Transnationality, Translocal Citizenship and Gender Relations: Transformation of Rural Community Organisation, Local Politics and Development[1]

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Transnational Rurality

Rural areas in developing countries are often seen as traditionalist, isolated and backward. This is also the case in Mexican discourses on underdevelopment. Such preconceptions are aggravated where indigenous communities are concerned. In such discourses, the region I am conducing research in, the *Valle del Mezquital*,[2] has been the example par excellence of an underdeveloped region.[3] Due to experiences from other rural areas and especially because of the existence of undocumented labour migration to the USA as a mass phenomenon (cf. Quezada 2004; Serrano 2006) it is obvious that such a vision of the communities studied is erratic, because it is based on a conceptualisation of them as enclosed communities in the sense of social formations "boxed" in territorial containers.[4] The case of the *Valle del Mezquital* is an excellent example to highlight the way in which even, or better said especially, such regions and communities, seen as remote and backward, actually have access to important transnational links. Such communities are able to manage processes of glocalisation (Robertson 1995) employing them as resource for their own reproduction and continuity, thus merging the so called traditional with relatively new elements of social life. Transnationality forms an important dimension of the rural communities and their social organ-

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1   This paper is based on empirical data that I have collected from 2005 during field-work in Mexico as part of my ongoing doctoral project on local political transformation in rural areas. I applied an ethnographic methodology based on the grounded theory and Long´s interface analysis (cf. Glaser/Strauss 1967; Strauss/Corbin 1998; Long 1989, 2005; Long/Long 1992; Arce/Long 2000)

2   This region is part of the state of Hidalgo in central Mexico. It is located about 80 kilometres north of Mexico-City. *Valle del Mezquital* means "Valley of the Mezquite Grove".

isation, giving evidence of how global and local processes are interwoven in the social spaces of these supposedly remote and secluded communities. Furthermore, this everyday transnationality is related to processes of transformation of communitarian self organisation and its internal rules, the so called *usos y costumbres* (ways and customs). Taking into account that the community is an important arena for the negotiation of local politics and development, this social change ultimately relates to transformation in these fields (cf. Besserer 2006; Lisbona 2005; Rescher 2006).

There are only a few studies that put a focus on two important aspects of this kind of community transformation. These elements, in the forefront of the observed change, are the local concept of citizenship (*ciudadania*) and gender issues. Citizenship is a central point in which the transformation of the community organisation becomes visible. This is especially true concerning gender relations (cf. Rivera 2006; Mendoza 1999). Thus, I will discuss more thoroughly the relation between transformation in community organisation and its central elements, gender relations in- and outside the community and, as mentioned before, some links to the fields of local politics and development. My interest in this transformation arises out of its relations to the field of development. Political negotiation, as a facet of multilevel and multilocally negotiated development processes, is especially intriguing. We have to take into account the interwoveness of transnational everyday practices, and corresponding lifeworlds (Schütz/Luckmann 1974), with political aspects at all levels of policy making and political negotiations.

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3   For a long time The *Valle del Mezquital* was seen as marginalised, poor and underdeveloped and it has been the target of a large number of development interventions and experiments of the Mexican state. The reason for this is the fact that, of the regions declared as underdeveloped, it is the closest to Mexico City. Thus, for the members of the urban middle class "poverty" became visible in the region and was considered a source of shame because it is so close to the capital. Nonetheless, since the 1960s, social movements have been active in this region, often drawing on ethnic discourses. The social pressure which manifested itself in those movements was mitigated through developmental programs and projects. For this a specialised organisation, the *Patrimonio Indígena del Valle del Mezquital* (Indigenous Patrimony of the *Valle del Mezquital*), was founded. It was intended to be an institution to represent and assist the rural population. At the same time, according to Mexican paternalistic ideas of politics, this aimed at their cooptation into the political system. The *Valle del Mezquital* eventually gained an image as a region extremely loyal to the (former) state party PRI and most throughly penetrated by clientelistic networks. Even the boundary of the region is related to disputes over development. (cf. Martínez/Sarmiento 1991)

4   According to Pries the term container was first used by Albert Einstein in his criticism of mechanistic visions of space (Pries 2001: 5).

The Case of Doña Clara and Don Raimundo[5]

In my fieldwork I came across the case of two informants that perfectly exemplifies the processes mentioned above. This is the case of Doña Clara and her husband Don Raimundo.

Doña Clara and Don Raimundo are native to El Thonxi a small village in a mountainous part of the *Valle del Mezquital*. Both of them grew up in peasant families and they "own" some land in the local *ejido*[6] along with an amount of small private property. Like most of the couples in the village they based their livelihood on a mix of diverse economic activities among which peasant agriculture, day labour and handicraft were the most important. This kind of market-oriented subsistence economy[7] was amplified when Don Raimundo migrated for the first time to the USA in the early 1990s in search of work. He started to work there in the agricultural sector and later on found a relatively stable, though irregular, job in a bean-packing-plant. Actually, he has been working there for more then ten years and has established a rather good relationship with his boss. During this period Doña Clara began to represent her husband in all domains. In addition to the activities she had been responsible for, she learned to manage the agricultural activities all by herself. She did all of the reproductive work and began to act as a representative of her domestic unit in dealing with the community. Thanks to his situation, Don Raimundo is able to visit his wife and his family without being afraid of losing his employment. These visits take place annually or every two years, mostly in winter, when important local holidays and festivals are held. However since he recently became ill, he is currently back in his village, trying to regain his health.[8]

