 'low' supply. A rethinking of aspirations is needed so as to not fall into the trap of a 'raising aspirations' political discourse where young people are held responsible for not having enough or the right kind of aspirations.

The focus of this research was (a) the meanings that young people and their families attribute to having HE aspirations, (b) the role of young people's networks in the formation and pursuit of their HE aspirations and (c) the ways in which young people's social networks influence the way they shape and navigate their HE aspirations. Drawing upon the concept of aspirations as cultural, collective and navigational capacities (Appadurai 2004) and its link to social navigation as a way of conceptualising the interaction between agency and social structures (Vigh 2006), this thesis shows how aspirations are intricately woven within young people's social life. It makes novel contributions to youth studies in the Global South by using a qualitative research approach with senior high school students at a technological high school¹ in Morelos, Mexico. This comprised 10 months of participant observation, life history interviews and participatory drawings with 20 students and their families.

¹ High school model where students chose a technical specialisation - in opposition to general high schools where none is chosen

The thesis makes four main contributions to our understanding of the higher education aspirations of young people living in poverty. First, it strengthens the view of HE aspirations as embodying young people's past, present and future. Second, it recognises that young people perceive HE as having transformative value, where young people can become someone in life, '*ser alguien en la vida*', through it. Third, it highlights that the changes in young people's HE aspirations are rooted in the different values attributed to education, family, community, labour and dependency, which coexist and at times contradict each other. In the face of an uncertain environment, young people strategise and do a 'bricolage' (Weston and Imas 2018) where they build their aspirations with what they have at hand. Finally, it provides an insight into the complex system of reciprocity networks in which young people participate that can constrain their HE aspirations. Policy and research around HE aspirations needs to take into consideration the diverse experiences of young people living in poverty, a group whose experiences are commonly generalised.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Both in Latin America and Mexico, conceptualisations of university aspirations have been principally explored in a quantitative manner (Casillas et al 2007, Nájera Nájera 2011, Boxer et al 2011, Altamirano et al 2012, Walkey et al 2013, Campos Vázquez and Medina Cortina 2018) hence the need for qualitative research that can advance understanding on the formation and influences of HE aspirations amongst young people. Consequently, my research aims to use a qualitative approach to explore educational aspirations in a wider manner. This study is located within a social constructivist epistemology and the methodology generates a culturally contextualised understanding of young people's higher education (HE) aspirations.

My principal objective in undertaking this research was to understand the ways in which the HE aspirations of poor young people in semi-rural Mexico are formed. I intend to outline young people's aspirations to higher education and resolve many of the misconceptions encapsulated in the deficit discourse that assumes that the barrier to accessing HE for poor young people in Mexico is that their aspirations are low or lacking (Blanco 2009, Perez-Santiago and Villarruel-Fuentes 2016). I propose rethinking the nature of aspirations and how they are achieved so as to not fall in the trap of a 'raising aspirations' political discourse as in the UK and Australia (St Clair and Benjamin 2011, Zipin et al 2015) where young people are held responsible for not having enough or the right kind of aspirations.

This thesis offers a sociological framework for understanding aspirations as complex socio-cultural constructs that draws conceptually on the work of Arjun Appadurai (2004), Henrik Vigh (2006), and its link to concepts on the interaction between agency and social structures as discussed in Chapter two. With this, I intend to change current understandings of the relationship between aspirations and agency. The perspective on aspiration developed in this thesis innovates in the youth studies field, by breaking with the conception that aspirations are only shaped in an individual manner.

Seeing that aspirations are complex social collective structures, an examination of the role that young people's social networks have on aspiration formation is also needed. Despite substantial evidence to the contrary, the narrative that poor young people and their families do not value higher education is pervasive and leads to assumptions that those who do not aspire to higher education have lower aspirations. The argument in this thesis emerges from the analysis of the Mexican educational policies to date.

As I will discuss in the following sections, the Mexican government policies to promote HE aspirations are reduced to cash transfers and scholarships that only provide a minimal base of financial support without any regards to young people's cultural and social spheres. As such, I recognise the need to explore aspirations and their social embeddedness through young people's narratives. I offer an analysis of data generated from participant observations and individual interviews with participatory elements. My study comprises qualitative research conducted between September 2016 and July 2017 with a cohort of senior high school students at a technological high school in Morelos, Mexico.

The questions my research asks were initially identified from the literature review but then shifted throughout the data collection process. I had proposed to look at the factors influencing university aspirations and their realisation, but I grasped that my timeframe for fieldwork was not enough to allow me to see whether young people actually realised their HE aspirations or not. Another change I made was regarding a question I had at the start: to what extent do they have agency over their university aspirations and their realisation? During my fieldwork with young people and collection of data, I saw young people exercising their agency when making decisions about participating or not in HE. Even though these decisions reflected different visions of what is a good life, I recognised that they were exerting agency in a way that belied the common arguments around aspirations.

I became aware of how the social structures around them also constrained their agency in various ways. In particular, how their family responsibilities and shifting family (in)dependence hinder their aspirations, specially for females (Punch 2007). This led me to examine the notion of aspirations more critically, as this provides a means to further understand the interplay between agency and social structures in young people's lives (Archer et al 2014). Thus, the three overarching questions of the thesis became:

- What does having a higher education aspiration mean to these students and their families?
- What is the role of young people's networks in the formation and pursuit of their HE aspirations?
- How do young people's social networks influence the way young people shape and navigate their HE aspirations?

In order to explore each of these questions, I draw together academic literature with my participant observations and the first-hand accounts of young people and their family members.

Quantitative research in Mexico based on surveys to students from three different modalities of junior high school (general, technical and *telesecundaria*)²³ proposes that females typically have higher educational aspirations than their male counterparts. This is particularly evident in schools with higher levels of marginality (Azaola Garrido 2009) and is relevant to my research. However, the study does not tease out how these

² *Telesecundarias* are located mostly in indigenous and rural communities (Dietz 2014) and as their name indicates, their central component is video material.

³ As seen in Appendix II, the Mexican junior high school level has a diverse structure. By 2018, besides the general junior high schools (51%), there were also technical (27%), and telesecundarias (21%) at the national level (Ministry of Education 2019a).

educational aspirations might relate to the type of education provided. By contrast, a similar study conducted with indigenous-language speaker students, attending two general high schools located in zones classified as highly marginalised, found that males had higher HE aspirations than females (Nájera Nájera 2011). This lack of aspirations amongst females was attributed to the gender role expectations for males to become breadwinners within indigenous-language speaking families (Nájera Nájera 2011: 85). The significant contrast of findings between these studies could have been explored through qualitative research, in order to understand what shapes aspirations to higher education. It is my aim to contribute to this debate by showing the influence of the social context in which females and males pursue their HE aspirations. It is also important to note that both studies referred to above based their categories of marginality on the National Population Council (CONAPO) index of marginality where the school is located; thus, a postcode bias is possible as not all students attending the school would be marginalised. My decision to sample poverty through Mexico's official CONEVAL (2016) measures which are applied to individual households aims to narrow this gap.

A great part of studies on the aspirations of young people has been characterised by a strong emphasis on agency and the role it plays in the formation of aspirations. However, the interaction between agency and social structures is often neglected. A further significant aspect of this research, therefore, is its elucidation of this interaction. As a way of highlighting young people's positionality within their context, my study is designed with a participatory approach. As will be discussed in Chapter 3, it was carried out using methods such as participatory drawings and life history interviews. The strength of these methods is that they allow researchers to carry out research with and by young people rather than on them (Cornwall and Jewkes 1995). Official social entities in Mexico such as the Mexican Youth Institute do not consider young people as "experts" in consultations that are concerned with their future (Alonso 2014). By contrast, I believe that young people's voices should be heard, particularly in the context of

Morelos, Mexico, where it is usually adults who dictate the future. Through my interaction with students, family members and teachers, I generate unique insights into the ways in which young people build their aspirations and how these are socially constructed. It is hoped that through these insights, this thesis will contribute to the formulation of education policy that is better informed by young people's needs.

Some Mexican sociological studies have depicted the social inequalities in Mexico as arising from the differences between private and public-school attendance, where the former is considered privileged due to the greater quality of education provided (Cuevas-Cajiga 2015, Pereyra 2008). However, this public-private divide has been challenged by an educational research study that points out that private and public academic institutions are not homogenous and thus should not be treated as such (Suárez Zozaya 2013). I share Suárez Zozaya's standpoint: differences between these systems do not lie in the quality of education or the institution itself, as this is not necessarily higher in one system compared to the other, but in the interaction of these systems with students' socioeconomic contexts. My research contributes to this attention to heterogeneity by focusing on a neglected part of the Mexican public-school system. It looks at the aspirations and experiences of poor public-educated students from a technological high school and at the socially embedded differences within this group's experiences.

I also draw on Bonfil's (2001) study to argue that the rise in private educational provision in Mexico has generated inequalities in the quality of teaching, affecting rural and indigenous-speaking localities the most. Sociological research in the global North has proposed that inequalities within HE are partly produced by students' choices, in the UK (Ball et al. 2002), and the technical and general divide in high schools, in Australia (Tranter 2012). A similar technical-general divide can be found in Mexico, as my study will discuss. Ball et al's (2002) work is a key conceptual influence to my work. Their study proposes that social class plays a role in UK ethnic-minority students' HE choices, i.e. applying to a local university because of family-

associated values. My study offers a similar albeit more complex analysis of students' HE aspirations. Similarly, the differences between the curriculum in poorer and wealthier Southern Australian high schools privileges the cultural capital of the elite "while introducing a class-differentiated system of technical education where working-class 'kids' are trained for working-class jobs" (Tranter 2012: 915).

Educational and sociological research in Mexico has dealt with the pervasive social inequalities that characterise its education system. These inequalities have been defined in terms of the differences between social groups which lead to disadvantages, i.e. groups with a low socio-economic background experience more barriers in terms of accessing education and continuity of schooling. There is a consensus across studies that are qualitative (Arzate Salgado 2015, Blanco Bosco 2011, Diez de Urdanivia 2011, Guerra Ramírez 2012), quantitative (Solís 2013, Bautista Gómez 2012) and mixed-methods (Solís et al 2013) that in Mexico, educational inequalities are pronounced by social class, urban-rural divide and for indigenous language-speaking families (Bracho 2002; Arzate Salgado 2015; Blanco Bosco 2011; Diez de Urdanivia 2011, Arnaut and Giorguli 2012). My study illustrates how this structuring process works through the narratives of individual students.

In adopting an ethnographic, narrative approach, my study fills a significant methodological gap. Research that has explored educational inequalities in Mexico in the last decades has been dominated by statistical research, which leaves a gap in terms of understanding the context of the related social actors (Aguilar Nery 2010). One exception is Aguilar Nery's mixed-methods study (2010) of how students enrolled in technological education are more likely to accumulate disadvantages than their counterparts from general education. The study was developed with vocational graduates

from a *universidad tecnológica*⁴(*technological university*) in an urban marginal zone in the State of Mexico⁵ and is therefore of particular interest in terms of my study. From those interviewed, 23 were employed and 3 were unemployed or studying⁶. The proposal arising from this research is that their technological 2-year studies had an important role in increasing the capabilities of participants as now graduates would attain jobs and develop personally and economically. The graduates with the lowest income and with full-time informal jobs were constrained to participate in further study. Other studies propose that Mexican universities can contribute to reducing these income inequalities (Flores Crespo 2002) and increase social justice (Silas-Casillas 2012). In this regard, I adopt the perspective of researchers who propose that the educational system may reproduce social inequalities while at the same time fostering social mobility for some (Blanco Bosco 2011, Bautista Gómez 2012, Casillas et al 2007, Brusi et al 2010, Ortiz 2014).

Although my thesis is concerned with the HE aspirations of young people, their prior academic trajectories are clearly relevant. Therefore, the following sections give an overview of the educational system in Mexico from junior high school through to university. I have mentioned the different high school models but it is important to highlight that not all states in the country have all the modalities. Instead, each state's provision is based on their demographic, cultural, geographic and economic needs and resources (Ducoing Watty 2018). I want to discuss in particular some of the differences between *telesecundarias* and the general high schools, as most participants in this study were enrolled in a *telesecundaria* prior to their high school studies.

⁴ Please see Appendix I for a matrix of the Mexican educational system

⁵ Study based on questionnaires to 451 and interviews to 26 participants.

⁶ Employed graduates were categorised as 'high income' for those earning between 7- 9+ days salary at the current minimum wage , 'middle income' for those who earned an income between 3-7 days ""salary at the current minimum wage and 'low income' for those between 1-3 days salary at the current minimum wage

1.1 Junior high school in Mexico

The Mexican Education system⁷ is one of the biggest in the world, and in the American continent, is in third place in terms of size, after United States and Brazil (INEE 2018). By the academic year 2017-2018, the Mexican educational system was composed of more than 250,000 schools where around 2 million teachers taught more than 30 million students (INEE 2018). Mexican educational discourse has focused on how the educational system transforms social inequalities into inequalities of educational destiny because it privileges the middle class (Blanco Bosco 2011: 72). I thus find it necessary to consider the differences between the general junior high school, technical and *telesecundaria* and the way in which disadvantages can accumulate in the latter type of school.

Technical junior high schools target rural and poor urban students because they provide technical skills that can be used whether or not they continue their studies and can help them continue their studies by giving them access to jobs they can do alongside studying (Pieck Gochicoa 2005). Examples of these skills are industrial drawing, electronics, computing, manufacture, secretarial and clerical skills, carpentry, blacksmithing, beekeeping, livestock and agriculture. General junior high schools are associated with prestige while technical junior high schools are associated with poor provision in the form of lack of technological equipment such as computers, laboratories and toilets lacking water and hygiene. These characteristics contribute to a disadvantaged experience for technical junior high schools' students (Pieck Gochicoa 2005). Sociological studies comparing junior high schools in Mexico (Reimers 2001, Blasco 2003) have suggested that the differences between the general and the technical junior high schools in Mexico lead to further disadvantages for young people living in poverty who mainly attend these technical schools (Pieck Gochicoa 2005).

⁷ Please refer to Appendix I for the summary of the Mexican education system.

Telesecundarias are located mostly in indigenous language-speaking and rural communities that are economically and socially marginalised (Dietz 2014, Garcia Cruz & Morales Hernandez 2017) and as their name indicates, their central component is video material. However, contrary to Mexico's educational policies, in practice, *telesecundarias* operate as unitary schools with one teacher being responsible for the three levels of junior high school (students aged 12-15), even though teachers do not have the training, or the material needed for teaching (Reyes Juarez 2014). Education quality in these schools is also affected by the lack of textbooks, televisions and high teacher turnover and absenteeism (Reyes Juarez 2014). As it is the students from the lowest socioeconomic contexts, the ones who are in most need, who attend these schools, they receive a lower quality of education (Reyes Juarez 2014, Santos del Real and Carvajal Cantillo 2001) thereby reproducing and exacerbating social inequalities.

1.2 High school in Mexico

The high school at Ayala, Morelos, where my study was undertaken, is a technological high school, which means that it has a dual modality: students can obtain either a high school diploma or a technical degree. To obtain a technical degree, the student must have a final mark of 8/10⁸. Technological high schools differ from a general high school in that students choose a technical specialisation from their second semester, whereas in the general high school, no specialisation is offered. Similar to general high schools, technological high schools also encourage students to attend HE. University fairs and programmes subsidising the price of state university entry exams for their graduates are an example of this. For the 2018-2019 academic year, students enrolled at the national high school level were distributed amongst the high school education models as follows: 62.7% at the general

⁸ This differs depending on the technological high school. In other states the final mark required for a technical degree is 9/10 (Ministry of Education in the State of Mexico 2019).

high school, 36.1% at the technological high school and 1.2% at the Technical Professional⁹ (Ministry of Education 2019a). Being enrolled in a general high school is considered most prestigious (Villa Lever 2007). Research shows that technological high schools students are most likely to include older students, students taking on family and labour responsibilities, facing economic disadvantages and being less supported by their families, compared with general high schools (Guerra Ramírez and Guerrero Salinas 2012). According to the Ministry of Upper Secondary Education, 50% of technological high school students and 60% of general high school students will go on to university (Poy Solano 2018). Mexican senior high school students are already considered privileged as 23.8% of students (21.2% female and 26.3% male) drop out throughout the first high school year (ages 15- 17) (INEE 2016).

A central disparity, alongside differences in the quality of education received in technological compared with general high schools in Mexico, is that students from general high schools which are part of an autonomous university in Mexico¹⁰, are granted a “pase reglamentado¹¹” to the National State University (UNAM) if they obtain a 9/10 final average at their general high school studies. The available places first go to the graduates who completed their high school studies in three years and with a final grade of 90. Then places go to the graduates who finished their studies in a maximum period of 4 years and who get a minimum final grade of 70 (Contla 2018). Additionally, every career programme has different requisites i.e. in 2018 the minimum entry grade for Applied Mathematics was 86 (CONAMAT 2018). Technological high school graduates’ access to university is dependent on an entry exam. The charges for this exam vary between states. For example, the admission exam for the Autonomous University in

⁹ High school model where students acquire a certification of professional competences and a professional license to join the labour market. If they wish, they can enrol in higher education

¹⁰ Not all general high schools are part of an Autonomous University in Mexico. There are 32 autonomous universities in Mexico and all of them are state funded. All the states in Mexico have one autonomous university and in Mexico City there are two. The universities of Guadalajara, Veracruz and Guanajuato are not formally autonomous but in practice they have their own practice and policies as the autonomous ones.

¹¹ A pass (as per the regulations) to access university without the need of sitting an admission exam

Mexico City (UNAM) costs 420 Mexican Pesos (4 days salary at the current minimum wage) and the one for the Autonomous University in Morelos (UAEM) costs 700 Mexican Pesos (7 days salary at the current minimum wage). The fact that students from technological high schools need to go through this process adds to their existing disadvantages (Guerra Ramirez 2012). This literature has highlighted that this and other barriers young people from technological high schools face when pursuing their HE aspirations are understudied.

I suggest that previous studies have erroneously treated students who attend technological high schools as a homogenous group in terms of their aspirations. At the same time, I have also indicated that students who attend these schools face more socio-economic challenges and that there is a hierarchy of quality in education in that general high schools in Mexico are perceived as the more prestigious and popular high school model (Villa Lever 2007). In this regard, a comparative study in Mexico City based on qualitative in-depth interviews with senior students (20 from a general high school and 21 from a technological high school), found that students from the technological high school faced a dual challenge in their transition to university due to having to sit an admissions exam and due to a lack of economic resources (Guerra Ramirez 2012). In Mexico, the transition to HE can be non-linear, particularly for poorer students (technological high school students) who may have to engage in precarious full-time work - *chambas*- in between university attendance. The gap can extend to several years in some cases. In Guerra Ramirez's (2012) study, none of the students enrolled at the university during their first year after graduation. After between two to four attempts on average, most enrolled in their second year, while the majority of the general high school students would go on to university in the first year after graduation.

1.3 Higher Education in Mexico

Although there has been a significant increase in the number of young people entering higher education, young people in the lowest wealth quintiles are still under-represented in Mexico (World Inequality Database in Education 2016b)¹². In the 1990s, sociological literature on Mexican young people living in poverty was guided by a structuralist view which proposed that those who have less also desire less from the educational system (Muñoz 1996). As a result, the Mexican government introduced a number of policies that encourage HE participation (detailed in the following sections). The question as to how higher education (HE) aspirations are shaped is clearly relevant in attempting to devise strategies that promote the individual and social benefits of higher education. For the 2017-2018 academic year in Mexico, 38.4% of young people participated in HE, of which 50.1% are male and 49.9% are female (Ministry of Education 2018).

Higher education institutions are also diverse (Please see Appendix II) and with key differences in prestige (Flores Crespo 2002, 2009). For example, studies highlight that technological universities are less prestigious than state and federal universities (Flores Crespo 2002). Since the 1980s, Mexico's higher education has been impacted by a neoliberalist economic model which has allowed private investment in the education sector. With this change and due to the incapability of public institutions to fulfil existing demand (Acosta 2014, Gregorutti 2011), there has been a notable increase in the number of private higher education institutions (HEIs) (Silas Casillas 2005). In 1996, Mexico had 23% private HEIs and 77% public HEIs. Twenty years later, by 2016, Mexico had 5,343 HE institutions, of which 3,163 are private (59%) compared to 2,180 public HEIs (41%) (Islas 2017). The growth

¹² The World Inequality Database in Education (WIDE) uses the Democratic Health Survey (DHS) and Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) to calculate the wealth indicators. The wealth index is a composite measure of a household's cumulative living standard. It is calculated using data on a household's ownership of selected assets, such as televisions and bicycles; materials used for housing construction; and types of water access and sanitation facilities. CONEVAL (2016) also uses access to basic household services and household space and quality as two of their 6 indicators (along with educational lag, food access, access to health services and access to social security).

of private HEIs is chaotic and unregulated because some of them are not fully accredited and lack quality in their education provision (Takayanagui et al 2016). The Secretary of Public Education is in charge of providing an Official Validity Recognition of Studies (RVOE) certificate. It offers a system where families can search if a university has been awarded this certificate (Gregorutti 2011, Hicks 2017). However, current education policies allow universities to continue to operate without the RVOE certificate.

A substantial number of private institutions offer relatively inexpensive undergraduate programmes that are relevant for the service sectors (i.e. accounting, marketing and business). These institutions provide opportunities to lower-income students who have applied to a national public institution and been rejected due to insufficient places (Varela Petito 2011, Gama Tejeda 2017). It has been suggested that 80% of applicants to public HE institutions are rejected (Hicks 2017). As students' demand for higher education exceeds the places available at public institutions, lower quality, demand-absorbing private institutions have been created to ensure HE access (Canton & Blom 2010, Hicks 2017).

The impact on HE participation in Mexico of characteristics such as social class, location, gender and indigenous language-speaking individuals are discussed in the following section.

Social class

HE is a luxury that many cannot afford, both in terms of the direct costs and the opportunity costs that results when individuals cannot work full-time. According to data from the Mexican Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy almost half (46.2%) of the Mexican population is

poor (CONEVAL 2015), meaning that more than 55 million Mexicans live in conditions of poverty¹³. Social stratification is high amongst those who enter higher education. By 2012, only 19% of high school graduates from the lowest SES quintile enrolled in higher education, compared with 87% from the highest SES quintile (WIDE 2016a). The richest 20% represent around 60% of the student body, while the poorest 40% constitute only 8% (Kaufmann 2014). The top-ranked public universities charge term tuition fees that range between one to thirty days salary at the current minimum wage. Additionally, many students cannot afford to move to a large city and pay for living expense to enrol in a university.

Geographical location

According to The World Inequality Database on Education (2012a) rural and urban differences in Mexico are still significant when it comes to high school completion rate. One out of every four students coming from rural areas graduate from high school in comparison to two out of every four students coming from urban areas. Social studies about the Mexican Education system highlight a significant access gap amongst classes as well as the effect of the urban-rural divide (Arzate Salgado 2015, Martínez Rizo 2002, Lera Mejía et al 2017) and indigenous language speakers (Duran Gonzalez and Raesfeld 2014). Social stratification is also high among those who enter higher education: 45% of students from households with middle to high income enrol vs 11% of the poorest in urban areas and 3% of the rural youth (Castiello-Gutierrez 2019).

Gender

¹³ CONEVAL measures poverty with a multidimensional approach; the factors or dimensions used are educational lag, access to health services, access to social security, access to quality housing, access to household basic services (water and light), and access to food.

The gender parity index (GPI)¹⁴ for HE enrolment in Mexico in 2013, was 1.01 (World Bank 2015). The GPI is not homogenous across the country. In 2013-2014, the GPI for HE enrolment was 1.04 at the expense of men in the state of Morelos, and 0.87 in the northern state of Coahuila (Mexico's Ministry of Education 2014), at the expense of women. Although access to HE has grown, retention rate is still an issue: only 21% of those who begin elementary school will graduate from university. Female retention is higher; graduates are 53% female and 47% male (Ortega 2018). After graduation, women in full time jobs receive only 66% of the salary of their male counterparts, which is 6% less than the OECD average of 74% (Ortega 2018).

Indigenous language-speaking population

According to the National Institute of Statistics and Geography, 6.7% of Mexico's population lives in a household where the head speaks an indigenous language¹⁵ (INEGI 2016). Data from the last census carried out in Mexico in 2010¹⁶ reports that 40% of Mexican indigenous language speakers are urban while 60% are rural (Schmelkes 2013). Mexico is also the most diverse country in the American continent with 68 indigenous languages and 364 variants in total. The alphabets of these languages are not standardised. For example, náhuatl¹⁷ has 4 alphabets (INEGI 2013). The National Institute of Statistics and Geography¹⁸ (INEGI 2013) and academic researchers (Schmelkes 2013) have highlighted the complexities of measuring the

¹⁴ The GPI is the ratio of female to male values of a given indicator and is calculated by dividing the female gross enrolment ratio by the male gross enrolment ratio for the given level of education.

¹⁵ According to the definition of the National Institute of Statistics and Geography; population living in a household where the head of the family and/or partner speaks an indigenous language

¹⁶ Mexico's Population Census, the most important source of statistical information in the country, is carried out every 10 years; some of the most relevant information about indigenous population is dated from 2010 (INEGI 2013).

¹⁷ Náhuatl or nahua languages has more speakers than any other family of indigenous languages in Mexico (Summer Institute of Linguistics 2019)

¹⁸ Its aim is to coordinate the National System of Statistical and Geographical Information of Mexico

Mexican indigenous population as the Population Census and the Population and Housing Count undertaken by the Government ask individuals if they are part of an ethnic group or if they speak an ethnic language but do not ask questions regarding the specific indigenous language individuals speak and if these languages have been displaced in their family (parents speak but not their children) (INEGI 2013).

The most recent statistics available from the National Association of Universities and Higher Education Institutions point out that only 2% of the Mexican indigenous language-speaking population -aged between 18 and 25- were enrolled in HE (Bertely Busquets 2011). However, due to the lack of consensus between the main Mexican social development institutions on how to identify this group, there is a lack of precise statistical information on their educational trajectories (Mendoza Rojas 2015). According to the National Association of Universities and Higher Education Institutions, they constitute only 1% of the total of higher-education students (ANUIES 2016). Mexican sociological and educational research has focused on how indigenous language-speaking young people are not expected to attend university. Instead, young males are expected to take up agricultural activities or low-paid urban jobs while young females are expected to become wives and mothers (García Álvarez 2015, Pacheco Ladrón de Guevara 2014).

1.4 HE widening participation policies in Mexico

In addition to the universal scholarship programme described earlier, Mexico's National Development Plan 2013-2018 established a national coordinating body for scholarships to HE, CNBES¹⁹. Their National Scholarship Programme provides scholarships for low-income students²⁰ to

¹⁹ CNBES {Coordinación Nacional de Becas para la Educación Superior} is the National Coordination of Scholarships for Higher Education is a body adjacent to Mexico's Ministry of Education that regulates scholarship programmes within the higher education sector

²⁰ Students are identified as low-income if they are from a household with an income of 4 minimum salaries per capita or less

continue their studies, as described in Appendix II. In 2015, the programme grew by 74%, with: 393 thousand scholarship holders in the 2012-2013 academic year rising to more than 682 thousand in 2015 (Mexico's Presidency of the Republic 2015). Another scholarship programme is PRONABES²¹, which targets low-income higher-education students. Findings that compare two groups of students - those who obtained scholarship grants versus those who were rejected - indicate that the former have a lower drop-out rate than their counterparts who were not funded (Gómez Triana 2014). With the scholarship cash transfer of around 1,000 Mexican pesos monthly (16 days salary at the current minimum wage), one of these grants can have a significant impact on a family's well-being. Students reportedly spend their cash transfer as follows: 40% on transportation, 26% for tuition fees, 9% on school supplies and 5% for food (Gómez Triana 2014b:112). The scholarship helps parents as it enables them to cover other family needs with the resources that were previously assigned for education-related expenses.

Despite the expansion of national scholarship programmes, a study found that 20% of students who dropped out of high school were in receipt of a scholarship (INEE 2017). Studies from the INEE (National Institute of Evaluation for Education) point out that these scholarship programmes in Mexico lack external evaluation of their impact (INEE 2017). Furthermore, the future of independent institutions that can evaluate these programmes is uncertain because the current national government has proposed to eliminate the INEE and instead, appoint an institution dependent on the Ministry of Education (Roldán 2018).

²¹ PRONABES {Programa Nacional de Becas para Estudios Superiores} is the National Programme of Scholarship for Higher Education established in 2001 with resources from the World Bank

Since its election in December 2018, the current Mexican Government has made some changes in national social development and education policies but is still setting Higher Education (HE) in Mexico at the top of the educational agenda. One of the most radical changes in education expenditure in Mexico was the closing down of their key cash transfer programme in February 2019 (Vega 2019). The Prospera²² (previously named as Oportunidades) conditional cash transfer programme was established in 1997 with the main aim to give money to a mother to encourage her to send her children to school and to the health centre. Prospera was a pivotal initiative that reduced income poverty by a third in rural areas and benefitted a fourth of the country's total population (World Bank 2014). This programme has been replicated in 52 countries around the world in very different contexts: in Latin America, Asia and Africa. The majority of mothers and female guardians in my study (17 out of 20) were in receipt of the Prospera conditional cash transfers.

From February 2019, the new president, Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, established the programme "Benito Juarez Universal scholarships" which will provide economic support to all students enrolled in Mexican public high schools, irrespective of their socioeconomic background. Every student at the high school level will receive bimonthly economic support of 1,600 Mexican pesos (16 days salary at the current minimum wage) throughout their secondary studies (Mexican Government 2019). In addition to the above, for HE participation and access to the job market, the government is providing cash transfers of 2,400 MXN monthly (24 days salary at the current minimum wage) for 'young people from a low-economic resource'²³ background who are enrolled in HE (AMLO 2018).

²² Prospera is made up of 4 components: Education- economic support to guarantee enrolment, retention and regular attendance to school. Health-promoting access to health services and regular attendance to health units. Nutrition-economic support given to beneficiary families to improve their food quality, quantity and diversity. Link-up: promote beneficiaries' inclusion in training and employment programmes, access to savings, microcredit and life insurance.

²³ The "Benito Juarez Universal scholarships" programme was part of the campaign of new president Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO). Its implementation will start in the first months of 2019. The economic requirements to measure the lower economic background have not been defined yet.

The idea of a universal scholarship system irrespective of socioeconomic status behind the Beca-Salario Universal scholarship scheme is now being replicated at the national level with the universal federal programmes, “Universal scholarships Benito Juarez” (discussed in the previous section) and “*Jovenes construyendo el futuro* (Young people building the future)”, which will undoubtedly benefit young people (Preciado 2019, Mata 2018). As will be discussed in Section 3.7, the great majority of participants, with one important exception, were in receipt of the Beca Salario Universal Cash Transfer. The programme “Young people building the future”, established in January 2019, will target youth not in employment, education or training (NEET), by providing them HE monthly scholarships of 2,400 MXN. It will provide training and apprenticeships in companies and other institutions, with an intended distribution of 70% for the private sector, 20% for the public sector and 10% for the social sector where they will receive 3,600 Mexican pesos monthly for up to one year. With these cash transfers, the government intends to curb youth migration to the USA and reduce antisocial behaviours that lead to violence (Mexican Government 2018). In addition, the Mexican government has set the target of creating 100 new public universities. So far, the opening of these new institutions has been criticised for being disorganised and lacking strategy and transparency. These universities will operate on land donated by the municipality and by communities (Zerega 2019). The changes in national educational policies will affect all of Mexico’s states and in particular the poorest regions.

1.5 Research location

The majority of Mexico’s poorest states are in the southern region of the country. My research was carried out in Morelos, a state located in south-central Mexico. Mexico is a vast and diverse country so no single state can be representative, but Morelos was chosen because it shares typical

features with the national context. Mexico exhibits high levels of inequality that are seen in the vast differences between the poverty levels at a regional level, e.g. the northern highly industrialised state of Nuevo León (14%) and the southern state of Chiapas (77%) (CONEVAL 2016b). Morelos's poverty levels (52%) are similar to the average national level (46%) (CONEVAL 2016a). Additionally, as shown in Appendix II, for the academic year 2012-2013, Morelos's higher educational coverage (27.5%) is similar to the national mean (28.6%) (Mexico's Ministry of Education 2016). Morelos's high levels of violence also reflect those of Mexico (Mendoza Escamilla 2016). The Index of Peace in Mexico²⁴ – with indicators such as number of security officers, perceptions of criminality and violent demonstrations -among others- puts Morelos in third position out of the 32 Mexican states, preceded only by Sinaloa and Guerrero (Institute for Economics and Peace 2016).

The representative nature of Morelos provides the opportunity to potentially generalise some of the findings to the whole of Mexico in terms of the meanings, factors and actors influencing university aspirations amongst students classified as poor. However, there is one potential gap in that only 70,000 indigenous language-speaking people live in Morelos where they constitute 4.4% of the total population, in comparison to the 6.7% indigenous language-speaking population in Mexico (Mexico's government 2015). At the same time, Morelos holds the 15th position (out of 32) for internal Mexican immigration, mainly from states such as Mexico City, Guerrero, Puebla and Veracruz (INEGI 2013).

During my time in the field until the beginning of 2019, Morelos' government was implementing the programme *Beca Salario Universal* (Universal Scholarship-Salary) that targets students in their third (last) year of junior high school, high school and HE. As its name states, it provides a monthly

²⁴ Please refer to Appendix IV to see complete list of indicators for the Index of Peace

wage to students. For junior high school, the monthly help for students is 300 Mexican pesos²⁵ (4 days salary at the current minimum wage), 500²⁶ MXP for high school students, and 700 MXP²⁷ for HE students (Morelos's Executive Power, 2016). Morelos's government first implemented the Beca-Salario Universal programme in the school year 2013 – 2014. In that academic year, 71.5% of the youth aged 15-17 were enrolled in school, which is above the national mean of 69.4% (Ibarra Uribe and Fonseca Bautista 2016). Of relevance is that in that same academic year, only 53% young people completed their studies in Morelos, thus becoming the state with the lowest percentage of secondary school completion at the national level, which is 64.7% (Idem). In January 2019, Morelos's government announced that this programme will cease to exist. The fact that senior junior high school students will no longer receive this benefit has not been addressed by the government yet. This leaves a gap for a policy targeting the transition from junior high school to high school, which is still a significant problem in Mexico: 19.3% (19.7% females and 19.6% males) of Mexican young people who graduate from junior high school do not commence their high school studies. In Morelos, 20.7% (19% females and 22.5% males) of junior high school graduates do not enrol in a high school (Solís 2018). In terms of a potential limitation to my findings, the fact that Morelos had implemented the Beca-Salario²⁸ programme at the time of this study, could have acted as a leverage to raise students' educational aspirations.

1.6 Mexico's migrational landscape

The Mexico-U.S. corridor is the largest in the world, with over 12 million migrants (National Council of Population 2018). It is estimated that 10,000 people try to migrate illegally over the 2,000 km border between Mexico and the USA every week. One in three is apprehended by police and those that don't make it are likely to continue trying to cross the border at least twice a year (British Broadcasting Corporation 2019). In 2015, women

²⁵ This accounts for 3 days salary at the current minimum wage.

²⁶ This accounts for 6.8 days salary at the current minimum wage.

²⁷ This accounts for 9.5 days salary at the current minimum wage.

²⁸ Beca-Salario is the universal scholarship scheme promoting post-compulsory education participation.

represented 47% (5.7 millions) of the migrant Mexican population migrating to the United States (National Population Council 2019). The flux of individuals crossing the Mexico-USA border has predominantly shown that close to 80% had up to 12 years of education. By 2016, 6% of male immigrants in the US had no schooling, 30% have up to 8 years of schooling, followed by 19% with nine to twelve years of schooling and no diploma, 25% of them were high school graduates, 12% with some college, no degree, 4% with a bachelor degree, and 1% with a postgraduate degree.

For females, the levels are comparable (29% have up to 8 years of schooling, followed by 17% with nine to twelve years of schooling and no diploma, 25% of them were high school graduates, 13% with some college, no degree, 5% with a bachelor degree, and 1% with a postgraduate degree) (National Population Council 2018). In recent response to the issue of youth migration, the Mexican government established in 2019 their key programme “Jovenes construyendo el futuro” (discussed in section 1.4) providing HE and training scholarship grants to young people. It has at its core mission to ease the difficulties to participate in training and higher education facing young people. It is proposed that “a great number of these young people whose future have been cancelled have migrated to the other side of the border” (AMLO 2018:2). It is expected to benefit the population of young people who are not engaged in education, employment or training which the government identifies as 22% of the total young people’s population in Mexico (AMLO 2018).

Informal commerce in Mexico makes young people the main subjects of overexploitation. Labour precariousness and low salaries are the main causes for migration to the United States (Paris Pombo 2012). Mexican population migrating to the USA is distributed mainly in the 15 - 24 age group (41%), followed by individuals 25-34 (27%) and 35-49 (17%) (INEGI 2010). The wage gap between Mexico and United States is also accounted as a driver for migration. From 2010-2015, in United States the minimum wage was 58 dollars, while in Mexico for the same period of time it was 4.96 dollars, so a

Mexican worker would need to work 11.96 days to earn the same as a migrant in United States (Vázquez Ruiz 2012: 105). Even though *Mexico's* new government raised the minimum wage to 102.68 Mexican pesos (\$5.1) per day, a 16 per cent rise from 88.36 pesos, the important gap remains.

An important aspect to note here is that the acquisitive power of the minimum wage in the United States guarantees access to a minimum wellbeing state (food, health, living, transportation and recreation), while in Mexico, the minimum wage does not satisfy the basic needs of food for a family of four (Vázquez Ruiz 2012). Measuring migration flows between Mexico and the USA is challenging because there are no official counts of how many Mexican immigrants enter and leave the USA each year (Carrión Flores 2017). Data from 2008 shows that the occupations of undocumented Mexican migrants was 25% agriculture, 19% gardening and repairing, 17% construction, 12% food preparation, 10% production, 7% for transportation of materials, 5% general labour (Aragónes Castañer and Salgado Nieto 2015). Female work in United States has greatly been focused on (in)formal domestic services (D'Aubeterre Buznego et al 2018).

Mexico is the country at third place globally for receiving remittances, with 36 000 USD millions in 2018, which represented an increase of 11% from the previous year (World Bank 2019). It has been seen that remittances arising from migration to the United States would usually be spent in house construction, expansion of the house, and household expenses such as clothes, medicines and educational services (Juárez Sánchez et al 2018). In the face of the increasing levels of remittances, Mexico established in 1992, the 2x1 migration programme originated in Zacatecas where for every dollar contributed by migrant associations in the United States, two dollars would be granted by the federal and state government. This initiative arose in response to the association between migrants living in United States and their contribution to develop community projects i.e. repair of

plazas, churches, sports parks and cemeteries on their own (Garcia Zamora 2007). In 1999, this changed to the 3x1 programme where academic support (scholarships, classrooms or school spaces), community social development (culture and recreation such as zocalos, parks, spaces related to health sports) and social infrastructure (water, electricity and draining systems, roads, bridges, highways) where the federal government would offer a 25% economic support (up to a maximum amount of 1 million pesos), 25% to the migrant association and the 50% to the state and municipal governments.

These projects were required to bring community (at least five families), familial (2-4 families) or individual benefits and had to be presented by a migrant (family or individual) part of a migrant club outside Mexico. This was part of a strategy from the Mexican government to make use of the collective remittances. With the change of government in 2019, this programme was modified and now targets only the migrant population living in poverty and marginalisation. Priority is now given to zones where the majority of the population is indigenous speaking, has the highest marginalisation and violence levels or with very high, high, and medium intensity levels of migration in Mexico (Mexico's Ministry of Government 2019).

Within these classifications, Morelos is categorised as a state with a high level of migration intensity in Mexico. In terms of international migration, mainly to the United States of America, Morelos is in seventh position (Preciado 2016). In terms of remittances, Morelos occupies the eleventh place, out of the 32 states, where 5% of the households in Morelos receive remittances from the USA (Mexico's Ministry of Government 2019: 35). Migrants working together with the government to contribute towards the development of their communities of origin speaks of the ways in which they negotiate their transnational citizenships. Even though remittances contribute to the wellbeing of these communities, they also contribute to a social

inequality between these and the communities that do not receive these. Due to the strong anti-immigration policies enacted by USA in the past two years, illegal migration from Mexico to USA has become a more difficult and riskier endeavour (Kulish et al 2017). Ironically, the rise in border enforcement had little effect on the rate of undocumented immigration from Mexico, but it dramatically reduced the rate of return migration (Massey and Gentsch 2014).

A direct consequence of militarisation in the border has been that undocumented migrants have the need to pay the services of *coyotes* to increase their success possibilities of crossing. In the 1970's, only 40% of undocumented used the services of guides and *coyotes* and from 2005, 96% of undocumented migrants have crossed with the help of *coyotes* that are more expensive and sophisticated (Massey et al 2009). Empirical research in the Mexican border has found that agricultural workers who were migrants themselves first (Coporo Quintana and Villafuerte Solís 2017) “selling their knowledge” where they would first provide key information in regards to job locations and even transferring their jobs in the USA for a payment, this process has now been extended and has become the service of the *coyote* who helps individuals traverse from the *coyote's* origin communities and across the border into specific cities of USA (Coporo Quintana and Villafuerte Solís 2017). The costs charged by *coyotes* has shifted from 1500 US dollars in 1997 to 2500 US dollars in 2003 (Pérez Monterosas 2003), the payments are usually made in two parts, half at the beginning of the journey and the rest when the migrant is “delivered” to their family or friends in the United States (Pérez Monterosas 2003:154). It is estimated that a third of the money *coyotes* receive is paid to corrupt police and civil servants in their way from Mexico to United States (García Vázquez et al 2007). To cover the high payments made to the *coyotes*, it has been demonstrated that Mexican migrants from the Southern state of Chiapas would seek

moneylenders who charge from 10-20 percent monthly and where it is expected that migrants need to work in the United States for at least two years to pay off their debts (Coporo Quintana and Villafuerte Solís 2017).

In these sections I have discussed the rationale and contextual background for my research. They serve to locate my study within the Mexican context. In the following section, I outline the structure of the rest of this thesis.

1.7 Thesis structure

The thesis has seven chapters. The first chapter of the thesis begins by establishing the research aims, justification and the need for carrying out my study. I then introduce the education policy context in Mexico and discuss the differences in the types of education provision for junior high school, high school and higher education in Mexico. I then focus my discussion on giving an overview of recent changes in Mexican government policy in terms of increasing HE participation, which impact this research project. I also discuss the location of my research in terms of the factors I have explored and discuss the migrational landscape of Mexico, which frames my project. Finally, I present an overview of the thesis structure.

Chapter two explores the complexity and fluidity of the concept of aspirations. I review the key concepts and literature framing HE aspirations and the conceptual links attached to these. My understanding of aspirations draws on the key works of Appadurai (2004), Vigh (2006), Crivello (2011, 2015) and Froerer (2011, 2012). The key theoretical underpinnings of HE aspirations in the Latin American and Mexican youth studies are presented and analysed. I introduce the key debates about aspirations which have informed these fields where my thesis aims to contribute knowledge.

Chapter three covers the methodology of the thesis. It explains why a qualitative approach was adopted in my study in order to address my research questions. This introductory section then leads into an overview of the processes, decisions and ethical issues that were considered whilst collecting and analysing the data. Reference is also made to researcher reflexivity and how the various data were prepared for analysis. After defining the methodology of my thesis and its conceptual and theoretical underpinnings, I then move on to the three empirical chapters.

Chapter four is concerned with the meanings that young people and their families attribute to their HE aspirations. A relational understanding of aspirations and how these change in light of young people's experiences, is presented. Young people conceptualise and adjust their HE aspirations in ways that involve life goals, family, community and social networks. The last section of this chapter explores migration to the USA as an influence on young people's HE aspirations.

Chapter five deals with the multiple informal jobs and activities young people engage with besides their academic studies, which have a complex role in informing young people's HE aspirations. The parental expectations for both female and male young people are explored. *Machismo* (Falicov, 2010, Cueva Perus 2012) is a powerful framework that is helpful to analyse the ways in which young people negotiate with the structures around them, which in turn shapes their HE aspirations. I also look at the intersections between *familismo* and *machismo* and how these underpin HE aspirations.

Chapter six draws principally on Ball et al.'s (2002) conceptualisation of parental influence over young people's HE aspirations. Parental occupations and the ways in which they inform young people's HE aspirations are also explored. My analysis is informed by Punch's (2007) approach to the ways in which young people exercise their agency amidst future expected responsibility towards their families. The *familismo* approach (Calzada et al 2012, Martinez 2013) is instrumental to exploring the extent to which Mexican young people's families inform the formation of their aspiration. Young people's complex processes of kinship and reciprocity ties in the form of a "*padrino*", "*patron*" and "*palanca*" are explored through the narratives of the young people, as these are enacted and re-enacted, depending on their life situations, needs and aspirations. To my knowledge, this is the first work to analyse kinship in the context of aspirations, thus I devoted this discussion a chapter of its own.

Finally, Chapter seven draws attention to the main findings of the study with respect to the aims set out initially. I present the arguments for this thesis and recapitulate its central arguments. The findings from the empirical chapters are used to answer my research questions. This chapter highlights the implications of the results of this study for policy makers to create education policies that are more sympathetic to young people's HE aspirations. Suggestions are offered to improve and develop current practice and for further research.

Chapter 2. Framing the research

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature relating to how young people living in poverty articulate their HE aspirations and from this, build the conceptual framework that was used in this study to understand them. I adopt Appadurai's theorisation of aspirations as cultural, collective and navigational capacities. Adding to this, I bring in Vigh's elaboration of the notion of 'social navigation' whereby, in pursuing their aspirations to HE, young people steer, adjust and strategise as they go along. I present my framework as a dialogue between HE aspirations' complex, diverse and entrenched conceptualisations. For young people, it can be a way to become different and more socially mobile than their parents, a tool to defend themselves and their community against injustices, a weapon with which to tackle gender expectations and often all three. As such, I approach HE aspirations as formed in social life and argue that young people's academic aspirations are articulated in relation to and facilitated by, their social networks.

2.2 Aspirations and its influences

Aspirations and expectations are used interchangeably throughout the academic literature. Educational aspirations have been defined as the desire to achieve high levels of education, while expectations refer to the assessment of the likelihood of achieving these levels personally (Bohon et al. 2006:208). Aspirations have also been approached as desires (Ray 2006) and as "the perceived importance or necessity of goals" (Copestake and Camfield 2010: 618). These uses illustrate the multiple dimensions of aspirations. Although the concept of aspirations is mostly discussed in relation to educational and occupational trajectories, it is also discussed in terms of shaping an individual's personal future, for example, through marriage or childbirth (McDonald et al 2011).

