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FUTURE IN THE PRESENT:

PROJECTIVE PRACTICES IN A TRANSNATIONAL MIGRANT COMMUNITY

By

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Future consideration in the form of plans, hopes, projects and dreams is a constitutive feature of the life of Mexican migrants and their families. This study seeks to understand this engagement with the future of transnational actors—of those that move around and those who stay. The study explores the ways in which this future consideration plays out in people’s everyday transnational living and, accordingly, how people’s future-oriented thinking is factored in transnational dynamics. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork with families from a mountain-town in Oaxaca, Mexico with recent migrant ties to central New Jersey, this study explores the interplay of future-related processes of thought with people’s practices and the contexts of their transnational movement. My analytical focus is on three interrelated elements: a) the socio-cultural processes that the imagining of the future results from, b) the form and process of consideration of future scenarios and, c) the forms of behaviors and experiences this future consideration creates. The analysis first addresses the ways in which the processes of future consideration in this town are responsive to transnational migratory dynamics. Second, drawing from research in the cognitive sciences, I elaborate on the subjective mental processes through which social actors create images of the future. I argue that future-scenario building is an outcome of reflexive processes that occur in conversation

with context and biographical history, and in relation to people's interactions with others. Third, I show the ways in which the puzzles of transnational everyday living pose challenges for social actors' future scenario building, exploring the ways that transnational actors conceptualize the future are consequential for strategic action. By examining these issues, this study proposes innovations to current migration scholarship, making subjective processes a central analytical focus in migration research. My findings suggest that the cognitive and emotional engagements with the future of transnational actors and the ways in which the modalities of this engagement take place produce subjectivity and action in their present. At the level of general social theory, this study addresses the projective capacity of human action and its relation to social and relational context.

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Chapter 1:

INTRODUCTION

Welcome To *La Esperanza*

I was drawn to a the town I call *La Esperanza*¹ searching for the sources of the aspired futures I heard about from people I met in New Jersey, who were originally from this town in the southwest region of Oaxaca in Mexico. I arrived to *La Esperanza* after becoming intrigued with the ways labor migrants understood their day-to-day living through their anticipation of the future they hoped to realize back home in Mexico—of a time to come that existed in their minds even before they crossed the border. I was puzzled and fascinated by a phrase I kept on hearing in my conversations with migrants: “when I go back to Mexico...”. Many times I heard stories about the houses people were building back home and the many plans they had for their return to *La Esperanza*, very often, to join the families they had left behind and with whom they shared plans, dreams and expectations. I wanted to understand what enabled these images for the future that, as the very act of migration proved, had tangible repercussions for people’s everyday living. I wanted to know what was their connection to the places from which and for which they were imagined. During one of my conversations with Marcela, a migrant originally from *La Esperanza*, while in New Jersey, I asked her to tell me more about the house she was building back home. Marcela replied by suggesting me to see it myself, telling me that I should ask her parents, who were in charge of its construction, to show it to me.

¹ “hope” in Spanish

When I walked down the streets of *La Esperanza* for the first time, I immediately saw images that matched the many stories people had about the future I heard back in New Jersey. I became aware very quickly of people's concern with what they call the "*porvenir*"—meaning, "that which is to come," their attempts at engaging it and making it happen. Popping up all over the town I saw the material representations of this concern in the form of many future-oriented projects, which were in various stages of completion. These materialized projects, as I later became aware of, corresponded to people's fulfilled dreams, in-progress dreams, and "on hold" dreams. During my first walk around, long before I reached the edge of the town, I saw several *casas de material*,² at different stages of construction. I could not stop noticing that on the roofs of the many semi-finished but inhabited houses there were construction rods poking out and sticking up, preparing the ground for the construction to continue one day. Many of these houses recognizably reserved a space at the front for building a future family store. I saw many of these stores as I walk down the modest residential *Avenida Malinche*. When I passed by the main street, where people were lining up at the *tortilleria*³ and the credit union to cash in the remittances sent from abroad, I saw many businesses, all of them very similar to each other. I remember I kept on wondering why these businesses were there since, it was obvious, the market was already saturated in town.

As I walked around, I remembered the conversations I had in New Jersey and realized that the construction projects and the materialized entrepreneurial efforts I was observing were telling visual narratives about the social and cultural dynamics in this community caught up in the reality of transnational migration, which I started learning

² These are brick houses with cement floors (*material* stands in Spanish for construction material, cement blocks) that replace traditional thatched adobe huts with dirt floors.

³ A store that produces and sells freshly made tortillas.

about from my exchanges with other migrants from *La Esperanza* back in New Jersey. At the same time, this material reality also provided images about the cognitive acts that brought such projects about in the first place—namely, the mental operations that allowed people to extend imaginatively beyond their present moment, to look forward and to contemplate scenarios that have yet to take place. In many ways, I was seeing traces of people's *thoughts for the future*. An addition to an extant home, for instance, suggested to me the contemplation of specific personal episodes that may occur in the future, such as a wedding or a birth. But this also suggested the form of that contemplation: how far in the future were people thinking? How general or specific is their vision of the future? How much time have they spent thinking about it? Accordingly, in observing the material reality of the town, I was observing manifestations of the various ways people in town were experiencing the future.

One of the clearest memories I have of that first visit *La Esperanza*, is the many metal rods I saw poking out of the roofs of the many semi-finished houses I came across with. The number of “in-progress” houses I saw did not surprise me, though. This is something one gets used to seeing in migrant-sending regions all through out Mexico, as it is very common for people to build their “dream houses” with the money earned abroad.⁴ What stuck me, however, as I came to understand more about the function and use of the rods, was how the exposed rods spoke to the promise of the future, of the (sometimes) undetermined and, yet expected time-to-come in which people's hopes of expanding their homes would be fulfilled.

These construction rods were the topic of several of my earliest conversations with people in town. During my first week in *La Esperanza*, I found myself having one

⁴ For more on the significance of these houses see Massey (1987) and Fletcher (1997).

such discussion with Patricia, whom I met after her sister Marcela recommended me in New Jersey a couple of months before to visit *La Esperanza*. We had been walking around town with her kids heading towards the soccer field at the edge of town, when I took a picture of the rods on the tile-covered roof of a *casa de material*. I was struck by the way these rods seemed to be competing with the vertical thrust of the surrounding mountains. Patricia was intrigued with me taking such a picture. After all, as she said, why would I want a picture of a roof? My attempt to respond to this question led to a conversation with Patricia about her family's history with their "own rods."

Patricia talked to me about her parent's house, where she lived at the time along with her two sisters, her niece (Marcela's daughter) and two sons. The house, a building with a full three-bedroom apartment under construction on the second floor and partially finished but inhabited living quarters on the first, had been at different stages of planning and construction for the past 10 years. The construction began a few years after Patricia's brother, Alejandro, left to the United States to work sixteen years ago, when he was fourteen. When Alejandro left, he promised his parents he would send money to build a house to replace the thatched adobe structure where they lived at the time, like many families in town. Since then, he has been sending money on and off to start, continue and complete the construction, which has been overseen by Patricia's father. When they started building the house, Patricia said, she never imagined that it would become the construction it is now. Originally, she thought they were only going to build the living quarters where her parents and sisters live now. The second floor, as she said, just happened. "I think my brother wanted to make sure he would have a place to live when he comes back and gets married. With this house, I am sure there will be many girls

lining up at the door for him,” remarked Patricia mischievously. “When they started building the house, the street looked strange,” she said, “I was not used to walking up the hill and seeing a house with bricks, before this was an empty *solar*.⁵ I then got used to seeing the ‘wires’ [the construction rods]... I cannot see those same wires anymore, they are buried now” she added, “but there are new ones, those that are peeking out from my brother’s house.”

After listening to Patricia, I was struck by the ways her family’s consideration of future scenarios connected to material realities. The “wires,” as Patricia called them, were an outcome of their future imagining as much as they were also a means for future imagining. I was especially intrigued by the ways that this material world of Patricia’s family own creation, enabled by the social circumstances of migration surrounding the family, was telling stories about the subjective processes that brought it about. As both a reflection and a reminder of their hopes and expectations, these construction rods helped this family to extend cognitively into the non-immediate future. For an observer like me, these rods were an indicator of the many ways in which Patricia and her family have surveyed, designed and engineered their future.

Patricia’s family is one of the many in *La Esperanza*, a town that people used to refer to as “a place where everybody seemed to be equally poor and without a future,” who are now “in the business” of “looking after their *porvenir*” (that which is to come). Patricia’s family story, like that of many families in town, a story about how social circumstances facilitated the creation of frameworks for future-oriented thinking. It is, as well, a story about how this future thinking figures in social actors’ inventiveness and

⁵ Plot of land

action, and of how this forward looking shapes the ways in which people reproduce and transform the context in which they live.

What This Book Is About

Much like the metal rods on the houses, this study is about the construction of futures and the creation of possibilities. It is about how transnational actors like Patricia and her family come to know, interpret, evaluate and inhabit the future, and, in doing so, respond to and create the scenarios of their everyday living. This study is, at its heart, an exploration of people's future-oriented temporal-imaginative practices, and of how these are embedded within a situated social, cultural and relational context; in this case a context that is shaped by dynamics of transnational migration. Based on multiple periods of ethnographic research over the course of three years, this book uses the ways people from *La Esperanza*—a mountain-town in Oaxaca, Mexico with migrant ties to central New Jersey—think of, talk about and pursue the future, in order to explore larger questions about the interplay of future-related processes of thought and imagination (such as dreaming, planning and projecting) with people's practices and understandings of their experiences. In particular, this book addresses questions about the ways in which this interplay informs and is informed by the contexts in which people happen to or choose to be living their lives. In this sense, this is a book that looks at what shapes people's thoughts about the expected "not yet," the ways in which people do this future-oriented thinking and what they do through that thinking.

Throughout this book, I explore these concerns as I follow the *projective practices*—those that allow people to extend temporally into the non-immediate future—

of a number of extended families from *La Esperanza*. Here I try to understand how members of these families engage the future as they or those close to them move between their hometown in Oaxaca, Mexico and central New Jersey. In this sense, the book explores the shared and divergent meanings among people in town of the imagined and material aspects of, what in town it is called, their *porvenir* (that which is to come—i.e. “tomorrow”, “when I go back,” “in five years” etc.), as well as their consequences for action. This book thus provides a detailed narrative of the ways in which people from *La Esperanza* schematize the future in relation to the different structural and cultural puzzles they are exposed to, and how such schematization is consequential for their everyday living, especially at the level of the choices they make as they participate in the particular reality in which they live. This book looks at the transnational reality as a contextual grounding for the understanding of experiences of the future and its relation to action.

In doing so, however, this book also tells another story: that of transnational migration. Intertwined with stories from people from *La Esperanza* and their engagement with the future, are images and stories of migration and transnational living as it is experienced and, very often, taken for granted by those in town. In this sense, this is also a book about what do processes of future consideration mean and do in the everyday lives of those living in contexts shaped by the overall context of Mexican migration to the United States—whether it is for the migrant themselves, their relatives abroad or for those living in communities with high levels of U.S migration. How do articulations of the time to come in the form of dreams, plans and projects enter into people’s ongoing experiences and practices in contexts of migration? How is the act of looking forward in anticipation of the future (e.g. dreaming, planning, projecting) responsive to migratory

contexts? How do representations of the future (e.g. dreams, goals, anticipations and projects) relate to the practices and strategies through which actors maneuver in these contexts? This book sets out to provide answers to these questions.

This book is about the simultaneously fragile and powerful quality of the *projective* capacity of human action, the way this takes place in social context, in the context of people's relations with others and in the physical and cultural surroundings where these relations are located (for a general theoretical statement, see Mische 2009). As the following chapters illustrate, just as our thoughts for the future take us into uncertain and intangible realities, our forward thinking is also the force behind many choices that are consequential to our everyday living. While we constantly reinvent and reexamine future scenarios in response to the puzzles of our daily life, we also hold to them and embrace them as a way to ground our present experiences and expectations. This book deals with this (often tension-filled) relationship by looking at what it takes and means to peruse, create, embrace, and let go of "the future" and the ways in which this future-oriented thinking responds to and impacts the contexts in which we live. *La Esperanza's* transnational context is the dynamic social canvas from which the book explores these concerns.

As a means to provide some backdrop against which to understand the content of the book, this introductory chapter pursues four specific tasks. First, I introduce a discussion of the analytical approach sustaining this book. Second, I provide the theoretical foundations supporting the analytical agenda I present in this book. This section is followed by the analytical concerns guiding my treatment of people's projective practices in *La Esperanza*. A section that provides an overview of fieldwork

and related methodological issues follows. I conclude by providing an overview of the book chapters.

From Cultural Sociology to Studies of Migration and Back

This book is written through the eyes of a cultural sociologist interested in social actors' future-oriented thinking and its connection to action. As a cultural sociologist, I look at people's meaning-making practices and the consequences these have for their actions and the social contexts in which these practices take place. Namely, this means an approach to social analysis that focuses on how social actors make sense of their everyday lives and the world around them. Likewise, this approach aims at understanding how in this making sense of the world, social actors respond to and construct the scenarios of their everyday living. Accordingly, as an analytical project, cultural sociology follows the active agency of social actors in relation to their contexts of action and explores the "webs of significance" (Geertz 1973, p. 5) mediating this relation as a means to account for social dynamics. This theoretical and cultural orientation strongly supports the work of this book. This book thus subscribes to an analytical and empirical agenda that highlights the powerful role that the domain of meaning—and affect, for that matter—plays in people's experiences and actions and in social life in general.

This study, however, takes this cultural analytical agenda one step further. It explores matters of meaning and its connection to how people structure their lives and intervene in their worlds as linked to social actors' future-related processes of thought and imagination. In this sense, this book aims to understand people's everyday action as embedded in horizons of meaning that are constituted through temporal-imaginative

processes of future consideration. In other words, this book looks at the ways in which people's future-oriented cognition impacts the actions and experiences of social actors. Thus, the analytical foci here are the ways in which such future-oriented meaning-making practices come into being, how these are executed in context and its consequences for people's experiences. In this sense, this book brings together meaning, action and cognition of the future under an analytical agenda that aims to understand the textures and pathways by which social actors fashion their lives.

This book embraces this cultural program in an analysis of the experiences and practices of social actors, such as Patricia and her family, involved in a transnational migration circuit (see Rouse 1991). In this sense, this is a study that brings these concerns on meaning, action and cognition of the future as central analytical foci into the area of migration scholarship. Accordingly, the analysis in this book is attentive to the form and process of consideration of future scenarios as they play out in the contexts and lives of social actors caught up in labor migration-related transnational movement—i.e. the migrants that move back and forth across national borders, the (im)migrants who, while remaining abroad, maintain ties with their community of origin, and the non-migrants whose lives are being impacted by the transnational movements of family and community members.⁶

This need to focus on “futures in action” (Mische 2009) to understand experiences in the context of the transnational everyday life is more than a mere analytical posture, however. As the story of Patricia's family illustrates, future consideration in the form of plans, hopes, projects and dreams is a constitutive feature of the life of Mexican migrants

⁶ See Mahler 1998, Levitt 2001 and Golbert 2001 for examples of these different manifestations of transnational living.

and their families. For instance, in going to the United States, many expect to return home after earning enough money to realize the dreams and goals —such as education for the kids, a plot of land, a family business or, especially, home ownership and household renovations— that motivated their relocation in the first place (van Wey 2005; Flores et.al. 2004; Cohen 2004; Grimes 1998; Fletcher 1997). These dreams of and for the future are shared with family or community members who stay in Mexico and, as such, they circulate within families, around the community and across borders in the form of narratives, ideas, and materialized projects. In this sense, in many ways, the day-to-day living of migrants, stay-at-home families and community members is marked by the experience of anticipation of the time to come —of a future reality that begins to exist in people’s minds even before, and often regardless of, actual border crossing and that is inherently connected to migration experiences. In this context, people’s considerations and calculations of the future inspire and motivate practices, structure interactions between family members and are connected to a sense of who individuals and families are (Dreby 2010; Hirsch 2003). As the very act of migration proves, the future consideration of a projected reality has tangible repercussions for people’s daily practices and for the socio-cultural contexts of origin and destination where people conduct their lives. For individuals and communities involved in Mexico-United States migration, considerations of the future—and their related expressions—are constitutive and constituent of their transnational social worlds.

The engagement of the future of transnational actors—of those that move around and those who stay—is so intertwined with the transnational migratory experience as to make it necessary to look at the consideration of the future as a central dimension of the

transnational everyday life and of how contexts of migration are maintained and reproduced. We cannot make sense of the lives of migrants and immigrants abroad and of the non-migrants who stay at home—their relationships with each other, their practices and their choices—without attending to questions related to these future-related processes of thought and imagination. Accordingly, if we are to fully understand both the lives of transnational actors and migration itself, we must also understand this intangible world of future cognitions and meanings that undergird migrants' and non-migrants's participation in their contexts of origin and destination. This is an approach to the realities of transnational migration that stresses the role subjective processes, the non-material and the intangible meanings play in the transnational migration experience and that acknowledges their social and material effects. This book provides such an (inherently cultural) approach.

This cultural approach to the understanding of transnational everyday living fills in the blanks where migration studies still remain incomplete. Overall, work that bridges research about migration with examinations of meaning-making have been in the minority among studies considering contexts of migration and the different levels and scales in which migratory processes weave into the lives of individuals, families and communities. In fact, this is the case to the extent that, in the context of discussions about matters of meaning, the literature in the area openly recognizes that “migration scholarship has been allergic to culture” (Levitt 2005, p. 51), that “studies overlook migrants' *non-monetary* contributions” (Castellanos 2009, p. 140—emphasis in the original), and that migration scholarship “doesn't take culture seriously enough” (Levitt 2012, p. 1). Such statements acknowledge that there are relevant and evident elements at

play in the migratory experience that have not been a significant focus of analysis. Also, they suggest the need of frameworks and approaches that can reach into analytical domains that traditional research agendas in the area do not address in their explanatory narratives because of their emphasis on the domains of the material, the structural and related processes (in the case of research of Mexican migration, for instance, see Durand, Malone, and Massey 2003; Durand and Massey 2006; Cohen 2010; Riosmena and Massey 2012).

In recent years, however, there has been surfacing in the literature research that provides compelling arguments for the need to take seriously matters of meaning in migration scholarship. Faced with the challenges brought about by the complicated nature of contemporary migration trajectories, as well as the diversity of patterns and experiences within migrant populations, in their work some scholars are now subscribing to the idea that meanings filter into the daily workings of social actors and that these meanings circulate into structures and interactions. This body of work, scattered across different disciplines, thus is beginning to delineate a research program that is distinct from that predominantly based on the theoretical building blocks of the political economy frameworks that have traditionally guided the research agendas in the field of migration scholarship. With agendas that address the role the non-material plays in the migratory experience, some scholars seem now to recognize that analytical agendas that embrace the domain of meaning are central for understanding how social actors navigate in social contexts shaped by the reality of migration, the choices they make, the interactions they engage in and the goals they pursue.

At the forefront of this agenda is an emerging line of scholarship that looks at migration, borrowing Joanna Dreby's description of her own research agenda, as "an inherently personal process" (Dreby 2010, p. 3). In this sense, some scholars are now locating the "interior" world of individuals—that of the mind and the heart—at the core of their empirical work and are treating it as a key dimension in their analyses. Recent scholarship is now systematically addressing the intangible and subjective world of emotions, desires and cognitions and is exploring the ways in which these intertwine with dynamics of migration and related lived experiences and practices. Under this agenda, for instance, research is looking at the forms of emotional expression that emerge from the realities migrant populations face, at the ways in which the affective and the cognitive informs people's practices and at how these impact people's social, political and economic engagements.

Joanna Dreby's (2010) work, for example, explores the ways in which feelings such as sacrifice structure interactions among Mexican migrant parents in the United States and their children living abroad. Similarly, Maria Tapias and Xavier Escandell (2011) explore expressions of envy and jealousy among Bolivian migrants in Spain and address these as tied to migration processes, showing as well how these affective experiences shape social relations both in the host and the home countries. Keumjae Park's work (2007) stresses the role of the imagination in the creation of transnational selves, by looking at the ways in which Korean women negotiate their identities by virtue of their imagining as members of multiple communities across borders. Another set of studies considers the centrality of affective processes for the development of communities embedded in migrant circuits, from looking at the ways in which migrants'

financial flows and investments are linked to emotional experiences (McKenzie and Menjivar 2011; Lieba Faier 2013)—Federico Besserer, for instance, refers to remittances as “a product of love” (quoted in Castañeda and Buck 2011), to exploring the ways in which sentiments are used as resources that, much like economic remittances, contribute to community formation (Castellanos 2009).

The implications of incorporating this realm of the non-material, the subjective and meaning making into migration scholarship are many. To begin, this literature directs the attention to the fact that processes of migration are composed and constituted by the activities of individuals. Accordingly, these studies provide an image of migration and its outcomes that is in synch with its social ontology: namely, that migration is a social process that results from the activities of social actors who, by virtue of their human nature, have feelings, thoughts and sensations. Heuristically, this analytical approach allows us to focus on the lives of the “ordinary” people behind migration. As this literature already shows, this analytical agenda provides a more specific and nuanced understanding of the actors whose thoughts, feelings and actions contribute to the migratory scene. Correspondingly, these studies invite to consider the need to attend to the role of subjectivities in the making of migratory contexts—i.e. to locate the modes of affect and thought that are informing how migrants and non-migrants act upon these social contexts. In a different vein, conceptually this literature is also providing a roadmap for expanding the analytical boundaries of migration scholarship by bringing in concepts such as “love”, “envy,” “hopes,” “desires” and “suffering” as central social and analytical categories into the field. By doing so, this set of studies is contributing to a more nuanced and enriched analysis of the processes characterizing contexts of migration

and of the lives of those participating in these contexts. By documenting the complex relation between formations of meaning and the social, political and economic life in migrant contexts, this literature is stressing that the non-material realm, so inevitably intertwined with migration processes and outcomes, matters as much as the material does in these contexts.

This book speaks to this emerging body of work that is locating subjective processes and matters of meaning within the reality of the political economy of migration. Like the above mentioned literature, this study pays attention to the processes of the mind and the heart of the social actors of migration and explores the constructive role these processes play in migratory contexts. This study, however, is also focusing on these social actors as embedded in multiple socio-temporal contexts, meaning that they have orientations toward the past, the present, and the future (Emirbayer and Mische 1998) that are impacting what they do and how they do things in these contexts. The future orientation of transnational actors, its expressions and outcomes are the focus of attention in this book. In this sense, this study pays attention to the processes of the mind and the heart of the social actors of migration and explores the constructive role these processes play in migratory contexts.

Certainly, this book is not the first study to touch upon the ways in which social actors think and feel about the future in contexts of migration and transnational living. To be sure, social actors' future thinking has always appeared as relevant and evident in migration scholarship. Elsewhere has already been suggested that considerations of the future lie at the heart of the migrant career. A set of studies, for example, have touched upon these processes of future consideration by examining migrants' foresight and

scenario planning. For instance, from a socioeconomic and behavioral perspective, research has predicted migration move-stay decision-making on the basis of the subjective expectations of migrants (De Jong 2000; Roberts 1995; Piore 1979). More recently, David Kyle & Saara Koikkalainen (2011) introduced the concept of “cognitive migration” to understand the role of the future-related imagination in the migration-related decision-making process of potential migrants—the authors argue, for instance, that would-be-migrants visualize themselves in a future time and place and try out in their minds different situations or images about their futures in a different place when undertaking migration-related decisions.

In the particular case of Mexican migration research, social actors’ forward thinking is a recurrent theme in many empirical studies—whether it is under the umbrella of discussions about goals, dreams, projects, prospects or expectations. Peri Fletcher’s (1997) work, for example, focuses on the material aspects of migrants’ construction projects—what she calls the “dream homes”—back home in a rural village in central Mexico to examine the impact of globalization on social and cultural reproduction. Alyshia Galvez (2011) in her work on pre-natal care among Mexican immigrant women touches upon the aspirational stance of immigrants and its impact upon their postures about life in the United States. In the context of discussions about social mobility, gender roles and adolescence life, Robert Smith’s (2006) study on the transnational lives of Mexicans in New York addresses the dreams and hopes of multiple generations of immigrants as he documents the ways people move back and forth Mexico and the United States. Joanna Dreby’s (2010) compelling analysis of Mexican migrants and their

children back home provides some insights of the ways in which goals and plans for the future navigate through the changing contexts and relationships of transnational families.

Although this scholarship and many other studies (e.g. Zavella 2011; Hellman 2008; Hirsch 2003) with Mexican migrants and with Mexican communities impacted by migration realities provide snapshots of the ways in which people's cognitions about their futures intertwine with their migratory experiences, not enough is known about the ways in which these future thoughts are playing out in the lived experiences of social actors and the ways in which these projections constitute dynamic forces in the everyday lives of Mexican families and communities involved in migration practices. In many instances in the literature, these subjective processes are taken for granted, are treated as peripheral or circumstantial to a different analytical agenda. In this book, I argue that there is a richer narrative to explore regarding this intangible—yet consequential—projective dimension underlying transnational practices. The key to reaching this narrative is to treat this cognitive dimension as an object of analysis in its own right. In this agenda, cultural sociologists—and especially so those interested in cognition—are well suited to be central contributors. Such an agenda, however, requires bringing into migration scholarship frameworks and analytical vocabularies that can allow us grasp and conceptualize this cognitive dimension and, accordingly, to create the necessary analytical bridges between the cognitive and the social. This book illustrates what exactly I mean with this. In the following section, I lay out the theoretical foundations underlying the analytical approach I introduce in this book. I then introduce the analytical framework guiding the analysis presented in the remaining chapters of the book.

Theoretical Foundations: On Cognition (of the Future) and Social Processes.

One crucial aspect for approaching the impact of social actor's engagement with the future in the transnational everyday lives of social actors is the acknowledgement that it is their awareness of their experience of time and their cognitive ability to reach into horizons that transcend the physicality of their present that makes the future accessible. In exploring how the future features in the transnational lives the book draws upon people's capacity to produce images about a reality that is yet to be lived, yet is nonetheless engrossing in the present. In this sense, this book is attentive to people's future-oriented cognition.

The book rests on a sociological approach that takes seriously the cognitive and temporal engagements that set in motion the envisioning of projected future times, arguing that these engagements are responsive to and reflective on the situational contexts within which social actors are embedded.⁷ Accordingly, this study is guided by an analytical framework that brings together insights from literature across the social sciences and neurosciences that explore the intersections between people's cognitive processes and social context, on the one hand, and that consider the impact of people's temporal focus on behavioral outcomes, on the other. This study is grounded in an approach that builds on sociological treatments of cognition, studies of temporal

⁷ At this point it is suitable to make a distinction between my analytical take on the future and the line of thought to which the subject could commonly be associated within the discipline. In the form of an intellectual and normative concern with progress and utopia, the future has always been central to the sociological enterprise. Within the discipline, interest in the future is commonly translated into a concern with forward looking or a concern with the "social future" (for examples see a 1995 issue of the *American Journal of Sociology* focusing on prediction, Bell 1997; Toffler 1972; Bell and Mau 1971). A more contemporary sociological approach to the social future can be found on the work by those working on the "sociology of expectations", anchored in the tradition of science and technology studies (for an overview see Adam 2005, for an example see Brown, Rappert and Webster 2000).

orientation and mental future articulation in psychology and the neurosciences, and, in particular, from sociological and philosophical discussions about projectivity and action.