During his periods of absence in the USA Don Raimundo always remained a full member of the community and was thus treated as a citizen. This meant that he could vote in the village assembly and had to pay financial fees as well as doing his share of

5   The names of persons and villages were changed to allow informants to remain anonymous.

6   *Ejido* is a common form of collective land ownership in Mexico. It was established after the Mexican Revolution and, as there are distinct types of *ejidos,* this does not necessarily imply that all the land belongs to everyone. Instead in this *ejido* it means that every member has got a share of land, but the overall organisation of this shared land ownership is collective. So there is an elected board with a representative, the *comisariado ejidal*, who is the link to institutions of agricultural extension services etc. In these communities the ownership of land is still very important, probably not just in terms of economy but also of identity, as common disputes over land show (in respect to the *ejido* and the relevance of land ownership from an ethnographic perspective cf. Nuijten 1998; for *ejido* in general cf. Eckstein, Florescano, Rivera).

7   Concerning the merging of distinct incomes and economic strategies cf. Evers (1985) and Elwert et. al. (1983) and for subsistence economy as related to market activities see Bennholdt-Thomsen (1984) and Bennholdt-Thomsen/Mies (2000).

8   This pattern of migration is common in the village. So is the fact that most reproductive work having to do with illness and aging is externalised from the productive process in the USA and left to "homestaying" family members in Mexico.

community work. As he is an experienced member of the community he was even elected to community positions during his absence and never lost the esteem of other community members. Correspondingly he and his family always tried to fulfill these duties. Doña Clara and her sons carried out his communitarian labour obligations and represented Don Raimundo in the village's assemblies. His contribution was to send money to pay the communitarian fees. In time, with the migration of the older sons, Doña Clara gradually took over all of her husband's duties and became increasingly experienced and confident in community affairs. The apogee of her engagement was when she stood in for her husband in the fulfilment of his duties as *delegado*, the community's highest authority, an elected office. Although her activity was formally as a substitute for Don Raimundo she was, de facto, the first woman who filled the post of village head. In this function, she acquired more experience, especially on the level of the municipality, a political sphere which was in these days nearly out of the reach of women.

The villagers relate that there were some inconveniences during her administration. They usually expect the *delegado* to "work for the community". This means that at the end of the one year tenure there should be visible changes in the village normally achieved through the realisation of communitarian projects. This idea commonly refers to visible manifestations of progress or development[9] like the construction of new public works and buildings or at least the renewal of previous ones.[10] Obviously, owing to limited material resources, this can not be achieved during every term of office. In general it is important to negotiate with funding institutions, especially the municipality, to gain support for projects. But this implies the support of the community in constructing the image of a well organised group. Doña Clara´s term was probably difficult due to a lack of confidence in her ability by male citizens, resulting in a kind of boycott. As a result she may have gotten less support than usual, in terms of the communitarian work itself or her duties of negotiation with the municipal administration. Nonetheless some people state that even if it was not the best of all tenures at least it was not the worst. But more importantly for our analysis, she insisted on trying to actively fulfil her responsibilities despite many odds and so managed to learn a lot about the modes of communitarian and local politics and was able to make some (personal) contacts in the municipality. After leaving the position she kept her interest in these spheres alive and felt the desire to continue her commitment "in support of her community" as she says. Thus, she started to "lobby" without a mandate on the municipal level. As a result she was elected a substitute counsellor and at present she is trying to collaborate with a NGO. Although several persons have criticised this dedication as a sign of Doña Claudia´s supposed conceit she carries on with determination.

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9   The most common emic expression for or reference to development is "so that the community advances" (*"para que la comunidad avance"*). Whereas the term development (*desarrollo*) is nearly never used.

10 This coincides with the vision of development in various parts of the world. An example is Benin where development is seen as manifested in prestigious buildings, named *réalisations,* which are supposed to exemplify progress irregardless their actual "usefulness", cf. Elwert 1991, 336pp.

In spite of the problems mentioned she can be seen as a pioneer within the community. Nonetheless this does in no way lead to recognition by the community's women. Instead there is a great rivalry among the women of the community and Doña Clara is constantly criticised, stressing the discourse already mentioned. It seems that especially other women consider her to be arrogant and claim that her administration and her commitment led to nothing. This constitutes a very common criticism of women who step out of their supposed domain. This attitude can be analysed as a reflex of the prevailing gender order in the community. Nobody is supposed to leave her social position and to act in violation of local rules.[11] Nonetheless following her term the participation of women as representatives in the assembly and the fulfillment of elected posts gained a different status and was more accepted. Surely, Doña Clara´s tenure served as an example that other women could relate to.

Based on this case I am going to discuss these phenomena in relation to the dimensions of the rural community organisation in the *Valle del Mezquital* mentioned above.

Transnationalised Communities

The rural communities in this Mexican region are characterised by a specific form of social organisation. They are relatively small, of approximately 400 to 1000 inhabitants, and possess several semi-autonomous institutions through which the communities' internal affairs are dealt with. This kind of social organisation is often associated with the indigenous background of its members, although it can also be found in other non-indigenous rural communities. In this case the people belong to the ethnic group Hñähñu. I am going to briefly discuss the migration history of the *Valle del Mezquital* and the communities´ pattern of social self-organisation and then discuss the transformation related to the rise of transnational migration. I will show how the villagers are able to adapt their social organisation, rules and institutions to broader transformation, repositioning themselves in the diverse fields they interact with.

