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Immigration status as a form of identity formation among Mexican immigrants

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**IMMIGRATION STATUS AS A FORM OF IDENTITY FORMATION
AMONG MEXICAN IMMIGRANTS**

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Sociology

San José State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

By

Hortencia Jiménez

December 2004

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ABSTRACT

IMMIGRATION STATUS AS A FORM OF IDENTITY FORMATION AMONG MEXICAN IMMIGRANTS

By Hortencia Jiménez

This thesis examines immigration status as a form of identity formation focusing on undocumented Mexican immigrants, permanent residents, and naturalized US citizens. This thesis explains how illegal and legal status differently shape Mexican immigrants who negotiate and re-define their identity in the midst of migrating, settling, and becoming politically active in San José. Research is drawn from two grassroots groups working with Latino immigrant families. Mexican immigrant identities were conceptualized using the theoretical framework of cultural citizenship, which focuses on how immigrants use cultural expressions to claim political rights and at the same time maintain to their national identity.

Data was collected from in-depth open-ended interviews with twenty Mexican female and male immigrants who are politically involved in the community. This study reveals that immigrant status plays a powerful role in relation to passage and settlement to the US. It also reveals how immigrants develop a critical consciousness stemming from cultural citizenship.

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I would like to thank GOD for giving me such a precious life and a wonderful family. I want to thank my family for their sacrifice, unconditional support, and love throughout the years. I love all of you very much and feel proud to have you as my family.

I want to thank my research participants for allowing me into their homes, and sharing from their hearts their stories. It was an honor to listen and learn from each participant. They remind me of the reason why I chose to pursue my career in sociology and conduct research on Latino immigrants.

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DEDICATION

Dios me ha dado una maravillosa familia que con su sacrificio y amor yo hoy día he podido completar mi maestria. Gracias a mi madre por haberme dado la vida y por su amor incondicional y sacrificio. A mi abuelita y tia por todo el apoyo que me han brindado, por su amor, y sacrificio. Las quiero mucho y estoy muy agradecida con ustedes. A cada una de mis hermanas: Norma, Mayra, Patricia, y Eva, gracias por su amor, palabras de aliento, y sobre todo por ser mi inspiración y ejemplo. Ustedes me inspiran hacer como ustedes; como una mujer fuerte, con fortaleza y tenacidad. A toda la demas de mi familia, gracias por su apoyo. A todos y todas ustedes con todo mi amor y sacrificio les dedico mi maestria y tesis. Los amo mucho. Que Dios los bendiga

I would like to dedicate my accomplishments and my master's degree to my family who made this possible. I am very proud of you and love all of you very much. God bless you.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This research seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the realities of Mexican immigrant men and women in San José, California, as they negotiate and re-define their identity in the midst of migrating, settling, and becoming politically active. This qualitative study was designed for in-depth investigation of the complexities and social experiences of these immigrants.

This research discusses the transformation of identity that immigrant women and men go through from objects of structural forces to political actors. This transformation is characterized by the development of a critical consciousness. This critical consciousness does not arise as immigrants cross the border and settle; it is acquired through an elaborate process, which this study will reveal. This is particularly apparent among immigrant women. Many women come to think differently not just about life as an immigrant, but also life as a woman. This particular finding is significant, given the scant literature on immigration and gender.

My interest in this research reflects a personal journey. I was born and raised for the first five years in Nayarit, México, until I migrated to Watsonville,¹ California in 1986. Watsonville is primarily an agricultural town with a large percentage of Mexicans

¹In the 1960s Watsonville supplied half of the nation's frozen broccoli, brussels sprouts, cauliflower, spinach, strawberries (Bardacke 1988) and with eight frozen food plants became known as the Frozen Food Capital of the World (Flores and Benmayor 1997: 215).

involved in agricultural work. During the hot summers of my childhood, I worked in the fields with my paternal grandmother.

Given the agricultural and demographic context of Watsonville, I never came to think of my own identity as an immigrant. I lived within a predominantly Mexican immigrant community, where most people were immigrants and most labored in the fields. However, with my academic training in sociology both as an undergraduate and graduate student and through my work experience in the immigrant rights movement, I began to identify myself as an immigrant.

Immigration research in San José, California

The City of San José within Santa Clara County is considered a major immigrant-receiving county. About “one third of the county’s 1.7 million residents are immigrants”. Santa Clara County is ranked the third county in California with the highest population of immigrants (Castellanos et al 2000).

The scant literature regarding Mexican immigrants and their political participation in San José, California led to the need to further explore this area. Pitti (2003) is one of the few scholars who provides a detailed historical analysis of the city of San José from the late eighteenth century to late twentieth century. He pays particular attention to Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants who laid the foundation of the City of San José. As Pitti (2003:3) notes:

migration has been a dynamic force in the Valley, a social process that shaped imperial institutions, native resistance, working-class political activism, and new forms of cultural politics over generations.

Although Pitti provides a fine historical account of how Mexican Americans in San José revolutionized the region, little reference is made to the demographic shifts of immigrants that are transforming contemporary San José and Santa Clara County.

Demographic shifts and immigrants' contributions in San José and Santa Clara County is partially captured in the "Summit on Immigrant Needs and Contributions" by the office of Human Relations of Santa Clara County. Hobbs et al (2000) point out the demographics, highlights immigrants' contribution, and lists the five largest immigrant populations in Santa Clara County. Similar research is found in the handbook on "Knowledge of Immigrant Nationalities in Santa Clara County" by Castellanos et al (2001). Castellanos et al (2001) examines the sixteen largest immigrant communities and their needs. Both of the research mentioned is limited because it is based on descriptive accounts that simply report and identify changes in immigrant communities with little in depth investigation. This thesis adds a new dimension to this research through a qualitative analysis that takes into account the lived experiences of Mexican immigrants who are politically active in San José.