Culture and Cognition

This book builds upon a wide body of work in cultural sociology preoccupied with incorporating the cognitive domain into sociological explanation. A key concern in the literature that follows this agenda—commonly associated within the field to the area of “Culture and Cognition” (see DiMaggio 1997) or identified with Cognitive Sociology (see Zerubavel 1997)—has been the understanding of the connection between people’s cognitive processes and the contexts in which these take place. From this perspective, cognition is “an act of social being—an act both enabled and constrained by one’s position in the complex web of social and cultural experience” (Cerulo 2002: 3). This sociological program thus entails a search for the social roots of what people think and do, emphasizing the ways in which socio-cultural factors (such as institutions, group membership, shared experiences or collective interests, to mention some) mediate what enters and leaves people’s cognitive apparatus. Cognitive activity is responsive to structure and culture and, as such, it shows patterned variation in different times and social environments (Cerulo 2002; Zerubavel 1997; DiMaggio 1997). This variation, this diverse methodological and theoretical body of literature suggests, can only be understood in the light of people’s belonging to collectivities (families, nations, ethnic groups, subcultures, communities, etc) and of their placement in well-identified contexts of action (institutions, social movements, interpersonal relations, economic markets, etc.). Scholars recognize, for example, that the schemata by which people cognitively sort out

the world is guided by distinguishable cultural elements and practices—e.g. rituals, symbols, metaphors and narratives—that synchronize cognitive experiences.⁸ Others have shown that the strategies, principles and practices that people use in their cognitive work tend to accommodate cultural and socio-structural expectations. Thus, while brain structures are responsible for people’s cognitive faculties, how people digest information is moderated by conventions and socially constructed meanings and understandings—e.g. values, beliefs, moral constructs, and other normative components.⁹ Furthermore, as a different vein of research illustrates, cognition is also structured by situations or cultural circumstances particular to specific social scenarios—such as historical change, social crisis, or technological innovation. These circumstances, for example, can orient or switch attention by facilitating the effacement, modification or creation of frameworks for the perception of reality.¹⁰

⁸ Zerubavel (1981), for example, uncovers the ways in which calendars and clocks create a collective sense of the passage of time. By exploring how commemorative practices and memorials create and sustain a collective recollection of the past, the extensive literature on collective memory (e.g. Schudson 1992; Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz 1991) also suggests that the cognitive work of members of a community can be synchronized.

⁹ Christena E. Nippert-Eng’s (1996) research on the ways people carve out the boundaries between home and work is exemplary here. In her ethnographic-based study she unpacks the ways in which people’s perception of this categorical configuration is based on the cultural understandings of these terms and exposes the ways in which social contexts encourage people to experience and practice this categorical distinction in specific ways.

¹⁰ For a classical study, see Benedict Anderson’s (1993) work on the rise of nationalism. Though not specifically emerging from the sociological literature under discussion, his study on the rise of national consciousness illustrates the power of the social in the tempering of cognitive practices. The author argues that the interaction between a system of production and a new technology of communications at the end of the 18th century, among other aspects, set the conditions for a collective shift in the ways people conceive their communion with others. By making possible new patterns of knowledge distribution for geographically vast regions, capitalism and print media led to the development of a new form of collective consciousness that substituted the one previously provided, for example, by religious ideologies. For other example see Meyorwitz (1997) arguments on how shifts in modes of communication are accompanied by shifting senses of place or Jasanoff’s (2005) comparative study on how biotechnology has given rise to different social discourses and conceptual categories.

Sociological research in other areas has also provided insights that point towards the other side of the cognitive/social coin, documenting the centrality of the cognitive domain for sociological processes. Scholars of social movements, for example, continuously call attention to the cognitive nature of collective action (e.g., Eyerman and Jamison 1991). Cognitive frames—particularly in the form of narrative structures—enable people to bond intersubjectively and to take meaningful action; thus they are regarded as important mechanisms for guiding action and energy in specific directions. Social movements, research in this area suggests, articulate and use narrative frames as resources for mobilization, and activists make sense of everyday interaction and their own protests through existing frames (Eyerman 2006). For the various players in political mobilizations, cognitive framing plays a critical role in evoking set of meanings that helps to define situations.¹¹ The outcomes of social movements thus depend heavily on the cognitive processes that underlie people's actions. Other insights about the ways in which cognitive processes can direct action and inform social behavior could be pointed to—particularly from studies that turn the attention to the problem of the definition of reality in their research agendas (e.g. Cerulo 1998; Isaacson 2002) or from those that, to some degree, explore distinct ways in which people translate categorical distinctions into collective behavioral patterns (e.g. Nippert-Eng 1996; Bourdieu 1984).

Overall, by addressing the connection between cognition and social processes in its two modalities (i.e. the impact of the social on cognition, and the relevance of the cognitive for social processes), this literature provides a relational conceptualization of cognition that connects the life of the mind of individuals with the life of their social

¹¹ Of relevance here is the work on framing processes that has characterized recent social movement theory (e.g. Snow *et al.* 1986). For a discussion of the analytical utility on frames and framing see Oliver & Johnson (2000) and Benford & Snow (2000).

contexts. This sociological approach to cognition speaks to an idea that is currently circulating in current developments in the Neurosciences' understanding of cognitive processes.

In the past two decades, for instance, the Neurosciences have abandoned a strong reliance on the “disembodied, atemporal intellectualist vision of the mind” (Clark 1997, p. 7) in favor of a notion of cognition that sees it as situated in place, as being embodied and, as such, as having temporal and spatial specificity (Clark 1999). This perspective invites to include the environment in which the mind-body interact into considerations of cognition, suggesting that cognition “can be social, particular and concrete” (Salomon 2006, p. 413). In other words, cognition “cannot be separated from context” (ibid).¹² Thus, more and more, in the Neurosciences, the understanding of cognition as autonomous operations of the brain is moving to an understanding of cognition as a result of transactions that occur between the brain and the world outside it.

In exciting new research agendas that are bridging the cognitive program in Sociology with the Neurosciences, in recent years, sociologists are beginning to systematically explore these transactions. Under this emerging agenda—referred to as a “new page in cognitive sociology, and more broadly, in the study of culture and cognition” (Cerulo 2010, p. 118), scholars are paying an increased and detailed attention to cognitive processes with respect to key theoretical and empirical concerns in social theory. Correspondingly, in their research agendas scholars in the field are locating the ways in which cognitive processes might be responding to cues found in the domains of the social and the cultural. Sociologists are pointing out to the fact that the organization

¹² This is exemplified by the movement in philosophy advocating for “situated cognition” (see Solomon 2006 and Clancey 1997)

of sociocultural contexts—as it relates to cultural routines, communication sequences, beliefs and traditions, for example—matters in the triggering of certain cognitive responses (Cerulo 2010). By looking at mental operations in action, as performed by social actors who are situationally, contextually and culturally located, scholars following this agenda are addressing now the relevance of attending to the mental operations that are impacting behaviors, on the one hand, and the sociological elements that are factored into these cognitive practices, on the other (e.g. Lizardo 2004; Cerulo 2006; Vaisey 2009; Danna-Lynch 2010; Daipha 2010). This book addresses people’s consideration of the future under this agenda. It points out to the need to address the constant reciprocal flow between the brain and the surrounding world in explanations of social experiences, practices and processes. As such, it follows an analytical agenda that pays attention to the mental operations underlying people’s thoughts about their futures.

Temporality and Experience

While the book is grounded in these sociological treatments of cognition, the approach I present in this book also moves beyond them. As the imagining of the future implies the experience of a temporal distance between the moment of conception of a future and the moment of its potential realization, here I also turn attention to the temporal element contained in the act of projecting a future. Thus, I complement the insights offered by sociological research on cognitive practices with those of scholars who have dealt with questions of temporality. I rely on the work of social theorists who address these questions as part of their discussion of everyday action. I also draw upon

social psychologists and neuroscientists who pay attention to these processes in their studies of temporal orientation and mental future articulation.

Temporality has been long recognized in social theory as deeply bound up with the content of human experience. In the humanities and the social and behavioral sciences, conceptions of temporality have long been understood to play a central role in the constitution of social and personal life (Adam 2005; Zerubavel 1999; Luhmann 1995). Literature scattered around these fields suggests that people's thinking and reflecting on temporality is indeed a powerful influence on how people think, feel, and act (Mead 1932; Schutz, 1967; Maines, Sugrue and Katovich 1983, Emirbayer and Mische Flaherty and Fine 2001). Thus, this literature puts forward the idea that people's relation to and understanding of temporality has practical implications for how people conduct themselves in their daily living.

One of the ways in which neuropsychological literature addresses this set of issues is by exploring what they refer to as "mental time travel" into the future (Suddendorf and Corballis 2007). Researchers proposed that mental time travel into the future is a facet of a more general brain-based capacity to be consciously aware of one's continued temporal existence and, accordingly, to mentally represent our subjective experiences in the past, the present or the future. This capacity is known as the auto-noetic consciousness—or self-knowing consciousness. Along with another form of consciousness that makes thinking about subjective time possible (known as chronesthesia), this has been related to the prefrontal cortex in the brain and is determined by the properties of each individual brain. (Tulving 1985; Suddenford and Corballis 2007).

Particularly helpful is the notion that people's view of and attention to temporal horizons constitute important elements for guiding action and energy in specific directions.

Evidence from empirical research and theoretical work in the social and behavioral sciences show that attitudes toward and beliefs about the past, present and future—the nature of the articulations of these temporal horizons, how these are represented, how far these extend, how detailed they are, and their perceived importance and degree of possibilities, to mention some—are implicated in the ways in which people react to and act upon social settings. According to literature in these fields, people's articulation of a relation to the past, present and future is potentially related to behavioral and experiential outcomes, and, hence, is both a constructive and structuring feature of human action.

(Nuttin 1985; Zimbardo 1992; Zimbardo et. al 2005)

Research in psychology, for instance, emphasizes that people's linking of the past and future to the present—a process known in the literature as *time perspective*—is a crucial organizational principle with implications for action, decision-making processes, attention and perception (Zimbardo and Boyd 1999). This literature suggests that people's tendencies to consider or emphasize particular representations of the past, the present and the future are key variables for behavioral functioning that predict how individuals will respond to choices and situations. Empirical investigations, for instance, suggest that the weight people attribute in their daily living to the past, the present and the future imply distinct modes of action. An emphasis on the future, to mention an example, is generally related to a proactive response to the environment and high levels of achievement. A focus on the past, on the other hand, is often associated with more

conservative behavior, reluctance to change and minimum engagement in risk-taking practices (Oettingen and Mayer, D. 2002; Aspinwall 2005).

The significance of the intersection between temporal considerations and conduct also resonates in the behavioral economic literature that focuses on how people make choices overtime—referred to in the literature as *intertemporal choices* (Loewenstein and Thaler 1989). Interested in predicting and modeling decision-making processes, this body of work suggests that individuals confronted with making decisions that have consequences in multiple time periods engage in negotiating between the needs of their current and future selves. Thus, this literature posits the idea that choice (and, accordingly, the directing of human action) depends fundamentally on the way in which people discount the future - or rather its representation -, whether it concerns future resources (rate of interest) or satisfactions (time preference).

Central to the conceptual work I present in this book are what neuroscientists and psychologists refer to as episodic future-thinking and semantic future thinking. This is a distinction they identify when exploring the various mental activities that deal with the extended or non-immediate future. From their discussions that look at varieties of future experience, a particular distinction regarding modes of future thinking is relevant to point out. Episodic future thinking is the ability to think about the future in a personally involved way, by projecting the self ahead in time. This entails people anticipating or foreseeing themselves in the future in ways that are novel and uncertain. Episodic future thinking means that people understand that the future can be constrained by one's present conditions. Semantic future thinking, in contrast, refers to thinking of the future in a fairly script-like way. This is different from episodic because the unfolding of a future

event is seen as fixed rather than uncertain and, accordingly, focusing on the regularities (typicality) of events. Two points on this distinction are worth stressing here. First, differences in the ways in which people cognitively articulate the future are impacting the ways in which people envision future scenarios and the actions through which they are pursuing them, as one accommodates personal irregularities and constraints and not the other. Second, each of these types of future-oriented cognition represents different degrees of awareness of the self in time and connection to situational context. As can be expected, these might have implications in people's behaviors. (For further discussion see Chapter 3).

These concerns resonate in social theory that has explored the temporal elements of human action. This work points out toward an understanding of purposeful action that accounts for its connection to people's reflecting on their past, present and future. Classic instances of this literature are Mead's (1934, 1932) discussions of how the interpretation of the present, past, and the future are central to people's actions and intentions, and Schutz's (1967) treatment of the role of time in the construction of meaningful lived experience. More recently, Emirbayer and Mische (1998) and Mische (2009) proves most relevant here.

Drawing on the pragmatist and phenomenological tradition, Emirbayer and Mische suggest that people's agentic capacity—the capacity for evaluating and shaping the conditions of their lives—is responsive to their changing temporal orientations. Emirbayer and Mische argue “agentic processes can only be understood if they are linked intrinsically to the changing temporal orientations of situated actors” (Emirbayer and Mische 1998:967). In other words, people's acting in and reacting to their contexts of

action is informed by their qualitative engagement with the past, present and future. For instance, the past provides known patterns of action (i.e. traditions, routines and schemas) that enlighten people in responding to the demands and contingencies found in the present. At the same time, this response is also oriented by people's anticipations of the future in the form of imagined possibilities and options. Particular forms of creativity and intervention (i.e. particular types of social agency), the authors suggest, thus result from the different ways in which people construct—always in response to particular contexts of action—this relationship between past focused iterational behavior, present focused practical-evaluative behavior, and future focused projective behavior. Emirbayer and Mische therefore suggest that human agency is

the temporally constructed engagement by actors of different structural environments—the temporally relational contexts of action—which, through the interplay of habit, imagination and judgement, both reproduce and transforms those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations (ibid.: 970).

One aspect of Emirbayer's and Mische's discussion worth pointing out is how this conceptualization of agency suggests that the integration of the subjective time orientations of actors with their particular structural environments has implications for structures of thought and action. Accordingly, this integration has an impact in how individuals react to the contexts in which they are embedded, thereby also implying consequences for the contexts themselves. Agency and the sustaining and transformation of social environments, thus, have to do with the ways in which people are connected to the past, the present, and the future at any given moment.

What makes these writings important and relevant for the concerns of this book is their underlying implications: namely, that people's understanding, negotiation and

commitment to their experience of the past, the present and the future are foundational for both societal and individual functioning and are central to any understanding of agency in relation to social processes. These insights suggest that for the understanding of the distinct forms through which people engage with their everyday contexts, it matters how and to what degree people think about temporality and how this thinking is contextualized in their responding to (and creation of) the situations of their here and now.

Emirbayer's and Mische's elaboration of forms of agency that are attentive to temporality provides a compelling foundation for this book, since it facilitates the positioning of the human experience of time in explanations of social processes. It is particularly useful because of the way in which the authors integrate micro-level processes (the subjective time orientations of actors) with larger structures (specific settings and contexts), suggesting that this integration has implications for how individuals react to the contexts in which they act and, consequently, for the contexts themselves. Overall, this framework allows for a consideration of the following two domains as mutually constitutive: 1) the formative influences of the reflective articulations of the future, and 2) the ways in which this reflective act plays out in particular contexts—especially at the level of variations in agentic activity that social actors might exhibit in context, as well as the outcomes that might result from this activity. Emirbayer's and Mische's framework is especially helpful for addressing the consequences of positing a future. After all, as the authors suggest,

the specific culturally embedded ways in which people imagine, talk about, negotiate, and make commitments to their futures influence their degree of freedom and maneuverability in relation to existing structures (i.e., it *matters* to what degree they understand time as something fixed and determinate, or

conversely, as something open and negotiable) (Ibid: 985, emphasis in the original).

Of obvious relevance for the book is Emirbayer and Mische's conceptualization of the future-oriented component of agency, referred to as the *projective* element of human agency—people's construction of “changing images of where they think they are going, where they want to go, and how they can get there” (ibid.: 984). The authors point out that motivations for present action are situated in the context of a culturally embedded process of forward-looking, or future projecting. These motivations are outcomes of narrative processes through which projects are constructed and reconstructed in face of changing circumstances, both at the level of relational context and of personal biography. Since narrative structures provide content and direction, the construction of narratives that locate future possibilities is constitutive of strategic action and, consequently, central for the understanding of the distinct forms through which people engage with their everyday contexts. Projecting into the future is thus a creative and productive process with implications for the construction of reality.

Particularly relevant here is the notion of *projectivity*—“the imaginative generation by actors of possible future trajectories of action, in which received structures of thought and action may be creatively reconfigured in relation to actors' hopes, fears, and desires for the future” (ibid.: 971). “Projectivity” offers a particular suitable theoretical tool to frame the questions of people's cognition of the future in relation to context. This notion suggests that to the extent that cognition of the future is action oriented and action is oriented to and taking place in social contexts, future consideration is also contextually located and responsive to it. This notion of projectivity is also outlining an agenda for addressing these relation: to focus on the relation between

structures of thought, structures of action and to the contextual circumstances under which “possible futures” get reconfigure. As a theoretical tool, this notion of projectivity offers a dynamic view of this relation.

Overall, this set of literature points out to a central theme that provide a basis for the analytical approach here proposed: that social actor’s temporal focus has behavioral outcomes. In order to understand these outcomes, it is necessary to understand the form of people’s temporal considerations, meaning that in addition to locating people’s future consideration in their actions, it is also important to consider how people are cognitively articulating such projections and the circumstances and situations under which this mental process takes place (for a programmatic statement on this see Mische 2009).

An Agenda For Researching The Future in (a Transnational) Context

Drawing on the above mentioned body of work, the analysis in this book is rooted on two general premises: First, that there are intersections between cognition of the future and social context, and, second, that future-oriented temporal focus is consequential for the practices and behaviors of social actors and, correspondingly, for the social contexts themselves. Accordingly, to address the concerns of this book—i.e. to understand how people’s projection of the future is factored into transnational dynamics—my analytical focus is on three interrelated elements: a) the socio-cultural processes that the imagining of the future results from, b) the shape and manifestations of this imagining and, c) the forms of behaviors and experiences this imagining creates. This focus thus demands to make connections between three elements:

- Articulations for and of the future (i.e.. dreams, hopes, expectations, projects)

- People's contexts and relations
- Practices and subjective processes (i.e. interpretations, reflections)

To gain empirical access to the mental category of the future, my analytical focus is on what I call *projective practices*. I define these as the practices that, through the mobilizing of ideal, material and emotional resources, allow people to cognitively extend ahead in time and to construct images of future selves and/or future scenarios for action. Accordingly, here I look at what people do, both at the level of the cognitively and material, on both sides of the Mexico-US border in their experiencing of the future.

Guided by these premises and foci, I developed three analytical themes that guide the fieldwork and analysis I present in the following chapters:

a) The Production of the Future

This first theme explores the formative influences on people's articulations of the future—by future I mean the realm of possibility that exists outside of cognition and that, as an object of consideration, is constituted through reflective processes. This concerns with the ways in which people's future considerations are constituted at the level of social, cultural and relational context. In this sense, here I argue that people's future imagining takes place in social context, in the context of people's relations with others and in the physical and cultural surroundings where these relations are located. As such, forms of personal and collective engagement with the future are moderated by socially and relationally constituted meanings and understandings, as well as structured by situations or cultural circumstances particular to specific social scenarios. All together, these components constitute what I identify as a *system of projectivity*: an interconnected network of practices and knowledge creating mechanisms and resources that circulate in

situational context and to-from individuals and that actors draw on to develop ideas about the future. The goal of the following chapters is to locate this *system of projectivity* and to understand the ways in which it operates in a specific context,

In addition, this first analytical theme also looks at the modes of people's engagement with the future, particularly at the ways in which these are articulated in form and content. Here I argue that how people engage the future—both materially and cognitively—matters. Central to this theme is the recognition of the processes by means of which images of the future—e.g. projects, future scenarios, dreams—are created.

b) The Productive Future

This second theme uncovers the ways in which the projective act plays out in the processes through which people reproduce and transform their present realities—especially in the variations in people's capacity for evaluating and shaping the conditions of their lives. This analytical theme thus concentrates on the tangible repercussions that dreams, predictions, anticipations, projects and other forms of future-oriented cognition have in people's everyday living. Here I argue that the imagining or consideration of the future (and, accordingly, the particular modes in which the future is imagined) define experiential scenarios for people, as these facilitate agency by impacting people's present decisions, identities, and relations. In this sense, the act of engaging the future has real effects that are independent from the actual realization or fulfillment of the future projection.

c) The Constraining Future

This third analytical theme addresses the different ways in which people's projective practices pose limitations on people's acting and, accordingly, on the ways in

which people relate to social context. Previously, I have argued about the productive nature of people's engagement with the future, as this becomes an enabler for action. This third theme points towards the other side of the coin, documenting the ways in which the act of positing the future translates into self-created constraints for action. Here I argue that by enabling people to act in certain ways, people's future imagining also enable them to *not act* in others, as future imaginings turn into blue-prints that guide actions in specific directions. In this sense, as the narratives that accompany future projections become more internalized and associated possibilities are defined, the consideration of and calculations about one future becomes constraining.

In Search of the Future: On Ethnographic Research

The idea for this book began with random conversations I had in a city of central New Jersey with migrants, both women and men, from Mexico—most of them originally from the state of Oaxaca, particularly from the southwest of what it is known as the *Mixteca* region.¹³ This city in central New Jersey, which roughly 25 years ago started receiving a large number of migrants from Southern Mexico, is one of a number of cities in the United States that have relatively recently become destinations for Mexican migrants.¹⁴ Most of the people I had conversations with were part of the most recent

¹³ The *Mixteca* region, mostly rural and sustained by seasonal agriculture, spreads between three states in south-central Mexico. This region is located on between the south of Puebla, the western side of Oaxaca and the east of Guerrero. A highly diverse population characterizes the region as their communities incorporate mestizos and indigenous people. Particularly in Oaxaca—the most ethnically diverse state in the country—there exist 16 identified indigenous groups each with its own customs, social organization and dialect (it is believed that at least ½ of the state population still speaks a dialect of pre-hispanic origin). Oaxaca is the most ethnically diverse state in the country, placing third out of 32 states in the national marginalization index. (CONAPO 2001). The *Mixteca* region is divided into three subregions: *Mixteca Alta* (Northeast Guerrero and Western Oaxaca), *Mixteca Baja* (Northwest Oaxaca and Southwest Puebla) and *Mixteca de la Costa* (the Pacific coastline of eastern Guerrero and Southwest Oaxaca).

¹⁴ For more on these new destinations see Zuñiga and Hernández-León 2005.

migration wave to the city. Many were relatively recent undocumented labor migrants who had been in the United States for less than five years.

These conversations occurred in the context of my encounters with people as I conducted my daily living in this American city. Benefiting from the sustained patterns of migration from Mexico to the city and the growing economic practices of the Mexican community, I had been purchasing ingredients very specific to Mexican cuisine at the local Farmer's market, and finding imported goods at the Mexican owned corner convenience store where other Mexicans shopped. I would satisfy my cravings for *sopes*¹⁵ and Oaxacan *mole*¹⁶ at one of the (then) five Mexican restaurants in town and, in the process engage in small talk with other Mexican customers and service staff. Almost every other day I would engage in conversations with fellow Mexicans either at the bus stop, the laundromat or the convenience store, very often listening to their remarks about my Mexico City accent. Also, some of my conversations resulted from me volunteering as an ESL teacher in a non-profit organization working with immigrant workers and participating in community and family events.

The centrality of the theme of the future in many of the conversations I had during these encounters became the seed for this book. In these conversations I heard about people's futures, the expectations they had for the months and years to come and the goals they aimed to accomplish. Many of these thoughts for the future were connected to life back in their hometowns. These series of conversations led me to follow the origin of these futures and to locate them in the context for which and from where they were conceived.

¹⁵ Corn masa patties topped with fillings such as beans, cheese or meat.

¹⁶ A chocolate and chile based sauce often served with chicken.

Prior to beginning formal research for this book, I spent a summer traveling in the region in Oaxaca where some of the people I had met back in New Jersey were from. Particularly, I visited family members of some of the people I had met in New Jersey in various towns of the region in Oaxaca known as the *Mixteca de la Costa* (figure 1).¹⁷ Towards the end of that trip, after visiting a few small settlements, I reached the town I call *La Esperanza*, a mid-size community of roughly less than 5000 habitants,¹⁸ located in the northern section of this region. Because many of the migrants I had met in New Jersey were from *La Esperanza* this mountain town community became the main location of my research. In this sense, I found myself following the pathways of the *migrant circuit* (Besserer 1999; Kearney 1995) I had been exposed to in New Jersey.

La Esperanza is reached via mountain roads built into the thickly forested hillsides of the Sierra Madre mountain range. To get to the town, in any direction, one has to travel through the rugged terrain of this mountainous section of the state, in parts through the federal highway and in others through dirt roads. Depending on the location, this is an approximate 5 hours drive from the City of Oaxaca and the region of the Central Valleys, about 4-5 hours away from the *Mixteca Baja* region and a 3 hours drive from the closest section of the *Mixteca Alta*. The closest airport on the Pacific coast of the state is about 4 hours away by car.¹⁹ Thus, while *La Esperanza* shares many

¹⁷ Research on labor migration points a direct connection between social networks and migration (Massey and Espinosa 1997; Massey 1987). Migrants draw on people they know to lower the costs and risk of movement from their locality of origin to the destination country. As a result it is likely to find people from the same community migrating to the same places. This dynamic organically concentrated my fieldwork, which originated in central New Jersey, in the specified geographical region in Oaxaca.

¹⁸ INEGI (2005)

¹⁹ Examples of research on migration concerning communities in these other regions are Jeffrey Cohen's (2004) work in the Central Valleys, Joanna Dreby's (2010) and Cornelius's et. al (2009) analysis in communities of the *Mixteca Baja* on the Oaxacan side of the region and Robert Smith's (2006) fieldwork in

characteristics with other communities in the state, its geographical location makes it also different than other places even within the general *Mixteca* region. For instance, because of the disperse patterns of migration in the region, the history of migration cannot be generalized for all communities in the *Mixteca* (see Besserer 2004). The following chapter elaborates more on this.



Figure 1. Subdivisions of the Mixteca Region. Based on Romero Frizzi 1990. Image source (approximate border divisions drawn by myself): <http://www.lienzoculinario.com/2012/03/asi-sabe-oaxaca-chiles-oaxaqueños.html>

A= Mixteca Alta
 B= Mixteca Baja
 C= Mixteca de la Costa

This book draws on materials gathered over the course of three years of fieldwork at different periods, with families from *La Esperanza*, both in their home-town in Oaxaca, Mexico, and in central New Jersey. In this sense, this is a book that looks at the

a community of the Mixteca Baja on the side of the state of Puebla. For more research on the Mixteca see Kearney and Besserer 2004.

lives of transnational families, those “divided by international borders and who maintain significant emotional and economic ties in two countries” (Dreby 2010 p. 5), and follows its members in both sides of the border. This methodological choice follows that of others who have conducted research with migrant populations by moving across borders just as their research subjects do (Levitt, 2001; Smith 2006; Mahler 1999). Fieldwork in both sites was based on semi-formal interviews, life stories and informal conversations, observations of immediate home and community contexts and participation in people’s day-to-day living (e.g. language instruction, family and community events, sharing meals with families, assisting people with errands, translating English-written materials into Spanish). Conversations focused on various aspects of the individual and collective experiences of and ideas about the future and, predominantly, on daily life in general. The analytical concerns presented in this book had their origins in the content of these conversations. This fieldwork generated data both on community-level patterns of behavior and on the experiences of families and individuals at a mezzo- and micro-level.