Migration in the *Valle del Mezquital* is relatively new as a mass phenomenon and has recently resulted in undocumented labour migration to the USA. As a consequence, the region has been only lately considered a so-called "expulsing area". Migration research on Mexico still has a strong focus on the supposed 'traditional' migration states, like Oaxaca, Michoacan, Zacatecas and Jalisco.[12] However, there is actually a large history of migration and of translocality in the

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11 Probably some of the women were also envious of the room to manoeuvre that Doña Clara gained and of her achievements.

12 This is reflected in anthologies like Fox/Rivera 2004 and Lanly/Valenzuela 2004. This is certainly owed to their prominence in pioneering studies on transnational migration spanning Mexico and the USA .

state of Hidalgo, especially in the *Valle del Mezquital*. (Martínez/Sarmiento 1991) Starting in the mid 20th century there has been an extended period of internal migration for work in the cities of Mexico as construction workers or housemaids. Everyday life even then seemed to have involved a certain level of translocality.[13] This shows the continuous flexibility and mobility of these rural people in the quest for their livelihoods. Some features of this mobility seem to have been translated to transnational migration. Migration to the USA surged in the 1980s and turned into a mass phenomenon in the 1990s. The actual commitment to this process varies from village to village, but currently all villages of the *Valle del Mezquital* witness considerable migration flows to the USA. In the communities I have studied there is no household without family ties in the USA, mainly in the states of North and South Dakota, Tennessee, Georgia and Florida. A fair amount of migrants were able to benefit from the 1984 amnesty, obtaining legal residence and thus accelerating the process of transnational community building (cf. Álvarez 1995; Schmidt/Crummett 2004).

As a result of the massive migration to the USA, several changes to the social organisation of communities in the *Valle del Mezquital* can be observed. One of the most important is, as in Doña Clara´s case the admittance of women, normally migrants´ spouses, to the community organisation and to formal positions as representatives of their husbands, or sons. This has resulted in an ongoing renegotiation of the community's gender relations leading to internal conflicts but bringing certain gains for some women as I shall discuss later. Transnationalisation is not the sole element in this transformation but it occurs in combination with several others. This shows that the transnational dimension of these communities is, in various ways, strongly related to diverse processes of current social and political transformation.

The key to the local organisation is the emic concept of citizenship (*ciudadania*). This concept is different from the legal and constitutional concept of citizenship, and has a peculiarly local character. Thus, it differs from the concept of transnational citizenship currently discussed in transnationalisation literature (Kivisto/Faist 2007; Smith/Bakker 2008). It is an emic term which makes reference to a social status inside the community which enables different persons to take part in community assemblies, where local affairs are discussed, as voting members. This means that they are enabled to formally take part in the communities' decisions. At the same time citizens have to fulfil collective work obligations in so called *faenas,* and to pay yearly contributions for the community projects. Furthermore citizens are eligible to fill community positions. These in-

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13 In contrast to terms like transnational the term translocal refers to the fact that most social processes are not taking place in reference to a nation but are very localised. Thus the importance of the analysis lies not in the crossing of a national border but more generally in the spanning of social textures between distinct localities, be they border crossing or not (cf. for translocal as analytical category Peleikis 2003; Lachenmann/Dannecker 2008; Burawoy 2000 and for the discussion of locality, Pfaff-Czarnecka 2005).

clude the membership in committees, for example for the water supply, schools and public works, as well as the highest local authority, the *delegado*. He acts as a justice of the peace, forms the link to governmental institutions and is more generally the community representative to the outside world.

In the past citizens were supposed to be representatives of their family in the sense of family patriarchs. According to this conceptualisation, it is still assumed that the supposed "male breadwinner" is the spokesperson of a household. Nonetheless over the last few years the social embodiment of this concept has undergone severe modifications through diverse processes of negotiation, which finally converted it into a kind of transnational citizenship with a strongly gendered background. It is important to note that the transnationalisation of this local concept has only become possible through the commitment of women like Doña Clara in the realm of community organisation.

The weight of transnational citizenship is seen in the continuous reference to the community as a collective and to the ongoing fulfilment of citizen duties, even in cases of migrants who are away from home for years, despite the relatively huge expenses this implies. In a certain way this can be seen as coercion, because those who won't contribute lose all their rights in the community, e.g. to community based services like access to water supply or even the right to be buried in their home village. This shows that identity as a community member is an important aspect as well. No one would ever dare to be excluded beyond death from his village.

Thus another fundamental feature of the community is its importance in the villagers´ identity formation. The community is a we-group in the classic sense (Elwert 1997, 2002). The villagers feel themselves to be part of a certain community, despite all conflicts. It is nearly unimaginable to live outside a community. Certainly there is certain pragmatism about this, as the community is needed for the provision of specific services and for the execution of projects. But deeper than this the community is a social construct every villager can relate him/herself to. This is even true in cases in which some people feel confronted by the community, (temporarily) cease to carry out their duties and speak about the community in an alienated way. In the end, these disputes demonstrate their commitment and their identification with the community. The members feel a strong sense of belonging (Cohen 1982) to this we-group which is reflected in their day-to-day relevance structures. So the rise of a transnational dimension is based on this deep identification with the community, finally enabling it to transform into

a transnational formation.[14] As in every construction of identity the process itself is dynamic and negotiated through self and external ascriptions (cf. Schlee/Werner 1996; Schlee 2002). Through the interactions between the community and the outside world the visions and perceptions of the "indigenous community" are in constant transformation on both sides.

