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Mobilising family solidarity? Rights, responsibilities and secondary schooling in urban Mexico.

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Abstract

The paper uses the case of schooling in Guadalajara, Mexico as a window onto exploring the implications of devolving responsibility for enforcing children's rights to families. Under the 1993 Education Act, secondary schooling was made officially compulsory and a constitutional right of all Mexican children; but at the same time parents were decreed 'co-responsible' for ensuring that their children attend. This is in line with wide-ranging reforms aiming to encourage the participation of private actors such as families in assuring social rights including formal education; and to promote a more 'active' understanding of citizenship. The paper argues that the right to secondary schooling is articulated as a norm that seeks to mesh with and mobilise intra-family relations of reciprocity, and discusses some problems that can arise when the enforcement of children's rights is devolved to the families in this way. The case highlights the potentially exclusionary nature of prevailing discourses of participation and 'responsibile citizenship' for poorer sectors.

Introduction[1]

Rights-based approaches to social development have gained increasing currency recently. Their attraction lies partly in the fact that they recast the poor as active subjects in their own development rather than passive beneficiaries of welfare and aid or, at the other extreme, as empowered consumers exercising 'choice' (DFID 2000: 13 in Cornwall 2002: 55; Subrahmanian 2002). In Mexico, the focus of this paper, social rights have been increasingly linked to the notion of responsible citizenship and social participation (Gordon 2001). These developments have implications for children, who depend on their parents, guardians or other adults to enforce their social rights since they are not yet able to secure their rights through participating fully as 'citizens' themselves.

This paper takes a critical look at the implications of linking social rights with the notions of participation and responsible citizenship by focusing on the example of schooling. It examines how the right to secondary education is negotiated in families from a marginal, urban neighbourhood in Guadalajara, Mexico, and raises some problems that can arise when parents are made responsible for guaranteeing their children's rights. Secondary schooling became a constitutional right and was made compulsory in 1993, and parents were simultaneously rendered constitutionally 'co-responsible' for assuring it (SEP 1993: 25). This took place in the context of reforms aimed at encouraging the participation of private actors, including families, in assuring children's access to public education.

The paper looks at how the devolution to parents of responsibility for enforcing the right to schooling assumes the *a priori* existence of specific types of affective relations and economic capabilities that can be mobilised through appeals to parents' sense of moral responsibility towards their children. It argues that the right to secondary schooling is neither legally expressed nor experienced by poorer families as a compulsory right but is articulated instead as a moral obligation that meshes with family norms and strategies of reciprocity. The paper looks at how the right to schooling is negotiated and reinterpreted by parents attempting to reconcile their obligation to school their children with the economic hardship that can make this extremely difficult for them.

Toothless rights?

The increasing influence of rights is a global trend that has had a profound impact on Mexico, as on the rest of Latin America. Popular awareness of the 'right to have rights' has intensified among many different groups - children, women, the elderly - as a result of increasing political pluralism, democratisation and the impact of international human

rights discourse (Levinson 1998; Salles 2001; Fox 2000: 184; Grindle 2000; Kersting and Sperberg 1999). Rights have become part of a language intelligible to all: a discursive field with a 'shared vocabulary and a shared ethic' (Rose 1999: 28). They have likewise become a fundamental building block in political legitimation - a political driving force in their own right.

Paradoxically, however, popular awareness of and demands for social rights seem to be finding heightened expression at precisely the moment that government commitment to guaranteeing them is waning and the actual functions of government are becoming increasingly dispersed and decentralised (Silva 1999). Despite the growing rights consensus and the progress made in terms of political rights in the region, this has not been matched by the consolidation of social rights, a contradiction that has been described as the growing divide between social citizenship and political citizenship (Sperberg 2001: 138; Kersting and Sperberg 1999: 133-4). In Mexico, as in the rest of Latin America, the major structural reforms of the '80s and '90s and the ensuing austerity severely reduced governments' capacity to guarantee social rights.[2] Governments obliged to 'do more with less', and following a global neoliberal political logic,[3] refocused welfare provision from a universalist approach offering basic universal subsidies, towards compensatory programmes targeted at the very poorest groups and often subject to conditionalities such as participation in certain activities such as health checks and ensuring children's school attendance[4] (Martin 1998; Gilbert 1997).