During this fieldwork, I employed families as windows of observation. A number of families²⁰ from *La Esperanza* served as a data collection site that provided a situated window on the processes that interest here. Early on during my research I noticed differences in the manner in which future-oriented thinking manifested—both at the level of the imaginary and the material— across generations within families and also within generations among different families (and even between different lines of the same extended family) in town. To some degree, these differences resulted from the specific ways in which the social experience of each generation was framed by the historical

²⁰ I am using a broad definition of family, understanding families as “cross-generational kin networks of any shape linked by descent or marriage” (Bertaux and Thompson 1997: 12). Thus, here I think of families as composed by many nuclear families that share a common origin.

periods they have witnessed as community members and, thus, by the ways in which the maturity of migration patterns (and its social consequences) over time had impacted each generation's time perspectives. However, I noticed that the variation in projective activity also involved the interplay between the particular migratory experiences of family members and the ways in which these intersected with different aspects of the community's complex social dynamics. In addition to giving access to the socio-historical change that had taken place in this community for the past fifty years, identifying this difference in experience was very enlightening for exposing some of the underlying logics interacting with the temporal-imaginative practices that concern me here. In this book I turn this empirical finding—the possibility of understanding societal dynamics by means of examining concrete experiences among families with distinct relational contexts—into a methodological strategy.

Social scientists from diverse areas have already proven the feasibility of family-based research for talking about social processes in general (Bodemann 2005; Bertaux and Thompson 1997; Lewis 1961; Lewis 1959) and, in fact, for migration-related studies in particular (Dreby 2010; Miles 2004; Bailey and Ramella 1998). As these studies suggest, families are wonderful channels for examining social phenomena through exposing the ways in which these impact private life trajectories. Since families can be situated at the crossroads between the micro and the macro, studies of this kind provide the opportunity to explore societal processes while focusing on the experiences, practices and subjective processes of family members. A focus on dynamics within families thus makes possible what C. Wright Mills (1978 [1959]) considers the goal of sociological thought: the grasping of history and biography—in other words, of social structures and

individual social actors—their points of intersection, and their changing relations over time. For the concerns that interest here, the methodological potential of this family focus is particularly important.

Overall, the bulk of the data here presented draws on what is known as family case history research. Bertraux and Delcroix (2000) argue that family case histories “function as small mirrors of general cultural and social patterns, of societal dynamics and change; and the idea is, by multiplying them, to grasp these patterns and their dynamics of reproduction and historical transformation” (p. 71). Identified as an extension of the life story method, this method considers families as units for social analysis by means of which it is possible to shed light on a given common issue. Its focus is on the narrative accounts of different generations of a number of families sharing a common social reality, concentrating on what people have to say about their own experiences, the experiences of other family members and the relations with these members. The final analytical goal of the family case history method is to expose the variety and commonalities of patterns of relations, settings and family stories in order to map from below the dynamics that generate social phenomena and how they have changed over time through the concrete situated actions of people. Thus, through in-depth explorations of the lived experiences of individuals *in context* and of their interpretations of their actions and the actions of others—through a “thick description,” as Geertz (2000 [1973]) would suggest, it is possible to piece together the inner workings of social arrangements, on the one hand, and, on the other, the underlying logics of distinct courses of action. This method allows social analysts to focus on the intersection between social

context and individual action—thus, to move back and forth between socio-structural factors and individual agency and related subjective processes.

Particularly for the concern at hand, the methodological relevance of this technique for conducting empirical research relies on what its narrative and relational approach brings into the research process and how this contributed to the analytical goals of the book. During fieldwork, its narrative approach facilitated the eliciting of people's reflexivity, making possible to explore the meanings, causes and outcomes of people's practices as these relate to particular material practices and situations. This was crucial to my effort to understand the nature of people's temporal-imaginative practices. Because of its focus on the life stories of individuals belonging to different generations and their comparison within and across families, this methodology also allowed for an in-depth exploration of the causes and effects of people's practices of projection while accounting for their intersections with the different historical times of the local context.

I reconstructed case histories of the families after multiple conversations I had with them and their members, at different times during the different stages of my fieldwork. All of the families I interacted with had family members who have had migratory experience to the United States. Most of my interactions with these families were anything but formal and these occurred in the context of other activities such as sharing a meal, walking around town or attending social events, to mention some. While I frequently had specific questions I wanted to explore with them during these encounters, more often my interaction consisted of spending time chatting about anything and everything with family members. The bulk of the data this article draws on emerged during these long and spontaneous conversations that, often, included unsolicited

accounts related to migration, family relations, everyday life and plans for the future. In this sense, the families' everyday thoughts, their activities, and my casual observations provide the foundation for the analysis that is presented in the following chapters.

All conversational data, originally in Spanish,²¹ is based on my field notes. Since most of the data contained here are outcomes from unstructured encounters, I did not tape-record while I was conducting fieldwork. The bulk of the quotes have been reconstructed from dialogues recorded in field notes and my recollection of my interactions with people. Thus, the conversational data are only as accurate as memory and ear allow. For expository purposes and to preserve anonymity, I have changed all proper names and, in some cases, when it does not impact the analysis some identifiers of the people who appear in the ethnographic stories of the following chapters.

What is to Come: Overview of the Chapters

Chapter II, "*La Esperanza*, Migration and the *Porvenir*," relies on conversational data to provide an overview of *La Esperanza* and of the circumstances that have led to a boom in people's consideration of future possibilities. The chapter thus takes a wider look at how projective practices in town and their related vocabulary are linked to a wider societal process that brought about changes in people's temporal orientation. This chapter places people's projective practices into a broader social fabric defined by the emergent dynamics of migration and their intersection with the particular socio-cultural context in this town. This chapter will provide the necessary backdrop against which to understand the processes explained in the following chapters and through which to situate the ethnographic stories that follow.

²¹ Unless otherwise indicated, translations are my own.

Chapter III builds on the analysis of the previous chapter by further exploring the kind of cognitive work people do in *La Esperanza* as they engage the future. However, in contrast to chapter II, this chapter explores the meaning making mechanisms through which people in town articulate future-oriented cognition in *La Esperanza*, as this is expressed through some of the ways in which people in town articulate and pursue future-oriented projects. This chapter looks at people's projective practices as relying on subjective mental processes that are articulated reflexively in conversation with context and biographical history, on the one hand, and in relation to people's interactions with others, on the other. Here, I engage with research in cognitive neuroscience as a means to understand how future experiences are articulated. I use their distinction between episodic and semantic future thinking as heuristics for the analytical purposes of this chapter. I build my argument around a set of three stories, each touching upon different forms of future experience-articulation.

“Futures in Motion” is the subject of chapter IV. This chapter draws on ethnographic accounts that depict the dynamic nature of people's future scenario planning. This chapter presents two biographical accounts to illustrate the constant reinvention and reexamination of future scenarios as people move between different contexts. Here, I look at the future as a unit of meaning that is biographically shaped and socially rooted. In conversation with the biographical accounts, I treat people's future as real players in people's transnational experiences. I do so by exploring the ways in which the puzzles of transnational everyday living pose challenges for social actors' future scenario building. The chapter points out to how transnational actors' conceptualization of the future—the way they structure the image of the future—is consequential for their

strategic action.

In the concluding chapter, I pull together all the threads of the analysis of previous chapters to formalize the understanding of the concerns addressed in the introduction. I organize these concerns around the three analytical themes introduced in this chapter: the production of the future, the productive future and the constraining future. I close this chapter with the story of the unfolding ethnographic process and my personal encounter with the substantive theme of this book.

Chapter II:

THE MAKING OF A CANVAS FOR FUTURE THINKING:

LA ESPERANZA, MIGRATION AND THE PORVENIR

In this chapter, I begin to explore the experience of the future I introduced in the previous chapter with the narrative of my encounter with people from *La Esperanza* and my observations of the manifestations of people's future-oriented thinking. I do so by taking a socio-cognitive stance that treats this experience as intertwined with social and cultural context. I explore these issues as they relate to people's capacity to mentally represent their subjective experiences in the future. In particular, I look at the question of future orientation—"the tendency for a particular individual to devote a considerable amount of his or her mental life to thinking about the future" (Szpunar and Tulving 2011: XX). Ultimately, this chapter points to the recognition of the projective behavior that brought me to *La Esperanza* in the first place as responsive to a communal system of projectivity that relies on the socio-cultural features of this context, as this facilitated the creation of frameworks for future-oriented thinking. I define a system of projectivity as an interconnected network of practices and knowledge creating mechanisms and resources that circulate in situational context and to-from individuals and that actors draw on to develop ideas about the future.

The purpose of this chapter is twofold. On the hand, this chapter looks at how projective practices in *La Esperanza* are linked to a wider societal process of change, due to the town's incorporation to the transnational migration scene as it impacted people's temporal orientation and future engaging practices. On the other hand, this chapter

provides some relevant background on the situational context to help locate the ethnographic stories introduced in the following two chapters. In what follows, first, I introduce the largest context of *La Esperanza*, namely its relatively recent history of transnational migration patterns. This section includes a further elaboration of the connection between migration and the question of the future, as well as a more detailed description of *La Esperanza*. Next, I provide a more detailed analysis of the ways in which this context of migration has provided frameworks and resources for people's engagement with the future.

Locating La Esperanza in Context

La Esperanza is one of a number of communities in the state of Oaxaca, in southern Mexico, with a significant indigenous population that, after having no substantial history of relocation outside their regions, have shown in the last two decades sustained patterns of migration to the United States²²--in this particular case, to central New Jersey and surrounding areas in New York and Pennsylvania. As of today, virtually every household in town has or has had at least one of its members residing abroad permanently or for periods of time, usually ranging from two to five years. These migrant experiences are central for understanding why the future, both as a concern and a form of subjective experience, has become so prominent in town, particularly in the past 20 years. The border crossing experiences of community members are at the core of the many ways in which the future features in the community's daily practices, both in its imaginary and material dimensions.

²² For more on these new emerging patterns of migration in the region see, for example, Fox and Rivera Salgado (2004).

The Transnational Context at Large

Over the past 25 years, high levels of out-migration have become a common denominator in most, if not all, of the state of Oaxaca. At the same time, the process of mass out-migration has affected communities at widely varying rates. This variation in rate has surprisingly significant consequences for the concern at hand. A brief overview of the history of migration in the region is thus appropriate here. This overview is not intended to provide a thorough treatment of the dynamics of out-mass migration from the region, but just enough to provide some context for the concerns of interest in this chapter.

The Oaxaca-Northeast United States connection is a relatively new phenomenon. In fact, overall, Oaxacan migration to the United States is not as prevalent as that from other more traditional sending regions in Mexico (Cohen 2004).²³ It is estimated that only 2.9% of the total state population migrates to the United States, ranking number 16 out of 32 among Mexican sending states (INEGI 2000). Some migrants from this new sending region have settled in traditional destination areas in the United States such as California, Texas and the Midwest. However, breaking the traditional migratory pattern to these receiving regions, many migrants have chosen new destinations of settlements in the East Coast of the United States in places like New York, New Jersey, and Florida and other

²³ Central-western Mexico, mostly composed by *mestizo* rural communities, is well recognized in the literature as the traditional heartland for migration. Identified sending states in this area with historically sustained migratory patterns are Guanajuato, Jalisco, Michoacán, Aguascalientes, Zacatecas, San Luis Potosí, Durango, Colima and Nayarit. (Durand, Massey and Zenteno 2001).

locations in Oregon, Washington and North Carolina (Fox 2006; Zepeda and Appendini 2005).²⁴

Migration from the southwest of the state (the *Mixteca de la Costa* region), where *La Esperanza* is located, has proceeded more slowly not only than the traditional migration from western Mexico but also than that from other regions in Oaxaca. In fact, most of the research on Oaxaca concentrates on the communities with long-standing ties to California, largely located in Oaxaca's central valleys, in what is considered the northern Sierra region and the northern section of the Mixteca region (e.g. Van Wey, Tucker and McCornell 2005; Cohen 2004; Runsten and Kearney 1994). This focus thus has left little documented the communities located in the southwest of the state and their counterparts settled in the United States, mostly in NJ.

It could be said that *La Esperanza* is relatively new to the transnational scene. While Oaxacan migrants began traveling to the southwest of the U.S. in the 50s through the Bracero Program,²⁵ it was not until the 1970s that the flows became more steady; it was only in the mid-'80s, following the 1982 economic crisis in Mexico, that the numbers of Oaxacans in the US considerably increased (Rivera-Salgado and Escalera-Rabadán op.cit.). It was during this time of crisis, as locals recall, when people from the region started arriving to the East Coast. Thus, while migratory practices are not new to the region where *La Esperanza* is located (some people were part of the first migration

²⁴ It is worth mentioning that this new migratory pattern not only has defined new transnational geographies but also, given the complexity of the socio-political reality of the indigenous population in Mexico—Oaxaca being the state in Mexico with the highest number of indigenous groups—has brought up new analytical and empirical puzzles for social scientists. Examples of these can be found in recent research agendas concerned with the question of how migration—in particular the emergence of indigenous participation in transnational public and political spheres— influence the structures of indigenous organization and community identity (see, for example, Fox and Gaspar Rivera-Salgado 2004b).

²⁵ This was a guest worker program for Mexicans in the United States that last from 1942-1964. For more on the topic as it relates to the Oaxacan migration see Cohen (op. cit.).

wave to California), it is only within the past 15 years that sustained patterns of migration from the area to New Jersey could be recognized. It is now possible, for example, to locate dense transnational connections that extend from southwestern Oaxaca to places such as Atlantic City (Grimes 1998), Princeton (Maloney 2002) and other locations in central New Jersey (Dreby 2010), where many people from *La Esperanza* relocate.

La Esperanza

La Esperanza is located in the mountain range known as Sierra Madre del Sur in the state of Oaxaca. The town is a small grid of paved and non-paved streets (it takes about 30 minutes to walk from south to north and about 20 minutes from west to east). It is divided into barrios frequently inhabited by members of the same families. At its center, *La Esperanza* has a main street—this is a segment of the federal highway—where almost all the quotidian activities in town take place. It is on the main street that the church, the municipal hall, the basketball court (which doubles as the town's main square) and most of the businesses in town are located. Also in the center of town, there is a loudspeaker placed on the roof of a store through which the local events and announcements are made all throughout the day. People pay the equivalent of \$2 to have their announcement made three times. Beginning at 6 am and ending around 9pm, the speaker broadcasts announcements for community events, services and goods such as are where to buy fresh meat or homemade tamales, the time and location of town meetings, reminders about school activities or promotions offered by the local dentist, to mention some.

Locals recall that before the highway reached town somewhere between 1959 - 1960, *La Esperanza*—which at the time was no more than a small rural settlement with scattered dwellings and a main dirt road—was very isolated from the rest of the communities in the region and, as a result, very impoverished. People remember that it used to take people two days of walking or riding a donkey or a horse through the mountains to get to the closest nearby city. If they wanted some basic products, they would have to wait until merchants known as *canasteros* (or basket-carriers) from regions beyond the closest city arrived to the town loaded with goods such as fruits and clay pots. Some remember that when the highway was inaugurated, there was still no drinking water, sewage, telephone or electricity available in town. Now, because of its location on the federal highway and its centrality for the smaller communities around, the town witnesses a lot of activity provided by the commercial trucks and passenger buses that stop by on the way to the capital of the state and the nearby large cities *La Esperanza* is located between, thus turning *La Esperanza* into a locus of commercial and interethnic relations. So while it still relies on the nearby largest city (about an hour away driving distance, approximately five times *La Esperanza*'s size) for the supply of goods and services, as the seat of the municipal government in the area, *La Esperanza* remains the social, educational, economic and political center for the rest of the villages in its municipality (the town, for example, hosts the municipality's health clinic and the only high school, which opened in the early 1990s).²⁶

²⁶ All states in Mexico are divided into administratively autonomous municipalities. *La Esperanza* belongs to a municipality that has the same name. It is composed by 36 settlements accessed from the head locality mostly through dirt roads. Excluding the town of *La Esperanza*, the population totals range from 5 to 1657 people per settlement (average population per settlement: 320 people) and total 15417 persons in all the municipality. Approximately 26.53 % of population <15yrs in the entire municipality is illiterate. Oaxaca state places third out of 32 states in the national marginalization index. (CONAPO 2001)

Economic life in the town is sustained by subsistence agriculture and livestock raising for household and local consumption, native textile production, small scale commerce and, in great part, from remittances sent by community members working abroad. In addition to accounting for a significant portion of the family income for some, these remittances are very often invested in housing construction and small service businesses. According to government estimates, 69.82% of the population have a daily income of 2 minimum salaries (the equivalent to 8.6 US dollars) and 57% of the adult population over 15 years of age did not finish elementary school.²⁷

Like many other communities in the region, *La Esperanza* has clear dynamics of ethnic stratification defined by its mix of indigenous and mestizo population—or, as it would be referred to in town, of “naturales” and “gente de razon”.²⁸ One of the fourteen indigenous groups of Oaxaca and considered the first settlers in the region dating back to prehispanic times, the indigenous population make up about 1/3 of the total elderly, and only speak Mixteco while the younger generations only speak Spanish. This ethnic community still preserves its distinctive forms of social organization, cultural practices and beliefs. Thus, while at first sight *La Esperanza* seems culturally homogeneous (Spanish language and people dressed in what could be considered occidental clothes are predominant), there exist clear social boundaries between them and *mestizos*, who are said to first arrive to the town from nearby municipalities in the early 1920s. Currently, as it is the case in all of the communities in Mexico with a mix of indigenous and *mestizos*, the indigenous population is most often at the bottom of the

²⁷ Source INEGI (2005).

²⁸ In English: the “naturals” and the “people of reason”. This distinction dates back to the times when Mexico was a Spanish colony.

community stratification system as a result of land expropriation and unequal access to educational opportunities and value-producing resources. However, thanks to out-group marriages, changes in the household economy of some indigenous families due to the monetary benefits resulting from migratory practices, and the implementation of bilingual classes in schools, their incorporation to the education system in the mid 1970s have helped to somewhat level the field for some, as it is remarked by some in town.

Migration Patterns

While *La Esperanza*'s migratory history to the United States started during the times of the *Bracero* program, according to locals, steady migratory practices to the North East of the United States started to develop in the mid/late 1980s for *mestizos*, mostly men, and a decade later for the indigenous sector of the population. Accordingly, three different periods of migration-related experiences to the United States can be identified from talking with people in *La Esperanza*.

I encountered some people in town in their seventies and eighties who can tell stories of travelling to the United States when they were young. Talking about the United States with them meant listening to narratives about the many adventures they had when moving freely from one state to another and from coast to coast, and about the many employment opportunities they encountered abroad. The timing of these stories seems to coincide with that of the *Bracero* program that began in the 1940s and continued through 1964, though it was not clear to me I was listening to *bracero* stories *per se*. In fact, I did not meet anybody who openly identified himself or herself as a *bracero*, though this does

not mean that there were none in *La Esperanza*.²⁹ What was clear to me, however, was that usually those with such stories were not people originally from *La Esperanza* but immigrants from other bigger towns in the region who, after building up capital, settled their businesses in town during the 1960s and 1970s, possibly as a result of the completion of the highway that made *La Esperanza* a potentially valuable commercial center. Accordingly, I would not identify those who told me their migrant stories as being the first people from the town who gained migratory experience. Instead, I see these people as the beginning of the arrival of migration-related outcomes and experiences to the town.

The first significant movement to the United States from people from *La Esperanza*, however, began in the early 1980s but intensified in the last five years of the decade. For instance, by 1985 the networks abroad, particularly in New Jersey, were solid enough to enable the migration of many mestizos to Central New Jersey—those with the earliest traveling experiences initially moved to border cities such as Tijuana, Los Angeles and San Diego before heading North. This is what can be considered the first big wave of migration from *La Esperanza* into Central New Jersey. Many of those who participated during this wave already had experiences spending periods of time working in different cities within Mexico, particularly in larger cities such as Puebla, Oaxaca City and Mexico City, and some close nearby touristic cities such as Acapulco and Huatulco. The migratory pattern from this time resembled that of many other traditional sending regions, namely mostly composed by young men in their mid-twenties, some of them married or with intentions to get married once they have saved some money abroad.

²⁹ After all, while the efforts of the bracero program recruiters did not reach Oaxaca with the same strength as it did in the center and north of Mexico, it is documented elsewhere (Grimes 1998) that some people from the geographical region of *La Esperanza* did participate in the program.

People estimate that non-indigenous women joined these patterns in the early 1990s. When inquiring about this with a former migrant, he said to me: “sisters, sisters-in law, nieces, wives... they all began to follow their brothers and husbands... now they do not need to follow people that much, they just go.”

The second significant phase of migration is that of the indigenous population in the mid 1990s (although it was during the first five years in the 2000s when the number of the indigenous population who were leaving town increased). People attribute the delayed migratory practices of the indigenous population to their “being scared.” After all, some said, these were people who not long ago lived exclusively in the *monte* (in the surrounding mountain side, away from the center of town) and who had never left *La Esperanza* or surrounding areas before. Unlike the *mestizo* population, who had more experience due to their internal migratory practices, for most indigenous people this was the first migratory experience. People in town estimate that it was around 1995-1998 that the indigenous population began to travel to the United States.³⁰ They initially went to California to harvest grapes, tomatoes and cherries but pretty soon after they began moving north.

Because of how steady this second phase of migration has been, currently people in town cannot really see any difference in the rate at which each group (mestizos, indigenous, men and women) is leaving for the United States, something they were able to do before. This is illustrated by a comment from a former migrant who I met in *La Esperanza*:

now they all go equally, people of reason [mestizos], naturals [indigenous], women.... The youth, for example, they become boyfriend and girlfriend here,

³⁰ For an overview of patterns of Oaxacan indigenous migration to the United States see Fox and Rivera Salgado 2004.

they talk to each other and tell each other ‘I am going up north and I wait for you there’... whether it is the man’s or the woman’s idea... there is more freedom for people to do whatever they want.

As could be expected, the historical change that has occurred between each of these phases of migration matters in how people live and understand transnational movement. In particular, the variations of the socio-economic context in the destination city in the United States have significantly framed people’s migratory experiences and their outcomes. For instance, because *mestizos* have been part of the migratory scene for more time than indigenous have—and thus have enjoyed for a longer time the economic benefits associated with migration—the differences in migratory history between groups has exacerbated the status differences between them in town. It is clear that those belonging to the first wave of migrants have had the chance to accumulate wealth through good investments of their earnings in productive activities such as cattle raising. Furthermore, for some families, having an earlier migratory history also translates into more family members having regularized their immigration status in the United States or having been born abroad, a condition that seems to be highly valued in town. In this sense, while now everybody in town would agree that almost (though not all) every household in *La Esperanza* has some sort of migratory history, it is impossible to say that the outcomes and experiences resulting from migration are the same for everybody. The context of reception in the United States is of particular relevance here.

Temo, a taxi driver and a seasonal merchant in town, describes very articulately the difference in experiences, particularly between the first and second wave. He belongs to the first significant wave of people from *La Esperanza* who arrived in New Brunswick in the 1980s, following the path of a couple of friends who were already there—they

were invited by an uncle who is considered one of the pioneers of the community abroad. He left for the United States in 1985 and stayed in New Brunswick for a couple of years, working two shifts at local factories. He returned to *La Esperanza* in 1987 and remained home for 15 years, operating the very successful fruit business he built with his earnings from abroad. In 2000, following personal challenges that turned into economic problems, he returned to the United States, where he remained for six more years. His accounts of his experiences abroad during each of these periods speak to the many ways in which historical change—mostly due to changes in the economy and the maturity of the networks abroad—brought about very different contexts of action for those who left in the mid-eighties and those who began to do so a decade later. Temo’s experiences resonate with those of others who shared with me their thoughts about border crossing experiences, employment circumstances, and, overall, the everyday community life in their host American city.

Temo and many others who left during the second migration phase remember the times when border crossing implied just having enough money to pay for the transportation costs between their hometown and the United States—about \$300-\$600 US dollars. People would find their own way to the border and, once there, someone they or an acquaintance knew would help them find their way across. It is not rare to hear people talking about their border crossing contacts with fondness and to listen to them being very grateful because of people’s kindness in helping them to make it to the ‘other side.’ “It was very easy to cross, now it is harder...there are more risks,” Temo said. His remark refers to the challenges that those waiting to make the journey northward currently have to deal with, referring to the newest migrant wave starting in the late 90s.

The most significant change is the centrality of *coyotes*³¹ in the border crossing experiences. The hiring of a coyote became one of the principal strategies people in town began to use in response to an intensified U.S. border enforcement. For the last migrant wave, a successful border crossing thus implies spending between \$2600-\$5000 dollars in travelling fees, depending on the means of transportation used to get people to the destination.³² There are many consequences in hiring these paid guides. For instance, people seem to be more vulnerable during the border crossing experience—there are many stories of coyotes abusing and even abandoning their customers. However, it is the economic consequence of this investment that impacts people’s experiences abroad. To begin with, those belonging to the third phase of migration have to pay off first the loans from which they obtained the money for the coyote before starting to send remittances back to *La Esperanza*. Also, because border crossing is not as “easy” as it seemed to be for those who left in the 1980s, people tend to stay longer periods of time, which makes life in the United States seem more permanent—Temo, for instance, remained six years his second time around. This has implications for the ways in which everyday life abroad is articulated as being less of a short and condensed period of hard work than it was for the previous wave.

Perhaps what made the biggest impact for Temo when comparing his two experiences abroad, were the changes that he encountered at the level of the migrant community and, especially how much this has grown both in size and significance. In his most recent trip, he found a very well established migrant enclave that had taken over an entire section of this American city. When he was in the United States for the first time,

³¹ smugglers

³² Once occurring through bus rides, some people are now traveling in planes, for instance.

there were not many Mexicans. In fact, he remembers, it was very easy to stay together because there were not that many to keep track of. They were always trying to be together looking after each other, especially because they were not very trustful of black Americans. “There was nothing,” he says, “we did not have a place where to eat what we liked or to buy things we were used to, like tortillas... there were no kids and no women.” Now, he says, things are different. He talks about the many people from Mexico that can be seen walking around the streets during the weekdays (including many children and women) and crowding the local bars and the many Mexican food restaurants that opened since his first time around—all of these restaurants are owned by people from the first wave who permanently settle in the United States. Temo is also quite amused by the ways that Mexicans are recreating La Esperanza life in New Jersey. For instance, as he said,

Mexicans there now can do everything we do here... they have their weddings, they celebrate the Mexican Independence Day, they go to parties, they have children... When I first went there, we knew that we were not in our country, now people seem more comfortable.

This increase in the migrant population not only from Mexico, but also from other places such as Honduras, Dominican Republic, El Salvador and Puerto Rico, has had significant consequences in the employment sector. “Before, there were many jobs,” Temo pointed out, “you can still make it through now, but it almost feels like it does in Mexico. There was not much competition before. Of course, you can still make money now, but not that much, and people have to go through a lot of sacrifices and challenges.” Not only did the employment opportunities seem greater in number in the 1980s, but also, the perception of how valued and needed were the Mexican workers was different. For instance, Temo

recalls how during his first time in the United States, he could get away with arriving late for work---something he explains was very exceptional, and would only happen if he had had a couple of extra beers with friends the night before. He recalls the many times in which his boss would call him to ask him to show up to work no matter he was already late, even offering to pay him for the full 8 hours of work. For instance, Temo recalls

They did not care if we were late, they just wanted us to show up because they needed us...they even wanted us to stay. I got plenty of offers from my boss to help me regularize my papers...some people did get their papers during that time, but I was not there to stay.

During his most recent trip, he says, things had changed a lot and he attributes this to the growth of the migrant population looking for jobs. For instance, if someone does not show up at work, this person would be fired: “People need to take good care of their jobs because there are a lot of people looking for jobs; they can replace people very easily.” Accordingly, the wages seemed to be lower than he was used to. On his second stay abroad he began working for the same employer he had in his first stay, but he had to change jobs because he was not being paid enough to make his stay worthwhile.

The employment-related challenges he now identifies are also due to the proliferation of employment agencies for temporary jobs, which Temo recognized as a “new thing.” On the one hand, migrant workers complain a lot about the agencies taking too much of their profits and charging a lot of fees. Thus, in addition to there being more competition for the available jobs, these jobs are not permanent and the profit obtained is lower. Additionally, the increasing use of employment agencies also poses challenges for making personal connections with the employers—this connection was pivotal in the maintenance of a steady job, in the obtaining of residency papers for some and in being referenced for other jobs. Like some other people in town who were in the United States

during that period, Temo speaks fondly of his former employer, with whom he still stays in touch. He even showed me his employer's business card, which he carries in his wallet.