It is noticeable that these communities do not have the kind of migrant associations that a considerable part of the migration and transnationalisation literature concerning Mexico frequently refers to.[15] Neither have the migrants established formal organisations nor have they attempted to create informal equivalents with the goal of developing their communities or municipalities or to influence local and regional politics in their places of origin. This fact is based in the form of social organisation, to which the migrants are attached to. In transnational citizenship especially I see the reason why these types of migrant associations, like hometown associations, have not been developed in these communities. Migrants have to cooperate and their interest in helping and developing their community is thus satisfied, so there is no need for separate organisations. The outcome is a basically transnational community organisation in which so called traditional elements are well adapted to these new circumstances. We can see this phenomenon as exemplifying a strong transnational link between actors in their places of origin and the migrants. This kind of transnational organisation should not be overlooked due to an intense focus on formal migrant institutions. It could be a feature of transnationality as common as formal institutions are.[16] In my cases the relative informality of organisational patterns is essential for transnationality. In contrast to the stereotypic perspective on rural indigenous communities above mentioned, their organisation is very flexible and capable of coping with diverse changes. In this respect, my analysis points to the *"usos y costumbres"* (ways and customs), which are often perceived as traditionalistic, strict and rigid,[17] as being the basis for the communities' flexibility and ability to adapt to new circumstances. They ultimately assure the survival of the villages and of their form of organisation. As a matter of fact, most customs and 'traditional' institutions seen as a legacy of precolonial times, are of relatively recent origin. In

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14 This sense of belonging and the correspondent relevance structures in identity formation are reflected in an often cited anecdote from El Thonxi. One villager was apprehended by the US Immigration Authority. When he was asked about his place of origin for deportation he answered "I am from El Thonxi." "Where is that?" asked the officers. "Next to Iglesia Nueva." the closest village. "And where is that?" "Close to Ixmiquilpan." the regional centre. This went on until the migrant finally said that he was from Mexico, the information the immigration officers were intending to find out. This shows that identity construction is not primarily related to Mexico as nation but to the local community.

15 Examples for this focus on formally established hometown associations are Goldring 2002, 1998 and Lanly/Valenzuela 2004.

16 This aspect will be discussed in detail in my forthcoming dissertation.

17 This vision is, on the one hand, present in some academic work and, on the other hand, in public discourse.

many cases for example, the *faenas* as an institutionalised form of community work, seem to be an recent reinvention of local traditions arisen in response to emerging necessities. This means that the community members have always been flexible enough to adapt themselves and their organisation to external changes. This has always been achieved through the interaction with the "outside". Since even the internal rules are based on constant renegotiations the community actors are able to achieve further transformation through this highly dynamic process. The everyday interactions in- and outside the community are ultimately the basis for the communities´ flexibility.

These communities are basically transnationalised communities. I call them transnationalised in contrast to the concept of transnational community, which refers to broader communities that are formed in the process of transnationalisation (cf. Glick Schiller et al. 1992; Basch et al. 1993; Pries 2008). These consist mainly of transmigrants and persons related to them through regular interaction like their family members and other persons who stay in the places of origin as well as those who live in places of arrival. These formations are located in or encompass transnational social spaces (cf. Pries 1999; Faist 2000) that are plurilocally grounded crossborder social formations. In my cases I refer to already existing communities that developed a transnational dimension mainly through processes of migration and, as a result, became transnationalised. Thus, in this case the transnational space does not encompass the whole of the community but just a facet of it. The transnationalised community can be understood as part of transnational fields (cf. Glick Schiller et al. 1999) to use a more comprehensive concept.

Due to its manifestation of global and local processes this kind of transnationality could be understood as a feature of a world society in an open and inclusive sense. This specific transnational formation is part of larger border crossing societal arrangements. However this example exposes the lack of utility of those world society approaches that are based on systems theory for explaining processes related to (transnational) migration. In that mindset it is frequently assumed that, as Stichweh (2005) states, migration is going to disappear. In this view migration will be superseded by communication technologies because the relevance of face to face communication in social systems is declining. Moreover, supposed global world society structures are seen as influencing local formations. The independence of local formations, like communities, from global ones and their relevance in the shaping of global processes, where local agency is prominent, is deliberately omitted (cf. Lachenmann 2007). My case demonstrates that social formations depend upon a common ground which is constantly reaffirmed and renegotiated through personal interactions, this means by processes which depend upon face to face encounters. Communication technologies are employed in the transnational processes described but they are in no way making personal interactions obsolete. They are just an additional feature of the transnational social space that rather stimulates and assists the physical mobility of per-

sons. In the communities studied, migration and the related symbolic flows are fundamental for the existence of a transnational social formation which can be part of broader global societal formations. Accordingly a world society concept has to take into account the localisation of world society based on encounters of social actors in localised formations. Only in this manner can it embrace significant parts of social realities.

Thus instead of leaving aside the analysis of interactions these should be the focus of study. The best way to analyse the dynamics of such processes is the analysis of the correspondent interfaces in the interactions between different social actors. According to Long, interface

"conveys the idea of some kind of face to face encounter between individuals with differing interests, resources and power. Studies of interface aim to bring out the types of discontinuities that exist and the dynamic and emergent character of the struggles and interactions that take place, showing how actors´ goals, perceptions, values, interests and relationships are reinforced or reshaped by this process" (Arce/Long 1992: 214).

"Such an analysis stresses the reproduction and transformation of social discontinuities inherent in interface encounters [...]" (Long 1992a: 6).

and he states that

"studies of interface should not therefore be restricted to observing what goes on during face-to-face encounters, since these interactions are in part affected by actors, institutional and cultural frameworks, and resources that may not actually be physically or directly present. Hence [...] the analysis should situate these within broader institutional and power fields" (Arce/Long 1992: 214).

