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Tales of two or many worlds?: when 'street' kids go global

Book section

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Introduction

As their spatialised nomenclature suggests street children or youth are expected to be located in, or their lives related to, a specific geographical locale. In the minds of most casual observers, and even many 'informed' ones, young people will frequently be described as "always there", be it at a market, bus depot or road junction. These young people may be working, and perhaps sleeping too in public spaces – or they may be seen to do little more than 'hang out' – whatever, there is a perception that their lives are devoid of opportunities for change and the sense is one of permanence.[2] Having 'run away', young people on the street seem to become a fixture of particular locales, though simultaneously marked as 'out of place' within them (Ennew & Swart-Kruger 2003). At the same time, it is understood that young people on the street move around and use migration as part of their survival strategies, to avoid police, vigilantes and social workers, and are often 'moved on' as part of clean up campaigns (Scheper-Hughes & Hoffman 1998). But despite earlier migration histories, the perception is that movement has served to get people to this point where daily lives display enormous imagination to create a presence, but little hope of getting out (Beazley 2002; Gigengack 1999; Van Blerk 2005; Young 2003). Departures from the street are often described by those left behind as short term, suffixed with the comment "they will be back".

Indeed, it is often the researcher that has a sense of being mobile. Our research with young people whose lives revolve around the streets involved frequent extended meetings over a number of years.[3] During this time, after a period of absence from meeting one group at the market an almost ritualistic conversation would open with questions about how far *we* had come. In the case of Gareth and Sarah, our willingness to travel distances to see them was a constant source of amusement and bemusement for the participants. Questions would check how long it took to fly to Mexico from 'England', as well as the cost, the need for a passport, whether one could take alternative routes or even swim. Conversations of course would often involve the query as to whether we might be able to take one of them with us. Twenty one year old Ramon, for example, every inch tough looking and streetwise insisted that he could come to England and work in the university. He knew, he said, that he had left school at primary level, and admitted to being illiterate, but he could learn. After all, he pointed out, "there is nothing here for me, washing windscreens, doing the same thing every day. For how long?". Much as it might have been intriguing to introduce Ramon into the rarefied atmosphere of a UK university we both knew that his request was part of an everyday tactic for searching out possibilities of change however far fetched. Even for Elsa, coming less than halfway across the city from her home, there would be occasional comments about what her neighbourhood was like and whether they could visit. Our participants knew full well that we could arrive and depart at will, and they expected us to do so. This was an observation born of experience. They

[1] We are grateful to participants of the panel *Urban Youth: cultures, identities and spatialities* at the 2008 Annual Conference of the Association of American Geographers, and especially co-chair Lorraine van Blerk and discussant Craig Jeffrey.

[2] The 'street children' nomenclature is often stretched to include young people over 18, a move that is misleading in Mexico, and much of Latin America, where in contrast with the 1980s, when unaccompanied eight, nine and ten year olds were a common sight on the streets, older teenagers and youth are more prominent (see UNYP 2008).

[3] The project research assistant, Elsa Herrera, was the most consistent point of contact.

had had so many encounters with government and NGO outreach workers, church groups, even a camera crew from Spain, all of whom sought to empathise and befriend, almost all of whom left. Our return therefore was important, a sign of some commitment and honesty on our part, but underscoring the apparent immobility on theirs.[4]

The exception to this immobility or fixity is the possibility of deterioration and possibly death. Street children and youth are seen to be 'wasting away', through drugs or lack of food, of succumbing to disease or infection, to be maimed, to present learning difficulties or non-normative 'social behaviours'. Their identities are assumed to form in the breach – through the lack or loss – and despite their 'difference' street children are assumed to be the same. Our research questions the ascription of identities as fixed, singular and ultimately determined, and drawing on Butler's (1993) ideas of performativity we have questioned how identity labels are acquired, and embrace the artifice by 'acting out' a set of presumed actions and emotions (Herrera et al. 2009). Yet in trying to imagine identities as open-ended we are uncomfortable with the deployment of euphemistic or metaphorical labels for identities as 'fractured', 'fragmented', 'splintered', 'schizophrenic', or referring back with hindsight to our original research proposal, as 'multiple'. In conducting ethnographic fieldwork with young people who *do* undertake prolonged drug use, present learning difficulties and display suicidal ideation, these terms jar with our ethical sensibility (see Jones et al 2006). The process of ethnography has allowed us to maintain a small sense of indeterminacy in our research by exploring the "something else" in accounts of daily life, the "subjective, wilful, and complexly and compellingly human" (Hannerz 1969: 14), that allow people to 'get by' and resist the impositions of others. We have considered whether alternative notions such as 'blurred' or 'unresolved' identities are an improvement, avoiding a steer to deteriorations or break ups/downs, or simply represent beguiling possibilities.