Aspirations are motivated by factors such as gender, age, ethnicity, abilities, talents, personality, academic performance, behaviour, family socioeconomic position, and friends' and parental influence (Gutman and Akerman 2008). Aspirations are rarely just about the goals of individuals (Crivello 2015:43); rather, they include the goals of individuals' reference persons and groups. Additionally, in educational and sociological literature, aspirations are seen as not fixed but as adapting and changing as the individual faces new experiences, choices and information (Gutman and Akerman 2008). As such, I consider aspirations as much more than abstract 'futures': they shape and are shaped by social processes (Mische 2009:702) and affect actions in the present (Crivello 2015). Thus, in my thesis, I approach aspirations as socially constructed phenomena that provide a means for examining the interplay between agency and social structures within young people's lives (Archer et al. 2014:59).

To examine how young people formulate their HE aspirations, I recognise their capability of reflecting on their own identity and actions (Giddens, 1984). In this sense, I see individuals as agents who are able to challenge the structures around them. As Giddens (1984: 14) argues "[agency] depends on the capability of the individual to make a difference to a pre-existing state of affairs or course of events [...], that is, to exercise some sort of power". I draw on educational studies that have examined the academic aspirations of girls living in poor communities in Tanzania (DeJaeghere 2016) and marginalised young migrants in South Africa (Mkwananzi 2018), which suggest that agency and aspirations are intertwined: both are needed for individuals to achieve their well-being and they change over time within a given social context.

While recognising the agency of individuals in constructing and realising their aspirations, this study also conceptualises aspirations as arising from, and embedded within, specific social contexts (Froerer 2012) where they have performative value (St Clair and Benjamin 2011:502). For this reason, aspirations cannot be seen as inert factors in educational progress and must be seen instead as inherently performative (St Clair and Benjamin 2011). This research adopts this 'performative' (St Clair and Benjamin 2011) approach to aspirations to understand how identities continue to be produced within social and economic spheres. As such, this research is based on a young person-centred approach, relying on their perceptions of what constitute barriers and opportunities for their educational aspirations.

The relationship between agency and social structures has been conceptualised by Archer (2003) as the 'internal conversation' by which agents reflexively deliberate upon the social circumstances that they confront. I view individuals not as passive recipients that are socialised by society but as subjects with agency (Davies 1993, Renold 2001) who act on social structures. In light of this, I reject holding poor young people responsible for lacking aspirations or attributing this to a working-class failure. Instead, viewing young people as intelligent social agents who reflect on the social influences around them, I aim to highlight their capacity for being reflective and for contesting dominant social discourses (Spohrer 2016). I challenge the view of young people holding unrealistic aspirations and argue that interventions should not look at raising their aspirations but rather, helping them to achieve what they aspire to (Gale and Parker 2015).

A large body of sociological literature in the Global North explores the complex role of aspirations in HE engagement (see for example, Hart 2013, Gale and Parker 2015, Tranter 2012, Archer et al 2007, Ball et al 2002). The findings from this body of literature suggest that it is essential to

understand social class, gender and ethnicity as these shape aspirations and are deeply embedded in society (Hart 2013). For example, working-class male and female students' self-exclusion from HE through 'not for people like me' feelings (Ball et al 2002, Archer et al 2007, Froerer 2015) play a key role in the reproduction of hierarchies within HE, at least in the UK. Gale and Parker (2015:92) argue that for alternative aspirations to exist for these students, the doxa²⁹ needs to change, a recognition that alternate aspirations and worldviews of poor young people are also legitimate in what they call "a redrawing of maps" (Gale and Parker 2015: 92).

To relate this debate to the context of this study, educational research in Mexico (Vélez Sagaón 2007) has indicated that high school students living in 'adverse conditions'³⁰ express their aspirations to attend HE in terms of acquiring social mobility and economic independence. Vélez Sagaón (2007) defines aspirations as part of young people's academic achievements. This view portrays a limited vision of young people's academic aspirations, only linking aspirations with academic achievement and curricular value within school. It does not pay sufficient attention to the broader context, including young people's aspirations and conceptions of their future selves. This perspective is recurrent in Mexican sociological and educational studies looking at educational aspirations, where they are represented in relation to individual learning and academic performance (Blanco Bosco 2011; Izar Landeta et al., 2011). My research challenges this view by looking beyond school outcomes to the social embeddedness of HE aspirations. I do so by exploring the ways in which young people's social positioning informs their aspirations.

2.3 Discussing aspirations using a cultural lens

²⁹ Originally from Bourdieu (1977) the term means conformity to the dominant discourse of a field.

³⁰ The author defines adverse conditions as economic difficulties, family violence and alcoholism amongst family member(s).

An important insight I have drawn from Appadurai's work is that aspirations do not exist in a vacuum, but rather, occur within a social frame. Therefore, understanding young people's position within broader social relations and how they negotiate, resist or change the surrounding social structures over time, is essential to comprehend how they construct their aspirational course. Appadurai's framing proposes that considerations of the future and the past are also rooted in the culture. As discussed earlier in this study, aspirations are seen as cultural capacities (Appadurai 2004) that are socially embedded (Appadurai 2004, Copestake and Camfield 2010). Appadurai (2013) sees aspirations as 'navigational capacities' whereby individuals develop the capacity to identify pathways to navigate from where they are to where they want to be. He termed aspirations as cultural matters rather than individual traits, as these 'form parts of wider ethical and metaphysical ideas which derive from larger cultural norms.' (Appadurai 2004:67-8). Therefore, the uneven distribution of cultural (and social) resources should be taken into account when looking at aspirations. To explain the capacity to aspire, Appadurai (2004) uses a metaphor in defining it as the ability to read 'a map of a journey into the future' (Appadurai, 2004: 76) and the wealthier have more opportunities to explore and share this knowledge of the future with one another than the poor.

Appadurai's conceptualisation of aspirations as navigational capacities has been drawn on in education studies in Australia (Sellar et al 2009, Sellar et al 2011, Bok 2010, Smith 2011, Gale and Parker 2015, Prodonovich et al 2014) and the UK (Sellar and Gale 2011). Gale and Parker (2015) propose collective views on HE including what HE is and who it is for. This approach to HE aspirations contrasts with the limited neoliberal understanding which frames it as a homogenous resource that young people have in 'high' or 'low' supply. These studies take a more structuralist approach and propose that the focus of HE policies should not be on raising aspirations but rather in providing opportunities for students to develop and experiment with the realisation of their aspirations (Sellar et al. 2011).

Appadurai's ideas have been used in a number of empirical studies conducted in the global south. For example, Mkwanazi (2018) looks at HE aspiration amongst 26 migrant young people in South Africa who were marginalised due to their migration status and lack of resident visas. Mkwanazi concludes that poverty, along with other elements i.e. migration status, influence the formation of HE aspirations. Appadurai (2004) argues that the capacity to aspire needs practice, repetition, exploration and refutation (Appadurai 2004). This is not to say that people living in poverty are unable to aspire, but that the opportunities for them to practice their capacity to do so are limited. In a sociological analysis of the HE aspirations of rural junior high school students in Peru (De La Fuente Calle 2014) and Puerto Rico (Brusi et al. 2010), the authors find that privileged young people have a greater and wider range of opportunities to develop their "interest" in university and the skills and resources needed to translate that interest into an achievement. I draw on Appadurai's (2004) analysis of community-based development activists and poverty in Mumbai, which highlights the urgency for poverty-tackling initiatives to understand individuals' own ideas of a good life in particular contexts: "Aspirations about the good life exists in all societies; yet a poor Tamil peasant woman's view of the good life may be as distant from that of a cosmopolitan woman from Delhi, as from that of an equally poor woman in Tanzania" (Appadurai 2004: 67).

Thus, my thesis uses Appadurai's theoretical framework since:

- (1) It is driven by a people-centred approach that helps us to understand the ways in which young people build their imagined futures;
- (2) Aspirations are seen as collective social and cultural matters;
- (3) All individuals are recognised as having valid aspirations (not only the ones who aspire to HE);
- (4) It takes into account the ways in which economic, social and cultural contexts shape young people's aspirations.

2.4 Appadurai meets Vigh

Using Appadurai's metaphor of aspirations as navigational capacities that are developed in social life, I also draw on Henrik Vigh's theoretical considerations to understand how poor young people mobilise the resources that are available to them. Using the notion of 'social navigation', Vigh (2006) posits that individuals navigate difficult terrains by making use of their craftiness. He developed the concept of social navigation through his study of the mobilities of urban young male soldiers in Guinea-Bissau and how they navigated the war. Although the young people in my study are not involved in a military movement, their environment is unstable and Vigh's insights help understand the ways in which young people strategise to improve their life.

Navigation has a Latin etymological root 'navigare' which means: to sail or go by sea. Vigh discusses a unique movement within a shifting environment. The term suggests motion within motion; it is the act of moving in an environment that is wavering and unsettled. When used to illuminate social life, it directs our attention to the fact that we move in social environments of actors and actants, individuals and institutions, that engage and move us as we move along "Where we normally look either at the way social formations move and change over time, or the way agents move within social formations, navigation allows us to see the intersection – or rather interactivity between the two"(Vigh 2009: 420). Social navigation through this lens includes the creative responses of individuals to the difficulties around them. Weston and Imas (2018) refer to this as 'bricolage', through which individuals transform what they can find into alternative forms. In Portuguese creole, young people use *dubria* while the French word *se débrouiller*, which means to get by or get the best out of a situation, has similar connotations (Vigh 2006: 129). What Appadurai and Vigh have in common is that both emphasize agency and cultural context. They focus on the individuals' immediate and imagined futures and this is included in the understanding

of social navigation. In combination, Appadurai and Vigh's theories provide a lens through which to understand young people's navigational strategy as an ability to adapt to the norms and expectations around them. Drawing from these two core theories allows for a culturally contextualised understanding of how young people navigate the cultural map of aspirations.

There is extensive research within sociology and human geography, on how young people worldwide navigate contemporary social and economic uncertainties (see for example, Comaroff and Comaroff 2000, Valentine 2003, Jeffrey 2010, Cole and Durham 2008, Froerer 2015). Indeed, Froerer (2015) illustrates the impact that perceptions of uncertainty have on young people's HE aspirations. Froerer (2015) powerful work explores how rural young people from central India adjust their aspirations according to the failed attempts of other young people who could not yield economic and social mobility from their HE and further education. This study demonstrates young people's ideas of what constitutes a 'good life' are changing, particularly in regard to their comparative positions of marginality (Froerer 2015: 367).

In the Mexican context, a study by Galindo Vargas et al. (2013) conducted in the capital city of Toluca in the central State of Mexico proposed that young people move in an uncertain context and face difficulties in accessing the job market. The authors argue that the 12 urban male and female participants -whether engaged in studies, working or unemployed - displayed their agency by choosing not to make long-term plans in regard to their life project. Although the study shed light on the uncertainty that is still present in young people's lives well after they finish high school, it fails to tease out how their situation - as students, workers, or unemployed - might be associated with differences in aspirations. Appadurai's and Vigh's theories underpin my view of how young people recognise the unstable terrain they have to navigate (Vigh 2006) and the extent to which

they are future-oriented. Facing a changing environment allows youth to reflect and deploy strategic actions towards their pursuit of a good life.

Young people negotiate the uncertainties they are faced with by being curious, exploring their options to make the best out of their situation (Vigh 2006) and shifting their aspirations accordingly.

2.5 Young people's aspirations within their broader social context

Technological high school students –in opposition to those from a general high school- are more likely to engage in precarious informal *chambas* such as street vendor, employee at a *taquería* (taco shop) or an assistant to a seamstress; and do so from as young as 9 to 10 (Weiss 2012b, Guerra Ramirez 2012: 268). Mexican sociological research defines *chambas* as informal jobs that are undertaken in precarious conditions: without a contract, low salaries or casual labour (Bonfil 2001; Oliveira 2006; Weiss 2012b). In the Latin American context, a *chamba* has also been used by poor young people in Lima, Peru as a way to refer to their occupations and low-paid informal jobs where only a tip is received in exchange (Rosales Luna 2016). In the day to day vocabulary of my participants, a *chamba*³¹ is used as a reference to activities outside of their school hours. I propose that their social navigation is operationalised through their *chambas*. As we will see in Chapter 5, I argue it is important to contextualize *chambas* as they are underpinned by gender roles, family expectations and the obligations perceived by young people.

³¹ The term is used to refer to informal casual labour without contractual or formal structures such as benefits and fixed income. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has launched programmes with the intention of integrating young people to the labour market, such as the “2017 Youth Chamba Plan” through training centres and apprenticeships in Bolivia (ILO 2018) and Venezuela (ILO 2017). Besides the establishment of these youth programmes in some areas of Latin America, the ILO does not confer an origin to the term *chamba* other than to refer to work.

Research undertaken through autobiographic retrospective interviews of 18 female and male graduates from a technological high school in Mexico City (Guerra Ramirez 2012) suggests that *chambas* were used by both female and male technological high school students in their life trajectories. It is proposed that after a period of pausing their studies, and engaging in precarious *chambas*, both female and male students then return to their studies (Guerra Ramirez 2007, 2008, 2012). It should be underlined that participants in the Guerra Ramirez's study are young people from "sectores populares"; a term used interchangeably with working-class. Their low socioeconomic context is characterised by living in "*barriadas*³²" and belonging to families where fathers were engaged in low-paid and manual occupations such as construction workers, taxi drivers, bakers, car mechanics and other low-paid service jobs. However, the author fails to provide a complete measure of economic resources and although it was specified that participants' families had an income of 3-5 days salary at the current minimum wage, there is no clarification over the number of family members per household.

Research with poor young males in Puebla³³ (Amat Saphiro 2015) and young females and males in Mexico City (Messina Raimondi 2013) has suggested that young people have *chambas* from 'whatever comes their way' (Messina Raimondi 2013:55). Relevant sociological research with young people who graduate from technical junior high schools in Mexico City has indicated that the relationships young people have with work is arbitrary and not aligned with formal institutions. Instead, young people would often say that they "asked a man if they could work for him" (Messina Raimondi 2013: 55). The *chambas* young people engage in are embedded within their family and community context. In this sense, I argue that a key element in making *chambas* possible is the social networks established within their communities and neighbourhoods. My argument contradicts a study carried

³² Barriadas are neighbourhoods that were rebuilt in illegal settlements in Mexico City's periphery

³³ Puebla is a city located in east-central Mexico.

out with poor young females and males from Northern Mexico that suggests that the majority lack relatives or close contacts who will help them to obtain an income (Castro Saucedo and Lopez Estrada 2016).

Punch's (2001) powerful work in rural Bolivia has reinforced the importance that gender has in the household division of labour. She proposes that rural children would start engaging with unpaid work in the household from a very early age –frequently around 10. While it was more common for males to help in the family's agricultural work, females were expected to engage in domestic chores (Punch 2001). Another important sociological concept that is related to *chambas* is *familismo*. In Latin American youth studies, the *familismo* approach has been devised to explore familial shared daily activities (Calzada et al 2012) and migration (Smith-Morris et al 2013, Rojas et al 2016). I use *familismo* as a lens to understand young people's life experiences. *Familismo* has been conceptualised as the strong in-group feelings, emphasis on family goals and mutual support that has been identified as a core cultural Latino value (Castellanos and Gloria 2007, Martinez 2013, Romo et al. 2013). Even though *familismo* values are not particular to Latin communities, Latinos have larger family networks and rely more on family for instrumental and emotional support (Martinez 2013). Some of its features are identified in other cultures too. A related approach looking at the family embeddedness underpinning entrepreneurial activities of British women (Ekinsmyth 2011) suggests that gendered social relations and the cultural norms of social groups matter. I recognise these work-family intersections informing young people's HE aspirations.

Familismo has been used to understand the transition from high school to college amongst Latin Mexican origin communities established in the United States (Rios Aguilar and Kiyama 2012, Alvarez 2010, Ovink 2014). For example, it has been suggested that poor young male and female Latinos

are more likely to choose colleges that are closer to their home (Ovink 2014, Ovink and Kalogrides 2015, Morales 2018). *Familismo* has been seen to take a toll particularly on Latina (female) first-generation high school students, as they are expected to fulfill caregiving roles within their family (Rangel Hernandez 2018). For males it has been proposed that *familismo* and the time and energy invested in the family can mean that males engage in work rather than going to college (Clark et al 2013). *Familismo* has also been explored along machismo³⁴ lines. In regard to Latino males pursuing a college education, it has been suggested that they have to balance their family demands (*familismo*) and machismo challenges (Ponjuan and Hernandez 2016).

Sociological research in Peru has shed light on HE constructions amongst urban young people living in poverty whereby HE is pursued as a means to achieve personal and economic progress and obtain a formal job, in contrast to the precarious jobs young people are in (Balarin et al 2017). Participants in Balarin et al's research, young people aged 19-24 from vulnerable urban contexts, identified HE-associated costs and the time incompatibility between their informal jobs and their studies as barriers to attending higher education. Balarin et al.'s (2017) study was carried out through in-depth interviews, focus groups and a photographic participatory method with 25 young female and male participants living in vulnerable urban areas³⁵. Their findings also suggest that barriers to HE attendance are gendered. Females spoke of having a domestic and family caring burden, while males indicated their economic responsibility for the family. Such social inequalities usually appear earlier in young people's academic trajectories and increase as young people become adolescents (Bonfil 2001, Bayón 2017). The added burden of undertaking precarious work since

³⁴ The construct that describes beliefs and expectations of the role of men and women in society. It will be discussed in Section 2.8.

³⁵ This research identified these participants' vulnerability based on the Peru's indicators measuring education, jobs, health and institutional trust.

childhood or early adolescence (Sandoval Hernández 2008) can compound educational disadvantage (Wolff and De-Shalit 2007). Furthermore, the precariousness of these situations tends to be worse for Mexican rural young people as they have multiple poorly paid jobs in parallel (Bonfil 2001).

An important literature on the trajectories of poor young people in Mexico City refers to the term '*multichambismo*' to the strategies deployed by young people in several precarious jobs at the same time to fulfil their various needs (Guerra Ramirez 2009). Having multiple *chambas* has been approached sociologically as an occupational multiplicity where the jobs both female and male young people can access are temporary, without a contract, benefits, sufficient income, or opportunities for mobility and promotion (Guerra Ramirez 2009). This biographical qualitative research suggested that the types of precarious jobs that females do are disadvantageous because they are less visible e.g. domestic work in the community and as assistants in small shops, in opposition to males who would more often work as assistants in bigger enterprises (Guerra Ramirez 2009). Even though Mexico City differs from the semi-rural community I carried out my study in, the findings suggest that female jobs are overall less advantageous than their male counterparts. In contrast to studies in which *chambas* are seen as a barrier to HE, *chambas* can be seen as a strategy. For example, in a study involving urban female and male young people in Mexico City and in the northwestern capital city of Hermosillo Sonora, Palomino (2015) proposes that both female and male young people who are engaged in a *chamba* through doing "*malabares*³⁶" beside the streets' traffic lights, display creative strategies to secure an income. My research shares this view of both female and male young people as agents who, besides their studies, pursue a better future via their *chambas*.

³⁶ juggling of balls or other objects for the entertainment of passing by cars with the aim of getting money from them

2.6 Becoming someone through HE: an individual and collective understanding

To enrich the approach of aspirations as navigational capacities and to understand what really matters to the young people in my study, I draw on the notion of ‘becoming someone’ or “*Ser alguien en la vida*”, which has resonated in youth studies both in Latin America (Crivello 2011, Llinás 2009, Meo and Dabenigno 2010, D’Aloisio 2015, Moya 2008) and in Mexico (Benavides Lara 2015, Weiss 2012a, Weiss 2009, Guerra Ramirez and Guerra Salinas 2012). I understand ‘becoming someone’ not as a single cohesive concept, but as one that goes beyond the individual, that is woven in with diverse ways of lifting themselves and their community out of poverty and that is driven by their ideas of a good life. I pose that this concept helps shed light on young people’s understanding of HE as a “good” that will help them to avoid difficulties and uncertainty, i.e. precarious jobs. Becoming someone has a political component, as it is seen by young people as a way to challenge the injustices and gender expectations around them. I argue that young men and women formulate the notion of becoming someone as a way to establish their goals within their social relations, i.e. parents, family, peers (Wexler 1992). My ascription to this concept is partly inspired by Wexler’s (1992) ethnographic study with USA high school students from different social backgrounds, where young people think of what they want to become in relation to their community.

I wish to highlight the particular resonance that becoming someone has with individuals living in poverty (D’Aloisio 2015, Guerrero and Palma 2010). I draw on the findings put forward by a youth study in urban Argentina (D’Aloisio 2015) in which it was proposed that only the young people from “*sectores populares*” (those who attended a state high school and lived in poor and precarious areas) are the ones who conceptualise their high school studies in terms of ‘becoming someone’. By contrast, those from “elite” groups attending a private institution in the city centre articulated their academic aspirations in terms of personal success in their future professional careers. Perceptions of state-school students’ HE

conceptualisations in Latin America have been contested in the sociological literature. A quantitative sociological study developed via questionnaires with state and privately senior high school students in the urban capital cities of Monterrey and Zacatecas, Mexico, found that while state educated high school students based their HE aspirations on the aim of attaining a job and economic remuneration, privately educated high school students expressed the desire of doing leisure activities, i.e. traveling prior to their university studies (Silas Casillas 2012). Mexican educational researchers who have chosen to move away from an approach purely determined by social structures, have argued that even though economic background impacts on young people's HE aspirations, they are agentic and choose higher education with the idea of becoming someone in life (Flores Miller 2002, Benavides Lara 2012).

Going back to D'Aloisio's study and its focus on the conceptualisations of high school rather than higher education, it is possible to propose that the capacity of "becoming someone in life" is associated with education in general, but is concretely linked with the entrance to university studies (Benavides-Lara 2015). D'Aloisio's study would have benefitted from the use of subgroup analysis, since her analysis assumes that state school students form a homogenous group. Nonetheless, her approach resonates with my own in viewing the process of "becoming someone" as multifaceted: it is seen as compounded simultaneously by the idea of aspiring to education, as a way of expressing a desire for a different future to that of their parents, a preparation for future difficulties and as a way of defending oneself and tackling gender expectations.

In a study involving students at a general high school in Mexico City (Flores Miller 2002) 'becoming someone' was articulated as being different to the previous generation. Among a group of underprivileged young people (Vélez Sagaón 2007) it was associated with the desire of becoming different

from their family members who were seen as ‘not making it’ in life and who instead struggled economically in low-paid unskilled jobs. A similar study conducted in Argentina (Meo and Dabenigno 2010) also found that ‘becoming someone’ was seen as a way to be differentiated from their parents. The participants, young people living in ‘*villas de emergencia*³⁷’, conceived of HE as the route that would help them pursue non-manual occupations and achieve income levels that were higher than those of their parents. A sociological study in rural Peru posited that the idea of “becoming someone in life” is closely associated with having a professional career (Rojas and Portugal, 2009, p.12). For these rural students, having a profession would stop them from becoming “a no one” as represented by their parents and neighbours who worked the land. By contrast, in urban Argentina, for young people from private and public lower and higher secondary schools, “becoming someone in life” was associated with social progress in that their secondary school studies would enable them to ‘get ahead’.“Becoming someone in life” is contrary to being a drop out, which is what the government expects of them (Llinás 2009).

2.7 HE as an instrument to defend oneself and the community

The concept of becoming someone is also linked to education through perceiving it as a way of ‘defending oneself’ and others against an unfair system and from bad people. In a longitudinal study of young people in Peru, it was found that it was mainly rural caregivers who conceptualised their children’s academic aspirations as a way of fighting against future uncertainties and not being easily cheated (Crivello 2011). In a comparative study conducted in urban Mexico City (Weiss 2007, 2009), students from a general high school and a technological one conceptualised their secondary studies in diverse ways. The former saw their high school as an expected transition to HE while the latter saw it as a way to “become someone in

³⁷ referring to a type of slums in the periphery of urban settlements in Argentina

life”, to overcome the injustices in their communities, such as not having enough doctors or lawyers. A similar emphasis on community can be seen in a mixed-methods study with university engineering students in Colombia which highlights that contributing to the development of their communities was an important driver for completing a degree (Pulido Talero 2017).

In a study that sought to compare aspirations across social class, Ochoa Cervantes and Diez-Martinez (2009) found that while high school students from upper-class backgrounds recognised the capacities and abilities they had to develop their aspired career, middle class students expressed their career aspirations in terms of how useful their studies were for society. Meanwhile, their low-class peers expressed their career aspirations in terms of income. The study, comprising an initial questionnaire and a follow-up interview, involved 120 fifth semester high school students³⁸ in three high schools (privately funded and state-funded general and technological high schools) in the city of Querétaro, Mexico, of which 30 later participated in 25-minute interviews. Although the difference in poverty levels between Morelos (49.5%) and Querétaro (31.1%) is significant (CONEVAL 2019), this research is relevant to my study. At the same time, contrary to Ochoa and Diez-Martinez (2009), I do not assume that students in the technological high school context are a homogenous group. I intend to make a contribution to knowledge regarding how young people’s HE aspirations are (in)formed by wider ideas around them.

³⁸ Students from the privately funded high school were categorised as the higher social context seeing that the majority of students’ parents hold a degree and came from middle and higher classes. Students from the state-funded high school were categorised as the middle social context because their parents worked in teaching and other trades i.e. taxi drivers or cooks. Students from the technological high school were categorised as the low social context because parents were technical and blue-collar workers and only few hold a degree.

Another study undertaken in Mexico City compared student aspirations in a general high school with those of a technological one. Students from both high school types considered the capacity to 'defend oneself' arose from their plans to face the difficult future ahead of them (Guerra Ramirez and Guerrero Salinas 2012). As discussed earlier, while not homogenous, nonetheless students at technological high schools are more likely to experience disadvantages throughout their lives (Villa Lever 2007, Guerra Ramirez 2012). My research aims to shed light on how poor young people in Mexico express their career aspirations in terms of justice and social utility and whether the desire to become someone to defend themselves and their community underpins their aspiration to HE.

This desire to become someone may have a gendered dimension. For example, in a qualitative sociological study by Meo and Dabenigno (2010) involving working-class students, HE was seen by some female students as a way of acting against the injustices experienced by women in their social context. They therefore saw that through attending HE they would be better able to tackle the injustices they witnessed around them. Before introducing the following overarching understanding of HE, it is important to introduce the concept of machismo, which has been present in North American and Latin American sociological literature since the 1940s and that is central in Mexican culture (Gutmann 2007).

2.8 Gender expectations and machismo in Latin America

Any study that seeks to situate an issue in its social context cannot overlook machismo in Latin America, not simply as an ideology, but as a field produced by the relations between individuals (Lancaster 1992). Sociologists in Mexico have approached machismo as a construct that describes beliefs and expectations of the role of men and women in society: "Machismo also includes attitudinal beliefs that consider it appropriate for women

to remain in traditional roles” (Nuñez et al 2016: 204). According to sociologist Cueva Perus (2012), machismo is a “mexicanism” (Gutmann 2007, Stephenson 2003) that has been conceptualised and used interchangeably with the notion of male chauvinism within social sciences (Gutmann 2007, Lancaster 1992, Gutmann 2007, Cueva Perus 2012). Although part of the sociological literature reduces machismo to a set of sexist ideas (Polanco Hernández and Jiménez Caracoza 2006), it is important to emphasise that females are not the only ones oppressed by machismo. A review of work on gender socialisation internationally (Barker 2005) has pointed out that it can also be detrimental for males since they are socialized into spending time away from their homes while girls stay in. As a result, it becomes more difficult for boys to concentrate on tasks and sit still at school.

A self-fulfilling prophesy arising from this is that male students are more likely to do less work through a desire to fit in with their peers (Pinkett and Roberts 2019). Toxic conceptualisations of masculinities where boys are expected to be independent and self-reliant obscure the real experience of socioeconomically vulnerable boys who do not fit in the dominant group of masculinities (Motsa and Morojele 2019). A study of male students from a state junior high school in Mexico City, that used participant observation and interviews, proposed that young male students reject and (re)negotiate the collective norms of masculinity (Mejía-Hernández 2015). The author argues that young men’s agency is central for them to build their own meanings and shows how they use their resources creatively to establish relationships with those around them.

The notion of machismo as including gender expectations of what it is to be a female and a male, underpins my view of how young people formulate their HE aspirations. I also share Barker’s proposal (2005) that machismo flourishes in conditions of poverty and social exclusion, without losing sight of the positive image of male gender role characteristics i.e. family provider attributes (Nuñez et al. 2016). In this regard, my research adopts the

approach used by other sociological research in Latin America whereby machismo goes beyond gender relations, in the sense that it is not only influenced by gender, but by class and race as well (Ramirez 2008). As the school context cannot be explored in isolation from its social environment, there are debates in anthropological research in Mexico that need to be noted. For example, it has been proposed that elementary schools in Mexico, particularly those located in rural contexts, constitute a masculinized space where traditional gender roles engrained in the community are reinforced (Morales Lopez 2017).

It has been suggested that the gender expectations for females to provide care and for males to be independent and productive, appear to be more entrenched in the rural Mexican context (Ruiz Ramirez et al 2014). A study in a rural community in the Northwestern Mexican state of Sinaloa indicated that the expectations for male high school students to be the providers and financially sustain their nuclear families, played an important role in their decisions to drop out of school (Ruiz Ramirez et al 2014). It was suggested that male high school students would engage more frequently in paid precarious jobs. Young males expressed that they worked and studied at the same time not “for fun” (Ruiz Ramirez et al 2014:178) but due to economic needs. Within their reasons for leaving high school, female students reported: getting pregnant, leaving their houses to live at their boyfriends’ and not being allowed to study by their partners, as obstacles to continuing their education.

A focus group study conducted in the state of Hidalgo, Mexico (Central Mexico) with high school female and male students (Castelli Olvera and Valles Ruiz 2015) found that traditional gender roles were reaffirmed and justified by the participants. Both female and males agreed that females should be subjected to more control, such as being given a curfew in the evenings, as a safety measure. Males viewed women as being more at risk of

possible attack and this was why they were allowed to stay out longer than their sisters. Females' mobility was restricted due to their families' impositions. For example, female students are often not supported to attend primary school (Ames 2005) or high school (Castelli Olvera and Valles Ruiz 2015) outside their hometown.

2.9 HE as a weapon with which to fight against gender expectations

For Mexican female students, university aspirations seem to be strongly linked with a desire to combat machismo at an individual level or at the collective level of being female. For example, in Guerrero Salinas's study (2008), the desire of one female student to become a lawyer was motivated by the desire to become "a defendant of women" [...] because they "continue to be smashed by machismo" (Guerrero Salinas 2008:220). Although the use of HE as a weapon is not exclusive to females, it is expressed in gendered narratives, as females might specifically focus on gender inequality.

In a study with young people living in poor areas of urban Argentina (D'Aloisio 2015), "becoming someone" through going to university is intricately related to overcoming their gender condition. The desire to challenge gender expectations can be seen in the narratives of their imagined futures. Female students saw completing high school so as "to not depend on anyone" (D'Aloisio 2015: 1140). Indeed, a qualitative youth study with 41 high school students found that it was generally the female students at technological high school, - not those from the general high school - who conceptualized their studies as "a way to overcome their [underprivileged] gender condition"(Guerrero Salinas 2008:227) and expectations associated with their gender, e.g. in relation to the household chores (Guerra Ramirez and Guerrero Salinas 2012, Weiss 2012b). In doing so, they

hoped to pursue their economic independence and personal realization, in opposition to what is expected for them and their future roles as mothers or wives.

Understanding how education, and university education in particular, has different meanings to poor female and males is relevant to my research. I also acknowledge that their social relations are an important part of what young people aspire to, as people aspire not only through their own imaginaries, but those of the people in their communities. The ways in which sociological and educational research have approached their social networks, will be explored in the following section. In summary, the notion of becoming someone enriches the conceptualisation of HE aspirations as a complex notion in which the individual and the collective are inextricably entwined.

2.10 Young people's networks, parental support and migration

In Hintze's (2004:1) review of Latin American sociological literature it is proposed that the networks poor people establish with other families are important as part of their 'survival strategies'. These networks are considered pivotal as their lack of economic security is balanced with those networks of assets and services' exchange, e. g. help during unemployment or sickness, moral and emotional support to its members and accommodation for migrants during the arrival stage. I see young people's aspirations as not merely a personal cognition but formed through their relationship with their wider social context (Archer et al 2014). Thus, it is important to understand how young people's networks influence their HE aspirational pursuit.

Aspirations are rarely about the goals of individuals, nor are they simply reflections of the future; rather, they are shaped by relationships past, present and future (Crivello 2015: 43). Since aspirations are socially shaped, young people's connections with their families, peers and key actors are an important part of their capacity to aspire. Crivello's (2015) analysis of data from the Young Lives longitudinal study of poor children in Peru, highlights the importance of extended family, sibling and peer networks in translating abstract aspirations into more concrete plans. In another study Silas Casillas (2012) showed that although high school students from both private and public institutions are shown to have autonomy in their decisions to study HE, their family, friends and teachers play an important role. A number of other sociological and educational studies in Mexico also suggest that parents' educational levels influence their children's HE aspirations (Castillo and Cabezas 2010, Martínez Curiel 2013, Martínez Curiel and Goyas Mejía 2017).

By contrast, a mixed-methods study looking at the higher education choices made by minority ethnic students in the UK, found that the parents of students in families with no tradition of higher education acted as 'weak framers' or 'onlookers' (Ball et al. 2002:337). From this perspective, working class, low-income parents who themselves do not have first-hand experience of what university studies entails, will provide poor support to their children. Conversely, in families where higher education is considered normal and necessary, parents act as 'strong framers' in their children's university choices (Ball et al. 2002). This categorisation proposes that parents who have themselves attended higher education, actively promote and invest in their children's HE aspirations and will mobilise different forms of support, i.e. access to information or conversations with career graduates. For these parents, finance is not an issue when it comes to choosing a type of institution. Even though I recognise there is a related body of research

on educational choices (Norzagaray Benitez et al 2011, Fuentes Vega 2016, Ferreyra et al 2017, López Dórame et al 2018), my focus remains within aspirations.

A popular saying that captures the way in which Latin American parents frame their children's university aspirations is *échale ganas*³⁹ (Gonzalez 2017, Guerrero Salinas 2008). Used by parents when giving academic advice to their children, *echale ganas* expresses encouragement and can be translated into English as try harder, give your all, do your best, go for it, or take care of business (Gonzalez 2017). Guerrero Salinas (2008) points out that it is an encouragement that is given without offering any specific guidance over where students' actions should be directed. Within youth studies, this notion has mostly been researched with Latino(a) migrants in the United States when exploring familial support students receive for the continuation of their studies (see for example, Jabbar et al 2017, Rios Vega 2014, Saldaña 2013, Fránquiz and Salazar-Jerez 2007). Qualitative research with Latino and Latina Mexican immigrants in United States examining their *dichos*⁴⁰ proposed that *échale ganas* is a notion understood by students as a shared common journey towards completing their high school studies. In other words, it was used to encourage each other to try their hardest and to promote confidence in one another (Fránquiz and Salazar-Jerez 2007).

Échale ganas has also been conceptualised as a way for students to reflect on how to give back to their parents. In an ethnographic study of immigrant Latino males in the USA, *échale ganas* was used in the narratives of male high school students when referring to the moral responsibility they felt

³⁹ The closest possible English translation is to separate the expression, "echar" is the verb to throw something forward and "ganas" is to want something. I have decided to respect participants' original expression in Spanish as it is loaded with more meaningful connotations.

⁴⁰ Dichos are aphorisms or proverbs. They transmit intergenerational values, attitudes, and perceptions rooted in culture, and function as a reservoir of culturally based resilience, allowing families to resist marginalisation (Espinoza-Herold 2007).

they had to do their best academically, in response to their parents' immigration histories (Rios Vega 2014). On the other hand, in an autoethnographic study based on the narratives of a female Latina immigrant, *échale ganas* is related to the encouragement the women in her family gave her to instill the value of education, without ever having to explicitly say she could benefit from this value (Saldaña 2013).

A study also conducted in the United States, exploring the meanings that migrant male Latino university students attribute to their college experiences, suggests that although they recognise the support of their parents through hearing *échale ganas*, they also perceived that their parents were unable to help them in this pursuit (Gonzalez 2017:75). A study in Mexico City with general high school students suggests that *échale ganas* is most likely to be said by parents with a level of education that is lower than the level their children have reached. Lacking knowledge of the rules and requirements at high school level, they use this phrase as the only resource that they have to help their children (Guerrero Salinas 2008). These parents fit into the category of parents as 'onlookers' (Ball et al 2002) of their children's higher education aspirations; they use *échale ganas* to express their support for their children's continuation of studies but, feeling insufficiently knowledgeable, are unable to offer a clear pathway for them to follow.

Entering higher education for Mexican young people living in poverty is filled with economic uncertainties, consequently migrating to the United States is seen as an alternative to HE (Guerrero Salinas 2008; Tucker et al 2013). This strategy is supported by young people's social networks (Arteaga 2007, Garip and Asad 2016). The decision is more complex for rural Mexican youth as for most of them, migration can become their only option to get ahead both personally and economically (León-Andrade et al., 2015). Observing other migrants' successes in the community, i.e. starting their

own businesses or buying land, was also a driver of migration (Garip and Asad 2016). Findings from a mixed-methods study with 138 in-depth interviews in the western Mexican state of Jalisco suggest that migration decisions were driven by the availability of help from others, typically prior migrants in the family or community. This was especially when crossing the border or looking for a job or place to stay in the US (Garip and Asad 2016).

The first migration trip amongst young people in southern Yucatan, Mexico is at times seen as a rite of passage that will give young people prestige amongst their peers (Echeverría and Fischer 2016). Migration as a rite of passage has been suggested as a notion that is more frequently found amongst Mexican communities not on the border as border communities see migration as an 'everyday reality' (Rocha-Romero et al 2016). Empirical studies on Mexican migration suggest a dynamic pattern of cross-border migration in which the economic situation in Mexico and the USA, as well as the presence of relatives in the USA, determines the location and length of stay of Mexican migrants (Carrión Flores 2017). A mixed-methods study in the southern state of Oaxaca in Mexico, where children of migrants and their caregivers were interviewed, proposed that US migration amongst Mexican parents is seen as a strategy for both survival and social mobility. Parents expect migration to enable them not only to provide economically for their family but also to support their children's schooling beyond what they themselves were able to achieve (Dreby and Stutz 2012).

One of the particularly influential relationships within a young person's social network are *palancas*. Ethnographers in Mexico have conceptualised *palanca* as the power that comes from networks of interpersonal connections which cover family, social and work life (Edwards and Hodges 2011). A review paper (Jancsics 2014) on interdisciplinary perspectives on corruption proposes that a *palanca* is a personal social network that is based on

long term social relationships which help individuals to deal with inadequate formal institutions such as the education system. Going beyond the school, sociological research has explored the ways in which reciprocity networks and favour exchange occur amongst Mexican people (Lomnitz and Salazar 2002, Zalpa et al 2014, Hernández Polo 2016). Someone could grant a favour either through the receipt of a bribe or through social relationships or *palancas*.

Network members circulate resources such as inside information, political support, admission to a good school and bureaucratic favors such as acquiring certificates, between and within public and private organisations (Jancsics 2014, Lomnitz and Sheinbaum 2004). A sociology of education study (Valencia Aguirre 20015) in the western state of Jalisco, Mexico researching the symbolic practices inside institutions through observations and interviews with school directors, found that the school directors recognised social relationships as the most important resource that intervenes in school access and job promotions. They said “a *palanca* to bring a relative to work in the education system...or to guarantee school access to friends or family...it reinforces the internal practice of reciprocity as a symbol of solidarity” (Valencia Aguirre 2015: 162). In relation to young people’s future desired selves, accessing the job market is one of the main goals to be achieved through a university degree (Guerra Ramirez 2012). In Mexican society, jobs can constitute part of a favour exchange between two people, therefore a majority of Mexicans believe it is more important to have *palancas* than to have money (Tapia Tovar and Zalpa 2011; Zalpa et al 2014). As has been discussed, students from technological high schools face a number of challenges to access HE, namely passing the entrance exam and studying alongside *chambas* (Bonfil 2001; Weiss 2012b; Guerra Ramirez 2012).

Although research on *palancas* and its impact on university aspirations is still limited, a study looking at middle-class young people's future imaginaries found that their perceptions of attending a private university are influenced by the "*palancas* they can obtain, because they give you connections with the job world" (Cuevas-Cajiga 2015:60). Contrastingly, an ethnographic study shows how students from public general high schools forge their own pathways with their individual efforts and without the need of *palancas* (Barford 2016). Indeed, Barford (2016) refers to *palancas* as the myth of meritocracy, where career and financial success are presented as a reflection of the effort rather than an advantageous starting point. In practice, *palancas* are commonly accessed when trying to pursue university studies. Because of the association of *palancas* and corruption (Zalpa et al 2014), accessing university is seen as a true achievement in the eyes of Mexican students; in their own words "Feeling in a way, proud to get a place [...]I was able to enter here [university]...without *palancas*, without bad treatment, without shady stuff, just simply did things properly" (Romo Martínez 2012:306). On the other hand, their parents believe *palancas* are necessary for their children to be able to "lograrlo" (to make it in life) (Miller Flores, 2002:247, internal quotes in original). These networks can be found everywhere: in the USA they are called *pull*, *blat* in Russia, *palanca* in Mexico and *compadrazgo* in Latin America, (Lomnitz 1988, Jancsics 2014).

People are agentic in the face of poverty by widening their social networks as a strategy (Arteaga 2007). *Compadrazgo* in Latin America is conceptualised as a personal social network that is based on kinship – a kin-like personal relationship- and allows individuals to deal with inadequate formal institutions such as the education system. Within global ethnographic literature, kinship has been studied in the context of migration (Flores-Yeffal 2019, Carsten 2020, Andrikopoulos & Duyvendak 2020) where it has been proposed that it helps migrants rely on social ties to navigate everyday life. In a study of trust networks amongst undocumented Mexican migrants in the United States, Flores Yeffal (2019) proposes that migrants

are embedded within relationships of trust that are “subject to social collective surveillance” (p. 108) and where any violation to the shared expectations results in exclusion. To my knowledge, kinship has not yet been analysed in the context of aspirations.

Kinship is formed by individuals that although not related by blood or marriage, are considered to be family and replicate many of the privileges and responsibilities assigned to biological relatives (Jelm 2010:2). A literature review on kinship refers to these network as the interrelation of two compounded relationships: (1) the one between the *padrino* (godfather) and the *ahijado* (the person who is being baptized or who receives the support) and (2) the one between the *padrinos* and the parents of the child as the one between *compadres* or *compadrazgo* (Gill-Hopple and Bradge-Hudson 2012). In my exploration of the networks of which young people are members and actively participate, I focus on how the *padrino-ahijado* relationship might influence a young person’s aspirations. In the Mexican context, a person would become a *padrino* usually through religious connection such as participating in the young person’s baptism, first communion or confirmation. There is a diversity of social life events where relationships with *padrinos* are also created and reaffirmed and where their participation would usually involve providing financial or in-kind support in these events. These include but are not limited to: weddings, erections of a burial cross and the traditional rites of passage for children such as school graduations, a girl’s 15th birthday (*quinceañera*), or the presentation of a 3-year old child to the church (Tambo Ciaque 2017, Gill-Hopple and Bradge-Hudson 2012). A child’s third birthday is related to the religious presentation of Jesus Christ but has now been suggested that it is used as a social moment in which working-class families share and present their child with relatives, neighbours and peers (Nieto 2001). Inviting someone to be a *padrino* is no longer exclusively related to religious rituals and may also have utilitarian motivations (Velez-Calle et al 2015). Being asked to be a *padrino* is in itself a recognition of status. In an example of this a participant in a study by Molina and Yañez (2009:14) recounts: “The moment I began

to make some money, old and new friends started to ask me to be a *padrino*". If a person rejects the invitation to become a *padrino*, their social relationships will deteriorate (Bezanilla and Miranda 2013). On the contrary, it is rare for individuals living in poverty to become *padrinos* as they are at the bottom of the social scale (Moreno Hernández 2011).

To highlight the complex *padrino-ahijado* dyad, anthropological research in Mexico (Nutini and Bell 2019) has proposed that baptism *padrinos* have a social obligation to give advice on their *ahijados'* marriage and their moral and religious education. A *padrino* is also seen as a second father if and when the biological father dies (Lizama Silva 2007). *Padrinos* are expected to provide in times of emergency, during celebrations and for sharing daily life. Anthropological research in the state of Tlaxcala in central Mexico suggests that in semi rural communities, social groups are highly connected so for example, in Hagene's (2015) study, there were 17 *padrinos* at a wedding. At times, kinship and blood relationships overlap. While parents cannot also be their children's *padrinos*, uncles, aunts or cousins can and are selected as *padrinos*, which strengthens family relationships while simultaneously making them more conflictual. An uncle who is a *padrino* in parallel has added pressure to contribute and provide towards *ahijados'* wellbeing.

In an anthropological literature review of *padrinazgo* in Latin America, it has been suggested that the practice of having a *padrino* has disappeared in areas where the middle class are strongly rooted (Mendoza Ontiveros 2010). Adler-Lomnitz (1977,1981, 2000, 2012), a renowned anthropologist in Mexico, working specifically with poor people in a shantytown of Mexico City, has proposed that choosing relatives as *padrinos* is more frequent

for families living in the countryside, whereas after migrating to the cities, selecting close neighbours as padrinos becomes more common. The selection of padrinos with(out) family ties in Mexico is underresearched and there are no other authors addressing the reasons for choosing *padrinos*. In the Latin American context, in Bolivia particularly, *padrinazgo* relationships are more likely to be based on vertical social relationships: a *padrino* is chosen based on their capacity to help the *ahijado* (Molina and Yañez 2009). Vertical *padrinazgo* is common in stratified communities where a wealthier or more powerful person would be asked to become a *padrino*. Horizontal *padrinazgo* is found in more egalitarian communities, whereby a person from the same social class will be asked to take on the role (Gill-Hopple and Bradge-Hudson 2012).

Support provided by the *padrinos* to the *ahijados* will be in the shape of educational opportunities, access to health care, connections to jobs or social contacts (Gill-Hopple and Bradge-Hudson 2012) and is given with the implicit expectation of deferred reciprocity. The problem for young people living in poverty is how to access a favour that is seen as reciprocal help, if they do not have the resources to reciprocate (Arriagada 2005). This is exemplified in the narrative of a couple from a low-socioeconomic context from urban Bolivia, who received a refrigerator from their wedding padrinos and were afraid of never being able to pay them back (Widmark 2006). With the provision of resources from *padrinos*, also comes the obligations young people are expected to give back.

The word *patrón* has latin origins and is used as formal reference to a boss or a superior who looks after you (Rao 2015), either in formal or informal jobs. The *patrón* reference is more common in informal jobs where there are no prescribed conditions, i.e. precarious *chambas* such as car washer or domestic worker. In keeping with gender role expectations in Mexico, domestic service was undertaken by participants' mothers, while fathers engaged in agricultural labour on the land of the *patrones*. Both activities are part of the informal job market and as such, salaries and working hours

are not regulated by the state. A law to regulate job security and benefits for domestic workers in Mexico has recently been passed and is expected to come into effect by 2020 (Rodriguez 2018).