Thus, the positions of social actors are never stable but always transformed through interactions. This means that social processes, like in our case, are very dynamic because they are based on interactions forming the foundation for social change. At the same time the interface is just the point where the diverse logics, perspectives and resources of actors based in their specific lifeworlds, become visible. As in the case of transnational formations interfaces have to be analysed within broader fields.

In the case of the transformation of the community organisation an important interface exists between those "staying home", the supposedly less mobile villagers, usually considered equivalent to the community as an institution, and those citizens who have migrated. The main arenas in which the encounters take place are the village assembly and related institutions in the community organisation. I could observe in the assemblies how the logics of the main actors collided. Depending upon the concrete situation, the actors involved were the leaders of the community and its elected authorities, on the one hand, and the migrants or their representatives on the other. There were constant quarrels about the way in which

repercussions of the physical absence of migrants could be remedied, exposing the distinct logics of the actors. Just one example is the migrants´ goal of having more influence over the communitarian processes of decision making. This concern arises basically from the fear of not being taken into account in an appropriate manner and, due to the migrants´ absence, not being able to argue in favour of their families needs. In this their increased self-confidence, owed to experiences, ideas and resources gained in the USA, forms a prominent part of the basis for the resulting interactions. The leaders and authorities, in contrast, are aiming at a smooth governing of the community. They often see themselves as owning the knowledge necessary for guiding village affairs and perceive the migrants´ interventions as perturbing or even as threat to the "ways in which the community should work." Furthermore they are worried about maintaining their position in the internal power arrangements. In the end, this kind of negotiation at interfaces has led to the emergence of the transnational dimension of community organisation in its current pattern.

It is important to stress that the process of transnationalisation has reached impressive dimensions. The case of the village of Barranca Empinada it is especially striking. In a relatively short period this community and its migrants developed nearly the full "set" of features of transnationality, despite its being based mainly on undocumented migration. It can be stated that almost immediately, this community in Mexico has seen migrants as continuously participating in the community. There have never been tendencies towards separation or exclusion. Thus, the transnationalisation of this community took place faster than described for other Mexican cases. But more importantly it took a form of everyday practices of transnationality particular to these communities. Furthermore it has to be stressed that it is basically women´s commitment and dedication to the community organisation that has facilitated the rise of and sustained the transnational dimension. At the core are changes to the ways and customs or better said, everyday practices of construction of citizenship and of the concept of citizenship itself. Thus, it can be affirmed that these rules, like community organisation as a whole, are constantly being renegotiated, which explains their flexible character. In this way transformation is achieved through interaction in a dynamic social field. The communities have developed their own specific transnationality through a dynamic process of interaction with diverse actors and groups. The change in gender relations is a prominent part of this process of transformation as I will analyse in the following.

Change in Gender Relations

Due to the growing incorporation of women into community organisation mainly as representatives of absent migrants, as in Doña Clara's case, spaces like the village assembly or the *faenas*, the community work, form the main arenas in which

the negotiation of gender relations takes place. I am going to analise, as exemplarily, four arenas or sets of interfaces in which negotiations of gender relations take place, sketching briefly the distinct logics involved.

The first arena in which renegotiations occur are the formal public spheres of the communitarian organisation where interactions between participating women and male community members, especially the leaders and authorities, take place. Although the incorporation of women into the community organisation and work is fundamental for the survival of the community and in this sense, especially of the community in its transnational shape, this transformation is not fully accepted and has led to continuous subtle conflicts. In El Thonxi there is constant criticism about the women's participation in *faenas*. It is uttered in comments ranging from the supposed physical inability to do hard work well, accusations concerning their supposed unwillingness to work preferring to gossip, and claims that they don't even know how to do the work.[18] What underlies these statements is a lack of mutual understanding, and up to a certain degree, a wish to discredit women's participation. The same applies to women's position in the community assembly. Here, men's criticism is again that women gossip instead of participating constructively, that they don't pay attention, don't inform their husbands correctly and finally that they don't understand what is being talked about. These reproaches rise partially from a misinterpretation of the fact that some women need explanation or translation of certain aspects, which is given by other women and understood by some men as gossiping. Women who do actively participate in assemblies are criticised for being disrespectful, for criticising the men's proposals and for saying irrelevant things. In consequence, there are regular attempts to limit women's participation. Some *delegados,* for example, tried to forbid female work in the *faenas*, requiring them to pay fees, and the actual *delegado* didn't want to grant representatives of migrants the status of voting members in the assemblies. This never succeeded because women resisted and these restrictions would have ended up putting the community's functioning at risk.

We may see the attempts to restrict women's participation and to reverse their incorporation as a response to a feeling of discomfort and of threat felt by many men. In a certain way, they feel threatened by the growing presence and influence of women, and are afraid that women could start ruling the community. These general and diffuse fears are augmented by community leaders who fear that they could lose part of their power. Accordingly, especially old men and leaders feel that the established order or the customs are threatened. From their perspective, the community is no longer how it should be. And this fear is not just related to the women's participation, but also to a growing influence of male migrants. These attempts at restriction are accompanied and supported by a rising neotraditionalist discourse about community and its institutions, stressing collaboration and harmony as a result of "proper behaviour" in the community, especially concerning the positions of men and women. This is definitely to be seen

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18 Obviously these reproaches stress classic preconceptions about female behaviour.

as a mix of prejudices and fear of losing power and control. It also concurs with statements that express the view that the community is going wrong, that the traditional order is affected, and that the village organisation, which from their perspective 'has been proven to work', should remain unaltered or be reinstated. Certainly, they also feel a risk of the community entering a state in which it would no longer work and thus disappear. For the leaders this involves the danger of losing the basis of their own political activities in the community and party politics. The resistance of women to these manoeuvres is quite inconsistent. Thus this neotraditionalist discourse is regularly supported by women. They often criticise in subtle ways the "inappropiate behaviour" of those women who take part in the community organisation.