Such terms are, of course, only hints as to the fluidity of identities. In this chapter we want to suggest that street children and youths' lives reflect a complex relationship between identities 'recognised' as fixed and fluid subject positions, between mobility and stasis, as being cast as 'out of place' and embedded in relations to family, nation, as well as work, and religion. Specifically, we ground the chapter in the life histories of two young people, Esteban and Jiménez, whose early lives as children involved extended periods living and working on the streets in Mexico but who subsequently migrated to the United States and Spain. We position their narratives and biographies in the context of writings on mobilities and "subaltern cosmopolitanism". We want to consider the experiences of Esteban and Jiménez in terms of their migration, their physical movement, and how they deployed and represented a series of mobilities. Here we mean that their spatial movement has been embedded in social as well as economic life and relations, and in turn their identities have been reflected in and affected by their movements. We draw from their narratives, however, that they both in different ways display a shift over time from 'reluctant' to 'harnessed' mobility.

Mobilities, Transnational Identities and Failed Globalisers

The perception of young people on the streets as static contrasts with the prevailing sense of (hyper)-mobility and fluidity that pervades accounts of contemporary modernity. Ideas of movement, especially over significant distances and across borders have shifted in short time from a linear conceptualisation of sending-transmitting-receiving, of step-wise moves

[4] Although we believe that friendship was formed with most participants, there was always a niggle of voyeurism and mutual performances (see Thomas de Benítez et al forthcoming).

and possible returns, to concepts of networks, webs, threads and rhizomes (Hannam et al 2006). Shifts to more multi-locational, diasporic, transnational or post-global arrangements have brought increasing awareness of the complicated associations conjured up by categories such as family, community, ethnicity and nationhood (Castles 2002; Chamberlain and Leydesdorff 2004). An earlier complacency that identity categories were relatively stable was in any case being challenged. Indeed, the metaphorical 'character' for this new mobile age of unfixed identities was according to Bauman (1995: 91) the "stroller, the vagabond, the tourist and the player" or for Ferguson and Gupta (1992) the figure of the nomad. The unsettling suggestion was that in a world inhabited by mobile 'strangers', that identities were being disrupted and reformed accentuating what were already considered to be identities in flux. As Vertovec (2001) notes, transnationalism and identity sit awkwardly with one another; transnational networks operate among people who feel a common identity, often based on a place of origin, while many contemporary migrants negotiate their identities, often with great difficulty, within social worlds that span many places (for example, Menjívar 2002). Identity attachments achieved 'away' moreover might depend on direct nostalgia for 'home' (Parkin 1999), while both the very notion of 'home' has changed radically (Golbert 2001). Although Bauman argues that the 'stranger' still holds the memory of having been somewhere else, emotively suggesting that "[s]he still smells of other places", the cultural effects of (hyper)mobility were deemed to hold new promise for identity and sociality (D'Andrea 2006), transgressing cultural distances in a spontaneous multicultural "conviviality" (Gilroy 2008) or shared cosmopolitanism (Hannerz 1996).