The relationship between *patrones* and young people are relevant to the formation of young people's aspirations, as *patrones* also enact some of the *padrino* features. Anthropological research in Mexico has identified that *patrones* compensate for the harsh working conditions (long hours and low pay) by integrating the domestic worker into their families (Reyes Kipp 2009), thus creating affective bonds between the *patrones* and the domestic worker's families. These relationships are not merely those of a boss-employee, but because they are enacted within informal (employment) circumstances, they are complex (Thomson 2009, Durin 2013, Howell 2017). Due to the proximity and the intimate nature of domestic service, it has been suggested that social class and race discrimination are also present within these relationships (Saldaña Tejeda 2013), along with diverse types of dependencies (Allemandi 2016) with exploitation features.

Exploring the rules or expectations, as defined by school and family, helps us understand how young people as social agents use their networks as a way to pursue their HE aspirations. Such networks bring both benefits and negative consequences, such as restricted access to opportunities, restrictions on individual freedoms and excessive claims on group members (Portes 1998). These expectations of family cooperation can at times be seen by young people as a burden (Rumbaut 1977, Portes 1998). The familial solidarity expected from individuals participating in these reciprocal transactions can at times constrain their life experiences: "Family ties bind, but sometimes these bonds constrain rather than facilitate particular outcomes" (Rumbaut 1977, p. 39). Rumbaut's (1977) findings were based on quantitative survey data from migrating families from Mexican and

other backgrounds in the USA where family members had high levels of collective obligation to the family. In other words, this is a negative aspect of social networks that can become problematic for individuals who are members of a highly cohesive group or family.

Within the networks and relationships of reciprocity that have been described in the previous sections, young people exercise agency to “move in and out of independence and dependence in different context and in relation to different people (Punch 2002: 124). In this regard, Punch’s (2007) work with 12-year old children in rural communities of southern Bolivia illustrates their agency in negotiating responsibilities towards their parents and siblings in light of their individual needs. Interdependency between family members is renegotiated as individuals’ situations and needs change over their life course. Nonetheless, Punch (2007) proposes that their imagined futures are greatly constrained by both family responsibilities and material conditions (p.159).

2.11 Conclusion

My conceptual framework was built in an iterative manner and changed throughout the preparation, fieldwork and analysis of the data. The framework I have constructed enables me to examine how youth are enabled or constrained by their social context and how they act on it by ‘socially navigating’ (Vigh 2006) the uncertain terrain around them. The conceptual framework and the literature review presented in this chapter guide the analysis of the capacity to aspire of the young people participating in my research.

I have introduced the key elements of my conceptual framework that adopts an individual-centred approach to explore how young people living in poverty are agents in their own future, negotiating the uncertainties present in their social context. In the face of precariousness, young people are inventive in the ways they, particularly females, navigate what is expected of them and challenge gender expectations. Recognising the heterogeneity

of this group, my aim is to explore the relational understanding young people have with regards to their HE aspirations. These aspirations are structured by local ideas of what is valuable, which also reflects broader norms and visions of the good life (Appadurai 2004).

Chapter 3. Methodology and context

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the rationale for the qualitative methods approach I adopted to address the research questions set out in Chapter 1. My positionality shaped my research so in the first section, I reflect on the implications of being a Mexican researcher undertaking research in my home country. Secondly, I discuss the implications of the ethical considerations and challenges which stemmed in relation to my role as a researcher. In the fourth section, I introduce the epistemological background to the research and its design. I then present the site of my study and the way in which participants were selected. Lastly, I discuss each of the methods that I used throughout the research and explain how the various data were prepared for analysis and then analysed.

3.2 Positionality and reflexivity

As a researcher, it is important to understand how the processes of doing research shape its outcomes (Hardy et al 2001). In this section I discuss the ways in which I monitored my actions during the research. In this process, I firstly consider how my identity impacts on my positionality. Secondly, I address power in my research. Lastly, I consider my positionality and my relations with participants. Research should be seen as an ongoing activity where reflection, flexibility, re-evaluation, and sensitivity to the power relations inherent to the fieldwork should take place (England 1994). I am a Mexican middle-class female from a higher socioeconomic background and educational level than that of my participants. I am aware of the class dynamics that are at play between and around us. Most of the parents I interacted with did not engage with or ask questions about my research. Parents living in poverty could be less engaged at school and less likely to ask questions or challenge school interventions (Sime and Sheridan 2014).

Thus, I always gave an extensive introduction about my PhD and research project. I also reminded participants of their right to abandon the study at any point prior, during or after the interview.

I negotiated access to the field with the gatekeeper, the school's director. He was my initial and main focal point. Due to the fact that it was the director who introduced me to the staff, I took care to introduce my research aim and highlight that I was not there as the director's appointed researcher but as an independent one. I provided staff with a copy of my information and consent sheets. Explaining my research project and sharing my university's business card helped to mark a distinction between the institution I belong to and the high school. My role as a participant observer during weekly group tutorials was helpful to liaise with students on a regular basis but could have also meant that students saw me as associated with the school faculty. To disassociate myself from the teachers, I asked for the opportunity to introduce myself as an independent researcher from an external institution. I also engaged and interacted with participants at the beginning or end of their school shifts, in between their school modules and at their lunch breaks, as requested by them. These interactions proved to be meaningful as they helped me build strong relationships with participants, which later translated into rich interviews and life history sessions.

I was very aware that there might be significant differences in our life experiences. To place myself closer to the participants, I decided to prepare my own life history timeline drawing and discuss it with them prior to the life history session with them. In my life history, I included the changes that had taken place in terms of my higher education aspirations. When going through my life history with them, some of them were grateful that I shared my experiences and said they identified with some of the changes I described. This proved to be a useful opportunity to share who I was and to find

similarities in our academic trajectories. In the school building there were three types of toilets (female, male and teachers). Another way in which I tried to take away some of the distance between myself and students (Brayboy and Deyhle 2000) was by using the student toilets rather than using the teachers' one with the key I was assigned. I found these times useful to interact with female students.

After hearing that I had a professional background in Human Resources and Education, the director asked me to prepare a Career and Life Planning workshop for senior and second-year students. Potentially, this could have introduced bias in my study- as I did not want to influence career or academic decisions- so I asked for this workshop to be held at the end of the academic year. Involving myself in the school in this way helped create a sense of reciprocity, i.e. my role in the school had a value in the eyes of school staff, outside that of being simply a "researcher". At the end of the academic year and the end of my stay, I organised a picnic for all the sixth semester students to thank them for their participation and to share with them my research plans. I have continued to provide career and professional advice to students seeking it, even after my time in the field was formally over.

The researcher and researched "affect each other mutually and continually in the course of the research process" (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2000: 39). I acknowledge that my role as the researcher may have facilitated or discouraged certain attitudes in the participants. When arranging parental/family interviews I sent out written information sheets with the aim of underlining that participation was entirely voluntary and making them aware of my research intentions. This was to minimise any sense of authority I was associated with that could make them feel obliged to answer. I knew that in

the past, most of them had received house visits, from the school or Prospera (Government's conditional cash transfers programme)⁴¹ staff, where their socioeconomic context was appraised. This might have affected the way in which participants responded, as their family could have expected them to give different responses if the interview was perceived as a way to obtain government financial support: *"Yes...I had people like you before who have interviewed me...they are sent by Prospera...so I know how it is to be interviewed"* **(Alma, parent, receives Prospera for her 3 children's education participation and for her nutrition and health)**. To address this potential perception, at every interview, I shared my information sheet⁴² with every participant and introduced myself, my PhD research project and emphasised my work as a researcher from the University of East Anglia. In instances where I felt participants were associating me with a social programme, I would clarify more than once that I was not associated with any institution other than my university. I informed parents of my role as an independent researcher at the beginning of our interviews and the fact that I could not make promises to change anything.

However, I was aware that some parents I engaged with, in particular the ones who were most economically disadvantaged, perceived me as a social worker. On multiple occasions, these parents mentioned the positive impact of the Prospera conditional cash transfers and the issues that they experienced in this regard. In some cases, parents would go back to the Prospera topic to make sure that I was aware that they were fulfilling the requirements for their cash transfers, as in the following example from Rosa: *"And I was telling you...what we have is the Prospera so hopefully they don't take that away.... because thanks to it she will get her career...because we will tie our stomachs a little bit...but it will all be ok[...] I was taken*

⁴¹ As discussed in Chapter 2, Prospera programme was previously named Oportunidades (identical cash benefits and conditions)

⁴² Please refer to Appendix VI

*out...because supposedly I already had the resources or I have prospered and they took it away...so I had like 3,4 years without Oportunidades⁴³ and then I was incorporated again and it was already (named) Prospera...not Oportunidades” – (Rosa, a mother of 4 who was receiving Prospera cash transfers (in addition to *Beca Salario Universal* benefits) for Fernanda’s high school participation and for her own food and health benefits). Rosa was having problems with enrolling her younger child in Prospera at the time of interview, even though she was now in the 3rd year of elementary school and was eligible to receive it. These exchanges made me reflect on the ethical dilemmas of involving poor people in research about their aspirations made me question “Is it ever ethical to probe into other people’s lives?” (Wolcott, 1999: 284), particularly without the promise of resources or support.*

In terms of reciprocity with teachers, I also had to make my limited powers clear. As with other technological high schools, this one did not have a well-maintained infrastructure. This was reflected, for instance, in the lack of roofing over the tables for lunch. Instead, there was a transparent thin plastic roof which did not provide protection from the sun. Even though I felt the need to ‘give back’ (Gupta and Kelly 2014) to everyone who collaborated with me and provided guidance through fieldwork, I was honest with the teachers and shared my situation of being in receipt of a scholarship which didn’t cover fieldwork travel expenses and that I myself had to save up for coming to Mexico and returning to the UK. On the other hand, on one occasion, I was able to give back by buying some products that students from the management programme had created as part of a school project.

⁴³ Mexico’s Prospera conditional cash transfer programme was formerly known as Oportunidades and Progresa in previous government periods.

During my interactions with participants and their family members, I realised that my presence could have affected the aspirations of some participants. Young people were very interested about my life and how I managed to study in the United Kingdom. In some interactions, I identified a sense of emulation towards my professional and academic career. Students said that they too would like to travel the world like me and one of them mentioned that they would like to study beyond university. I became an unintentional role model (Crivello 2018) for their children: *“Maybe one day she will be interviewing other people like you”* (**Bernardino, parent, father of Silvia**). However, as I narrowed the focus of my study on the shaping of educational aspirations, the possible bias might not have been there to the same extent.

3.3 Ethical considerations and challenges

Before research could be conducted for this study, the consent form, information sheet and interview questions were submitted for approval to the University of East Anglia ethics committee (see ethics approval in Appendix I). Here some issues were raised about power relations, anonymity and consent. In this section, I will discuss my ethical stance and the related actions taken.

At the beginning of the interviews, each participant read the information sheet and gave verbal or written consent and it was made clear that they could decide not to participate in the research at any stage. All participants were provided with my and my supervisors' contact details in case they had further questions or wished to withdraw from the research at any time. Interviews were conducted at two points throughout students' academic year in order to be able to comprehend the changes and transition of young people's university aspirations. This longitudinal aspect allowed me to

keep in touch with students and regain their consent before collecting their life histories. In doing so I was mindful that consent is not a one-off decision, but instead a continual process throughout the research (Valentine 1999).

Reflecting on how one as a researcher is inserted in power relations and how this influences key informants' interpretations is an important part of the reflexivity that has to accompany research (Kobayashi 2003). Recognising that high school students classified as poor (CONEVAL 2016) are more likely to experience imbalances of power in their relationships, I made sure participants knew that they could change their minds about participating. Also, from the start, I explained my research focus and distinguished myself from their teachers, calling myself "*la investigadora*" (the researcher). It is important to note that there have been other youth studies in Mexico where researchers do not disclose their full identity. In one study of youth identities in a general high school in Mexico City, participant observation was carried out inside the school by a researcher who presented himself as a 'student'. They explained they were there for academic research to the students with whom a closer relationship was established but "never clearly explained its focus" (Avalos Romero 2007: 4). I argue that my approach is better as my practice is honest and ethical and it empowers students to decide whether or not they would like to be part of my research project.

On one occasion, two participants blinked away tears. Silvia's father shed some tears while talking about how he felt proud of his children already studying high school, which he couldn't manage to. "The opportunities that one didn't have, let's try to provide to our children [...] I am fortunate because I didn't fulfil the expectations I had as a child but thank god my children (have)"⁴⁴. Filemón's mother cried while recounting the narrative of

⁴⁴ Por la oportunidad que no tuviste, hay que tartar de dársela a tus hijos [...] Me siento afortunado porque gracias a dios las expectativas que yo tenía de niño pues no se dieron pero mis hijos (sí)

how she married at 15 years old and her partner didn't "value" her. Even though the focus of my research was not intended to touch on sensitive topics, I tried to be aware of participants' feelings during the interviews. I used open-ended questions such as tell me about your life? giving participants the freedom to share their hopes, concerns or any other information only if they chose.

Throughout my fieldwork, I offered full anonymity to school staff and students. To preserve participants' identities, I replaced their real names with pseudonyms. However, I did not remove all identifying information such as gender, age, ethnicity because it provides context for a fuller understanding of their background and therefore, of the empirical data (Clark 2006). One of the challenges of my research design was to maintain my commitment to confidentiality with the students when interviewing the parents. I didn't want students to think I would break my commitment to confidentiality when I was visiting or talking with their family members. Waiting until the second semester to start parental interviews countered this as by then, my relationships with students had matured.

The great majority of senior high school students are over 18, but there were two participants who were considered minors, as they were 17 years old. To gain their consent, parental/guardian permission as well as the minor's assent was required. Firstly, the purpose of the research was made clear to them and their parents were only approached if the students had indicated their willingness to participate. All interviews with students took place in the school setting to minimise concerns about their safety and the time required. If permission was given to make a recording of the interviews and life histories, I reinforced the fact that these records were stored in a password-protected hard drive that only I could access.

Another challenge when working with young people was time management. As discussed in the Sample section, all of my participants were engaged with multiple activities beyond school. I tried to balance the time demands for semi-structured and life-history interviews. I reconfirmed their consent and availability prior to our meetings and adapted to their time suggestions. Lack of adequate street lighting was a problem in the area. I conducted the interviews at times when it would be safe to travel, particularly for the afternoon shift participants.

3.4 Research design

In the review of literature in Chapter 2, I emphasized the complex nature of young people's university aspirations. The need to understand the diverse factors influencing their aspirations within their social context and networks led me to develop my research within a social constructivist paradigm. With this approach, I seek to understand the world from the participants' viewpoint, based on the assumption that people actively construct their worlds (Creswell 2013). I see each person's view of reality as unique. This stance represents a holistic perspective that allows participants to identify the concepts that are meaningful to them. It can shed light on the complex interactions between these concepts that impact the way in which they are experienced and made sense of. Within this approach, I view the participants' interactions and discourse as a reflection of their social reality (Edwards and Potter 1992, Holstein and Gubrium 2008). This approach is particularly suitable for research with young people as it allows them to be in a central and powerful position by seeing them as actively influencing their own lives. Throughout my research, I sought to understand and illustrate participants' realities through visiting them and gathering information directly from them and from the social actors around them, i.e. parents, teachers and family members.

In line with this approach, I chose to conduct my research through adopting a longitudinal ethnographic approach within a high school setting in Morelos, Mexico. Studies about the meanings young people attribute to high school and HE in Mexico have used autobiographic interviews (Guerrero Salinas 2008, Guerra Ramirez 2008 and Romo 2009), ethnographic observations and conversations in the school common areas (Hernandez 2007, Grijalva 2011) or participant observation (Avalos Romero 2007). For my research design, I chose a variety of data collection methods: participant observation, semi structured interviews, and life histories with participatory drawings. As I argue, they offer complementary understandings that may be difficult to access through relying on a single method (LeCompte and Preissle 1993, Valentine 2005). As discussed in Chapter 1, university aspirations are multi-layered, so need to be explored in all their complexity through a variety of methods. I read an extensive number of articles on the methodologies used for youth studies and attended a variety of qualitative research workshops at my university. With participant observation, I hoped to access a participant perspective, identifying the meanings that they might take for granted. I selected semi-structured interviews as a method because they offer flexibility in capturing participants' voices and the ways that participants make meaning of their experiences. Lastly, using life histories creates the opportunity of knowing how participants experience the world and "re-present [their] experience narratively" (Dhunpath 2000: 545). The combination of the above-mentioned methods allowed me to understand young people's lives from different perspectives. Had I used a smaller subset of methods I would have lost a part of these meanings. In the following section, I discuss in more depth the specific methods used in this research to collect the data. These reflect my social constructivist view in that I recognise young people's agency and their social contexts.

3.5 Methods of data collection

As stated in the previous section, three data collection methods were used: participant observation, semi structured interviews and life histories with participatory drawings. To explore how young people formulate their aspirations, I opted to conduct longitudinal research that lasted 10 months throughout students' senior (third) academic year as they made their decisions around whether and when to attend university. The following timeline depicts the time frame within which each of the three methods were implemented. My participant observation started from the moment I arrived in the field and it helped me to shape the research and have some insights into young people's lives. I carried out the semi-structured interviews with students in the first semester. I wanted to establish rapport before asking them in-depth questions about their life and academic journey. The life histories were collected in the second semester. It was also during the second semester that I made contact with participants' families to arrange house visits and get their consent to conduct semi-structured interviews. In the subsequent sections, I will go through each of these methods.

Table 1. Methods' timeline

PhD timeline	2016				2017										
	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun					
Participant observation	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Semi-structured interviews with students		■	■	■	■										
Life histories with students						■	■	■	■	■	■	■			
Semi-structured interviews with parents						■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Observations at students' households						■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■

Having an assigned room at the school (see Figure 3 below) meant I could offer privacy to my participants. It also gave me a space where I could receive any participants who passed by and wanted to say hello. This allowed me to continue to build rapport throughout the course of my fieldwork. Although there was a window, I brought a small fan to make sure the room remained inviting and comfortable for participants during the hottest months of the year during the second semester, when I also conducted life history interviews. This method will be discussed in section 3.5.3.



Figure 1. Room at school assigned for researcher/interview duties

3.5.1 Participant Observation

My role as participant observer also permitted observations to be made during both structured and unstructured periods of the school day. By being part of the school community, I had the opportunity to ‘hang out’ (Dewalt and Dewalt 1998) with students. I recognise that being inside this space also blurred the boundaries between researcher and teacher, which could have been ethically problematic in terms of ensuring genuinely voluntary consent. However, I asserted my identity as a researcher from the beginning by referring to myself as “la investigadora” (the researcher) to distinguish myself from the teaching staff. Furthermore, as discussed in the previous section, I was explicit about my purpose for being there and took every opportunity to be transparent about who I was.

Participant observation provides a “written photograph” (Kawulich 2005:2) of the complex relations between young people’s aspirations and their actions, behaviours and meanings inside school. My rationale behind using this method is that it allowed me as the researcher to take part in the daily school life of the participants, i.e. their activities, interactions, events and rituals. It also allowed me to observe situations that participants had described in interviews (Kawulich 2005). Adopting this technique allowed participants to speak of their own topics in “their own terms” (Hammersley and Atkinson 2001: 126). It also provided context to the open-ended questions in my semi-structured and life-history interviews (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011). Participant observation was used to explore, first- hand, the school practices of students and staff. I carried out this role for a period of 10 months whereby I undertook observations of young people’s every-day lives and had informal conversations with young people and parents. I also participated in some social events where generally I wouldn’t have been invited (Bernard 1994) had I been there purely to do research, i.e. house visits, potential university visits, private graduation parties, and other social and academic events.

I was asked by the school's director to participate as an observer and listener at the senior year's "Tutorials Programme". Even though the tutorials' objective was to accompany students both individually and in a group, tutors admitted not having enough time to provide individual counselling due to their additional teaching duties, thus they were happy to have me join. I attended weekly sessions for each of the four senior groups (consisting of 25, 26, 27 and 24 students each) designed with the aim to identify personal and academic needs and contribute to the completion of their high school studies⁴⁵. Students' schedules were variable. Morning shifts started between 7:00 - 8:30 am and until 12:45- 2:00 pm, with a break from 10:00 to 10:30 am. The afternoon shifts started from 12-12:45 pm to 6:30-7:00 pm with a break from 15:00 to 15:30 pm. Besides these tutorials, I also interacted with them before or after class, during their breaks and in between their modules. The rest of the time I made observations from the school's communal areas – the garden benches, the basketball court, the parking lot and the adjacent field and streets.

Tutorials were 45-minute sessions for each of the four cohort groups (24-27 students each). Due to the lack of time, some exercises and workshops were only reviewed by the teacher outside the classroom, without giving students the opportunity to share their reflections with the group. As part of my role, I was able to discuss these with the students one-to-one. This space allowed me to gain an overview of some of the concerns and ideas young people had around their futures. Being at school and around students also allowed me to build rapport with the participants before commencing the interviews. The topics covered in these tutorials related to students' reflections on their academic achievements, motivations, goals, learning experiences and development of skills such as teamwork and time management. Examples of the activities done during these tutorials were the family presentation and the caterpillar's dream. For the first one, students brought a collage of their families. Even though there was not enough

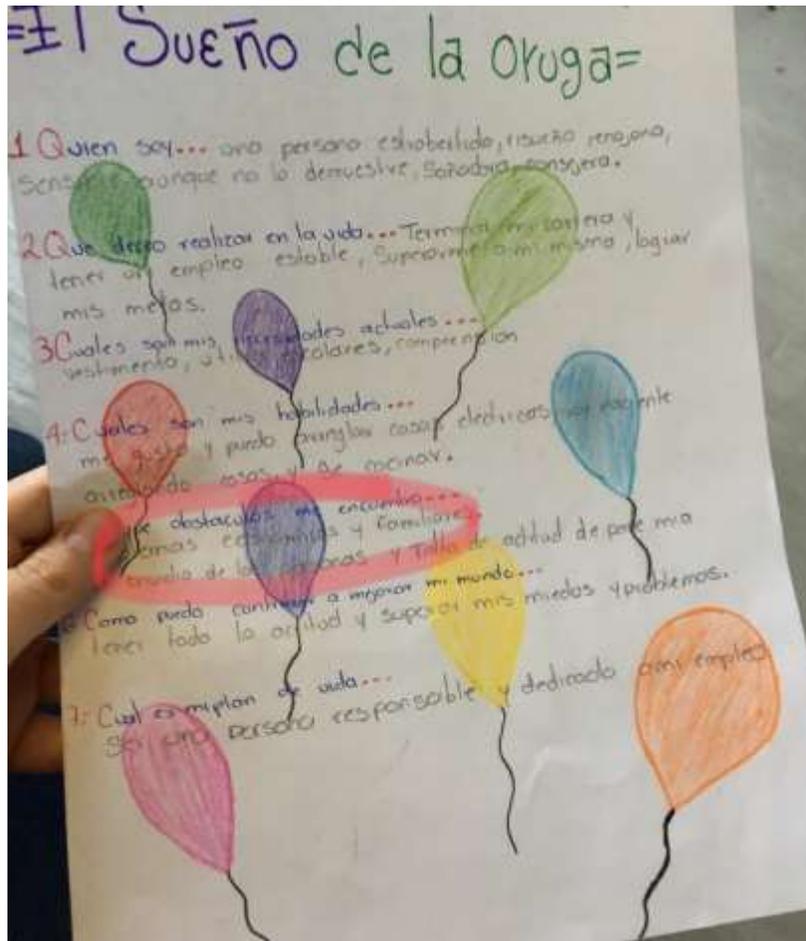
⁴⁵ The aim of the Tutorials programme quoted from the school's tutorial manual.

time for all of them to present in the allocated time, their collages gave me some insight into students' familial contexts prior to conducting the life history interviews.



Figure 2. Collage posters for "My Family" activity

In the other activity, "The caterpillar's dream", students were asked to think of the metamorphosis that a caterpillar goes through to become a butterfly. In this activity, students had to answer the questions: what is my life plan? what obstacles do I find? I found these activities were useful starting points for me to talk to them about their aspirations outside of the interview and life history settings.



Translation box for Figure 3. The caterpillar's dream (Diana, female student, 18)

- 1 Who am I? An extroverted person, jiggly, angry, sensitive even though I don't show it, dreamer, counsellor
- 2 What do I want to make in life? Finish my career and have a stable job, get ahead, achieve my goals
- 3 What are my current needs? Clothing, school supplies, comprehension
- 4 What are my abilities? I can and I like to fix electrical stuff, I am patient when fixing up things and I can cook
- 5 What obstacles do I find? Economic and family problems, jealousy from other people and lack of attitude from myself
- 6 How can I contribute to improve my world? Having all the attitude and overcome my fears and problems
- 7 What is my life plan? Being a responsible person who is dedicated to her job

Figure 3. "The caterpillar's dream" Tutorial activity

Participant observation also proved useful in that it gave students an opportunity to get to know me within a group setting prior to the one-to-one interviews and enabled them to feel more confident and comfortable to meet with me alone. In the following section I introduce the semi-structured interviews I conducted with participants.

3.5.2 Semi-structured interviews

I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews due to their conversational style (Brinkmann 2004, Longhurst 2016). This allowed me to have a chat with students, rather than them feeling as if they were being interviewed. Through reviewing the literature relating to HE aspirations and youth studies, I identified topics that were particularly pertinent to my research. I then created a list of key topics that the semi-structured interviews would cover⁴⁶. These open-ended questions aimed to encourage participants to reflect upon their views and the semi-structured format allowed participants to introduce new topics. The non-directive informal tone of the semi-structured interviews offered the freedom for participants to share their views in their own words and gave me the flexibility to follow new leads as they arose (Bernard 1988).

The semi-structured interviews were conducted at the school and usually before or after classes when young people were most available. Aware of their academic responsibilities as senior high school students, I organised our meetings according to students' convenience and time availability. In a few cases and at the request of the young people, interviews were also conducted during lunch time. Refreshments and snacks were provided at all our meetings to create a relaxed atmosphere. All interviews were undertaken in the room I was assigned at the school, seen in Figure 3. They usually lasted around 60 minutes, were audio-recorded and then analysed (see Chapter 4.7).

To add to my understanding of the familial context, I also conducted semi-structured interviews with family members. As discussed, through my role as a participant observer, I was able to establish rapport with participants and obtain their trust. They then helped me to invite their parents for an interview with me. As discussed under ethical considerations, I was aware that the young participants might have concerns about my interviewing

⁴⁶ Please refer to Appendix XII for the list of topics covered at the semi-structured interviews

their parents, having shared private information with me before. I emphasised our confidentiality agreement and assured them that my interaction with their parents would be based on a chat to broadly discuss university aspirations⁴⁷. Invitations were sent along with an information sheet about my research. I waited until the second semester to hold interviews with parents. This proved to be sensible as by then, parents were already familiar with my research and in some cases, we had briefly said hello at school before our formal meeting.

In order to have both genders represented within parents' responses, I made an effort to invite fathers and male guardians. However, this was largely unfruitful due to the fact that it was usually these family members who worked longer shifts, as opposed to their female counterparts. Consequently, I interviewed 13 female and 4 male family members. In total, I held 17 family interviews: 12 interviews with parents and 5 with family members i.e. grandmother, aunt, sister and husband. By parental suggestion, these semi-structured interviews were mostly held at the families' households, with the exception of a mother who was head of the household and working long shifts at a factory. I visited her at her workplace as requested by her. She worked as a janitor and wasn't allowed to leave the site at lunch time. I interviewed her through a barred security gate. Interacting with my participants outside of their household allowed me to become familiar with the ways in which they live and make their meanings.

3.5.3 Life history interviews with participatory drawings with students

⁴⁷ Please refer to Appendix VII for the list of topics to cover in the semi-structured interviews with parents

Following the semi-structured interviews with participants, I requested again participants' consent and proceeded to collect life histories from all of them. Six months into my fieldwork, I conducted individual life-histories with each of the young people in thirty to sixty minute sessions ⁴⁸. Life-history interviews have been used successfully to explore the formation of career aspirations amongst young people (Ashby and Schoon 2012, Elliott et al 2010), where youth's agency and the notion of them as social actors and active participants in their daily lives, is central. Furthermore, life histories permit participants to explore and reflect on their meanings and reasons for their choices and experience. Life histories are also a tool that allows the researcher to understand how participants interact with the structures around them (Bertaux 1981).

I wanted a participatory method that not only provided students with the opportunity to freely express important aspects and events of their lives, but also to do so visually. Even though draw-and-tell techniques have mainly targeted research with children (Pridmore and Bendelow 1995, Punch 2002, Crivello et al 2009). I wanted to use them here because I believe they allowed students' creativity to unwind as evidenced in the figure below where a female student drew her timeline represented through a Nintendo console.

⁴⁸ Please refer to Appendix VI for the list of topics to cover in the life histories and interviews with students

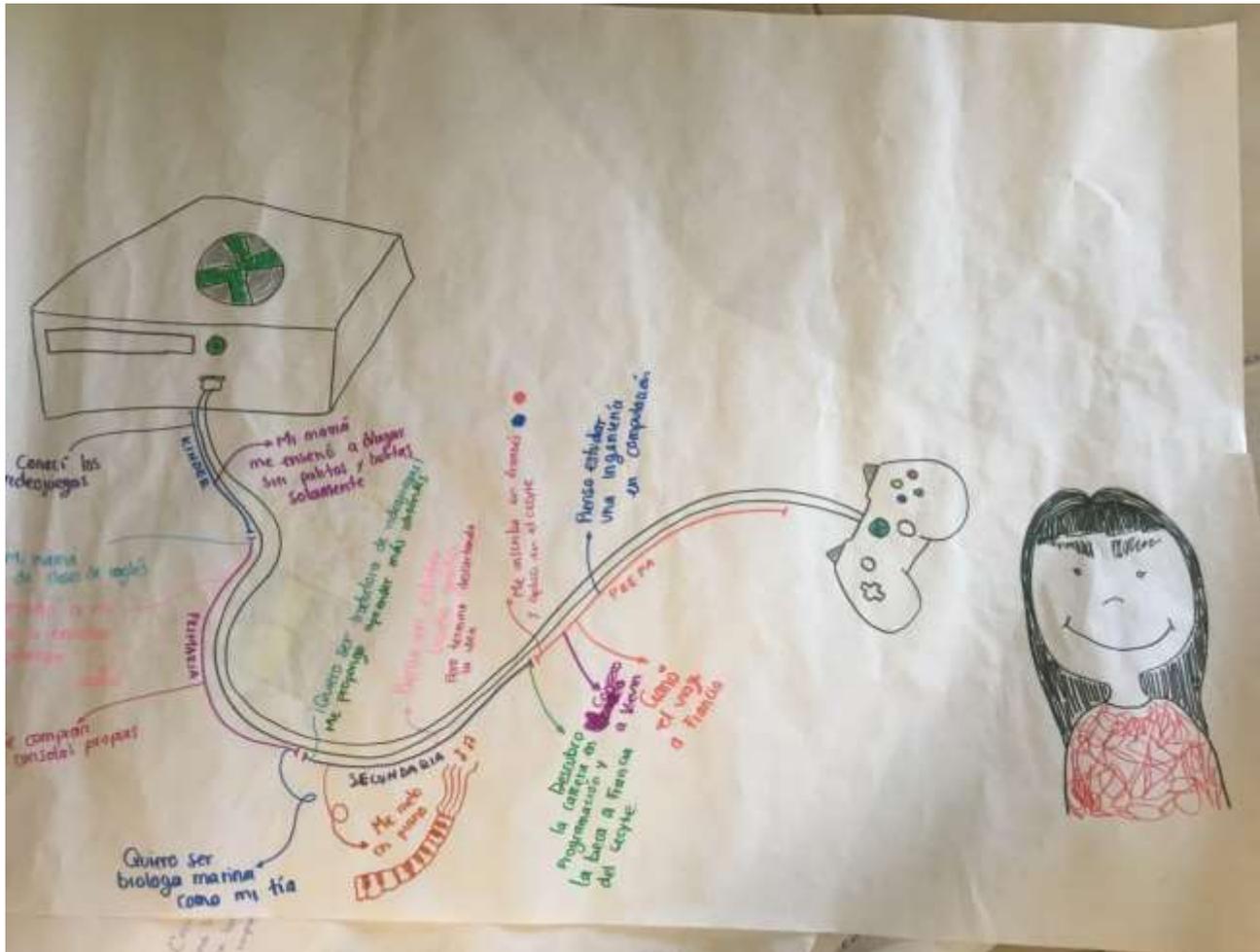


Figure 4. Participatory lifeline drawing

I gave all participants an A1 size (594mm x 841mm) white poster and a pack of 24 markers and asked them to draw a timeline that would represent their lived academic and personal experiences and expected goals. As suggested by participants, the process of drawing and discussing life events was an ongoing conversation. Timelines were used to stimulate discussion and were referred to during these life history interviews. At the beginning

of each session, I shared a timeline drawing that reflected my own life history and discussed the major life events I have experienced. I did so because I believe that building trusting relationships is central for in-depth qualitative research. In trying to achieve this, I decided to share something of myself in order for students to feel some sense of commonality with me, even though there was a slight risk that by doing this, I was indicating that their story should be related mainly to educational achievements. In fact, sharing my own life history proved to be beneficial as it significantly enhanced the connections I made with students. I noted that participants were more open and communicative. Many of them used curse words and colloquial terms that youth usually use around friends or colleagues and not around teachers or parents, suggesting the strength of our rapport.

Life history interviews were conducted with the aim of fully contextualising HE aspirations and understanding their broader meaning. Having a conversation and a drawing made by them that we could refer back to was useful. I managed to probe around topics such as the role of their families and their prior educational experiences in their aspirations. A final strength of the life history approach is that it privileges agency (Riessman 1993). Life histories arise from the perspective of individuals themselves and show the way they tied together significant events and relationships in their lives (Labov 1982, McLeod & Thomson 2009). The life history method helped to understand “the changing experiences and outlooks of individuals in their daily lives, what they see as important, and how to provide interpretations of the accounts they give of their past, present and future” (Roberts 2002: 1). Using this method yielded rich data about participants’ earlier educational, familial and cultural contexts as well as recording how their aspirations are constituted and developed in their last year of high school.

3.6 Research site

The municipality in Morelos, Ayala, where this research was developed is one the most disadvantaged semi-rural municipalities in the state (Ministry of Social Development 2016). Ayala is included in the National System for the Crusade against Hunger 2016⁴⁹. Twenty two percent of people aged 15 and under don't have access to basic compulsory education or attend a formal education centre, compared to 16% at the state level⁵⁰(Ministry of Social Development 2016). Ayala is also one of the municipalities in Morelos where the indigenous language-speaking population (8.25% of the state indigenous language-speaking population) is particularly concentrated (Ministry of Planning 2015). Agriculture, livestock activities, poultry farming, and commerce are some of the main economic activities in the municipality. This municipality has two public (technological high schools) and two private high schools. I contacted the two public technological high schools but only received follow up on my communication requests from one of them.

The private high schools are situated on the border between this municipality and Cuautla. After Cuernavaca (Morelos's capital), Cuautla is the second municipality that is most benefitted by commerce in Morelos. While the technological high school in my study had an enrolment fee (1,300 Mexican pesos), the private school on the border of Ayala had an enrolment fee that was four times higher (4,033 Mexican pesos) and monthly fees of 2,865 Mexican pesos. General public high schools weren't accessible to participants due to these being located in more urbanised areas in Morelos. The transportation costs of attending made these schools unaffordable.

⁴⁹ Mexican government's initiative targeting extreme poverty and food insecurity

⁵⁰ Please refer to Appendix V for the table summarising the indicators for social deprivation at the municipal level for Ayala

Ayala also has one higher education institution (HEI), a university “Escuela de Estudios Superiores de Xalostoc” (Xalostoc HE School), affiliated to the Autonomous University of the State of Morelos (UAEM). Back in 2014, this university announced that they were cancelling the scholarships and a waiver of enrolment fees for the children of *ejidatarios*⁵¹ who donated land for the construction of this university (Vega 2014). It also decreased the number of programmes from 16 to 4. Up until now, the number of programmes remain the same (as seen in Table 2) but the waiver to fees paid by relatives of *ejidatarios* is still in place in a less official way (only reported by students to still be in practice but no evidence of it in their admissions system).

Table 2. Academic programmes offered by the Xalostoc HE School (Vera Jiménez 2016)

Academic programmes	Duration	Available slots in 2015-2016	Accepted students in 2015-2016
Industrial engineering	9 semesters	80	73
Vegetal production engineering	8 semesters	80	41
Chemical engineering	9 semesters	80	68
Phytosanitary engineering	8 semesters	80	25

According to the latest activities report published by the UAEM’s rector, the university in Xalostoc had 80 available slots per programme in the academic year 2015-2015 but in some programmes, only half or fewer of the slots were actually taken up by students. Information about the numbers of student applications has not been publicly reported (Vera Jiménez 2016).

⁵¹ community-based land tenure holders. Arising from the Mexican Revolution in 1910, the Constitution was reformed to explicitly recognize community-based land tenure and forbid commercial manufacturing, mining, or petroleum companies from “acquiring, holding or administering these rural properties.

I conducted my research at a technological high school located in the peri-urban municipality of Ayala. At this high school, the cohort of senior students was approximately 101 students: 57 attended the morning shift and 44 attended the afternoon shift. The technological high school senior cohort was formed of four groups in total, two groups (morning and afternoon) from the following two programmes:

- Programming Technician (development of software, web applications, e-learning and electronic commerce)
- Administrative processes Technician (accountancy, management, sales and production processes)

3.7 Sample

The school allowed me to access the summarised data from individual socioeconomic questionnaires. All students have to complete these at the beginning of their academic year. The data I used for sampling is derived from the socioeconomic questionnaires and house visits and was created in line to the CONEVAL classification (Please see Appendix V) where students were classified into extreme poverty, poverty, vulnerable due to social deprivation and vulnerable due to income.

This data allowed me to identify senior high school students classified as poor by CONEVAL (2016), along with their gender, place of origin (rural or urban) and if they were indigenous language-speakers. Of my 20 participants and their families, Nancy was the only indigenous language-speaking student who identified as Tlapanec – one of the regional indigenous groups. Within the sample, her family was the only one living in an indigenous settlement located on the outskirts of the municipality where the school was located. According to the school's data, for the 2016-2017 school year the percentage of senior high school students classified as poor (CONEVAL 2016) was 55%. This led to approximately 50 senior high school students

classified as poor (CONEVAL 2016). As this constituted an unmanageable amount of data to be collected, a sample was needed. For the sample, I stratified for morning and afternoon shift and gender. It has been suggested that the afternoon shifts have a greater concentration of poor and at-risk students (Cárdenas Denham 2011, Solís 2014).

For each of the four above-mentioned groups in the cohort, the school management staff shared with me the lists of students' names who fulfilled the CONEVAL classification criteria. In order to make my sample completely randomised, the names in the lists were then numbered and I then used an online random number generator (<https://www.random.org/>) to generate a list of randomly ordered numbers. I then proceeded to invite the first five numbers, then the next five, and so on, until I reached my sample.

I first introduced myself and my research, group by group and answered a few questions about my research focus. This helped me acquire some presence at the school and talk briefly to participants. Students were not provided institutional e-mails and important announcements were usually given by the school prefect at the start of a module, on a hallway bulletin board or via Facebook. Per the school's director suggestion and to protect anonymity, I contacted students via telephone. I explained my research in detail over the phone, including their right to withdrawal and asked if they had any questions.

The twenty students whom I contacted all answered positively to my invitation to participate in my research. The first time we met again in person, I again explained my research, gave them an information sheet and asked them to take their time to think about whether they wanted to participate.

If so, we could meet again and schedule a meeting for an interview. Respecting the fact that in their senior year they would have extra academic responsibilities and that most of them were working besides school, our meetings were usually at a time proposed by students themselves. The two participants under 18 who gave voluntary consent for taking part in my research, received a consent form sheet to be signed by their parents. It was not until after they returned the signed consent form that we began the interviews. The aim of having 20 participants' interviews and life histories was to take into account the possibility that some young people might drop out from the research project. However, throughout the academic year, none of the participants dropped out of the project (see Table 2). As discussed in the Appendix, participants were assigned a pseudonym to protect their privacy and identification.

During our interactions the fact that 13 families were beneficiaries of Mexico's Government social programme, Prospera, was salient. Besides the Prospera conditional cash transfers that families received, all students, with the exception of two, were in receipt of Beca Salario Universal Cash Transfer (discussed in Chapter 1). Nancy, the only indigenous language-speaking student is the only student not in receipt of this support. This illustrates the added barriers that the indigenous language-speaking pupils face. The paperwork needed in order to be eligible for this programme had to be taken to Morelos capital, around two hours away by public transport, and she had been unable to do so, due to economic and family support circumstances.

Table 3. Summary of the sample

Participant	Gender	Mother/female guardian in receipt of Government's Conditional Cash Transfers	Student in receipt of Beca Salario Universal Cash Transfer
Nancy	female	Yes	No
Fernanda	Female	Yes	Yes
Juan	Male	Yes	Yes
Karen	female	Yes	Yes
Teresa	female	Yes	Yes
Patricia	female	Yes	Yes
Armando	male	No	Yes
Carolina	female	No	Yes
Alberto	male	Yes	Yes
Gerardo	male	Yes	Yes
Daniel	male	Yes	Yes
Tania	female	No	Yes
Itzel	female	Yes	Yes
Diana	female	Yes	Yes
Felipe	male	Yes	Yes
Flor	female	Yes	Yes
Nidia	female	Yes	Yes
Miguel	male	Yes	Yes
Filemon	male	Yes	Yes
Pedro	male	Yes	Yes

3.7.1 Young people's multiple activities outside school

Young people in my research continuously displayed inventive responses to their situation of economic uncertainty. As we will see later, young people engage in a variety of activities to fulfil immediate and future goals simultaneously. These activities are embedded in families and communities have

an impact on young people's university aspirations. At the same time, the amount of time young people dedicate to the multiple activities outside of school is substantial and deflects their attention from their studies. Male participants were the ones who would more commonly engage with paid jobs outside the household. Both the females and males working in salaried jobs outside their household were seen to be driven by *familismo* attitudes (Morales 2018). Even though marginal, receiving a payment for a job is dependent on young people's age and on the members of their family and community they are working with. The kind of paid jobs young people engage in are usually the ones with the lowest status, especially in the agricultural field. As previously described in Chapter 3, young people engage with paid work in precarious and informal conditions -lack of a contract, social security or employment benefits- and with low salaries (Bonfil 2001, Weiss 2007, Weiss 2012b). Besides receiving Beca Salario (Universal scholarship)⁵², they engage in sporadic casual *chambas* in the form of agricultural and street trading or at *tianguis*⁵³, followed by informal jobs in the service sector that have been circulated through networks in the community.

At the *tianguis*, goods are acquired via bartering and through money payments. The activity of bartering happens with other families who come from nearby towns and who also sell foods, products and handcrafts at the stalls. Exchanging goods that are easier for young people's families to produce, i.e. food, for products such as clay bowls, is a survival strategy (Fabre Platas and Egea Jimenez 2015). When they receive money instead of goods, the amount some of the young people receive is unfixed and is dependent on their parents' decisions to allocate the money obtained. Participants usually used the obtained money to pay for school tuition fees and other school-related expenses such as transportation.

⁵² Please see section 2.4 in Contextual Background for more on Morelos's programme Beca Salario

⁵³ open-air temporary markets usually found in Mexico and Central America. Local governments in Mexico have promoted public markets or "mercados" to better regulate the selling of goods traditionally available in tianguis

Young people usually do the precarious jobs that adults will not engage in. For example, it was common to see young people working with toxic chemicals in the (agricultural) field through applying pesticides or weeding. Due to their young age, they received half of the payment considered appropriate for a full time adult agricultural worker (*peón*). Thus they engage in an exploitative relationship, as they work the same number of hours as an adult *peón* but receive half of the wage and do not receive any health care or other additional benefits. For most participants, the same work can be both paid and unpaid at different stages in their lives, so these are fluid categories. For the male participants who worked in the agricultural fields, payment usually came with age and when their male elders (fathers/uncles/grandparents) thought they were of an age to receive small amounts of money for things such as taking care of a girlfriend. Some participants were paid *half a peón*⁵⁴. A *peón* day is \$170⁵⁵Mexican pesos. As referred to by participants, having an unpaid *chamba* in the family business and/or agricultural work was not considered as work. When initially asked if they were working, participants would say they were not. After interactions and life history interviews, participants would mention family activities they participated in, the main ones being agricultural work and informal stalls at *tianguis*.

3.8 Data Analysis

Analysis of my data was an iterative process in which ideas emerged that helped make sense of the data while reflection on the data changed my ideas (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). During my fieldwork I started processing my data by typing up notes and reflecting on it. After my observations and the semi-structured interviews during the first semester, I acquired a more comprehensive picture of young people's lives. This

⁵⁴ Patron-peón relations in Mexican agriculture are between Mexican landowners (patrones) and indigenous agricultural workers (peones) and are usually exploitative.

⁵⁵ Two days salary at the current minimum wage.

helped me expand the topics to talk about during our interactions. For example, it wasn't until I was in the field that I discovered how many students had family members who had migrated to the USA or engaged in a multiplicity of activities besides school. Identifying that the majority of these activities were not initially acknowledged as work-related made me include further prompts in the life history interviews where I would ask if they worked or did any activities alongside their families or neighbours.

When building and developing the conceptual framework I also took an iterative approach and embraced the movement between concepts and my empirical data. I thought of the conceptual framework as dynamic and revised it throughout according to new insights, literature and data (Jabareen 2009). An example of this is how my literature review was on-going and my concepts and data are in a dialogue between each other. To work towards this, I created a literature map and a matrix of emerging key concepts found in the literature and data (See Appendix XVI and XVII). As discussed in Chapter 2, after systematically reviewing the literature and identifying key concepts, I had initially proposed a research question that looked at agency in an abstract manner. It was only after analysing my observations, field notes and interactions with participants that I discovered new elements of the conceptual framework and identified how key concepts such as agency are operationalised (DeWalt and DeWalt 2002). This changed the analytical lenses I used on the data that emerged from the field.

The audio recordings from the life history interviews, semi-structured interviews, notes from participant observation in the school setting and notes from the observations in students' homes, were transcribed verbatim in Spanish⁵⁶, so as to respect as much as possible the meaning transmitted in

⁵⁶ Please refer to Appendix XIII and XIV for an example of an interviewee transcript both in Spanish and English.

the words used by participants (Atkinson 1998). Transcripts were edited to ensure that they were structured into paragraphs, but the participants' words are still the original ones (Atkinson 1998). I decided against carrying out an analysis of English transcripts as I started identifying several words, expressions and cultural phrases that would lose value if translated into English. In translating particular extracts and quotes, care was taken in choosing carefully the words that best represented the meaning intended by the participants.