In this context, the gendered power texture in the community and its organisation can be analysed where interaction between women is guided by gender rules, or in other words at the interface between different groups of women. Generally in the analysis of the gender relations in the communities it has to be taken into account that they are basically power relations. Nonetheless power should not be understood as something imposed on individuals and groups in an oppressive manner but as constantly constructed and renegotiated through interactions between diverse actors. As Foucault (1982: 225p.) states

"What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms of knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network that runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression."

Furthermore, as Abu-Lughod (1990: 41p.) suggests, power can be detected through the analysis of resistance. As Foucault (1978: 95p.) says

"Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power."

In this sense the ongoing processes of renegotiation of women´s position in the communities points to the transformation of the gendered dimension of power relations. The challenging of established rules, supposedly ancient and traditional, by dedicated women is to be understood as a form of resistance inside the power texture of the community. But this is always related to power itself and in a certain sense implies a certain recognition and legitimation of the power relations themselves, perpetuating power and thus gender relations as a whole. So it is necessary to study in the long term whether or not the change in gender relations is nonetheless leading to a lasting transformation of the local gender orders.

As the example of Doña Clara reveals, women, as part of their involvement in the transnational community, are becoming more experienced in aspects of

community organisation and some have even become politically active at the municipal level. This is in part a result of their involvement in community organisation but also of their increasing work and responsibility in all aspects of social life, in community, household, agriculture and waged labour. It also coincides with the migration experiences that many women have had on their own. Generally, this experience leads them to feel more self-assured and to be more independent, knowing that they can achieve goals by themselves. An important part, as these women often mention, is the feeling of earning their own money in the USA, which makes them more independent and 'equal' to their husbands. This change happens to an extent which leads the female villagers to categorise the older women as "women of the past" and the younger ones as "women of the present". This categorisation encompasses a vision of the younger women as having different values, attitudes and abilities based on their different education and experiences. This difference is marked and can be observed in everyday-life.[19]

In any case, there exists a marked difference between elder and younger women in questions of social control, an interface characterised by discontinuities (Long 1989). The relations of power in the negotiation of women´s positions and the existing ascriptions about what is defined as proper female behaviour imply a strong dimension of social control in the transnationalised community. This kind of control has always been common in the communities as social formations and refers widely to the control of women´s activities. This aspect has gained increasing importance in the realm of transnationality. Because married couples are often separated for long periods of time it is seen as important to assure the „good behaviour" of women by maintaining or even deepening the control over women's day to day activities. This is done especially to lessen the presupposed risk of infidelity. Thus in the transnationalised community the social control of women is stronger than before. It is mainly exerted through the instrumentalisation of gossip and rumour about the attitude of specific women. Actually an important part of the long-distance communication is related to gossiping and false rumours are used to intimidate women and to create an attitude of cautiousness. It is quite common that this social control is exerted through the mothers-in-law. This exemplifies the interface between women in which some uphold and enforce social rules, that are constituted by men as supposedly traditional, thus facilitating the social control of certain other women.

Nonetheless in addition to the upholding of power relations through women there are examples of hidden resistance in the sense of James Scott (1985, 1990). Often a visible subordination to the dominant rules and visions is just a strategy

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19 It is striking that despite categorisation, and the discursive formation of two distinct groups there is no apparent generational conflict, no confrontation, at least among women. They often work together and help each other through well-defined ties of solidarity and reciprocity. Existing conflicts are related more to personal antipathy than to age based othering.

to defend existing particular spaces and room to manoeuvre. This properly describes the daughters-in-law's logic in coping with attempts at control. They cooperate up to a certain limit to avoid problems that could lead to stronger restriction. There are several other points in which this kind of hidden resistance can be seen in women's actions. Thus, Doña Clara almost always speaks Hñähñu, the local language, in the village assembly. Officially she states that this should be normal because they are an indigenous community. Nonetheless she told me that she does this to avoid being cheated by the leaders due to their eloquence in Spanish and to insure that the other women are able to understand the discussion.

There is a further point in which distinct visions of the internal rules of organisation could bring actual transformation to put a strain on the communities. The corresponding interactions take place in a more subtle and discursive way at an underlying all-embracing level in the communities. Although the transformation in the communitarian organisation leads to an increasing degree of incorporation of social groups that were formerly marginalised, it applies almost exclusively to male citizens. It is still very difficult for women to integrate themselves into the arenas in which such negotiations take place, and often they are not fully taken into account. Gender democracy is far from being achieved at all levels. This is especially problematic for the communities themselves, as currently the majority of villagers who go to university are young women receiving financial assistance from their migrant relatives, while young men prefer to migrate and work in the USA before even finishing secondary education. This causes a huge educational gap between younger men and women, but the main problem is that women, as they are not 'citizens', are not politically taken into account in their community. Thus, their potential is not used for the good of the community and in time, these women become alienated. As for the community, it is losing its educational elite in a context in which there are attempts by the leaders to instrumentalise village customs to maintain their position and power.