One concern of course was of privileging 'a' cosmopolitan mobility (Ahmed 1999; Gidwani 2006). Poorer people were rarely described as mobiles or cosmopolitans – lacking the purchasing power to buy into the consumption patterns, hook into cyber frontiers, their lifestyles enclaved by illegalities, linguistic limits or host intolerance, their movements might be massive but their identities a little too 'sticky'. Transnational lives might be understood as forms of resistance to exclusion and oppression 'at home', using global networks and localised linkages open up livelihood opportunities (Kothari 2008), but it was not clear if mobility within a global economy demanding 3-D labour (dirty, demanding, dangerous) and where states have erected barriers to citizenship really did "trip up" exclusion and empower, or were the means for continued oppression (Benhabib 1999). To avoid an elision of mobilities and cosmopolitans with wealth, education and taste, and thereby representing the 'others' as parochial and eschewing new identity possibilities, a number of writers argued that case for "subaltern cosmopolitans" (Gidwani 2006; Jeffrey and McFarlane 2008; Kothari 2008). This work suggests that there is nothing essentially progressive about cosmopolitanism. Working out how to live in different cultural settings, create economic and social contacts, and deal with ideas of home and belonging from positions of apparent 'outsiderness' is vital if we are to appreciate what is happening with global mobilities. From the standpoint of Esteban and Jiménez this endeavour is suggestive of some valuable questions. How do young people attributed with no great sense of 'home' – as 'street children' – understand their experiences of movement? How has mobility affected sociability, given that street life may have involved relating to a group and mobility as an individual stranger? What does 'transnational community' mean, if anything, to young people who in some sense ran away from 'home' or family networks? How has the experience of moving lead them to appraise their life before – in societies they might feel let them down, their life in the 'new home' or what awaits them on return? How and what do we understand of these people, now regarded as 'former' street children – what have they now become?

Our research considers mobility of young people from Mexico. With over 20 million people of Mexican origin abroad, few countries have been more challenged to reconcile their identities to ideas of migrancy, transnationalism or 'Diaspora'.Government concern for the implications to 'Mexicanidad' has resulted in instructions to consuls and cultural groups to support national days, festivals, film and food fairs to reinvigorate an idea of Mexican citizenship (Levitt & de la Dehesa 2003). Most of the "Tijuaneros" – the vernacular term for Mexicans making their way 'north' – expect to cross the border illegally (see Martinez 2002; Quinones 2007), an endeavour that in 2005 the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Relations appeared to endorse with the free distribution of 1.5 million copies of "The Mexican Immigrant" handbook providing details on how to cross a border increasingly 'hardened' with bespoke surveillance equipment, the use of biometric measures and secondment of military personnel (Amoore 2006; Chavez 2008). The handbook was just more evidence to nativist lobbies such as the Federation for American Immigration Reform that 'mobile Mexicans' would undermine 'white' identities and 'Balkanise' the nation state through a 'clash of civilisations'. For would-be "subaltern cosmopolitans" without visas and having to avoid enthusiastic vigilante groups from the infamous Neighbourhood Ranch Watch and the Minute Men, the only recourse was the "killing deserts" in what Rosas (2006) terms a process of "managed violence". For most Mexicans then mobility is far from effortless and 'hyper', but once abroad earns them the opportunity to experience what Gómez-Pena (1996) has called "Othercide", or The Killing of Otherness.

A second concern with the mobile cosmopolitan, subaltern or not, is how we consider age. On the one hand we might highlight young people 'caught up' in the global flows of goods, technologies and 'lifestyles', and focus on the possibilities for new, unstable or destabilising, 'youth' identities (see Baulch 2008; Wildermuth & Dalsgaard 2006). On the other, the subaltern migrant is often depicted as the 'unaccompanied minor' whose narrative reflects both the determination and difficulties of overcoming the friction of transnationality. The poster for Sonia Nazario's film "Enrique's Journey" shows the back of a young boy on top of a train looking into a misty future along the tracks. The film's subtitle – "the story of a boy's dangerous odyssey to reunite with his mother" – speaks to a Homeric quality, a journey of (self) discovery amidst danger, the maternal bond that drives it all, and the strong sense despite the train from Guatemala through Mexico being known as the "train of death" that all works out well in the end. Some research, however, expresses unease that young people who grow up 'apart' from parents may face difficulties with intimacy and norms (Salazar Parreñas 2005), others that parental pressure to maintain links with 'home' through family occasions, religion, or going or being 'sent' back may put strain on relations (Menjívar 2002; Orellana et al. 2001).