However, only a tiny percentage of Mexico's poor are currently assisted by targeted poverty alleviation programmes. According to recent estimates, over half the population is poor, with 24 per cent unable to meet even their basic nutritional needs (Boltvinik in *La Jornada* 14.08.02).[5] The current restructuring merely marks the further erosion of a social protection system that has *always* been scanty and inadequate: the social rights that emanated from the 1910 Mexican Revolution and were enshrined in the 1917 Constitution – for instance to education, health and housing – have never guaranteed

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[2] Between 1980 and 1995, social spending on housing, social security and welfare, and education fell substantially, with spending on health unchanged (Grindle 2000: 27).

[3] Most Latin American countries turned away from their 'old' development model of inward-oriented and protectionist import-substitution, which roughly spanned the period from the 1940s to the mid-80s, and began to switch to an outward-oriented model of close integration with international markets – marking a 'paradigm shift' in the region's economies from import-substitution to globalisation (Gwynne and Kay 1999: 3; Gilbert 1997: 325). These changes were part of larger packages of economic reforms supported by international agencies such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, and implemented through structural adjustment programmes (SAPs). The reforms have been inspired by the so-called 'New Public Management' paradigm that advocates the deployment of private sector management strategies in the public sector (Nickson 1998: 3). The reforms are neoliberal in orientation, increasing the influence of markets on economic decision-making and reducing that of national governments. They have promoted trade liberalisation, tariff reductions on imports, privatisation and decentralisation (Gwynne and Kay 1999: 14 and 68). The informal sector (defined by the Regional Employment Program for Latin America and the Caribbean (PREALC) as all self-employed workers (except professionals), non-remunerated family workers and domestic workers (Palacios 1990: 120)) has grown rapidly as a result (MOST-FLACSO 1997: 5), leaving the poorest groups unprotected by social security provision there is, which is accessible through formal public or private sector employment only.

[4] As in the PROGRESA programme, rechristened Oportunidades by the Fox government.

[5] These figures, which result from official poverty measurements have been criticised for failing to take into account access to basic social rights such as health, education and housing are not taken into account (Boltvinik in *La Jornada* 14.08.02). They should thus be taken as an absolute minimum estimate of real poverty levels.

effective protection for the poor (Gordon 2001). What little social security protection there has been has often been limited mainly to the urban formal sector and rural modern sectors, leaving the urban informal and rural traditional sectors, which constitute the majority of the population, unprotected. The rest of the population have had to try and secure their social rights via the market or by other means: the family, NGOs, civic, community or neighbourhood organisations, churches, or social movements. Social rights have been effectively 'toothless': their provision is inadequate and there are no sanctions for their non-fulfilment.[6]

An important shift has nonetheless occurred in the meanings associated with social rights in official discourse (Mesa-Lago 1992). From being portrayed as a State responsibility, social rights have been reframed in terms of self-help, 'shared responsibility' and the need for an active, participatory role for 'society' in individual and social development.[7] The notion of citizenship thus also becomes recast as contingent upon responsibility, involvement and personal choice, to be enacted in an array of different optional arenas and practices ranging from the political act of voting to sending one's children to school. This shift both opens up for new opportunities for inclusion and democratic participation whilst simultaneously ushering in new forms of exclusion and control.

How do these forms of inclusion and exclusion affect children? And through what kinds of apparently 'free choices' – and whose - do they manifest themselves in everyday practices? According to Kabeer (2002: 21), citizenship is 'a particular way of defining personhood that is in contradistinction to definitions based on status within hierarchical social relationships. It seeks to replace claims based on norm, charity, benevolence or patronage with rights guaranteed by the state'. These relationships include the family, where, in principle, relations of status and ascriptive hierarchies of authority are replaced by relations of contract guaranteed by law (Dolgin 1990a in Strathern 1996: 42). The 1993 Education Act in question here does precisely the opposite, however, by placing both enforcement of and accountability for children's right to schooling in the hands of their families. Their social rights thus come to depend on the goodwill, capabilities and 'choices' of the adults, typically parents or other family members, who are responsible for them.