At the same time the physical mobility of women is seldom recognised in the communities. Even though very many of them actually have extensive migratory experiences, often made on their own, and an important share of the actual migrants in the USA are female, it is continuously assumed that women stay at home or migrate as a mere annex of their husbands and will return to the village after a short while.[20] Thus it is generally supposed that they will be present to cope with all of the responsibilities the migrating men leave behind. This causes problems for those women who live differently and are confronted with assumptions and demands based on this prejudiced attitude. This relates not only to migrants' spouses but also to the women who attend university. As they are not living in conformity with the local conception of a good women's life, especially by

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20 This corresponds to a widely shared view of female migration that fails to recognise women as autonomous and active migrants with their own strategies and objectives. For a discussion of academic blindness in relation to female migrants see Dannecker 2005.

not staying home, their reality is ignored in the communitarian self-organisation. Thus they drop below the authorities' horizon and their abilities are not used to benefit the community.

Looking at a fourth arena we can see that, despite the importance of transnationalisation for the transformation of gender relations in the communities, it is important to have a wider scope of analysis when taking into account other elements fostering their renegotiation. In this way it is possible to study transnationality in terms of the local context and to analyse how it relates to other distinct elements in the processes of transformation. This can be exemplified through the analysis of the community Barranca Empinada. Here the position of at least some women had already changed, mainly due to interaction at interfaces on the meso-level between the community and state institutions. In the 1990s this community had the reputation of being rebellious. This was due to its participation in a social movement which some say actually started in Barranca Empinada. The ground for this movement was a protest against local and regional politics especially concerning the disregard of the communities and the accusation of a clientelistic and unjust allocation of resources and assistance. As a result of these struggles, the autonomous status of the community was strengthened.[21] Although today a majority of the former activists feel that they were misused and their claims instrumentalised by the former leaders of the community and the movement, they seem to have enthusiastically participated at the time.[22] Several women also participated actively in the forefront of marches and other activities during this protest. Some say that this was a strategy by the leaders to draw attention to the mobilisation and to confuse the state forces. But even in that case these women gained experiences in the field of organisation and of local politics. This prepared them in the long run to take a more active and independent part in the community. Thus, this group of women formed part of the pool of persons who were entitled to occupy the most prestigious positions in the community.[23] In the same way they were always present as group in the discussions held to make decisions in the community. Although they were not formally entitled to be voting members their opinion was taken into account. When the community broke up due to its leaders' quarrels and split into two rival groups these women were, on the one hand, blamed for being responsible for the friction and, on the other hand, are frequently asked for supporting one of the sides.

Finally in this year, 2008, the community elected for the first time a *delegación* that is made up solely of women. This is presented as an attempt to overcome the two-year long friction in the community. Although most of these wo-

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21 As mentioned before in this community nearly no interference of governmental actors from any level is accepted and state forces like police and military are not allowed to enter the community without having a permit obtained through the *delegado*.

22 This movement became famous in the region due to several roadblocks and the burning of the regional station of the federal police force.

23 Although none of them had been elected *delegada* before.

men are not formal citizens it appears that they were elected in their own right, this means elected as the persons they are and not as proxies of their husbands. I have come to this conclusion because of the fact that the most active women were already present in the community's organisation. In addition the *delegada* is the daughter of a previous informal leader of the community. That means that these women had to have a proper background and image in respect to organisational experience and their reputation inside the community.[24]

The analysis of this case shows that the involvement of women in arenas and spheres that were formally restricted to or at least mainly occupied by men has been achieved due to a combination of diverse aspects. In this the transformation related to the transnational dimensions of the social formations inside the communities, is not the sole cause although it is often an important aspect. Probably the most important point in reaching this goal of full participation is the continuous activity and insistence of these women. Thus it can be stated that they achieve a higher level of emancipation in this process. But at the same time the foundation for this seems to be really a previous emancipation which is then fostered. However these cases can not be understood as a compelling hint of a change in the gender order that goes beyond a mere change of gender relations in certain cases. Nonetheless an important change is definitively taking place.

Local Politics and Development

It is important to underline that these changes seem to be leading to more general change in various aspects. This transformation can not be discussed here in detail, but I will point briefly to some of them. Apart from the change described in gender relations and the renegotiation of belonging and of local institutions, there is a change going on in the local modes of political negotiation and even in the way state and national projects and programs are implemented. The formation of the transnational space seems to be leading, together with other national and global influences like political disappointments and discourses on democracy, human rights and ethnic identities, to more democracy in the sense of greater access to political decision making. Many persons in the rural communities are becoming increasingly interested in political decisions, starting in the community

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24 Generally women´s position in the communities is also influenced by other aspects like their age or educational background. Elderly women have a distinct position which grants them freedom from certain expectations. They have, for example, more freedom of movement and can drink alcohol in public. Women with a formal education and often working as teachers have always had a distinct position in the community as they are citizens in their own right. This was due to their income but also to a respectful view of them as educated persons. Nonetheless this does not mean that they are fully exempted from rules and attempts at control. However the difference is that they always have been more self assured and devoted more effort to gain recognition by the community.

and reaching other levels. Based on experiences in the USA, a growing educational level and a far better economic situation, village dwellers are not as easy to manipulate as they were before. Many, and because of the concept of citizenship, mainly male migrants, are beginning to get actively involved in community affairs, claiming their right to be taken into account in decisions. This participation quickly leads them to take part in the discussion of aspects concerning the community's relation to various governmental levels and finally, as community representatives, in the corresponding negotiations. In certain cases their position is developing into what Bierschenk, Chauveau and Olivier de Sardan (2003) have conceptualised as one of development brokers. This means that the former community leaders´ supremacy is being challenged, leading in some cases to a rupture and in other cases to the integration of the rising leaders. It can be also widely observed that the former local elites are being displaced or enlarged with migrants and younger professionals who are becoming politically active. As part of this process, a slight change in political logics and modes of negotiation can be observed. An example is the fact that governmental support granted to the community is no longer seen as personalised help in a clientelistic manner. Now, most citizens are aware of the impartial character of these benefits and of their right to receive them. Thus, the logic of clientelistic 'begging' is slowly changing to one of insisting on the right to support from public institutions.