Chapter 1 addresses the current literature on immigration highlighting research on Mexican immigrants. Chapter 2 discusses the methods used and addresses how interviewees were selected, as well as reviews issues concerning transcribing, translating, and data analysis. Chapter 3 examines immigrants' reasons for immigrating, the conditions in which they immigrated, and the challenges they faced in settling in San

José. Chapter 4 focuses on the role played by two grassroots organizations in creating a politically active community. Moreover, Chapter 4 examines the services and leadership skills that immigrants acquire from both organizations. Chapter 5 highlights the findings and delineates how immigrants acquire a critical consciousness that leads to a political immigrant identity. A discussion suggesting future research direction is included.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section examines existing literature on Mexican immigration in relation to transnational migration, assimilation, gender, civic participation, and cultural citizenship. It is not within the scope of this research to delineate the historical waves of immigration to the US, since much has already been written on this topic (Bennett 1963; Brown; 1969; Gjerde; 1998; Bischoff 2002). Instead, the researcher will provide a brief historical context of the different pathways of immigration with particular attention to Mexican migration to the US. The purpose is to illustrate the diverse experiences among Mexican immigrants when compared to immigrant groups from other countries.

Mexican immigration to the US has a long history from the beginning of the nineteenth century. Cardoso (1980) delineates the waves of Mexican immigration to the US from the 1890s and mid 1900s. He points out that during the Porfirio Diaz regime (1876-1911) there was an influx of Mexican immigrants coming to the US. This was due to a series of land reforms that displaced many rural Mexicans, depriving them of land that was rightfully their own. Mexican immigration was further stimulated by economic

opportunities in the southwest, as opportunities to work in the railroads and mines were abundant. Cardoso (1980: 365) points out that “these patterns of employment, settlement, and attitudes had established a system of immigration.” The Mexican revolution of 1910 also increased the flow of Mexican immigration. Approximately 1,000,000 Mexican immigrants immigrated to the US (Cardoso 1980). The desire of employers for cheap labor and the labor shortage associated with World War I were also key factors that encouraged Mexican immigration (Barrera 1979).

During the economic depression of the 1930s, anti-immigrant sentiment increased and unemployment rose, causing many people to blame Mexicans for taking the jobs away from US citizens. As a result thousands of people of Mexican descent were repatriated and/or deported to Mexico. However, once again, World War II brought a new demand for labor. Mexican immigration was further stimulated as a result of the emergency farm labor program, known as the Bracero Program² (Salomon 1997). The Bracero Program lasted from 1942 to 1964, providing Mexicans temporary work visas and the US cheap labor. As the US economy improved, repatriation was introduced with Operation Wetback of 1954. Operation Wetback repatriated thousands of undocumented Mexican workers to México (Meier and Ribera, 1993). The Bracero Program institutionalized a temporary migration pattern for Mexican immigrants where many undocumented immigrants entered the US for temporary work (Roberts et al, 1999). This labor migration provided Mexican immigrants the money and moral support to sustain their families back home (Portes et al., 1999). By the time the Bracero Program ended in

² Braceros were Mexican nationals recruited from 1942 to 1964 as temporary workers, mostly in agriculture.

1964, “4.5 million Mexicans had worked as braceros” (Fletcher, 1997: 36) and about five million Mexicans entered illegally to meet the US shortage demands (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994).

During the 1960s Mexican immigration continued despite repatriation and deportation, but this time it was characterized by a greater representation of women, children, and families (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994). Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) points out that the influx of women and families resulted in the establishment of permanent settlement for many Mexican immigrants.

Legislation in 1965 led to a second wave of large-scale immigration from Mexico and Latin America. These post 1965 immigrants are referred by scholars as “new immigrants” mainly coming from countries in Latin America, the Caribbean, and Asia (cited in Suarez-Orozco 1998). Immigrants tend to be non-white and non-English-speaking, as in the case of the Mexican immigrants in this thesis research.

While Mexican immigration has played an important role in bolstering the US economy, deep anti-immigrant and nativist sentiment has often prevailed. Throughout the 1960s, 1970s and mid-1980s, Mexican immigrants continued to be scapegoated, seen as a threat to the public, and blamed for the nations’ social problems. In 1986 Congress passed the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA). The purpose of IRCA was to reduce undocumented immigration by imposing employer sanctions against employers who knowingly hired undocumented immigrants. IRCA also provided thousands of undocumented Mexican immigrants with amnesty (Ochoa, 2004).

Mexican immigration to the US has historically been characterized by patterns of labor exploitation, recruitment, deportation, and anti-immigrant sentiment. The experiences of Mexican immigrants have been difficult. In the midst of this, Mexican immigrants have often maintained ties with their families in their home country either by returning for home visits, settling, sending remittances, or helping family members to immigrate.

Transnationalism

This back and forth movement is known as transnational migration - the physical movement of immigrants who participate on a routine basis in two nations. Immigrants who follow such patterns are called “transmigrants,” since they maintain multiple relationships; familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, and political that span the borders of nation states (Basch, Glick-Schiller and Blanc-Szanton 1992). Yet there are inconsistencies in the research area of transnationalism. For example, some scholars view this as a recent phenomenon while others trace it as early as labor immigration (Portes, Guarnizo, and Landolt 1999). Portes and colleagues (1999) point to the historical precedents of contemporary transnationalism by providing several examples of economic and political transnationalism with particular attention to “trade diasporas”. Trade diasporas were merchants who settled in foreign jurisdictions to engage in commerce. They were considered transnational immigrants because they traveled back and forth for commercial reasons and maintained their separate identity as members of a trading diaspora. This can be traced with early European immigrants such as the

Portuguese, Dutch, and English during the European colonization of Africa and the Americas (Portes et al 1999).

There is ample research on transnational migration. Much of this research has focused on the maintenance of immigrants' ties to their place of origin, the remittances they send, and their participation in hometown or home state associations (Basch et al. 1992; Goldring 1998; Rouse 1991). For instance, Goldring (1998) looks at social relationships as a way to explore immigrants' transnational practices. As immigrants participate in these transnational practices they are extending their social and political capital, but also challenging existing hierarchies of power and status (Goldring 1998). Goldring's research focuses in the state of Zacatecas, Mexico and California. She argues that the immigrants' home country provide a spatial context within transnational communities for making claims to and valorizing social status. Moreover, Goldring (1998) indicates that immigrants are reorienting regimes of stratification because power that is traditionally not available to immigrants in the US is available through hometown associations where they participate in projects that benefit their communities of origin and make decisions. In this process, Mexican immigrants in hometown associations are creating alternative power hierarchies (Goldring 1998: 169).