Needless to say, these phases of migration are not rigid. People conduct multiple border crossings during their migrant careers, thus their behaviors expand over different phases. It is common to see people who began travelling in the 1980s pursuing short-term stays during the 1990s and even 2000s. Also, while the indigenous population began their migrant careers mostly during the second wave, they were not the only ones engaging during that period in migratory behavior, as some *mestizos* were beginning or even continuing their migrant careers.

Transnational Migration and the Question of the Future

As is the case in many other regions in Mexico, in Oaxaca, variations in migratory history between regions and the manner in which this has locally impacted the fabric of daily life translate into variations in such contexts. As I observed while traveling between towns in the region during my fieldwork, how people engage with the future seems to be related to the social picture that results from the impact of sustained migration in the community's daily life. After all, the anticipatory experience of the time to be, how clearly and detailed it seems to people and how far away it feels are not independent from the times in which people live and the contexts from where they imagine (and for which they might imagine) futures.

In communities with lengthier migratory histories, for example, migration has become a phenomenon of permanent relocations instead of repetitive and temporary ones.

These communities, especially those small in size and isolated from larger commercial towns, have seen a shift from a pattern of circular migration to and from the United States to one in which migrants end up sending funds for their families to join them abroad. Over the years, this change in pattern has emptied communities from working-age people creating a demographic imbalance and an economic dependence on remittances among those left behind—mostly elderly taking care of the young kids until they become old enough to join their parents or to migrate by themselves.³³

These communities—that have followed the paths of many others in states with long and steady migratory histories—can be found all through rural central Oaxaca. Here the evolution of migratory dynamics, along with a lack of local support for community development, has created barriers to the opening of local opportunities, producing a social scenario that constrains the imagining of local futures. For those staying, as I observed during fieldwork while traveling between sites, the shape and feel of what is to come is inseparable from their image of an extended present. For the younger population (many of whom are expected to leave at some point), the future is conceived as pre-ordained by the anticipation of the time when they will go to the United States. To the casual observer, particularly for the younger population their relationship to the future seems to be unreflective and is mediated by the knowledge of what has previously happened to others in the community. It is a relationship in which people appear to be recipients of futures instead of their makers.

La Esperanza is unlike many of these communities with lengthier histories of migration, especially those small in size and isolated from large commercial towns,

³³ For more on this see the research in Durand and Massey (2004).

where minimal development and intensified patterns of permanent relocations abroad have posed serious challenges for community life—leading, in some instances, to what some both in academia and popular media refer to as “ghost-town communities” (see, for example, Cohen op. cit, Thompson 2001 and Fletcher op. cit). In *La Esperanza*, the intersection of its recent migratory history with a relatively dynamic community life given its centrality for the surrounding towns, has created social scenarios where people actively imagine, design and produce future scenarios by means of projects, plans and goals. As a community that, to some degree, has become the economic center for the surrounding villages, transnational migration plays an important role in the maintenance and reproduction of locality.

As an alternative to the lack of financial support from the state, the income obtained abroad has been helpful in maintaining, often in enhancing, the social and economic positions of community members. For some, migration is still seen as a short-term solution for specific needs such as the purchase of livestock, land or a family business. Thus, unlike in smaller villages, it is still common to find migrants who have returned home and have invested their earnings in a small business, especially in the service sector. Either in the form of a taxi service that connects villages through dirt roads or in a weekly supply of chickens for selling, these investments have helped to create and support economic activities providing opportunities for community and family subsistence.

La Esperanza still does not offer sufficient opportunities to satisfy the local demand for economic resources. In many ways, *La Esperanza* follows the paths of many other Mexican rural communities with lengthier migratory histories that, partly because

of the lack of government support and a history of pervasive social and economic inequality, do not offer sufficient opportunities to satisfy the local demand for economic resources and, thus, encourage migratory flows facilitated by the maturity of the networks abroad. In this sense, *La Esperanza* is experiencing the same tangible consequences high levels of out-migration have brought to other migrant-sending communities over the years. *La Esperanza*, for instance, is not free from the exodus of working-age people, the decomposition of families because of physical separation, population imbalance and the increasing dependency on remittances so characteristic of migratory contexts.³⁴

However, it offers a different social picture than the communities portrayed earlier. Because people still plan short and medium-term stays abroad, motivated by specific goals, these are contexts in which everyday life is articulated around a continuous interplay between the present and the future aimed for or fantasized about. Here it is common to see people considering, planning and projecting futures, relating them to the production and transformation of their everyday living. As limited or boundless as these futures might be, or as real or virtual as they might seem, this act of extension into the future allows for the development of varying degrees of inventiveness and intervention at the level of community and family life (the migratory act being one of their consequences). Here the future appears as a horizon of latent possibilities. The future is more than a temporal given; it is a reality subject to surveillance, to being imaginatively structured and restructured and, most important, to be lived and worked for.

³⁴ For more on this as it affects other communities see, for example, research in Durand and Massey (2004).

The Opening of Possibilities

Among the community, there is the consensus that migration is highly responsible for *La Esperanza's* transformation from a scattered rural settlement with *redondos* (dwellings in round shape made out of hay), thatched adobe huts and dirt roads, to a formally organized town with family owned businesses, access to consumer goods, paved roads and *casas de material*. Migrants' experiences abroad are at the center of the material prosperity perceived in the town, the entrepreneurial practices that have sprung up particularly in the past 15 years and the improvement of the standard of living of both mestizos and indigenous (which, as could be expected, varies from household to household and very often is not necessarily translatable into access to productive resources and financial stability). Because of this, transmigratory practices are perceived as potentially transformative of people's realities and are pursued as a means to materialize plans, dreams and projects.

People proudly recognize that earnings abroad have brought a building boom into town. For many (if not for everybody), this is an indicator of progress and of people's concern with the *porvenir* of their families. For instance, people track and measure the success of community members abroad and their interest in their future wellbeing through the characteristics of the houses they are building and the pace in which they are being built. Thus, even if one community member has gained financial stability abroad, if he or she has not built a home in town, it is common to hear people comment, "all those years abroad and he or she has done nothing". This is the case, for example, of a woman who left *La Esperanza* in the mid 1980s and over the years had established two successful businesses (a restaurant and a bar) in New Jersey and had put her three

children through private schooling (her eldest son is now in college). Nonetheless, regardless of her accomplishments abroad and people's awareness that (unlike many) she is not returning to *La Esperanza*, she is not necessarily considered a success story: she has no home in town and her father's house (her parents are separated and her mother lives with her in New Jersey) remains unchanged.

Migrant money has also facilitated investments in potential money-making activities in the hope of securing steady income. While not necessarily all successful providers of income and often relying on remittances to survive,³⁵ businesses such as family owned groceries and clothing stores, taxis, food stands, telephone booths for long distance calling, and, recently, premises with computers and internet access (known locally as "cybers") are common in *La Esperanza's* streets. Success of these enterprises varies considerably. Very often, this variation is related to the early migration practices of the owner or the degree of novelty of the business idea. Nonetheless, while people are aware that running a business does not necessarily provide additional resources (because saturation of the market is becoming a real problem in *La Esperanza*), central to people's understanding of their everyday life is the planning of and working towards achieving business ownership. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, common to the design of most of the *casas de material*, for example, is a space at the front of the house purposefully planned to be one day the family store.

Beyond providing economic means, migration to the United States has also provided some people with valuable experience to draw on in opening and planning opportunities for themselves and their families both in Mexico and the United States. In

³⁵ As migration has become more inclusive and access to remittances more widespread, people have replicated each other's businesses and saturated the market.

New Jersey, for example, capitalizing on the increasing immigration to the area, some of those who were among the first to arrive in the mid 1980s have drawn on their experiences working in the kitchens of diners to open their own family-owned restaurants. This is a compelling example of the impact of what Peggy Levitt calls *social remittances*: “the ideas, behaviors, identities, and social capital that flow from receiving- to sending-country communities.” (Levitt 1998, p. 927). In *La Esperanza*, within the past 10 years, some have used their experiences abroad for creating business ventures in town with the expectation that they will be as profitable as they seemed to be in the United States. On some occasions, these ventures actually provide people with solutions for existing needs or problems in town. For instance, a former migrant who spent 15 years going back and forth between *La Esperanza* and New Jersey is currently building a Laundromat with a 24/7 convenience store on the second floor. His idea for this business venture reflects both his experience as a migrant spending every Sunday feeding coins to a washer machine to do laundry, and his awareness that he can capitalize on the lack of steady water supply in town³⁶ and on the needs of the non-locals renting single rooms in town because schooling or temporary employment brought them to town. On other occasions, migrants’ experiences abroad suggest possible business ventures for which there has been no previous felt need but that, in the eyes of those opening them, now seem useful and even necessary. Within the past eight years, for example, migrants who worked as cooks in take-out restaurants have been taking advantage of the skills they learned abroad to open their own businesses. Because of this, *La Esperanza* now has a pizzeria where you can also buy Philly cheese-steaks, a Chinese restaurant, an Italian

³⁶ The town does not have a municipal water system, thus people rely on self-supplied cisterns or wells.

restaurant with a name in English that doubles as a disco-bar with DJs, and a sports bar that serves, among other things, french fries, hamburgers, and buffalo wings.

Migratory experiences have also enabled people to acquire new perspectives in contemplating future wellbeing, especially for their children. On multiple occasions I heard former migrants talking about how much they learned abroad about prioritizing the well-being of children above anything else. A taxi driver, who spent three years abroad—he returned to La Esperanza in 2005—was very vocal about this issue:

I got the idea in the United States because they do everything for a kid to grow up well. That is how you guarantee a good future for them. The kids always go first there and there are many services that are working towards that aim... I figured that one can always find ways to provide clothes and food, but children need love, they need care. I have relatives in the United States and I see that in order for them to work, they need to put the kids under the care of someone else. Their kids do not look nourished; they are not active. When I was in New Jersey I saw that those kids that are loved and whose parents devote time and attention to them grow up *bonitos* [“pretty,” meaning well nourished]. I want that for my kids, that is why I came back... I see my kids here, we go out for day trips. When I came back we decided that my wife would not work so she can spend more time with our kids. My daughter is only 4, and people believe she is 6 because she is very smart. It is because of all the stimulus and attention from my wife.

Another way in which transnational movement has contributed in the opening of possibilities for people in town has to do with the way in which migratory practices have changed the boundaries between the mestizo and the indigenous population that have traditionally defined opportunities for each group. Earlier in the chapter, I mentioned that the monetary benefits resulting from migratory practices have contributed to leveling the field between these groups. People began to have access to goods and material resources that turned into a better standard of living for many indigenous households. People recognize that the youngest generation in these households is growing up differently than their grandparents and even than how their parents did, particularly as it relates to living

arrangements and schooling opportunities—for instance, as it is the case with many mestizo households, relatives abroad are contributing (and very often fully sponsoring) the costs of schooling for the kids in town. To be sure, in part this opening of opportunities is also due to the convergence of migration outcomes with the town's own development and transition from a small rural settlement to a more established town and its growing centrality for the social and economic practices of the region, as illustrated with the opening of the bilingual school and the introduction to the town of government programs to motivate indigenous students to stay in school.

Inter-group relations have also changed a lot since members of indigenous families joined the migratory field in the 1990s. Such changes have contributed to break some opportunity barriers for the younger generation of indigenous households—or, at least, to give the illusion that these barriers can be overlooked. For instance, people were able to clearly establish distinctions between mestizos and indigenous given the indigenous everyday use of traditional clothing;³⁷ this is not the case anymore. Locals attribute the decreasing use of the traditional attire to the changes that the indigenous migration to the United States has brought to the community. I heard many comments that treated the loss of traditional clothing as a symbol of upward mobility:

..since they now have siblings up north and the facility for buying better clothes, they do not like dressing like they used to. Now you cannot tell among the youth who is mestizo and who is indigenous and they can do pretty much the same other mestizo kids do... you see them walking around with cell phones and at the cybers... there is no distinction now.

³⁷ The traditional male clothing is a handmade white cotton shirt made of two long strips open on the sides with long sleeves only closed at the wrist, and matching undergarments. Women wear a loosely fitting dress called *huipil*.

However, what people seem to be talking the most about is how migration has enabled inter-group dating and marriages between mestizos and indigenous—traditionally, people in the region were not open to inter-group marriages, this was seen out of the norm as it was not very common. “Things have changed a lot,” someone said to me:

these changes happen when mestizo and indigenous kids meet in the United States. Kids forget there how things work here [in La Esperanza]...[while in the United States] they get together and do things that would not be seen here, like getting married. Then they come back with children of their own and you have now families that have no other choice than to be okay with them being together.

The manner in which everyday life is produced in this transnational community expresses the multiple ways that local and transnational experiences have become bound together for people in town in the last 20 years through the reality of migration. As illustrated above, transmigratory practices have had a dramatic impact on the social and physical landscape of the town. Not only have these contributed to the transformation of the everyday realities of many individuals and families; they have also changed the economic and social shape of the town as a whole. *La Esperanza's* current state is indeed reflective of the cross-border movements and economic achievements of migrants and of the efforts of their stay at home families, often responsible for allocating the remittances into the projects that originally drove their relatives to move. Nonetheless these remittances are meant to support long or short-term projects through which people aim to materialize visions of an anticipated future. Above all, the town's current state is an outcome of people's imaginative practices of projection and of the ways in which these practices are intertwined with the cultural and structural conditions in this transnational context.

In short, the incorporation of people's experiences abroad in the form of resources (such as money, knowledge, practical skills and ideas) into the fabric of their daily lives, has brought about, in the collective mind, the possibility and attainability of change. This perception of the possibility of change, in turn, has created a social context where "to figure out how to move ahead" becomes a central activity of everyday life (whether their future articulations actually move them ahead is of course a different story). Thus, for instance, it is common to see people considering, planning and projecting futures by means of short or long-term goals—even when these goals appear to be the same for most, like building a house. These are very basic and general examples, but they underline a basic point: Migration made new futures possible, and also renders possible new ways to relate to and engage future thinking.

Seeing and not Seeing Constraints

With the arrival of the opportunities associated with migration, giving form to the future became a viable possibility for many. Migration brought the promise of the resources needed to support people's planning and, by doing so, it opened new attitudes for thinking about what now seem "apparently" attainable futures. Iraidí, a former migrant herself, now in her mid 40s told me:

we did think before about things we would like to see happening and had plans, I guess. I liked going to school a lot and I wanted to become a teacher, but at that time there was no high school in town and we had no money to send me to school in [the nearby town]; then I stopped thinking about it. I guess we used not to think about the future that much because there were not many options around... I do not know why now people seem to be more invested in it.

Iraidi's comment resonates with that of many other people in town: people have always thought about the future, but now they are invested in the future differently—and as I argue further ahead, they engage it in different ways as well. The consideration of future possibilities is indeed not something new to *La Esperanza*, and arguing that it only came about as a consequence of migration would be a big mistake. After all, as a basic human ability embedded in our neurological machinery,³⁸ forward thinking—in its multiple varieties of dreaming, hoping, planning, and projecting—is one of the most remarkable capacities through which people adapt to the context in which their lives are played out, making a huge difference to what people are and how people live. In my many casual conversations I had with people in town, I heard plenty stories about the plans, dreams and hopes for the futures people had when they were kids and, especially, before people's transnational practices brought about the town's large-scale changes. I was moved, for instance, by the nostalgia with which people talked about the dreams that were never accomplished (like Iraidi's desire to become a teacher) or even about those that were achieved, though not in the form they were envisioned originally.

A story Rode, a woman about the same age as Iraidi, told me is a good example of this forward thinking and its associated nostalgia. Rode clearly remembers the day in which Almita, her daughter, shared with her images of how she saw herself as a young adult. When Almita was in elementary school she told Rode she wanted to become a TV presenter when she grew up and wear high heels, particularly needle heels. Rode had no idea how Almita knew that TV presenters wore high heels and when she asked her about this, Almita added that she wanted to see the marks of the thin heels showing on the dirt

³⁸ While this is common to many, this capacity varies depending on personal and individual characteristics. For instance, research indicates that certain brain injuries brain can impact people's capacity to think of the future.

floors of their house. Rode talks about the image of these marks fondly; in many ways these are the symbolic representation of her daughter's thinking about her own future at a very early age, and of the goals she, as a parent, would pursue for Almita. Almita is currently a senior in college pursuing a degree in Communications thanks to her uncle, a successful immigrant in New Jersey,³⁹ who is paying for her college education in a private university away from *La Esperanza*. Almita is now wearing heels as well, though there are no marks of them on the floor to be found. Rode and her family now live in a house with cement floors, a house she built with the remittances her husband earned over the many years he spent going back and forth *La Esperanza* and New Jersey. Rode is very proud about the house they live in now. After all, as she says, she built it herself, pretty much she was in charge of everything involved in its construction and put a lot of her own hand labor in it. Still, she feels nostalgic about that component of the future that “did not happen.”

I will come back to Rode's story later. For now, however, let us return to Iraidi's comment above and to what it suggests about how changes at the level of social context in town rendered possible new ways to relate to and engage the future. To begin, Iraidi's comment points to the recognition of objective constraints, and, especially, to the ways in which this acknowledgement impacts people's dreaming of and planning for the future. For Iraidi, for example, the limited educational opportunities in town—the local high school opened only in the early nineties—posed limitations to her envisioning of her future self and of how much it was worth thinking about it. She is not alone here. Many people of her generation and above narrated similar stories that exposed the many ways

³⁹ He belongs to very first wave of migrants who left town and who had the opportunity to enjoy paths for obtaining legal residency abroad, hence providing opportunities for success in ways newest migrants do not have.

in which material constrains became cognitive constrains as well, as they posed challenges to people's projective practices both in content and frequency. As Iraidí suggests, as an object of reflection, people used not think about the future that much because there was no way people could get away from the consequences of the economic deprivation and limited opportunities in town—or, better said, there existed the perception of not being able to get around such constrains.

As Iraidí indicates, people's relationship to the future seems now to have changed. Though she cannot pinpoint exactly what made people being more interested in it, it is clear to her that there is more consideration about the future than there had been in the past—as it is clear to many others as well. The material changes brought about by people's transnational practices and how these have combined with the town's own economic development, have indeed impacted people's attitudes towards the future. If it is true that people's transnational practices in town brought resources that had ameliorate some of those material constraints, for many the constraints remain the same. What has changed, however, are the ways in which people think about these limitations, and the meanings that they attribute to them in relation to their own projective practices. With the change in the perception of those material constraints, people started to think about what were once unavoidable obstacles as '*defeatable*' (even though, in practice, this is not necessarily the case). Constraints somehow seem conquerable, and the future appears somehow more '*colonizable*.'⁴⁰ Planning now seems more feasible in ways in which it was not before, and creating images of future selves seems not to be so pointless anymore. (Chapter 3 explores in further detail the processes through which planning and

⁴⁰ I am aware that both "defeatable" and "colonizable" are not words, though my choice for using these speaks to a sense agency that feels appropriate to stress here.

future-self creation takes place.)

Exploration and Experimentation

“We used not to think that much about what we would like in the future,” Lupita, a pharmacy owner in her thirties, once told me. “When I was a girl,” she said, “I do not remember people having projects like they do now... now it feels like a competition... everybody is trying to figure out how to move ahead” she said. I heard these words in the context of a conversation that had to do with the many businesses people are opening in town and about Lupita’s ideas about why this was happening. Lupita’s words refer to something others have noticed as well, namely that since people began to move to *el Norte* there has been an increase in the generating and executing of plans that will somehow enable people to achieve something in the future. People are acting with the future in mind in ways that were not evident before. People seem to be constantly exploring future-oriented options and, furthermore, experimenting with them.

The highly changing nature of the business scene in town is a clear example of this “trying out” of the creation of possibilities. If you pass by the main street at different moments during the year, you will notice new businesses that were not there before as much as you will notice others that had been replaced. It is not rare to see people opening business ventures and close them just to open a new one soon after, or to switch from one form of business to another. For instance, internet access points locally known as “cybers”—very popular among junior high and high school students for chatting online—increased in just two years from one to eight, and the number of taxis increased from 39 to 110. Others keep on adjusting the scope of their businesses, trying to branch them out

in as many directions as possible. Rode, who I already mentioned early in this chapter, for example, began taking care of the laudromat she owns with her husband, a venture it came about, as mentioned earlier in the chapter, as an outcome of his experiences abroad and his evaluation of the current needs of *La Esperanza*. Within six months of its opening, Rode began offering table cloth rentals for parties which she sewed herself, and more recently, she has an improvised stand at the front where she sells handmade hair accessories and leather sandals she purchased from a vendor who stayed at the hotel she helps to administer.

At a very basic and obvious level, this exploration and experimentation is related to the availability of material resources brought about by the transnational practices that have allowed people to pursue, in varying degrees, opportunities for themselves to move ahead, on the one hand, and to pay for new services, on the other. The many small convenience stores and food stands popping up in people's homes, as well as other business ventures such as the cybers and taxis, are indeed, in one way or another, related to family remittances and, especially, to the ways in which these have impacted the local economy and people's consumer practices.

However, this exploration and experimentation of possibilities also speaks to something else that goes beyond the mere mobilization of economic resources. This has to do with the ways in which people started considering new (or previously unavailable) courses for future-oriented action, what I refer to as *projective pathways for action*—namely, the courses of possibilities for acting in which or from which a plan or a series of plans for the future are hoped to be realized (i.e. the possible paths by which future plans are enacted). With the change in the perception of constraints elaborated in the previous

section, and hence their impact on people's understanding of what they can and cannot pursue, there came along as well the opening and unlocking of routes for acting towards the accomplishment of future goals and for articulating those goals. Accordingly, it is not only that people in *La Esperanza* are exploring and experimenting with the future, but also that they are doing so through roads that seem novel or that were not even considered before. These new pathways are responsive to the changes that have resulted from the intersection of the town's migratory history with its own community development.

Almita's pursuing of college education is a good example here. Not only is she pursuing a projective path not available for her mother—nor even conceivable for people like Iraidi—but also, due to the help of her uncle, she is expanding that pathway into attending a private institution. This is similar to the case of some of the kids from indigenous households, in which the thought of a college education now seems “more attainable” and a feasible expectation to have—though in many cases, this goal is not accomplished due to constraints that go from the lack of economic resources, the challenges and limitations of the town's schooling system, the pervasive dynamics of ethnic stratification in town and their family backgrounds (many of these kids are first generation elementary school graduates).

Communal Narratives

Sociologist Margaret Somers highlights the ways that social actors “come to be who [they] are (however ephemeral, multiple and changing) by locating [themselves] (usually unconsciously) in social narratives *rarely of [their] own making*” (Somers &

Gibson 1994: 59, emphasis in original). In this sense, the narratives through which people prospectively structure experience are configured on the basis of socially available narratives that circulate, for example, at the level of the family, nation, or community (Somers identifies these as “public narratives”). This suggests that people configure their lives through versions of the stories they have been exposed to and of which they are also part as actors in a specific social landscape. To this, I would add that these narratives suggest clearly defined projective pathways for action. Combined with stories particular to people’s biography, these socially available narratives provide with a supporting frame that encode images about people’s past and future, helping them to orient and motivate their actions in accordance with these visions.

La Esperanza has plenty of these narratives circulating around. Embedded in the town’s history of transnational practices, migration-related narratives have been central in articulating people’s future-oriented action. These have been especially pivotal in suggesting plot-lines for people’s projective practices, as often these narratives have served as means through which many have articulated visions of themselves at different points ahead in time. These narratives are indeed sources of inspiration and motivation. Also, these provide versions of alternative possible scenarios for action and, especially, they are used as means through which people create knowledge (or learn) about the futures that *can* be. In other words, migrant narratives are interpretive devices through which people in town produce stories about their own futures. In this sense, public narratives of migration are informing the futures of many.

To an increasing degree, because of the maturity of migration patterns and the growing diversity in migratory experience among those engaged in transnational

behavior, people in *La Esperanza* now have a plethora of migration story-lines to choose from: the success story, the voyager, the lay about, the expatriate. This variation of story-lines reflects the changing circumstances migrants are currently facing in the United States in relation to those encountered by earlier migrants. These changes are due, for example, to the increasing competition among migrants for jobs (an outcome of the rise of the number of migrants leaving the town), a different economic time in the United States and the strengthening of a Mexican community abroad. Though from all these available narratives, there is one that, while it no longer necessary reflects migrants' actual reality in the United States, continues providing a recurrent plot line for people to articulate projective pathways for action.

This public narrative is first and foremost a story about the hard-working migrant that succeeds on the basis of effort and the seizing of the many opportunities available abroad. This migration story is principally connected to a plot that exposes a grand moral purpose: one goes to the United States to work hard and accomplish something. This outstanding plot is thus associated with notions of what people should be doing abroad and what they can and, further more, should achieve. In this narrative, of which I heard many examples, people who leave for the United States are presented as agents of change and progress. One useful example here is the story of the locally famous “Felipe *Tortilla*”, which is celebrated in a popular song written as a *corrido*.⁴¹ The story tells Felipe’s immigrant story, from leaving town in the mid 1970s and associated hardships in arriving to the United States, to his personal shortcomings and his achieving of financial success. Felipe accomplished socio-economic ascent in the United States initially by

⁴¹Corridos are a form of narrative song often about daily life, social events and historical facts very popular particularly in countryside regions in Mexico. To this date, these remain important popular forms for the dissemination of information, particularly in rural Mexico.

selling *tortillas* door-to-door (this explains his nick-name) and then opening service businesses for immigrants. His story stresses how through hard work, entrepreneurship and fighting against adversities he has succeeded in his search for his *porvenir* abroad—Felipe is a local legend both in *La Esperanza* and among the migrant community in the American city where most people from the town have settled.⁴²

This narrative of the hard-working migrant provides a supporting structure for many of people's projective practices. For many, this story has turned into a moral imperative, a sort of responsibility about how to construct futures and how these should look like. In other words, this is the standard against which people are articulating images about the future, and, accordingly, against which they evaluate future-oriented actions and measure achievements and goals. Thomas and Lupita, a couple that owns a pharmacy in the center of town can help to illustrate this point. Lupita, who is not originally from *La Esperanza*, met Thomas while she was doing her practical training for becoming a nurse. Soon after they married and moved to *La Esperanza*, Thomas began spending periods of time working at the kitchen of a restaurant in New Jersey. With Thomas's remittances, Lupita financed the necessary arrangements needed for her to open a pharmacy—the first one in town with a registered nurse—something she had dreamed since starting nursing school. For Thomas, the pharmacy was an unexpected outcome. While he has always been very supportive and makes efforts to learn the business, he does not really understand how the pharmacy could translate into a better future for them.

⁴² I first heard about this story when Patricia asked me if I knew him, after she learned that I had spent a few years where her sister Marcela lives in NJ. She played for me the song that day from a cassette. I met Felipe a couple of years later at a convenience store he owns in New Jersey. I learned then that he had in fact commissioned the song to be written by a popular band from the region. Currently, there exist different versions of this song circulating in the area. This *corrido* has been recorded by different local music groups and different videos that showcase images that illustrate points of the story can be found in you tube.

He acknowledges that it is good for making ends meet, but it is not a framework for him to think about the future wellbeing of his family. For Thomas, the way to achieve progress is going to the United States. He is very invested in this migrant story of striving and persistence, valuing these as character traits and characteristics that one can demonstrate perhaps even best of all through the process of migration. Thomas is very invested in the narrative of the hard working migrant and keeps on dreaming about returning to the United States. Very often, while spending long periods sitting on the doorsteps of the pharmacy, he speaks fondly about his former crushing 16-hour work shift in the kitchen at the dinner in New Jersey. In his mind, the conception of future fulfillment is associated with what he describes as almost heroic migrant experiences. Lupita is very frustrated by this attitude and does not understand why Thomas cannot think differently about how they can achieve future wellbeing. No matter what Lupita tells him, it is the narrative of the migrant that defines the way Thomas understands progress and future achievement.