Firstly, I took an inductive approach. After going through the data a number of times, I identified the emergence of themes and subthemes (Ezzy 2002). Then, the data was approached deductively. To identify patterns in the data that could contribute towards answering my research questions, I coded my interview transcripts and field notes according to themes linked to my research questions. After an initial coding, overlapping categories were further grouped for emerging themes, in relation to the research questions. The theoretical framework arising from the literature was used to identify the initial emerging themes, but I also allowed for new themes to emerge from the data (Coffey and Atkinson 1996). After constantly evaluating the data against the research questions, I modified the research questions (Parlett and Hamilton 1976) to bring in key concepts that were operationalised in participants' lives.

Coding was undertaken through re-reading the interview transcripts to ensure that coded sections did not lose their meaning when taken out of context. I view coding as the act of noticing relevant phenomena; collecting examples of those phenomena; and analysing those phenomena in order to find commonalities, differences, patterns and structures (Seidel and Kelle 1995). For creating codes, I carried out a manual thematic analysis of all collected data where I identified themes and highlighted them with different colours. This accounted for a preliminary identification of overarching

themes, experiences and perceptions held by young people. I then elaborated a matrix⁵⁷ and used it as a tool to review emerging themes across the data sets.

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined my methodological approach and the research setting, which was adjusted to fulfil my research concerns. My social constructivist approach enabled me to highlight participants' agency as a central focus of my thesis. I argue that bringing together the different qualitative methods of participant observation, semi-structured and life-history interview techniques, allowed me to extend my understanding of the complex multi-layered features of HE aspirations. My data analysis was a continuous process that started from the moment I arrived in the field and kept going until my revised drafts. This entire process was worked through on several occasions through a four-year period. Stepping back from the data and reflecting on my own position as a researcher within my research, helped me to prepare a better analysis that was respectful of participants' voices.

⁵⁷ Please refer to Appendix for the matrix of initial emerging themes

Chapter 4. Young people conceptualising their HE aspirations

4.1 Introduction

It is March and it is very hot in Morelos, so I brought a small fan and cold refreshments to Miguel's life history interview. It is the second semester of the academic year, so I have already had several interactions with him, including an interview. From our first encounter, Miguel shared that his father is a *campesino*⁵⁸ and his mother a housewife. After the life history interview, I find out that the family owns a chicken stall where Miguel and his mother help sell chicken. During elementary and junior high school, Miguel planned to study veterinary medicine because he witnessed many 'street dogs' suffering in his community and he wanted to help. Miguel's aspirations are informed by his position and the place in which he lives. This is an example of something we will see throughout the chapter, which is that young people's HE aspirations are socially embedded (Appadurai 2004).

Recognition of how aspirations are shaped by social context has focused my analysis on my participants' relations and their community. Miguel also shared that he only enrolled at this technological high school on the first day of school. He planned to drop out of school and work full-time to financially support his father, but his uncle convinced him at the last-minute to continue studying. His uncle's influence on Miguel's aspirations illustrates the part young people's social relations plays in their constructions of their future. This illustrates the importance of understanding the ways they relate and negotiate their positionality in their context in exploring their aspirations. In this chapter, I also argue that the idea of HE as a way to become someone also has a political element, as young people want to fight for their community and counter the unfairness around them.

⁵⁸ farm worker

During his first four semesters of high school, Miguel continued to be tempted by the idea of dropping out of school. It was only in his final year that he started to consider a career in agronomy or general medicine and not veterinary, as he thought this would create more job opportunities. In his final semester, he is now torn between three programme choices: agronomy, law and medicine. Miguel's interest in law came about because his grandmother had recently been sued and he would have liked to defend her and wants to be able to defend his community so that they don't suffer injustices. My interview with Miguel sheds light on the articulation of aspirations across time and how these are produced within complex and unjust social relations and family events. As I will discuss later, young people's aspirations are dynamic and are conceptualised in individual and collective terms. As we will see in the following sections, their narratives combine potentially contradictory understandings of education as a way of defending oneself and others against an unfair system (Crivello 2011) and lifting their family out of poverty.

Influences such as the family, community and peers, shape young people's complex and often contradictory aspirations. I argue that in the face of scarcity, young people strategise and assemble their responses to uncertainty: they do a 'bricolage' (Weston and Imas 2018), building their aspirations with what they have at hand. An important point from Miguel's narrative is the idea of giving back to his parents. This reciprocity is interconnected with his desire of becoming someone through HE. Within their family, young people negotiate their responsibilities towards their parents in light of their individual needs (Punch 2007). However, the idea of becoming someone can also become a burden to young people, as they are expected to fulfil responsibilities within their family, such as becoming important economic contributors to their household (Meert 2000).

4.2 Chapter structure

In this chapter, I begin by highlighting the complexity of young people's aspirations, specifically in relation to HE and through this, address my first research question: What does having a higher education aspiration mean to these students and their families? To answer this, I draw on key literature on aspirations that shows how they are embedded within the social context where they are formed. In section 4.3, I argue that young people's aspirations are contested in their daily practices and relationships. I explore the ways in which they adjust and lower their aspirations before encountering challenges. My analysis is underpinned by a relational understanding of aspirations that change in light of young people's experiences and input from family and friends. I take inspiration from Ball et al. (2002)'s characterisation of parents as 'strong framers' or 'weak framers' in shaping their children's educational expectations; parents in the former category are most likely to be those with the lowest academic levels. Time and values also play a central role in the way aspirations are dynamic and multidimensional. I show that within this context, HE aspirations are conceptualised by young people and their family in terms of becoming someone in life, as a way to give back to their families, and of defending themselves and their community from injustices. Section 4.4 deals with the tension in young people's view of HE whereby 'becoming different' from their families cuts against the inherent collectivism of their other aspirations. In Section 4.5, I discuss the influence that the possibility of migrating to the USA has over young people's HE aspirations.

4.3 How do young people conceptualise their HE aspirations?

In this section I use the example of Filemon to show how young people's aspirations change over time in response to new experiences and information. During his first semester, Filemón, 22, narrates that he had adjusted his aspirations throughout his life. He dropped out of the agricultural

programme at another technological high school to start working fulltime as a *mariachi*⁵⁹ for three years. The music band he played in included his father and uncles. Filemón studied at another technological high school but dropped out for a year and then decided to continue his studies:

“I went to look for a job...but no...the place was a bit far away and the pay won’t be enough for all my traveling...at times I also helped other men who had crops too [...] truth is I was looking [for a job] and they didn’t call me [...]so after a while I just decided that I will continue studying⁶⁰”.

His valuation of formal education has changed over the course of the last few years. In response to his experience of trying to find a salaried job, he now sees HE as a means of easing this pathway. Filemón’s academic journey is typical of technological high school students: interrupted and discontinuous (Guerra Ramírez 2009).

Teachers’ insights also play a part in young people’s shaping of their HE aspirations. Filemón contemplated studying an agricultural-related university career. However, Filemón heard from a teacher that one of the universities he had considered included a whole year of mathematics-related modules in the programme and he thought it might be complicated for him to be accepted because he is not good at maths. There are also financial considerations in weighing up his choices: he had considered a university in Mexico City, but was discouraged by the cost: *“ I see the economic side of going to rent [over there]⁶¹”* This illustrates the financial constraints when contemplating a university outside his hometown.

⁵⁹ Mexican folkloric musician

⁶⁰ “Me fui a buscar trabajo...pero no...estaban un poco retirados y dije no me va a salir...a veces le ayudaba a otros señores que sembraban también [...] la verdad yo llegaba a buscar (trabajo) y no me hablaban [...] y ya después dije voy a seguir estudiando”

⁶¹ “Veo la parte económica de irse a rentar [allá]”

Filemón also articulates his drive to attend HE as a way *“to help people...my family has had several problems [...] they lost some plots of land⁶²”*. This has influenced Filemón’s decision to consider a law career so that he can support others who experience similar situations to his family and who cannot afford to pay a lawyer for their defence. The disadvantageous experiences he and his family have lived through shape his current aspirations to attend university. He sees his entry to HE in terms of helping him to fight against unfair conditions in his community. Filemón’s conceptualisation of university in terms of defending oneself and others from unfair conditions (Crivello 2011) was prevalent amongst young people in my study. In this way, his aspirations are not just individual but reflect his desire to protect and help his family and his community. This is part of the notion of becoming someone (Weiss 2007) where young people look to HE as a way to overcome injustices in their life. As such, enrolling in HE is driven by young people’s wider aspirations to contribute towards bettering their communities. This narrative is widespread amongst the young people in this study, who often spoke of HE as a tool to help them avoid being easily cheated in life.

Clearly, HE aspirations are informed by young people’s place and position. Motivation goes beyond individual preferences and HE is seen as a way to defend the family from mistreatment (Crivello 2011). HE aspirations are informed by both an idea of social mobility and the feeling of responsibility for supporting their families. Becoming someone through their studies is seen by young people as an opportunity to ‘become somebody’ of value who can help the family lead economically better lives. The notion of becoming someone (Crivello 2015) who can help the people around them is well exemplified in the responses given by Teresa and Alberto in their explanation of their career aspirations:

⁶² *“Para ayudar a la gente...ha tenido mi familia varios problemas [...] unas tierras así las han perdido”*

“I want to study marketing...my big dream is to work at a company...like offering, selling...[I]don’t [want to] deceive the client [...] because honestly it is really bad that one goes to a company and is deceived...and one works a lot to get that money and then the product [bought] is wrong [...] it has just been like three months...and she (mother) will finish paying for it in two years’ time [...] I told my mom: mom did they not explained you? – no, they didn’t, they even told me I could refill it [the printer] with small bottles, with those...you know those that are sold...paint bottles...and it enrages me to be lied to, to be deceived...and I told my mom...that is what I would like to do⁶³” (Teresa, management course afternoon shift)

“My mom and my uncle said it is a career that doesn’t have much future and that they don’t earn enough [...]I had decided on that...on Psychology...but because they started telling me this...now I don’t know what to study...it’s not really about the money...I wanted to study clinical psychology to be able to help people⁶⁴”. (Alberto, programming course morning shift)

These data challenges dominant normative constructions of HE aspirations in which aspirations are termed as individual wants. Families’ input influences the formation of young people’s aspirations. Itzel’s account illustrates the extent to which youth’s aspirations are not formed just at the individual level but collectively. These narratives show how aspirations are intricately woven within young people’s social life (Appadurai 2004). I argue that young people value the capacity to defend themselves and be treated fairly over possible economic mobility. For their calculations of the

⁶³ “Quiero estudiar mercadotecnia...yo mi gran sueño es trabajar en una empresa...así ofreciendo, vendiendo...no engañar al cliente [...] porque sinceramente es muy feo que vayas a una empresa y que te engañen y tú con tanto trabajo juntas ese dinero y como para que te salga mal ese producto [...] apenas tiene como tres meses...y la va a terminar de pagar en dos años [...] yo le digo a mi mamá: mama eso no te explicaron, -no, no me lo explicaron, hasta me dijeron que podía estar llenando con botellitas, con esas...ve que venden botellas sueltas de pintura...y no...da coraje que te mientan, te engañen...y sí, le dije a mi mama, a eso quisiera dedicarme”

⁶⁴ “Mi mama y mi tío me dicen que es una carrera que no tiene mucho future y que no ganan bien [...]estaba decidido por eso...por psicología...como me empezaron a decir...ahorita no sé ni si quiera qué estudiar...pues no es mucho por el dinero...yo queria estudiar psicología clinica para poder ayudar a las personas”

future, young people's aspirations undergo changes as they try to balance their families' input and their desire to help others (Appadurai 2004; Guerra Ramirez and Guerrero Salinas 2012). While balancing their families' expectations and immediate financial constraints, young people conceive their future HE studies as a weapon with which they will address the injustices around them. Young people's orientations to the future are framed with pieces of other people's opinions and built within a process of 'bricolage' (Weston and Imas 2018). Faced with a changing environment, young people deploy strategic actions towards their desired futures in reflecting on alternative trajectories when developing their HE aspirations. Participants reflect on the routes some of their colleagues from junior high school took and how some of them did not continue their studies due to economic factors.

“Some of them are married, or just living together and with children [...] half (of the junior high school cohort) continued studying and the other half not [...] I say that they (parents) have a lot of children so they have other children going to primary, high school or junior high school [...] (a friend) got married (and has children)...well got together, we were in third year (of junior high school) [...] and sometimes I ask him if he doesn't feel bad and he says: “at the beginning yes because I wasn't used to working like going everyday and doing heavy work I couldn't manage” and he says: I regretted it (leaving school)but with the pass of time I got used to it and now I am used to it [...]he works as a bricklayer and well...nimodo⁶⁵...that's what happened to those who do not study...although for those who are studying, nothing is guaranteed either⁶⁶” (Pedro, Management morning shift)

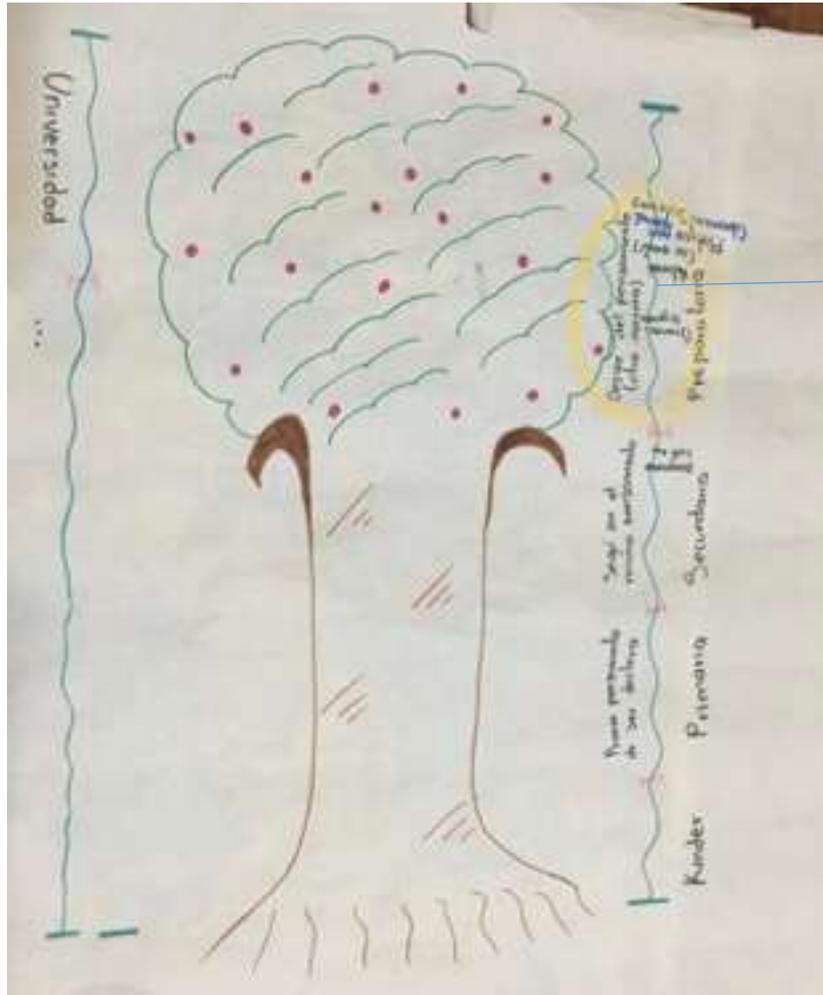
⁶⁵ Idiom meaning “oh well, this is not good, but it can't be changed either, so we might as well accept it and deal with it.”

⁶⁶ Unos ya están casados, juntados con hijos nadamás [...] mitad (del salón) continuó estudiando y mitad ya no [...] pues yo digo que porque tienen allí muchos hijos y hay otros que tienen hijos en la primaria, prepa y secundaria [...] (un amigo) se casó, se juntó (y tiene hijos) [...] Y luego le pregunto de que si no se siente feo y me dice al principio si porque como no estaba yo acostumbrado a trabajar dice como irme diario y hacer trabajo pesado no aguantaba y dice sí me arrepentí (de salirse de la escuela) pero ya conforme pasó el tiempo ya me acostumbré y ya estoy acostumbrado [...] trabaja de albañil y pues nimodo es lo que pasa a los que no estudian, aunque dicen que también que a los que estudian no te garantiza nada tampoco

Progressing to HE represents a disjuncture in the normative life trajectory, which would commonly involve a school to work transition and pose as a less uncertain destination. Aspiring to HE is seen by participants as the road less travelled, when compared to the trajectories of their peers and families, although not to that of their *patrones*, as I will discuss in Chapter 6. A significant proportion of their peers have not made it to the end of high school. Yet, young people also acknowledge that their post HE future does not necessarily make them less vulnerable to the future of physical and economic hardship that probably awaits their peers. Reflections on the struggles of their peers who have not studied are present in participants' considerations of the alternatives for their future.

The importance of peer and family influences (discussed further in Chapter 6) is recurrent amongst participants. As such, the concerns of uncertainty can also lower aspirations (Froerer 2015). For some, negotiating uncertainties by exploring options that might lower the risks was the way forward. This is exemplified by Fernanda in her participatory drawing. Fernanda adjusts her knowledge and repositions herself as she reflects on her pursuit of viable futures. Her aspiration to pursue a career in criminology was undermined when her family pointed that she would not “earn enough”. During high school’s fifth semester, Fernanda applied for a career in nutrition at a state university but was not accepted. She then planned to study a computing engineering career because her brother, who completed a technical course in computing, had a job lined up for her. Young people’s aspirations are therefore far from linear and are formed “in interaction and in the thick of social life” (Appadurai 2004:67). During the lifeline interview session, Fernanda identifies how she “diverted from her line of thought”. She decided to draw a tree divided into sections which represented her

academic trajectory. In it, she wrote that during elementary and junior high school she aspired to become a doctor. Afterwards, at the beginning of high school she “diverted” from her thoughts [circled in yellow in Image 2].



Text in Spanish: Desvié del pensamiento (otra carrera)
- I diverted from my thought (another career)

Figure 5. Fernanda's lifeline session poster

For Fernanda, not knowing if she would get a job related to medicine made her strategise and lower her aspirations accordingly, before encountering challenges (Hartung et al 2005, Zegarra Perez 2013). She adjusted her aspirations (Hernandez and Raczynski 2014, Froerer 2015) after witnessing how her half-sister studied to become a nurse but did not obtain a job related to medicine and now works as a cleaner instead. We cannot fully know what young people would have wanted in the absence of the constraints they see around them. Fernanda was also aware of another obstacle to realising her university aspirations as her other sister had not passed the admission exam at the nearest public university. When expressing her desired future self, Fernanda states: *“I will not get stuck like my sister”*. This knowledge and reflections on the experiences of those around her inform how Fernanda anticipates possible futures and alternatives for her life.

At the risk of simplifying young people’s aspirations, I have created Table 4 to illustrate the shifts in HE aspirations. The reasons for these changes are complex as they are shaped by the different values young people attribute to education, family, community, labour and dependency, which coexist and at times contradict each other. The table shows that only two young people among my participants maintained the same aspiration throughout: Pedro and Patricia. They both exercised high levels of agency in pursuing their studies, in the face of the lack of support from their families. By contrast, other young people seem to receive too much input into what they should be doing. The vignettes in the earlier part of the chapter show some of the reasons why students might change their ideas, but here I explore the reasons why Pedro and Patricia did not.

Table 4. Summary of changes in HE aspirations in participants

Participant	Elementary studies	junior high	High School first 4 semesters	HS 5th semester	HS 6th semester
Nancy	doctor/veterinarian	teacher	teacher	teacher/industrial engineering at military uni	Agricultural engineering/ pause studies
Fernanda	doctor	criminology	criminology	criminology	nutriology/ Computing systems engineering
Juan	none/none remembered	soldier	mechatronics engineering	management/architecture	Accountancy engineering/ Industrial Engineering
Karen	Paediatrician, arts	paediatrician	marketing	graphic design/marketing/tourism	pause studies
Teresa	nurse	nurse	marketing	marketing	accountancy
Patricia	police officer	police officer	police officer	police officer	law
Armando	none/none remembered	robotics/mechatronics engineering	pause studies/work	accountancy/inherit father's post at greenhouse	mechatronics engineering
Carolina	none/none remembered	teacher	medicine	medicine/teacher	teacher
Alberto	computing	computing	pause studies, ecology	Psychology/ Industrial Engineering/Social Anthropology/Education	pause studies, industrial engineering, psychology
Gerardo	police officer	computing engineering	pause studies	Computing Engineering/ Navy	computing engineering
Daniel	doctor	doctor	pause studies/work	police officer/ Industrial Engineering	accountancy, economics
Tania	computing, marine biology	translator/ graphic design	Computing Engineering	Computing Engineering	computing engineering
Itzel	medicine	nurse	nursery school teacher/law	nursery school teacher/law	pause studies
Diana	teacher	surgeon	dentist/teacher	dentist/teacher	navy/management
Felipe	criminology	soldier, forensics	criminology	Industrial Engineering/Technology	industrial engineering/freighter/ migrate to USA
Flor	architecture, astronomy, geography	medicine	civil engineering	Civil Engineering/ Biology	civil engineering/police officer
Nidia	none/none remembered	hair and beauty stylist	hair and beauty stylist	Psychology/industrial engineering/ migrate to USA	pause studies/migrate to USA
Miguel	veterinarian	veterinarian	pause studies/ librarian/management	Agronomy/Medicine	law/industrial engineering
Filemon	none/none remembered	migrate to USA	work/pause studies/agriculture/law	accountancy/ administration/ law	accountancy/ administration/ law
Pedro	accountancy	accountancy	accountancy	accountancy	accountancy

Pedro has 7 siblings: 6 brothers and a sister. Five of his elder brothers studied until junior high school and now work seasonally as *albañiles*⁶⁷ and agricultural labourers. Only one of his brothers completed his high school studies and now plays the clarinet in a music band. His sister dropped out of high school because she became pregnant and now works as a doctor's assistant. His father works in farming, cow breeding and at a market stall, selling cheese and dairy products. His mother also works at the market stall and does domestic chores. Neither of his parents finished primary school. Noe, Pedro's father, told me:

"He (Pedro) says that work is hard and I tell him if you don't like the field (agricultural) well 'échale ganas'⁶⁸ well you should do something then, if you don't like the field (agricultural), then what will you do for a living? [...] So I say 'échale ganas' and I don't have anything else than to support you, if you will 'echar ganas' well go ahead [...] if you are going to fail, then no"⁶⁹.

None of Pedro's family members went to university so his father doesn't know what is expected of Pedro when he enrolls in university. As discussed in Chapter 2, parents who have low academic qualifications put forward the notion of *echarle ganas* to express support for their children, without explicitly providing them with detailed academic advice (Gonzalez 2017).

⁶⁷ bricklayers

⁶⁸ As discussed in Chapter 2, *echale ganas* expresses encouragement and can be translated into English as try harder, give your all, do your best, go for it, or take care of business (Gonzalez 2017).

⁶⁹ "Dice que es pesado el trabajo y le digo pues si no te gusta el campo pues échale ganas, pues algo tienes que hacer, si no te gusta el campo, entonces de que vas a vivir [...] le digo échale ganas y a mí no me queda más otra cosa que apoyarte, si le vas a echar ganas adelante [...] le digo para no reprobar no"

Patricia is 27 and has three children: the older boy is 9, the girl is 8 and the younger boy is 6 years old. Patricia has 4 siblings: 2 brothers and 2 sisters. Her youngest sister is married and is studying an accountancy degree. Both her brothers migrated illegally to the USA when they were 17 years old. They are now married there and are working as house painters and in restaurant kitchens. Her mother used to work as a childminder and she hasn't had contact with her father since she was 5 years old. The only thing that her family knows about him is that he also works in the USA. In the first semester, Patricia mentioned that her husband, Mario worked as a coffee shop cashier. When I interviewed Mario in the second semester, he was working as a security guard. When talking about the way they shared their children's homework, Patricia explained:

“What happens is that my husband only studied until fourth year of elementary....and he says: ‘no...ay no...when my children ask me...I don’t even know what to answer [...] (his) proper studies were just until fourth year of elementary...now he just finished junior high school but through INEA (Open school system for adults) [...] but they don’t teach the same...through the open school they have junior high school but it’s not like he is there (studying)...he comes and he tells them (children) tomorrow you have to tell me the multiplication tables...but he also has to be seeing the (tables) to supervise that they are right⁷⁰”

Patricia's narrative highlights the feeling that parents have when their academic qualifications are surpassed by their children's. I had the opportunity to speak to Mario about the support he provides in her studies:

⁷⁰ “lo que pasa es que mi esposo solo estudio hasta cuarto de primaria...y pues él dice no...ay dice no...cuando mis hijos me preguntan...no se ni que responderles [...] estudios bien bien, hasta cuarto de primaria...ya acabo ahorita la secundaria pero por INEA (Escuela abierta para adultos) [...] pero no les enseñan lo mismo, por la abierta pues tienen secundaria...pero no es así que se ponga pues...ósea si llega y les dice sabes que mañana les toca que me digan las tablas...pero pues el también tiene que estarlas viendo para que supervise que si está bien”

“I tell her to “eche ganas”...if she likes to study...well, ‘I support you’...and I tell her...‘I will support you as much as I can...and if you are good with your study...if you like that...then continue studying’...or she says that after she finishes there, she wants to work and study law⁷¹”

As discussed in Chapter 3, by referring to ‘*echale ganas*’, Mario expresses his support for Patricia. He encourages her to do her best, but without being in a position to provide specific guidance over where she should direct her actions (Guerrero Salinas 2008). I compare this situation with that of students being the drivers, while parents and partners act as the co-pilots. At times they provide help and encouragement, but within this metaphor, they lack a GPS, or specific knowledge about how to reach the destination. It is therefore up to the driver to find their own way. As discussed in Chapter 2, with reference to ‘weak framing’ (Ball et al 2002), working class, low-income parents are only able to provide limited support to their children as they themselves do not have first-hand experience of what university studies entails. However, the limited non-specific support Patricia and Pedro have received also means that they have more space to be agentic and pursue their original HE aspirations, studying to become a lawyer and an accountant, respectively.

Aspirations are not just for young people themselves; rather, being in a position to support their family is part of what they want to achieve with a degree. Juan’s narrative exemplifies how family is an important space where aspirations emerge (Froerer 2011):

⁷¹ yo le digo a ella que le eche ganas...si a ella le gusta el estudio: pues yo te apoyo y le digo...pues yo te voy a apoyar en lo más que yo pueda...y si a ti se te da el estudio...que te gusta esto...que siga estudiando...o ella dice que saliendo de allí, ya quiere trabajar y quiere estudiar derecho

“I just want to aspire so that I can have...well...a degree...so that I can look for...a better life for them (two siblings) ...so that I can open the doors to my brothers...like now...my parents sometimes don't have (money)...so I want to help them too...so I want to at least give them a little bit more money...so that we can have enough...and to help my brothers...economically...well...in whatever they lack...and mostly that...so that they can get a degree in the future⁷²” (Juan, 18, afternoon shift of the management course)

I wish to highlight two important points in Juan's narrative. Firstly, he conceptualises his university aspirations in terms of bringing his younger siblings out of poverty, by helping them to access university. Secondly, through HE it is expected that he will be able to 'give back' by funding the education of his siblings, just as his parents helped him. This is part of the idea of becoming someone and of becoming socially mobile via HE, with social mobility a shared concept that includes the expectation of reciprocity. While young people exercise agency in (re)negotiating their responsibilities towards the family throughout their life (Punch 2007), they know that they are expected to reciprocate the help given to them. As such, this can stand in the way of young people's aspirations if they are expected to contribute economically towards their household before they have completed their studies (Meert 2000). The expectation of giving back to younger siblings posed as a potential barrier, particularly for those who were older brothers and sisters themselves.

Francisca's (Juan's mother) excerpt illustrates how the importance of reciprocity within collaborative family ties:

⁷² “yo quiero aspirer a tener...más que nada...un título para buscar...este...una major vida para ellos...más que nada para abrirles las puertas a mis hermanos...como ahorita...mis papas que a veces no tienen (dinero)...quiero ayudarlos también...por lo menos, pues...a darles un poquito más de dinero pues...para que nos alcance más y a mis hermanos más que nada ayudarlos...económicamente pues...y en lo que les falte...más que nada...para que puedan llegar a tener un título en un futuro”

“One of these coming days...when, god willingly, you have your career or job.... never stop looking after your grandparents...there was a time where we did not have (money) to eat... (so they said) -here you go, daughter, have some beans, some corn so that the children eat- ... so even if it is a chili...but bring something to your grandma⁷³”

Francisca’s parents helped her family during their financial struggles and so there is the expectation that when Juan eventually establishes himself in a career, he will reciprocate by providing financial help or caring for them. The expectations of family cooperation can at times be seen by young people as a burden (Rumbaut 1977, Portes 1998). The problem arises especially for students who are continuing in education but are expected to economically contribute to their nuclear and extended family at the same time. The idea of becoming someone through sustaining their family can therefore also become a barrier towards HE aspirations (Portes 1998). We can also see that conflicts arise when families’ expectations are not met and the negative consequence experienced by those who break the “pact” of giving back. Flor narratives exemplifies this:

“Well...my sister, she is selling picaditas⁷⁴ at a stall... she has good “sazón⁷⁵”, many people know her...it is going well for her...and well... she always helps me and my parents, she gives them some (money) weekly and whenever I need it, she helps me, the other day she bought a new table, she is

⁷³ “El día de mañana...que primero dios tengas tu carrera o trabajos...nunca dejes de ver a tus abuelitos...hubo un tiempo que no teníamos para comer (decían) – ten hija frijolito, maizito para que coman los niños-...aunque sea un chilito, arriménle a tu abuelita”

⁷⁴ maize based meal dish usually sold as street food

⁷⁵ cooking technique

always looking out for us and I admire her for that [...] my mother always tells us to be grateful...she says “don’t be like your aunt who didn’t even gave a peso to your grandparents and now no one speaks to her”⁷⁶ (Flor, 18, afternoon shift, management course)

By financially contributing towards her household and siblings, Flor’s sister acquires social recognition within her family. Explaining how her sister’s sales are going up, Flor shares that her sister’s social progress is accompanied by her (in-kind and financial) contributions to family members. Reciprocal ties and help transmitted between young people and their families is usually viewed positively and drives young people to get ahead. However, it can also be perceived as an undesired duty (Portes 1998) with possible negative effects such as young people being socially condemned or excluded if they can’t make a timely contribution to the family because of their studies.

Flor’s quote illustrates the relational nature of university aspirations (Silas Casillas 2012, Romo Martinez 2012). Young people acknowledge that they have received key economic support from their older siblings to continue their studies. Students with older siblings acknowledge receiving financial help from them, while students with younger siblings visualise themselves as providing financial help to their younger siblings, particularly to support their academic opportunities. These shared experiences resonate with the reasoning among participants in Weiss’s (2012) study, whereby financial support between Mexican siblings is more likely to occur amongst technological high school students than amongst those attending a general high school, as the former are usually from underprivileged urban sectors, semi rural or indigenous language-speaking areas.

⁷⁶ “Pues...mi hermana, ella vende picaditas en un puesto...tiene buena sazón, ya mucha gente la conoce, le va bien...y pues Bueno...ella siempre me ayuda a mi y a mis papas, les da algo seminal y cada que ocupo, Tambien me ayuda, el otro día compro una mesa, siempre se preocupa por nosotros y por eso la admire [...] mi mama siempre nos dice: “sean agradecidos...dice “no sean como tu tía que no les dio ni un peso a tus abuelos y ahora nadie le habla”

While young people with older siblings, like Filemón, spoke of the economic assistance they had received from them, participants with younger siblings spoke of the help they provided -or intended to provide- to these younger siblings. Helping was commonly understood by them as a way of being part of their family. Thus, family ties and familial reciprocity can act as both a driver and a barrier to HE aspirations. These notions are interconnected and yet also conflicted because of the family expectations surrounding young people's lives and the negative consequences that can arise if and when these are not fulfilled.

4.4 Aspiring to HE as a way to escape from poverty and rurality

Having looked at the way in which aspirations for HE can strengthen family bonds, I now explore the perceptions young people and their families have of pursuing HE in order to differentiate themselves from their families' rural livelihoods. In this section, I will also discuss parents' expectations that their children will become someone different to them. During my encounters with young people and in subsequent interviews, participants would often talk about life in the field and how they see education as a way of escaping the rural existence of their parents. While only half of the participants in my study had worked in agriculture, everyone was familiar with the community's main activity and most people said that they had extended family, neighbours and friends involved in farming. Alongside being students, participants often made sense of their future role as financial contributors towards their families through agriculture. For example, in keeping with many other students, Juan works in the field intermittently, usually throughout the harvest season. Participants' negative perceptions of their parental and their own experiences of hardship have dissuaded them from staying in the rural pathway. This is exemplified in the following excerpts:

“Well...always...the one who has influenced me to reflect is my dad...because well...I always saw him working every day and sometimes money is not enough and that’s where I think: “If I don’t go to school, I would stay like this forever.... I will always wake up very early, I will work very hard and I will get very low pay” ...so that’s what mostly up until now has pushed me...is pushing me to keep going...and well now that I have my brothers, they also motivate me to get ahead⁷⁷” [...] “When you have a wife...that’s when it’s difficult...when you are one its fine....but when you are 2,3 or 4 (people) that’s when it starts to get difficult and...well...I see this happening in my family....so that’s why I think that after having a degree...now you can get a permanent job where you can get an annual bonus...and when you are in the (agricultural) field...well sometimes things are fine and sometimes they are not (...) you just get 170 MXN (2 days salary at the current minimum wage) daily and there is not social security...there’s nothing...if you cut or hurt yourself...there’s nothing” (Juan, 18, afternoon shift of the management course)

“(I went to) clamatequear⁷⁸[...] and the tool was very heavy for me, it is a hoe...it is a metal...a hook and it was difficult [...] and (I had to) fertilise plants [...] and I ended up hurting myself⁷⁹”(Nancy, indigenous language-speaking student, 18-year-old)

These extracts are a pertinent example of the complexity of HE aspirations. In Juan’s cases, his narrative illustrates how aspirations are shaped as a way to avoid poverty and become different from his father. That will allow him to do something other than rural work (Rojas and Portugal 2009).

⁷⁷ “Pues...siempre, este,...el que me ha influenciado para reflexionar es mi papá...porque pues siempre...lo veía trabajando diario y pues el dinero a veces no rendía y de allí era cuando yo reflexionaba sobre: “si no voy a la escuela, me voy a quedar así siempre...siempre me voy a levantar muy temprano, trabajaré muy duro, y me pagarán muy barato” ...entonces eso pues, más que nada, hasta ahora, todavía me ha impulsado...me está impulsando a seguir adelante...y pues ahora que tengo a mis hermanos, ellos me impulsan más todavía, a seguir adelante”

⁷⁸ To separate the weeds from the crops

⁷⁹“(Iba)a clamatequear [...] y se me hacía muy pesado la herramienta, es un azadón...es un metal es un ganchito y se me hacía pesado [...] y lo que es abonar a las plantas y (me) terminaba lastimando”

Juan's negative view of agricultural jobs was widespread amongst the young people in my study who had direct experience of them such as Nancy's case who began working in the agricultural field since she was 10. Juan plans to get a degree in order to achieve his aspiration of providing for his two younger siblings and to avoid working in agriculture because he would "*stagnate in a hole*". Juan's father has worked illegally in the United States on three occasions. The first time he went for two years, and the subsequent times he went for one year each. During his stay in the USA, he worked as a dishwasher and in food preparation. He is now working as an agricultural labourer but has also considered going back to USA. Juan began working in the field with his father when he was 8 years old (or possibly younger). They usually worked very early (from 3 -7 am) because it is the best time to water the crops and the sun is not out yet (in the hot months it can be 40 degrees under the sun in Morelos). When he turned 12, he began to do low-paid agricultural work with other farmers. This was usually during school holidays or in the afternoons when he finished school. He also helps his father in the field and with the breeding of the three hens and two pigs owned by the family.

Besides the physical effort of waking up at 2 am and working long shifts, Juan also reflects on the lack of formality and benefits embedded in agricultural work and how this affects his future role as a breadwinner for his family. During a group visit organized by the school to a private university nearby, Nancy shared that she had covered her mother's shift the previous afternoon after school and that she had a sore back from "*bending over in the onion and corn crops*". Young people articulated the belief that they can become someone if they pursue higher education and can escape the rural path that their parents had taken. Parental occupation influences young people's aspirations as it highlights what they don't want. In other words, they aspire to obtain their university degrees in order to '*become different*' (Crivello 2011, p. 402) from their parents.

4.4.1 Parents' expectations for young people to become different to them

Parental expectations are often shaped by a desire for their children to be better off than them. In this study, many parents perceive school as a resource that was not available to them or only to a limited extent. For example, Bernardino (Silvia's father) and Gloria (Filemón's mother) who only completed junior high school or elementary studies, represent two thirds of the parents in my sample as their children are already enrolled at a higher level than them.

Silvia's father, Bernardino, dropped out of school after his first year of junior high school. He had six other siblings, had to work from when he was very young and did not have enough money to cover transportation to school. Parental desire for children not to follow a similar route is exemplified in Bernardino's narrative:

"(I am) working for the opportunity that you (I) didn't have, let's try to give that to your children...and in this case I feel like because thank god the expectations I had as a kid well it didn't happen but my children...it's very flattering because they are good students [...] in a way I didn't have the chance and your children shouldn't pay for that guilt, we have to give them the opportunity⁸⁰"

⁸⁰ "A trabajar por la oportunidad que no tuviste, hay que tratar de dársela a tus hijos...y pues en este caso me siento afortunado porque gracias a dios las expectativas que yo tenia de niño pues no se dieron porque pues mis hijos...es muy halagador no, porque son muy buenos estudiantes [...]de cierta manera dices tu no tuve la oportunidad y tus hijos no tienen porque pagar esa culpabilidad, hay que darles la oportunidad"

The expectation for his children not to drop out of school like him and to go beyond their parents in their education is clear in Bernardino's account (Flores Miller 2002). Other parents also did not talk about leaving poverty themselves, but about the opportunity their children had to be lifted out of poverty through HE. Gloria, Filemón's mother, dropped out after her fourth year of elementary school and completed her elementary studies through an open school as an adult. Her husband similarly did not complete his elementary studies. She recounted what she and her husband tell their son with regards to his studies:

"Your father and I did not have that opportunity of studying and we are giving it to you now...so go ahead, you should continue studying until god gives us life⁸¹"

Throughout the time I spent with parents and family members, the view of education as being necessary to 'go beyond the field' was typical in their accounts. I asked Dora, Felipe's mother, about the advice she gives to her children:

"I've always told the three of them (sons) that if they want to be someone in life, they have to study, otherwise it won't be useful for them, they won't go beyond the field...because now for any job; (they ask for) high school, to be a street sweeper, you need high school...that's what I say to him (her son), if you want to go forward just make an effort and if you don't want to continue studying...well at least finish high school...that's what I say...because in the first place, you don't like the (agricultural) fields so at least with high school you can defend yourself a little bit more...that's what I say...but if you want to study more...well then have your career because that's how you will earn whatever you want".

⁸¹ "Yo y tu papá no tuvimos esa oportunidad de estudiar y a ustedes se las estamos dando ahorita...entonces adelante, ustedes estudiando hasta donde dios nos preste la vida"

I later probed this and Dora explained that she doesn't want Felipe to be in her situation, without a salaried position, where she receives low payment on a weekly, informal and variable basis. Finding a path that leads beyond the rural world is seen by parents as a way for their children to become someone. Dora's view of education as a way to defend oneself and to become different from one's parents (Guerra Ramirez and Guerrero Salinas 2012, Froerer 2012) was common amongst the parents I spoke to. Even if they remain in agriculture, parents motivate their children to engage in formal jobs and earn more than them. Having a degree is seen as an entry path into the formal job sector where, as opposed to agricultural activities, young people will have access to a job that provides not only a salary but benefits, such as a yearly bonus and social security. Dora's expectation is for her children not to follow her and her husband's footsteps. She rejects the idea of her son becoming a janitor like her or a farmer like her husband. She wants her son to 'become different' (Crivello 2009). High school studies, such as hers, are a minimum requirement for unskilled, low-paid jobs. University is perceived as a way to greater economic rewards. Thus, parents encourage their children not to 'repeat their own mistake' of leaving school early.

There is a common view of HE as a way of escaping agricultural work and as an opportunity for social mobility. From this perspective a young person "becomes someone" by avoiding agricultural work. Both young people and their families articulate this type of work as one of hardship and physical challenge, where shifts are long and badly paid. Rosa, 49, and mother to Fernanda, sees office work as physically less challenging than working in the agricultural field: *"I prefer that they are sitting at an office than burning themselves under the sun"*. In Rosa's narrative, escaping agricultural and farm work in Mexico is seen as a way of avoiding the physical hardship associated with agricultural-related jobs (Pérez Escobedo and Escobar Moreno 2016, Rojas and Portugal 2009).

4.5 Influences on HE aspirations: USA migration

Another way of avoiding agricultural work is through migrating to the USA, which I discuss in this final section of the chapter, starting with the experiences of Nidia. It is Monday and I am meeting Nidia at 1:30 pm before her modules start at 3 pm. She is in the afternoon shift of the programming course. When discussing her reasons for choosing programming, she reflects that it was not her choice: she enrolled late and was only offered a space on that course and shift. She described that experience as follows:

“I was late for enrolling [...] I didn’t want to study, I didn’t feel like it and that’s it...the majority who were at the junior high school with me are not studying and I too said ‘I am not going to study...like 5 friends and the rest they were my colleagues and they also said they won’t continue studying [...] (my parents said it was my problem)⁸²”.

I asked Nidia what her parents had said when she told them she was abandoning her studies. She told me: *“They said it was my problem”*. Nidia is now planning to migrate to USA:

“I don’t plan to study anymore...my parents don’t want me to study...they want me to go to United States...because I have the documents (passport and visa) [...] I was born there [...] when I was 3 years old, they brought me here [...]they first left (Mexico) because there weren’t any job here [...]

⁸² “Llegué tarde a la inscripción [...]Ya no quería estudiar yo, no me daban ganas y ya... la mayoría que iba en la secundaria conmigo ya no estudian y yo también dije no voy a estudiar...como 5 amigos y los demás ya eran compañeros y dicen ya tampoco voy a estudiar [...] (mis papas dijeron) que era mi problema”

(they came back) because my siblings were living with my paternal grandmother [...] (I will go) with my uncles...from both my dad and my mom's side...they are like six⁸³".

Nidia's decision to migrate to the USA was due to the pressure she had received not only from her parents but from her sister too. In the USA, her uncle has promised a job and she is planning to live with an aunt with whom she has been talking over Skype. Her aunt is now very eager for her to come and live with them as she will be able to help her aunt with looking after her small cousins. Nidia's parents want her to stay in the USA for at least one year. What is significant in Nidia's narrative is the perception that migrating to United States is seen as another way to become someone. However, as a route to realising their aspirations this can be a problematic option, not least because in order to do so, young people have to cross the Mexico-USA border. In Nidia's case, she has the advantage of having a USA passport through being born there, even though her parents were there illegally. Her father is a farmer and her mother works in a grocery shop. Both of them studied until elementary school. Nidia's two older siblings finished a technical degree in nursing and sports teaching and are now working. In our initial encounters, Nidia wasn't certain about the idea of migrating to the USA as she was considering a career in Psychology because she wanted to help others. She had also considered Engineering because her mother said that this career was better as one of her neighbour's children had studied this and was earning a lot. Nidia's father had encouraged her to become a hair stylist because it does not involve much preparation and so she would be able to start working and earning money sooner.

⁸³ "Es que ya no pienso estudiar, mis papas yano quieren que estudie...ellos quieren que me vaya a Estados Unidos, como tengo papeles [...] naci alla [...]cuando tenia como 3 años me trajeron aca (México) [...] se fueron porque aquí no había trabajo [...] (regresaron) porque dejaron encargados a mis hermanos con mi abuelita paterna [...] (me voy) con mis tíos, de parte de mi papa y de parte de mi mama, como seis"

Nidia's narrative illustrates the important role young people's social networks play in their formulation of university aspirations; this will be discussed in more depth in Chapter 6.

In most cases, parents or relatives migrating to the USA undertake one or more low-skilled informal jobs in restaurants, construction or agriculture (Aragonés Castañer and Salgado Nieto 2015). These are not the kind of jobs they want to engage in at home but the enormous difference in minimum wages between Mexico and USA is a compelling attraction. From 2010-2015, in United States the minimum average wage was 58 dollars, while in Mexico for the same period of time it was 4.96 dollars, so a Mexican worker would need to work 11.96 days to earn what they can earn as a migrant in the United States (Vázquez Ruiz 2012: 105). Their act of migrating is usually seen as temporary, motivated by their desire to save enough money to pay for the construction or extension of the family house (Juárez Sánchez et al 2018), car or a family event such as a wedding or a *quinceañera*⁸⁴. The act of migrating is highly valued both by parents and siblings who recognise that their migrant family members provide economically for their families.

During my interactions with young people, the life stories of parents and guardians migrating to United States were shared as a background to their life histories. In these narratives, migration emerges as a common and significant influence. For example, Gerardo's first experience of working in the field was with uncles, one of whom became a father figure. This uncle has since migrated to the USA:

⁸⁴ 15th year birthday (gendered event for females)

“My uncles showed me how to work and all that...to be independent...to not depend on my mom...I used to work in the fields with my uncles...and then I started working in other stuff...house stuff like electrician activities...all of that (...) now two of my uncles left...the one who taught me also went to El Norte⁸⁵”

Gerardo lost his paternal figure due to migration to the USA. Also central to Gerardo’s narrative is his reflection on how to become someone by not depending financially on his parents (D’Aloisio 2015) and progressing socially. His mother is head of his family and has received *Prospera*⁸⁶ since Gerardo was in elementary school. Having influential individuals who offer in-kind help and other type of favours impacts young people’s HE aspirations, as discussed further in Chapter 6.

Migration, illegal in most cases, has been experienced or witnessed by all participants. Rodriguez Gutierrez (2015) suggests that for most young people, aspirations to migrate to the USA emerge while they are in junior high school. Evidence from my study suggests that migration to the USA continues to be part of their future imaginaries as a back-up plan. Two of the participants were thinking of attending HE first but were considering USA migration if their HE aspirations were unsuccessful. They both had lived in the USA very early in their lives and therefore, have a social network of family members that will help them migrate and work there. Young people’s desire to migrate is conditioned by the possible rejection from university. Felipe, enrolled on the management course, aspires to migrate to the USA like his older brothers if he does not secure a place at university.