In modern, liberal democratic regimes, plans, policies and programmes cannot merely be imposed upon micro-locales such as families and schools, but must be linked up with these different authorities through a process of conviction rather than coercion

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[6] Making them fundamentally different in nature from other types of rights. Gordon (2001) criticises T.H. Marshall's classic categorisation of rights into social, political and civil rights on the grounds that social rights cannot be compared to the latter two since they are a *result* of the adequate functioning of civil and political rights. Social rights also differ insamuch as they are not absolute like civil and political rights; but are concrete social services whose provision depends on other variables such as efficient taxation and administration, sufficient resources; and they are subject to restrictions such as eligibility criteria.

[7] In Mexico, the PROGRESA poverty-alleviation programme (reframed as *Oportunidades* under the current Fox administration) introduced during the government of President Ernesto Zedillo, is one example. Families received nutritional supplements and and cash payments as long as they complied with certain 'conditions', such as regular health checks for women and sending their children to school. However, such

(Rose 1999: 48). The following sections examines how the meanings of social rights, responsibilities and citizenship are articulated in the 1993 Education Act, and discuss how these meanings are 'translated' and negotiated in the arena of the family over the issue of secondary education.

Recasting educational policy: the 1993 reform

The context of austerity and the changes in the conceptualisation of social rights, described above, shaped the 1993 Educational Modernisation Act (Piester 1997: 469; Trejo 1996: 156). The reform was also partly instigated by preparations for the imminent signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the pressing need to produce better-skilled workers to facilitate Mexico's insertion into the global economy (Martin 1993: 2). At the same time, it formed part of a political project aimed at shoring up the legitimacy of the (then) ruling party, the PRI, by providing at least a facade of political opening and a sharper focus on equity. The reform was a product of this double-edged situation where devolving centralised power and improving the quality of education was essential for political and economic reasons, but resources were scarce.[8]

A key change introduced by the Act was that secondary education was made compulsory and a right.[9] As mentioned above, this step was accompanied by an emphasis on the co-responsibility for schooling of parents/guardians and the State, with the former made responsible for ensuring attendance (SEP 1993: 14).[10] Education is depicted in the Act both as an individual right and as a duty to society, where the development of the self becomes the means to develop society through its transformation into 'human capital'. At the same time, though, the Act emphasises that no sanctions will be imposed for failure to attend school, and that lack of schooling must not be used as an excuse for discrimination in employment or other spheres (SEP 1993: 21):

> Education ennobles the individual and improves society ... [it] is a social
> duty whose reward is individual and collective progress, and the only
> sanction for not attending school is the person's more limited
> development. (SEP 1993: 20-21)

targeted programmes only attend a very small percentage of the poor population and barely begin to address the severity of difficulties experienced by families in e.g. schooling their children (Martin 2000: 8).

[8] Key specific aims of the reform included: to decentralise and involve the states to a greater extent in educational planning; to promote teacher training and incentives; to restructure the powerful and volatile teachers' union, the SNTE; and to promote 'social participation' in education (Rodríguez 1997: 83). See Blasco (2001); Government of Mexico (1992); Martin (1998); Quiroz 1990 and 1995; SEP (1993) for further details concerning the changes ushered in by the reform.

[9] Primary schooling was made compulsory under the 1917 Constitution

[10] The 1993 amendment to paragraph 1 of Article 31 of the Constitution reads that 'it is the duty of all Mexicans to … ensure that their children or tutees attend public or private schools, in order to receive primary and secondary education …' (SEP 1993: 30). However, in much of the document, parents are named as solely responsible for children's school attendance, e.g. 'Parents are made co-responsible for ensuring that their children exercise their right to education' (SEP 1993: 25; see also pp. 35; 45; 21); and

Making secondary schooling compulsory and a right undoubtedly has positive dimensions inasmuch as it puts greater pressure on government to universalize access to this level. However, the emphasis on family responsibility for ensuring school attendance has a number of less favourable implications. Chief among these is that educating oneself is portrayed not as a right but as a personal choice entirely devoid of legal repercussions. Failure to do so, on the other hand, is depicted as a *moral* transgression towards oneself and, by extension, towards society. When tranposed into the family arena this means that the 'compulsory' side of the right to schooling is left to parents to enforce, with the implicit message that non-compliance will truncate their *children's* opportunities.