In their study of Salvadoran immigrants, Landolt and colleagues (1999) focus on Salvadoran immigrants who entered the country in the 1980s as a result of the war in El Salvador. They argue that Salvadoran immigrants tended to establish transnational ties due to a combination of economic, political, and legal conditions both in the US and El Salvador. For example, Salvadoran immigrants sent remittances, made periodic phone

calls and sometimes visited their family members in El Salvador. Landolt and colleagues (1999) argue that transnational ties were possible due to the war conditions that forced Salvadoran immigrants to leave.

The study of Smith (1998) of villagers from Puebla, México living in Brooklyn, New York, examines how Ticuanese immigrants both in Puebla, México, and in the US negotiate limits of boundaries and engage in a transnational life. Smith (1998) focuses on the fundraising activities of this transnational community in an effort to improve village conditions, such as the installment of a sewage system. These studies challenge the long held orthodoxy that once immigrants enter the host country they forgo ties with their country of origin. This will be investigated in the next section.

Mexican immigrants³ have historically been involved in transnational migration. The immigrants in this thesis research are also characterized as transnational migrants because even though they live in and work in the US, they make periodic home visits to México, sometimes staying as long as three months to a year and have regular communication via telephone.

Assimilation/Race and Ethnicity

Early literature on immigration assumed that once newcomers arrived and settled in the host society would undergo a gradual but inevitable process of assimilation (Alba 1985; Alba & Nee 1997; Gordon 1964). Assimilation is characterized as the integration

³ Not all immigrants have been transmigrants. For example the Irish came to stay in the US in the 1840s and never returned home.

of immigrants into US society where immigrants acquire “English language and middle-class, Anglo-American values and traditions” (Ochoa 2004: 18).

The understanding of assimilation is traced to the early work of Horace Kallen⁴, who introduced the concept of cultural pluralism and later by Robert E. Park in the 1920s in the Chicago School with the ethnic paradigm on assimilation (McKee, 1993). Both challenged the pre-existing biological paradigm of social darwinism that had prevailed in studying ethnicity. Social Darwinism used biology and biological arguments to explain the struggles of assimilation. Early proponents of the ethnicity theory indicated that race was a social category, and sought to document the role race and ethnicity played in the social life of immigrants. Park (1950) counted the prevailing biological arguments in his race relations cycle by noting the social experiences that individuals go through; contact, competition, accommodation, and eventual assimilation. As Park (1950: 150) noted:

Customs regulations, immigration restrictions and racial barriers may slacken the tempo of the movement; may perhaps halt it altogether for a time; but cannot change its direction; cannot at any rate, reverse it”.

These models of straight-line assimilation as Carola Suarez-Orozco (2002: 304) points out “assumed that the goal was for immigrants to disappear into the mainstream within a couple of generations.” Research on Mexican immigrant assimilation often assumed that Mexicans like many Eastern European immigrants gradually assimilated into the dominant US society. Suarez-Orozco (2002) points out that assimilation for many European immigrants was possible because they changed their names and lost their accent but not for Latinos who live in a race conscious society. As Popkin (1999: 268)

⁴ Anthropologist Franz Boas was also arguing against the biological paradigm of social darwinism in his research on immigrants to the US in the early twentieth century.

indicates “immigrants rarely abandon their culture and language to embrace that of the United States, challenging predictions of assimilationist models of migration.”

Current research has gradually recognized the limits of the assimilation paradigm arguing that it tends to blame immigrants for not assimilating into the dominant society. The assimilation paradigm has been challenged by power conflict theorists who provide class and nation base analysis for understanding race/ethnic relations. A power conflict perspective “emphasizes the impacts of historical events, structural factors, and dominant ideologies that emerge throughout time and remain significant today”(Ochoa 2004:24). Since people of Mexican descent have a history of conquest, patterns of exploitation, deportation, discrimination, and protest, a power conflict perspective is particularly appropriate.

This thesis research challenges the traditional paradigm of assimilation that emphasizes the loss of cultural ties to homeland as new immigrants are incorporated into society. In the case of this thesis research, Mexican immigrants became incorporated into US society through their participation in two grassroots groups where they affirmed their identity as legal or undocumented immigrants. By becoming politically active, Mexican immigrants hold on to their national identity, culture, and values, while claiming basic rights. They did not loose their native language and tradition as the assimilation perspective suggests.

Theoretical Frameworks of Immigration

Two theoretical frameworks dominate the study of immigration research: the orthodox equilibrium perspective, and the macro-structural approach. The orthodox equilibrium perspective developed by Lee (1966) focuses on the individual migrant's decision to migrate. This is indicated by the well-known "push" and "pull" factors for migration that act to hold and attract people within the area or repel people. The "push" factors are associated with the area of origin and the "pull" factors are associated with the area of destination. Although Lee provides one of the most well developed theories of migration, his perspective overlooks the broader structures that force immigrants to migrate. That is, Lee's focus is on the self-driving immigrant whose motive to migrate is based on economic factors. Immanuel Wallerstein's (2000) world system theory is helpful in understanding migration in the context of changing global, economic and political relations between advanced core nations (often colonial powers), semi-periphery host nations (often former colonies), and nations at the periphery from which immigrants generally come from.

Macro-structural approaches focus on the structural and historical factors that shape the reasons for migration and the experiences of immigrants. This approach argues that periphery countries supply labor to the developed industrialized countries who benefit from cheap labor (Pedraza, 1991). On a similar note, Manuel Castells (1975) argues that sending countries that provide immigrant labor benefit the advanced capitalist countries. Portes (1978: 47) similarly argues that the structure of economic forces in the

core, condition migrants in the periphery “to sell their labor in places where needed and at the cheapest possible price.”