⁸⁵ “The North”- colloquial reference of USA

⁸⁶ Conditional Cash Transfers programme targeting mothers organised by the Mexican government

Filemón, 22, also had planned to migrate to the USA but in light of the rising costs and the risks of crossing the border unauthorisedly, he has decided to pursue a university career instead:

I also thought about going (to United States) so I told (them-his brothers): “give me a hand”, and they said “No”, that I should study because it was really difficult (over there)”. A little bit later when you are in junior high school” (they said), and I told my dad that I wanted to go to United States and he said that it was very hard to pay for a coyote⁸⁷ it is expensive. We have an aunt who is a coyote but she has to charge us anyway, (My brothers said)” We support you, it would be good, at that time, the coyote asked for 15 thousand pesos, now they ask for 40 or 50 thousand pesos. If they are not good, they can get you lost in the desert. You have to run and if the “migra” (USA migration police) sees you, they will beat you, you have to take only the necessary things and whoever stays behind, stays there, no one is coming back to get you”(…))Now I am thinking) to continue studying, it is a problem now because I still don’t decide what...accountancy, management or law...there are so many degree programmes...ilke 100 and a bit more and like 50 engineering programmes...It will ultimately be in the one that I get (a place), but what if I am making plans and in the end I don’t secure (a place) in any of these...”⁸⁸

Gender and birth order play a role in the aspirations to migrate to the USA. Elder brothers were the ones mainly expected to migrate (Garip and Asad

⁸⁷ A coyote is a colloquial term for a person who guides illegal immigrants across the border.

⁸⁸ Yo me pensaba ir también le digo pues échenme la mano. Me decían que no que estudiara porque estaba difícil,

Un poquito mas que crezcas iba en la secundaria. Le dije a mi papa quiero para estados unidos y decía no pues esta duro para pagar un coyote está caro. Tenemos una tía que es coyota pero pues comoquiera cobraba. Te apoyamos pues sí estaría bueno, en ese entonces pedían 15 mil pesos ahora piden 40, 50 mil pesos el coyote. Si no son buenos también se pueden perder en el desierto. Tienes que correr, si te ve la migra, te golpean tienes que llevar lo indispensable y el que se queda, se queda ya no se regresan por el (...) seguir estudiando, ahorita es un problema porque todavía no decido que? contabilidad, administración o derecho, hay hartas licenciaturas...como 100 y cacho y como 50 ingeniería...pero mas que nada es en la que quede, pero no vaya a ser que yo haciendo planes y no vaya a ser que no quede en ninguna

2016). Filemón's older brother migrated to the USA when he was 16 and has now been there for over ten years. He returned to Mexico just once, after three years, to get married and then returned to the USA with his wife to start a family. His brother engages in casual labour at restaurants and sends monthly remittances that help Felipe's family cover their household bills.

"I think my brother could help me to cross (the border) ...otherwise I will try with a coyote".

I asked Filemón if he has considered applying to more than one university, but he tells me that his family doesn't have enough money to pay for two admission exam fees. Filemón spent three years in the USA when he was five years old, as his parents were unauthorised migrants there.

Like Filemón, many students have social networks of family and friends who have migrated illegally to the USA and are willing to help them to migrate (Coporo Quintana and Villafuerte Solís 2017). Indeed, some receive remittances and gifts from family members in the USA. Gloria, Filemón's mother, recalls that Filemón's older brother migrated to USA when he was 15 years old and lived as an unauthorised migrant there for 12 years: *"Thanks to him we have a roof over our heads"*.

As discussed in the previous section, the collaborative ties between families are important in young people's lives and make the Mexico-USA border permeable. Filemón elaborated on the financial help he receives from his brother:

"You know...(he helps) with those kind of payments that sometimes we have to make at school...the other day they charged us for the fence...you've seen how they finished building the fence...well they charged a family cooperation...so with those kind of payments"

Filemón's older brother helped him with his school-related expenses. Filemón was not able to pay for additional compulsory schooling expenses so his older brother's remittances have been key to Filemón continuing his education.

Juan, the male student whose pursuit of HE was motivated by seeing his dad work long hours with small pay in agriculture (see previous section) shared that his father had thrice spent time in the USA as a "mojado"⁸⁹. The first time he migrated, he was 19. According to his mother, he went with the sole purpose to "make money to get married". He stayed there for two years until he saved enough, came back and was able to "pedirla"⁹⁰. In Juan's narrative, his father's migration to USA was central in his journey of becoming an adult capable of forming and providing for a family (Echeverría and Fischer 2016). There is also, a gendered dimension in his narrative as it is males who are frequently the first migrants in their families (gender differences in terms of HE aspirations and expectations are further discussed in Chapter 5). In Mexico it is usually the head of a family or elder brother who are expected to migrate so that they can provide economically for their families (Garip and Asad 2016). A couple of years working in the USA allowed him to provide for his family in contrast to the diffuse benefits perceived from HE.

Patricia's younger and older brothers illegally migrated to USA after completing junior high school, with the help of other family members. They are now working informally in construction and in restaurants:

"Our cousins who are older than us went to United States...and once there [...] they helped my brother to cross [...] she (my mother) didn't want them to go, she said: no, sons, we can also make it here, you are older, you can help me...but they said no, that they will go (to USA) so that when I would

⁸⁹ Slang: illegal immigrant- "wetback" is the English translation and it is originated from the act of swimming across the Bravo River which separates Mexico and USA

⁹⁰ A pedida is a traditional ceremony in Latin American culture where the future groom asks the bride's family for her hand in marriage. Even though the proposal is already accepted implicitly by her. This event is celebrated with the purpose of setting up reciprocal relationship between the two families and it is expected that the groom's family will bring gifts or goods.

be studying, they would take her out of working and it looks like they kept (their promise)[...]and from my dad's side we have a cousin who doesn't like to work...and people told my mom: your kids are going to be thieves and other stuff....and my mom said no [...]and my brothers are now people of good...they suffered a lot in United States but now they have their reward and now they have their things...they know how to work and no one is pointing fingers at them”.

They have since sent remittances to build a house for Patricia's mother and are now sustaining her economically because she is unable to work due to illness. Spending remittances on house building is common amongst families with migrant family members (Aragón Castañer and Salgado Nieto 2015). Central to Patricia's narrative is the importance of the social network established by her extended family in USA who helped her brothers migrate (Carrión Flores 2017) and the social status that family members acquire when migrating.

By working, sending remittances, alleviating the economic issues at home and thereby caring for their parents one can 'become someone' who is worthy and respected by the community. Thus, migrating to the USA can be seen as a quicker route than HE to achieve the same aspiration. On the other hand, HE offers the possibility of acquiring social status without the emotional distress that families experience when children migrate to USA indefinitely. Filemón's mother, Gloria, has two children who migrated unauthorisedly to the United States. Family visits between Mexico and USA are difficult when migration is unauthorised so families know that when one of them migrates, they might not see each other again. Gloria did not see her sons for 15 years and 12 years respectively. Below she recalls the conversations with her sons about migrating and the impact migration has had on her:

That idea came from him because I told him not to go, I didn't want him to go: "Even here, we can get by (and have) something good, the oldest one told me: "No, I'm going mom, to help you build a roof...when we have a little house I will come back", "Oh, son", well sometimes I understood but I said to him: "Don't go", well it feels bad when they go and later on...little by little, I started coming to terms with the idea that he was leaving: "well you told me you will only stay 3 or 4 years, but then it was 6, 7 years and he was there for 12 years and I say: "Thanks to god, he helped us to have this roof"⁹¹(...)he suffered, he took like 15 days in the desert, yes, he took fifteen days in the desert to cross to the other side (of the border)".

Patricia's husband, Mario, perceives migration to the USA as the only way he can support his family. He worked at a coffee shop last semester but is now working as a night security guard on a residential estate. They live in a one-bedroom house where he lives with Patricia and their three children. He mentions that they are now renting this property and that he would like to go to USA to save money and then build a house on a piece of land that they can borrow from Patricia's mother. The previous year he tried to cross the border unsuccessfully:

"I went with a bad (fake) ID [...] as if I was a resident...yes, I crossed again...and I got caught [...]and they've caught me 15 days earlier [...]and here my wife studying and with the children...alone...and all...and I got 6 months [...] in jail...they sent me to the federal (one) in the United States"⁹²

The possibility of escaping from poverty and from the low-paid jobs available to him has driven Mario to save around five thousand US dollars to pay for a *coyote* in order to try to cross the border again later in the year.

⁹¹ "Pues de el salio su idea porque yo le decía que no se fuera, no quería yo que se fuera, aunque sea de aquí salimos algo bien, el mayor me dijo, no, me voy mamá, más ayudarles a construir un techo, dice ya teniendo ya una casita ya me vengo digo ay hijo pues a veces me conformaba y decía no te vayas pues se siente feo cuando se van y pues después poco a poco me fui dando a la idea de que se iba a ir, pues me dijiste que te ibas a quedar 3 o 4 años, pero después ya eran 6,7 años y estuvo 12 años, si 12 años y tardo y si le digo gracias a dios nos ayudo a levantar este techo (...) él sufrió, tardó 15 días en el monte , si 15 días en el monte para llegar hasta allá al otro lado (de la frontera)"

⁹² "Y que me voy pero con una ID chueco [...]como si fuera yo residente...si, pues pase otra vez...igual que me agarran [...]y ya yo tenía una agarrada de hace 15 dias [...] me dieron 6 meses [...]y aquí mi esposa estudiando con los niños solos y todo y luego me aventaron 6 meses [...]si cárcel...me mandaron a la federal de Estados Unidos"

When asked about his motivation to cross the US-Mexico border, Mario reflects:

“I saw that my brothers-in-law are doing something, I said :’I’m going’ that’s what I said...well so that we can have something more [...](my brothers-in-law) are doing well, (they say) there you get paid more and here you do some hours and you make this much, but there you double this (pay), or even more and they do well...and I am still keen on going there⁹³”

Mario wants to change his socio-economic condition and USA migration brings with it the promise of social mobility and closer links with family and friend networks across the border (Arteaga 2007, Garip and Asad 2016). This will be discussed further in Chapter 6.

Having an extensive social network that can transmit resources such as employment across the border can be problematic. Young people have to migrate to the USA to access these resources. The high perceived economic rewards stemming from her aunts and uncles’ narratives of life in the USA are also behind her drive to migrate. In Nidia’s account we can see that aspirations are interconnected to different parts of young people’s social life. Nidia understands her parents’ drive to migrate as “typical” amongst her community. From my fieldwork and my interactions with participants, I can say that every participant I met had a family member, friend or neighbour who had migrated to USA (seasonally or at some point in their lives) so I understand the “typicality” of the situation.

Nidia’s account of her future plans included working in the USA as that is where her social network is established:

Me: And how do you feel about it (leaving for USA)?

Nidia: Well...good...because I have many opportunities over there [...] my parents went to work there because they needed the money

⁹³ “Porque yo como ví que mis cuñados si hacen algo, dije: “me voy” pos yo digo...pues para que tengamos algo más [...](a mis cuñados) les va bien, (dicen) que allá es más pagado y que acá son tantas horas y ganas tanto y allá lo dobleteas o más y pues les va bien...y no se me quitan las ganas de irme para allá”

Me: They needed it (money) for something in particular or just because?

Nidia: I think it was also to build a house...but I can't remember that much

[...] Me: And what does your mother say (about USA)?

Nidia: That there is a lot of work [...] she says it is pretty and that there are many jobs and that you earn well

Besides her social networks in United States, Nidia recognises that she shares her parents' perceptions of life in the USA. She acknowledges that there is a difference between the structural conditions of both countries and that USA has more (well-paid) employment opportunities to offer. International migration is not purely driven by individual factors only as the promise of employment. Social networks and the resources they represent play an important role in the desire to migrate among the young people in this study.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has examined the meanings young people attribute to their HE aspirations. The longitudinal aspect of my study and the life history interviews have enabled me to show how young people reconfigure and adjust their HE aspirations in response to their social experiences and context. The shifts in HE aspirations in Table 3 relate to the different values attributed to education, family, community, labour and dependency, which coexist and at times contradict each other. I argue that these aspirations are rooted in the cultural sphere of their lives (Khattab 2015, Appadurai 2004). The notions of “becoming someone”, “defending oneself and others” and “becoming different” from their parents, choosing a path that will lead them away from agriculture and poverty, are deeply woven into their conceptualisations of the purpose of higher education.

Young people's drive to attend HE is also fuelled by concern for their communities and the desire to defend their families and themselves from the injustice they see around them. Young people see the idea of "defending oneself" in combination with that of "becoming someone", through contributing and giving back to their families of origin. I have shown how the responsibilities placed upon young people when they become someone through HE and the pressure to reciprocate their family's help can motivate and simultaneously obstruct their HE aspirations. HE is seen by young people as instrumental to 'become someone' and escape the trajectory of their parents. On the other hand, the benefits of HE are less immediate and direct than migration to the USA. I have discussed how migration is also seen as a way of 'becoming someone' and an attractive alternative to HE studies, particularly for young people with strong social networks in USA. The impact and the role that these networks have over young people's HE aspirations will be examined in Chapter 6.

Chapter 5. Young people's relational understanding of their HE aspirations

5.1 Introduction

It is 10:30 am, time for the morning-shift students' lunch break. I am sitting outside with four other fifth semester students and I am contemplating the cows eating grass on the other side of the wired fence while eating a *torta de milanesa de pollo*⁹⁴. We are all sitting on a circular concrete bench in the school yard when a teacher pulls out of a black *Ford* car. Griselda, a female student, immediately says she loves this car and Mariana, another female student, jokes "then you should better start working now *güey*⁹⁵". Luis, another student, says "you know you've done well in life when you drive in a car like that". They all laugh, nod and seem to agree with Luis. As I will show in this chapter, young people build their university aspirations partly with the imaginaries of key individuals who have material resources that are unattainable for them at the moment. To give more information about the context, the photo of the school car park exemplifies the contrast between urban and rural elements outside the school. The new cars parked next to the hens and roosters are part of the daily realities lived by the participants in my study.

⁹⁴ similar to sandwich, made with a "bolillo" Mexican bread and filled with breaded chicken

⁹⁵ Güey's literal meaning is "ox" and is a negative term like "fool" but it is used as a term of endearment like "dude".

Figure 6. The contrast between rural and urban outside the school



5.2 Chapter structure

Moving away from how young people make sense of their university aspirations -explored in the previous chapter, in this chapter I examine how young people's social worlds influence how they construct their future. This chapter will discuss the influence young people's networks have over their university aspirations. More precisely, it will examine the networks young people engage and interact with and have expectations from. It addresses my second research question: what is the role of young people's networks in the formation and pursuit of their HE aspirations? In addressing this question, I draw principally on Ball et al.'s (2002) conceptualisation of the parental influence over young people's HE aspirations and Punch's (2007) approach to the ways in which young people exercise their agency amidst their families' expectations for their future selves. I found these conceptualisations, outlined in Chapter 2, to be instrumental in exploring the extent to which young people's networks act in the formation of their aspirations.

The first section focuses on the analysis of young people's networks both inside and outside school. I explore how young people respond to gender role expectations in their context. I address how youth perceive and act towards these expectations and the influence that these actions have in the construction of their HE aspirations. In the second section, I return to a theme partially addressed in the previous chapter and discuss the role parents and guardians take in (dis)enabling young people's HE aspirations. Parents and guardians take on a strong role in young people's HE aspirations but the support they provide to young people is far from uniform. I use Ball et al.'s (2002) lenses of parents as 'strong framers' or 'weak framers' in shaping their children's educational expectations.

5.3 The HE aspirations of females and males

Female and male participants had different HE aspirations. For example, male participants mostly had technical career aspirations related to diverse engineering branches whereas female participants expressed this interest less frequently. Financial motivation played a part in both male and female aspirations. These motivations were framed by parents' experiences. Miguel shares how this and the feasibility of 'making it' after HE were part of his reasons for adjusting his HE aspirations:

"I went with my mom [...] and she almost always said "What do you want to do?" because almost always it is at junior high school when they start asking you what you want to do and I started saying that I wanted to be a pólíce man and she said: Do you really want to be that? Well maybe you can go into the military school or something like that...and I said "yes, it would be nice" but then she was doubtful if I was going to make it or not and she started telling me about her friends (at work) who were engineers and that were earning good (money) [...] she almost always talked about that".⁹⁶

Miguel's mom works as a janitor in a factory and her experiences are drivers of Miguel's aspirations. The nature of participants' career aspirations is summarised in the table below. Management and technical careers are preferred by males and professional careers such as teaching, law and the police are preferred by females.

⁹⁶ yo iba con mi mamá [...] y ella casi siempre me decía que es lo que quería hacer, porque casi comúnmente es en la secundaria cuando te empiezan a decir que quieres hacer y pues ya le empezaba a decir quiero ser policía y me decía en serio quieres ser eso, pues te puedes meter en la escuela eso de militarizada algo así....y este le digo si estaría padre pero ya después ella sentía como duda de que si lo iba a hacer o no, y me empezó a platicar de sus amigos que eran ingenieros y que ganaban bien y que tenían esto y casi siempre me hablaba de eso

Table 5. Summary of the programme and nature of participants' career aspirations

Pseudonym	Gender	High school sixth semester aspiration (HE programme)	Nature of career aspiration
Nancy	female	pause studies	pause
Fernanda	female	computing systems engineering	technical
Juan	male	Industrial Engineering	technical
Karen	female	marketing	management
Silvia	female	accountancy	management
Patricia	female	police officer	professional
Armando	male	mechatronics engineering	technical
Carolina	female	teacher	professional
Alberto	male	industrial engineering	technical
Gerardo	male	computing engineering	technical
Daniel	male	accountancy	management
Tania	female	computing engineering	technical
Itzel	female	pause studies	pause
Diana	female	management	management
Felipe	male	industrial engineering	technical
Flor	female	police officer	professional
Nidia	female	pause studies	pause
Miguel	male	industrial engineering	technical
Filemon	male	law	professional
Pedro	male	accountancy	management

A female student, Silvia, explains why she is changing her desired career programme. She no longer plans to study marketing, but accountancy instead:

“Well you see that (studying) marketing here would only be at a private one (university) [...] no (I couldn’t find it anywhere else), you see what I told you...that my parents didn’t let me...because of delinquency [while travelling to university] and all those things”⁹⁷

Silvia was interested on marketing programmes which were not feasible options for her. One was unaffordable and the other one was far away from home (Ovink and Kalogrides 2015). Her quote illustrates that the opportunities for people living in poverty to practice their capacity to aspire are limited (Appadurai 2004). We can see that the family’s fear of insecure transportation to university constrains her university aspirations (Duran Gonzalez and Raesfeld 2014). This was not the case for male students as neither they nor their parents expressed a concern over safety or living far away from the family. This may partially explain why that females are more likely to pause their studies than their male counterparts.

Fernanda also considers being far away from her mother, the head of the household, when constructing her HE aspirations:

And well it is the only one (university) that is nearby...but I don’t want to go...because of my mom...I also think a lot about my mom, that if I leave her...what will she do? [...] I had the possibility of going to Mexico (city) there are some universities there...because my sister lives there and even my brother-in-law said that they had a room for me to stay and go to university...I had some opportunities to say yes...but I thought about my mom...I said no, my mom...⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Pues ve que lo de marketing aquí solo es en particular [...] no (encontré en otra parte) y ve lo que le había mencionado que mis papas no me dejaron que la delincuencia y que no sé qué

⁹⁸ y pues es la única de que está cerca...y pues yo no me quiero ir...porque mi mamá..yo también pienso mucho en mi mamá de que si la deajo...que va a hacer [...]tenia la posibilidad de irme a México a varias universidades...porque mi hermana está allá...y entonces hasta mi cuñado me dijo...te hacemos un cuarto en la casa dice...para que te quedes y que vayas a la Universidad...tuve muchas oportunidades de decirle sí...pero es que yo pensaba en mi mamá...decía no, mi mamá...

Even though Fernanda's mother is not ill, she strongly values being close to her mother and family. *Familismo* is useful to understand the importance both female and male participants confer on their families, and how this can restrict their HE aspirations, particularly for female students who choose a university option that is closer to home (Rios Aguilar and Kiyama 2012, Ovink 2014) due to prioritising their family needs.

I argue that teachers also perpetuate traditional gender roles. I encountered Alicia, a female participant, painting the fingernails of Mariana, the accountancy teacher, in the science laboratory just after the end of the last module. I was shocked, as this was not part of any programmes or qualifications at school. Teacher Mariana praised Alicia for being talented in art-related activities. We can see how careers in the feminised sectors of the service industry such as beauty parlours are expected and supported for female participants whereas males expressed how their professors encouraged them to study biology and other technical-related careers. Another important point here is the dynamics of class. Teachers were mostly from middle-class backgrounds so we can also see power issues in their relationships with individual students. As will be discussed in Chapter 6, teachers perpetuate the *ahijado-padrino* relationship.

In fact, female participants were the only ones who by the sixth semester had expressed that they were intending to suspend their studies for the year following their high school graduation. Equal numbers of females intending to suspend their studies as planned to study management-related and service careers. Their reasons for suspending their studies were varied. Itzel placed her studies on hold for her brother (Martinez 2013). This shows an element of machismo engrained in the *familismo* perspective of looking after the family before oneself.

“I will let a year go by...because my brother got into a “escuela de paga”⁹⁹ and every month they (parents) have to pay like one thousand pesos and I wanted to pay for the admission exam for the Normal¹⁰⁰ school [...] but no...because I’m about to finish here...there are a lot of expenses...and I feel it is a lot”

Itzel decided that she would no longer pursue HE the following semester to help alleviate her household’s financial difficulties. Itzel’s narrative shows how the strong family ties and the responsibility owed to one’s household can at times constrain young people’s educational outcomes (Rumbaut 1977). It also shows a gendered dimension in these reciprocity ties: it is the female who is most likely to change or postpone her HE aspirations and the discourse of reciprocity will be used to ensure that she does.

Nancy and Nidia are now planning to engage in paid work. Nancy did not secure a place at the military university and decided that she would work instead. Nidia plans to suspend her studies and engage in a paid job in the USA that is similar to the one her family members have, as they would have the contacts for her to find a job easily. The possibility of a well-paid job in the near future influences her more long- term aspirations. In addition, she planned to care for her younger cousins in the afternoons. These exemplifies how gendered expectations influence the future plans of the young women.

⁹⁹ Literal translation: a school where you pay. Usual reference to a private school in Mexico

¹⁰⁰ Teacher training college. Please refer to Appendix I and to Chapter 2 for a summary of this HE subsystem

5.4 What is expected of females and males

As discussed in Chapter 3, I draw on Ramirez's (2008) conceptualization of machismo in Mexico as a set of beliefs, attitudes and behaviours that go beyond gender relations and is not only influenced by gender, but by class (Falicov 2010), race and rural context (Ruiz Ramirez et al 2014) as well. Machismo pervades Mexican society and is prevalent in both fathers and mothers equally, as reflected in the HE and career advice extended to their children. I argue that the way in which male and female young people navigate gender role expectations impacts how they formulate their university aspirations.

Fulfilling familial expectations is an expectation for both female and male young people, but these expectations are gender specific. Females are expected to be responsible for domestic chores and private spaces within the household while males are more likely to engage in paid jobs outside the household to financially contribute to the family. In this way, machismo is intertwined in families' perceptions of the type of *chambas* young people engage with. For the sake of clarifying what my participants refer to when discussing their *chambas*, I have categorised them into: unpaid work/family work, and paid work outside the household. I see these as fluid categories. At times domestic/agricultural work with the family or caring for an ill relative or neighbour can also turn into paid activities where students receive small payments. Engaging with paid activities, even when marginal, helps many young people pursue their university aspirations, as they can obtain the financial resources needed to continue with their studies. At the same time, the time invested in paid, unpaid and domestic work will often constrain young people's university aspirations, particularly for females as domestic work is unpaid.

On the other hand, as discussed in Chapter 4, young women also see attending university as having the potential to reshape gender relations. When speaking about their desired futures, young people recognise these gender role expectations and deploy agentic responses to challenge and negotiate within them. Karen's HE aspirations are informed by her aunt's advice after she dropped out of HE to be with a man:

"She (aunt) told me: "Continue (studying) and don't focus on men" [...] well...everyone, aunts, uncles, grandparents, my parents also from my father's side they say the same thing...because my cousin became pregnant (at 19)...and they know I am the first one (to enter university) they have told me: focus on what you want because if you drop out and then your relationship ends then you lost something over him...so I never liked that idea¹⁰¹"

Karen's excerpt demonstrates the pressure students receive from their families as future first-generation university students. Her aspirations are informed by the experiences of those who had come before. We can see how aspirations are influenced by young people's social, cultural and economic contexts (Appadurai 2004). The contextual nature of aspirations is evident through this narrative. It was common for participants to have siblings, cousins and peers that had become pregnant and eventually dropped out of their junior high school, high school or HE studies. Young people were aware of gender role expectations and many respond by challenging them and acting with agency towards their goals, even though this means

¹⁰¹ ella me dijo sígueme y no te enfoques en los chicos bueno [...] en sí todos, tías, tíos, abuelitos, mis papas también por parte de mi papa también me dicen lo mismo, pues como mi prima salió embarazada y como saben que soy la primera, me han llegado a decir concéntrate en lo que quieres porque si después te sales y termina tu relación y ya perdiste algo por el entonces también nunca me ha gustado esa idea

breaking the patterns established by their families and the community. Moreover, for some young females like Karen, their gender roles seemed to have particular important bearing upon expressing their imagined futures:

“I think that studying at the university is to give oneself more value as a woman...I have also seen that women are looked down on and I don't like that¹⁰² [...] (I see university as a way to) stand out as a woman and then you don't need to depend on a man...so you can work, you can vote, you can get your children ahead and I have also seen that with my mom...because there are times that with the 1700 (Mexican pesos weekly) that she earns, with that she has to make it work so that she gets me, my sister and my brother ahead. My sister also studies here and my brother is in junior high school and she [my mom] takes the three of us ahead...so I believe a woman has a place there (at university) and not serving a man whenever he wants¹⁰³”

Karen makes sense of higher education as a way in which female gender roles expected within her community will change. This helps explain how wider social aspects influence young people's aspirations (Appadurai 2004). She thinks that university will provide her with the tools to escape the expected gender role of serving a man. Karen's university aspiration is therefore a way for her to challenge the social constructions of gender relations embedded in her socio-cultural environment. Studying is seen by young females and males as providing the tools for women to defend themselves

¹⁰² Pienso que estudiar la universidad es mas que nada para darte valor a ti misma como mujer, también he visto que hacen de menos a las mujeres, no me gusta

¹⁰³ Destacar como mujer y no necesitas depender de un hombre, osea tu puedes trabajar, tu puedes votar, tu puedes sacar adelante a tus hijos y eso también lo he visto con mi mamá...porque hay veces que creo ella con 1700 que gana, con eso le hace para sacarme a mi, a mi hermana que también viene aquí y a mi hermano en secundaria y nos saca a los tres adelante...entonces creo que también la mujer tiene un lugar aquí, no sólo de estar atendiendo al hombre cuando él quiere.

and avoid traditional wives' roles. Social landscapes inform both female and male's reflections of their HE aspirations. In this sense, Filemón, 22, shares how education will benefit his half-sister, Maria, who is 19:

"She did not want to continue studying...and I told her she should study...because she dropped out for a year otherwise she would have finished (high school) by now [...] she failed a module and I told her "If you get married, you are young, enjoy...if you get a husband who is more or less a good person well he will make an effort but what if you get someone canijo¹⁰⁴ then it is cañon¹⁰⁵ and if you have studies, if he leaves you or you become a widow...then you have somewhere to work and pay for your expenses¹⁰⁶"

Like him, Filemón's younger half-sister also paused her studies for a year. In Filemón's advice to her, we can see that he accepts the traditional gender role given to his sister to some extent but he also identifies a way to use HE to create some space for herself within this traditional role. This is reflective of the community's perception that ultimately, the financial security of a woman comes through a man and not by getting a degree. Thus, education is seen by male students as a way of giving females the ability to negotiate within their gender roles, rather than fundamentally challenge them.

¹⁰⁴ Mean.

¹⁰⁵ Mexican slang meaning "difficult".

¹⁰⁶ ya no quería estudiar y le dije que estudie, porque se salio un año, sino ya ahorita ya hubiera acabado [...] reprobó una materia y le dije: si te casas, estas joven, disfruta...si te toca un marido medio pues buena gente pues le va a echar ganas y si te toca alguien canijo ya está cañon, y ya si estas preparada, te deja o enviudas...ya tienes en donde trabajar y solventar tus gastos.

Male students perceive HE as a way for them to fulfil the gender roles that their communities and family expect of them. When thinking about their futures, young males in my research recognised the gendered expectations that their parents have of them, particularly that of becoming a breadwinner. In this respect, Pedro shares the advice for their future that his father gave him and his brothers:

My dad said: "If you want to study and get ahead and echarle ganas...or if you want to be working as donkeys, well that is your problem...you'll have a wife and you will have to sustain her and a woman needs to be cared for"¹⁰⁷ (Pedro, 20, management, morning shift)

"I think of getting married after my studies, (after) I finish my career and to enjoy a year or two earning my money and buying my things and after, I will look for something formal to start a family"¹⁰⁸. (Armando, 18, management, afternoon shift)

Pedro's father highlights the pressure on male participants to become the main provider for their wives and households. This account also refers to the image of a woman who needs to have the care and protection of a man, which is in line with the commonly accepted and expected gender roles in the community. An important point to note is that all male participants accepted their futures as breadwinners. Responsibility, protection and providing for the family are some of the emphases of a gender socialisation arising from family's expectations. In Pedro's excerpt, we can also see how *familismo*, the cultural value of prioritising the family's needs and welfare before their own (Rangel Hernandez 2018), is engrained on both female and male's HE aspirations. Armando's excerpt illustrates the negotiated view of the *machista* and *familismo* expectations expressed by male participants. Even though Armando pursues economic independence through his HE aspirations, he is flexible in that he anticipates enjoying his own

¹⁰⁷ Mi papa dijo si quieren estudiar y superarse y echarle ganas...o si quieren estar trabajando como burros pues es su problema, van a tener una esposa y la van a tener que mantener y la mujer necesita cuidado

¹⁰⁸ Si pienso casarme después de mis estudios acabe mi carrera y disfrutar un año o dos años ganando mi dinero y comprándome mis cosas ya después de allí buscaría algo formal para hacer mi familia

economic resources before starting a family, at which point he will enact the expected provider role. The idea of providing for female partners starts early in life for male participants. Miguel's quote serves as an example to pinpoint how family expectations frame males' engagement with work outside the household.

“My first job [before junior high school] was to build a fence for my neighbours [...] a bit older, my dad took me to the (agricultural) field to fertilize and fumigate¹⁰⁹. As I started learning that at times an unpaid job with the family or a neighbour could shift to a paid one over time, I started asking about the type of retribution received from initially unpaid work”. Asked if his dad paid him for going to the field, Miguel mentioned he received a tip from his father “for a girlfriend or something^{110”}

Miguel's engagement with manual activities outside the household distinguishes him from his female counterparts who are mainly engaged in domestic work. When his job changed to a paid one, his dad would give him some money so that he would make sure he could pay for everything on a date with his girlfriend at the time. Since he was 14 years old, he has been expected to socialise into a gender role of providing for a female throughout his relationships with a girlfriend and with a partner/wife later on. Gender ideologies for both men and women are embedded in socio-cultural discourse around young people from when they are young, reinforced throughout the teenage years, and into their adult relationships (Castelli Olvera and Valles Ruiz 2015).

¹⁰⁹ Mi primer trabajo fue poner una cerca para mis vecinos [...] Ya mas grande mi papa te llevo al campo a las abonadas y fumigadas.

¹¹⁰ decía que para una chica o algo

Both fathers and mothers expect male students to act as breadwinners in their current love relationships and their future marriages. To illustrate this point, I bring in the narrative of Armando's mother, Nora. When talking about Armando's future, she shared the following:

“Because you will be the one who is going to sustain, you are going to have...a woman...if she wants to support...then she will work...but if it is needed...then she stays at home...and you (Armando)...you are going to work all of your life...you are going to be the motor of a family and that's what we (her husband and her) have always made him focus on¹¹¹”

In her account, Nora expresses that she is aware of Armando's future role as the primary financial support of a family. In her narrative, she conceives that the woman's role as a financial contributor is optional within the family, whereas the man is obliged to do so for the family's sake. Her narrative puts forward the expected gender roles for both female and male youth. Parents expect their children to fulfil the roles they have been preparing them for.

Male students are encouraged to study and then become the heads of their families. While female students are also encouraged to engage in HE, their parents' vision of their future role as primarily wife and mother does not change as a result of this. Furthermore, in regard to the decision to work or stay at home, they are still expected to depend on their husbands' approval. Ines's advice to her daughter conveys her acceptance of the fact that even though Karen, her daughter, will have a career, having a job will be conditional on her husband.

¹¹¹ tu vas a mantener, tu vas a tener, una mujer si gusta apoyar trabaja pero si hay necesidad se queda en casa y tu toda tu vida vas a trabajar vas a ser el motor de una familia y eso siempre le hemos enfocado

“You have to think about your house, gas...this and that...and well you will have your career and let’s hope you will be allowed to work (by your husband¹¹²)”

By listing the ordinary expenses in a household, she wants to make Karen aware that adult life is not easy, and her luck will depend on her husband. Ines acknowledges the unequal realities lived by Mexican women under a traditionally accepted patriarchal system in which the male is the decision-maker (Castañeda 2002). At the start of our interactions, Ines said that at the beginning of their marriage, her husband had not allowed her to work:

“I wasn’t allowed to work...so I left work [...] I was pregnant and he (my husband) said that it was better for me to dedicate myself to the house and that is what I dedicated myself to¹¹³”

Even though Ines has more education than her husband, she did not work until her children were older because he wanted her to occupy the role of a housewife. Acceptance of the working restrictions imposed on mothers by their husbands is a common experience for females of this generation. This was the case for both mothers who had higher educational levels than their partners and those who did not. Rosa, Fernanda’s mother, shared that one of Fernanda’s sisters closed her small beauty salon because her husband did not let her work. She works sporadically now but only from home. As part of her introduction, she recollected that she had gone through the same experience as a wife:

¹¹² la casa el gas, esto el otro, que no se que, entonces le digo ya tu tienes tu carrera, esperemos que él te deje trabajar

¹¹³ ya no me dejaron trabajar ...me sali de trabajar[...] estaba embarazada, el decía que ya no que este que mejor me dedicara pues a l hogar y ya pues me dediqué

“My husband had me at home and he went out to work, well as a campesino,¹¹⁴ and I stayed at home to prepare food and take it to the field for him, I wasn’t working...well I was working at home, making food, washing...the chores¹¹⁵”

Noteworthy in Rosa’s narrative is the phrase that her husband “had” her at home. Rosa is locating herself within the machismo, in this case, power inequality existing between women and men, where the latter is the one with the most power in the household. The natural way in which Rosa introduced herself is part of her acceptance of what her role should be within her family. Additionally, Rosa does not initially recognise her domestic chores as work, adding to her precariousness and placing her in an invisible space within the household. *Machista* attitudes not only constrain a woman’s choice to work, but also to be educated. To illustrate this point, I will draw on Alma, Nancy’s mother, who also recalled that her partner did not allow her to work. She explained that he was very jealous and would scold her if she would sit outside her house. When imagining her daughters’ future, she gives them the following advice:

¹¹⁴ agricultural worker

¹¹⁵ Mi esposo me tenía en la casa y el salía a trabajar pues de campesino yo me quedaba en la casa a hacer de comer y llevarle la comida al campo, yo no trabajaba... si trabajaba en la casa hacer la comida lavar...el quehacer

I tell them (her children): “Wait and get married... and if your husband allows it then you can continue studying...well that’s good...then you can keep studying...but you don’t see that now ...I always tell them: “that’s a child’s life...that’s how they see life...everything is easy...it’s all easy because their parents give everything to them...but once you are married and have a husband...that’s when it all changes...everything (turns out to be) difficult¹¹⁶”

Alma sees her daughters’ future as full of adversities. Like Ines, she wants her children to be aware that their adult status will involve more responsibilities and constraints. She acknowledges that her daughters’ school engagement is not conditional on her agency or capability but on her husband’s approval. In this way, Alma acts as a transmitter of *machista* attitudes across the generations in her family. Gender role expectations affect young people’s university aspirations. Female participants recognise that it is not only their fathers who are the transmitters of *machista* attitudes but their mothers too. These play out in their families in terms of different gendered expectations. Asked if her mother was different from her father in terms of prioritising males over females, Carolina explains that her mother has similar attitudes:

C: No, my mother also treats my brother the same, “bring this to him because he is the little man, my mom is the same as my dad in that aspect

CLS: Like machista?

C: Yes...I don’t know how that is...but yes like saying he is the little man¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Les digo espérense y casense y si su marido les deja estudiar más les digo pues que bueno pues sigan estudiando, pero ahorita no, les digo, por que la vida, yo siempre les digo, la vida a un niño o una niña ve así que la vida es bien fácil, todo fácil, pero todo fácil se les hace pero sus papás les dan, pero ya casense ya tienen su marido, allí cambia todo, totalmente todo difícil

¹¹⁷ No, mi mamá también lo trata igual a mi hermanito, tráele esto y porque porque es el hombrecito, osea mi mama es igual en ese aspecto es como mi papá. ¿Como machista? Si, no se como sea eso, pero si como el hombrecito

While Carolina doesn't appear to recognise the word *machista* in the attitudes of any of her parents, she recognises the unequal treatment that her brother receives compared to her and her sisters' experience. The female participants in this study also reflected on how their relationships with their male partners could act as obstacles to further study. In Silvia's depiction of her boyfriend's attitudes below is the expectation for her to engage in gender-specific roles such as selling food:

He was very machista [...] because...like I said I want to study this and he would say: "what for?" and...he didn't like it that a woman would be superior than a man...that's what I started to realise...he told me...I told him: well I want to study to become a nurse, he told me: no, for what? You always get nervous...because of him I left my (nurse-first aid) workshops...and then I said I want to study management, (he said) what for? What if you make a mistake and all that...and I was like ahhh and I want to study marketing, (he said) what for?... when I started working, he was mad...and then when I told him I will sell sopes (corn pastries) ...he told me that it was a good idea, and I was like (whaat?) ...it was like he didn't want me to get ahead.

Silvia's account demonstrates how young females are aware of *machista* attitudes in their partners as possible barriers for continuing in education (Ruiz Ramirez et al 2014).

At times, the amount of time invested in these parallel activities becomes a burden to young people, particularly females, who mainly engage in unpaid work and as principal carers in the family (Bayón 2017). Females were more likely to help family members in unpaid domestic chores than male students were. There were no accounts of any male participants engaging with caring activities within their families or with their nuclear or extended families. By contrast, many of the female participants were responsible for taking care of siblings, family members who were unwell and

elderly relatives in their households. Diana, 18, enrolled in the morning shift of the management course, also had an informal *chamba* after school. She was helping her aunt to sell cream and cheese on her stall, a job she has been doing since junior high school. At the time of interview, she had stopped because she was retaking the modules she had failed in the first semester. In addition to attending both the morning and afternoon shifts at school in the final semester, Diana cared for her younger siblings after school. Her father worked unfixed shifts as a taxi driver and bricklayer while her mother worked in a factory. Their work shifts were usually long and variable, so Diana took care of her young siblings.

During my fieldwork, I became aware of young people's creative responses to the economic necessity of supporting their family. As discussed in Chapter 2, the way in which young people socially navigate (Vigh 2006) is operationalised through a range of informal, paid and unpaid activities referred to as *chambas*. For example, Felipe engaged in multiple activities. Besides working in a plant greenhouse where he was doing his professional practice hours, he worked in agriculture with his father and uncles, was also a *chinelero*¹¹⁸ and dancer in cultural events as well as baking and selling cakes:

CLS: "Are you working now?"

F: "No...well...I sell cakes..."

CLS: "On weekends or sometimes?"

F: "During the week and on weekends...the "impossible (cake)"¹¹⁹ of chocolate and flan...only that one"

CLS: "And do you get many orders?"

¹¹⁸ Carnival dancers in Mexico with Morelos having the most groups

¹¹⁹ Called "impossible" in Mexico (also known as chocoflan) because it is surprising how the chocolate mixture and the flan change positions during baking, this is due to different density of ingredients

F: “Yes, sometimes”

Felipe does not initially recognise that he is currently working, showing the complexity of examining *chambas* and their influence. I faced this on numerous occasions and as a result, rephrased my questions for young people and changed the way I approached asking about their multiple activities. It is also striking that while Felipe can bake and sell pastries without it affecting his masculinity. Females are not expected or allowed to take on activities such as bricklaying. In a later interaction with Felipe I found out that he sells and delivers his cakes for 120 MXN pesos (1.5 days salary at the current minimum wage) each. This sum was unusually large as the majority of participants did not talk about the payments they received, due to them being marginal sums (Rosales Luna 2016).

Pedro tells me that his involvement with different *chambas* is a result of his intention to get ahead and out of poverty. Currently, Pedro intermittently helps his dad in the field and at his parents’ *tianguis* stall selling cheese. Additionally, he sells the embroidery work he creates and sporadically helps his aunt to sell food on a street stall. As for Felipe, it is acceptable for Pedro to engage in domestic activities usually attributed to females, without affecting his masculinity. In resisting poverty through the simultaneous pursuit of these multiple pathways, Pedro demonstrates an agentic response. The active way in which he steers through the economic hardship he faces reflects his agency and resourcefulness in adjusting and pursuing his goals. We can also see how he tactically navigates his social ties, particularly those with his family, to move through an environment that changes.

As part of an intergenerational tradition of occupational multiplicity (Salas Quintanal and Gonzalez de la Fuente 2014), participants engage in multiple activities in addition to their role as senior high school students and their academic responsibilities. I soon noted that these activities were fluid

categories that change from paid to unpaid in light of diverse influences such as young people's age and family expectations. By proposing that the *chambas* young people engage in have both an inhibiting and enabling role in relation to the formation and development of HE aspirations, I challenge the view of *chambas* from other Mexican youth studies (Weiss 2012b) that present *chambas* as something young people engage in only as an interruption to their studies when resources are scarce. Engagement in *chambas* is underpinned by what is expected from young people within the family and their obligations towards it.

The prioritisation of family needs is understood by Flor as a family obligation she has to fulfil (Calzada et al 2012). Young females are the ones principally affected, as they are the ones who will take the caring roles in the household – an activity which is not necessarily their choice. In Flor's narrative, her *chamba* is underpinned by how she mobilises her family ties with her grandmother and engages in these activities as a way of contributing to her family. Flor speaks about the informal activity of selling desserts with her mother. Even though she also delivers the cakes and receives payment for them, which she gives to her mother, she refers to it as a "house thing". This sales activity was started initially by her single mother, as an additional family income-generating strategy besides the salary she receives as a factory worker. Later on, I met Flor's grandmother (her guardian) and found out that Flor also helps her grandmother at times on her street stall. Flor's engagement with her mother, sister and grandmother's businesses and the caring responsibilities she has for her niece is evidence of the significant amounts of time a female dedicates to sustaining relationships with others (Ekinsmyth 2011).

All of Flor's multiple *chambas* are embedded within her family (Ovink and Kalogrides 2015). Using a *familismo* lens (Martinez 2013), I see young people's *chambas* being used as a way of not only meeting young people's needs, but also taking their families into account. For example, when conceptualizing his future plans, Miguel expresses: *"The thing is that I want to take my parents out from work and sustain them myself...they are 42 or older¹²⁰"*. Miguel evokes a sense of family collectiveness, where his main purpose is to take care of his family. His narrative also reflects the machismo and *familismo* expectations that he has to fulfil with his plans of providing for his parents so that they can retire from work and his willingness to embrace full responsibility for them as the breadwinner. We can see how home, family background, the community and cultural norms inform and shape young people's HE aspirations (Appadurai 2004).

The need for students to engage in multiple activities alongside their high school studies is illustrated by Filemón's excerpt. Besides his studies, he is also working as a *mariachi*¹²¹ at nights and at weekends. Filemón also works sporadically in the field along with his brothers and father and he is now also breeding some lambs. When speaking about his intermittent *chamba* as a *mariachi*, he says:

"My uncles and cousins taught me how to play the instrument [...] the guitarrón (big Mexican guitar) and they brought me with them (to play music) like as cuates (friends), comrades, chilate (Mexican maize drink with cocoa- slang meaning it doesn't count), for free [...] (payment) was a little bit so it wasn't a (good) business [...] even though you don't earn much but every eight days you have a payment¹²²".

¹²⁰ "Pero el chiste es que yo quiero sacar a mis papás de trabajar y mantenerlos yo...ya tienen 42 o más".

¹²¹ Mexican folkloric musician.

¹²² Mis tíos y mis primos me enseñaron a tocar el instrumento [...] el guitarrón, me llevaban de cuates, de camaradas, de chilate, de gratis [...] (el pago) era poquito pues no era negocio y pues terminando la prepa ya tienes trabajo aunque sea seguro aunque no ganes mucho pero cada 8 días tienes un pago.

Chambas also shed light on a tradition that is often intergenerational (Salas Quintanal and Gonzalez de la Fuente 2014): Filemón's father works as a *mariachi* and a farmer simultaneously. His *chamba* is underpinned by his family (Ekinsmyth 2011) as it is developed within his family's relationships. The *chambas* that young people are engaged in translates into the reconfiguration of their roles within their family. Important to note is that Filemón combined the financial support he received from his older brother, who had just returned from the USA after migrating there illegally for fifteen-years, with the money obtained from intermittently working in music and farming. With this, he paid schooling related expenses that would ordinarily have been covered by his parents: *"I felt ...proud...because I said: It means less expenses for my parents (...) and I felt good because I also bought school supplies for my sibling¹²³."*

I argue that *chambas* allow young people to (re)negotiate their roles within their families. As they grow older and they can acquire paid jobs, they can contribute towards the family's economy and gain autonomy. *Chambas* support HE aspirations as they provide a space for young people to reflect on what they do not want to pursue through HE. For example, Diana's work caring for her siblings has made her rethink her HE aspirations by distancing herself from a career in teaching:

¹²³ "(Trabajé el fin de semana) y estuve trabajando en mis vacaciones...desde que salí hasta que entré estuve trabajando...y ya con eso me...como se llama...me pagué lo de mi colegiatura, mis útiles, todo eso [...] y ya la señora me contrató los sábados [...] me sentí como que...orgullosa...porque dije es un gasto menos para mis papas [...] y me sentí bien porque les compre los útiles a mis hermanos".