In this way, secondary schooling is simultaneously 'universalised' as a right but also paradoxically turned into a commodity, access to which in poorer sectors depends not on parents' free choices, as the Act implies, but on their economic capabilities. Significant private contributions to public schooling are nothing new in Mexico (see e.g. Bracho and Zamudio 1997). Despite the constitutional premise that basic education is 'free' (SEP 1993)[11] the state actually provides only the school building and the teachers' salaries; all other outlays must be met by parents through so-called 'voluntary' enrolment contributions (*cuotas*), added to the cost of books, uniforms and other occasional expenses that are often far beyond the means of poorer families (Calvo 1998; González de la Rocha et al. 1990; Martin 1996a). The opportunity costs of schooling can also be prohibitively high for poorer families where a child in school is a potential worker lost[12] (World Bank 1999: 51).

The lack of sanctions for non-attendance means that the right to schooling is articulated more in terms of 'a punitive approach to non-participation' rather than a universal social right and a *sine qua non* of citizenship (Subrahmanian 2002: 74). It thus becomes a moral issue, not a legal absolute. Moreover, it is children who suffer the consequences if their parents fail to 'participate'. In this way, parents are 'harnessed' to the task of universalising basic education through a rights discourse that appeals to their moral obligations towards their children and the latter's expectations of them.

Parents in this study were well aware of the changes in their role demanded by the introduction of compulsory secondary schooling, having been informed of this through parent-teacher meetings. The school is the key arena where information about policy changes, such as those described above, is mediated to parents. The way such information is mediated and received thus also comes to be shaped by the nature of

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in regard to other school-related duties, such as attendance at social participation councils and parents' associations (SEP 1993: 81).

[11] In July 2002, a single secondary school text book from one of the cheapest editorials certified by the Education Ministry, Santillana, cost 90 pesos – around two days' minimum wage.

[12] See also World Bank (1998: 83). Work may mean income from a job, or it may mean help in the home, especially in the case of girls, who are responsible for looking after younger children to release their mothers for work outside the home (Martin 1994: 8; Moore 1994: 23). The OECD (1998: 360) notes that: 'From the individual's point of view, costs correspond to direct costs of tuition fees, educational materials, student living costs and forgone earnings during the time of study'.

the teacher-parent relationship. In many schools, including the one studied here, an authoritarian tradition exists between teachers and parents, where teachers make no attempt to hide the fact that they considered parents to be the key culprit in school failure and drop-out, owing to their own low educational levels, apathy and sometimes direct sabotage of their children's schooling (Blasco 2001; see also Calvo 1998). They were commonly regarded as 'undoing all the good work done by the school', as one teacher put it. In this way, a sensation of blame is often directly transmitted to parents through their relationships with teachers. For their part, children also learn in school[13] that basic education is their right both according to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 3 of the Mexican Constitution; and that it is the obligation and responsibility of their 'parents/families' and 'society' to guarantee this right (De la Barreda 1999: 64-66). How this awareness plays out in practice, however, looks somewhat different. The following section looks at how families recast their children's right to schooling and their obligation to ensure their attendance into a *favour* that they bestow upon them with the explicit aim of reinforcing reciprocity in the immediate present and in the future.

Parents: using schooling as a bargaining counter

Arguably, the transformation of secondary schooling into a right enables children to potentially make new claims of their parents and to legitimately protest if they fail to assure their schooling. New spaces for appeal and reproach are, thus, opened up within the family. Education is highly valued in Mexico as a route to personal progress (*superación*) and a better future, and secondary schooling specifically has become a key 'make or break' level in Mexican education both in terms of work and life opportunities. It is widely acknowledged that primary alone is no longer sufficient to ensure an adequate income or to improve a young person's chances of social mobility (Reimers 2001; Martin 1990; 1992; Blasco 2001). Parents who do not support their children's schooling thus risk being seen as failing both as parents for denying their children's rights and limiting their individual development; and as citizens, for failing to assume their responsibility to produce well-educated human capital. Following this reasoning, the conversion of secondary schooling into a right means that parents ought, in theory, to lose some of the leverage *vis á vis* their children that supporting (or threatening to withdraw support for) their secondary schooling afforded them before it was made compulsory, when poorer parents could and did frame their support for secondary schooling as a *favour* they bestowed on their children.

However, as others have pointed out, students' awareness of their rights is a fairly recent development in Mexico (Levinson 1998). For parents, too, it is a new situation. This study found that far from the right to schooling being perceived as unequivocal in families, it is instead deployed as a bargaining counter in family negotiations of different

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[13] Until 1993, students were informed of this during a class called Educational Guidance (*Orientación Educativa*); in 1999 this subject was replaced by Civic Education (*Formación Cívica*), which devotes a section in its textbooks to children's rights, including to basic education.

kinds, with parents reframing the right to schooling in the language of family rights and obligations.