As described before, migration to the USA and the formation of transnational social spaces has led, building upon former experiences of translocality, to the transformation of the communities' self-organisation. It is important to notice that communities' flexibility which I argue to be the basis of their survival despite all changes can even lead to a strengthening of the relative autonomy of the communities. This coincides with change in political logics and modes of negotiation and both processes seem to mutually reinforce each other. As a result of the remittances and local community organisation, which enables the villagers to undertake their own projects, the communities have become more independent of state projects and financing. This leads to a stronger position in negotiations with representatives of the state and its institutions. These villagers are conscious of being able to achieve something on their own and they are aware that the state projects would not work without their collaboration and especially without their financial cooperation. Although in the past, this fact has been neglected in designing their projects, over the last few years, communities are becoming more and more aware of the value of their own work and financial contribution. In consequence, the multitude of self-organised projects have enabled the communities to be more autonomous. They are no longer willing to accept every kind of conditions and "interference" from state institutions in exchange for a kind of assistance which is no longer seen as essential for achieving the development of their communities. At the same time, criticism and distrust of state agents has increased and this reinforces the caution about accepting interference in community affairs. This does not mean that the members of the communities would decline

any kind of assistance. In fact they even ask for it, but basically the basis for the negotiation of benefits has changed. Parting from these interfaces can rise a new vision of the communities with a gradually more inclusive perspective on development.

Nonetheless, up to now state institutions have not nearly taken into account the existence of female migrants and professionals and their participation in the community decision making. So the general underestimation of rural communities is even worse in the case of their female members. The change in women's lives goes practically unnoticed by these institutions. Thus the planning of development programs and concrete projects remains rooted in a kind of artificial blindness to an inadequate image of rural women. If, nevertheless, change is noticed, it is only defined in negative terms, such as family disruption, etc. As a consequence development and social programs heavily emphasise women as being affected by migration, but the projects proposed are not adapted to women's social reality. Therefore, these programs often do not benefit women and even increase their work load as discussed before. This is a common outcome of development programs which are planned on the drawing board with too little contact with, and understanding of, the social reality of beneficiaries´ everyday life. This is the case with several projects in the communities, e.g. the *oportunidades* programs and several projects which were planned to foster the local or "family" economy. Thus, women's work load, which is already increased due to the extra work in household, agriculture and community, is augmented by an extra-amount of communitarian work and of other duties as a result of programs implemented which do not take into account the transnational reality of their lives. A major problem in development planning is that these transnational aspects are not taken into account and therefore the programs and schemes offered do not fit into the social reality of most of the migrants and their family members.

Small Changes – Large Results

As I have analysed in this chapter there are several processes of transformation taking place in the central Mexican rural communities studied. There are changes in the communitarian self organisation and in gender relations and order which are related to transformation in other spheres like (local) politics and development. At a first glance this transformation may be seen as mere processes of emancipation giving rise to a more democratic and egalitarian social organisation. Nonetheless, as I have shown in my analysis, the underlying processes are very complex and diverse and have inconsistent outcomes. Thus certain phenomena concerning gender relations which could be seen as a gain for women in the communities can result in a higher burden and increased social control. For this reason it is important to continue studying the processes related to transnational-

ity taking into account the relation and interwoveness of a variety of dimensions and processes.

The way in which the communities are transformed points to a particular type of transnationality. It is the way in which transnational phenomena are negotiated in those communities. An essential part of this social and political change is based on the activities of women. Nonetheless, instead the gendered dimension of physical mobility and thus of the rising of transnationality in the community organisation and its everyday life is frequently being overlooked. This refers as much to actors in the community itself as to relevant representatives of the state, especially in institutions concerned with development. Thus, even interventions which are meant to "support" women often have a contrary influence increasing their work-burden. It can be stated that the communities can not be simply developed and empowered from the outside. As Long (1992b: 275p.) shows, precisely the dynamics at the interfaces hinder such an emancipation driven from the outside. Such a deeper social change has to build on processes taking place inside the communities, gaining importance in interactions with (institutional) actors from the outside. As I have shown this is the case of the actual transformation that has led to a change of gender order, mainly due to the access to formerly restricted spaces. What is actually causing the problems discussed for the women actively engaged in community organisation and politics is the fact that their commitment is seldom formalised. As in the case of being informal proxies to their spouses, there exists no official manner of taking part in the relevant activities. A recognition of their commitment with a relative formalisation (at the community level) would enable them to combine their numerous duties and activities without being overloaded.[25] Up to now a subtle but considerable change in the gender order has taken place, not only due to transnationalisation but also to the growing education and formal employment of women. As I have shown this process is not just restricted to the communitarian level but reaches other spheres and levels as in the case of local politics. This exemplifies the opportunities for sustainable change through the interrelation with diverse processes of transformation.

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25 This has already been achieved in few cases where couples have rearranged their duties. Thus when the husband is in the village they attend jointly the village assembly. These men state that the wife is better informed and more experienced in issues of community organisation. This happened with Doña Clara and Don Raimundo. Officially he is still the citizen but, de facto, the community considers her as a citizen.

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