“(I thought about) becoming a teacher [...] in elementary school [...] but after I said no...because (dealing) with kids...I already struggle with my siblings [...] my sister is in elementary school and my sister in secondary [...] and I also saw that my cousin had to look after her brothers because her mom was never home [...] I said: no, what for?¹²⁴”[...]“In the afternoons...I go and pick up my sister from elementary school...the one who is in fifth (grade) [...] my house is...very far away [...] and under the sun...I get spots in the skin¹²⁵”

Diana’s caring responsibilities are part of her role within her household, a role that both her and her female cousin have. Diana’s father works casual shifts as a taxi driver and bricklayer while her mother works long shifts at a factory. As the oldest of three children, she complained about having to walk under the sun to pick her sister up from school as her share of the childcare. The roles of care provision that Diana and her cousin are responsible for are common amongst young females. Silvia considers that through her *chamba* she contributes towards her family’s expenses. As the older sibling, she is concerned about providing and contributing to her younger sibling’s education. This contribution has enabled Silvia to negotiate a role with more authority and higher status within the family, as she is now covering her own school fees and providing for one of her siblings too. Fernanda, who was taking care of one of her sisters who recently had surgery at the time of interview, described her typical weekdays:

“I wake up early and take my sister to school...go and buy food...come back, have a shower and come to school...at night...get there (home)...take care of my sister so that she can take care of her girl and then go to sleep at 10 pm...and then all over again¹²⁶”

¹²⁴ *“según yo de maestra [...]fue como en la primaria [...]pero despues dije que no que ya no que porque con los ninos...si ya con mis hermanos batalló [...]mi hermana en primaria y mi hermano en secundaria [...] y luego también veía que mi prima veía a sus hermanos porque su mamá nunca ha estado en su casa [...] dije no para qué?”*

¹²⁵ *“En las tardes...voy a recoger a mi hermana a la primaria, la de quinto [...]mi casa esta lejísimos [...] y con el sol me salen manchitas”*

¹²⁶ *Yo me levanto temprano y llevar a mi hermana a la escuela, ir a comprar la comida, regresarme, bañarme y venir a la escuela, en la noche llegar, cuidar un rato a mi hermana para que ella cuide a la niña y ya acostarme a las 10 de la noche...y ya volver otra vez*

Fernanda's engagement in these activities within her household is typical of the majority of the female students in my research in that they are the ones who take care of sick, younger or elder family members in addition to the other income-generating activities they might be involved in. Young female participants in my study were also in charge of domestic work within their household. Males would be expected instead to contribute towards household activities by working in the cornfields with their parents or relatives. An example of this is Carolina's account of how she and her sisters are expected to take over the domestic work around the house:

"I help my mom in her chores [...]to wash the dishes...we are four women in my house...so I wash the clothes...my clothes...I sweep the living room or the kitchen...or things like that [...] because in my house my dad does not do anything...he comes home from work and he works (related to his job as a teacher) and he doesn't do anything in the house...he says that we are four women so the house should be clean and the food ready...and my little brother and him nothing [...] he (father) calls him my machito [...]because my little brother when he wants something and wants someone to hand it to him and I say: come and take it...and my dad says "hand it to him because he is the little man of the house"¹²⁷"

Carolina's brother and father do not engage in domestic work in the household. This shows the *machismo* attitudes prevalent in students' homes, discussed in the earlier section. Carolina says that all the domestic work is her mother's responsibility and that she contributes to it. Males rarely mention doing any domestic chores other than running errands to the market or being responsible for any nurturing activities such as cooking in the

¹²⁷ Le dice mi machito [...] porque mi hermanito si quiere algo se lo dan si grita

house, even though they bake to sell. Domestic chores are gendered and disadvantageous for females. They represent a great deal of time that is taken away from their time to study and to prepare for HE. They also lower the opportunities for young women to save money towards HE related expenses.

5.5 Influences on HE aspirations: parental education and occupations

In addition to the transmission of gendered norms, parents' own education and economic position affects their aspirations for their children. Overall the parents and guardians in this study had left school relatively young, in most cases after completing junior high school, and certainly had no higher education experience. The only two parents from my sample who studied beyond high school, studied a 'normal'¹²⁸ degree to become teachers. Throughout my interactions and interviews with parents, they expressed that economic difficulties had been the main barrier to them continuing with their studies. In most cases, when I asked young people to share the way in which they saw themselves and their academic future, they brought up their parents' academic trajectories and recognised them as incomplete. Table 6 provides an overview of parental occupations and academic background.

Table 6. Overview of parental occupation and academic background

¹²⁸ A normal degree (teacher training college) has been proposed to have a lower quality of academic provision than the rest of Mexican HEIs (Perfiles Educativos 2018). Please see Appendix II.

Participant	Parents	Occupation	Academic Background
1 Nancy	Father (not present)	works unauthorisedly in USA	Incomplete elementary school
	Mother (head of family)	farmer/housekeeper	Elementary school
	Uncle (guardian)	farmer/seasonal unauthorised work in USA	Incomplete elementary school
2 Fernanda	Father (not present)	lorry driver	Elementary school
	Mother (head of family)	housekeeper/market stall	Incomplete junior high school
3 Juan	Father (head of family)	worked unauthorisedly in USA/ farmer	Elementary school
	Mother	housekeeper/housewife/farmer (animal farm)/catalogue sales	Junior high school
4 Karen	Father (not present)	photocopier technician	Incomplete high school
	Mother (head of family)	housekeeper/stationery shop	(Stenographer technical programme) High school equivalent
5 Silvia	Father (head of family)	worked illegally in USA/ayudante municipal ¹²⁹	Incomplete junior high school
	Mother	worked unauthorisedly in USA	Incomplete junior high school
6 Patricia	Father (absent)	works unauthorisedly in USA	Incomplete elementary school
	Mother (head of family)	housewife/sells food	Incomplete elementary school
	Husband (head of family)	shop assistant/ security guard/farmer/unauthorised work in USA	Junior high school
	Father (head of family)	Labourer	High school studies
	Mother	housewife/childminder	Incomplete high school
8 Carolina	Sister (guardian)	Teacher assistant	Normal (Degree)
	Father (head of family)	teacher	Normal (Degree)
	Mother	housewife	Incomplete elementary school
9 Alberto	Father (absent)	farmer	Junior high school
	Mother (absent)	worked unauthorisedly in USA/ works at a bakery	Junior high school
	Grandmother (guardian)	housewife/farmer	Elementary school
	Grandfather (guardian)	farmer	Incomplete elementary school
10 Gerardo	Father (absent)	construction worker/gardener	Elementary school
	Mother (head of family)	factory's janitor	Junior high school
	Uncle (guardian)	works unauthorisedly in USA	Junior high school
11 Daniel	Father (absent)	works unauthorisedly in USA	Incomplete junior high school

	Mother (absent)	Housewife/sells clothes	Incomplete junior high school
	Aunt (guardian)	housewife/accountant	Bachelor's degree
12 Tania	Father	deceased	Incomplete Bachelor's degree
	Mother (head of family)	independent teacher at 6 schools (no benefits), private teacher	Bachelor's degree
13 Itzel	Father (head of family)	lorry driver	Junior high school
	Mother	housewife/catalogue sales	Junior high school
14 Diana	Father (head of family)	worked unauthorisedly in USA/taxi driver/policeman/bricklayer	Junior high school
	Mother	housekeeper/factory worker	Junior high school
15 Felipe	Father (absent)	worked unauthorisedly in USA/farmer	Junior high school
	Mother (head of family)	worked unauthorisedly in USA/janitor/sells food and pastries	High school
16 Flor	Father (absent)	farmer	Junior high school
	Mother (absent)	Factory worker/food-stall	Junior high school
	Grandmother (guardian)	housekeeper/factory worker /food-stall/farmer	Incomplete elementary school
	Grandfather (guardian)	blacksmith/construction worker/farmer	Incomplete elementary school
	Uncle (guardian)	works unauthorisedly in USA	Junior high school
17 Nidia	Father (head of family)	worked unauthorisedly in USA/farmer	Elementary school
	Mother	worked illegally in USA/grocery shop/gas station shop	Elementary school
18 Miguel	Father (head of family)	farmer/chicken stall	Junior high school
	Mother	housewife/chicken stall	Junior high school
19 Filemón	Father (head of family)	farmer/musician	Incomplete elementary school
	Mother	housekeeper/coffee shop/farmer (animal farm)	Incomplete elementary school
	Older brother (guardian)	Construction/farm/ unauthorised work in USA	Incomplete junior high school
20 Pedro	Father (head of family)	farmer/market stall	Incomplete elementary school
	Mother	housewife/market stall	Incomplete elementary school

¹²⁹ An ayudante municipal is the liaison between the community and the municipal government.

This confirms the findings of key studies focusing on Mexican high school students (Figueroa Ruvalcaba et al 2015, Silas Casillas 2012, Ochoa & Diez-Martinez 2009) that factors such as parental academic background and occupation are central in shaping HE aspirations. As discussed in the literature review chapter, their findings suggest that the low levels of schooling attained by parents and their lack of HE experience, influence young people's HE aspirations. Students with parents who did not attend higher education refer to not being able to speak to them about their career choices.

At the same time, despite some similarities, participants' parents/guardians were a heterogeneous group. Each family had a complex structure of relationships that influenced the way students perceived their context and the opportunities available to them. A great majority of students were still living with their parents. This was true of almost all participants with the exception of Patricia, Alberto, Flor and Daniel. Patricia's mother poverty led Patricia to live at a teacher's house when she was young. She is now married and lives with her husband and three children. Alberto and Flor lived with their grandparents and Daniel lived with his aunt. The three of them were not raised by their parents for economic-related issues and are now living in their guardian's house. Two of them still spoke with their parents who were now living nearby. The complex family dynamics in which my participants interact has led to them acquiring diverse role models which I discuss in Chapter 6.

Eight families had a mother head of the family and nine of the twenty families were father-headed household. The remaining three students lived in households where the head was their uncle and grandparents and were also male-headed households. One of the most noticeable features of the parental occupations of the participants is that their jobs are manual low-skilled and unskilled jobs, primarily agricultural, service-related, driving and construction-related. The gendered nature of their occupation is also a salient characteristic. While men are primarily engaged with jobs outside the

house, women mainly work in housekeeping (for wealthy families), housework and childcare. As discussed in Chapter 4, half of my participants' households are involved in farming activities. All of the parents/guardians engaged in agricultural-related activities reported that they worked on a piece of land that was not their own. In some cases, mothers also participate in the management of the family-owned animal farm which is usually either a food-source for the household or exchanged with neighbours.

A great proportion of fathers and male guardians had illegally migrated '*irse de mojados*'¹³⁰ to the USA where they had undertaken manual jobs as agricultural labourers in construction, and low-skilled jobs such as valet parking and dish washing at restaurants. Most of them were now back in Mexico. Most parents were working in agricultural related activities or have done seasonal agriculture work in the past. As agriculture or construction labourers, their job conditions are informal and insecure (seasonal, no contract, no social security or benefits). This is widespread for the majority of parents. The informal sector is a common arena most parents have entered and exited throughout their lives and most change jobs frequently. The findings from my longitudinal research show that even from one academic semester to another there were changes in parental jobs. Even though in my initial encounters with students, they referred to their parents' occupations as only one activity, I identified that most parents were pursuing multiple pathways. For example, besides being farmers or janitors, they would act as businessmen/women and run their own *tianguis* stalls selling food or clothes.

¹³⁰ Illegally cross the border as a wetback (in reference to crossing the Bravo river running through Mexico and USA's border).

Within the male headed households, when I asked mothers about their occupation, some of them defined themselves as housewives. Their involvement in entrepreneurial activities such as selling toiletries and preparing food is not initially recognised by their families or by them. Mothers who were head of the family were motivated to do so because their partners were not present (50%) or had migrated to USA (50%) indefinitely or intermittently. A significant number of mothers and female guardians have worked/currently work in domestic service. One example of this was Teresa.

I was invited for breakfast at Teresa's house, Flor's maternal grandmother who has been her guardian since Flor's parents could not provide economically for her. When arranging the meeting she told me that in case I got lost, I should ask for the house of the *huesera*¹³¹ because she lived just next door to her. Like most addresses in the community, it was still not updated on google maps. When I arrived, she was already waiting for me at the front entrance of her house. Her house floor was dirt and the ceiling was made from aluminium plates. She already had some blue hand-made *tortillas* and *frijoles*¹³² ready for me at the table. She had a big *comal* instead of a stove and she was making some more. She urged me to sit at the table and start eating straight away. I was really happy to try her blue tortillas, as these are rarely found in the *tortillerías* (tortilla shops) of the city. Teresa is a 56 year-old-woman, now working at a *tortillería*. I congratulated her on the flavour of the *frijoles* and she explains that besides working at the *tortillería*, she sells food at a stall where people tell her she is a good cook. I asked her about her life and she tells me that she studied until the fourth year of elementary school. When she was very young, she started helping her father with the cultivation of tomatoes, chillies and flowers

¹³¹ Hueso= bone. Huesera is a healer that works with bones and joints

¹³² A tortilla is a flatbread made out of maize (corn) and frijoles are cooked beans. There are many varieties of both tortillas and beans and the both are the most important staple food in Mexican diet.

which they later sold at the market. As they didn't have enough resources to pay for a market stall, their products were usually confiscated by policemen. When she was 9 years old, she started working at a family's house as a live-in-domestic worker:

"Well...I "me acomodía" (did what I was told) and...well, they fed me...well, I helped with washing the dishes, with the kitchen, looked after a 3-year-old girl and that's how I earned my food...so, well...I was happy just with eating better because my parents were poor¹³³"

While we were talking and eating together, three hens came running to the kitchen area. I jumped a little bit because I wasn't expecting it and she told me she and her husband also breed hens. They have 6 hens and a rooster. They eat some of the eggs produced and sell the others to neighbours. Teresa then went on to tell me that she got married when she was 15 years old and has 10 children. Her children didn't attend pre-school because she and her partner used to work at the *ferias del pueblo* (village fairs) where they would rent out games and had to travel throughout some other villages in Morelos. Some of her children studied until their junior high school and only one of her daughters studied until the first year of high school. All of her children got married at 18 and 19 years old. When asked why her children haven't continued studying, she recalled that it was hard for them as they had to study and work long shifts at the same time. She shared that one of her sons was working as a chicken peeler at a *pollería* (chicken shop) and had to wake up very early. He was always tired at school, so he couldn't continue studying beyond junior high school. Her older son is now living in the USA. He migrated when he was 18 and has been living there for 17 years now. He usually sends Teresa and Flor money

¹³³ "Pues yo me acomodía yo pues...y me daban de comer, pues les ayudaba a lavar trastes, la cocina, cuidar unan niña de 3 años pues ya me ganaba mi comida...pues...yo era feliz con comer mejor porque pues mis papás también eran pobres"

whenever they need it. Besides taking Flor under her care, Teresa also cares for another grandson. When asked about the advice she gave her children, she said:

“I told them: ‘echenle ganas’ and let me see how I deal with you, continue studying, I will know how to take you ahead’...well my idea was for them to become someone or to see if they could be someone, I would say...well...‘echenle ganas’and let’s see how we (family) will manage with the expenses¹³⁴”

Teresa’s notion of education as a way for her children to become someone by putting effort into their studies, resembles parents’ expectations of a university degree. Wanting a good life for children without advising on the particular aspirational pursuit they should follow is part of her ‘echenle ganas’ discourse. When I asked about her husband’s occupation, she replied:

“He is like how the saying goes...he is “El Mil Usos” (The one with one thousand uses) ...he makes windows, he is a brick layer, he likes the (agricultural) field...well, he likes everything¹³⁵”

¹³⁴ yo les decía échenle ganas a ver como salgo yo con ustedes, sigan estudiando, yo sabré como sacarlos adelante...pues mi idea de que fueran alguien o a ver si me sale alguien, pues así como yo ahorita, pues échenle las ganas y a ver como nos arreglamos con los gastos

¹³⁵ es como dice el dicho, es el mil usos...hace ventanas, es albañil, le gusta el campo...pues todo le gusta

The expression “One who can do a thousand things at a time” is a reference to a Mexican film from 1981, “El Mil Usos”, which depicts the life of a farmer who migrates to the city in search of a better life. He ends up doing a dozen low-skilled informal jobs interchangeably (bricklayer, cleaner, carrier at the market, security guard, etc.) and gets nicknamed as the “One who can do a thousand things at a time”. Teresa’s comparison eloquently depicts the struggle with but also the agentic response to poverty found amongst my participants’ families. Parents’ informal and casual labour is associated with low educational attainment. This perception is widespread among my participants. Following multiple pathways is also widespread amongst parents and guardians to make ends meet within their households. Besides parental educational backgrounds and occupations, family support also influences the formation of HE aspirations. The following section captures the prominence that family support has over young people’s projections of their future.

5.6 Influences on HE aspirations: Family support

I met Maria at her house as she invited me to do so on WhatsApp. She lives in a 3-bedroom cemented house with a tall fenced entrance. Maria, 24, is Carolina’s sister, but is registered as Carolina’s official guardian at school due to their mother’s housewife and caring duties. Their brother has heart disease and needs constant care from her mother. I tried to interview both Carolina’s parents but they both said they were too busy with family and job commitments. Instead, they pointed me towards Maria. Maria recently finished her normal degree to become a teacher and is now working as a teaching assistant to her father. When she finished high school, she wanted to take a sabbatical year prior to university but her father insisted that she continue studying. *“My dad has always guided us...has unconditionally supported us...so even though we didn’t have anything to eat but if we*

needed to get a book...only he knew what he did but he got it...because that (education) is the only thing he will leave for us¹³⁶. Maria and Carolina's father is an elementary school teacher – one of only two in the sample. He works both the morning and afternoon shift. Like her father, Maria firmly believes in education as a way of becoming someone:

"The only door in this world...or in this society is education...if you don't have education...you are a no one¹³⁷"

Her father's drive to continue studying was mainly influenced by her grandfather: *"My dad is the only male of a family of 6 siblings, they are all teachers...at some point his dad had to make many sacrifices so they could study...you have to study because I don't want children who are farmers...because he was a farmer and he didn't want them to just be farmers like him¹³⁸"*.

Maria explained that her mother doesn't talk about education with her or her siblings *"My mom is a housewife...she just studied until the second year of elementary school...her family is very poor...she got married when she was 17...and I feel like she is self-conscious because she doesn't have the adequate preparation to hold a conversation with her children"*. Maria's characterisation of her mother is typical among young people. When asked about how they discuss their academic or career plans for the future, they would say that their parents are not sufficiently educated (even though they had elementary or incomplete junior high school studies) and that therefore they cannot advise on one career over another. As seen in Table 5,

¹³⁶ Y pues es por eso que mi papá siempre nos ha aconsejado nos ha apoyado incondicionalmente aunque no tengamos que comer pero si necesitamos para ese libro, el sabe como le hace porque dice que es lo único que nos va a dejar

¹³⁷ La única puerta en este mundo...o en esta sociedad es la educación...que si no tienes educación no eres nadie

¹³⁸ Mi papa es el único hombre de 6, todos son maestras en algun momento su papá tuvo que hacer muchos sacrificios porque tienen que estudiar, ustedes tienen que estudiar porque yo no quiero hijos campesinos

Maria's mother's low educational attainment is common amongst parents. When speaking about her maternal extended family, Maria expresses her concern over her cousins, given that none of them have studied past elementary school *"Because they don't have family that can push them to study...so they just say, I'll get married, work and earn my money...they say...what's the purpose of studying? Nothing¹³⁹"*

The valuing of work over education within their community was described by many other participants in my research. All of them mentioned friends or peers who had interrupted their studies after junior high school. As discussed in Chapter 1, the transition from junior high school to high school is considered a pivotal point in Mexican young people's lives, as it is the moment when low-income young people are most likely to abandon their studies (Guerra Ramirez 2009). Maria said that contrary to the experience of her cousins, her father's support and guidance was a key driver for her to become a teacher. However, most students in my research saw their parents as unable to advise them in career related decisions due to low educational attainment.

Maria and Carolina's father is one of two exceptions with regards to the typically low level of parental involvement in the young participant's education. Even though all parents want the best future for their children, not all of them have been able to play a strong role in shaping their children's academic aspirations. The other exception is Beatriz, the other teacher in my sample. She was curious about me and asked me many questions about my degree and research. As discussed in my positionality section on chapter 3, most parents didn't ask anything related to my project or studies, perhaps due to class dynamics (Sime and Sheridan 2014), so Beatriz's interest in the project was refreshing and enjoyable. She told me

¹³⁹ Que como no tienen familia que los impulse a estudiar, dicen me caso, trabajo y gano mi dinero dicen ¿para que? no me sirve de nada el estudio, es lo que dicen

she works as an English teacher, lecturing at six public schools during the mornings and giving several private lessons in the afternoons. As head of the household, Beatriz said she was specially busy this year because she was preparing for the financial burden Tania's university will entail. Beatriz does not receive job benefits because she is not officially hired by the school but by parents. She is a single mother; her ex-partner having passed away recently. She anticipates that Tania will have to start working while studying at university, because her salary alone won't be enough to cover her expenses. Tania's lack of experience of paid work is uncommon amongst the young people in my research.

Beatriz usually leaves Tania in her grandmother's care and feels guilty for not giving Tania more attention, especially at this crucial time when she has to decide on her career. Beatriz recalls how she had to bargain with her daughter, Tania, to persuade her to apply to a second university so that she would have a back-up option in case she didn't secure a place at the first one. Tania is planning to apply to a state university in Mexico City, but Beatriz is afraid she could get rejected because of the university is in high demand. Beatriz's priority is for her daughter to continue her studies:

"Well...she (Tania) told me "I'll stay one year without studying and I'll find myself a job...and then I'll do my (university admission) exam"...I had to say: No, Tania, no...she didn't want to listen, she is a bit of a rebel, so I had to make a naughty plan so that she would decide to take an exam here (closer university) as well (...) she wanted to go visit her aunt and I said "you want to go with your aunt but I won't give you permission...so you have to consider that option and I will let you take some days to be with your aunt (...) so that's what I came up with...because she didn't want to take an exam here¹⁴⁰" .

¹⁴⁰ Pues ella me dice me quedo un año sin estudiar y me busco un trabajo y después vuelvo a hacer mi examen, tuve que, dije no soy no, por ese lado si no me quería hacer caso es un poco rebelde, tuve que hacer plan con maña para que decidiera hacer examen también aquí

Both Carolina's father and Tania's mother are 'strong framers' of young people's educational expectations (Ball et al 2002). As such, they are active participants in their children's HE aspirations and largely support them in pursuing these aspirations. These two parents share a common trait; they have both completed a teaching degree. Conversely, parents in my research with the lowest levels of education did not actively encourage their children to pursue higher education futures; these are what Ball et al. (2002) define as weak framers' or 'onlookers' of their children's higher education choices. Most parents I spoke to wanted their children to do well in education, but did not push them to pursue higher education. Parents wanted their children to have a "good life" but at times, the structural conditions around them act as barriers in terms of the support they were able to provide their children. Nancy's mom, Alma, illustrates how support is perceived by parents in relation to their positionality.

As previously mentioned, Alma and Nancy's family is the only indigenous language-speaking one in my research. Alma's house doesn't have walls or wall divisions; it is an open space where they have a wood stove, a small wooden table and two double beds that I can see from the table. The ceiling is made of wooden and aluminium plates and they have a small bathroom without sewage access in the corner. Of all participants, they are the ones who live the farthest away from school. Nancy would usually use a bicycle to get to school but it is broken at the moment and she can't afford to fix it. She usually takes from 30-60 minutes to get to school, depending on what kind of transportation is available on the day. Some days she will hitchhike if one of her *patrones*¹⁴¹ is there. Other days she might take the bus, but usually public transportation is unreliable.

Alma is 36 years old but looks much older. She got married at 16 and became a housewife because her husband didn't give her permission to work.

At 18, while she was pregnant with Nancy, her husband illegally migrated to the USA and never came back. Alma now has 3 children with different

¹⁴¹ In reference to boss and used in informal employment

partners and she is a single mother. Alma works in the fields and receives economic support from her brothers and from *Prospera*¹⁴². The help she receives targets her three children and herself. Alma studied until the first year of elementary school. Some months before I met her, she decided to enrol at an open school, mainly because she needed to learn how to read and write to fulfil a requirement to continue to receive her *Prospera* CCT benefits:

“Prospera demands a lot from us...when they tell us: “come and sign”...we went and we used our fingerprint...but then they told us that the fingerprint couldn’t be used anymore...that it should at least be a name or a signature...so the (Prospera’s) representative from around...I don’t know how she did it...she went to see someone...I don’t know how she managed to get the people from INEA (Mexico’s open school institution) to come¹⁴³”. As I discuss in Chapter 3, the majority of the families in my study reported that they were in receipt of some kind of governmental economic support for the continuation of their children’s studies, besides the *“Beca- Salario Universal”* scholarship.

Some parents see support in economic terms and attribute the aspiration to HE to how much motivation and effort the young people have (Guerrero et al 2016). This is well exemplified by Alma when asked about how she views Nancy’s, her daughter, plans to study a university degree:

“Well...I see it as her dream...because I don’t really pay attention to that...whoever wants to study, studies and if she doesn’t want to anymore...then she doesn’t have to study...what I see in her is that she is very eager to achieve what she wants to do”

¹⁴² Mexican Conditional Cash Transfer benefits scheme

¹⁴³ *Prospera nos exige mucho, cuando nos dicen pasen a firmar, allí vamos con la huella, y nos dijeron que con la huella ya no se puede, si quiera el nombre o la firma, la promotora de aca, no sé como le hizo fue a ver a alguien, promotora o no sé como le hizo para que del INEA hizo que viniera*

Alma sees Nancy as an adult who is capable of pursuing her own goals and conceptualises the support she can provide in an economic way. Alma doubts that her economic resources will allow her to continue sending her daughter, Nancy, to high school. She lacks the knowledge of having family participating in education so she asked for economic advice from two of her neighbours with children in high school:

“She (neighbour) told me: “No...don’t send your daughter (to school) ...she didn’t encourage me...she told me: “don’t send her to school because they will ask for lots of money” [...] and I thought “How am I going to get that money?[...]and my daughter said “I want to study [...]but I have another friend and I thought I’d ask her because her daughter is also attending (high school) and she told me...no...you only have to pay twice a year...you’ll pay when she starts, for the enrolment fee, and the books and then you are going to pay again in January or February so that she finishes (graduation)[...]she was the one who gave me a good explanation [...]she said to me well...just put your daughter at school...if you see that it is too difficult, then you take her out...nothing happens...just take her out...so I said that’s ok...and that’s why I enrolled my daughter”¹⁴⁴.

Alma’s decision to send Nancy to school was the main driver behind Nancy attending high school and developing HE aspirations there. Her lack of knowledge of high school fees and rules is commonly seen among ethnic minority parents (Hutchings and Archer 2001). Alma’s and Nancy’s social networks played an important role in the continuation of Nancy’s high school studies, as they rely on people in these networks to provide the

¹⁴⁴ ella (vecina) me decía no, no vayas a meter a tu hija...no me animaba pues...porque me decía: no metas a la escuela porque allí te va a pedir mucho dinero [...] y decía mi hija yo quiero estudiar [...]tengo una amiga y dije voy a preguntar porque su hija va (a la escuela) y...no, dice doña, dice...dos veces al año vas a pagar, vas a pagar cuando va a entrar y la ficha y los libros y vas a pagar otro en febrero o enero para que salga [...] ella si me explicó bien
pues mete a tu hija a la escuela, si ves que se te hace bien difícil, la sacas, dice, no pasa nada, la sacas...digo esta bien, y si la inscribi a mi hija”

information they need. Asked about the advice she gives Nancy for her future, Alma says:

“If you don’t find a job in the area you studied, you can ‘trabajar en casa’¹⁴⁵, or you can work in the field, that’s why you have to learn a little bit from the field and a little bit from the house”

Even though Nancy is planning to go to HE, Alma does not think Nancy will be able to transfer her HE/further studies certificate into a professional job. She thinks Nancy should prepare to clean houses like herself. As well as most parents in my research, Alma acknowledges the uncertainty that prevails regarding her children’s entrance into the job market. She adopts a positive attitude towards not obtaining a job within her daughter’s field of study but she knows she should be prepared to face adversities.

This chapter was concerned with the expectations that participants ought to fill and how these act as a barrier for young female’s HE aspirations. Females are mainly responsible for domestic work and caring duties within their household which detract time from studying and from saving towards university-related expenses. Education is highly valued by parents, but their lack of knowledge and HE experiences influences the way in which they support young people’s HE aspirations. In light of Appadurai’s (2004) framework that posits aspirations as navigational capacities, young people’s networks can help develop or constrain their HE aspirations. The following chapter is concerned with the role that networks have in strengthening or deterring young people’s aspirations.

¹⁴⁵ “trabajo en casa” literal meaning is “work at a house” often referred to domestic service duties which includes but is not limited to cleaning, cooking, looking after the patron family’s children and running errands outside of the house

Chapter 6. The role of networks in shaping young people's HE aspirations

6.1 Introduction

This chapter depicts the complexity of young people's HE aspirations and their embeddedness in the family and community contexts. In this chapter I address my third research question: How do young people's social networks influence the way they shape and navigate their HE aspirations? Far from being abstract, aspirations shape and are shaped by social processes (Appadurai 2004, Mische 2009). In the first section of this chapter, I examine young people's agency and their ability to source their own role models outside of their family. This section will also shed light on key individuals who serve as positive or negative role models and the ways in which young people view them. It also seeks to clarify the extent to which these role models impact young people's attitudes towards their HE and career plans. I discuss how young people's underprivileged socioeconomic position impacts their choice of role models.

As I have shown in Chapter 2, in the face of structural barriers, people living in poverty extend their social networks through kinship. Section two is concerned with the influence that kinship has over young people's HE aspirations. Portes's (1998) work, as discussed in Chapter 2, shows how these reciprocity networks bring benefits but also restrictions on individual freedoms. I argue that there is a tension as the support that young people receive is expected to be reciprocated in the future. Exploring the ways in which young people act on and engage in these reciprocity networks helps to better comprehend young people as agents in the formulation of their academic and career aspirations.

6.2 Role models and *patrones*

As argued in Chapter 4, HE aspirations are partly understood by young people in terms of wealth and social status. When articulating their HE aspirations, the young participants shared their plans of following in the footsteps of key successful individuals in their communities and families. Their intention of replicating the academic trajectories of economically successful individuals underpinned their choice of role models. In turn, their choice of role models was also informed by their agentic response to the economic barriers around them and by their desire to end their precarious economic situation. While the prevailing view in youth studies in Latin America is that poor young people lack role models to identify with (Munar et al 2004, Tapia Garcia et al 2010, García et al 2019), I argue that the young people in my research are able to identify role models within their social worlds as part of an agentic response to their structural limitations.

During my visit to Silvia's house, I noticed that part of her family's living room was dedicated to her mother's sewing machine. One of Silvia's afternoon and weekend *chambas* was to help her mother with her sewing. Silvia aspires to study an accountancy university degree. She explained that the origin of her interest in accountancy arose from her interactions with Nayeli, an accountant who is one of her mother's regular clients:

“Well...she is an accountant and she is doing well...she just finished building her own house [...] but I know she has also struggled...well like everyone...she told us (my mother and me) she made sacrifices to stay in school because she wanted to sustain her family and she thought about dropping out many times...and now she is better off than her cousins who just have high school (studies)¹⁴⁶”

Silvia’s narrative raises two important points. Firstly, it demonstrates Silvia’s agency by searching for and recognising a key individual outside her family who she wants to emulate. Secondly, Silvia identifies similarities with her role model’s struggles in life; her role model is someone who started from a similar place in terms of class thus making this aspiration more grounded in her everyday reality. In Silvia’s description of Nayeli, she recognizes the impact she makes in her life: she wants to study the same career as Nayeli. Highlighting the impact that their role models have had on their university aspirations was a common theme across participants, as we will see in the following narratives.

Like Silvia, Gerardo has also looked beyond his family for a source of inspiration for his academic aspirations. Gerardo’s father and mother have completed their elementary and junior high school studies respectively and he lives with his mother and brother only. His mother, Berta, works as a janitor. Gerardo told me that he wants to study for an engineering career, like his mother’s boss, an engineer with a ‘well-paid’ job. Gerardo highlighted how his mother’s boss studied with a university scholarship while he juggled multiple *chambas*, like the ones Gerardo currently has (Gerardo intermittently helps his uncles with agricultural duties, carries out lighting and electrical work at neighbouring houses and has a weekend job at a market stall). Gerardo has looked beyond his family in order to identify someone in his social world with whom he finds similarities (Lockwood

¹⁴⁶ Bueno...pues ella es contadora y le va bien...acaba de terminar de construir su casa [...] sé que también batalló...bueno como todos...nos dijo (a mi mama y a mí) que sí se sacrifique para estar en la escuela porque quería mantener a su familia y varias veces pensó en salirse...y ahora le va mejor que a sus primos que solo acabaron la prepa”

2006) and who he considers worthy of emulation. In talking about his mother's boss, Gerardo's depicts him as an individual who has struggled in his transition to adulthood, as he had to take on further responsibilities besides school to complete his studies. Identification with non-parental role models was widespread across young people in my research. Nancy, the only young indigenous-language speaker in my study, is no exception. She wants to pursue the same career as her uncles and mother's *patrón*. He is an engineer, who like Nancy, worked in agriculture during his studies and had a university scholarship. Nancy's mother and uncles work in his (agricultural) field as *peónes*¹⁴⁷. Without me asking explicitly for a "modelo a seguir" (role model), Nancy identified the *patrón* as a significant person in her life who is worthy of imitation. Her account is also structured around the fact that the *patrón* accomplished his university aspirations in spite of his financial difficulties at the time.

Young people's underprivileged socioeconomic positions are reflected in their comparisons with role models who completed HE and have achieved material goals such as owning a car and a house. While parents would give examples of young people who had "made it" without studying, young people did not talk about these examples. Instead, during our talks, students would generally refer to successful people outside their families and would seek to pursue similar accomplishments (academic and personal trajectories, career choices). Most young people regarded their parents' *patrones* as representing their desired future selves. Patricia wanted to follow the footsteps of her mother's previous *patrón*. He is a lawyer and Patricia's mother was a domestic worker at his 'very big house'. After a couple of years of not seeing him, Patricia met him recently while he was in charge of organising space and charging fees at the market where she and her husband have a socks' stall over the weekends. After meeting him again, she realised that he is an important member of her community and she wants to be like him. Patricia identifies the influence her mother's ex

¹⁴⁷ A person subject to peonage; labourer who has little control of work conditions

patrón's has in her aspirational pursuit to become someone of value. Thus, given that Patricia's parents have not progressed far in their own education, she looks beyond her family for a role model. Not having a role model closer to home, Patricia seeks one further afield. Patricia's mother's *patrón* not only provides a role model but has also promised to help Patricia after she finishes studying. In the next section, I talk more about the benefits young people can access through their social networks.

Mirroring Patricia's plans, Fernanda would like to replicate the success of her mother's *patrona*. Fernanda's mother is a domestic worker at her *patrona's* house. When she elaborates on how she decided to pursue her university aspirations, she describes her mother's *patrona*:

"She studied a licenciatura¹⁴⁸ and it is going two,three¹⁴⁹ for her...it is going well....like they are not rich but they are getting ahead without worries so I think studying is very important".

As in the previous accounts discussed in this section, Fernanda plans to pursue a similar trajectory to that of her role model in order to achieve success in the future, specifically in relation to their academic preparation. Fernanda focuses on her *patrona's* academic degree to explain that her studies were key for her to 'get ahead'. Upward social comparisons are an important part of how young people explain their choice of role model, in that their role models' social position is invariably better than theirs. Additionally, young people's role model is someone who had come from a similar class to them, making this future more attainable to them. Choosing role models within their communities was also common. This was often

¹⁴⁸ bachelor's degree

¹⁴⁹ Mexican slang expression; it is not good but not bad either

their parents' *patrones* who, besides being role models, often also acted as negotiators of key resources for them. The relationships between families and *patrones* will be explored in detail in the following section, as for many young participants, *patrones* are regarded as significant in the formation of their HE aspirations.

Teachers are also key individuals who interact with students on a daily basis. After the first semester, once I had built trust in my relationships, I managed to obtain important information from my chats with the teachers. Most teachers had a second job at another school and the lack of a staff room made it more difficult for them to stay at school prolongedly. Even though teachers' time outside of the modules was brief, teachers regularly prompt students to think about their academic plans in their personal time. Chemistry teacher Amelia mentioned that she was helping one of the senior high school students in her class. The student had reported that his family had financial problems and Amelia proposed paying him for recording music CDs for her. For students from the poorest families, teachers play an important role in both their personal and academic lives. For example, Teresa, Flor's grandmother and carer, told me that a teacher was essential in the academic lives of her grandchildren:

"There was a teacher who also 'gave me a hand' [...] that teacher supported me a lot with expenses, he supported me with money because I had to pay the (schoolenrolment fee or surgeries and the teacher gave me a hand [...] and then when I had the money I would say: here you go teacher, your money [...] with my other grandson (he helped) too, because he didn't have Oportunidades (conditional cash transfer programme) [...] there was a

meeting with all the mothers and I went and that teacher said: “Ladies, what do you think about giving Oportunidades to the girl Ana” [...] And he helped me a lot with that boy because he didn’t know how to read and he helped me too with that¹⁵⁰”

Teresa’s narrative highlights some of the *padrino* aspects that teachers offer families in poverty. Rather than just acting as role models, they take up *padrino-ahijado* relationships. Via their economic and emotional sponsorship or support, they foster young people’s academic integration. Even though conditional cash transfers (CCT) are granted by the government, it has been suggested there is corruption in the way these benefits are granted (Ortiz 2016). In practice, as Flor narrates, these CCT supports are informally promoted and influenced by school directors and staff (Arteta 2018). Having discussed the importance of positive role models from similar backgrounds and the overlap in some cases with a *padrino-ahijado* relationship, the following section explores the role that young people’s kinship has in shaping and developing their university aspirations.

6.3 Kinship and reciprocity in the form of a *padrino*, *patrón* and *palanca*

Besides parental support, young people identify other types of support that come from kinship relations such as *padrinos* and *patrones*, which I discuss at length in Chapter 3. I see *padrinos*, *patrones* and *palancas* as a complex system of reciprocity networks that overlap with each other and that influence the aspirations of the young people who participated in my study. Young people’s social relationships are enacted and re-enacted, depending on their life situations, needs and aspirations. As discussed in Section 3.5.3 of my methodology chapter, I waited till the second academic semester before conducting the lifehistory interview and participatory drawing sessions, when I had interacted more with students and begun to

¹⁵⁰ había un maestro que también me echaba la mano [...]ese maestro me apoyó mucho con los gastos, me apoyaba con el dinero porque tenia que pagar la inscripción o operaciones y el maestro me echaba la mano [...]y ya cuando ya tenia el dinero, aquí esta maestro su dinero [...] con mi otro hijo también (ayudo) , el no tenia oportunidades pero si me ayudó mucho con ese niño porque también el no sabia leer, el me ayudo también con eso...

visit them in their homes. While revisiting their key life narratives, the importance of these social relations became more apparent to me. During her life history interview, Patricia, 22, narrated that due to her mother's inability to pay for her and her sister's expenses, she had to live with other families in the neighbourhood. In these households, she would clean in exchange for education, accommodation and living expenses. During elementary school, she lived with a family composed of a female, owner of a clothing shop, and her husband who was a *coyote*¹⁵¹. In junior high school, she then started living with another lady who was a teacher at a nearby school.

“(In secondary) that’s when I met this teacher...and that teacher didn’t have daughters, only had boys, she was my madrina for when I was “coming out” (graduating) from elementary school, she said to me: “daughter, why don’t you come and help me daily, I will ask your mom for permission” and my mom said: “yes you can go”, well...my mom had to work more and wasn’t with us that much, my brothers spent time with my uncles, my mom the only thing she could teach was the house (chores), not something else, so they went with our uncle or with my grandpa...we were two girls but my sister went to live with a teacher and because of that teacher I met this teacher [...] and the teacher said: “come with me and I will provide so that you can eat and I lived with her (throughout junior high school) [...] she sent me to school, she gave me money in the mornings, and in the afternoon she came back from teaching, together we would make the cleaning chores, we eat together, she took me everywhere and everywhere she said that I was her daughter and that’s how years went by...”¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ Colloquial term for a guide who helps people cross the Mexico-USA border. Please see section 1.6 for a discussion of this role within migration.

¹⁵² “(en la secundaria) de allí conocí a esta maestra y esa maestra no tenía hijas, tenía puros niños, ella fue mi madrina para cuando iba a salir de la primaria, dice “hija porque no te vas a ayudarme dice por día, le pido permiso a mi mama, y pues dice si si quieres vete... pues ya mi mama se iba mas a trabajar y ya casi no estaban con nosotros, mis hermanos se la pasaban con mis tios, mi mama pues lo único que le podía enseñar era de casa, no de otra cosa, entonces se iban con el tío, con mi abuelito...eramos dos niñas, porque la otra niña se fue a vivir con una maestra y por esa maestra yo conocí a esta maestra [...]y la maestra me decía te vienes conmigo y yo te voy para que comes y yo vivía alla con ella (toda la secundaria) [...] ella me mandaba a la escuela ella me daba dinero, en la mañana y en la tarde regresaba de ir a dar clases, juntas hacíamos el quehacer, comíamos juntas, me llevaba a donde quiera y donde quiera decía que ella era su hija y así fueron pasando los años...”

In Patricia's narrative, the key relationship in her life was the one that developed between herself and her elementary school graduation *madrina* (female form of *padrino*). Patricia and her family widen their social networks as a strategy (Arteaga 2007). Having a graduation *madrina* is far from a religious venture: it is economically motivated. This relationship strengthened when her *madrina* became her main financial sponsor, providing the resources that her parents lacked (Velez-Calle et al 2015). When parents have time constraints and economic limitations, a *madrina* can provide both. *Padrinos* and *madrinas* are generally seen as second parents (Lizama Silva 2007). In Patricia's case, her mother's economic struggles strengthen the relationship with her *madrina* outside of her family.

At times, the strengthening of these social networks is activated by a specific change in a young person's life circumstances. Karen's junior high school "crisis" illustrates this. Her parents had separated some time earlier, her mother was unemployed and there were times when she and her two younger siblings did not have enough money for the bus to school. Ana, one of her neighbours, who is a lawyer, hired her mother as a domestic worker and trusted her to clean the houses of other family members. Since then, the relationship with Ana became latent and was only activated when Karen's family was in need of sporadic money loans, a feature which has been suggested as characterising the *padrino-ahijado* relationship (Nutini and Bell 2019). These relationships are woven together to create complex social norms of respect and reciprocity that have to be respected throughout a person's life, if that individual wishes to continue being a member of their social group. Another key aspect highlighting the reciprocity of these networks is the term used by participants to refer to the act of someone "apadrinar" or sponsor someone (through paying for a graduation or a key life event). "Apadrinar" represents the dynamic nature of the reciprocity involved in the *padrinazgo* relationship (Jelm 2010).

In her participatory drawing of her key life events, Karen represents herself as a girl riding a bike.

Figure 7. Karen's participatory drawing



She explained that going uphill through sunny weather represents the positive experiences she has had. The negative situations in her life, i.e. her family's economic "crises", are represented by the image of riding downhill through rocky mountains and stormy weather. Ana was mentioned by Karen as someone who helped her ride uphill, identifying her as a key individual who has positively impacted her life and her aspirations to attain a degree level qualification. When talking of Ana's role, she recalls:

“I also want to thank her for...so much...she has been my example and she has talked to me (...) and there were times where Ana bought clothes for my sister and I and invited us to her children’s birthday party...these are beautiful things...and how am I to repay her for this...she has helped all of us and gave us orientation...when she knew I was about to finish junior high, she said: You should continue studying, don’t give up”¹⁵³.

Karen’s account brings together common factors expressed by young people when they discuss the key social networks in the formation of their HE aspirations. Karen perceives her relationship with her mother’s *patrona* as central to developing her HE aspirations. Karen values the material (clothes) and emotional (orientation and school motivation) support provided by Ana. Important to note is that the *patrona* appears back in Karen’s life when there is a milestone such as junior high school graduation (Karen’s mother and father completed technical high school and dropped out of high school studies, respectively). Within this social relationship, Karen recognises the benefits she enjoys and expresses concern over how to reciprocate (Arriagada 2005). This makes the relationship more complex, as paying back would probably relate to giving back her time, even though she is still in school.

During their life stories, young people frequently referred to the important role their parents’ *patrones* had on their milestones such as their school graduation, as we will see in subsequent narratives. As discussed in Chapter 3, a person usually becomes a *padrino* through a religious connection, such as participating in the young person’s baptism, first communion or confirmation. A *padrino’s* participation would usually involve providing

¹⁵³ Por...mucho...ella ha sido mi ejemplo y siempre me platica [...] y Tambien hubo veces en que Ana compró ropa para mi hermana y para mi y nos invitaba a los cumpleaños de sus hijos...son cosas bonitas...y como le voy a pagar por esto...ella nos ha ayudado a todos y nos ha orientado...cuando supo que iba a terminar mi secundaria, dijo: debes de continuar estudiando, no te quedes

financial or in-kind support in these events. Additionally, from my time with participants, I learned that a kinship relationship such as the *padrinazgo* one can be made through a young person's key life experiences. One can become a *padrino* through being a key part of a person's third birthday¹⁵⁴, their *quinceañera*¹⁵⁵, elementary, junior high or high school graduation, a wedding or a family member's burial. It is important to note that these roles could be fulfilled by different people, so a person could have more than one *padrino* throughout their lifetime, who provides the young person with different in-kind or economic support throughout their life course. After the key event, *padrinos* do not disappear from the life of the young person; instead, they continue to be present in their life and help when they can. An individual can have a number of different *padrinos* throughout their life course, specific to different events. This means young people's kinship relations are added throughout, as it has been proposed in other highly connected semi-rural areas in Mexico (Hagene 2015). These relationships can be latent (Nutini and Bell 2019) and activated in emergencies such as the need to borrow money.

I felt honoured to have been invited to attend the graduation parties of Alberto and Silvia where I briefly met their graduation *padrinos*. Both were initially introduced to me at their graduation and I later found out Alberto's *padrinos* were a wealthy married couple, neighbours who lived nearby. Silvia's *padrino* was one of his dad's colleagues at the government institution where they worked. To have a *padrino* or a *madrina* for the graduation ceremony was a given for all of my participants. It was a common pattern amongst young people to have *padrinos* from a higher social status, as in-kind support was expected when someone was asked to be a *padrino* (Velez-Calle et al 2015). As such, this was also an indication of young people's stratified community as all the *padrino-ahijado* relations I came across were vertical (Gill-Hopple and Bradge Hudson 2012).

¹⁵⁴ Their third birthday related to the presentation of a three-year-old child to church discussed in Section 3.11.2.

¹⁵⁵ Quinceañera is the 15th year birthday party, particularly celebrated for females.

Gerardo also shared his narrative of a *padrino*, a key individual in his life who first took this role through his high school graduation. Of particular note is that Gerardo's *padrino* was a member of his family, which was not so common. As it is the *padrino*'s obligation to provide for what the *ahijado*'s parents cannot (Velez-Calle et al 2015), families would usually look outside their circle of relatives to ask for help. In this case, Gerardo's uncle, an illegal migrant in USA, acted as his high school graduation *padrino*. Within Gerardo's family structure, relationships are established and re-established in light of the family members' needs. Now the financial and emotional help of his uncle-turned-*padrino* has been pivotal in his completing high school studies and his pursuit of HE. In this way, relying on kinship relations helps young people to navigate their HE aspirations. This was well documented by Gerardo's explanation of how essential his uncle's support was with his graduation expenses. Gerardo helped me to understand the level of assistance provided by a graduation *padrino*:

Me: Is the graduation padrino the one who pays for food and clothes then?