Why do they do this? A key point in this connection is that children are an important resource for low-income families in Mexico, both in terms of their immediate contributions to the household economy and with respect to the 'promise' of future support to their parents. Studies from Mexico City and Guadalajara indicate that reciprocal exchange mechanisms among family and neighbours are a key survival strategy in areas where few families have access to social security benefits or insurance of any kind (Lomnitz 1993: 26; Martin 1990a: 126). This reciprocity can take various forms: it is not necessarily just a short-term strategy, but can also operate over longer periods with, for instance, favours done to children 'repayable' when elderly or infirm parents need support (see e.g. Varley and Blasco 2001). In this context, schooling may be conceptualised not only as an investment in children's futures but also in parents' own futures. By supporting their children's education, parents improve their children's life chances and concurrently also their capacity to take care of them in later life.

In this study, expectations of reciprocity explicitly underpinned parents' provision of schooling to their children. Students reported how their parents described the future 'payback' they expected from their educated children: 'They tell me not to leave them, and to work hard at my studies because if I want a great future the only way is to study'; 'They say "if you study you'll be able to achieve the profession you always wanted in life, and then you'll be able to help your parents"'. As one mother remarked:

> I tell my kids – I'm giving them as much schooling as possible, I want them to study, even if it's just to the end of secondary school, because to get a job as a road-sweeper, a dustman, they're already asking for secondary school … I want to give my kids everything I can, because tomorrow, God knows, and they know too, I want *them* to give *me* everything they can.

In theory, parents should no longer be able to deploy schooling as leverage to secure compliance with present and future family obligations in this way. But since non-attendance is not sanctioned, parents can continue to make schooling conditional.

Parents used the powerful ideology of sacrifice to reinforce their children's gratitude to them for supporting their schooling. The link between parents' emphasis on sacrifice and their expectations of filial loyalty and help in return has been noted by others working in comparable sectors of Guadalajara. Martin (1996b: 198) notes that sacrifice is a key feature of the 'moral economy' of 'self-regulating' households, where the parent-child relationship is characterised by 'mutual sacrifice and reciprocal rights and

duties in a hierarchy of authority' (Martin 1996b: 199).[14] Expected of family members is a sense of solidarity, which may mean sacrificing individual dreams or ideals, including schooling, for the good of the collectivity. Or, conversely, if one member sacrifices comforts or dreams for the sake of another, then the lucky recipient will also 'owe' something in return. Emphasis on sacrifice gives parents emotional leverage over their children, both in the short and the long term; with schooling mobilised in this dynamic as a *bargaining counter*, concrete proof of sacrifices undertaken and favours owed.

It is notable that the ideology of sacrifice invoked in connection with schooling was primarily wielded by mothers. Self-sacrificing motherhood is a powerful ideal in Mexico[15] that women may use to secure the sympathy and reciprocity of their offspring.[16] This ideal has an important inbuilt 'welfare' function, as among many low-income families children are often women's only future safety-net. Many women in such contexts do not have jobs that could provide them with social security cover in old age (or husbands who do)[17] and some form of support from their children in later life is crucial for them, especially given that they are more likely to be widowed than men (Varley and Blasco 2001).

Mothers used the ideology of sacrifice to recast schooling into a privilege for which children should be specifically grateful to them. They drew their children's attention to the sacrifices and hardships involved in supporting their schooling often despite their husbands' opposition. These sacrifices were not gratuitous, however. Children had to earn the privilege of going to school by studying hard, getting good marks, and helping out and behaving 'properly' at home (see also Martin 1990; 1994; 1998a). As one student's mother put it:

> I tell her "listen, my girl, I've sacrificed myself so much and then you turn out like that, and then your father shouts at me, do you think it's OK to be humiliated on your account? I've given you everything that makes you what you are and sacrificed myself so that you can study and I don't like to have to complain about you or to hear complaints from other people about you, you should know how to behave properly, I don't like it when people come and say 'so-and-so's daughter's like this or like that', no, on the contrary, I want them to say 'so-and-so's daughter is so well brought up, she behaves so well', that sort of thing".