Among the young people of our project 'moving' was a constant allusion, even if the actual act appeared to be rather more an illusion. Many respondents made reference, often quite fleeting, to their desire of experience of getting out of Puebla[5] and going to the US or elsewhere. While we were able to find evidence that some had come to the city from the countryside, or had spent time in Mexico City, most accounts of going further afield were difficult to substantiate or were fantasy. One of our first contacts recounted his travels at some length, claiming to have been to the US on several occasions and to have lived in Beverley Hills where he said he had a family. On a much later occasion Moises also hinted that he had been to Europe, although it was clear that he had no real idea where Europe was or how to get there. Mobility however was clearly a vital component to a young

[5] Puebla State, our main fieldwork site, ranked 6th poorest of Mexico's 32 States and registered the 4th largest decrease in income attributable to migration, after Oaxaca, Veracruz and Chiapas (UNDP, 2007).

person's identity that, more mundanely, had involved years in and out of state and non-governmental institutions. Others too 'performed' mobility, for our benefit but with an authenticity of articulation that suggested a need to be believed. Sitting in the Jardineras one afternoon the usual patterns of work, drug taking, and conversation were disrupted by the deep rumble of an on-coming train. Dividing the Jardineras from the market was a barely used track that linked a number of industrial sites in the city, and which went further north. On board were young men sitting on the roof. On this and other occasions some of the group would jump onto the train and wave a faked goodbye. The first time Gareth asked Mateo if he had ever jumped the train for real. His answer was affirmative, he had 'been north' many times, but said with little conviction. How far had he gone? To Apizaco came the response. Apizaco is about 40 kilometres outside of Puebla, barely an hour's journey by bus. Mateo presented an imagined mobility, not to impress us with the idea of travel but to indicate his desire and efforts to 'get out', meaning to change a life marked by poverty, drugs, violence, and loneliness.

A very different insight was offered by Ramon. We had learned from a more formal interview that Ramon had been brought up in Tierra Blanca, Veracruz, came to Puebla before spending time in Mexico City where he became involved with a gang, before returning to Puebla. When asked whether he had been north he would answer that he had got as far as the border, indicating variously between Tampico in east and Tijuana to the west. He had not crossed however, claiming that he had run out of money and been homesick. In general terms his accounts were always consistent. But, on our last visit to the Jardineras in 2008, Ramon suddenly confided that he had lived in Los Angeles, and had spent time in prison there for involvement in a gang. Like many young people on the streets, Ramon may have been reluctant to reveal too much about himself to outsiders, and to offer instead a series of credible 'personas'. We are not sure the reason for the sudden revelation, except that perhaps it relates to the fact that he came back. He could not make it in the US, despite his gang and the life that awaited him in Mexico. It was not that he was reluctant to tell us about being a mobile Mexican, but that he was embarrassed about being a 'failed globaliser'.

Travelling Identities

We met Jiménez in Bensonhurst, at the corner of 20th and 86th in Brooklyn, New York on Tuesday 23rd October 2007. Surfacing from the subway at mid-day, we phoned his mobile number, as he had instructed, and five minutes later there he was – jogging easily up the street, grinning. Now 19, Jiménez was a fit, muscular, tanned and handsome young man, quite changed from the chubby, asthmatic 16 year old interviewed 3 years before by Sarah in a Pueblan care home for street children. Jiménez had agreed to meet us (both Gareth and Sarah) today, on his day off, for a lunch to catch up on 3 years of news. We were keen to learn about his move to the USA, his life in New York and his plans for the future. And Jiménez wanted to show us where he lived, on the second floor of a 4 storey apartment block in a quiet leafy suburban avenue, just 5 minutes from the subway station. As we strolled towards his apartment, he told us about his job in the kitchen of a nearby pizzeria, working 11am to 11pm Wednesdays through Mondays, earning 550 dollars a week preparing pizza dough. He'd been working in the same restaurant for the past 2 years, basically since he'd arrived in New York, had been promoted from washing dishes in his first year and now aspired to a move from the kitchen to front of house where the cooks made pizza. A conscientious worker, he hadn't missed a day's work in 2 years – except for yesterday, when his younger brother Antonio had arrived.