G: Well, for everything...even for the graduation ring¹⁵⁶...and I remember that when I was finishing junior high school...my uncle told me that if I should continue studying...then he would be my graduation padrino

Gerardo perceives his *padrino* as a source of motivational and material resources that has been key in shaping his academic trajectory and continues to be so. Young people typically receive gifts, in-kind help such as food or drinks for their graduation party and financial support to pay for graduation

¹⁵⁶ The purchase of a class graduation ring has become a tradition for high school and university graduates.

photos, school graduation fees or their graduation outfits. *Padrinos* can either take the role of supporting a key life event entirely or make a significant contribution towards it. Someone could take the role of the graduation gown's *padrino* and provide the young person with a gown while someone else might provide the food at the graduation party (Hagene 2015). Having a *padrino* is a way in which families resist their poverty and uncertainty.

As discussed in the previous section, Gerardo's mother's job as a janitor is the main financial sustenance of his family, which means that Gerardo is accustomed to economic uncertainty and hardship. Kinship relations such as *padrinazgo* or *compadrazgo* are a way for individuals living in poverty to defy these uncertainties (Adler-Lomnitz 2012). Gerardo is now thinking about studying an engineering programme. His mother has received advice from her *patrón*, an engineer who says this career will bring economic returns to Gerardo too. Even though Gerardo's mother has a formal job, his family still refer to her boss as the *patrón*, as this is a formal reference to a boss or a superior who looks after you (Rao 2015). The *patrón* has promised to tell Gerardo's mother when the university enrolment starts so that Gerardo can apply. Gerardo's mother, like most parents in my research, does not have first-hand HE experience so her boss provides the knowledge of how to gain access to HE. The *patrón* studied engineering and Gerardo is now considering following in his footsteps. We see how Gerardo faces the challenges and restrictions in his life by expanding his social networks (Hintze 2004).

Nancy, the only indigenous-language speaker participant in my research, also reported receiving support simultaneously from her mother's two *patrones*. Nancy's mother has worked intermittently in domestic service throughout her life and her mother's *patrona* was one of the people who encouraged her to enrol at INEA (open school system for distance learning) so she could learn to read and write. Additionally, Nancy has received

economic support and career advice from her. The *patrona* will be her '*madrina*¹⁵⁷' as she is sponsoring Nancy's graduation expenses, celebration, food, and the dress for her high school graduation ceremony. She has also offered Nancy a Monday to Friday teaching position at the institution where she works. For the weekends, she invites Nancy to stay at her house so that she could also attend a weekend university and the *patrona* in turn would benefit from Nancy's help with house chores during the week. What is noteworthy here is that Nancy's network with her mother's *patrona* is significant in her academic and career plans. Her academic aspirations are not merely personal but are formed through her relationship with her wider social context (Appadurai 2004, Archer et al 2014). Similarly, Patricia is planning to study law because her mother's previous *patrón* gave assurances that he could provide her with a job at his office. He works as a lawyer and Patricia's mother used to do domestic work for him and his family.

Nancy explained that her mother asked her to address her *patrona* as "mother", to acknowledge the maternal role she has in Nancy's life by providing for her whenever she is in need. *Patrones* displaying paternalistic attitudes towards domestic workers and their families was a constant in young people's accounts of their interactions with them. Anthropological research in Mexico has identified that *patrones* compensate for the harsh working conditions (long hours and low pay) by integrating the domestic workers into their families (Reyes Kipp 2009). Besides receiving help from her mother's *patrona*, Nancy told me that she has also been supported by her uncles' *patrones*, specifically with academic counselling. Nancy initially referred to her uncles working for the *patrón* and it was not until later on in our encounters that I learned that Nancy and her mother also did intermittent agricultural work on his land:

¹⁵⁷ Madrina is a godmother.

“My uncle’s patrón sent me universities’ information...on Facebook...he sent me videos of agronomy universities (...) I saw him because I worked for him....in the (agricultural) field and also now...he opened a business where he sells surveillance cameras for houses (...) and I work with him in the afternoons (...) he studied agronomy engineering and he went on an exchange to Costa Rica and he told me that the school is very nice and that he would give me a hand to get ahead...it is like a boarding school”

The *patrón* transmits key resources that are included in Nancy’s university aspirations. In response, Nancy expresses the affective links between her family and the *patrón* (Reyes Kipp 2009). Young people were articulated when identifying their sources of inspiration for their university aspirations. The majority stated that they had received some type of help that will ensure that they ‘get ahead’ in life. The participant observations and interactions I had with participants in my research helped me identify the development of aspirations not at the individual level but as a capacity which is influenced by young people’s social relations (Appadurai 2004).

Mexican society is highly stratified according to social class and status, which are key components for domestic service: poor women wait on and serve the middle and upper classes (Thomson 2009: 283). When initially asked about their mothers’ occupations, young people would express that their mothers worked “en casa”, which referred to the act of providing domestic service. Like Karen and Nancy, young people would say their mothers’ *patrones* were financially better-off and that they always received support in-kind (gifts, clothes, food) and financial loans and assistance for emergencies. It was during one of these emergencies that I was invited to Fernanda’s house. As discussed in the previous section, Fernanda’s mother

works in domestic service. When I visited them in their home, I learned that Fernanda's sister was recovering from a recent operation and that her mother's *patrona* had loaned them money for related expenses. Fernanda shared that she and her family were very grateful to her mother's *patrona*, especially because she was not obliged to loan them money. As my rapport with the young people grew, I became increasingly aware of the importance of *patrones* in their lives. Besides acting as role models, *patrones* provided material and emotional support in the form of personal advice and/or career guidance. However, the main benefit of having a '*palanca*¹⁵⁸' or a *padrino* was that this was often a source of support not only for their schooling but future employment too. Filemón extract exemplifies how the *palanca* embedded in his social network strengthens his capacity to aspire (Appadurai 2004). He is planning to study as a lawyer like his uncle. Like other young people, he perceives his social connections to be instrumental in achieving his career aspirations:

"I have an uncle...he works in the Procurement Office (Government)...but people say he has a strong personality...so I am not very sure if I should ask him for a job...sometimes I think about getting ahead on my own...but you know how it is...sometimes one needs "palancas" to stay at a job...sometimes you can gain it yourself...but in the end, the ones who decide are the ones at the top¹⁵⁹"

Filemón's quote depicts how aspirations connect to [...] culture, including the lifestyle, morals, habits and material life of the community (Appadurai 2004:83). Filemón formulates his career aspirations in terms of accessing the resources available through his social relationships and potential family

¹⁵⁸ Palanca=leverage

¹⁵⁹ Tengo un tío que es creo trabaja en la procuraduría pero dicen que es medio de un carácter fuerte pero no sé si pedirle trabajo o también pienso por salir por mi propia cuenta pero no se cre a veces necesita uno de "palancas" para quedar en un cargo público y ahorita para ganar, algunos se los ganan pero ahora sí que los que deciden siempre son los de arriba

support. In his account, he also identifies the inequalities within Mexico's society and how only people in powerful positions engage in decision-making processes. Participants' narratives are consistent with sociological research in Mexico where it has been seen that young people perceive the need to have *palancas* to achieve career and job success (Flores Miller 2002). Like Filemón and Nancy, other participants in my study reported that their social networks exercised a key role in the development of their aspirations. The value that is generated through young people's participation in social networks is key in the aspiration to access HE. Young people and their families maintain ties of collaboration across these social networks both with biological and kinship members like *padrinos* who become important in terms of pursuing their studies towards a career. Promises of jobs were made by both family members and non-family members in their networks. Miguel was planning to drop out of school before entering high school but his uncle said he should continue studying. Miguel's uncle is a teacher and is the only one from his extended family with a degree. His uncle promised him to '*acomodarlo en un trabajo*'¹⁶⁰ as a librarian at the school where he works when he finished his high school studies. Miguel, like many other young people in my study, values his social network very highly in terms of both education and future employment.

This chapter has analysed young people's social networks and shed light on the key role that these networks play in their university aspirations. It has illustrated how these aspirations are formed within their social and family relationships, including kinship relations. These relations are enacted and re-enacted in light of their life events and needs. Young people participate in the family's strategy for survival. Through it, they aim to get ahead by strengthening their social relationships, thus obtaining in-kind and economic help from significant individuals in their social networks. In turn, they are expected to reciprocate by respecting them and by dedicating time to help their *padrinos* and *patrones*, (not necessarily immediately), in a variety

¹⁶⁰ Place someone at a guaranteed job position.

of activities and chores. This can sometimes represent a conflict in terms of their HE aspirations, as young people plan to enrol in university while simultaneously needing to reciprocate, if they want to continue to access key resources, social support and assistance in times of need.

I have discussed some of the expectations that students feel obligated to fulfil when developing their university aspirations, whether it is helping their families or 'paying back' their *padrinos* and *patrones*. In the final chapter, I look back to my research aims. I summarise the significance of the findings, discuss their implications and make suggestions for future research.

Chapter 7. Concluding reflections

Research looking at HE aspirations has done much to highlight the importance of HE aspirations but has thus far been limited to developed countries such as the United Kingdom, Canada and USA (Bok 2010, Sellar et al 2011, Zipin et al 2015, Gale & Parker 2015, Friesen & Purc-Stephenson 2016, Nielsen 2015). To provide an original contribution to knowledge, this research was sited in Morelos in South-Central Mexico. It goes beyond simply outlining the HE aspirations of young people living in poverty by exploring the everyday lives of twenty young people to understand their HE aspirations and the meanings they, their peers and their families, attribute to these.

As a background to this study, increasing attention in public discourse in Mexico has been given to widening HE participation amongst young people living in poverty. Despite the prominence of this issue on a national and global agenda, there is a lack of coherence in the way policy makers frame and respond to this challenge. Understanding the HE aspirations of young people living in poverty is pivotal, as these aspirations embody their past, present and future (Appadurai 2004). Owing to the frequency and salience of structural barriers, one could ask whether young people's aspirations are in fact pivotal. I argue that exercising, nurturing and pursuing their aspirations enables them to contest over who dictates their future and what is in it.

The theoretical framework I chose to use successfully sheds light on the social and structural influences on young people's HE aspirations. I argue that it is not only important to study HE aspirations but to use this knowledge to inform young people about the types of obstacles they might encounter so as to anticipate them and develop adaptive coping skills. Throughout my thesis, I developed Appadurai's framework and showed how

his theories links to other theories and concerns relative to young people's aspirations. These included concepts related to the interaction between agency, social structures and social navigation. Conceptualisations of social navigation (Vigh 2006) have been used in other disciplines and not been presented in combination with a cultural grounded theorisation of aspirations (Appadurai 2004). Through my theoretical framework I have shown that these concepts work well in dialogue with each other.

This framework evolved through an iterative process of theories and data, thereby contributing to a growing understanding about young people's aspirations to a good life as much more than abstract futures (Crivello 2015). In this thesis I illustrate the complex and multi-faceted nature of young people's HE aspirations and the dynamic interplay of personal and social factors in shaping them. The participatory approach I adopted in this research has enabled rich insights to emerge with regards to the multiple and dynamic ways that young people shape their HE aspirations. My study makes a methodological contribution in that it combines traditional and participatory methods that allow for youth participation. As a conclusion, I now revisit my research questions and provide a summary of my response to these. Implications of the findings for policy are provided together with recommendations for further research.

7.1 What does having a higher education aspiration mean to these students and their families?

From the beginning of this thesis, I have distanced myself from the deficit discourse whereby the barrier to accessing HE for poor young people in Mexico is low or absent (Blanco 2009, Perez-Santiago & Villarruel-Fuentes 2016). My findings demonstrate that poor young people in Mexico have multiple aspirations, including aspirations to access higher education. I have also shown that these young people exercised high levels of agency to

pursue these aspirations, thus further challenging this deficit discourse. My findings therefore add to the literature from the Global North rejecting the notion that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds lack aspirations (Archer et al 2010, St Clair et al 2013, Spohrer 2016).

This study has demonstrated that the meanings young people give to their aspirations are profoundly embedded in their social context. Theorisations of poor young people's HE aspirations show these as being a gateway to economic mobility. Parental perceptions of HE are underpinned by a strong expectation that their children will leave behind their poverty and go beyond the point that they as parents were able to go. Young people see HE as a gateway to social mobility, but also value it as creating the capacity to defend oneself and one's community against an unfair system. I argue that the young people in my study perceive HE as a weapon that will enable them to defend themselves and their families. These findings help us to understand the relational nature of HE aspirations and the importance of families and relations as a space where these aspirations are performed and adjusted (Froerer 2011). In this sense, aspirations are not simply individual and nor are they formed in a vacuum. Rather, they are formed in their social context, drawing on the experiences of those who surround them (Appadurai 2004). Besides these instrumental roles, HE is also perceived by young people as having transformative value, a way in which young people can become someone in life, '*ser alguien en la vida*'. In this concern with self-realisation and social positioning, my research replicates findings from previous Latin American youth studies which suggest that young people's individual and collective worlds are seldom separate (Weiss 2007, Crivello 2011, D'Aloisio 2015).

By highlighting the complexity and dynamic nature of HE aspirations, this thesis makes several contributions. During my ten months of fieldwork, I found that young people's aspirations were far from linear or static. Their understanding of HE and what they could become through it, reflected a view of what constitutes the good life, which differs from individual to individual (Appadurai 2004). Changes in young people's HE aspirations are

rooted in the different values attributed to education, family, community, labour and dependency, which coexist and at times contradict each other. In the face of a poorly resourced environment and an uncertain present and future, young people strategise and work creatively with what they have at hand, in what Weston and Imas (2018) call '*bricolage*'. Thus, their HE aspirations can shift and change according to individual experiences and the opinions of peers and family. In a changing and uncertain environment, young people's HE aspirations are altered in relation to the changing possibilities of realising them (Froerer 2012).

HE is also seen as a tool through which they will be able to give back to their parents and siblings in terms of resources and support. Young people associated the idea of becoming someone through HE with giving back to their families what was given to them. Thus, having HE aspirations represents a way for young people to become someone of value who can help their family lead economically better lives. Here, the process of social mobility is understood by young people and their families as a shared concept, where they are expected to reciprocate what was given to them. Thus, their aspirations are seen as a way to strengthen family bonds. However, families' expectations of young people to reciprocate can also stand in the way of young people's HE aspirations. Despite the agency young people exercise when (re)negotiating their responsibilities towards their family throughout their life, if they are under pressure to contribute economically towards their household, this can often mean 'interrupting' their studies. This supports previous findings by Punch (2007) in Bolivia: the idea of becoming someone of value to their families through HE is therefore a double-edged sword where family ties and a strong sense of cooperation can also constrain young people's HE aspirations (Portes 1998).

Recent research on HE in Mexico has explored the role of culture in shaping HE aspirations (Benavides Lara 2015, Weiss 2009, Guerra Ramirez and Guerra Salinas 2012, Weiss 2012a), but has failed to explore the impact of these reciprocity ties on HE aspirations. This thesis contributes to this emerging body of work by demonstrating how cultural factors such as norms, traditions, and the expectations arising from reciprocity ties, impact young people. I propose that birth order also plays a role in reciprocity ties. Young people with younger siblings are expected to become financial providers, which can be an obstacle for the formation and realisation of their HE aspirations.

My findings also shed light on the gendered dimension within these reciprocity ties showing that such ties are particularly detrimental to the development of young females' HE aspirations, as they are the ones who make more sacrifices for their family. The processes by which young females reciprocate the support of their family members constrain their HE aspirations. At the same time, some female participants perceive HE as an opportunity to challenge the gender roles embedded in their socio-cultural environment. HE aspirations also have a political component as they are seen by young women as a way to reshape their social relations. On the other hand, male students who recognise the political dimension of education for women, see it as a way to give females the ability to negotiate within their gender roles, rather than fundamentally challenge them. My research adds to a related body of Mexican youth studies where it has been proposed that high school is a gateway for young females to challenge the gender expectations around them (Guerra Ramirez and Guerrero Salinas 2012, Weiss 2012b).

Through aspiring to HE, young people see themselves as becoming someone different from their parents, which goes against the inherent collectivism of their other aspirations. Within my study, parental occupations were low or unskilled, gendered and with little or no provision of working benefits.

Parental agentic response to poverty was reflected in their pursuit of multiple occupational pathways to make ends meet, including unauthorised seasonal migration to the USA. Parents' experiences of hardship, particularly in the agricultural field, play a significant role in motivating young people to forge a different pathway. Young people in this research see HE as a way to escape rural poverty. This finding echoes studies in which education is seen as key to leaving behind the agricultural work that their parents are engaged in and as an opportunity for upward social mobility (Rojas and Portugal 2009, Crivello 2011, Guerra Ramirez and Guerrero Salinas 2012). Parents working in farming and agriculture are low paid and have neither healthcare nor benefits nor formal contracts. HE is seen as enabling young people to find work that takes them away from the physical and embodied elements of hardship and insecurity that are associated with agricultural-related jobs (Perez Escobedo and Escobar Moreno 2016). Family members' perception of HE is not uniform, however; it can be seen as a way for their children to enter the formal job market, but it doesn't guarantee that young people will leave agriculture.

A competing aspiration amongst young people and their families is migration, the idea that young people can become someone of value through migrating to the USA. This is problematic as young people need to cross the Mexico-USA border to realise their aspirations. Even though this is a journey that is increasingly unsafe, young people continue to undertake the journey and many of them acquire social status within their families and communities, primarily through sending remittances (Arteaga 2007, Garip and Asad 2016). As such, migrating to the USA is seen as a different route to the same aspiration of becoming someone who can be of value. In this way, we can see that self-realisation on its own is not enough if youths do not perceive that they can also add value to their families or communities. This entails a rethinking of how HE might also offer social status without the sufferings and risks of an unauthorised crossing of the border (Cleaveland 2011). As I have shown, migrating to the USA is often seen by both female and male young people as a back-up plan in the event that they do not secure a university place in their desired careers.

Through my study I contribute a new narrative to the youth studies literature where it has been proposed that young people usually aspire to migrate to USA around junior high school (Rodriguez Gutierrez 2015, Echeverria and Fischer 2016). I argue that even for those who have successfully continued beyond junior high school and are making the transition to high school – a time when poor young people are most likely to abandon their studies – the aspiration to migrate to the USA instead of enrolling in HE is still present in their future imaginaries. Furthermore, participants with family members who had been (un)authorised migrants in the USA earlier in their lives were more likely to be susceptible to the lure of migration given that they had social networks across the border through which they could obtain accommodation and a job. Gender and birth order cut across young people's aspirations to migrate to the USA. Elder brothers were the ones mainly expected to migrate and provide economically for their families (Garip and Asad 2016). Family perceptions also impacted the young participants' aspirations to migrate to the USA as it was easier for the students' families to identify the direct economic returns brought by migrating to USA than the ones brought by enrolling in HE. The lack of job opportunities, low educational achievements and the difficulty of translating HE into socio-economic mobility are some of the factors that cause families to doubt the potential of education to improve life outcomes.

7.2 What is the role of young people's networks in the formation and pursuit of their HE aspirations?

To add to the multidimensional nature of HE aspirations, my findings show how young people form their HE aspirations through social interaction (Appadurai 2004). Both families and kinship relations are central to the social worlds of young people. I propose that it is not only parents who play a central role in the formation of young people's HE aspirations. Guardians, partners and other family members can take on a strong role in young people's HE aspirations and providing support. Even though they shared some similarities, parents and family members were a heterogeneous group,

each family being a complex structure of relationships that influenced students' actions and decisions in different ways. My research adds to the bodies of work on Mexican youth studies where it has been suggested that the low levels of schooling attained by parents and guardians and their lack of HE experience, influence young people's HE aspirations (Figueroa Ruvalcaba et al 2015, Silas Casillas 2012, Ochoa & Diez-Martinez 2009).

The great majority of parents in this study had only completed junior high school studies due to financial issues, the two parents holding a teaching degree being the exceptions. Parents with higher education credentials – a degree- were 'strong framers' (Ball et al 2002, p. 337) of young people's HE aspirations as they actively encouraged both young female and male participants to pursue HE. Parents with lower academic levels were 'weak framers' in shaping their children's educational aspirations, as although they wanted their children to do well academically, they did not necessarily see this as involving HE. They acted as 'onlookers' (Ball et al 2002) of their children's HE aspirations and choices. This attitude is embodied by the expression '*echarle ganas*' that was used frequently in the narratives both of the young people themselves and their parents. Parents with low academic qualifications who expressed support for their children continuing their studies, were unable to envision a clear pathway for them to follow due to not having enough knowledge about HE and how to access it. Besides, the majority of the parents did not know how to navigate high school fees and rules, which was an added barrier to their HE aspirations. Parental engagement could be a mixed blessing as the only two participants who did not change their original aspirations expressed in elementary school were seen to receive less parental support and therefore less input into what they were expected to do.

The findings in this study do not concur with findings from a number of Latin American youth studies that found that poor young people lack role models to identify with (Munar et al 2004, Tapia Garcia et al 2010). Within their structural limitations, young people in my research exercised their agency to identify role models beyond their family. Parents' *patrones* were significant role models for young people's HE aspirations. This can be problematic seeing that the foundation of these relationships can be exploitative and the power *patrones* can exert over families can undermine young people's agency. When framing their desired future selves, young people also look at their negative role models and draw their HE aspirations as an alternative pathway to avoid the precarious circumstances they observed around them. This finding also contrasts with other findings from Mexican youth studies where it has been proposed that young people's relationships with peers who are not studying act as a barrier for their HE aspirations (Perez-Santiago & Villarruel-Fuentes 2016).

According to my data, teachers are key actors in the formation of young people's HE aspirations. The ties between teachers and young people are strong and often transcend the academic sphere. In their limited free time, teachers can be a source of informal paid employment for young people, although this can be problematic, as giving young people extra tasks in exchange for small sums of money can become a distraction from their studies. However, teachers were also found to provide financial support in the form of money loans, gifts (clothes, food), and cash contributions towards key life events such as their graduation. In this way, teachers also function as *padrinos*. Besides providing emotional support, they defend students' rights to governmental cash scholarships, which then support student attendance. Teachers also became temporary guardians to young people with financial struggles. However, I argue that teachers' role is complex: it can limit HE aspirations, particularly for females in that teachers can perpetuate

the expectations that females will seek feminised service industry sector jobs in places such as beauty parlours where HE credentials are not necessary.

To cope with the daily economic uncertainties, young people and their families rely on tightly knit networks that include kinship relationships with *patrones*, *padrinos* and *palancas*. Based on my findings, I suggest that young people's aspirations are underpinned by their family and kinship. I see *padrinos*, *patrones* and *palancas* as forming a complex system of reciprocity networks that overlap each other. I compare these networks with a spiderweb as they are equally intricate. These relationships are enacted and re-enacted in light of their life events. They become a complex web of shifting relationships, which are latent or active depending on individuals' needs. The relationships within these networks are woven together to create complex social norms of reciprocity and respect that participants have to adhere to. Besides *patrones* being perceived as role models for young people's HE aspirations, they also act as second parents and provide the resources that parents lack, a feature which is shared by both *padrinos* and *palancas* (Velez-Calle et al 2015). The exploitative elements present in the relationship between *patrones* and young people should not be underestimated. Within the social structure of quasi-patronage, I argue that young people have agency to envisage their HE aspirations and pursue them, with the resources provided by their families' *patrones*. The problem is that the implicit reciprocity can mean *patrones* can interfere in a young person's career choices, thus favouring the *patrones'* own interests and undermining the young person's agency.

Young people's *palancas* can provide a gateway for accessing not only HE but jobs too. The tension arises when these jobs are presented as an alternative to HE. There is an added constriction for young people who have *palancas* who are (un)authorised migrants in the USA, as receiving

support and reciprocating that support in other ways often motivates them to migrate to the USA instead of attending HE. The reciprocity in these relationships can create a conflict with the formulation of young people's HE aspirations while enrolled -or even before enrolling - in HE. Those who are perceived not to be participating in these reciprocal exchanges, face consequences such as exclusion and losing group membership (and its benefits). This tension is significant in young people's considerations of their future, as their kinship and social relations are central to pursuing their HE aspirations. To my knowledge, this study is the first one to investigate the impact that kinship such as the *padrino-ahijado* dyad have over the shaping of young people's HE aspirations. It adds to understanding that HE aspirations are not just formed at an individual level.

7.3 How do young people's social networks influence the way they shape and navigate their HE aspirations?

In this thesis, I argue against the belief that young people's HE aspirations can be simply explained by their socioeconomic status. While economic resources available to a family are important, this perspective fails to recognise the values, traditions and processes that young people participate in while formulating their HE aspirations. I challenge the view of young people's pursuit of HE being driven only by the desire for individual economic status. Instead, I have shown how their understandings of the value of HE combines the individual and the collective.

I further argue that focusing on young people's experiences offers a greater insight into the structural factors that shape and constrain their aspirations towards HE. In accordance with Appadurai's ideas, I have argued in my thesis that the cultural context of individuals has great influence over the formation of their HE aspirations. Among these individuals, it is the influence of families that is pivotal. When constructing their present and future realities, it is *familismo* and class that frame the ways in which young people living in poverty consider their families' needs. The HE aspirations

of the young people in this study were radically (re)shaped by the views and experiences of their family members. As a great deal of the lives of family members and peers around the young people were characterised by economic hardship, young people adjusted and lowered their aspirations before they encounter challenges. By securing promises of jobs at the end of their studies, young people negotiated the uncertainty and lowered the risks.

This work provides a substantial contribution to the literature. To my knowledge, it is the first study that uses Vigh's (2006) concept of social navigation as a lens to explore young people's HE aspirations in the uncertain social context of Mexican youth in poverty. Building on Vigh's (2006) work, I have emphasised that the ways in which young people navigate through their HE aspirations requires not only strategizing for survival but their agency in doing so. Young people assess their position and actualise their routes in navigating towards HE. Accordingly, their HE aspirations were specific and subject to change and revision. Within this complex navigation process, young people's social structures can be limiting and recognising the terrain in which they move requires knowledge of the field such as HE rules, scholarships and regulations.

The insights gained from my study challenge the view of *chambas* currently given in Mexican youth studies (Guerra Ramirez 2012, Weiss 2012b) as an alternative space to technological high school that students engage in while taking a break from their studies. My findings show that young people's *chambas* have both an inhibiting and enabling role in relation to the formation and development of HE aspirations. As highlighted by young people's diverse narratives, these *chambas* are embedded within their family and their communities, enabling the reconfiguration of family relationships and helping young people (re)negotiate their interdependence with their family and shifting the roles of power within their household.

Additionally, young people reflect on their *chambas* not always as temporary while taking a break from their studies but as an alternative path to HE. In this way, their HE aspirations are often constructed in opposition to these precarious jobs and activities. Factors such as age, relations, and gender impacted on the nature of their *chambas*, which are particularly disadvantageous for females as they are the ones responsible for the domestic work and also for caring for others in the family. By not participating in paid work outside the household, female young people have fewer opportunities to save money towards HE related expenses.

7.4 Future research and policy implications

The construction of aspirations is a continuous process that is affected by individuals' social contexts. As such, understanding young people's past, present and the representations of their futures, is key to exploring young people's HE aspirations. My research was not able to accompany the young people long enough to examine the realisation of their HE aspirations. To better understand how HE aspirations are built and developed, it would be helpful to include a longitudinal component whereby young people's experiences after their high school can be analysed too. This could provide in depth analysis of social mobility processes within young people's lives.

It would have also extended the scope of this study if young people's *padrinos*, *patrones* and *palancas* had been interviewed about their perceptions of HE, alongside that of the young people. This analysis could have shed light on the pattern of family influences and contextualise the interaction and impact these have on young people's lives and aspirations. Comparing the experiences of young people living in poverty with others from other social backgrounds would have given more insights into specific differences between how young people's backgrounds enhance or hinder their HE

aspirations. Ethnicity and its intersection with the ways in which young people living in poverty formulate their HE aspirations also merits further exploration in future HE aspirations research. Looking at the ways in which ethnicity intersects with gender, socioeconomic status and other social factors, such as age or immigration, is a possible further avenue of research. Given the position of Mexico's indigenous communities and the widening participation agenda, research is urgently needed that asks how indigenous young people's aspirations are shaped. Would their experiences differ from the young people who took part in this study?

My findings suggest that trying to foster HE aspirations without consideration of young people's wider lives, which is the current approach of Mexico's government, is too simplistic. Education policies in Mexico need to go beyond the provision of scholarships. Academic programmes should target not only young people but extend to their families and communities, particularly in the Mexican rural context. HE institutions and policy makers should tap into the values and traditions of the communities of the young people living in poverty, who have traditionally not valued HE as a trajectory, to design programmes for widening HE participation and ultimately alter the 'terms of recognition'¹⁶¹ (Appadurai 2004:67). If the latter is not accomplished, the education system is at risk of reinforcing pre-existing social inequalities.

With my thesis, I intend to raise awareness of why policy makers should pay attention to young people's perspectives, which are currently underrepresented in the political and social discourse. Policy ought to focus on strengthening young people's capacity to aspire and understand how this is interwoven with their wider lives, rather than simply focus on raising their HE aspirations. This approach and the related academic policy

¹⁶¹ the conditions and constraints under which the poor negotiate with the norms framing their social life

discourse of aspirations has been the case to date in Mexico and other countries such as UK and Australia. From a constructivist framework, I hope this study promotes a critical reflection on the importance of individual-centred analysis and their social networks in policy-making processes. Each of the young men and women in this study have very individual narratives that give a nuanced insight into the ways in which HE aspirations are articulated and how these shape their engagement with education. Policy and research around HE aspirations needs to take into consideration the diverse experiences of young people living in poverty, a group whose experiences are commonly generalised.

The conceptual framework proposed in this thesis serves as an alternative lens for policy makers to use to make sense of the meanings young people attach to the formation of their HE aspirations. Policy needs to comprehend the local cultures in which aspirations are grounded. It is our responsibility to regularly interrogate how we define and assign agency and success in our academic discourse. Finally, policy makers need to support young people's voices and the forums where they can exercise these. I want to finish my thesis by giving voice again to Juan. The narrative he offered me shows how Mexican young people's passage to university goes beyond the immediate purview of the school. Their aspirations are constructed amongst coexisting and contradictory orientations to the individual and collective spheres: *"This stage that I am going through right before going to university where I cannot think with a young person's mentality but with an adult's one instead, every step that I take is with my family and my family goes in front of me"*¹⁶²

¹⁶² Esta etapa que voy a pasar a la universidad que ya no puedo pensar en mentalidad de joven sino de adulto, cada paso que de lo doy con mi familia y mi familia va por delante.

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Appendix I. Mexican education system

The following table describes the Mexican education system according to the National Institute for the Evaluation of Education (2014) based on the Ministry of Education guidelines and on the General Law on Education from 2014. The Basic and Middle higher education constituted by Preschool, Primary, Junior high school and high school or professional education without antecedent are considered mandatory. This table also includes the transition points between each of these levels that are constituted by terminal exams aimed at identifying the inequity between learning of different population groups and evaluating the learnings and achievement of students (PLANEA 2015). It is important to consider that the results from these terminal exams do not yield negative impact on students. The National Entrance Exams are managed by the National Centre of Evaluation for HE. (CENEVAL 2016) and they provide information on the success possibilities students have when participating in highschool and in HE. The EGEL, also instituted by CENEVAL, is the General Exit Examination for Bachelor's degree and is currently developed for 40 Bachelor's Degree programmes.

Educational type	Educational level	Educational model	Typical age	Duration in years
Basic education	Preschool	CENDI General Indigenous Communitary	3-5	3
	Primary	General Indigenous Communitary	6-11	6
	Terminal Exam from "PLANEA" The National Plan for the Evaluation of Learnings			
	Junior high school	General Technical Telesecundaria (Distance learning through televisions) Communitary	12-14	3
		For workers	-	-
Terminal Exam from "PLANEA" The National Plan for the Evaluation of Learnings				

National Exam for High School Entrance: "EXANI – I" from "CENEVAL" National Centre for Higher Education Evaluation					
Middle education	higher	High school or professional education without antecedent	General high school Technological high school Technical professional	15-17	2-5
National exam for Bachelor's degree Entrance: "EXANI – II" from "CENEVAL" National Centre for Higher Education Evaluation					
Higher education	Bachelor's degree	Normal education (for teachers) University Technological	-	-	
	General Exit Examination for the Bachelor's degree (EGEL) – (by area) from "CENEVAL" National Centre for Higher Education Evaluation				
	National exam for Postgraduate Entrance: "EXANI – III" from "CENEVAL" National Centre for Higher Education Evaluation				
	Postgraduate	Speciality Masters PhD	-	-	

Appendix II. The Mexican Higher Education system

According to Mexico's Ministry of Education (2019) 66.1% of Mexican young people don't attend university.

Mexico's HE public system is formed by a wide variety of institutions. These are categorized by the Mexican government (2019b) as follows:

Type of university	Duration	Number of institutions	Percentage of HE students enrolled
<p>❖ <i>Federal Universities</i></p> <p>HE institutions with federal government funding.</p>	<p>Universities offer undergraduate (4 years) and postgraduate programmes. Certain Engineering and Architecture courses offer an extra semester (4.5 years' programme).</p>		10% of HE students
<p>❖ <i>State Universities</i></p> <p>Decentralized public bodies created by decree of the local congress.</p>	<p>These Universities offer undergraduate (4 and 4.5 years) and postgraduate programmes.</p>		30% of HE students
<p>❖ <i>Teacher training colleges - Normal</i></p> <p>From 1984, the "La Escuela Normal"(Teacher training college) became a Higher Education Institution. They are in charge of training teachers for the basic education level (preschool, elementary, junior high school). An analysis of the Normales teacher training</p>	4 years	<p>By 2016, there were 484 "Escuelas Normales" in Mexico (Solano 2016).</p>	2% of HE students

colleges proposes that they have a lower quality of academic provision than the rest of HEIs in Mexico (Perfiles educativos 2018).			
<p>❖ <i>Technological universities</i></p> <p>Since 1991, technological universities were established in places with few HE institutions. Their aim is to provide service to low-economic background students (Flores Crespo 2009).</p>	<p>Technological universities provide a basic (two-year) formation at the university level where a HE certificate as a “Técnico Superior Universitario” (University Technician) is obtained. They also offer the possibility to enroll in a <i>licenciatura</i> (licentiate) or an engineering career later (with an additional one year of studies). These options are available in other technological universities.</p>	<p>There are 114 technological universities in Mexico (Ministry of Education 2019).</p>	<p>6% of HE students</p>
<p>❖ <i>Technological Institutes</i></p> <p>Higher Education institutions have over 65 years specializing in the teaching and learning of technologies such as xxxx.</p>	<p>Some of them offer 2-year programmes and the rest offer 4- and 4.5-year programmes.</p>	<p>There are 266 institutions.</p>	<p>15% of HE students</p>
<p>❖ <i>Politechnical Universities</i></p>	<p>4- and 4.5-year programmes</p>		<p>2% of HE students</p>

<p>Besides offering the option of a Licentiate or an Engineering university programme, they also offer a lateral exit for students who do not finish their degree (associate professional). There are 62 politechnical universities in Mexico. 2% of HE students are enrolled at this university model (Ministry of Education 2017).</p>			
<p>❖ <i>National Pedagogical University</i></p> <p>Offers undergraduate and postgraduate programmes for Education professionals/teachers. It has 76 units and 208 academic institutions in the country which constitute the National System of Units. These universities initially recruited graduates from the teacher training colleges and by 1984 the teacher training colleges were elevated into higher education institutions.</p>			<p>2% of HE students</p>

<p>❖ <i>Open and at Distance University</i></p> <p>Created in 2012 to satisfy the growing HE demand in Mexico. Offers flexible study plans through the use of information technologies and technological networks. The official 2017 Ministry of Educations’s report of HE statistics were not disaggregated to include this subsystem.</p>			1% of HE students
<p>❖ <i>Intercultural Universities</i></p> <p>Created in 2004 to target Mexico’s indigenous population (Dietz 2014). They offer undergraduate and postgraduate programmes (4 and 4.5 yrs) that contribute to value the indigenous languages and cultures. The official 2017 Ministry of Educations’s report of HE statistics were not disaggregated to include this subsystem. This university model is perceived of less value in</p>			0.3% of HE students

relation to the others (Ávila Romero & Ávila Romero 2016).			
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The Mexican Higher Education system is very diverse and has other institutions that could not be categorised in the above subsystems (Mexican Ministry of Education 2019).

- Education in Library and Archivonomy
- Institutions of Military Education
- Institutions of Navy Military Education
- Education in judicial matters, security and justice impartation
- Education in Fine Arts
- Education in Health
- Adult Education in Latin America and the Caribbean
- Education in Anthropology and History
- Education in Sports
- Education in Merchant navy

Higher Education Coverage 2012-2013

State	Percentage	Position
Distrito Federal	60.6	1
Nuevo León	38.5	2
Sonora	38.1	3
Sinaloa	37.4	4
Tamaulipas	34.5	5
Aguascalientes	33.9	6
Chihuahua	33.3	7
Colima	32.4	8
Coahuila	31.7	9
Puebla	31.5	10
Yucatán	30.5	11
Baja California	30.4	12
Tabasco	30.2	13
Campeche	29.6	14
Baja California Sur	29.4	15
Querétaro	28.9	16
Hidalgo	28.9	17
Nayarit	28.7	18
República Mexicana	28.6	0
Jalisco	27.8	19



Morelos	27.5	20
Zacatecas	25.8	21
Durango	25.4	22
San Luis Potosí	25.3	23
Tlaxcala	24.1	24
México	23.4	25
Veracruz	22.4	26
Michoacán	21.6	27
Quintana Roo	19.2	28
Guanajuato	18.5	29
Oaxaca	16.8	30
Guerrero	16.7	31
Chiapas	14.4	32

**HIGHER EDUCATION COVERAGE IN MEXICO
2013-2014**



State	Percentage	Position
Distrito Federal	64.9	1
Sinaloa	39.3	2
Nuevo León	38.6	3
Sonora	38.4	4
Aguascalientes	34.8	5
Chihuahua	34.5	6
Tamaulipas	34.2	7
Colima	33.5	8
Coahuila	32.7	9
Yucatán	31.9	10
Puebla	31.6	11
Tabasco	30.9	12
Baja California	30.7	13
Hidalgo	30.7	14
Campeche	30.3	15
Querétaro	30	16
Baja California Sur	29.9	17
Nayarit	29.4	18
Mexico (national mean)	29.4	0
Jalisco	29.2	19
Zacatecas	27.6	20
Morelos	26.7	21
San Luis Potosí	26.2	22
Durango	25.4	23

Estado de México	24.6	24
Tlaxcala	24.1	25
Veracruz	22.8	26
Michoacán	21.5	27
Quintana Roo	21	28
Guanajuato	19	29
Guerrero	17.1	30
Oaxaca	16.8	31
Chiapas	14.6	32

Appendix V. Global Index of Peace indicators (Insitute for Economics and Peace 2018)

TABLE A.1

Indicator Weights in the GPI

Internal Peace 60% / External Peace 40%

INTERNAL PEACE (Weight 1 to 5)		EXTERNAL PEACE (Weight 1 to 5)	
Perceptions of criminality	3	Military expenditure (% GDP)	2
Security officers and police rate	3	Armed services personnel rate	2
Homicide rate	4	UN peacekeeping funding	2
Incarceration rate	3	Nuclear and heavy weapons capabilities	3
Access to small arms	3	Weapons exports	3
Intensity of internal conflict	5	Refugees and IDPs	4
Violent demonstrations	3	Neighbouring countries relations	5
Violent crime	4	External conflicts fought	2.28
Political instability	4	Deaths from external conflict	5
Political terror	4		
Weapons imports	2		
Terrorism impact	2		
Deaths from internal conflict	5		
Internal conflicts fought	2.56		

Appendix VI. Poverty as defined by CONEVAL (2016)

In the Mexican context, CONEVAL's multidimensional measurement of poverty is established under the General Law of Social Development (2004) which guarantees access to social development¹⁶³ for the Mexican population and should be mandatory applied for all entities and public institutes that are implementing social development projects. It will be based on information stemming from the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI), and other convenient sources i.e. the National Council of Population in Mexico.

According to CONEVAL (2016), a person lives in poverty when he/she has at least one social deprivation (from the six indicators);

Social deprivation indicator	Measurement
Food access	When at least one of the household members has a degree of moderate or severe food insecurity
Access to health services	Persons that are not entitled to medical services from any institution providing these; including: Seguro Popular, public institutions of social security (IMSS ¹⁶⁴ , ISSSTE ¹⁶⁵ , Pemex ¹⁶⁶ , the army or the marine) or private medical services
Access to social security	Social security is the mechanism that guarantees subsistence for individuals

¹⁶³ social development rights - or social rights- are relatives to no discrimination, education, health, food, housing, the enjoyment of a healthy environment, work and social security.

¹⁶⁴ Mexican Social Security Institute

¹⁶⁵ Institute for Social Security and Services for State workers

¹⁶⁶ Mexican Petroleums

	<p>facing socially challenging situations such as pregnancy or old age.</p> <p>For populations in general: access is considered when the person is enrolled in a retirement or pension scheme, or the person has parental relations with someone who has access to social security.</p> <p>For the active economic population receiving a salary: There is no lack of access if person enjoys the benefits of the Social Security Law</p> <p>For independently active economic population not receiving a salary: Access is considered when an individual enjoys either medical services as part of the labour benefits, has voluntary enrolment on the IMSS, has SAR (Savings System for Retirement) or an Afore (Pension Funds Manager).</p>
Household space and quality	<p>When the household has at least one of the following characteristics;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Soil floors

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ceiling made from aluminium plates, cardboard or waste material - Walls made from reed, bamboo or palm, cardboard sheet, metal sheets or waste material -The ratio of members per room (overcrowding) is more than 2.5.
Access to basic household services	<p>When the household has at least one of the following characteristics;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Water is obtained from: a well, river, another household or public hydrante -Without sewer services, or drainage leads to a river, lake or sea. -Without electric energy -Fuel used for cooking is wood or charcoal without a chimney
Educational lag	<p>Requires one of the following circumstances;</p> <p>Person between 3-15 years without basic compulsory education or not attending a formal education centre</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Person born before 1982 without the mandatory educational level valid at the time (completed primary).

	- Person born from 1982 without the mandatory educational level (completed junior high school).
--	---

and their personal income is not enough to acquire the goods and services required to satisfy their food and non-food needs (public transport, hygiene, personal care, education, culture and recreation, communication and services for vehicles, housing and its maintenance services, clothing, domestic utensils, health care, leisure items and others).

The official measurement of poverty describes the social situation of the entire Mexican population and the type of attention required by each population group. This characteristic is unique in the history of poverty measurement in Mexico. Besides, it provides relevant information to make poverty reduction public policies more effective.

A person is living in extreme poverty when he/she experiences three or more social deprivations and does not have sufficient income to buy the basic food basket.

A person is vulnerable due to social deprivation when he/she experiences at least one social deprivation but has sufficient income to buy the aggregation of the basic food basket with the basic non-food basket.

A person is vulnerable due to income when he/she does not have sufficient income to buy the aggregation of the basic food basket with the basic non-food basket but has no social deprivations.

The '*línea de bienestar*' (well-being line) is the monetary value of a basket of food, goods and basic services: (food and non-food needs).

As of June 2016, The monthly urban well-being line was \$2,653.84¹⁶⁷ Mexican pesos per person.

¹⁶⁷ Constitutes 36 minimum salaries

The monthly rural well-being line was \$1,711.41¹⁶⁸ Mexican pesos per person.

¹⁶⁸ Constitutes 23 minimum salaries

Appendix VII. Social deprivation¹⁶⁹ indicators at a municipal and state level.

Sources: Ministry of Social Development (2016), Ministry of Social Development (2016a), Ministry of Social Development (2016b)

Social deprivation indicators	Ayala (2015)	Morelos (state level) (2014)
<p>Educational lag:</p> <p>One of the following circumstances required;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Person between 3-15 years without basic compulsory education or not attending a formal education centre -Person born before 1982 without the mandatory educational level, valid at the time (complete primary). - Person born from 1982 without the mandatory educational level (complete junior high school). 	22.0%	16.6%
<p>Lack of access to health services:</p> <p>Person that is not entitled to medical services from any institution providing these; Seguro Popular, public institutions of social security (IMSS, ISSSTE, Pemex, the army</p>	14.5%	16.6%

¹⁶⁹ Calculated using information from the Unique Questionnaire of Socioeconomic Information for every household or person

or the marine) or private
medical services

Lack of household space and quality	15.4%	13.4%
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When the household has at
least one of the following
characteristics;

-Soil floors

- Ceiling made from alumium
plates, cardboard or waste
material

- Walls made from reed,
bamboo or palm, cardboard
sheet, metal sheets or waste
material

-The ratio of members per
room (overcrowding) is more
than 2.5.

Lack of access to basic household services	29.7%	24.6%
---	-------	-------

When the household has at
least one of the following
characteristics;

-Water is obtained from a well,
river, another household or
public hydrante

-Without sewer services, or
drainage leads to a river, lake or
sea.

-Without electric energy

-Fuel used to cook is wood or
charcoal without a chimney

Lack of food access	20.2%	26.9%
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When at least one of the household members has a degree of moderate or severe food insecurity

Appendix VIII. List of topics to cover in the life histories and semi-structured interviews with students

- Early years and family life
- Early education
- Junior high school experiences
- People whom the student talked to about their academic desires
- Perceived female/male responsibilities
- Goals to be achieved
- Perceived difficulties/barriers for goal attainment
- Possible ways of overcoming barriers
- Education's role in achieving own goals
- Perceived meaning and value of education
- Perceived opportunities
- Expectations of university
- Plans for the future

- Friends' plans for the future
- Significant others' opinions regarding own plans for the future

Appendix IX. List of topics to cover in the semi-structured interviews with parents

- Current jobs/activities
- Educational achievements
- Perceptions on education
- Own experiences within education
- Expectations for students' future
- View on what constitutes a "good future" for students
- Family support for students' education

APPLICANT INFORMATION

To be completed by the applicant

Forename	Claudia Yvonne
Surname	Linan Segura
Student ID number <i>(if applicable)</i>	100084380
UG, PGT or PGR <i>(if applicable)</i>	PGT
Supervisor <i>(if applicable)</i>	Maria Abranches
Project Title	Aspirations and expectations amongst Mexican Youth: The role of educational and labor policies in the transition out of high school

RESUBMISSIONS – IF YOU ARE ASKED TO RESUBMIT YOUR APPLICATION FOLLOWING REVIEW BY THE COMMITTEE PLEASE ALSO ATTACH **A LETTER** WITH YOUR REVISED APPLICATION DETAILING HOW YOU HAVE RESPONDED TO THE COMMITTEE’S COMMENTS. **Students please ensure your supervisor has approved your revisions before resubmission.**

REVIEWERS’ RECOMMENDATION

To be completed by the Ethics Committee

Accept	x
Request modifications	
Reject	

REVIEWERS’ CHECKLIST

Delete as appropriate

Risks and inconvenience to participants are minimised and not unreasonable given the research question/ project purpose.		
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All relevant ethical issues are acknowledged and understood by the researcher.		
Procedures for informed consent are sufficient and appropriate		

REVIEWERS' COMMENTS

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COMMITTEE'S RECOMMENDATION

This application is approved

SIGNATURE (CHAIR OF THE INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT ETHICS COMMITTEE)

Signature	Date
<i>Stella Akman</i>	12.5.15

Appendix XI. Information Sheet and Consent form

My name is Claudia Linan, a PhD student from the University of East Anglia in Norwich, United Kingdom.