These publicly available narratives, however, are not the only ones that structure people's projective practices. Some draw from other sources such as other people's biographical stories to create narratives that are negotiated with personal biography and internalized into one's projective practices. In this sense, the plotting for the future also occurs at the level of the biographical. Rosalinda, for example, helps her husband operate the restaurant he opened when he came back from the United States. They met and married soon after he returned to *La Esperanza*. Her husband opened a Chinese restaurant, modeled after the take out restaurant where he worked at in Atlantic City, hoping that it would eventually generate the kind of wellbeing he saw in successful

examples in the United States. When I went there, Rosalinda asked me whether the restaurant food was the way Chinese food should taste, because she has never left Oaxaca and was unfamiliar with it. Rosalinda interprets the potential success of the restaurant, and thus creates knowledge about her own future wellbeing, through her husband's narrative. I will come back to Rosalinda's husband later in the book. For now, it is enough to point out that people draw stories from their relational others; thinking about the future is a collaborative experience, as people project with and through others. The following chapter touches upon this relational element.

Chapter III:

MEANING MAKING, FUTURE THINKING, AND REFLEXIVITY

During the many conversations I had with people from *La Esperanza*, both during fieldwork in Mexico and in the United States, very often I was struck by the clarity in which people talked about the future. I recall the first time I heard about the house Marcela was building back home. Though she had never seen the construction, the image of this house was very clear. Marcela was able to describe to me the spatial composition, including the number of rooms it would have—this included one room for her and her husband, a family room, one for her daughter, and a front store for setting up a small flower business. She talked about this house with excitement, though with tones of nostalgia about home, her daughter—who was six when she left—and the moment when she decided to join her husband abroad. With both making money, she believed they could get the house finished much faster and have him back with them sooner. She had been gone from *La Esperanza* for a year already; her plan was to stay in the United States for two more years until the house was completed: “we figured that is how long it would take,” she remarked. Marcela was getting updates from her father, who was in charge of the construction—like when she learned that they had just put up the frames for the windows and the front door—and talked to her daughter a couple of times a week.

It had been three years since Marcela left *La Esperanza* last time I saw her. She felt she was lucky in always having work. Through an employment office, she had found a job at a factory, and she remained working there pretty much for all the time she has been abroad—in fact, she managed to find a job there for her sister Patricia too, who left

La Esperanza a year after she did. While there had been some progress in the house over this period of time, at the time of our last conversation for a few months not much new work was done to the house. Marcela and her husband had continued sending money, but with Miriam getting older there were more expenses that went from the necessary to the desires of a pre-teen with a mother who tries to give her what makes her happy. Miriam, however, once excited about the house, did not want to move there when her parents came home. Her home, she said, was with her grandparents. She did not see the other house (still in the structural work stage) as “pretty.” Marcela still thought of the house as the material component of the future she would encounter when she returned home. However, while she never stopped providing her daughter with what she needed and wanted—and she felt that this was especially more important once she was away—she was not able to contribute much more money to complete its construction. She came to feel that she had to prolong her stay abroad to make enough money to complete the house back home. It could be three more years, she said, but she wasn’t sure. By then, her daughter would be twelve.

Marcela’s account points out to a form of articulating a future-scenario that uses a cognitive script about the future—that of the house—which, over the course of her time abroad, has become removed from the very rich experiences of her everyday living both in New Jersey and her family context back home. Accordingly, the image of the future she is working for seems to be not necessarily attuned to her changing contextual circumstances, even though she is making choices and decisions for her current everyday life on the basis of that image. This experience speaks to the processes through which people’s future scenarios are articulated, the ways in which people make use of

resources—both material and cultural—for thinking about the future, and how, in this processing of the future contextual and biographical circumstances are accounted for.

This chapter builds on the analysis of the previous chapter by further exploring the kind of cognitive work people do in *La Esperanza* as they engage the future. The present chapter explores people's projective practices as relying as well on subjective mental processes that are articulated a) through varied forms of reflexivity in relation to situational and biographical context, and b) in the context of people's interactions with others. The chapter also places specific forms of projective practices into the broader social fabric that results from the impact of migration-related changes in the town's daily living and their intersection with the particular socio-cultural context in this town. In this sense, this chapter talks about how distinctions in how people experience the future connects with different forms of social experiences in this town. To accomplish this, the chapter makes a connection between forms of future-oriented thoughts and the ways in which these connect to people's practices. The chapter, thus, complements the previous chapter, which took a wider look at how projective practices in town are linked to a wider societal process that brought about changes in people's temporal orientation. In this sense, the previous chapter looked at the power of social and cultural circumstances in the tempering of cognitive practices, as these circumstances facilitated the creation of frameworks for future-oriented thinking.

To enrich the understanding of the projective practices that interest me here, I engage with research in cognitive neuroscience as a means to understand how future experiences are constituted. In particular, I build on the distinction between *episodic* and *semantic future thinking*, two ways the existent literature assumes that people articulate

mental representations of the future. I treat this distinction as a heuristic tool to represent distinct meaning-making mechanisms for future-scenario building that have distinct implications for action and for how people relate to, adjust to or transform existing structures. I consider how this process of future scenario building is constituted not only by the actors' needs and desires, but also by the specific demands and offerings of the context, and, especially, by the ways in which experiences of other people are interpreted and internalized into one's own future scenario planning. In this sense, here I propose that the forms of future-oriented cognition at hand are relationally constituted.

Conceptual Framework

The problem of anticipation—namely, how the brain creates knowledge of scenarios and outcomes not yet at hand—has recently acquired an increased interest among neuroscientists and psychologists. In the neurosciences, this act through which people cognitively extend themselves into a non-immediate time is referred to as “mental time travel” (Suddendorf & Corballis 2007) This is a facet of a more general brain-based capacity to be consciously aware of one's continued temporal existence, on the one hand, and of the passage of time, on the other.

Within the past ten years, but especially in the past five, there has been an increased interest in the neurocognitive research in the mental processes and brain functions related to people's construction of mental images about the future. This research agenda has been quite fruitful in two parallel and partially overlapping directions. On the one hand, thanks to neuroimaging studies in laboratory settings and observations of patients with brain damage in clinical psychology, research has provided

data on the neurological machinery involved in people's thinking about the future (see Addis, Wong, & Schacter 2007; Klein, Loftus, & Kihlstrom, 2002; Tulving 1985). Evidence suggests, for instance, that the process of imagining the future depends on many of the same neural mechanisms that are involved in thinking about the past (Schacter 2007). This emergent research agenda has resulted in various approaches for understanding people's experience of the temporally extended future, as well as provided neuroscientists and psychologists with useful heuristic devices for characterizing these experiences. Accordingly, terms such as 'future orientation,' (Aspinwall 2005) 'episodic future thinking,' (Atance and O'Neill 2001), and 'mental simulation,' to mention only a few, have become common to the vocabulary for speaking about how people contemplate their future.

Building on a construct introduced in the psychological literature in 1972 for characterizing memory (Tulving 1972), neuroscientists have been exploring the characteristics and differences between two ways of thinking about the future that draw on differences in the nature of people's knowledge of the world: 'episodic future thinking' and 'semantic future thinking'—also referred to in the literature as 'episodic and semantic prospection.'⁴³ Among the many concepts that have emerged from the agenda that addresses the various human capacities related to the cognitive processing of the future, this distinction is one of the most recent. Within the past few years, this distinction has suggested new experimental questions and research directions and, as evidenced in the available neuropsychological literature, it seems to have become an important and permanent entry in the taxonomy of future-related cognitive processes.

⁴³ See Race et al 2012.

Those who study how the mind enables us to mentally represent future thought distinguish between ‘episodic future thinking’ and ‘semantic future thinking’ as belonging to two distinct systems for cognition, namely one that relies on subjective experiences about the future (the episodic) and the other that draws on scripted factual and generalized knowledge (the semantic). In this sense, episodic future thinking and semantic future thinking imply differences in a) the nature of the information used to construct mental images of the future, and b) the element of self-awareness in the conception of future outcomes.

This characterization of future thinking builds upon the episodic/semantic distinction that began in the field of memory research and the understanding of people’s construction of mental images about the past as a result of the re-experiencing of past events, on the one hand, or as the outcome of the recollection of factual knowledge about the world in general, on the other (see Atance & O’ Neill 2001).⁴⁴ This characterization is also related to a recent paradigm shift in which memory is viewed as an adaptive and constructive process that enables the imagining of possible events in the future—thus, the extension of the distinction from the realm of memory to that of prospection seemed logical.

Currently dealt with as part of the major mental cognitive capacities enabled by the brain, in the literature *episodic future thinking* is treated as “a projection of the self into the future to pre-experience an event” (ibid., p. 533). Though there exist various working definitions and conceptualizations, a central core feature is the articulation of

⁴⁴ These are assumed to be systems related to declarative cognition. Originally postulated as heuristic tool, this distinction has now been embraced in the field and research has produced findings that scientists consider as plenty evidence for suggesting that this in fact a system of the brain, a subset of declarative cognition, that that is related to conscious processes.

future thought through representations that involve images of the self—some sort of putting one’s present self into the shoes of the future self in the process of conceptualizing future events and behaviors. In this sense, episodic future thinking refers to thought about the future that is based on the anticipation of one’s personal experience in the future. Accordingly, underlying this practice of self-visualization in time is the awareness that one’s personal and contextual circumstances might be impacting one’s visions of events to occur in the future—some sort of self-consciousness. In other words, this implies the consideration of the future consequences of present circumstances. An example mentioned in the literature is that of a child with an upset stomach who, after being asked to go to a friend’s birthday party, recognizes that she will not be having cake (Atance & O’Neill 2005: 138); another example is the consideration of one’s budget in the envisioning of an upcoming vacation (Attance & O’Neill 2001: 533). As these examples illustrate, at its basis, episodic future thinking implies the recognition of constraints and the appropriate adjustment of mental representations of the future.

Semantic future thinking has received much less explicit attention than its counterpart, though it is often mentioned as the referent construct in the episodic future thinking literature. Semantic future thinking is different from episodic future thinking regarding the resources it draws on in creating knowledge about the future and in the kind of representation of the future it produces. Unlike episodic future thinking, here the articulation of future thought does not involve the projecting of oneself into an anticipated event. Instead, visions of a future time are constructed on the basis of a repertoire of scripts—or database, as some suggest (MacLeod & Conway 2007)—of learned factual and conceptual knowledge about the world. In this sense, semantic future

thinking highlights the regularity of events rather than the particularities of personal and contextual circumstances in the consideration of future consequences. In other words, semantic future thinking is “knowing in a fairly script-like, general way, the sorts of things that happen in the future” (ibid., p. 115). As such, mental representations of future scenarios tend to be fixed, generalizable and impersonal, as these are constructed through well-established scripts or routines without reference to specific personal contexts. To follow-up on one of the examples previously introduced, when the same child is asked what she will be doing at the friend’s party, she envisions the party scenario as involving a cake and that she will be eating it. In this case, knowledge about the typicality of birthday parties provides this child with schemas and meanings for the making sense of the future.⁴⁵

To address this distinction in clinical studies, researchers rely on markers to identify the presence of episodic future thinking or semantic future thinking. A clear example in the literature is a study that assesses episodic future thinking in young children (Atance & O’Neill 2005). Faced with the challenge of recognizing these mental operations—and aiming to identify when this this ability for future thought emerges in childhood—the authors pay attention to some aspects of a child’s behavior, as well as aspects of the child’s language. For instance, to mention just a few of these markers, the authors look for evidence of “anticipatory” behaviors, of the child’s understanding the future consequences of present constraints, and pay attention to the manner in which children talk about the future (i.e. whether the vocabulary used is speculative in nature—episodic oriented—or presumes the unfolding of a future events fixed—semantic oriented).

⁴⁵ This example is as well mentioned in Attance & O’Neill (2005), but the interpretation is mine.

The three critical, and often overlapping, questions that seem to be underlying much of the research in the area are how these two forms of future thought relate to adaptive behavior (a behavioral question), how these relate to memory (a cognitive question), and how the brain supports these two systems (a neurobiological concern). In the literature, the interest in these questions has translated into intriguing data and theoretical statements that suggest insights on the phenomenological experience accompanying future thought. For instance, research suggests that temporal distance from the present affects how people experience the future (D'Argembeau and Van der Linden 2012); that the familiarity of the imagined location, the people and the objects impact the vividness of our future thoughts (D'Argembeau and Van der Linden 2012); that how we experience the future depends on available information about the spatial context (Szpunar & McDermott 2008), and that the sensation of one's personal future lies in the relevance of imagined events with respect to personal goals (D'Argembeau and Van der Linden 2012).

What is interesting here, as well, is how the episodic/semantic distinction has shown promise in the cognitive sciences and psychology for addressing empirical questions, holding analytical value in considering phenomena such as planning, goal-attainment and emotional states, to mention some (for an overview of this utility see Szpunar & Tulving 2011 and Atance & O'Neil 2001). This distinction can guide us to understand the nature of the projections associated with people's future-oriented practices—i.e. whether they are more episodic- or semantic-like. Indeed, it can represent an important organizing construct in the understanding of people's practices, of how they

articulate and make sense of everyday living and of their relation to situational context. Thus, I argue, the mental operations through which the future is anticipated—the articulation of mental images about the future—is a sociological question as well.

In fact, some of the issues at the core of the episodic/semantic distinction resonate with classical concerns in social theory, as the experience of a future time is a recurrent theme in phenomenological treatments of experience and action. For instance, in his work, Alfred Schutz (1959) argues that people create knowledge of what will happen in the future (and plan for those future events) on the basis of the stock of knowledge at hand at the time of projecting. This stock of knowledge—i.e. schemas, repertoires, recipes for action and meaning making in the everyday life—is developed through past and present experiences: “we cannot expect any event of whose typicality we have had no pre-experience,” (Schutz 1964, p. 292). Dewey, to mention another example, describes deliberation as “a dramatic *rehearsal* (in imagination) of various competing possible lines of action” (Dewey 1922, p. 190, italics are mine). His conceptualization points towards the processes of self-representation in the future talked about in the previous paragraphs: “[deliberation] is an experiment in making various combinations of selected elements of habits and impulses, to see what the resultant action would be like if it were entered upon...the experiment is carried on by tentative rehearsals in thought” (ibid.). Dewey’s arguments thus suggest an imaginative engagement with the future in ways that are personal and that emphasize projected consequences in the imagining act.

I am not saying here, however, that Schutz and Dewey are necessarily talking about semantic future thinking and episodic future thinking, respectively. I propose that this distinction can be used to tackle the interplay between reflexivity, situation and

temporal experience so central to sociological treatments of everyday action—a concern central to the chapter in relation to future-oriented thinking. Furthermore, connecting insights from sociological treatments to the phenomena described in the episodic/semantic distinction adds an aspect to the understanding of prospective cognition that is quite overlooked in current treatments in the neuroscientific and psychological literature: that people think of the future in (and for) situated contexts and that they do so with (and, often, because of) others. In this sense, for instance, as Schutz work suggests, the knowledge that serves as the substratum for mental representations of the future results from people's everyday activities as members of social groups; it is biographically modeled, socially derived and situationally-generated. To address people's future scenario building and its related actions, sociologists may not necessarily find answers in the cognitive scientific literature, but what this body of work has to say about people's mental operations could pinpoint directions for further research. In the same way, a sociological eye can help to demonstrate the underpinnings of certain cognitive mechanisms that cannot be explained by looking at cognition alone.

As a taxonomy of future-oriented cognition, the distinction between episodic and semantic future thinking is useful for addressing what seems central for understanding the forms of projective practices associated to the present (but future-oriented) behaviors from people from *La Esperanza*. Namely, I refer here to the different forms of reflexivity towards one's experiences and contexts of action, going from the non-personal and regular to the subjective and autobiographical, that impact people's behaviors. These reflexive processes occur both outwards—towards the cultural, social and relational context—and inward—towards the realm of the biographical and subjective experience.

By looking at the nature of the information used to construct mental images of the future (script-like vs. highly subjective experiential), the analytical distinction between episodic and semantic future thinking provides a window to specify these reflexive processes. Different ways in which people create knowledge about the future (more semantic-like or episodic-like) would be consequential to people's behaviors in different ways, especially to the forms in which people intervene in their contexts of action, and in the way they contemplate alternative paths of action. In this sense, episodic future thinking and semantic future thinking can represent two distinct meaning-making mechanisms that have distinct implications for action and for how people relate to, adjust to or transform existing structures.⁴⁶

In the following pages, I explore how episodic and semantic future thinking plays out in this context as a meaning making mechanism through which actors navigate the complexities of this context. This context is both shaped by biographical histories of migration and changes in the social fabric of the town related to the transnational reality and the town's own development. My argument here is that distinct forms of reflexivity, as related to the distinction between semantic-like and episodic-like future thinking, lead to different forms of social experience and contextual intervention. I organize this argument through three accounts that illustrate forms of future-oriented meaning-making, each followed by an interpretation. These accounts point to some of the ways in which future oriented thoughts get enabled by particular forms of reflexivity and of how this future scenario building connects to people's situational and relational context.

⁴⁶ Accordingly, I am adopting this distinction as a useful heuristic device. I do this primarily for facilitating theory construction—rather than as an expression of a profound believe that I am in fact looking at what lies in people's minds, or locating the structural and functional distinctions neuroscientists try to identify.

The Borrowing of Scripted Futures: Cuca

Cuca is a fifty-something indigenous woman mother of five. She is Marcela's and Patricia's mother, whom I introduced in the opening paragraphs of the current chapter and of Chapter I respectively. Cuca has another son, Alejandro, currently living in the United States, having left town as a teenager about 14 years ago. Cuca has two other children, Ady (fourteen) and Irazi (eleven). She is also taking care of her three grandchildren while the parents are abroad: Patricia's children, Julian and Beto (eight and six, respectively) and Miriam, Marcela's daughter. She and her husband Salvador—a farmer who estimates that he is making about \$10 working in his *solar* (plot of land)—supplement their income with the remittances sent from the United States. These remittances finance Cuca's convenience store as well.

The day I first met Cuca and her family, they were all sitting outside by the storefront entrance. The kids were putting together a hot air balloon with tissue paper, and Cuca and Patricia were hanging out outside, being amused by the kids trying to make the paper balloon fly up. Cuca's store is not unlike the many others in town: it is set up at the front of a private home, it does not have a large inventory and sells basic household supplies for cleaning and cooking, soda and candies. This kind of ownership is common. Given the lack of employment opportunities, self-employment through the opening of small businesses is a common practice in town, as it is in many other migrant-sending rural towns. Like many other small stores in town, Cuca's store is largely financed by the remittances sent by family members abroad. Both Alejandro and Patricia contributed resources to set it up.

The store occupies the space in between the open-air area where the family cooks and the building where they sleep and hang out. This is a rectangle-shaped space with unfinished concrete walls and floors that extends from the street to the back of the house, with an exit door to the open-air area. A couple of heavy industrial looking shelves line the wall on the left side. These are covered with a few household supplies (oil, flour, paper cups, a few canned goods, and basic cleaning supplies). A wooden structure with some crates with some vegetables is located on the opposite side right next to a small fridge with sodas and ice pops. At the far end of the area, opposite the entrance with the rolling gate, there is a table with an old-fashioned balance scale, a couple of jars with candies, and plastic bags; this area serves as the cashier. Glued on the top surface of the table there were a few scraps of paper with the names of those who owed money and the amounts they owed.

Cuca's relationship to this store is complicated. On the one hand, Cuca feels very proud of having the store. After all, it stands for the efforts of her daughter and son abroad who sent the money to open it and continue providing funding to keep it in business. Because of this, Cuca is convinced that she needs to keep the store running—even if, for the past months, the only regular “customers” have been her own children and grandchildren, who make use of the store as if it was their own pantry. “That is what you do when you have a store, you just keep it going,” she says. Still, she does not seem to be very invested in the store beyond the merely operational aspects of the daily transactions with customers, who are often handled by one of her daughters or whomever is around whenever a customer shows up.

On the other hand, despite the positive feelings she has towards the *idea* of the store—in particular as these relate to the promised economic scenario that originally came along with it—she is puzzled and, at times, frustrated by it. It is clear to her that the store plan is not working in the way they all thought it would and as they saw it has worked for others; it has not turned out to be what she envisioned it would become. Cuca blames this on the opening of a number of similar new businesses located within a few blocks of her house—and these stores have the same characteristics as hers. When she first opened the store, she was the only one in the small section of town where they live and, according to her, “business was good.” It also helped that she was raising chickens and offering fresh chicken meat to order (now Patricia, who is responsible for the idea of selling chickens, and who was in charge of this part of the business is in the United States, and nobody wants to take care of the chickens, nor do the necessary killing). With a store two blocks down from her house, one on the street behind hers and, one right across from hers, the scenario is now different. Days could go by before someone bought something. Though, according to Cuca, before the other stores opened, they were not selling that much merchandize either but, as she said, “people were showing up for business, especially to buy chicken.” As a side note here, it is not obvious to me that the other stores are doing well either.

For Cuca perhaps more puzzling than the lack of business in her store is the way the other store owners are trying to compete with her. She is particularly angry with the woman with the store across the street, Lucia, who asked her husband working in the United States to set her up with her own store, about a year after Cuca opened hers. Talking about Lucia with Cuca means listening to plenty of anecdotes about how

“sneaky” her business competitor is and how much she is trying to copy her business. For instance, before Lucia opened her store, she would spend a lot of time at Cuca’s store getting information about what to order and where to order. Cuca stopped sharing information once it was obvious to her what Lucia was doing and, thus, Lucia started sending her own kids to Cuca’s store to find out things for her. If Cuca had a new product, soon after it would show up in Lucia’s store. Also, a common practice for Lucia has been to stop the delivery truck that supplies Cuca’s inventory and asking them to replicate Cuca’s order. Lucia’s store is in fact larger and much more well supplied than Cuca’s, also it is more “well put together” than Cuca’s, still it is not clear how profitable this store is. During the many times I hung out at Cuca’s, I do not recall seeing much activity happening at Lucia’s store either.

For Cuca, Lucia’s behavior is an example of how envious people have become in *La Esperanza* after steady migratory flows to *el Norte*—meaning, the United States—increased and turned economically productive for families. In fact, she is not alone in making these remarks. That people in town had become envious and greedy is a generalized feeling in town. Like Cuca, many believe that with migration everyone started desiring what other people were obtaining, hence copying each other’s ideas about their *porvenir*, and the continuous flow of remittances made these desires become a possibility for many. And, indeed, when some began to buy pick up trucks, others did too, even if there was nobody to drive them; when some got stores, others copied, even if they did not attract a lot of customers; when some improvised a street food stand others did too and, even if people were not in the best economic position to pursue these projects, they would dream about one day attaining them.

I heard comments from many people in town referring to this as “a competition” driven by desiring what other people want. The owner of the fonda, the most successful restaurant in town, is very vocal about this issue. One of the most hard working women I met in town, she once mentioned to me that this envy and competition is something new to the town, and she attributes this to people having more resources than in pre-migration times to obtain what they want. She seems to argue that with money from the United States, it is easier for people to pursue projects. Overall she thinks this is good. After all, she says, the town has dramatically changed and improved, and it is good to see people trying to look after their *porvenir* “now that they can”. However, she wishes people were not copying so much other people’s projects. “It is not good for business,” she said, “because there are so many of the same in town, not all of them do well, and then you see people who do not know what they are doing.” She referred here to the many other food businesses that open and close in town—she is very proud of hers being the only one that remains always successful. “If you are going to have a restaurant, you need to know about cooking, about how to treat the customers, about how to choose the right product... there are a lot of things involved... You do not open a restaurant just because others did.” Accordingly, she is very critical about the other food restaurant businesses in town, though she says that the new pizza place that had just opened a couple of blocks away from her restaurant is doing an okay job.

As for the fonda owner, it might seem to observers that projects such as the restaurants she is talking about, Cuca’s store and even Marcela’s house are not well planned, that people do not know how to execute them or that they do not have a clear

vision about them to begin with. In some way, it could be argued there is some truth to this. The fonda owner's comments point towards an issue common, to varying degrees, to many of the projects you see in town—especially those that are business-related: people's projects are not in synch with the actual resources (far beyond the mere economic) they have (or have access to) for attaining them—not to mention the constraints brought to this equation by the actual limitations associated with the town's historic and economic reality. This gives the impression that people are operating under some sort of magical thinking that stresses the power of personal desires and hard work in making things happen. However, as the following section in the chapter elaborates, there is more to observe here beyond people failing to think about and execute these projects—or even people's envy (and hence, their need to have what others have) impacting the feasibility and success of people's projects, as materialized in the entrepreneurial practices through which people aim to fulfill images of future wellbeing.

The account of Cuca's store, including its contradictions, confusions and interpretations, is a clear example of the paradoxical nature of planning the future and of the devising strategies to transport people into the image of such futures. On the one hand, people see these future-oriented projects as a motor for change. On the other, however, people's future-oriented actions and their expectations are inconsistent with the actual outcomes of their behaviors. In this sense, there is a social scenario in which expectations for the future, future-oriented practices and future-projected present outcomes do not seem to go together.

Discussion

Cuca's store illustrates a form of reflexivity that can be characterized as semantic in its approach to thinking about the future. Semantic-like future thinking "appears" to be guiding her actions and choices. How she thinks about her *porvenir* and by means of what she articulates these thoughts about the future is highly mediated by a general stock of knowledge and conceptual framework for thinking of the future that circulates in town. In this sense, the store becoming economically profitable is envisioned as a "known fact to happen," as it has occurred for others.

Given the lack of other viable ways for thinking about the self-opening of opportunities, for many such as Cuca, the idea of opening a store has become a reference point to draw on in their desires to move ahead in life. In the minds of many, business ownership provides the path for enabling changes in the conditions of their life and for guarantying some sort of future financial stability. In many ways, the narratives of success of business owners are one of the few scripts available (if not the only one) for articulating ways for opening the future. This script serves both as a heuristic tool for articulating knowledge about people's future and, to varying degrees, as a blue print for defining a sequence of expected behaviors. In this sense, Cuca is focusing on the routinized behaviors available in the context and on generalized knowledge on already existent scenarios as a means to articulate her own future-scenario in a characteristically semantic-like approach.

This semantic approach to thinking about the future, and especially to articulating projective paths for action, to varying degrees, is also present in many other material projects that can be found in town. The envisioning of the *casas de material*, and

accordingly its associated future scenario planning, is a relevant example to point out and, perhaps, the most significant of all. For many, an interest in future wellbeing necessarily translates into the construction of a house. As it is the case with many other migrant sending regions in rural Mexico with a history of economic inequality, the image of the casa de material stands for the image of the future. In this sense, knowledge about the future is knowledge about a house that would have certain characteristics—the most obvious, for instance, that it will be made out of cement, bricks and metal rods. The future is a known fact and it is treated and pursued as such.

Take, for example, the way Marcela thinks about her future back in Mexico. In the introductory paragraphs to this chapter, I mentioned the many conversations I had with her about the house she envisioned upon her return to Mexico. She left to the United States with a clear and fixed idea of what her future back home would look like, she had a script about how things would evolve based on the typicality of this type of projects that had become so abundant in town as a result of a pervasive use of remittances for construction projects. Regardless the changing circumstances of her family context—i.e. a daughter that does not want to move to the house, expenses that keep on growing and impacting how much she can invest in the construction of the house—she continues thinking about the house in terms similar to those she armed herself with in leaving home. Her projecting into the future, her thinking about this house, is semantic in nature; it is composed of general knowledge about facts of the future imagined and an extended state of being that is not accounting for the contextual and temporal constrains impacting the fulfillment of the house project. Thus in some way, while she is emotionally invested on the house project, the project appears to be existing outside from her present

conditions having acquired a life of its own that is not compatible with the contextual circumstances of her current life. This form of projecting herself into the future is posing challenges for the strategizing of when to go back to Mexico and, overall, for the development of an action plan for her and her husband. In paradoxical ways, she is committed to a representation of the future that is not accommodating her specific circumstances.