Although this approach was developed to improve the previous equilibrium orthodox perspective it too has weaknesses. As Pedraza (1991: 308) points out, “it has a tendency to obliterate people, to lose sight of the individual migrants who do make decisions.” Immigrants should be seen as social actors who respond to structural transformations, and who have the power to decide to migrate or not. This thesis research intends to bridge this perspective by attending to the structural factors without losing sight of immigrants’ passage and settlement to the US. That is, this research examines the political, economic, and social structures that force immigrants to migrate, but also examines how immigrants make sense of these structures in their struggle to immigrate and settle in the US.

Gender in Immigration Research

Research that focuses on Latin America, the Caribbean, and Asia is a rapidly growing area in immigration studies. However, research on immigrant women has been largely overlooked. Most of the literature on immigration has tended to focus on men. E.G. Ravenstein (1885: 196), the pioneer theorist on international migration, noted that “woman is a greater migrant than man,” highlighting that women in immigration research were equally if not more important as men. Despite this call, many researchers continued to almost exclusively neglect the role of women and focused on men. Kofman (1999: 271) indicates “the image of the adventuresome male seeking new opportunities abroad,

joined later by a wife and family or returning to hearth and home with cash in hand still pervades the male bias of research.” This bias serves to reinforce gender stereotypes particularly those of women who are seen as objects, passive followers, dependents, and without agency. This obscures the images of many strong, courageous, intelligent, and self determined immigrant women who leave their country (often with their children) to journey foreign lands. This was the case for several immigrant women in this thesis research. Most immigration literature has also neglected to analyze gender as a central theme. Only recently have there been attempts to redress the scant body of research on women and immigration (Pedraza 1991; Tienda and Booth 1991, Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994).

Prior research on immigration treated sex as a variable and added it to the list of other variables to be examined. Sex is used to refer to a person’s biological maleness or femaleness. Gender, on the other hand is more complex “involving the psychological, social, and cultural systems organizing men and women’s lives differently and unequally” (Newman 2000: 127). The social experiences of men and women cannot be explained solely by the biological differences (Lips 1993). Sex is more than a variable to be examined. As Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994:3) indicates:

Gender is not simply a variable to be measured, but a set of social relations that organize immigration patters. The task, then, is not simply to document or highlight the presence of undocumented women who have settled in the U.S., or to ask the same questions of immigrant women that are asked of immigrant men, but to begin with an examination of how gender relations facilitate or constrain both women’s and men’s immigration and settlement.

Hondagneu-Sotelo (2003) provides an analysis on the ways in which gender has been analyzed in immigration research. She indicates that over the last three decades,

three waves of immigration research and gender have developed. The first stage was during the 1970s and early 1980s, in which gender was treated as a variable. The second wave emerged during the 1980s and 1990s, in which gender was analyzed as a set of social practices shaping and shaped by immigration. This wave focused on “the gendering of migration patterns and how migration reconfigures new systems of gender inequality for women and men” (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2003: 7). In addition, this wave of research analyzed the ways in which men’s lives were constrained and contested as “immigrant women enhance their social status through employment, social network resources, or new interactions with social institutions” (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2003: 8). This is particularly relevant and significant in my thesis research where immigrant women enhance their social status and redefine their identity from objects to political actors. Immigrant women engage in political activism, develop community networks, and draw family members into the process. The third wave examines gender as the center element and how “it permeates at every level of immigration” (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2003: 9). Gender is no longer treated as a variable, but an integral part of the daily operation of the social structure, that organizes and reshapes “immigration practices, beliefs, and institutions” (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2003: 9).

The aforementioned research examined how gender has been overlooked in immigration research up until the 1970s. Moreover, research regarding immigrant women and domestic violence has received little attention. This is meaningful because it emerged as a central reason for immigrating among the Mexican immigrant women in

this thesis research. This is meaningful and important because it shapes immigrant women's experience when settling in the US.

Menjívar and Saucedo (2002) indicate that more scholarly attention and research needs to focus on the relationship of women's migration experience and domestic violence. Menjívar and Saucedo (2002) further point out that most of the research concerning immigrant women has focused on their labor participation, the number of women migrating to the US and worldwide (Menjívar 2002: 899). Menjívar and Saucedo recommend that research linking domestic violence and immigration should be made. This thesis research addresses this in Chapter Three where gender becomes meaningful for Mexican immigrant women's decision to migrate and the challenges they face in settling in the US.

Cultural Citizenship

Historically, electoral participation has been limited only to citizens, excluding non-citizens. However, non-citizens like many undocumented Mexican immigrants engage in other forms of political participation at a grassroots level by lobbying, organizing, and so forth. Desipio and De la Garza (2002) indicate that many naturalized Latinos face many of the same barriers that US born Latinos face because they are not familiar with the US political system and process. Organizations play an important role in mobilizing citizens and non-citizens to engage in political participation. This is particularly apparent in this thesis research where two grassroots organizations play a pivotal role in educating immigrants. Political participation can be broadly defined as

“signing a petition, writing a letter to a public official, and attending a public meeting” (Montoya 2002: 410).

An area of particular interest among researchers is the way in which immigrants participate civically. Much research has made the claim that Latino immigrants are civically disengaged because they tend to be under-represented in electoral politics. The cultural citizenship model proposed by Flores and colleagues (1997) challenges this, arguing that Latinos engage politically in multiple ways even when they don’t have voting power. This framework referred as cultural citizenship is particularly useful in this thesis research because it provides opportunities to examine how immigrants participate in political processes and how their immigrant experience shape political participation.

Cultural citizenship offers an alternative perspective in understanding the complex processes that result in civic participation and the political claims by marginalized groups, such as Mexican immigrants. Flores and colleagues (1997: 262) term cultural citizenship as:

a broad range of activities of everyday life through which Latinos and other groups claim space in society, define their communities, and claim rights. It involves the right to retain difference, while also attaining membership in society.