I am carrying out this research project that is looking at how young people construct and shape and realise their aspirations for their educational future and how they perceive the opportunities and constraints for it.

I will be carrying out life histories and interviews. In the life histories, I will ask you about your perceptions of your past and present experiences. I would also like to know about your perspective regarding your future goals and what you need to achieve them.

Please feel free to ask any questions you have at whichever stage. Participation is completely voluntary and you are free to say that you do not wish to participate – either now or after I have given you further information. Let me remind you, no one else at school will know if you choose not to participate.

I cannot promise any direct benefits from taking part in this research but I will give you a soda and a snack while we talk.

I will use the results from this study for my PhD thesis. I do hope that I will be able to provide a short general account of my findings, but this is a small study so I cannot for example, expect to be able to influence local policy or practice.

The information from your life history or interview will be used with all the other information I collect. You will not be named. All information will be treated confidentially and anything made public will always be anonymous. For example, if I wanted to repeat something that you say, I would refer to you using a code, such as 'Interviewee 34 told us ...'.

If you are willing to participate, you will initially be agreeing to a short interview about your plans for your education. Following that, if you are willing, I'd also like to collect your life history (this might be over two to three sessions, of, say one hour each). Your participation would be voluntary for each of the sessions and you can withdraw your participation at any time (even after the first or second sessions).

If you decided that you do not wish to take part, you can stop the interview at any point and I will not use the information you have given me. If after the interview you decide that you do not want me to use your information you can contact me to ask for the information to be withdrawn, and I will withdraw it and destroy it.

If you want to ask someone other than me about my project please contact Gabriela Navarro, director of the school on gabriela.navarro@cecytemorelos.edu.mx or (777) 3139321 Ext. 124 or Catherine Jere, my main PhD supervisor, on c.jere@uea.ac.uk or (0044) 160359 3383

My contact details are: 044 777 233 51 36 or c.linan-segura@uea.ac.uk

AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE AND HAVE MEETINGS DIGITALLY RECORDED

I confirm that the research information was presented in written form and read to me. Anything I did not understand was explained and all my questions were answered. I understand I can withdraw my participation and any or all of the information which I give at any time.

I, agree/do not agree to participate in the study

I, agree/do not agree to have the meetings digitally recorded.

Signature or mark of interviewee:
Date:

Signature of Researcher
Date:

Hoja informativa y forma de consentimiento informado.

Mi nombre es Claudia Linan, soy estudiante del Doctorado en Desarrollo Internacional en Universidad del Este de Anglia en Norwich, Reino Unido.

Estoy realizando este proyecto de investigación que se enfoca en conocer como los jóvenes construyen y forman sus aspiraciones para su futuro educativo y como perciben las oportunidades y barreras para ello.

Estaré realizando entrevistas. En las entrevista, te preguntaré acerca de tus percepciones e interacciones importantes con tu hijo(a), ya sea en el pasado en el presente. También me gustaría conocer tu punto de vista acerca de las metas de tu hijo(a) y lo que necesita para lograrlas.

Por favor siéntete en confianza de preguntarme cualquier pregunta en cualquier momento de cualquiera cosa relacionada con esta investigación. Tu participación es completamente voluntaria y nadie más sabrá si no deseas participar. Eres libre de decir si es que no deseas participar, ya sea ahora o después de que hayas recibido más información.

No puedo prometer ningún beneficio directo de tomar parte en esta investigación, pero te puedo dar un refresco y un bocadillo mientras platicamos.

Usaré los resultados de este estudio para mi tesis del Doctorado. Espero poder darte un resumen de mis resultados al finalizar, pero al ser un estudio pequeño no puedo prometer que estos van a influenciar políticas locales.

La información de tu entrevista será utilizada con toda la otra información que recolecte. Tu nombre no será publicado. Toda la información será tratada confidencialmente y cualquier cosa que sea publicada se hará de manera anónima. Por ejemplo, si quisiera repetir algo que tú me hayas dicho, yo me referiría a ti usando un código, como “El entrevistado 34 me dijo...”

Si estás dispuesto a participar, inicialmente estarías aceptando a participar en una entrevista de aproximadamente una hora en donde te preguntaré acerca de tus perspectivas con respecto a las metas educativas de tu hijo(a) y sus planes para lograrlas.

Si decides que no estas interesado en participar, puedes detener la entrevista en cualquier momento y la información que me hayas dado no será utilizada. Si después de la entrevista decides que ya no te gustaría que yo utilice tu información, puedes contactarme para que la información sea quitada de mi estudio. Tu información entonces será borrada y destruida.

Si le quieres preguntar a alguien más acerca de mi Proyecto por favor contacta a Gabriela Navarro, la directora de la escuela en gabriela.navarro@cecytemorelos.edu.mx o al (777) 3139321 Ext. 124

O a Catherine Jere, mi supervisora del Doctorado, en c.jere@uea.ac.uk o al 0044 160359 3383

Mi contacto es el siguiente: 044 777 233 51 36 or c.linan-segura@uea.ac.uk

ACUERDO PARA PARTICIPAR EN EL ESTUDIO Y QUE NUESTRAS SESIONES SEAN GRABADAS

Yo confirmo que la información de la investigación me fue presentada de forma escrita y me fue leída. Cualquier cosa que no entendí se me explico y todas mis preguntas fueron contestadas. Entiendo que en cualquier momento puedo decidir no seguir participando y que toda la información que he dado será usada de la manera en que yo decida.

Yo _____ estoy de acuerdo/no estoy de acuerdo en participar en el estudio

Yo _____ estoy de acuerdo/no estoy de acuerdo en que nuestras juntas sean grabadas

Firma del entrevistado

Fecha:

Firma del investigador

Fecha:

Appendix XIII. Information Sheet and Consent form (Minor)

My name is Claudia Linan, a PhD student from the University of East Anglia in Norwich, United Kingdom.

Purpose of the research study: I am carrying out this research project that is looking at how young people construct and shape and realise their aspirations for their educational future and how they perceive the opportunities and constraints for it.

What your child will do in the study: I will be carrying out life histories and interviews with your child. In the life histories, I will ask students about their perceptions of past and present experiences. I would also like to know about their perspective regarding their future goals and what they need to achieve them.

Voluntary participation: Participation is completely voluntary and you are free to say that you do not wish for your child to participate – either now or after I have given you further information. Let me remind you, this research is independent from the school and no one else will know if you choose not to participate.

Benefits: I cannot promise any direct benefits from taking part in this research but I will give your child a soda and a snack while we talk.

Findings: I will use the results from this study for my PhD thesis. I do hope that I will be able to provide a short general account of my findings, but this is a small study so I cannot for example, expect to be able to influence local policy or practice.

Anonymous data: The information from the life history or interview will be used with all the other information I collect. Your child will not be named. All information will be treated confidentially and anything made public will always be anonymous. For example, if I wanted to repeat something that your child said, I would refer to him/her using a code, such as 'Interviewee 34 told us ...'.

Time required: If you are willing to allow your child to participate and if he/she is also willing. Students will initially attend a short interview about their plans for their education. Following that, if both of you are still willing, I'd also like to collect students' life history (this might be over two to three sessions, of, say one hour each). Participation will be voluntary for each of the sessions and he/she can withdraw from participating at any time (even after the first or second sessions). Let me remind you, that all interviews will always take place at school.

Right to withdraw from the study: If you or your child decided that he/she does not wish to take part, you can do so and let me know at any point and I will not use the information your child have given me. If after the interview one of you decides that you do not want me to use his/her information, you can contact me to ask for the information to be withdrawn, and I will withdraw it and destroy it.

If you want to ask someone other than me about my project please contact Gabriela Navarro, director of the school on gabriela.navarro@cecytemorelos.edu.mx or (777) 3139321 Ext. 124 or Catherine Jere, my main PhD supervisor, on c.jere@uea.ac.uk or (0044) 160359 3383

My contact details are: 044 777 233 51 36 or c.linan-segura@uea.ac.uk

AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE AND HAVE MEETINGS DIGITALLY RECORDED

I confirm that the research information was presented in written form and read to me. Anything I did not understand was explained and all my questions were answered. I understand I can withdraw my child's participation and any or all of the information which I give at any time.

I, agree/do not agree to allow my child to participate in the research study described above.

I, agree/do not agree to allow my child's meetings digitally recorded.

Signature or mark of Parent:
Date:

Signature of Researcher
Date:

Hoja informativa y forma de consentimiento informado_Menor de edad

Mi nombre es Claudia Linan, soy estudiante del Doctorado en Desarrollo Internacional en Universidad del Este de Anglia en Norwich, Reino Unido.

Proposito del estudio: Estoy realizando este proyecto de investigación que se enfoca en conocer como los jóvenes construyen y forman sus aspiraciones para su futuro educativo y como perciben las oportunidades y barreras para ello.

Lo que su hijo hará en el estudio: Estaré realizando historias de vida y entrevistas. En las historias de vida, le preguntaré a los estudiantes acerca de sus percepciones y opinión de experiencias de su pasado y presente. También me gustaría conocer sus punto de vista de sus metas futuras y de lo que necesita para lograrlas.

Participación voluntaria: Por favor siéntete en confianza de preguntarme cualquier pregunta en cualquier momento de cualquiera cosa relacionada con esta investigación. Tu decisión de que tu hijo(a) participe es completamente voluntaria y nadie más sabrá si no lo deseas. Eres libre de decir si es que no deseas participar, ya sea ahora o después de que hayas recibido más información. Te recuerdo que mi investigación es independiente de la escuela.

Beneficios: No puedo prometer ningún beneficio directo de tomar parte en esta investigación, pero le daré a tu hijo un refresco y un bocadillo mientras platicamos.

Hallazgos: Usaré los resultados de este estudio para mi tesis del Doctorado. Espero poder darles un resumen de mis resultados al finalizar, pero al ser un estudio pequeño no puedo prometer que estos van a influenciar políticas locales.

Anonimidad: La información de las historias de vida y de las entrevista será utilizada con toda la otra información que recolecte. El nombre de tu hijo no será publicado. Toda la información será tratada confidencialmente y cualquier cosa que sea publicada se hará de manera anónima. Por ejemplo, si quisiera repetir algo que tu hijo me haya dicho, yo me referiría a él/ella usando un código, como “El entrevistado 34 me dijo...”

Tiempo requerido: Si estás dispuesto a permitir que tu hijo(a) participe y si él/ella también está dispuesto a hacerlo. Los estudiantes inicialmente estarían participando en una corta entrevista acerca de sus planes para su educación. Después de esto, también me gustaría recolectar su historia de vida (esto podría ser en dos o tres sesiones que durarán alrededor de una hora). Su participación es voluntaria para cada una de las sesiones. Tanto tú como tu hijo(a) pueden decidir no continuar en cualquier momento (aún después de la primera o segunda sesión).

Derecho a retirarse del estudio: Si tú o tu hijo(a) deciden que no están interesados en participar, me lo pueden avisar en cualquier momento (incluso a la mitad de la entrevista) y la información que me haya dado no será utilizada. Si después de la entrevista tú o tu hijo(a) deciden que ya no les gustaría que yo utilice su información, pueden contactarme para que la información sea quitada de mi estudio. Su información entonces será borrada y destruida.

Si le quieres preguntar a alguien más acerca de mi Proyecto por favor contacta a Gabriela Navarro, la directora de la escuela en gabriela.navarro@cecytemorelos.edu.mx o al (777) 3139321 Ext. 124

O a Catherine Jere, mi supervisora del Doctorado, en c.jere@uea.ac.uk o al 0044 160359 3383

Mi contacto es el siguiente: 044 777 233 51 36 or c.linan-segura@uea.ac.uk

ACUERDO PARA PARTICIPAR EN EL ESTUDIO Y QUE NUESTRAS SESIONES SEAN GRABADAS

Yo confirmé que la información de la investigación me fue presentada de forma escrita y me fue leída. Cualquier cosa que no entendí se me explicó y todas mis preguntas fueron contestadas. Entiendo que en cualquier momento tanto yo como mi hijo(a) podemos decidir no seguir participando y que toda la información que se haya dado será usada de la manera en que yo decida.

Yo _____ estoy de acuerdo/no estoy de acuerdo en que mi hijo(a) participe en el estudio

Yo _____ estoy de acuerdo/no estoy de acuerdo en que las juntas de mi hijo sean grabadas

Firma del Padre:

Fecha:

Firma del investigador:

Fecha:

Appendix XV. Information Sheet and Consent form (Parental/Guardian Interviews)

My name is Claudia Linan, a PhD student from the University of East Anglia in Norwich, United Kingdom.

I am carrying out this research project that is looking at how young people construct and shape and realise their aspirations for their educational future and how they perceive the opportunities and constraints for it.

I will be carrying out interviews. In the interviews, I will ask you about your past and present perceptions and key interactions with your child. I would also like to know about your perspective regarding your child's future goals and what he/she needs to achieve them.

Please feel free to ask any questions you have at whichever stage. Participation is completely voluntary and you are free to say that you do not wish to participate – either now or after I have given you further information.

Let me remind you, my research is independent from the school. I cannot promise any direct benefits from taking part in this research but I will give you a soda and a snack while we talk.

I will use the results from this study for my PhD thesis. I do hope that I will be able to provide a short general account of my findings, but this is a small study so I cannot for example, expect to be able to influence local policy or practice.

The information from interview will be used with all the other information I collect. You will not be named. All information will be treated confidentially and anything made public will always be anonymous. For example, if I wanted to repeat something that you say, I would refer to you using a code, such as 'Interviewee 34 told us ...'.

If you are willing to participate, you will be agreeing to an interview of approximately one hour where we will touch upon your perspectives on your child's educational goals and related plans to achieve these.

If you decided that you do not wish to take part, you can stop the interview at any point and I will not use the information you have given me. If after the interview you decide that you do not want me to use your information you can contact me to ask for the information to be withdrawn, and I will withdraw it and destroy it.

If you want to ask someone other than me about my project please contact Gabriela Navarro, director of the school on gabriela.navarro@cecytemorelos.edu.mx or (777) 3139321 Ext. 124 or Catherine Jere, my main PhD supervisor, on c.jere@uea.ac.uk or (0044) 160359 3383

My contact details are: 044 777 233 51 36 or c.linan-segura@uea.ac.uk

AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE AND HAVE MEETINGS DIGITALLY RECORDED

I confirm that the research information was presented in written form and read to me. Anything I did not understand was explained and all my questions were answered. I understand I can withdraw my participation and any or all of the information which I give at any time.

I, agree/do not agree to participate in the study

I, agree/do not agree to have the meetings digitally recorded.

Signature or mark of interviewee:
Date:

Signature of Researcher
Date:

Hoja informativa y forma de consentimiento informado_Entrevista con padres de familia

Mi nombre es Claudia Linan, soy estudiante del Doctorado en Desarrollo Internacional en Universidad del Este de Anglia en Norwich, Reino Unido.

Estoy realizando este proyecto de investigación que se enfoca en conocer como los jóvenes construyen y forman sus aspiraciones para su futuro educativo y como perciben las oportunidades y barreras para ello.

Estaré realizando entrevistas. En las entrevista, te preguntaré acerca de tus percepciones e interacciones importantes con tu hijo(a), ya sea en el pasado en el presente. También me gustaría conocer tu punto de vista acerca de las metas de tu hijo(a) y lo que necesita para lograrlas.

Por favor siéntete en confianza de preguntarme cualquier pregunta en cualquier momento de cualquiera cosa relacionada con esta investigación. Tu participación es completamente voluntaria y nadie más sabrá si no deseas participar. Eres libre de decir si es que no deseas participar, ya sea ahora o después de que hayas recibido más información.

No puedo prometer ningún beneficio directo de tomar parte en esta investigación, pero te puedo dar un refresco y un bocadillo mientras platicamos.

Usaré los resultados de este estudio para mi tesis del Doctorado. Espero poder darte un resumen de mis resultados al finalizar, pero al ser un estudio pequeño no puedo prometer que estos van a influenciar políticas locales.

La información de tu entrevista será utilizada con toda la otra información que recolecte. Tu nombre no será publicado. Toda la información será tratada confidencialmente y cualquier cosa que sea publicada se hará de manera anónima. Por ejemplo, si quisiera repetir algo que tú me hayas dicho, yo me referiría a ti usando un código, como “El entrevistado 34 me dijo...”

Si estás dispuesto a participar, inicialmente estarías aceptando a participar en una entrevista de aproximadamente una hora en donde te preguntaré acerca de tus perspectivas con respecto a las metas educativas de tu hijo(a) y sus planes para lograrlas.

Si decides que no estas interesado en participar, puedes detener la entrevista en cualquier momento y la información que me hayas dado no será utilizada. Si después de la entrevista decides que ya no te gustaría que yo utilice tu información, puedes contactarme para que la información sea quitada de mi estudio. Tu información entonces será borrada y destruida.

Si le quieres preguntar a alguien más acerca de mi Proyecto por favor contacta a Gabriela Navarro, la directora de la escuela en gabriela.navarro@cecytemorelos.edu.mx o al (777) 3139321 Ext. 124

O a Catherine Jere, mi supervisora del Doctorado, en c.jere@uea.ac.uk o al 0044 160359 3383

Mi contacto es el siguiente: 044 777 233 51 36 or c.linan-segura@uea.ac.uk

ACUERDO PARA PARTICIPAR EN EL ESTUDIO Y QUE NUESTRAS SESIONES SEAN GRABADAS

Yo confirmo que la información de la investigación me fue presentada de forma escrita y me fue leída. Cualquier cosa que no entendí se me explico y todas mis preguntas fueron contestadas. Entiendo que en cualquier momento puedo decidir no seguir participando y que toda la información que he dado será usada de la manera en que yo decida.

Yo _____ estoy de acuerdo/no estoy de acuerdo en participar en el estudio

Yo _____ estoy de acuerdo/no estoy de acuerdo en que nuestras juntas sean grabadas

Firma del entrevistado

Fecha:

Firma del investigador

Fecha:

Appendix XVII. List of topics to cover in the life histories and semi-structured interviews with students

- Early years and family life
- Early education
- Junior high school experiences
- People whom the student talked to about their academic desires
- Perceived female/male responsibilities
- Goals to be achieved
- Perceived difficulties/barriers for goal attainment
- Possible ways of overcoming barriers
- Education's role in achieving own goals
- Perceived meaning and value of education
- Perceived opportunities
- Expectations of university

- Plans for the future
- Friends' plans for the future
- Significant others' opinions regarding own plans for the future

Appendix XVIII. List of topics to cover in the semi-structured interviews with parents

- Current jobs/activities
- Educational achievements
- Perceptions on education
- Own experiences within education
- Expectations for students' future
- View on what constitutes a “good future” for students
- Family support for students' education

Appendix XIX. Example of a semi-structured interviewee transcript in Spanish

Primera entrevista con Juan

Fecha: Diciembre 7, 2016 **Lugar:** Oficina del investigador dentro de la escuela

Programa escolar: Administración

Edad: 18

Juan: J

Investigador: I

I: Platicame de tu familia, con quienes vives?

J: Con mis papas....mi mamá y mi papá

I: Sólo con ellos?

J: Y mis dos hermanos

I: Son más grandes que tú?

J: No, son menores

I: Ok, muy bien...y platicame a que se dedican tus papas?

J: Mi mamá es ama de casa y mi papa es campesino

I: Y le tienes que ayudar a tu papá a veces?

J: Sí...siempre que tengo tiempo

I: Osea en las tardes a veces?

J: Aha, a veces, pero ahorita ya casi no...porque pues este, estoy haciendo mis practicas...y como me voy temprano, voy hasta en la tarde ahorita a la escuela y ya hasta en la noche, bueno en la tardecita que llego...ya empiezo a hacer mi tarea...y no me da tiempo

I: Y pláticame, al ser el hermano mayor sientes que algo es diferente contigo?

J: De hecho, no me exigen...lo que pasa es que yo quiero aspirar a tener...más que nada...un título para buscar...este...una mejor vida para ellos...más que nada para abrirles las puertas a mis hermanos..como ahorita...mis papás que a veces no tienen...quiero ayudarlos también...por lo menos, pues...a darles un poquito más de dinero pues...para que nos alcance más y a mis hermanos más que nada ayudarlos...económicamente pues... y en lo que les falte...más que nada...para que pues puedan llegar a tener un título en un futuro...

I: Sí, y qué te gustaría hacer cuando te gradues?

J: A la Universidad

I: Super bien y pláticame más de alguien que te haya hecho reflexionar acerca de lo que quieres ser? De chico alguien te haya influenciado?

J: Pues...siempre este, el que me ha influenciado para reflexionar es mi papá, porque pues siempre lo veía trabajando diario y pues el dinero a veces no rendía y de allí era cuando yo reflexionaba sobre...si no voy a la escuela, me voy a quedar así siempre...siempre me voy a levantar muy temprano, trabajaré muy duro, y me pagarán muy barato...entonces eso pues, más que nada, hasta ahora, todavía me ha impulsado, me está impulsando a seguir adelante...y pues ahora que tengo a mis hermanos, ellos me impulsan más todavía, a seguir adelante...

I: Y qué estudió tu papá?

J: sólo llego a sexto de primaria...ya después se salió porque tenía ya que ir a trabajar...en el campo

I: Fue porque él quiso o porque su padrastro lo obligó?

J: Ah...porque lo obligaron, sí porque lo obligaron...pues si le he preguntado y sí dijo que él quería seguir estudiando...pero ya desde sexto empezó a trabajar en el campo...jornadas duras...este pues sí...porque lo trataba mal, le pegaba...porque le pegaba a mi abuelita, a él y a un hijo que el padrastro tenía también...

I: Y a qué edad se casó?

J: A los veintidós...porque de 18,19 creo conoció a mi mamá...de 19, 20 creo se fue al norte (United States), de mojado..ya allí,le dijo a mi mamá que iba

I: Entonces se fue a Estados Unidos a los 19?

J: Aha, a Estados Unidos...pues le dijo a mi mamá que iba a juntar dinero para casarse...porque sí se iban a casar...y duro un año...casi un año y no le habló...y mi mamá pensó que ya se había casado por allá

I: Pues sí

J: Y entonces le habló por teléfono y pues...se sorprendió, más que nada...porque no había sabido nada de él durante un año y le dijo: “Pues nos vamos a casar, ya tengo el dinero”, y ya se vino como a los 21 creo

I: Osea como dos años después, entonces duro allá dos años?

J: Sí y pues como no estaba mi abuelita ni el padrastro aquí, le dijo a unos tíos...le dijo pues échenme la mano para ir a pedirla...aha y fueron y sí la pidieron y pues le habló a mi abuelita que fuera porque ya se iba a casar...pero el padrastro dijo “De mí, no esperes nada”y mi papá le dijo “Si tú quieres ir, está bien y si no no vayas, porque de tí no estoy esperando nada”

I: Sí, así como la invitación está abierta...

J Aha y pues osea...pues más que eso pues...si él pudo así solo...así solo se pudo levantar...entonces porqué yo no?

I: Sí, claro

J: Más yo porque tengo los recursos que él me está brindando...eso pues me está impulsando todavía más

I: Claro, muy bien...y sabes tu papá a que se dedicó estando allá?

J: En el norte...de lavaplatos y preparados

I: Y alguna vez tú has pensado en eso? En ir?

J: Aha...cuando tenga veintiuno

I: Entonces si has pensado?

J: (Asienta con la cabeza)

I: Pero crees que vayas a terminar la universidad a los 21 o cómo que piensas ir a la universidad y luego no terminarla, irte y luego regresar?

J: No, pienso terminarla...cuando la termine

I: Pero te gustaría terminando la universidad?

J: Sí...pues allí hay más trabajo...y pues no sé...necesito ir para ver cómo está

I: Sí, y no crees que este más difícil irte...porque dicen que cada vez dicen que está más difícil cruzar?

J: Con la visa...yo creo que se puede sacar visa...es más fácil sacar visa porque...de mojado puedes quedar en la línea..

I: Sí, eso es lo malo

J: no sé cómo le hizo mi papá...tres veces y no lo agarraron

I: Osea se fue tres veces?

J: Sí, primero se fue cuando se iban apenas a casar...para juntar dinero...ya en la segunda vez se fue con mi mamá y mi abuelita...porque para eso ya había dejado a su padraastro...sí y allá yo ya nací...

I: Y porque se regresaron?

J: Porque...pues yo ya estaba de 2, 3 meses y ya le dijo mi papá a mi mamá que si me quedaba, que ya no me iba a regresar, si llegaba como a los 12 años...o a los 10...que yo estuviera allá...ya no me iba a querer regresar...que mejor que me trajeran cuando estaba chico...porque ya de grande...como ahorita tengo un tío que se fue hace 18 años y no ha regresado...

I: Sí, ya se quedan...

J: Ahaa...sí, Por eso dijo mi papá: “Mejor hay que irnos porque no se va a querer ir y si descubren que él es de aquí y nosotros no, nos van a sacar y allí va a estar el problema”

I: Super bien y la tercera vez que se fueron o ya se fue tu papá solo?

J: Después fue solo, fue cuando me dejo

I: Cuántos años tenías?

J: Yo tenía cuatro o cinco años

I: y cuánto tiempo se fue entonces?

J: Un año...siempre lo dejaba sólo un año...mi mamá sólo lo dejaba irse un año

I: Si, porque sino ya es mucho

J: Sí

I: Y ya nunca dijo tu papá que le gustaría volver?

J: Ya no...pero bueno...dice que se quiere ir...porque pues está bien duro pues...pero pues por otra parte no..porque dejaría a mis hermanos y más que nada...ehh lo que pues lo que quiere ver es amor más que dinero

I: Lo que quiere ver es amor más bien acá no?

J: Sí, porque pues el dinero como me dice “Va y viene” pero las personas importantes o personas así ya no...hasta ahora ya cambió también...porque antes cada 8 días iba a emborracharse...sí cuando yo estaba niño...eso vino...me dijo mi mamá que cuando se murió mi abuelita...él empezó a tomar y pues hasta...lo vino a dejar cuando yo tenía casi 15, 14 años...

I: Pero cuando tomaba era violento?

J: No, no había agresión, sólo este...llegaba y se iba a dormir

I: Y tú tomas?

J: No, es por eso...si es lo mismo, osea, por lo que veo que mi papá...siempre...porque si porque llega...este pues...no me gusta tomar por lo mismo...no quiero este...más que nada...lo que no quiero cuando tenga a mis hijos es darles ese ejemplo...aunque yo no sigo su ejemplo pero bueno no quiero este influenciar...más que nada a mis hijos...a mis hermanos...porque pues hasta ahora no tomo

I: Y has pensado como casarte a cierta edad, tienes algo en mente?

J: Pues me gustaría casarme como a los 25, 23 años

I: Y tener una familia?

J: Sí (sonríe)

I: Cómo de cuantos hijos te gustaría?

J: De 2 a 4 hijos

Appendix XX. Example of a semi-structured interviewee transcript in English

First Interview with Juan

Date: 7th December 2016 **Location:** Researcher's office inside the high school

High school programme: Management and Administration

Age: 18

Juan: J

Researcher: R

R: Tell me about your family, how do you live with?

J: With my parents...my mom and my dad

R: Just with them?

J: And with my two brothers

R: Are they older than you?

J: No, they are younger

R: Ok, great...and what do your parents do for a living?

J: My mom is a housewife and my dad is a farmer

R: And do you have to help your dad sometimes?

J: Yes...only when I have time

R: So in the afternoons?

J: Aha...well...not now...because I am doing my professional practices...and...well....I have to go very early...so I don't really have time...

R: Being the big brother...do you feel like you are treated differently?

J: Well...in fact...my parents don't push me to do anything...I just want to aspire so that I can have...well...a degree...so that I can look for...a better life for them (my brothers)...so that I can open the doors to my brothers...like now...my parents sometimes don't have (money)...so I want to help them too...so I want to at least give them a little bit more money...so that we can have enough...and I want to help my brothers...economically...well...in whatever they lack...and mostly that...so that they can get a degree in the future...

R: And what would you like to do when you finish high school?

J: Go into University

R: Great! And tell me...who has made you reflect about what you want to be when you grow up?

J: Well...always...the one who has influenced me to reflect is my dad...because well...I always saw him working...every day...and sometimes money is not enough...and that's where I think: "If I don't go to school, I would stay like this forever...I will always wake up very early, I will work very hard and I will get very low pay"...so that's what...mostly...up until now...has pushed me...is pushing me to keep going...and well...now that I have my brothers...they also motivate me to get ahead...

R: What did your dad study?

J: He only got to sixth grade of elementary school...he then dropped out because he had to begin working...in the (agricultural) field

R: Was it because he wanted or because he was forced?

J: He was forced...because I have asked him and he said that he would have liked to continue studying...but since sixth grade, he began working in the (agricultural) field...tough times...and his stepfather abused him physically...he also abused my grandma...and another son that he had

R: And when did he get married?

J: At 21...he met my mom when he was 18...and then he went to United States as a "wetback" (Slang: illegal immigrant)

R: So he went to United States when he was 19?

J: Aha...he went to the States...he told my mom that he was going to make some money so that they could get married...and he stayed there for a year...and throughout that year...he didn't call her...so my mom thought that he had already married there with someone else...

R: Of course

J: And then he called her...she was surprised...because she hadn't hear from him in almost one year...he told her "Well...we are getting married, I have the money now" and he return when he was 21...

R: So he stayed there around 2 years?

J: Yes...and he told his uncles to help him ask for my mother's hand in marriage...and he called his parents he was getting married and his stepfather said "Don't expect anything from me" and my dad told him "If you want to come, it's fine...or don't come...because I am not expecting anything from you"

R: So he just left the invitation opened...

J: Yes...well...if he made it on his own...he rose on his own...then I will certainly can

R: For sure...

J: Besides, I have the resources he has given me...and that is motivating me even more...

R: And do you know what he worked as when he was there (in USA)?

J: He was a dishwasher...and he prepared food

R: And have you ever thought about that?

J: About going?

R: Yes

J: When I am 21

R: So you've thought about it...

J: (Nods)

R: But do you think you'll finish university when you're 21 or do you think you won't finish university and you'll go?

J: No...I am thinking I will finish it first...so whenever I finish it

R: So after you finish, you would like to go?

J: Yes...well...there are more jobs over there...well...I need to go to see how things are...

R: And don't you think it will get more difficult to go?

J: With the visa...I think that we can get a visa nowadays...it's easier to get a visa...because as a "wetback" you can die in the line (border)

R: Yes, that's the bad thing...

J: I don't know how my dad made it...three times and they didn't catch him

R: So he crossed three times?

J: He first went before he got married...so he could make some money...the second time, he went with my mom and my grandma...and I was born there...

R: So why did you guys come back?

J: Because I was already 3 months old and my dad told my mom...that if I stayed until I was 10 or 12 years old... I would never want to go back after...so it was better to bring me back when I was young...because...for example...I have an uncle that left 18 years ago and he hasn't come back...

R: He stayed there...

J: Aha...so my dad said "It's better to leave now because if we get discovered, we'll be kicked out and he won't.... that's where the problem will be"

R: And when was the third time your father went back?

J: He went on his own...he left me

R: How old were you?

J: I was around 4 or 5 years' old

R: And how long did he stayed there?

J: One year...my mom only left him go for one year...

R: Yes...otherwise it is a lot

J: Yes

R: And has your dad ever said that he would like to go back?

J: Not now...but well...he says he would like to go...because things are very hard here...but on the other hand...no...because he would have to leave my brothers...and now...he wants to see love...instead of money

R: So he prefers to stay and see the love here?

J: Yes, because as people say...money comes and goes...but not important people...he is changed now...he used to get drunk every week...when I was young...my mom told me that it started when my grandma died...he started drinking...and he stopped until I was about 15,14 years old...

R: Was he aggressive?

J: No, there was never any aggression...he just came back and went to sleep...

R: And do you drink?

J: No...that's why...because I see how my dad was...that's why I don't like drinking...I don't want to give that example to my kids...when I have them...that's why I don't follow his example...I don't want to influence my children, my siblings...that's why I don't drink

R: Have you thought about when do you want to get married?

J: Well...(laughs)...I would like to get married when I'm 25...or 23 years' old

R: And do you want to have a family?

J: Yes (smiles)

R: How many children would you like to have?

J: 2 to 4 children

Appendix XXII. Matrix of emerging themes

Matrix of Emerging Themes										
Overarching theme	Sub-categories	Students' Interviews	Students' illustrative quotes	Parental/Family interviews	Parents/Family illustrative quotes	Sources Lifeline sessions	Students' illustrative quotes	Observations	Questionnaire	Authors discussing theme
Perceptions towards Education	Education as a mean to acquiring social status						(Explaining why he wants to continue studying) "Well, just because of the name, of how it is heard when people call you <i>Licenciado(BA graduate)</i> "-Int 18	Observation notes from (22/03/17) a conversation I had with a student about how she wanted to study to become someone in life. On (01/06/17) a male student mentioned he was planning to study because he wanted to "go up"	"Wanting to get ahead", "Improve themselves"and "Wanting to be someone in life" were three of the main reasons stated by students who were planning to continue studying a degree.	Rojas Betancur (2011)
	First-generation university students			From my observations during my interviews with parents, this was an emotional topic to some parents; their children being the first one in their nuclear family to go to university. A father (Int7) shed a few tears over the fact him and his family didn't have the chance to study and now his children will	"Let's work because one never had the opportunity (of attending school), one should try to give it to your children and I feel fortunate because thank God the expectations I had as a child weren't realised but my children (have them now)"-Father of Int7	A participant mentioned the fact she will be the first university graduate in her extended family motivates her to continue her studies.	"It motivates me, in my father's family there is no university graduates and he tells me that if I finish university I will be the first university graduate"-Interviewee 4			Engle & Tinto (2008) Lubrano (2004) Lohfink & Paulsen (2005)
	Education as a mean to expanding career options			Participants' family members mentioned how going to school will make them capable of doing something more than farming. They said they want them to continue studying and not to become a 'campesino' (farmer) like their parents and grandparents.	Speaking of how her grandfather told her father and uncles "You have to study because I don't want my children to <i>only</i> become farmers like me" -Sister of Int 8	Students mentioned their desire of doing something else other than working in the field like their fathers	"I never thought about working in the field, I wouldn't want to stagnate in a hole"- Interviewee 3	From my chat with a female Tutor on (31/01/17). She mentioned she had met with many parents were working in the field and didn't want the same destiny for their children.		Rojas & Portugal (2009) Carnoy et al (2002) Rojas Betancur (2011)
					Mother's advice to daughter "I'd rather have you sitting at					

Participants' mothers mentioned they wanted their daughters to study so that they can have more options besides becoming a maid.

an office than burning yourself with the sun (in the field)" –**Mother of Int 2**

(Speaking about the advice she gives her children)

"I've told them that if they want to be someone in life, they have to study (university), otherwise it won't be useful for them, they won't go beyond the field"

Mother of Int 15

"Because if you don't find a job in the area you studied, you can work at a house (as a maid), or you can work in the field, that's why you have to learn a little bit from the field and a little bit from the house"-

Interviewee 1's mother

"If they don't have studies, then they don't get ahead, they will always be either working at a house (as a maid), washing, like me, I didn't finish (my studies) and I'm cleaning at a house and I wouldn't like that for her"-

Mother of Int 2

Education as a
humble vs
superior paradox

During the interviews, several participants' parents expressed how they have met educated people who are not humble and they advise their children to always be humble, even after obtaining a degree.

Many people study their careers and they feel like nobody deserves them, they lose the floor and that shouldn't happen, humility should come first"- Int 5's father

"You can have a career but always remember you have to be humble" -Int 7's mother

"Many young women study and then they look down on other women"-Mother of Int1

(Speaking of previous colleagues with a career)

"what happened to you, you weren't like this, they talk (to me) but with a certain distance, so I say what is the matter if we were all the same, that's why I tell my daughter:

Congratulations for the career but humility always before anything" Mother of Int4

"I will give you a piece of advice, when you have to decide between being a mother or having a profession, well, you are talking about economic success but your children represent 2 or 3 generations, so you are going to have to decide"Because I've successful mothers but their sons are drug addicts or homosexuals"-

A family member expresses the advice she gives to her daughter; choosing between being a mother or having a profession

A female participant talks about only women in her house should do house chores except for her brother.

A female participant (4) mentions how university is also a place for women to go, instead of just being home serving their husbands.

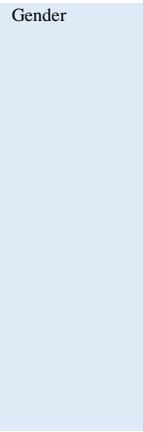
(Speaking of her father) He arrives from work...and he doesn't do anything in the house, he says because we are 4 women, the house should be tidy and food ready"-Int 8

(Speaking about university) I believe women also have a place here, not just at home serving a man whenever he wants"- Int4

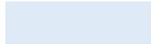
House visit Int 1 on (09/05/17) I noticed how her mother asks only her daughters to hand me a glass of water, a piece of watermelon. She doesn't ask her son for help even though he is also there. From my chat with

Gender differences Mercado-Salgado & Nava-Rogel (2013)

Gender roles: Luna (2011) Gutmann (2000)



Gender Gender roles



Machismo-
Superior male,
inferior female
beliefs

Interviewee 11's
aunt

A female interviewee says her father thinks women are not capable of doing certain things.

(Speaking of her father) "He thinks we(women) are not capable(...)because he is disappointed by my half-sister who studied nursing and is now working as a cleaner"

From my chat with the psychologist in the afternoon shift on (06/07/17). She mentioned the belief of undervaluing women was stronger amongst school families when she started working at the school 5 years ago. She believes it has been slowly decreasing but it is still there.

Family's
inheritance
through male
channels

Interviewee 8 says her father says only his son will be the one who will inherit the family's wealth.

(Speaking about how she feels her brother gets a special treatment) "I've always felt it because he (her father) tells her little brother that he will own everything her family has"-Int8

Bonfil
(2001)

Male as an
absolute authority

Participants' mothers (Int 1,4,15) mentioned their husbands didn't allow them to work. Other mothers (of Int 2,4) mentioned the possibility of her daughter not being allowed to work by her husband.

(Speaking about husband) "I wasn't allowed to work so I stopped working"-
Mother of Int4

(Speaking about marriage)
"You have to think about your house, gas, this and that, and well you have your career and let's hope he will let you work"-Int4's mother

From my chat with a male teacher (06/06/17). He mentioned the mothers in the region where school is located are still dependent from their husbands and that this example is taken by students.

Luna
(2011)

University as a way to fight Machismo

A female participant speaking about how university will provide her with the tools for not being in the position where she needs to be dependent on a man.

Int4: "I think that if one studies university is to give yourself more value as a woman, I have also seen that women are looked down on and I don't like that.
C: So you see university as a way of?
Int4: "Stand out as a woman and then you don't need to depend on a man"

From my chat with a male teacher (04/04/17). He mentioned nowadays women with an education had the "weapon" to finish a relationship or a marriage if they want to be independent.

Expectations for male students as breadwinners

During their interviews, there were male students who talked about their destiny as the sole supplier of wealth to their future family and of the importance of having economical resources to look after a girlfriend (Int 19) and a wife (Int 20).

(Speaking about his father's advice for him and his brothers) "If you want to study and improve yourselves or if you want to work as donkeys, that is your problema, you are going to have a wife and you will have to provide for her, women needs to be taken care of"
-Int20

Parents mentioned they advised their male children they will be the ones who will be economically responsible for their family unit. (Mother- Int 7, Father-Int 20, Mother-Int 19). Parents also mentioned they advise their male children to work and have money to invite their girlfriends on dates.

(Speaking about family business)"If you want to earn so you have for your expenses, for your girlfriends and just to earn money here"- Father of Int18

From my chat with a male student (29/06/17). He mentioned how it was more difficult for a man to get ahead because the family and the wife will always rely on him earning enough to look after them.

Luna (2011)
Pineda Duque (2003)

Family

Family migration

Students (Int15) expressed they will try to go to USA and work as their back-up plan, in case their university application was rejected

(Speaking about the possibility of not getting a place at uni) "I think my brother could help me to cross (the border) otherwise I will try with a coyote (colloquial term for a person who transports illegal immigrants)"- Int15

Some parents and family members mentioned they temporarily migrated to USA because they wanted to save money to build a house and salaries in Mexico were not enough. Some of them already had family connections there (Father-int5).

(Talking about what his brothers-in-law said about USA) "You get paid more over there and that here you have certain hours and you earn a certain amount and there you will earn the doble, they are doing well over there"- Husband of Int6

Students mentioned they had family members in USA who would send remittances (money or gifts).

(Talking about his older brother who lives in USA) "He help us to pay the electricity and phone bills"- Int15

From my observations on (01/03/17) I saw some announcements in the school surroundings advertising people who will help with paperwork for a USA visa application

Chavez-Ayala et al (2017)
Urciaga Garcia (2002)

Parental/family expectations

Students talked about how important their parents' wishes and suggestions shaped their desires and academic choices (universities and programmes).

"I was thinking about studying to become a teacher in Jonacatepec but my mom said no because teachers were usually in demonstrations and other things, and also

Several participants (Int 2, 15, 16) brought up the fact they were choosing a career programme because they were trying to accomplish their parents' frustrated academic dreams.

(Speaking about her mother's frustrated dream of becoming a doctor) "She wanted to be a doctor and that's why she wanted one of her children to study medicine". -Int 16

A female respondent stated one of the reasons to continue studying was to prove her brothers wrong

Kisilevsky & Vileda (2002)

	Participants (Int-13,14) talked about the fact they had been discouraged by their parents to choose a certain programme.	because they earn less” - Int14		Other participants talked about family members (Int 10,13) not supporting their studies because they have witnessed cousins or neighbours who have dropped out and they believe the same will happen with them.	(Speaking about her desire to be a nurse) “She (mother) thought I wasn’t going to make it because there are many people who want to be doctor sor nurses and then they regret, I think this is the longest career (.....)where I live there is a lady whose daughter couldn’t handle it because of all the blood there is involved”. -Int 13	
Parents’ low academic background	Some participants talked about the fact their parents encouraged and supported them to overcome them and to continue studying because they didn’t have the opportunity to do so themselves.	(Speaking about the fact his father only studying elementary school and working in the field) “The one who influences to reflect is my dad because I always saw him working and sometimes money wasn’t enough and that’s when I reflected...if I don’t go to school, I will stay like this forever, I will wake up very early, I will work very hard and I will get paid very little...so this is what is driving me”-Int3				From chatting with a male teacher (22/06/17). He noted students felt satisfied with finishing high school they already overcame their parents because the majority of parents at this school don’t have a degree.
Alcoholism in the family	Participants mentioned their fathers’ alcohol abuse problem (Interviewee 3, 11). A participant (Int 13) mentions her grandfather died from an alcohol abuse problem.	“He just changed until recently...because before every 8 dias he would go and get drunk...that was when I was a child”- Int3	Interviewee 16’s grandmother mentions there is an alcohol abuse problem in her community.	(Talking about drunk young people in her community) “Some times it is every day, even the police comes to take them away because sometimes there are fights”- Grandmother of Int16		From my observations and house visits to Interviewee 7 and 16 (24/05/17) I noticed “Alcoholics Anonymous” associations in the small communities where they lived. From my observations, I also noted several empty beer bottles in a street close to the school.
Broken families	Participants (1,2,4,10,12,15)with a female head of household (where the father had left or barely involved)		From inviting family members to an interview, I learned about some participants not living with either of their parents but with family members such as a			From my observations (02/05/17) and conversations with students I learned it was very common for them

			grandparent or an aunt instead (Int 9,11,16)			to live only with one of their parents (usually their mother). Other students mentioned (29/05/17) their fathers are working in USA. Some of their uncles are also in USA leaving behind cousins same age as as students.		
	Familism	Participants (Int 2, 3) stating they should stay in their hometowns and take care of their parents or because they won't allow them to move far away from home.	(Speaking about a university in another state)"Because of my mom...I cannot leave her...because I am the one who is with her, who is supporting her the most...I am the one that can help her get ahead"- Int2	Mother of Interviewee 7 says she wants to stay close to her kids so that she can protect them.	(Speaking about her children) "I am a hen mother, as long as I am around I will always support and take care of them"-Int7			Rojas Betancur (2011)
Economic issues	Economic problems to continue studying	Participants mentioned economic issues affecting them. A student who was not able to buy school supplies (Int 6) and another participant who thought about pausing her studies due to financial issues (Int 4). Other participant (Int 13) said she is not applying to university this year because her family can't afford it. A student (Int1) mentioned she was almost going to pause her high school studies because of her lack of economic resources.	(Speaking about her grades) "I believe it is not only the academic side, I also feel that money plays a part, because if you don't bring the material, well, you can't work...and that's where it affects you, because we have a teacher who will register an absence if you didn't bring the material"-Int 6 (Speaking about the fact she almost paused her high school studies) "we didn't have money so my uncles contributed so that I could get into this highschool and to buy my school supplies and all that"- Int1	Some parents mentioned they didn't finish their studies due to economic reasons.	(Talking about why he couldn't continue his studies) "For one mother, we were many children (6 siblings), I was the smallest one, I had to start working since I was young, and basically it was the economic side, I had to pay transportation to a school in another community" - Father of Int5	From my observations, I also know that Interviewee 1 didn't get a place at university and she will pause a year because she can't afford going to another one. From my observations, students talked frequently about their economic issues being a constraint in their lives.	Economic issues was listed as the main reason why students won't continue studying the following year. Supporting their family economically was listed as one of the reasons to continue studying a degree.	Hutchings & Archer (2001) Students pausing studies after high school: Leyton (2015)
	Choices of university based on tuition fees	Some participants (Int 1) mentioned they chose a certain programme because it is cheap. Others mentioned they changed their programme because they didn't have enough		Parents (Int 4) also mentioned they encouraged their children to change their programmes because the family couldn't afford paying for a certain career.	Isn't there a school where you only enrol and that's that, that way I will only give you (money) for your transportation"- Mother of Int1	From my observations and my participation at a private university open day, students talked about choosing a university based on		Padilla-Gonzalez (2017)



house visit
(13/06/17) I
noticed
Interviewee 18
works in the family
part-time business
of feeding and
selling pigs.