Antonio's arrival was a stunning piece of news. The 15 year old had just spent 5 days travelling from Puebla in central Mexico to north-eastern USA, including an illegal border crossing – through the "killing deserts" from Sonora into Arizona. When we reached Jiménez' apartment we found Antonio accompanied by another brother, 17 year old Federico, and Rocío, a girl of the same age who had shared the journey with Antonio. Rocío we discovered was the sister of Jiménez' girlfriend – who lived and worked as a teacher in Puebla. The brothers compared their experiences of the Mexico-USA journey: back in 2005 Jiménez had taken 9 days to complete the crossing; Federico had managed in 4 in early 2007; Antonio and Rocio got just through in 5, looking dazed and raw-skinned from the experience. Jiménez explained that all had taken the same route, arranged by an uncle of theirs who belonged to a ring of 'coyotes' or people smugglers, but his trip had taken longer when the group's 'coyote' didn't show up at the pre-arranged meeting point in Mexico and they had had to wait several days for his replacement to arrive. Each had travelled from Puebla to Mexico City by bus, taken a plane to Hermosillo, Sonora, and hooked up with a larger group in a hotel to be taken by pick-up truck close to the US border. Walking only in the dark, they had taken 3 punishing nights to make the border crossing, under strict instructions about clothing (black), jewellery, lamps and mobile phones (none), equipment (1 light rucksack, sand-coloured blanket), food (tins of tuna, biscuits) and water. A pick-up truck on the other side took them to a hotel in Phoenix, where they cleaned up and rested before taking a bus to New York.

There were stories of exhilaration and adventure. Antonio told of a 'migra' policeman coming within feet of where he was hiding, as he held his breath….; Jiménez recounted how they had lain still as helicopters circled overhead, aware that they could be picked up if someone was transmitting a mobile phone signal; Federico said muggings by gangs on the US side were rumoured to be common… But underlying the adventure was a more calculated tale of risk assessment, of coordinated planning and organized execution. Jiménez had not allowed his girlfriend Sonia to make the journey - he had assessed the dangers as too great for her and was mindful that his investment in her teaching college fees back in Puebla would be jeopardized. He had paid $50,000 Mexican pesos (about US$5,000) for each brother to make the crossing under the guidance of an experienced coyote, each trip taking months to prepare. A certain mental attitude was necessary for the dangerous border crossing, Jiménez explained. He had advised his brothers 'don't think about where you're coming from or going to, just do it for yourself, concentrate on where you are right now.' (interview notes, 27/10/07). This, he told us, had been his approach and it had worked for him. In all, these had been anything but impulsive or reckless border crossings. Rather, they suggest that Jiménez has a highly organized view of himself and the world around him.

We were given tantalizing glimpses of the Brooklyn-based world into which Jiménez had negotiated his own entry and also that of his two younger brothers – and to which he intended to bring his Mexico-based mother. They reflect common Mexican experiences of illegal migration to the USA. He had, for example, a significant network in the USA of family members who had emigrated from Puebla – uncles, aunts, his father and older brother were all now resident in and around New York City (a popular destination for Mexicans from Puebla state) – some were reportedly now legal joint US-Mexican citizens, others were legal residents, relative newcomers had lived and worked illegally for several years.

In New York, Jiménez had quickly settled into a latino social network, finding work in an pizzeria owned by an Argentinean and staffed by Guatemalans and other inhabitants of Jiménez' birth place - Cholula town, close to Puebla City. Seventeen year old Federico

had also been found a job by Jiménez in the same pizzeria chain – and Antonio was to be similarly placed by his brother. Jiménez assessed restaurant work to be ideal, providing meals to save money and a refuge from police as they worked out of sight in the kitchens. They were also likely to be able to negotiate the same day off, allowing them to spend Tuesday together as a family. The latino social network extended to their living accommodation – an apartment owned by a Guatemalan woman, Elena, and shared by 7 illegal residents from Mexico and Guatemala. Jiménez' day was highly structured, beginning at 08:00 with 2 hours at the gym (US$45 per month for unlimited use) followed by a 12 hour working day from 11:00 to 23:00. He watched a little TV and used internet-enabled mobile phones to keep in touch with other news in Spanish. With little need for English in his daily life, Jiménez had quickly given up on his 'English for Latinos' book purchased on arrival over 2 years earlier, although was keen to press Antonio into learning more to improve his options in New York. On arrival in New York in 2005 as a minor, Jiménez had enrolled for health and dental care, careful to have all the health checks and all the dental treatment available free to minors. On turning 18, his health care plan had become preventive, consisting of a careful diet, plenty of exercise, no cigarettes, coffee, alcohol or illegal drugs. A picture of clean living, Jiménez, was, at 19, a hard-working young man who had assumed responsibility for his younger brothers' well-being. Saving most of his earnings, Jiménez had bought a plot of land back home in Cholula, intending to return to Mexico in 2009 when, he calculated, he would have enough money to build a home for himself and his girlfriend.