A critical question here is how this semantic knowledge about the future is constructed, particularly how people's thoughts about the future acquire semantic detailing through publicly available images of future possibilities. While this is too big of a question to answer here, there are a few elements to point out to begin providing an answer. As illustrated by Lucia's and Cuca's interactions, as well as by the fonda owner's comments regarding competition in town, people are *looking at each other* projecting and executing plans for the future. And, it is not only that people are seeing each other doing things (like building a house), but they are seeing the outcome of their doing (the house). The highly material nature of people's projects provides clear visual narratives about future scenarios that, by virtue of their visibility, become publicly available to those in town. Accordingly, it is enough to be looking across the street—like Lucia did—to create knowledge about how a future time looks like if pursuing a sequence of behaviors. In this sense, material landscape translates into a social mindscape (Zerubavel 1997) for future thinking. In a town that, as suggested in the previous chapter, was so eager to move forward and yet, so “new” at doing so, these flows of activity that are so public and visual play a pivotal role in the giving of meaning to the future.

I am arguing that forms of future-oriented cognition emerge as people engage the future through their interpretations of the ways those around them have engaged with their own futures. What is happening here is that people are learning about the future from observing personal experiences of others and through the ways in which these experiences are being communicated through the material reality in town. This implies a process of interpretation, appropriation and re-contextualization (or de-contextualization) of other's experiences, through which the particularities of someone else's reality lose their sensitivity and association to particular circumstances, creating the form of generalized and factual knowledge about the future I am encountering. People's observations are thus providing the scripts for their own action.

Identifying the extent to which, for example, in her future thinking Cuca is adopting the perspective of another or the perspective of her future self, or even variations within this continuum, allows me to see her business practices as something other than, for example, a failed cost-benefit analysis. In the same terms, it allows me to seek an explanation not based in Cuca's lack of entrepreneurial capacities or perhaps a failure in education—as someone suggested to me—but rather in other kinds of cultural phenomena, such as the circulation of models for future thinking. So, in this sense, what is mediating people's actions in *La Esperanza* is not necessarily pure envy as people in town have interpreted it. Underlying people's behaviors there is a system of stories about the future that are being shared, interpreted, appropriated and externalized.

This form of reflexivity for future-scenario building points to a context that already shows very scripted experiences of migration and related material benefits, because transnational movement has already gone through many years. There is

saturation in the market and also in the narratives available for people to plan ahead on the basis of economic practices. Because of the many years of experiences of migration and of economic changes, models for opportunity-building have become routinized and institutionalized—this is happening in *La Esperanza* as much as in neighboring towns. In other words, the conditions that facilitate Cuca's particular form of reflexivity have to do with the town having experienced many years of material benefits from migration which created opportunities for people copying each other, and hence to *compete for futures*. The problem also is that, while the town is indeed growing, it is not yet providing other varieties for people to nourish other kind of future-oriented narratives. Especially for generations like Cuca, there are not many other cultural resources to draw on for future-building.

Also, it is important here to point out that the kind of scripts that people are adopting—i.e., the script that when people go to the United States, it is likely they would have a house completed upon their return—corresponds to a different historical moment. The opportunity structure has changed in the United States over the course of the many years since the outcomes of the benefits of migration began to show considerably in the *casas de material* people built in the 1990s. Inflation in the town also makes it difficult for people to complete their homes. Therefore people are searching for similar outcomes to experiences and borrowing scripted futures that occurred in historical and economic times that are not the same.

Innovation and the Making of Futures: Iker and Chato

I met Iker when I took the taxi he was operating on my way to the bank in the city that is about an hour drive away through the mountain.⁴⁷ It had been three years since he returned to *La Esperanza* in 2005, after spending a period of time beginning in the early 2000s working at a restaurant kitchen in New Jersey. Like many other people in town who plan short/medium-term stays abroad, he came back to *La Esperanza* because, as he remarked, he knew he could make a living back home. He admits liking the United States: “it is a country that is a good place to live in, it is a country that is doing very well.. if I was ‘legal’ I would have liked it for living there, but as someone ‘illegal,’ there are many things one cannot do. One cannot buy a car, one cannot buy a house... there is no future.” Iker has many family members living abroad, mostly from his wife’s side of the family, who continue encouraging him to return to the United States. However, he continues telling them that he is happy with what he has and what he wants: “why should I be looking for trouble... it is difficult to be away from the family,” he said. Iker has two children, one in pre-school and a second grader.

Iker bought his taxi when he came back to *La Esperanza*. During our ride to the nearby city, he told me about this taxi:

before, there were not that many taxis... it was very rare to find someone who bought a taxi... I thought it was going to be big business because people were paying for someone to take them between the many *rancherías*⁴⁸ and to the largest cities through the mountains.. for a while business was good, then, all of a sudden, many people started buying taxis... it seems to me there are more than a hundred taxis now [within the past 4 years].. and the town is very small, there are way too many.. now, even people in the smaller towns are also starting to get their own taxis.

⁴⁷ Since I conducted my fieldwork, a branch of a bank opened in *La Esperanza*.

⁴⁸ Small rural settlements

Iker is talking about the same kind of competition we learned about in Cuca's story, which is impacting how profitable this business venture is for him. He now treats his earnings from the taxi as a supplemental income. With the rapid increase in the number of taxis, the rate for each trip got lower, making this business not as promising as he had envisioned. His other source of income, however, is the one that he is the most proud of: a video and photograph service for events and parties.

Iker came up with this idea when he was in the United States, after seeing the events that were held at the restaurant he worked in and after being exposed to the videos and photo albums people he knew had paid for. At the time, he did not recall any local people that provided that kind of service back in *La Esperanza*. "To go the United States, one needs to have a goal to achieve, and I wanted to make some money to have my own business that could provide for the future, and at the end I came up with my business idea too." During his time abroad he did research about the equipment he needed, saved money to buy the equipment and, when he returned home, he brought with him the cameras and film equipment he now uses in weddings and parties.

"Business is going well", he says. With the taxi and this camera business, he points out, his family is doing okay money-wise. After all, as he says, his kids are very young and they do not ask for much, so he can focus on making the video and photograph business grow. "Perhaps in the future I will go back to the United States," he said to me, but it is not my plan right now."

Recently, his brother, who lives in the United States, has been trying to convince him to go back so he can upgrade his camera equipment:

He keeps on telling me that I need to get new equipment if I want to see my business grow.. It is not worth taking the risk to go back for the sake of buying

camera equipment. Here in *La Esperanza*, the technology does not show as it does in other places [meaning that people do not notice technological change], right now, I can manage with what I have... back in the United States, things get outdated in a matter of months, but that is not the case here. Here years can go by before something gets outdated... I keep on telling him, that things do not work here like they do in the United States, where everything is readily available. Here people do not have access to things so easily, one need to go all the way to the city of Oaxaca [an 6-8 hr drive through the mountains] or even to Mexico City to find things. That helps me because what I have is what people can get here.

Discussion

Iker's story encapsulates a recurrent theme in *La Esperanza*: that people are drawing on their experiences abroad to articulate future scenarios.⁴⁹ In the previous chapter, I began to mention this, though as a meaning-making process for articulating images of future wellbeing this deserves closer scrutiny here. This issue illustrates a different kind of reflexivity on context and biography than the one that characterizes Cuca's story, in which ideas for the future is acquired through the attentiveness to routinized behaviors in the social context that turn into what seems generalized information about the future. Her story illustrates the highly scripted nature of people's future scenario building, both as responsive to the impact of sustained migration-related entrepreneurship in town, and as reflective on the competition and oversaturated market that has taken over the town in very recent years.

In contrast, Iker's account illustrates a kind of future-scenario building that implies a reflexivity that is more attentive to biography and that contemplates particular constraints that are relevant to personal history and the contexts in which this takes place. Accordingly, Iker's future-scenario building is more episodic in its approach. For instance, in his planning on the growth of the video and photograph business, there is a

⁴⁹ See Levitt (1998) concept of social remittances here.

clear consideration of the specificities of the context in where this plan is taking place. Also, he is making choices accordingly about whether or not to follow his brother advice to engage in migratory behavior. This consideration of the conditions of his own biography, which include his family context and experiences, shape the vision he has for how he sees himself pursuing this venture.

Iker is not the only one in town that is doing this episodic-like reflexivity. Iker's form of reflexivity accounts for the many experiences of innovation that I encountered in town and that, in many ways. This reflexivity characterizes those cases of future scenario building that capitalize on the novelty of migration-related experiences and the changing context in *La Esperanza* as an outcome of the town's growth, both as semi-urban center and as a transnational community. Let me follow up here on the Chinese restaurant I introduced in the previous chapter.

The Chinese restaurant owner, Chato, is a former migrant with a history of multiple stays abroad that began in the mid 1990s. For most of his migrant career, he worked in the restaurant business; his latest job was at a Chinese food take out restaurant in Atlantic City, where he had worked already during earlier trips. He prides himself on how much his former employer taught him about how to cook "real" Chinese food, about how well he learned about the ingredients used in Chinese cooking—some of which he has never heard of before, as he pointed out—but, especially, about how savvy he was at writing down everything he saw and learned. He then figured this would be a good business back home for two reasons. On the one hand, the restaurant was very popular among the many other Mexicans living in the area. On the other, the restaurant would be the "only" Chinese restaurant in town. "That was the beginning of my plan," he

responded when I asked him about how he came up with the idea. Upon his return to Mexico—he always knew he would return to *La Esperanza* to get married—someone told him that the restaurant space located at the edge of town (formerly a night club) was closing down. By then he had already met Rosalinda, his wife, and soon after he got married, he made the restaurant their project.

The opening of the restaurant, however, brought about many challenges. As he said, while showing me items in the restaurant pantry, he could not cook Chinese food without the right ingredients. Accordingly, he had to become very resourceful at exploring the available options for obtaining the supplies necessary to make the restaurant work. “if you could see how resourceful I was...how active.” Chato now travels on a periodical basis to Mexico City to get the right supplies.⁵⁰ Though more expensive than many other restaurants in town—mainly because of the costs of the “special ingredients”—Chato’s restaurant is very popular in town; many of the customers are former migrants. When I first heard of this place someone told me “the fried rice tastes just like the rice the Chinese make.” For many, the mural of the Great Wall painted on the back wall also adds to the “real” Chinese experience.

Like Iker, Chato is drawing on his own biographical experiences and reflecting on his contextual circumstances while designing and executing his plan. Though, Chato is not necessarily drawing on his migrant past in his future scenario building, he is in fact drawing on the biography of who he has become with that experience, an “experienced” Chinese food cook. He recognizes that “now” he is someone who can make fried rice, who knows what ingredients to buy and where to buy them. It is on the basis of this self-awareness of who he has become from where is able to articulate and execute plans.

⁵⁰ About 400 miles away.

“When I left I used to work in the field, now I am a cook,” he said, and as such he is projecting accordingly. Also, as a form of meaning making mechanism for articulating the future this also enables Chato to mobilize his resources and to look for the ways to make things happen. This enables a distinct kind of agentic element. Thus the negotiation of resources and the reconciliation of settings and experiences implies as well a certain kind of agency.

As illustrated by Chato’s story, such an episodic-like approach to envisioning the future—as entailing a reflexive process that attends to the present circumstances of the self in the consideration of future outcomes—allows for the reconciling of two sets of experiences that occur in different spatial and temporal contexts, as well as the constant negotiation between the cultural and material offerings and demands of each context (that of *La Esperanza* and the United States). Chato’s and Iker’s accounts, thus, illustrate a couple general themes here. First, in the consideration of future possibilities in this context, people are mobilizing biographical-based resources as a means to navigate the overly saturated market in town. Second, for many, choosing paths for future scenario building is a process of negotiation between the biographical, material and cultural resources that exists in two different geographies.

Making Futures for Someone Else: Alejandro

Alejandro is Cuca’s son. He left to the United States when he was a young teenager (he is in his early thirties now) and has what seems a pretty stable job working, already for many years, in the kitchen of a restaurant in New Jersey. Unlike his sisters who are abroad, he seems to have more permanent living arrangements abroad.

Migration-wise, many would agree that Alejandro was one of the first of his generation and family background to engage in transnational movement in the early 1990's. As I mentioned in the introduction to this book, over the years, Alejandro has been building his own apartment back home, in addition to having built the living quarters where his parents and sisters live now. While Alejandro has given instructions of what he wants for his apartment, he has never seen it—not even in pictures—all what he knows about it is through what Salvador, his father who is in charge of the construction, reports to him when he calls every other week. This apartment seems to be almost done, though. The first time I visited *La Esperanza*, Alejandro had recently bought a truck for himself; this is parked in the open space area next to Cuca's store. At that time, nobody in the family drove—in fact, the truck was being used as an extra recreational and storage space—and it was unsure when would Alejandro return, though there were many conversations with me about him “almost having all his papers straighten to come back.” When I returned to *La Esperanza* a couple of years later, Alejandro was still not back, though Cuca and Salvador assured me one more time that his papers were almost ready.

When I visited the family for the first time, I saw a brand new stove by a water tank in the open area of the house—where there is an open fire cooking area constructed with bricks that stays on pretty much all day; this is where food is cooked at unscheduled times of the day. The stove had a wood board on top to serve as a counter space where a variety of plastic containers were piled. The oven was serving as extra storage space for supplies—very much like the microwave oven did, which was buried under a pile of fabric. I learned that Alejandro had sent money to buy the stove for his mother; he also told his father to buy the microwave for her. Alejandro has always shared with his parents

his thoughts about the comforts of the apartment he shares with others in New Jersey. In fact, he has send pictures of his air conditioner unit that keeps the house cool.⁵¹ The stove came to Cuca's house with the promise of comfort and wellbeing for her mother who has to light the fire pit everyday if she wants to cook. However, for Cuca, the stove turned out to be unpractical and she does not understand very much why Alejandro thought she would need it, "it is too expensive to buy a gas tank," she said, "and food does not cook as well as it does on the open flame."

Discussion

Alejandro is drawing on his own experiences for articulating hopes for her mother. His experiences abroad provide a reasonably good script for suggesting future wellbeing for her. He is moving his personal experiences into her mother's context for constructing visions of future wellbeing for her, in ways that do not incorporate her contextual circumstances. Alejandro is, thus, acting semantically when articulating images for the wellbeing of her mother, though, he is thinking in an episodic-kind of way about the stove. For instance, the stove materialized Alejandro's understandings of what his mother's future self could be doing. The interesting point here is that this image was articulated through his own understanding of his own experiences. In this particular case, Alejandro's vision of his mother's future self⁵²—or, better said, his interpretation of such self—is articulated as an expression of his own self. Alejandro transferred his own experiences and expectations to his mother's reality. Because of the differences in the

⁵¹ La Esperanza's average temperature is 82 degrees Fahrenheit, thus this information is of particular significance for them.

⁵² I refer to the future self as a "cognitive representations of one's essence or identity at a particular moment or place," (Cerulo 2009, p. 537) in this case in a future time.

context and circumstances, he is not accounting for his mother's specific constraints, such as the challenges with purchasing a gas tank. This vision of future wellbeing translates into a vision of a future that feels semantic in nature seen from the mother's side.

However, from Alejandro's perspective this vision of his mother's future self feels more episodic in nature—it is personal, specific and biographical. In contrast to the case of Cuca, in which there is a borrowing of experiences in the conception of future selves, then Alejandro is transferring his experiences to other people to create images of future selves for others, in this case his mother. This is consequential because his actions are articulated on the basis of these images.

Alejandro's account also speaks to a common theme for many households with family members living abroad, namely that future scenario building is accomplished for the sake and in the name of others and that this is accomplished transnationally. This is a reality in many households with family members living abroad that are cognitively and emotionally engaged in various ways in the creation of futures across geographical borders. Alejandro, for example, in addition to continuing envisioning what he interprets as a better daily living for his mother, he is also very active in the creation of "the future" for his sister Ady.

At the time of my fieldwork, Ady was in high school and she was about to become the first member of his family who completed elementary school, junior high and high school—her younger sister, Irazi, quit school after graduating from elementary school and her two other sisters, like Alejandro, dropped school before reaching that stage. Overall, Ady's family is very invested on her education, but, Alejandro is especially invested—he wants her to stay in school to avoid the need to go to the United

States like he and his other two sisters did. Thus, Alejandro sends remittances explicitly destined to Ady's educational costs. However, in addition to monetary resources, he also has ideas about Ady's future. As it is the case with his mother's stove, some of these ideas are being articulated semantically—through scripts about the outcomes of achieving a higher education degree. Ady is, in fact, constructing images of her future self in relation to these images and articulating plans for the future that, while in accordance with those images, overlooks the structural constraints over which they do not have control. Alejandro, for instance, is encouraging Ady's desire to attend a private college in a town about four hours away to the west of *La Esperanza*. This behavior is encouraged by the parents, who bought a very expensive laptop computer for her on the advice of Alejandro—he told them to get the “best computer” she could use. For Ady, college away represents not only a future education but also, a future self that is far from her hometown, which she is beginning to find too boring. However, there exist constraints beyond the mere economic and her academic performance, that need to be factored in this future-scenario building such as the high competitiveness in the higher education system and the elitist cultural environment of the private higher education system, both posing real challenges to the viability of this planning.

For Ady, her future self is an outcome of a collaborative effort. It implies the bringing of experiences, understandings and constraints from actors in distinct contexts. Ady's future thus has both semantic and episodic elements. On the one hand, her future scenario building draws on scripted knowledge about how college educating impacts mobility. On the other hand, part of this image of the future also takes into account her

own biographical present and considers future consequences according to her brother support for her education and his perceived financial viability.

Alejandro's and Ady's relationship illustrates a particular dynamic of future-scenario building that occurring across different experiential contexts (the United States and La Esperanza). This implies a kind of projective behavior that, as pointed out before, attends to a form of reflexivity that navigates between two mechanisms of meaning making: the semantic-like and the episodic-like.

Conclusions

As sociologists we can contribute to understanding how cognition of the future works and what makes it possible, if we figure out which are the ways in which this interaction between cognitive processes and social context occurs. In the chapter, I have found very useful to adopt the vocabulary provided by neuroscientists and psychologists that distinguishes between two different ways for thinking the future: episodic and semantic. Episodic future thinking is the ability to think about the future in a personally involved way, by projecting the self ahead in time. This entails people anticipating or foreseeing themselves in the future in ways that are novel and uncertain. Episodic future thinking means that people understand that the future can be constrained by one's present conditions. Semantic future thinking, in contrast, refers to thinking of the future in a fairly script-like way. This is different from episodic because the unfolding of a future event is seen as fixed rather than uncertain. Semantic future thinking focuses on the regularities (typicality) of events.

What is particularly valuable here is the way in which the distinction between episodic and semantic future thinking allows me to address how, in constructing future-scenarios, people draw on situational context and biographical history. I treat each of these types of future-oriented cognition as standing for distinct forms of reflexivity that address people's attentiveness to the non-personal and regular, on the one hand, and the subjective and autobiographical, on the other. In this sense, this distinction also addresses issues related to the understanding of the interplay between reflexivity, action, situation, and social reality. Key to the understanding of the way people engage the future in *La Esperanza*, is the acknowledgement of the relational component in this mental processing of the future. This implies looking at the relations between people as the starting points in the creation of the experiences of the future and, accordingly, of the ways people articulate their future-oriented thoughts and behaviors.

Chapter IV: FUTURES IN MOTION

This chapter is organized around the accounts of the lives of two cousins, Patricia and Josefina,⁵³ and their conceptions of their *futures*,⁵⁴ as reconstructed through the many encounters and conversations I had with them and their families across two distinct geographical contexts, *La Esperanza* and New Jersey, over the course of almost 4 years of their lives. Within that time frame, I saw Patricia and Josefina respond to the circumstances of their everyday living in *La Esperanza* and, in doing so, I saw them engage the future through their planning and strategizing in the present. For instance, I saw Patricia, Cuca's daughter [we met Cuca in Chapter III], be creative about how to maximize her mother's store success when she came up with the idea of selling chickens. I also saw Josefina always coming up with new ideas to implement in her sewing and seamstress store—from the selling of regional clothes, to making costumes for the school's end-of-the-year performance, to designing handmade accessories with the trademark stitching that characterizes the town. In the setting of *La Esperanza*, I saw their lives happening as intertwined with the reality of transnational migration so engrained in how everyday life happens in *La Esperanza*. For instance, I visited Patricia in the house built with the remittances his brother sent from abroad; I helped Josefina translate some documents she needed to obtain dual citizenship for her US-born son, and I listened to

⁵³ Both in their twenties (Josefina being the oldest)—their mothers are sisters.

⁵⁴ Here I am using the conceptualization of futures as units of meaning that are biographically carved out and socially rooted and that encompass ideas, expressions of self and biographical experiences.

both telling me at different times about the moment when returning migrants mention to them that they had seen their respective estranged husbands abroad.⁵⁵

Within that timeframe, I also saw Patricia and Josefina moving between different contexts of action, as they engaged in transnational movement from *La Esperanza* to New Jersey. As they moved from one geographical, social and cultural context to the other, I saw them moving as well from one biographical time to another. During the time I remained in touch with them, Patricia's and Josefina's lives changed both in context and content. I learned about their changing experiences navigating the American context, the challenges they had encountered, and the new skills they have acquired—like Josefina's accounts of her responsibilities at work in a fast food restaurant, and Patricia's use of new words—"el bos" "parquear" "el rait" (Spanglish for "the boss", "to park a car", "the ride")—that speak to her not living anymore in *La Esperanza*.

In the context of this spatial and biographical movement and its related changes, I saw Patricia and Josefina design futures for themselves and for the sake of—and because of—their children. For Patricia, there is a house with all its implication of independence from her parents. For Josefina, there is an already successful store she hopes to expand. For both, there is their kids' opportunity building—Patricia has three kids and Josefina one. When they moved from their hometown to New Jersey, I saw these futures initially conceived in *La Esperanza* move with them as well, as they brought projects, expectations to fulfill and goals with them—this is one sense in which this chapter is about futures-in-motion

⁵⁵ When I met them, both had estranged husbands living in the United States and were caring for their children alone with the help of family.

There is another way, however, in which this chapter is about futures in motion—one that much like the other just mentioned, is a byproduct of Patricia and Josefina participating in transnational movement and might be less obvious and yet as meaningful as the first and tightly imbricated with it. In arriving to the United States, Josefina and Rosalba also set in motion another process: the taking in of new information as New Jersey becomes not just one component of a plan—i.e. an interpretive framework or a stage for the consideration of future possibilities—but also a real place with all kinds of new and unexpected experiences, dynamics and possibilities. Almost inevitably, this move from the idea of life in the United States to the reality of living there impact Josefina's and Patricia's future consideration. For instance, the contexts of action change for them, and accordingly, the circumstances under which the pursuing of plans takes place—the expected speed in which their goals would be attained gets modified, as well as the viability and even desirability of these goals. Their *futures* were suddenly in motion in this sense too—speeding up or slowing down along biographical lines, making unplanned stops in face of unforeseen circumstances and switching tracks like a train that was set in motion at the original moment of the consideration of future scenarios. While the consideration and reconsideration of plans might be inherent to all future-making—as “possible future trajectories of action . . . may be creatively reconfigured in relation to actors' hopes, fears, and desires,” Emirbayer and Mische 1998, p. 971), transnational dynamics make futures' motion especially dramatic as it complicates the processes of future consideration.

As observed in *La Esperanza* and in New Jersey, because of the circulatory nature of contemporary migrations—and this is especially the case for Mexican migration—

people engage cognitively and emotionally with futures that take place in settings that transcend the geographical boundaries of their present actions. A recurrent theme I encountered, for example, is that people's futures exist in several contexts rather than in a single location. In New Jersey, for instance, I met people that, while being abroad, were invested cognitively, emotionally and materially in the future they will encounter once they went back to *La Esperanza*. As someone I met earlier in my fieldwork told me, "I am here [in New Jersey] because I want to build a house for my mom in Mexico." In *La Esperanza*, on the other hand, I had interactions with people that were working toward the fulfillment of projects that would take place in *La Esperanza*, and yet they related to these projects across borders. Take for example, Ady, who we met in the previous chapter. She lives in *La Esperanza* and receives remittances from Alejandro, who is working in the United States, and, thus, she is able to entertain the idea of attending a private college in Mexico. This represents not only a future education and the possibilities that will open up, but also a future life that is far from her hometown. Of course, this is a vulnerable future because a change in the working conditions of her brother could put her plans in jeopardy. Ady's future is being both constituted in the United States and in *La Esperanza*, as the image of college exists in relation to her brother's experiences abroad, and, as such, is being impacted by both contexts.

In the previous chapters, I have already looked at how the process of future consideration is situated in context and the ways in which it is interrelated with the particular scenarios in which people live. Chapter III, for instance, explored people's projective practices as relying as well on subjective mental processes that are articulated through varied forms of reflexivity in relation to situational and biographical context, and

in the context of people's interactions with others. This brings up a few fundamental questions: how do transnational actors manage the future when moving between contexts? Conversely, how does thinking about the future along the lines of different spaces, times and contexts look like? What are the practical implications of future consideration and pursue when these are tightly imbricated with transnational living and the related consideration of other futures? This chapter explores these questions.

The chapter complements the previous chapter, however. Chapter three touched upon the meaning-making entailed in the creation of future-scenario building; namely it looked at the form of cognitive work that people in *La Esperanza* reflexively engage with in conversation with their context and biography. This chapter, conversely, looks at the outcomes of those meaning-making processes—i.e. the projects to be completed, the dreams to be fulfilled, the goals to be achieved—and the ways in which these play out and are negotiated in the context of people's changing life circumstances. In this sense here the focus is not necessarily on the mechanisms for thinking about the future, but about the ways in which people negotiate these futures once they are articulated and made intelligible. In other words, this chapter deals with the question of how transnational actors live with *the* future(s) they are looking forward to, those they have designed, embraced and that have used to define pathways for action as they engage in transnational movement.

There is a premise underlying the analytical work in this chapter: Social actors do more than cognitively articulating futures. Actors need to deal with these futures once conceived and embraced. As such, these futures become part of the cognitive and emotional baggage actors carry around, replace or leave behind, as they navigate between

distinct contexts and biographical histories. In this sense, people's futures are in the move as much as those who hold them are. This movement is multidimensional. These futures move as actors physically move from one geographical, social and cultural context to the other; this movement thus has spatial features. Also, futures move up and down within people's biographical history. Futures can become a foreground and background concern, as these get repositioned in relation to the puzzles of people's everyday living.

Accordingly, to understand this movement (and its consequences), it is necessary to acknowledge that this movement occurs when people consider already articulated units of meaning in new contexts; when they incorporate them to novel biographical scenarios; when they modify them according to circumstances, and when they compare them to some other possible futures, to mention a few of the ways in which this carrying around of futures can take place.

Correspondingly, in this chapter, I am using the word future to refer to the conceived future people relate to—i.e. the image of the future vs the actual realization of a planned future scenario. Accordingly, I am not talking here of the future in its temporal dimension, as a time horizon that follows the “here and now” and that gets actualized in the present through people's planning and its related fulfillment —i.e. a temporal experience. Instead, I am referring to the biographically carved out and socially ingrained futures that, like Josefina's store, evoke meanings in people's minds and to which people relate reflexively. Accordingly, these are the futures that people nourish through their interpretive practices and to which, one way or another, they relate to emotionally in their present.