Drawing on this framework, Lepofsky and Fraser (2003) indicate that people use their culture and cultural struggles to claim their rights. In the process of claiming space and rights, immigrants also engage in struggles for self-definition, affirmation, entitlement, and empowerment. This is examined in depth in Chapter Four where Mexican immigrants who are involved in two community grassroots groups claim rights

within the context of legal citizenship. Particular attention is placed in the ways in which Mexican immigrants affirm their identities as entitled to civil rights and social health services through their political participation.

Civic Voluntarism Model

Both Mexican immigrant men and women, undocumented, and naturalized, engage in various political activities. Montoya (2002) indicates that the more resources an individual has the more he/she is likely to participate. Verba and colleagues (1995) developed the Civic Voluntarism Model that consists of resources, engagement, and recruitment that help explain political participation. Resources refer to time, money, and civic skills. Engagement refers to the individual's decision to participate. Recruitment refers to the various ways in which individuals are asked to participate, through church, work, organizations, friends, etc.

The Civic Voluntarism model is useful in understanding Mexican immigrants in this thesis study and their civic participation in the community. Both grassroots organizations in this study are organized around this civic voluntarism model. That is, both organizations provide Mexican immigrants: information, leadership skills, and new social networks. This ultimately leads immigrants to become civically involved and develop a new identity that is characterized by their political participation.

Elaborating on Rosaldo and Flores (1997) research on Mexican immigrants in San José, this thesis researcher examines how both Mexican male and female immigrants, undocumented and permanent residents with diverse class, age, immigration status,

religion, educational backgrounds make sense of their identities in the context of their journey, settlement, and political participation in San José, California.

This study of Mexican immigrants contributes to the existing literature in several realms. It shows that immigrants in this study are characterized transnationally because they make periodic home visits to Mexico, staying as long as three months to as much as a year. This study also challenges the traditional paradigm of assimilation and shows how Mexican immigrants affirm their immigrant identity by holding to their culture, values, and beliefs as they become politically active. Moreover, this study also bridges the macro-structural approaches for migration by attending to the structural factors without losing sight of immigrants' passage and settlement to the US. Highly important is how this research contributes a richer examination of gender, particularly immigrant women.

CHAPTER

METHODS

This study is based upon data gathered from twenty in-depth interviews conducted with eight Mexican immigrant men, ten Mexican immigrant women, and two immigrant men from El Salvador, all of whom reside in San José, California. The decision to focus on Mexican immigrants rather than Central and South American immigrants stem from the researchers interest in a deeper understanding of the triumphs and travails of one particular group as they migrate and settle in the US. Another reason is that the leading countries of origin of Latino immigrants in Santa Clara County are from México (Castellanos et al 2000). Thus, the narratives highlighted in this thesis center on Mexican immigrants.

The eighteen Mexican immigrants interviewed represent a diverse group in themselves. They differ in terms of age, level of education, religion, occupation, and immigration status. Their ages range from twenty four to sixty three years. All interviewees are Christian, mainly Catholic. All are employed and largely concentrated in construction, janitorial, restaurant, and home care industries. All are from México, mainly from Puebla, Michoacán, Nayarit, and México City. Three are employed in managerial and professional occupations, one is an administrative assistant, another a teacher, and one is a program director for a non-profit organization. Five are naturalized US citizens, six are permanent residents, and nine are undocumented. With respect to education, nine completed elementary school and eleven either completed high school or

earned a bachelors degree. Mostly permanent and undocumented women had advanced degrees or high school equivalent.

Interviews were conducted during a seven-month period. The interviews were face-to face interviews without the presence of others⁵ except for one interview.

Participants were selected from two community grassroots groups: *Unidos X la Justicia* and *Mujeres Fuertes*⁶. These groups are considered grassroots groups because they are composed of ordinary people as opposed to corporations or government bureaucracies. Their funding comes from private foundations, the county, and state funds. Both of these organizations focus on pressing issues that affect disempowered and marginalized individuals. The goal of these grassroots groups is to fight for social justice and institutional change to benefit immigrants and ultimately society at large.

The researcher's prior work experience at Immigrant Voice⁷ brought her into close contact with these groups on a day-to-day basis. The researcher was able to make appropriate interviewee selection because immigrants in both of these groups were Mexican immigrants who were politically active. Both groups were diverse with regard to immigration status. Both groups had male and female immigrants from diverse social class, age, and educational backgrounds.

Each interview lasted between one and two hours. In all instances participants appeared eager to share their stories, perhaps because they saw this as an opportunity to

⁵ In this instance the husband of one of the female interviewees was sitting beside her. His presence appeared to make her nervous. She seemed insecure when responding to the researcher's questions because in prior contact with the research she appeared comfortable and secure about herself. This may have affected the reliability of the interview with this particular subject.

⁶ Both community groups have been given pseudonyms to ensure the confidentiality of its members.

⁷ This organization also has been given a pseudonym to ensure that both community grassroots are not identified and to ensure confidentiality.

educate non-immigrants about the struggles they face in the US. Most interviews took place in the immigrant's home; three immigrants were interviewed in the office of *Unidos X la Justicia* and one immigrant was interviewed in a restaurant.

All interviews were conducted in Spanish given that the researcher was bilingual and bi-literate. More than half of the immigrants were monolingual Spanish speakers and the others preferred and felt comfortable to speak in Spanish. Speaking in their native language, immigrants were able to express and provide better accounts of their life, realities, and experiences as immigrants in the United States.

Interviews were semi-structured allowing the researcher to probe appropriately. Questions were open-ended, which allowed participants the freedom to speak freely about events that were meaningful and private to them (Emerson et al 1995). The researcher began to ask questions that allowed immigrants to talk in broad terms about their experiences. Specifically, the researcher asked a series of open-ended questions: Why did you come to the US? How long have you been in the US? What challenges have you faced now? How and why did you become politically active? This approach to interviewing is guided by “grounded theory” (Strauss and Corbin 1990), which aims to uncover layers of social meaning by allowing themes relevant to the participants to emerge. This inductive method of investigating contrasts with deductive approaches, which work with pre-established categories of analysis.