Jiménez' story echoes the aspirations of many young Mexicans hoping to use illegal entry to the USA as a way to earn enough money to return as landowners, homeowners, successful businessmen. But Jiménez's new identity as highly organized, ambitious and farsighted seems remote from his 'street' child identity of a few years earlier.

> At the age of 9 I left home and was living for 2 years on the streets. I spent 4 years… 3 years in a [NGO] care home… maybe 5… then I was in a Welfare home for a few months, and I left again and was in the street. Really I don't remember how long I lived in the street […] Then they took me to the borstal… No, they took me back to the Welfare home… and when I behaved badly there they sent me to the borstal. And from there they brought me here [a second NGO care home] and here I've spent 2 years (Interview 19/11/04, p.2)

His story of early mobility, of moving on to the streets, was a typical 'street child' story of family disintegration and abuse:

> So my mum decided to go off with this other man. And my dad stayed with us and drowned himself in alcohol. […] And he hit us a lot […] and my brother – the one after me – sometimes he would leave him tied up in a sack […] When I arrived here in JUCONI house, I still had, after all that time […] the marks from being hit with wire […] and with the lead of an iron […] and with rope (ibid, p.19)… I was 9 when my mother left and I didn't see her again….my dad, when my mum went off with the other man, my dad, well we stayed with him but it's like…. Well it made my dad uncomfortable, he could only stand 2 years with the 4 of us and then he had a son with another woman (ibid, p. 2)… and then when my grandmother died, my dad decided to leave us and he went (ibid, p.21)… My dad goes to the United States and we stay with a teacher and that teacher divided us up, she didn't put us together in the same place. I think the agreement with my dad, he told me this recently when he called, was that she was going to look after us – she was going to have all 4 of us in her house. Anyway, this woman takes me and leaves me in a

> care home, another brother was left in another care home and another in another and the oldest ran away… (ibid, p.2)

Jiménez' early moves foster the notion of a 'reluctant' mobility – buffeted by traumatic family circumstances, with movements between street and institutions reflecting not choice but unhappiness about his treatment and frustrated attempts to be with his family:

> When I was in the Welfare home… because well, according to the Convention [on the Rights of the Child, 1989] we have the right to freedom, but we never went out […] You're never allowed to go out when you're in Welfare…. and the thing was, like I wanted to search for my brothers, but they don't let you out, so I escaped time and again (ibid, p.16)

Intriguingly, Jiménez' job of tracking down his younger brothers, each in a different care home, was made easier because all were known simply as 'Jiménez' – by-product of an institutional device in busy homes to identify children by their surnames.

'Reluctant' mobility was similarly evident in the story of Esteban, who, like Jiménez, reached a time when he was able to 'harness' his mobility to use it to further his career. But at the age of 7, his moves between home and street were hardly signalling an adventurous spirit:

> ´My specific problem: family disintegration. My mum left my dad when I was little, from then I had a stepfather (interview with Esteban, 25/08/06)… I remember that when they punished me, at 6, 7 years of age, it was with a cable with the plastic peeled back, with the pure metal and with that they beat me. It split the skin, it marked you, first it made you all swell up where they hit you and then the skin split… And…. well, nothing, just nothing. And I used to have to work, I was working and going to school, I used to sell chewing gum at first, then I shined shoes and the first time that I left home for the street, my first experience of living on the street I remember really, really well because it was caused by pure fear, I was working in the street, selling chewing gum, but all my earnings were taken by my stepfather, right? (ibid, p.1)… On that occasion I had sold all my chewing gum and there was a travelling fair, there in Salina Cruz [Oaxaca], so I went to play roulette and I lost all my cash. I was excited, there were coins worth 20 pesos and I got excited about winning them, I got excited putting money on. You bet on the red or the green. I got so excited, I started to win and saw my money increase and then I lost it all at the end, like always happens, always. And there I was in Salina Cruz' mini Las Vegas and I was terrified they were going to beat me, right? And I was frightened about staying away from home too, I was frightened of both things, but I was more frightened of going home to be beaten than of staying out…' (ibid, p.2)