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[14] In Mexico, such relations of reciprocity have been documented as permeating many areas of social life, in various forms. They are present in networks among kin or neighbours, ritual bonds of reciprocity such as *compradrazgo*, they can be horizontal, i.e. among equals, or vertical within an established hierachy of authority; and they exist in the political system, the unions, and both the public and the private sectors (Mantilla 1999; Lomnitz 1993; Lomnitz 1982). 'Traditional kinship and social exchange ties' are an 'integral part of political institutions' (Carlos and Anderson 1980 in Lomnitz 1982: 65). Lomnitz and Pérez-Lizaur's (1987) study of a *Mexican Elite Family* over several generations shows how 'patron-client relations permeate both family and enterprise' (see also Lomnitz 1982: 60; Vangstrup 1999).

[15] Although the notion of the self-sacrificing Mexican female has been criticised for 'universalising' female traits (see Guttman 1996: 92).

[16] Women whose children abandon them elicit little sympathy, and suspicion that they have been 'poor mothers' who must have done something to deserve being abandoned in earlier life (Melhuus 1990a: 13; Varley and Blasco 1999)

[17] Under Mexican Social Security legislation the spouse, children, siblings and parents of a contributor (government employee) have the right to health cover.

Students and teachers confirmed that it was not uncommon for students to be withdrawn from school because of bad marks. One mother described her disappointment at her son's poor grades, as she felt he was letting her down after all the effort she had made to school him:

> Look, it makes me feel really disappointed and sad because if you're making all that effort, and you're poor and all that and you can only manage to school your children with a lot of sacrifices, and then they don't make any effort, then you feel bad, because if you're giving everything you have and don't get anything in return, of course you feel bad, and as I was saying, you start to ask "what am I doing with my life if my child doesn't respond as he should?" Well, you could understand it if, you know, there are parents who hit their children all the time, who are bad to them, but if you're not like that, and you're giving them the best you have, then …

Mothers thus translated the right to schooling into terms intelligible in the language of family norms of reciprocity. The right to schooling was re-interpreted as contingent upon the *student's* behaviour, not upon mothers' willingness or capacity to send them. In doing this, they devolved responsibility for the 'right' to schooling even further down the chain: to their children. Mothers used the ideology of sacrifice to bargain over schooling, thus securing their children's compliance with their demands in the immediate present *and* appealing to an ethic of family solidarity with a view to assuring their own personal security in old age.

Students reported that their mothers were far more involved with their schooling than their fathers, who sometimes even attempted to sabotage their studies in various ways, for instance by disallowing any manifestation of the school, such as homework. A few mothers even claimed that they had to hide the fact that their children were studying from their husbands, doing extra work in secret in order to pay for books, uniforms and enrollment fees. Teachers confirmed that mothers usually assumed total responsibility for their children's studies, both in terms of economic support and encouragement as well as liaison with the school e.g. parents' meetings and grade collection.

Perhaps because of their scant engagement with their children's schooling and lives more generally, fathers seemed to have fewer illusions about the likelihood of their children caring for them in later life, suspecting that since they had had little to offer, either materially or affectively, their children would be unlikely to feel obliged to care for them in the future. These fears are not unfounded, as shown by work carried out among the elderly in low-income areas in Guadalajara which found that when weighing up whether or not to offer their elderly parents a place to live, mothers were usually given priority over fathers, since they had more 'credit' in the 'balance-sheet of reciprocity'. Many elderly men, however, had been left in homes for the elderly because they had been judged irresponsible, distant or uncaring in the past and their children wouldn't have them (Varley and Blasco 1999 and 2000; see also Guttman 1996; Martin 1994 for similar observations).

The notion, implicit in the 1993 law, that 'parents' constitute a consensual unit when it comes to their children's schooling was thus found to be questionable in this study. It is also belied by literature documenting the many fissures and fractures that can characterise marital relations in low-income sectors such as that studied. Parents are not necessarily consensual, and households and their members more generally are not always mutually supportive or self-abnegating. Both decision-making and the distribution of resources in the family are likely to depend on its internal power relations, with gendered and generational hierarchies shaping decision-making, which can be characterised by vigorous negotiation and conflict (González de la Rocha 1995; Chant 1985; Varley and Blasco 1999; Benería and Roldán 1987).