The interviews were transcribed in Spanish; quotations used throughout this text are also in Spanish. Emerson et al (1995: 9) point out that “a transcript is never a verbatim rendering of discourse because it represents...an analytic interpretation and

selection of speech and action.” Transcribing an interview is complex involving constant analysis and interpretation. The researcher must make the decisions on when to punctuate, when to indicate a complete a sentence, and what words and grammar to use. In the process of translating the original transcript the essence of the interview can be lost. The researcher made the decision to present data in Spanish and English in order to best capture the essence of each interview and to place the immigrants’ voices at the center of this study.

Coding

In coding the data, the researcher followed a model of analytical induction. As is the tradition of qualitative research, coding involves “bringing together and analyzing all the data on major themes, ideas, concepts, interpretations, and propositions” (Taylor & Bogdan 1984:150). To open the inquiry, the researcher began with an open reading, identifying initial codes; generating a wide range of codes. The codes that were more recurring across interviews became the core codes. After identifying core codes, the researcher underwent a careful line-by-line reading with the aim of identifying additional instances and variations of the core codes. This gave way to various sub-codes and in some instances generated new core codes. The core codes served as the basis of this analysis.

This research seeks to provide a better understanding of the realities Mexican immigrant men and women in San José, who negotiate and re-define their identity in the midst of migrating, settling, and becoming politically active. Although the stories

captured in this study cannot be used to generalize about other Mexican immigrants in California or the United States, they capture some of the struggles of other immigrants and help place these experiences into a broader perspective as they also bring them to the forefront.

CHAPTER 3

MEXICAN IMMIGRANT IDENTITIES: PASSAGE AND SETTLEMENT

A widely held assumption in mainstream American culture is that immigrants come to this country in pursuit of the “American Dream.” None of the Mexican immigrants in this study indicated that they came to the United States in search of the “American Dream.” They left their home country to escape gender repression, to reunite with their family members, and to improve their economic situation, rather than any real “choice” to follow the “American Dream.”

Leaving México was not easy for many of the immigrants in this study who had to cope with the grief of leaving family members behind, and who had to obtain the financial resources to migrate to the US. Immigrants in their home country must confront these and many other challenges that may complicate their ability to migrate. Lee (1966:49) points out that:

no matter how short or how long, how easy or how difficult, every act of migration involves an origin, a destination, and an intervening set of obstacles. Among the set of intervening obstacles, we include the distance of the move as one that is always present.

Once in the US, immigrants confront new sets of challenges in relation to their settlement. Some of the core challenges that arose for the Mexican immigrants in this study included domestic violence, language barriers, immigration surveillance, police harassment, and stigmatizing immigration labels. Immigrants’ passage and settlement challenges ultimately prevent many, if not most of them, from fully participating in society. Identity shifts are also examined where immigrants undergo a process of

migrating, legally and/or illegally. These identity challenges are particularly apparent among undocumented⁸ immigrant men who cross the border illegally enter an uncertain and precarious existence.

REASONS FOR MIGRATING TO THE U.S

Gender Repression in Country of Origin

As mentioned above, gender repression was one of the factors that forced Mexican immigrant women to migrate to the US. For these women, domestic violence and gender repression is central to understanding their passage and settlement challenges. The lives of the two women that are examined in this section reflect many of the realities of immigrant women. Scholarly research concerning domestic violence and international/transnational migration research often dismisses this perspective. Menjívar and Saucedo (2002) point out that there needs to be more scholarly attention and research on immigrant women and domestic violence.

This chapter highlights the ways in which gender profoundly affected the lives of two Mexican immigrant women who journeyed to the US to escape sexually oppressive situations. Their class, gender, race, and marital status are intertwined and interrelated, exacerbating their vulnerability to gender repression and domestic violence in their home country. For instance, Yolanda,⁹ an undocumented mother of two from México City migrated with her nine-year-old son to escape a sexually oppressive situation due to her

⁸ Undocumented describes someone who is in the US without legal binding documents such as a green card or travel visa.

⁹ Pseudonyms have been given to ensure confidentiality.

marital status as a single mother. Yolanda worked on a chicken farm for four years in a predominantly male setting where she experienced male sexual harassment because she was a single mother. Her status as a single mother meant that she did not have the protection of a man and made her vulnerable. Yolanda began narrating her challenges of being negatively stigmatized as a single mother:

Yolanda: *Yo sufrí, yo estaba trabajando en una granja de pollos y eran puros hombres, habíamos solo 2 mujeres. Porque había puros hombres, pensaban que uno trabajaba para estar con ellos. Si yo quería realizar mi vida no era para andar de volada. Yo dí mi respeto, dí mi lugar y me trataban muy mal. Me hacían hacer trabajo más de la cuenta, me hacían llorar* [I suffered, I was working on a chicken farm with predominantly males, there were only two women. Because there were only men, they thought that we worked so we could be with them. If I wanted to fulfill my life it wasn't going to be by flirting. I respected them and asked to be respected but they treated me very bad. They would give me more work than usual, they would make me cry.]

Hortencia: *Por el hecho de ser madre soltera?* [Because you were a single mother?]

Yolanda: *Sí. Uno una vez se me desvistió, así descaradamente, así como Dios lo hechó al mundo. Yo agache mi cabeza y lloré. Ellos no tenían que hacer eso. Me estoy acordando de cada instante y me sentí humillada por el hecho de ser madre soltera y ganar el dinero...Había sufrido bastante como madre soltera, me han hecho la vida imposible, los aguanté por cuatro años, los aguante por necesidad. Mi necesidad era tan grande que tenía que aguantar todas las humillaciones. Me aventaban los pollos, me rasguñaban por la cara, por el simple hecho de que no les daba un motivo.* [Yes. One day, one undressed in front of me the way that God brought him to this world and he was not embarrassed. I lowered my head and cried, they didn't have to do that. I remember every minute of it, I felt humiliated and all because I was a single mother and earning decent money...I had suffered enough as a single mother, they made my life miserable, I tolerated them for four years, I tolerated them out of need, my need was so great that I had to tolerate their humiliations. They would throw chickens at me; they (chickens) would scratch my face, all was due because I never paid any attention to them.]