Esteban and Jiménez manifest time and again a ´reluctant' mobility in their early lives, Jiménez restricting his mobility to within Puebla City, Esteban moving through various localities in Oaxaca, to Veracruz and Puebla with numerous return journeys. Each spent time on the streets in the company of other young people, but links formed on the street were tacitly understood as transitory, being instrumental to the immediate job of survival. Both opted to spend their teenage years in more settled environments, each in a different care home in Puebla City, each choosing, despite their earlier experiences of reluctant mobility, a settled existence to complete their schooling.

> ‘the only thing we had to do was study and that was it. I mean, they didn´t make us work or anything. So we used to go to school and arriving home we’d do the cleaning. Each of us had a job – the patio, bedroom or bathroom. When they put us to cleaning – there were 4 of us – 2 of my friends said: no, they’re going to make us work, let’s go, let’s go. But 2 of us wanted to stay (interview with Esteban, 25/08/06, p.4)… and after a month and a half, my mum arrived. Because the 2 boys who had run away had gone back to Salina Cruz and they told where we were. So our mums arrived and everything, the other boy, Nestor he was called, my friend, he’d been my friend since the first year of primary, he went home. His sister was friends with my sister, which was why we spent so much time together. And he went home after a month and a half, but when my mum came I didn’t want to go home. I was better off (in the care home). I mean, I was not OK in my family home, I was definitely not OK there, there was nothing more than abuse there, I would have done nothing there and I was no fool…’ (ibid, p.5)

Jiménez and Esteban took journeys not simply within the spatial dimension, but also moving from early identity ascriptions as ‘abandoned’ or ‘street’ children, in a way we began to think of as ‘harnessing’ their abilities to negotiate public and other spaces to deploy them in the interests of furthering socio-economic ambitions. Leaving Mexico they left behind their labels, living abroad simply as ‘Mexicans’, planning for an eventual return ‘home’ as successful travellers. With no family home to return to, they nevertheless identified ‘Mexico’ as home and more specifically localities they had known as children: Jiménez had bought land within spitting distance of his parental home; Esteban returned to Veracruz where he had spent his first years off the street in a care home. They understood their experiences of movement outside Mexico as preparatory to their successful returns to familiar corners of central Mexico. Jiménez had ‘made it’ from ‘street’ child to a steady job in the USA which allowed him to reunite his family and held the expectation of returning to his home town as a land owner and marriage to a local teacher. Esteban’s social mobility traversed red light districts, care homes, private university, a year travelling in Europe, to become a lawyer and university teacher embarking on his doctoral studies in Spain.

> I know how to fight and I so know how to fight that I looked for the opportunity to do a doctorate in Spain. And, yes, these are opportunities given to one in a thousand, but I didn’t get it through luck, nor did they give it to me on a plate: I had to work for it. They didn’t say: Right, we’re going to look for a lad from Hogares (care home) or someone that has these certain characteristics. No. I earned it. I went and worried away at it and I made it. […] And, well, life in Veracruz is treating me well, see now, I belong to the one percent of Mexicans who go abroad to do a doctorate, life is treating me well… (interview with Esteban 23/01/08, p.16).

While Esteban and Jiménez’ early lives hardly fit the mould of idealized, cosmopolitan mobility – indeed their younger lives conjure all the elements of social exclusion – they nevertheless worked at turning themselves into subaltern cosmopolitans: Jiménez through his family connections in the USA, Esteban in the welfare home in which he spent much of his adolescence. But are Esteban’s and Jiménez’ simply idiosyncratic life histories or can they tell us something about the social identities of (mobile) children and youth more generally? A shared reluctance to become mobile, to leave the family home and move on to the street, echoes much research about ‘street’ children leaving home because of fear of abuse rather than in search of adventure. A subsequent harnessing of spatial mobility to follow personal ambitions suggests a transformational period in which spatially mobile young people increasingly identify and pursue opportunities involving socio-economic