Through the account of Josefina's and her cousin Patricia's future consideration as this intertwines with their respective migratory behavior, I touch upon this theme of futures in motion and the implications of this movement. I locate this movement along the axis of the changing circumstances, both in space and biographical time, brought about their engagement in transnational movement. I present the story of Patricia first followed by a discussion. Josefina's account and its respective discussion follows. In both accounts, attention should be put on the spatial and biographical movement both of Marcela and their respective futures and, particularly in the ways in which these futures play out in the context of the decisions and choices they make. A conclusion that returns to the analytical theme of futures in motion ends this chapter.

The Juggling of Futures: Patricia

I met Patricia when I visited *La Esperanza* for the first time. Patricia is Cuca's daughter and sister to Alejandro; she is also Josefina's cousin. When I first met her, she was living with her two children, Julian and Tito (eight and six, respectively), in the small adobe structure located at the back of the property where Cuca lives—this was where Cuca used to live before Alejandro built the living quarters on the front of the property. When I met the family, Patricia was in charge of Cuca's store and, especially, of the family's chicken business—Patricia would take care of slaughtering and cleaning of the chickens upon people ordering them.⁵⁶ This business was her idea, an idea she felt very proud of it.

⁵⁶ People in *La Esperanza* are not used to refrigerated meat and all of the meat consumed in town comes from animals slaughtered within a couple of hours from being sold.

Like her sister Marcela, Patricia also wanted to have a house of her own. When I met her, it had been three years since her husband⁵⁷ left with the promise of sending money to finance this house. When her husband left, for a few months she remained living at her parents-in-law's house—as it is accustomed for some people in town—though some family conflicts with them led her to move back in with her parents. My conversation with her about this house seemed to generate mixed feelings for her. On the one hand, she was hopeful about the day she would move to a house of her own--so she did not want to be living with her parents for a long period. She talked about the idea of the house with excitement, though it did not seem to me that she had more information about what this house would entail. On the other hand, talking about the house puzzled her. There was too much uncertainty and confusion around the idea of the house. Particularly, as it related to her not knowing about when it would happen—or if it would ever happen, for that matter. Long periods would pass without hearing news from her husband abroad. She had never had a steady flow of remittances from him.

I returned to *La Esperanza* a couple of years after this first visit. To my surprise, Patricia was not living in *La Esperanza* anymore. A month after I met her, she had moved to New Jersey with her sister and husband. She had left her parents in charge of her two oldest kids. I also learned she had given birth to a baby boy, who was then one year old. Cuca showed me a few of the pictures of the baby Patricia had sent to them. Everyone in the family was excited about the new baby. “He does not look like his two brothers here,

⁵⁷ Like other marriages in town, this was an arranged married.

Cuca told me, “because he was born in *el norte*, he is *blanquito* [pale]; he is *gringo* like your husband.”⁵⁸

I met with Patricia a few months later; this time it was in New Jersey. Along with her husband and another couple, she was living in the two-bedroom apartment where Marcela and her husband live. Her son, Danny, of whom she was very proud, was already walking. At the time, Patricia was not working. In fact, since she arrived to the United States she had not been employed steadily. Initially, Marcela helped her find some work at the same factory where she was employed. For a while, Patricia worked the afternoon shift and was able to earn enough money to send some to her parents to help with her kids’ expenses, as well as making arrangements with a local delivery service to bring a video game console to Julian and Tito. However, with the pregnancy first and then the taking care of a newborn, she found it hard to continue being employed. She could not wait to get back to work, though. She was very motivated to put the idea of the house into motion. After all, she said, that is why she decided to join her husband abroad, a decision that came about when she saw the opportunity to travel to the United States. She felt somehow anxious at the time because of how long it was taking her to start moving towards the house, but she was very happy that life in the United States had given her Danny. When I asked about deciding going to the United States after not having talked about it with me when I first met her, she said that “it just happened,” Marcela helped her with the travel expenses. Alejandro, her brother, was surprised to hear she was in the United States when he found out she had made it to New Jersey.

⁵⁸ Because of the constant exposure to the sun, people in town are very tanned. Thus, kids who are born abroad, because of their paleness, are perceived as being white. For some, this seems to be understood as an inherent feature of being born on American soil. Grimes (1998) documents as well this perceptions about kids born abroad in her own research in another town with ties to New Jersey. Also, here Cuca was referring to her knowledge of me, a co-national, being married to an American Citizen.

I saw Patricia again after I had been in *La Esperanza* for a few more times. She was still living with her sister in New Jersey and Danny was three years old. The day I met her she was getting ready to go to work. Recently she had found work through an employment agency. While not always in the same job, she had been lucky to be called to work very often—though, I did not have the impression this was steady over the month. She was happy about having work, though she was also troubled about not making enough money. To begin with, she was getting paid less than she was in her first job; there were fees due to the employment agency and she also had to pay for the ride that brings her back and forth from a designed location in town to her site of employment.

When I first arrived to Patricia's apartment, she was putting together Danny's back-pack to give to the woman who takes care of him when she works, which included some food and clothes. We walked together to the house of the baby-sitter—she takes care of other 4 children, as well—to drop Danny off. Marcela would pick him up on her way back from work. "This is another expense," she said. Sometimes the shift she was assigned to coordinated well with Marcela's and she managed to save the money she spent paying for someone to care of Danny. Though this was not often the case: "for me to make money," she said, "I need to spend money."

Patricia talked about her life in the New Jersey with mixed feelings. She was very proud that finally she was earning some money. She was hoping she could start building her house soon. She still had this future in mind, just as when she decided to join her husband abroad. She came to the US to get the house done and, as she said, she "cannot go back without having finished her house for her kids." "That is why I am here," she

mentioned to me in a couple of times. Also, Julian and Tito had more expenses and her earnings from abroad could help her parents with that. However, at the same time, she acknowledged she was having a hard time and that things did not turned out as she thought they would. She also remarked that even if she decided to return, she and her husband had no money to go back to *La Esperanza*.

Additionally, Patricia did not see her returning to *La Esperanza* feasible because of Danny. “I cannot bring him back to Mexico,” she said, “he ‘belongs’ here; if I bring him back, they [some sort of public official like social services, I figure] would go look for him and take him away from me. Here they take care of their children.” Patricia was also concerned about where Danny would go to school and the services that he had available by virtue of being born in the United States. Though, she also believed that Danny should be with his brothers, Tito and Julian, and she wanted to have all her kids with her. She had thought about bringing her children to the United States—Julian, particularly kept on telling her he wanted to be in the United States with her. However, she had no money to pay for the costs of the trip for the kids, either. Julian and Tito remained attending school in *La Esperanza* with Patricia’s parents taking care of them.

Discussion

Patricia’s account speaks to the theme of futures in motion and the implication of such movement in the lives of transnational actors. To begin, Patricia’s future plays out in two contexts. For instance, while her house might be physically located in *La Esperanza*—or, better said, the fulfillment component of this future is found back in Mexico—it also exists for Patricia in the context of the United States, and on several

levels. For instance, long before she even left Oaxaca, Patricia's relation to her future is mediated by her own subjective experience of what the United States would be and bring to her—in this case, the United States served as the framework for her future consideration. Her experience and knowledge of the United States before leaving town as well as after her arrival in New Jersey are intrinsic to her future. It is because of her experiences of housing in *La Esperanza* and her association of it with the United States—both related to her not having a house of her own and the script of the *casa de material* predominant in *La Esperanza*—that the future of the house took shape. Conversely, her work experiences in the United States are central for the sustenance of this future. Life in the United States is a central component of this future, both as a condition for its conception and its future realization.

Conversely, Patricia's story demonstrates other ways that futures move through space and biographical history, so that futures constructed for one place play a role in other places. In moving to the United States, Patricia contemplates her future while being abroad, and this future thinking becomes significant—central, even—to her understanding of life in the United States. Patricia's ideas about why she 'cannot' go back to Mexico are a good example to illustrate this point. One of the reasons she is able to articulate her having to remain in the United States, despite her awareness of the obvious challenges she has encountered, speaks to the centrality of the house future in the meaning-making process through which life in New Jersey—and away from her other two children, Julian and Tito—is made sense of. In this sense, Patricia's future is part of the vocabulary through which social experience is being justified. Also, the house as a unit of meaning that stands for the future is the scaffolding that somehow holds this

experience together by placing her in a particular position from which to make sense of the situations she is going through. Moreover, the house future ties Patricia (during a challenging time of extreme fluidity) not only to a potential scenario in Oaxaca, but also to the scene from which that future was projected.

There is another way in which the future manifests in Patricia's experiences in the United States beyond helping her to make sense of her experiences abroad. This has to do with how this future becomes a player in the ways in which Patricia conducts her living and, particularly, in the choices she makes. For Patricia, her future as related to the house is keeping her in the United States. Also, this is impacting the choices she is making regarding employment and the need to look for child-care for her son, Danny. After all, as she said, she needs to pay someone to look after Danny so she can work and save money to continue pursuing the building of the house. Still, she struggles with the ways in which this future has not been compatible with the contextual challenges she has encountered and the changes that have occurred in her life at the level of biography—what prompts her to wonder about returning to Mexico. However, Patricia also has another future operating in her life, namely the one related to Danny, her son. This future encompasses meanings that have to do with the maintenance of the opportunities Danny has by virtue of being born in the United States—opportunities for which she has become very resourceful and knowledgeable about. Because of different mechanisms, this future is also keeping her from going back to Mexico. Though, this is also impacting the future that is related to her other two kids back home, and that she tries to reconcile by wanting to bring them with her to the United States.

Patricia's struggle captures the ways in which in this movement of futures between contexts, the ways in which actors insert them into novel contexts or carry them along from one biographical time to another matters. Patricia's future as it relates to the house back in Mexico is a good example here. The future of the house is not negotiable, it is not open to changes or modification. The struggle is oriented by future that is experienced as having fixed boundaries. This treatment of the future as fixed has real consequences for how she evaluates the choices she has to make and, especially, for how she tackles the puzzles of the daily living, both at the level of structural constraints and opportunities. Josefina's negotiation of futures presents a different story, however.

The Future Endured: Josefina

I remember the day when I found out that Josefina was leaving *La Esperanza*. I just had lunch at the *fonda* located across the town's main square and spent the afternoon making my usual rounds on *La Esperanza*'s main street before walking down the main street towards Lupita's pharmacy, which I used many afternoons as my "observation post." In many ways, that day seemed like the many others I spent in town: the cyber was getting crowded with kids on their way home from school; people were lining up at the *casa de ahorro*⁵⁹ which was about to start distributing the remittances received for the day; taxis were waiting for clients at the terminals of both taxi unions in downtown, and the town speakers were making their (almost) daily announcement for the fresh tamales for sale at a house in the neighborhood. However, when I looked ahead on the main street and did not see the awnings that usually displayed the colorful regional clothing hanging of Josefina's store, my experience of the town's daily life became different from that of

⁵⁹ Lending and saving money institution.

the many I had before. Josefina's sewing supplies and seamstress business seemed to be closed. Since my first visit to *La Esperanza*, I had never seen Josefina—one of the most hard-working women I met in town—take a day off. Later that day I found out that she had sold her stock and would be leaving to the United States any time soon.

She had been telling me about how she was hoping her store could become an affiliate of one of the largest fabric stores chains in the country, and not long ago she had met with one of their store managers. Her store was the only in town of its kind, and thus, the sole provider of sewing supplies for *La Esperanza* and the many smaller surrounding towns. Though she often complained of time constraints and very long workdays—she was open 7 days a week—she had what she and others considered a very good business with a steady local and out-of-town client base.

After learning the news, I met with Josefina at her mother's house, where she lived with her son Saul, again. During our conversation, she pulled out “samples” of her work from the wood armoire that keeps her sewing projects and pointed out the pictures decorating her wall that show some of the clothes she had made. She proudly talked about the dress she made for her niece's third birthday party, the traditional outfits she embroidered for the school festival, the party dresses she designed for herself and the many pieces she had made over the years for Saul, her eight-year-old son—she seemed to be especially proud of the homemade Spiderman bedspread on Saul's bed. I learned that Josefina sold everything she had in the store to a woman living in the opposite side of town. It was a hard decision, she admitted, as it took her many years to have it so well stocked.

I learned that Josefina had not changed her mind about expanding her business; she was just taking what she considered a shortcut. For quite a while already, her sister living in New Jersey, who had heard of Josefina's long workdays, had been inviting Josefina to join her with the promise of helping her finding a job that would pay well. With Gustavo, her other brother, an experienced migrant himself, planning to go as well—thus making the border crossing seem safer—this time she agreed. “Just a couple of years,” she said, “it is worth trying.” I asked Josefina about Saul, who was watching TV swinging in his grandmother's hammock as we conversed. Josefina assured me that she was doing this for him and that as soon as she could, she would send money to have someone bringing him to her. “After all”, she said, “he is American and he belongs there too.” Josefina had already spent a couple of years abroad before, living with her now estranged husband—Saul was born during that time. Upon her return, she settled in town as a single mother convinced that all it takes is willpower, hard work and an eye on the *porvenir* (that which is to come) to make things work. Her store, she often highlighted, was a good example of this work ethic. “Will you miss sewing?” I asked, knowing how much her identity evolved around her craft. “My sister told me she already has a [sewing] machine waiting for me,” she proudly responded. “When would you leave?” I asked. She did not know, though she knew it would be soon. It all depended on the *coyote*.

I met Josefina at her sister's house in New Jersey. Her son, Saul, was already with her. For the past year, Josefina had been staying at the front porch sunroom of her sister's house, where she had improvised a sleeping area and a workspace for Saul to do his homework. This arrangement would not last much longer, though. Josefina had just found a room at an apartment very close to Saul's school and was planning on moving

out within the next weeks. “I want my independence, and a better space for Saul to sleep ... during the winter it gets very cold out here” she said.

That day Josefina showed me around “her new town.” On our walk, I could not help being fascinated by Josefina’s excitement about the town and about her constant remarks on how beautiful everything seemed to her. I kept on hearing phrases like “this is where I wait for the bus,” “we like coming to eat here,” “Saul’s school is that way,” “that is the casino, it is very pretty inside”. The enthusiasm with which she was sharing with me what had become her landmarks in town and the ease with which she was able to communicate her life to me was remarkable. She seemed very comfortable, quite adjusted and authentically happy. I was not surprised, though. Josefina was one of the most resilient women I had met in *La Esperanza* and I had always admired her capacity for always making things work. That day Josefina showed me what had become her favorite spots in town. It was a sunny Saturday late afternoon and people were strolling around and hanging out on the benches along the boardwalk in town. Saul was running in circles asking his mother to buy things for him. “See how pretty this is!” she said to me as she pointed out to the waterfront; she seemed very excited about her new environment.

Josefina had been working at a fast food restaurant pretty much since she arrived to the United States. Her sister helped to arrange the position for her before her arrival so, unlike other newcomers, she did not have to wait long before starting earning money and being able to pay off the border crossing costs. Josefina could not be happier about this new job. After having worked all her life without a fixed schedule, and never having drawn any clear line between home and work, she found her new fixed-hours schedule very refreshing and, as she said, “very easy and without worries.” She especially liked

being able to drop Saul at school in the mornings and having time to have fun with him during the weekends. From the way she talked about her daily life at the fast food restaurant, it was clear that she was thriving at work. Within a few months of her starting date, Josefina was moved from her entry-level position as a kitchen worker to helping at the drive-through window and, very recent on occasion, to the cashier. During our time together, she spent a lot of time passionately talking about what she has done in each of these positions and how she is continually learning new skills. She seemed very surprised to hear herself telling me about her learning how to operate the appliances, about how fast and efficient she could be during certain times of the day, and about the many times she had been asked to interact with customers, especially when she has had to speak a few basic words to them in English—at that time she had just began taking formal English lessons. “I tell them to call me *Josephine*—that is my name here, right?” she said.

Towards the end of my day with Josefina, I could not help asking her about her plans of going back to *La Esperanza* and the prospectus of reopening her business back home. After all, as I reminded her, that was the reason she had left. “Of course I will go back and I still want to have my store...this time it will be bigger” she responded, “but I do not know when.” Though, there was one thing she was certain about: she knew she had to be back in *La Esperanza* by when her niece, turns fifteen (at the time she was five) to make the dress for her *Quince Años* party. “I want to have a house of my own and that takes time. I want it to look just as pretty as the ones they have here, with everything I need and I want it all white.” To that end, she proudly mentioned to me she had just bought a *solar*⁶⁰ nearby her mother’s house. She told me she used to own a *solar* that she inherited long time ago, but gave it to his younger brother when she got married, since

⁶⁰ plot of land

she had a husband that would provide her with what she needed and his brother had nothing. Though, with her marriage not turning out as she expected, she was left with no property and no place to go back but her mother's house. With her new acquisition, things are different now, she said. I was surprised to learn about her buying a plot of land, especially because it felt to me she had not been abroad long enough to earn sufficient money to invest in *La Esperanza's* increasingly high real estate market.⁶¹ When I expressed my surprise, she seemed authentically confused: "I have been working all my life, I had enough savings back home... why would I need the money from here?"

Right before saying good bye to each other, Josefina told me about the new ideas she had for the future and, especially, about the ways in which thinking of opportunities for her son Saul (an American citizen) made her adjust her ideas about how her life would look like for the next few years. Saul, for instance, adjusted very well to school and to her he seemed very happy. "There are things here he does not have at home, and I have to pay attention to that." Her words made me think about all the time and energy Josefina put over the past years in getting Saul's dual citizenship straightened out—one of the few people in *La Esperanza* I knew were taking care of this legal issues. I could not help thinking about the many times I knew she wondered about what it would mean for Saul's future to have the possibility "to live legally" both in Mexico and in the United States and to let him decide to live wherever he wanted. Within a year of this encounter I learned that she was expecting another baby in the United States.

⁶¹ During my time there, I heard news that a house was sold in the equivalent of a \$100, 000 US dollars. Many locals remarked to me that migrant money has raised real estate prices as people's purchasing power increased, as well as their desire to better their living arrangements or guaranteeing a place to go back upon their return to *La Esperanza*.

Discussion

Similar to Patricia's, Josefina's account speaks to the ways in which futures move from one context to the other and the ways in which these play out in the lives of transnational actors. However, Josefina's story looks very different than Patricia's in this respect. In Josefina's store—both as an ongoing project and as an image of the future—the United States was not present until very recently. Unlike many other businesses in town that, in one way or another, are connected to the United States (either through economic or social remittances), Josefina's store had never been constituted through resources, material or experiential, from abroad. While she spent some time in the United States during the year Saul was born, her experiences abroad were very limited and she describes them as uneventful and unproductive due to personal conflicts. “I accomplished nothing while I was there; things began to look good when I came back,” she once remarked to me.

When Josefina left *La Esperanza* for New Jersey, however, she carried along with her the future of the store. Though she had already sold the material reality of this store, when leaving to the United States, she still considered this future, particularly because of the way in which this connects with personal growth as a seamstress.

When leaving to the United States, moreover, she also carried along the future as related to Saul's opportunities. More than this, however, in New Jersey she began to elaborate goals for Saul that applied not only, as she had originally imagined, to the long-term future back in *La Esperanza*, but also to the median future in New Jersey (improving his studying and sleeping spaces). At the same time, Josefina explained her taking care to attain and maintain dual citizenship for Saul as a wish to keep a more open-

ended future, one in which Saul had agency. All of these factors lead to a stark contrast of Josefina's future planning with that of Patricia, because Josefina's includes life abroad not only as a means, but also *as a constitutive element of the future*.

Even the future of the store, which seemed, already in *La Esperanza*, so compact and clear to Josefina, has already acquired a new component: Josefina's time in the United States. Because Josefina's future has, unlike Patricia's, permeable boundaries, this works in reverse as well: as Josefina's future opens up to New Jersey, the realization of projects like the store, on her return home, will 'contain' and 'carry' within them, as it were, the time spent abroad.

Josefina's plans, of course, require integrating the short-term future of New Jersey and the long-term future she imagines fulfilling in *La Esperanza*. Her open-ness to extend the future back from a distant future, closer to the present, is complemented by a new elasticity in her vision of her future in *La Esperanza*. We may view Josefina's commitment to her niece's *Quince Años* party not only as an investment in that event as such, but also as a way of stretching and grounding 'the time to come' in *La Esperanza*. This concrete but somewhat distant celebration even ties Josefina back into the web of extended family as the future Saul becomes independent.

In this sense, Josefina's future is a future that, unlike Patricia's is conceptualized as malleable and that is changing along with Josefina's changing life circumstances. The structure of her future is a future that appears as having interlocking components—as opposed to Patricia's who seems to be composed by many co-existing and, apparently, incompatible futures. In contrast to Patricia, Josefina held her futures negotiable, adaptable, fluid in their boundaries. What is interesting here are the ways in which her

treatment of these futures as flexible and adaptable to her changing context, allows her for varying degrees of flexibility in the ways she adapts to context, on the one hand, and on the other, allows her to maintain the future of the store as compatible with the changing circumstances in her life, both in context and biographical history. Relating to this future in dialogue with context and biographical change has also elicited particular responses to the new context of action she encountered in New Jersey. This is a distinct kind of intervention in context than the one Patricia displays.

Conclusions

Patricia and Josefina's examples speak to the complexity of the experience of the future for people whose lives are happening across borders. This is particularly the case because people's futures seem to have transnational life as well; these futures move around by virtue of social actors evaluation, reconsideration, alteration, and adaption of their futures to their context into which they move and for which they plan. Though looking at how social actors move their futures transnationally and the content of their futures is only part of the story. It is necessary to explore what this future is doing, directly and indirectly, for those who hold them and carry them along with them.

The previous paragraph speaks to a relevant theme: that in this movement between contexts, and as people bring futures along from one context to another and create novel ones in the new contexts, people need to juggle, negotiate, reconcile and make choices regarding co-existing futures. Patricia for instance, is negotiating three futures in the United States, two (the house and her two oldest kids) rooted in her biographical history back in Mexico and one, Danny, as engrained in her biography in the

United States. Josefina has three: the store back in Mexico, the opportunities for Saul and the ones that is related to her personal growth. What is important to pay attention to here is that these futures are playing out differently in their daily living. These are indeed different types of futures that provide them with different standpoints for action. I argue here that these standpoints are a function of the ways in which Patricia and Josefina conceive of these futures and of how they relate them to each other, as they encounter constraints and opportunities at the level of contextual and biographical history. The point here is that the ways in which transnational actors such as Patricia and Josefina conceptualize the future—the way they structure the image of the future, either as fixed or flexible, co-existing or interlocking—is consequential for their strategic action. Structures of thought then translate into structures of action.

Another theme is relevant as well. People's futures do not exist exclusively in the realm of the possibility and the strategizing, but they are real players in people's present. By virtue of their composition and emotional load, futures can be pull and push agents that elicit thoughts and action, such as in the case of Patricia and Josefina. Futures make people orient behaviors; they can suggest people to confront context and can make them see constraints. In this sense, futures are enablers and constrainers of agency and cognition, as they bring out people's responses. Futures also play important roles in shaping people's interactions with others and, especially, in defining the contexts in which those interactions take place. In other words, futures are agents for the present, they make things happen or not happen.⁶²

⁶² See Cerulo (2009) for a thorough review of non-human elements as legitimate elements in social interactions, in particular the author's reflection on mental images as social interactants.

CONCLUSIONS

This conclusion is divided into three sections. The first section provides an overall summary of findings organized around the analytical themes introduced in chapter I, each exploring a different dimension of the relation between people's consideration of the future, socio-relational context and situational action. The second section considers the implications the issues raised in this book have for migration scholarship. At the level of cultural analysis, the following section presents a reflection on the challenges, both epistemological and empirical, I encountered while theorizing and researching the future in *La Esperanza*. The third section is of reflexive character, providing an account of my personal encounter with the substantive analytical theme of the book during fieldwork. This account leads to a reflection on the impact of this encounter in my research and subsequent analysis of the material here introduced. All together, these three sections provide an overview of what it meant to engage with people's imaginative capacity for thinking about the future and its related action, meanings and understandings.

Future Consideration in *La Esperanza*, a Transnational Migrant Community

The argument of this book can be summarized under the analytical themes introduced earlier: the production of the future, the productive future and the constraining future.

The Production of the Future

The "production of the future" refers to the formative influences on people's

articulations of the future. This theme concerns with the ways in which social actors' consideration of future possibilities are constituted at the level of social, cultural and relational context.

Throughout the book, I have tried to map out *La Esperanza's system of projectivity*—the interconnected network of practices and knowledge creating mechanisms and resources that circulate in situational context and to-from individuals and that actors draw on to develop ideas about the future. The bulk of this mapping occurs in Chapter 2 where the intersections between *La Esperanza's* history of migration and people's temporal orientation towards the future are discussed. In the chapter, I explore people's concern with what they call their *porvenir*—"that which is to come"—as intertwined with people's migratory practices and the town's own community development. I argue that the distinct forms in which social actors in town imaginatively extend beyond their present moment—as it is reflected on material and behavioral outcomes—result from contextual and relational dynamics. The core argument here is that projective practices in town and their related vocabulary are linked to a wider societal process that encompasses two interrelated aspects. First, a more heightened concern with the future is associated to collective perceptions of change and progress that accompanied the material changes in town brought about by migratory behaviors. These perceptions, in turn, translate into a shift in people's understandings of what at some point were seen as constraints for future-oriented thinking and, accordingly, into the opening and exploration of future possibilities. Second, people's projective practices resulted from people turning novel experiences acquired during their migrant career into new vocabularies for thinking about the future and opportunities for articulating future

wellbeing. This exploration of possibilities is related to a) the availability of material resources brought about by transnational practices that have allowed people to pursue opportunities and b) the consideration of new or previously unavailable courses for future-oriented action. In the chapter I refer to these courses of action as *projective pathways for action*—the courses of possibilities for acting in which or from which a plan or a series of plans for the future are hoped to be realized.

The “production of the future” also refers to the modes of people’s engagement with the future in *La Esperanza*, particularly to the ways in which these are articulated in form and content. Chapter 2 describes the ways in which socially available narratives embedded in the town’s history of transnational practices help configure social actors’ ideas for the future, structuring people’s projective practices. Combined with stories particular to people’s biography, in *La Esperanza* socially available migration-related narratives provide with a supporting frame that encode images about people’s past and future. These narratives, that manifest both at the level of the communal and the biographical, draw on people’s migratory experiences and have been especially pivotal in town in suggesting plot lines for people’s projective practices. Often, these narratives serve as means through which many in town have articulated visions of themselves at different points ahead in time. In other words, in town, migration-related narratives as well people’s own experiences abroad have served for social actors in *La Esperanza* as interpretive devices through which they produce stories about their own futures and design courses of action.

Chapter 3 touches upon this issue as well by exploring different forms in which future experience articulation manifests in *La Esperanza* through processes of meaning-

making. The chapter elaborates on the subjective mental processes through which social actors articulate images of the future. The central argument is that future-scenario building is an outcome of reflexive processes that occur in conversation with context and biographical history, on the one hand, and in relation to people's interactions with others, on the other—I identify different forms of these conversation as *episodic-like* future-scenario building and *semantic-like* future-scenario building. This conversation, however, occurs at distinct levels that go from the personal and biographical to the general and non-personal. I tackle this distinction through an analysis of three modalities through which people articulate futures for themselves and others, mostly concentrating on some of the entrepreneurial practices encountered in *La Esperanza*. For instance, some social actors in *La Esperanza* construct images of the future through a form of reflexivity that points to attentiveness to routinized behaviors in the social context that turns into what seems generalized information about the future that actors use in their meaning-making practices—i.e. semantic-like future-scenario building. In this sense, future-scenario building is articulated relationally through observations and interpretations of the other's experiences. Conversely, other social actors are drawing on their own personal experiences abroad to articulate future scenarios. In this case, attentiveness goes towards biography and particular constraints that are relevant to personal history and the contexts in which this takes place—i.e. *episodic-like* future-scenario building. The chapter discusses a third form of future-scenario building that has to do with the ways in which people are articulating future scenarios for others. Particularly common in households with family members living abroad, social actors draw on their own personal experiences to articulate images of the future for others. In these cases, people “produce futures” by

attending to personal biographical experiences in the creation of scripted knowledge for the future scenario building of others.