Gender and class influenced Yolanda's journey to the US in many ways.

Yolanda's social position as a single mother, and lower social class made her vulnerable

to male verbal, physical, and sexual assault. Chávez (1998) points out in his case study of undocumented immigrant workers in San Diego County that Mexican women who are widowed, divorced, or abandoned by their husbands find themselves struggling as single mothers, a situation with low social status. This is similarly illustrated in the case of Yolanda who endures repeated sexual harassment, which she attributes to being a single mother. Without the protection of a man she is forced to endure repeated sexual harassment since she is viewed as available to men. Equally important is how Yolanda feels and how she discusses her situation and feelings. That is, Yolanda is conscious that being a single mother has a negative stigma and as a consequence will endure harassment. This causes Yolanda to feel powerless, degraded, humiliated, and angry. Ultimately, Yolanda got the strength, courage, and financial resources to leave and migrate to the US. Yolanda's decision to migrate to the US stems from the lack of family support she received and lack of protection from the Mexican authorities.

Yolanda, a poor and uneducated single mother was forced to journey to the US to escape a repressive gender situation. The case of Blanca is quite different, however, her migration experience is similar to Yolanda in that both left a sexually oppressive situation. Blanca is a 37 year-old undocumented immigrant woman from Veracruz, México, and mother of two teenagers. Unlike Yolanda, Blanca comes from a middle class family. In Mexico, Yolanda completed six semesters of law school, was a former high school teacher and had her own ceramic business, while her former husband was a chemical engineer. Blanca and her two children were financially stable but lived an emotionally turbulent life filled with mental and physical violence since her husband

repeatedly beat her. After eleven years of domestic violence, Blanca decided that she wasn't going to tolerate her husband's abuse anymore and decided to migrate to the US:

Blanca: *Tomé la decisión de no más humillaciones, él me gritaba, a mis hijos los torturaba físicamente, emocionalmente. Mi hijo estaba jugando, le quitaba el cable y lo golpeaba. Si mi hijo hiba mal en la escuela lo maltrataba, ya no quería que fuera mas a la escuela...a mí para tener relaciones me agarraba a patadas, yo nunca fui utilizada con amor, yo aparentaba una vida muy bonita....siempre me hizo sentir que yo tenía que aguantarlo* [I decided that I wasn't going to put up with any more humiliation, he would yell at me, he would torture my children physically and emotionally. If my child was playing, he would hit him with a cable. If my child got bad grades in school he would mistreat him, he no longer wanted him to go to school...in my case, he would physically kick me in order to have sex, I was never treated with love, I always pretended that I lived a nice and happy life...he always made me feel that I had to put up with him.]

Blanca's decision to leave a domestic violence situation was not easy because her former husband made her feel that she had "to put up with him" and Blanca internally believed it. Blanca attributes her staying to the patriarchy notions of family. She was brought up with the idea that marriage was sacred, and that only death would dissolve a marriage. Blanca was aware of her family's expectations, and had internalized a set of values expressed by her parents. As she indicates:

Blanca: *La cultura que yo traigo es de cultura muy fuerte de mi Papá, mamá y hermanos. Casada hasta la muerte*". [The culture that I've been brought up with is very strong, my father, mother, and siblings. Married until death do us part.]

Blanca knew that her family would not approve of a divorce much less of having a divorced daughter. Her family refused to believe that she was battered by her husband and pretended that Yolanda's marriage was going well. The lack of family support made Blanca's domestic situation difficult. Menjivar (2002) indicates that if immigrant women decide to leave their abusive situation they may not find support and approval from extended and immediate family. This was the case of Blanca and was further

complicated by the lack of legal protection from the Mexican authorities. This is why Blanca refused to stay in Mexico. For the most part domestic violence cases are not reported, and if they are reported to the Mexican authorities no serious action is taken. As Blanca narrates:

Blanca: *Yo me salí de México, yo quería huir de una situación de injusticia por parte de las autoridades y de violencia doméstica. Esa fué la razón por la que yo me vine aparte que yo me imaginaba vivir en otro lado*” [I left México, I wanted to escape a situation of injustice on behalf of the authorities and domestic violence. That was the reason why I came and because I imagined living in another place.]

Blanca escaped a domestic violence situation not only to protect herself, but her two teenage boys. Escaping this situation was not easy for Blanca who was raised with patriarchal values where women defer to their husbands. But after eleven years of physical and emotional violence she decided to leave and migrate to the US along with her two children. Commitment to family was an emerging theme in the interviews and will be discussed later in this chapter.

Yolanda and Blanca’s situations are different; both belong to different social classes and each have different levels of education. However, their migration experiences are overwhelmingly shaped by gender and reflect many of the realities of immigrant women who leave gender oppressive situations filled with sexual harassment, physical, and emotional violence. Both left to escape Mexico’s judgment of being labeled as single and divorced women feeling they would have little protection as women by the state. Although Yolanda and Blanca did not explicitly indicate that they left México following the “American Dream” their stories capture the hope of finding gender equality in the US where they would not be judged based on their marital status.

Family reunification

Family reunification is another factor that led Mexican immigrant women to migrate to the US. Kofman (1999:279) indicates that “family reunification refers to immediate members, mostly spouses and children, brought in by primary migrants.” Traditionally,¹⁰ family reunification has been viewed as female. This study reveals that Mexican immigrant women migrate to reunite with their husbands in the US. Cerrutti and Massey (2001) examined the determinants of female migration between México and the US using data from the Mexican Migration Project (MMP) and found that large numbers of immigrant women migrate to reunite with their families. This was also common among the undocumented women that were interviewed in this study. For example, Violeta, is a 40 year-old undocumented immigrant from Nayarit, México who holds a nursing degree. Her husband holds a degree in agricultural science. Both degrees were obtained in México. Violeta’s husband had difficulty finding a job once he graduated from college because of the scarcity of jobs in México and the high unemployment rate in the community in which they lived. He migrated in the mid 1980s to the US and Violeta migrated shortly thereafter. As Violeta states:

Violeta: *Porque me casé y me tuve que venir con mi marido. Mi esposo ya estaba aquí, él era residente*” [I got married and I had to come with my husband. My husband was already here, he was a resident.]