Thus, mothers' and fathers' attitudes towards schooling and other matters of child upbringing can, and do, diverge substantially. The very different upbringings that are brought to the same household by each partner at marriage do not necessarily dissolve into a shared and harmonious worldview or a jointly worked-out child upbringing strategy, but instead can be a source of friction and conflict between parents. Interviews with mothers showed that they drew heavily upon their recollections of their own upbringings when discussing the way they brought up their own children, often stressing how different their own perspectives and upbringing had been from their husbands'. Their reference for how to bring up their own children was their own upbringing ("*mi casa*"),[18] not a consensus they had reached together with their husbands (Blasco 2001).

The differences between mothers' and fathers' engagement with their children thus also appeared to affect their ability to use schooling as a 'bargaining' counter. Mothers' almost sole responsibility for the domestic sphere, including their children's material and affective welbeing and education, cemented their claim to their children's loyalty and reciprocity, a claim which was often reinforced through deliberate contrast with their husbands' comparative distance and negligence (see also Lomnitz 1993: 100-104; 208). The few fathers who did take an active interest in their children's education expressed similar hopes that their efforts would be rewarded.

The need for parents, and in particular mothers, to reinforce their children's sense of obligation towards them in this way may be becoming more acute since there is evidence that children are increasingly unable or reluctant to care for their elderly parents in Mexico. Attitudes among Mexican youth towards their filial duties are changing:

> Without social security benefits or pension plans, most elderly Mexican
> parents continue to look to adult children for economic support but often
> with less confidence than parents did in the past ... in recent decades,
> many factors have combined to reverse the intergenerational flow of

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[18] It is also notable that the term 'in my family' (*en mi casa*) was typically used to refer to the parental home, not to the marital home (see also Stephens 1973: 98). Lehmann (2000) has also observed a substantial degree of autonomy between spouses in rural contexts in Latin America, something that is also likely to apply to marginal urban contexts such as the one studied, where many parents were first generation rural migrants.

wealth ... and to their dismay, parents are beginning to realize that resources invested in the rearing of children do not guarantee an economic return to themselves (LeVine 1993: 179).

In this connection, schooling was frequently referred to by students and parents alike as a form of *inheritance* in the area studied.[19] One father remarked, for instance:

It's the only inheritance you can leave them, studies, well what else? The way things are right now, it's very difficult … it's the only inheritance you can leave your kids at the moment, studies, and once they've finished their studies, whatever they want to study, then they'll have what they need to stand on their own two feet.

This schooling-as-inheritance analogy recurred in further research by the author in low-income *barrios* in Guadalajara, even though the subject of the interviews this time was property inheritance, not schooling. One young father living in a small rental flat (*privada*[20]) in central Guadalajara, struggling to make ends meet, told of his fear that his children would reject him for not being able to leave them a normal, material inheritance. For parents like him, living in extreme hardship, education is the only thing they can claim to be 'leaving' their children, thus hoping to encourage their loyalty and prevent rejection in later life when the tables are turned, and vulnerable, ageing parents need their children's support. He eloquently described an educational inheritance as his key bargaining counter *vis a vis* his children:

Well … my concern as the one responsible for my family … is to do something for them, leave them something … they're on the way up and we're on the way down, so tomorrow or one day soon they'll be up and I'm on my way down and they'll say to me 'You didn't leave me anything! What did you ever do for me?' Lately, that's the way kids are thinking: 'What's my father going to leave me, as my inheritance?' So, as I don't have anything right now, what are they going to do? They're going to be very disappointed with me, they're going to be a bit resentful, they'll hate me, actually … I'd like … well as I don't have anything to leave them, well I'd like to leave them what my father left me, an education … I'd like my son – OK, so he might say 'he isn't going to leave me any land or a house, we don't have anything of our own, but he's leaving me something of my own, my education', right?

The analogy between schooling and inheritance is a formalised expression of the pact between parents and their children whereby the latter are expected to one day 'pay back' their parents' sacrifices in schooling them. Parents thus reshape their legal duty to send their children to school into a *personal* legacy that they hope will secure their children's support and loyalty in the future.

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[19] See Smith and Cheung's (1982) article for a similar idea of schooling as patrimony in the Phiippines; and Berry (1985), whose work on cocoa-growing Yourbá farmers in Nigeria who fund their children's schooling in the hope that they will later assist them in retirement.
[20] A small apartment with shared washing facilities (sometimes also shared bathing and toilet facilities - in this case called a *vecindad*) that typically houses some of the poorest groups in Mexican inner city areas.