The Productive Future

The “productive future” refers to the tangible repercussions that social actors’ projective practices have in their everyday living and on the contexts in which this daily life takes place. This section thus focuses on the ways in which future consideration plays out in the processes through which social actors in *La Esperanza* reproduce and transform their present realities—especially in the variations in their capacity for evaluating and shaping the conditions of their lives.

At a basic level, the first couple of chapters introduce this issue in their treatment of the material changes occurred in *La Esperanza* as an outcome of people’s planning and consideration of opportunities for achieving future wellbeing. We have the example of the many *casas de material* that are being built in town; these speak to people’s transformation of this setting both in its material and socio-cultural realities as an outcome of their projective practices. Following up on this example, there is an increase in people’s entrepreneurial practices in town that have transformed the social scene in *La Esperanza* with businesses that keep on opening and changing. Chapter 2 elaborates more on this theme as it touches upon people’s production and transformation of their everyday living in relation to the entrepreneurial practices through which people are trying to shape (and in some cases) alter the current conditions of their lives—this in response to a pervasive history in town of deprivation of opportunities due to the town structural constraints.

This material component leads to evaluate the productive nature of people's cognitive extension into the future at a different level as well. People's projective practices expressed through plans, projects, expectations and ideas about the future has enabled in town varying degrees of inventiveness and intervention at the level of community and family life. Through out the chapters are examples that illustrate the many ways in which cognition about the future translates into action in the present in the form of future-oriented behavior. Social actors' projective practices have consequences both at the level of the individual and the social. The many experiences of migration mentioned in the book are a clear example, as people engage in migratory motivated by their consideration of the material goals, dreams and projects that they hoped to realize on their return to *La Esperanza*. Chapter 3, also, explored the consequences that distinct forms of future-scenario building have both for the modes of people's intervention in context and for the context themselves. For instance, certain forms of future-scenario building translate into a competitive businesses market in town, while other forms allowed for forms of innovation in La Esperanza's entrepreneurial field.

Beyond these instrumental effects, there are other ways in which the productive nature of people's projective practices manifests in *La Esperanza*. As explored in chapter 3 and four, people's future-scenario building (and, accordingly, the particular modes in which this takes place as well as the imagined outcomes in shape and content) define experiential scenarios for people, as these facilitate agency by impacting people's present decisions, identities, and relations. Chapter 3 addresses these issues as it explores the ways in which people's future-scenario planning in town relate to people's understanding

of their relations with others. Also, as in the case of family members abroad who participate in the creation of futures for those left behind, projective practices serve as mechanisms that mediate people's interactions with others. Additionally, by creating images of future selves through the design of future experiential scenarios and opportunities structures, projective practices serve as enablers of behaviors. In this sense, as seen through out the chapters in this book, the act of engaging the future has real effects that are independent from the actual realization or fulfillment of the future projections. Chapter 3 illustrates this with the examples introduced regarding the stores people are opening and that are not producing the expected outcomes. Chapter 4 also touches upon this issue as it narrates the experiences of two women who make decisions and choices on the basis of images for the future that are yet to be fulfilled.

In this sense, understanding how the future is productive in town implies looking at two mutually constitutive levels: a) as having instrumental effects, as it enables people to act in certain ways, and 2) as consequential for the production of people's subjectivity in the present, as it provides a standpoint for action and locates people in a particular position from which to make sense of their being in the world. Chapter 4, for instance, explores this instrumentality and positionality, particularly as it explores the ways in which social actors reconcile already articulated futures as they encounter different puzzles for daily living when they relocate transnationally and incorporate into their frameworks for action futures that were conceived in a different geographical and biographical time.

In the last two Chapters of the book, attention was placed in documenting the ways in which the act of positing the future translates into particular pathways for action

that, in turn, define identifiable forms of intervention at the level of social context. Though, while it is clear in those chapters that people's future-scenario building orient behaviors, it is also clear that it produces constrains for agents. The "productive future" thus has another dimension that points towards the ways in which social actors' projective practices translate into constrains for action for some in *La Esperanza*.

The Constraining Future

Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 explore this paradoxical nature of planning the future by exploring the ways in which the devising of strategies to transport people into the prospect of an articulated future, translates into blue-prints or scripts that become obstacles for strategic action and responsiveness to contextual and biographical circumstances. This is particularly the case when social actors are faced with the need to negotiate and reconcile plans or visions of the future that seem not to be in synch with the changes at the level of context and biographical history they are faced with. In this sense, as the narratives that accompany future projections for those abroad become more internalized and associated possibilities are defined, there are two modalities in which consideration of and calculations about one future becomes constraining: 1) as limiting the recognition of alternative paths of action offered by context, and 2) as limiting because social actors cannot reconcile narratives associated to what are perceived as incompatible paths of action. Chapter 3 and, especially, Chapter 4, point to the challenges that accompany the consideration, articulation and pursuing of future scenarios in the transnational reality people from *La Esperanza* are immersed in. They show the ways in which the puzzles of everyday living that takes place in two geographical and

biographical spaces pose challenges for social actors's projective practices and the ways in which they relate to their futures, both new and old.

Implications for Migration Scholarship

In exploring the ways in which people think and feel about the future, this project touches upon a recent interest in transnational studies on what Mahler and Pessar (2003) describe as the "transnational cognitive space," namely the realm of the imaginary thought that prefigures, shapes and underlies transnational living. Despite the fact that, as the authors point out, "much of what people actually do transnationally is foregrounded by imaging, planning and strategizing" (p. 817), people's cognitive actions remains a neglected dimension in transnational studies. By looking at the temporal-imaginative practices through which families from *La Esperanza* survey and cognitively articulate an expected time to come, this book touches upon this underexplored concern. By doing so, this book helps us to understand that the everyday choices of social actors who participate in transnational dynamics are not about mere economic conditions or desires, but about the meanings that mediate social constraints, biographic history, and actions.

Much has been written in migration scholarship regarding the experience of transnational living, yet, much more needs to still be known about the texture of such experience. Tracking the intangible—yet consequential—projective dimension underlying transnational practices improves our understanding of the complex ways in which transnational contexts are constituted by the daily practices of social actors. My findings suggest that the cognitive and emotional engagements with the future of transnational actors and the ways in which the modalities of this engagement take place

produce subjectivity and action in their present. Yet, studies looking at the lives of transnational actors and transnational communities tend to ignore these subjective processes in their explanatory frameworks. Research traditionally has focused on uncovering the macro forces at play in shaping transnational lives. The analysis here presented suggests that locating subjective processes and matters of meaning within the reality of the political economy of migration not only contribute to a broader conceptualization of transnational processes, but also to discussions about the constructive role “the life of the mind and the heart” play in migratory contexts.

Epistemological and Empirical Challenges in Researching and Theorizing Future Engagement

Epistemological Challenges

This book, as its content shows, is about people contemplating the future. However, as the book moves from chapter to chapter, the meaning of ‘engaging the future’ changes, as well as the form of social experience associated to this engagement. In following the ways in which people in *La Esperanza* look after their *porvenir*, Chapter 3, for instance, touches upon this as related to the problem of temporal orientation.⁶³ In this chapter, the future stands for the time regarded as still to come—the realm of the possibility that represents the ‘not yet’—to which social actors are attentive to and act upon. Chapter 3 explores the meaning making processes through which social actors construct representations of the future and its respective outcomes. Here, this engagement with the future speaks to the cognitive exercises through which the future, as a mental

⁶³ “the tendency for a particular individual to devote a considerable amount of his or her mental life to thinking about the future” (reference)

representation of a temporally located scenario, is thought about and acquires content. Lastly, Chapter 4 locates social actors in relation to a set of meanings and understandings expressive of a prospect that is negotiated as part of everyday living. In this sense, each of these chapters in this book corresponds to a distinct form of thinking the future. Better said, each chapter has examined different modalities through which people experience the future. As seen in these chapters, the engagement with the future, as an object for analysis, seems to have many nuances, many different manifestations. This poses a larger question that stayed in the back of my mind all throughout the working on the project this book is an outcome of: how can one analytically grasp something that seems so fluid and ambiguous?

The above paragraph speaks to the challenges encountered in conducting the kind of analytical agenda here presented. What exactly does it mean when people talk about considering the future? As this book illustrates, this implies many things. We are not dealing with one set of phenomena, and, accordingly, we are not dealing with one set of experiential consequences. Phenomenologically speaking—and a similar argument could be made at the level of cognition—it is not the same to talk about the future as an experience of time, than to talk about future-scenario building. In similar terms, talking about mental representations of the future, is not the same as talking about the process of determining the future, nor is it the same as talking about the process of actualizing the future or the experience of expecting the time to come. As distinct modes for contemplating the future and manifestations of people's future thoughts, we as sociologists are dealing with various forms of phenomenological experiences that, in turn translate into distinct expressions at the level of social experience. Looking at the

consequences of people's consideration of the future indeed poses real analytical challenges. Myself, I experienced these challenges while trying to make sense of the particular nuance of future thinking I was dealing with in relation to the behavioral manifestations I was observing.

In addition to the differences in its phenomenological manifestations, another difficulty is that there is not enough conceptual vocabulary for talking about future-related experiences—or, for that matter, that there has been an unambiguous use of terms to make reference to similar, yet not equal phenomena (myself, I am guilty of this in this study). Those dealing with people's experiences of the past might encounter similar challenges. Though, in contrast with the domain of future thinking, research on past thinking counts with more identifiable vocabulary with terminologies such as “collective memory,” “remembrance” or “collective forgetting” to aid in the analytical task. Sociology is not alone in this challenge, however. In the neuroscientific and psychological literature, researches have also expressed this concern as it relates to their own fields (see Attance and O'Neil 2001, and Szpunar—varieties). Particularly in Sociology, despite the fact that, as discussed in Chapter 1, notions of temporality and concerns with the future as a temporal dimension have been part of the vocabulary of social theory, there is, at present, little research that has examined forms of future-oriented cognition both as an analytical and empirical concern. To be true, however, in recent years there has indeed been an increased interest in imagined futures and projections as objects of and for sociological analysis (see Mische 2009, Frye 2012). This interest, in turn, has opened the vocabulary to address these issues, for instance in the literature we can now find terms such as “projectivity,” “imagined futures,” “future

projections,” and “projected futures” (for examples, see Emirbayer and Mische 1998; Mische 2009; Frye 2012; Weigert 2012). Still, there is much more work to be done.

On a more practical level, this discussion points towards the importance of terminological development and clarity, as people’s imaginative capacity for thinking about the future becomes an object of study in its own right for the sociological endeavor. If, as sociologists, we are to understand the experience of the temporally extended future and its impact in sociological phenomena, we need to have ways to talk and think about it in the many expressions and manifestations that seem consequential to social experience. The challenge associated with lacking a conceptual vocabulary was very clear for me, for instance, in Chapter 4. I struggled, first with trying to identify what exactly was what Patricia and Josefina were engaging with when they were considering “the future.” To my understanding, this was not the same engagement with the future I dealt with in Chapter 3, where the future is more associated with scenario articulation and its related planning and execution. Second, I was not able to come up with a way to name what I was looking at—hence, my usage of the term “future” that at times might feel confusing. I thought about which alternatives could be used, other than the word future. For instance, I played around with the term “projective capital,” though I was not able to come up with a clear conceptualization for such a terminology. Perhaps employing, as others have done recently, the terms “imagined futures” or “projected future” might have worked here better—though it is not clear to me that those terms referred to the same issues I was looking at. Again, it is a problem of clarification.

Ann Mische (2009) has already been advancing this analytical enterprise by providing a vocabulary for apprehending people's consideration of the future. In her essay "Projects and Possibilities: Researching Futures in Action," Ann Mische proposes a set of cognitive dimensions that can serve as organizing principles for conducting research on future projections. Future projections have a shape and a feel to them—she repeatedly uses the very concrete metaphor of a rope—and, as such looking serve as organizing principles for conducting research. She suggests, for instance to look at future projections as temporal constructs that have form and content (a "shape and a feel," she says) and these can be organized around a set of dimensions that include degrees of clarity, range of possibilities, logic of connection between temporal elements, to mention a few. By proposing these dimensions for looking at the 'character' of people's future projections, she develops, both, a conceptualization of future projections as entailing certain intelligible characteristics, and a vocabulary for analyzing these projections. These dimensions, while useful for looking at certain aspects, are not applicable to all kinds of projective-related phenomena.

In this book, I also responded to this conceptual challenge. As can be seen in the preceding chapters, I developed my own vocabulary for analytically addressing the empirical puzzles encountered during my research. I attempted to build the necessary conceptual framework, in some occasions, with my own terminology, and, in others, by borrowing taxonomies from literature in other fields. Accordingly, in my analysis I introduce terms such as 'projective practices,' 'projective pathways for action,' 'system of projectivity' and 'episodic and semantic-like future scenario-building'. I am aware,

however, that I accomplish this concept-building task with varying degrees of success. Further development, both conceptual and theoretical, needs to be done in the future.

In Chapter 3 and 4, I drew on vocabulary used in the neurosciences that addresses two distinct ways for articulating thoughts about the future—episodic future thinking and semantic future thinking. This dualism proved fruitful for pinpointing the meaning-making processes I was interested in, particularly in Chapter 3. To begin, in my usage of this distinction I was not interested in reducing people’s future-oriented cognition to one kind of future thought or another, and neither my goal in using them was simply to identify what kind of thinking social actors were doing. (In principle, to me this seemed an unnecessary and impossible task, as people often draw on both in the visualization of the future—in this sense, the distinction is merely analytical). As suggested in Chapter 3, I used these as heuristic tools for addressing larger questions that have to do with the positioning of social actors within frames of reference—both contextual and biographical—that function as sources for knowledge production about the future. Through elaborating on what marks the distinction between these two forms of cognition (i.e. scripted knowledge vs biographical specificities), and applied it as an analytical framework, I was able to get to the distinct modes of reflexivity the chapter is interested in. The distinction is appealing here because it allowed me to distinguish between forms of future-scenario building that draw upon different forms of information. This, in turn, renders different phenomenological experiences that translate in different forms of intervention in context (though, it could be argued, that future-scenario building through context is in itself a form of intervention). Thus, the semantic-episodic distinction served as heuristic mechanisms of analysis that allowed me to do interpretive work for

conceiving and pin-pointing the reflexive and relational mechanisms through which I was observing social actors conduct their future-scenario building in *La Esperanza*. In this sense, this distinction allowed me to analyze actors' s consideration of and calculations about the future as an outcome of their reflexive engagement, both, with context and biographical experience.

There are some limitations to this analytical exercise, however. To begin with, the biggest limitation is the impossibility to grasp the duality of the episodic/semantic distinction in practice. I had problems fitting the behaviors and reflexive processes I was encountering into this dichotomy. Actions and reflexive practices may not be reduced to two dimensions exclusively. Further elaborating this framework with a more unified treatment of both, might be more productive and more conducive to theory development. Second, can the logic of future-oriented practices, which at the end is what I am looking at, be reduced to the episodic and semantic dualism? The answer is probably no. It seems that the episodic semantic dichotomy is better suited for categorizing models of cognition and thought than for analyzing logics of projective practices. To my knowledge, these models are not used for theorizing projective practice, but for understanding mental structures. Third, the distinction between episodic or semantic alone does not necessarily grasps the dynamic nature of how meaning making processes operates. Merely characterizing future scenario building as being semantic or episodic does not lead to getting to the processes underlying people's projective behaviors and, further less to theory development. This challenge was evident in Chapter 4, when applying the characterization to the ways in which Patricia and Josefina relate to and negotiate their respective futures with their changing contextual puzzles. This distinction has heuristic

value, but for the analytical purposes of chapter 4, further theoretical work might need to be done before this distinction can tackle the meaning-making processes I was interested to get to in the chapter.

In short, what is discussed in the previous paragraphs—i.e. the phenomenological complexity that results from people’s imaginative capacity for thinking about the future, and the conceptual ambiguity about all things future in the discipline— turn into real epistemological issues in my dealing with the subject matter of this book at its different stages. I thought (and continue thinking) of these issues through two interconnected questions: how do you create knowledge of something when you cannot exactly pinpoint it? How do you talk about something when you cannot name it? This book was conceived within the awareness of this struggle.

Empirical Issues

There is another set of questions at the heart of the sociological analysis presented in this book: how do you conduct research on something that you cannot see? There are two concerns to pin point here. First, how can the realm of the “not yet” be researched sociologically? And, second, how can we as sociologists access cognitions about the future? In other words, how do you see the future in the present? How do you see cognition about the future in present action? These are methodological questions.

Since the beginning of my research, it was clear to me that asking people to tell me about what they thought about for their future was not going to be analytically fruitful for the initial concerns of this study—particularly because this study is interested in future-oriented practice and processes of future-related meaning-making. Exclusively

asking people to talk about the futures proved methodologically insipient to reach these goals. I initially realized about these challenges particularly during the earlier stages of my research in New Jersey when beginning inquiring about the topic with Mexican migrants. Sometimes people's answers to my inquiring about their plans and would lead me to answers about what they wanted for the future. As I later became aware of, wanting something is not the same as engaging in future-oriented practices. Other times, questions explicitly asking about the future would also sometimes turn into qualitative and moral evaluations about it. Finally, answers to a direct inquiry about their plans for the future would translate into me hearing about people's houses—and as this and other studies in migrant communities documents, wanting houses is not a surprising finding. While people's answers were helpful at beginning to explore the content of people's future scenarios, they were not necessarily conducive to the meaning-making and phenomenological processes I was interested in. In this sense, talk about the content of the future represented just a window for me to start considering processes that needed to be accessed through different means.

To reach the analytical concerns in this study, I pursued the identification of relevant data in two ways. First, I went backwards from the outcomes of people's projective practices and used completed, in progress of even unfulfilled projects as indicators of future-oriented cognitive processes. As it is transparent in the chapters of this book, I traced cognitive agency through its associated material components—in other words, I look at things that were recognizably outcomes of people's consideration of a time to come at a certain point (hence, the predominance of the material reality in *La Esperanza* in my analysis. I looked for manifestations of people having pursued a goal or

a plan (like a house or a business) and assumed the presence of future-oriented cognition. In this sense I used what can be called a retrospective methodology. Second, I looked at behavioral cues. Instead of concentrating on material cues in context, I focused on people's actual practices as they were happening in the present. I was looking for what can be called as the contemporary future. Chapter 3 is an outcome of this approach. Overall, for the bulk of my research, I observed people "doing" their future and inquired about this doing rather than about the future alone. I looked at their future as a form of experience that is both articulated in the present and lived through it.

Both methods for constructing the data used in this study provided me with different, yet interconnected, types of information and gave me access to distinct types of processes. The retrospective methodology allowed me to get to the world of meanings underlying people's projections and facilitated me to visually identify cognition in relation to context. Also, often exploring the concrete manifestations of social actors' projective practices provided me, as well, with the opportunity to elicit conversations, serving as stimulus for articulating thoughts about abstract or taken for granted issues I would be interested in addressing.⁶⁴ On the other hand, looking at practice as cues allowed me to reach people's situated agency, something the retrospective methodology could not do for me alone. For instance as a researcher one can suggest the presence of

⁶⁴ This research strategy for data collection draws from my initial experience in the field during the exploratory stage, as well as from insights from researchers who use visual materials to bring out people's reflexivity and generate a verbal response (see Harper 1984 on photo-elicitation). Pablo Vila (2000), for example, in his extensive research about life along the US-Mexico border employs a form of photo-interviewing for exploring the process of identity formation for population groups living along this geographical region. In order to capture the experiences of persons living on both side of the border, he conducted focus groups where participants talked about photographs containing scenes of everyday activities (leisure, religion, social interaction) in Juarez, Mexico and El Paso, Texas. This methodology proved to be successful for eliciting responses that allowed Vila to approach issues as abstract as the process of identity formation and how this impacts the network of relations among distinct populations along and across the border.

future-oriented cognition by virtue of seeing concrete manifestations. Myself, I did this. When I arrived to *La Esperanza* and saw a lot of projects (the houses, the businesses), I took for granted that people in town were engaging the future in particular ways, but such observations did not get me to actual forms of agency or meaning-making practices.

Needless to say, there exist other ways to conduct research on the topic—following Mische’s (2009) cognitive dimensions of the future as methodological cues is another way, for instance. The key here is, like it is with any other kind of research, to acknowledge the need to identify what exactly is it that one is looking at and to find the appropriate means to get to it. As suggested already, as researchers we need to take responsibility for defining what exactly are we looking at when engaging in future-related research and design our research agendas accordingly.

Reflections on Reflecting on the Future

“... do not worry about it, the most important thing right now is you getting better. Concentrate on what you have to do now for your health; you’ll have plenty of time to do other things later,” so responded Rode to me when I asked her if we could have a conversation for my book. I had this interaction with Rode about three months after Josefina left to the United States. This was not the first time during that visit to town that I heard, in varied ways, such words. At their pharmacy, where I hung out most afternoons, Lupita and Tomas had already stressed to me in various occasions not to spend a lot of energy wondering about “*el mañana*” (the tomorrow) but to stay focused on “*el hoy*” (the today). Even people with whom I was not well acquainted, but that learned about me dealing with health issues, were giving me the same advice. Since

meeting Marcela, my first acquaintance from *La Esperanza*, back in New Jersey, I had spent a lot of time thinking of how people in this town bridged their present and their future, wondering about the origin of their temporal focus and the ways this provided them with a meaningful framework for their experiences and practices. Strangely enough, this time around in town I was spending more time thinking about my own future and some in town were, in fact, spending more time thinking about it too. This was the first time I was back in *La Esperanza* after medical issues had forced me to take a hiatus from fieldwork.

A month after Josefina left to the United States, I was diagnosed with breast cancer. I discovered a lump in my breasts within a couple of weeks of having spoken to her. This happened towards the end of the second of many research stays I had originally envisioned for that year of formal fieldwork in *La Esperanza*. When I saw Josefina again in New Jersey, it had been two months since I had successfully completed the standard treatment protocol for the stage of cancer I had. It had been exactly one year since my diagnosis.

During the first six months of that year, I traveled between Mexico City—where I received oncological treatment—to *La Esperanza*. As I continued with my fieldwork in town at the times that my treatment schedule allowed me to, the substantive theme that had brought me to Josefina's town in the first place—i.e. how people dream, hope and plan for *el porvenir* and its consequences for action—became a central object of reflection in my own personal life. In addition to the obvious challenges posed by ten months of medical treatment, future planning and scenario building marked the time between my two encounters with Josefina. Along with my diagnosis came the constant

consideration and negotiation of possibilities at different points ahead in time—from focusing on the short-term actions of the immediate future following each of my chemotherapies, to the tactical planning of my overall treatment protocol, to the visualization of long-term life goals, to the experiencing of the closing off and opening up of possible futures, some of which I had thought about before being diagnosed, like the writing of this book. My researching of people’s forward-directed thinking thus began to overlap with my own considering of future possibilities in the wake of my diagnosis and with my own phenomenological experiences of time.

In many ways, this book is not written from the perspective of the naïve observer, but with the eye of someone who, because of personal circumstances, became very sensitized to “seeing” lived time and chronological time. Oncological treatment is both very temporal and timed. For the most part, everyday life seems to be organized around very defined temporal frames. For five months, for instance, I measured time in 21-day chunks—the length of my chemotherapy cycle—and within that period I learned to see smaller portions of “good” time. Though, as my treatment progresses, those temporal frames shifted into new ones along with the temporality of my treatment protocol. In this sense, I experienced different times that felt qualitatively distinct, from the time of waiting to have my surgery post chemo, to the weeks of daily radiations that defined my measuring of the passage of time during the last portion of my treatment. My medical treatment provided a temporal anchor for my everyday living. These experiences somehow forced in me an awareness of temporal existence that made me continuously reflect on time in symbolic, phenomenological and chronological terms.

Paradoxically, I thought about the future a lot and yet, sometimes I was not able to pin point it. During the length of my treatment, the future seemed always provisional and contingent, both short and long term. For instance, my doctors had a plan to follow, but it was always open to adjustments depending on my response to treatment. I would plan to go back to *La Esperanza* but would have to wait to make sure my blood cell count was good enough to travel. Accordingly, the meanings that I ascribed to the future changed. At moments, the future stopped being a temporal given—“would the treatment work?” “would I ever finished my fieldwork?” “can I even plan for six months from now?” Other times, it would acquire greater significance, like when I knew I had to reach certain milestones to move on to the next treatment steps. Sometimes it was hard to grasp; at points I had difficulty thinking about it, as the temporality of the treatment itself made me be very focused on the present and to concentrate on immediate action. And, very often, the future, as I had imagined and planned it, felt like it was slipping through my fingers both for my personal and professional life—“I cannot do the research I had envisioned” “I will not finish the book within a year,” “I need to postpone personal plans because I do not know if I’ll be in the condition to pursue such plans.” In this sense, the future also became the unknown. During the course of my treatment, I found myself engaging with a tension-filled dialogue between different temporal dimensions for my own life. In many ways, my diagnosis and subsequent treatment problematized temporality for me. It became an issue in ways it had not been before and all of a sudden I began seeing it everywhere in ways I had not before.

I conducted my research for this book, and subsequent analysis as I moved from patient to survivor, in the context of this on-going process of temporal meaning making.

In many ways—some more obvious than others—my research in *La Esperanza* and its related analytical work has evolved in conversation with my own personal experiences and concerns about time—and in particular my concern with the future—that have resulted from these experiences. In some way, during the course of the research and data analysis for this book, I became my own informant. My personal experiences negotiating different time horizons became part of my data for understanding the dynamics through which people engage the future. The analysis of this book was researched and reflected upon in the context of this conversation.

APPENDIX

The *Corrido* of Felipe Tortilla

Version One

Felipe [last names here] is the name of the man of whom I'm going to talk about.

He is a native man from Oaxaca who travel around looking after his *porvenir*.

He was nicknamed "Lipe Charte".

In 1976 he imigrated from Tijuana to Los Angeles as a wetback, through the Continental Line he went to New York.

The *migra* [Border Patrol] was waiting for him just when he arrived, since he was undocumented, his dream ended, after a few days he returned to Tijuana.

Felipe worked there as a bricklayer and a *pollero* [people smuggler helps people cross the border]

Six months later he came back again to California, there he found his friends and they went to Hermosillo.

In 1978 he returned to Los Angeles where he received a message from his girlfriend that said: "I am in New Jersey, do you come here or I get there?"

Immediatelly he moved to New Brownsville [mispronounced, stands for a city in New Jersey] and there he met her.

Once they were together they planned to work together selling tortillas, from house to house.

They worked together some years, everything was going well, there came two heirs [children] to join them.

In 1987, his wife betrayed him.

It's never good to fall in love when there is not sincere love.

They [women, wives] live faking love for the love of money.

I would even give my life for true love.

He loved his sons but he hated his wife. "I pledge for God that if I saw her again, I would never forgive her, but I am smart, and I better keep up with my business."

With this, I say goodbye and stop singing. Let's always be alert because there are mean women around.

I had told you the story of "Don Felipe Tortilla".

Version Two

I'm going to sing a *corrido* to all my people,

I'll let you know about Felipe Tortilla, he went to USA looking for a better life.

He left *La Esperanza* wanting to test his luck,

When he arrived he looked for a job, he began selling tortillas, a very honest job.

Time passed by and Don Felipe continued working.

The dollars he earned, little by little he saved them; now he has a patrimony, he accomplished it with his work.

To all mi "paisanos" (people from the same town) that have left as wetbacks, you must do what gave good results to Don Felipe, just from selling tortillas, luck has been with him.

I will send greetings to all my people and to Don Felipe and to all his family, and to the sate of Oaxaca, to *La Esperanza*, especially.

The friends that you have will never forget you. A friend who cares about you is
Pinotepa Nacional [a city in the region of *La Esperanza*]

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