mobility. Both our research subjects have used technology to pursue multiple social lives : Jiménez through his two expensive mobile phones, one used for sustaining his distance romance with a Mexican girlfriend, the other (we suspect) for helping his uncle orchestrate border crossings; Esteban using the internet to maintain and grow his network of friends in Europe and to educate himself. Each displays a highly organised view of himself and the world around him, after being subjected to family disorganization (within a history of family migration) and living an unsettled, unhappy young life. Both spent adolescent years settled in care homes, valuing their educational opportunities.

> Nowadays, I feel more Pueblan than anything because in Puebla I spent… well in Puebla I grew up. All the rest were just stages, stages in my life, which shaped me. But in Puebla I became who I am today. In Puebla I had great experiences, with the priests and lads at the care home [Esteban lived in Hogares Calasanz, Puebla from the age of 13 through to University] (interview with Esteban 23/01/08, p.12)

Both indicate ambitions of economic security, a family and a successful return 'home', considered almost stereotypical of Mexicans abroad. They seek not to change Mexican society, but rather to improve their own standing within a society which abandoned them, their transnational living representing less resistance to exclusion and oppression 'at home' than a means to join the 'included'. Esteban relates his ambitions to religion and morality, but also to his business acumen and opportunities to 'do a deal', Jiménez relates his to working hard, saving and taking opportunities presented by a family network. For both, 'clean living' is valued, not just in terms of being drug free but also through stable relationships with partners. In this sense, 'family' for both young men relates to constructions in which they are central figures shaping their family destinies, rather than contemplating a return to the parental home. Both Esteban and Jiménez desire - and have prepared for - their return to Mexico.

> My idea is to get to know about things – my studies are kind of the vehicle, right? They are pretext to leave, but really it's so I can get to know, see, do, live other cultures, understand them, have things to recount to my grandchildren: Spain is like this, look, it's like that, have things to tell them and to become better, to be a better person. My life project is to have a family, have my wife, my children and to be good for them, not for myself. I mean, it's no good if it's just for yourself is it? It's no use to me that my University certificate is on the [care home's] office wall. It does nothing for me really. But having a wife and children, when it's all for other people not just for yourself, then it's great (interview with Esteban 23/01/08, p.25)

Esteban and Jiménez experienced mobility in a number of different ways, moving with reluctance onto the streets, experimenting with mobility between institutions, before harnessing mobility to pursue personal ambitions. Our interviews reveal two young people deeply aware of how they have become 'global' travellers, networked into flows of information and responsibilities, expressed as their knowledge of education grants and the internet, to the payment of remittances and arrangements for family to follow behind.

Conclusion

Colloquially all Mexicans abroad are referred to as "*hijos ausentes*" (absent children), a turn of phrase that suggests both infantilisation and loss to the paternalistic nation, 'la patria'. For the two people at the centre of this paper, neither family nor nation would seem, on their merit, to demand much loyalty. Both left home in childhood and spent time on the streets and various institutions, 'movements' that we describe as reluctant, before becoming transnational actors. Getting to New York and Seville entailed a shift across and

mixing with worlds that would have seemed distant, physically, socially and culturally not long before. In so doing both shifted from being, or being ascribed, identities as 'street children' with the notions of immobility/deterioration to becoming youth and 'subaltern cosmopolitans'. Both harnessed the opportunities presented to them by civil society organisations, and in different ways by family, signalling the material and emotional importance of home to the act of departure. Once abroad, both Jiménez and Esteban's narratives present pride in their respective achievements but also an awareness of their 'difference' from hosts and a continued presence that requires negotiation.[6] Hovering in the background of both narratives – as we suspect is especially true of all subaltern cosmopolitans – is the register of previous identities. Their cosmopolitanism is heavily caveated by their responsibilities to themselves, to brothers and girlfriends, and preparation for going back. In traversing borders two 'mobile Mexicans' and successful globalisers, once streets kids but now confident young men, have reconciled mobility and identity.

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[6] Jimenez relates this to his good conduct and hard work, Esteban to his social networking and academic record.

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