But whereas the promise of a concrete, material inheritance such as property or money can be used as a powerful form of control over children (Young 1958; Finch 1989), schooling is a far more risky legacy. Parents cannot keep schooling 'in trust' until children have proved their loyalty by looking after them, as they can with property.[21] Investing in schooling is a leap of faith with an uncertain outcome since children are usually schooled long before they ever have to repay their debt to their parents. Schooling thus constitutes a kind of 'pre-death inheritance' *(herencia en vida)*,[22] a highly risky undertaking since there is no guarantee that children will respect the 'pact' with their parents. In a context such as the one studied, where many parents are too poor to 'leave' their children anything except an education which is officially free, a right and a parental duty, it is all the more important for them to intensify their reminders to their children that they 'owe them' for their schooling.

Schooling may even be seen as potentially undermining children's future sense of obligation towards their parents. Rather than being seen as a safe investment in a parents' futures, schooling can also be perceived a double-edged sword. It can help a young person to 'better herself' (*superarse*) but in the process it can also distance her socially and geographically from her family.[23] One mother described her mixed feelings in connection with her daughter's studies: happiness when she finished her nursing course, but at the same time dread that she might take her diploma and seek work elsewhere instead of continuing to work in her current job near the family home:

> I cried until I couldn't cry any more, I asked the Virgin Mary, I asked her 'Holy Mother, what have you got in store for my daughter? You gave her the intelligence to study, I wish you would make it possible for her to do it' ... Because I don't want my daughter to go looking around far away after she graduates, I want her [the Virgin] to let her stay here, I certainly don't want her looking for work somewhere else.

In this connection, Selby et al.'s (1990: 384) study of low-income urban Mexican families found that the amount of education 'given' by parents was calculated '"strategically", namely, not enough for them to abandon the family in search of work commensurate with their high qualifications, nor low enough for children to think that their parents are exploiting them, depriving them of basic opportunities'. Parents recognise the importance of schooling and they must not lay themselves open to accusations that they are truncating their children's life chances; but at the same time

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[21] For instance, promising to leave their property to the family member who cares for them in old age (Varley and Blasco 1999).

[22] *Herencia en vida* (inheritance of property while the owner is still alive) is a strategy sometimes used by parents in Mexico to save their children the red tape and expense involved in transferring a property to their name after they have died. Although usually done in good faith by the property owner, in our research in low-income areas in Guadalajara we found that this strategy often backfired: we heard of many cases where elderly parents had transferred their property to their children's names whilst they were still alive - and subsequently been turned out onto the street (see Varley and Blasco 1999).

[23] Berry (1985) has also noted the dangers of kin-based strategies for attaining wealth and power. In particular, children's education, since it confers seniority based on personal achievement, can match or surpass that of their elders. Education can, therefore, be the cause of a difference in lifestyle between children and their parents that can jeopardise both established patterns of authority and reciprocity-based strategies.

they cannot afford to fund long courses of study and may be unwilling to risk the distancing process which schooling can set in motion.

Conclusion

The paper argues that in contexts where governments cannot guarantee the social right to schooling, shifting this responsibility to the family is not a viable alternative. The 1993 Education Act presupposes that the right to schooling will be assured through mobilising parents' sense of moral obligation towards their children, but this cannot be guaranteed, particularly given marked differences in mothers' and fathers' attitudes to their children's education. Not only does children's right to schooling then became contingent upon parents' goodwill and economic capabilities, but accountability and 'sanctions' for non-fulfilment of this right also come to be enacted in the realm of the family. Parents can hold schooling hostage to their children's compliance with certain demands, e.g. for good marks and behaviour. In other words, they must 'earn' the right to study. Responsibility for schooling is thus ultimately shifted to children, those least capable of assuring it.

The paper also highlights the potentially exclusionary consequences of prevailing political discourses of participation and 'responsible citizenship'. Once the right to a social right like schooling is articulated in terms of *choices* it becomes fundamentally inequitable, since poorer families often cannot make the 'right' choices, those deemed morally right and conducive to promoting their children's futures. Thus, socioeconomic differences that should be attenuated through the 'equality of abstract rights' which is an integral part of citizenship are, instead, reproduced by these (García Canclini 2001: 15).

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