Violeta reunited with her husband two years later once he settled in an apartment, had a job, and a legal green card. Violeta’s narrative reflects an expectation that a

¹⁰ Kofman (1999) indicates that several countries in Eastern Europe reveal that women are agents of family reunion. Kofman’s explanation is due to policy changes that have altered gender balance where women are able to find employment and bring their spouses and children. It is important to highlight Kofman’s research in order to break the prevailing image that family reunification only occurs among women.

married woman must be with her husband and follow him wherever he goes. Violeta did not indicate if she liked the idea of reuniting with her husband but Maribel did. Maribel is a 25 year-old undocumented woman from Nayarit, México who became pregnant shortly after her marriage. Maribel states that she migrated in 1996 to reunite with her husband because they were going to start a new family and she did not want to be separated from her husband. This demonstrates how Maribel has internalized motherhood; a married woman reunited with her husband. As she points out:

Maribel: *Me vine porque iba a hacer una familia... él no podía estar aquí y yo allá. Entonces me vine entre queriendo y no.* [I came because I was going to start a family...he couldn't be here and me over there, so I came without entirely wanting to.]

Maribel's words illustrate the realities of many immigrants who are torn between two bi-national families, one in México and one in the US. Her words also illustrate her strong family values and commitment to family. Although in today's global economy, it is common to have a divided family living a bi-national or transnational life both Veronica and Maribel's narratives reflect an unwillingness to do so. They and their husbands share similar family expectations that husband and wife are supposed to be united.

Economic instability in home country

Economic instability in México is another factor that led some of my interviewees to migrate to the US. Gledhill (1995) points out that México in the 1980s and well into the 1990s witnessed an "escalating polarization of income distribution, rising unemployment, and poverty" (Gledhill, 1995: 1). Even with economic growth in the

1990s poverty continued to increase along with the overall population. Given the economic context, large flows of Mexican immigrants migrated to the US. The prevailing assumption is that immigrants who migrate based on economic factors are working class immigrants who have little or no former education. However, a growing number of Mexican immigrants are high-skilled, white-collar workers who are of urban origin. They are middle class Mexican immigrants who were hard hit by the Mexican economy of the 1980s and 1990s (Roberts et al, 1999). In his study of urban-origin migration from México, Roberts et al (1999) points out that Mexican immigrants who are highly educated professionals with managerial positions migrated because of the peso devaluation of 1994.

This was the case of Norma, one of the interviewees. Norma holds a B.A in economics from the National Autonomous University of México (UNAM). Norma lived a middle class life, working as a high-ranking manager in a Mexican bank, and owning property. However, with the 1994 peso devaluation, interest rates on her houses doubled and eventually tripled. She struggled to keep up with her car and house debts. She was laid off, and after six months of searching for work she gave up and decided to migrate in 1995 to the US to find work to pay off her debts. As she narrates:

Norma: *Yo tenía un buen trabajo, era ejecutiva de banco, trabajé por 13 años y terminé mi carrera de economía pero en los 90's vino una crisis muy fuerte, la economía de mi país y perdí mi trabajo. Los intereses en los prestamos que yo tenía subieron y eran tan altos. Si yo pagaba un interes anual por ejemplo de 7 %, de repente los intereses subían a un 20%, increíble, era algo de locura. Si yo pagaba un prestamo de 200 pesos en menos de 6 meses ya me estaban requiriendo 1,200 pesos...Yo vine originada de la crisis económica y la falta de trabajo en mi país aún siendo una persona con experiencia de 13 años, aun a pesar de tener mi carrera terminada de 5 años...pero no había trabajos”* [I had a very good job, I completed my degree in economics and worked in my profession for 13 years but I

was hard hit with my country's economic crisis that I lost my job. The interest rates on my loans were very high. If I paid an annual interest rate of 7% it incredibly went up to 20%, it was crazy. If I owed a loan of 200 pesos, in six months it went up to 1,200 pesos...I immigrated as a consequence of my country's economic crisis and also due to the lack of jobs even when I had thirteen years of experience and had a degree...but there were no jobs.]

Norma indicates that regardless of her level of education and thirteen years of professional work experience it did not matter because there were no jobs. Being highly educated and experienced did not matter in times of economic recession. This was also the case for Alfredo, an agronomist, who after six months of searching for a job gave up and migrated to the US in 1988. As he points out:

Alfredo: *Estuve seis meses tratando de buscar trabajo, no encontré, queriendome casar, no hay otra que vamonos*"[I was searching for a job for six months, I wanted to get married, I didn't have another choice than to migrate.]

Unlike Norma, Alfredo does not come from a middle class background; however, both are educated professionals who were affected by Mexico's economy, which ultimately forced them to migrate.

The narratives presented reflect the most common factors for migrating among this sample of interviewees. These are gender repression, desire for family reunification, and economic instability in their country. The intention is not to make generalizations about all Mexican immigrants, but rather to provide a broader understanding of the factors that are often dismissed upon migrating. These narratives illustrate the diversity among Mexican immigrants in terms of their reasons for migrating. Gender, marital status, education, and social class all come to bear on migrating. These findings are significant

because they contradict the notion that immigrants leave their country in search of the “American Dream.”

Having discussed some of the factors that led this sample of immigrants to migrate to the US, it is important to point out the challenges that they encountered in their journey to the US. This will be examined in the following section.

Crossing La Frontera

There are two ways in which immigrants enter the country: legally or illegally. Legal immigration is characterized as a movement from one country to another with a legal binding document. Illegal refers to a process whereby undocumented immigrants enter the country without inspection (EWI's). Legal or illegal entry by an immigrant to the US is important in terms of immigrants' self-perception, security and protection. In other words, having a legal document to cross the border gives immigrants a sense of protection and security as opposed to undocumented immigrants who cross the border illegally often without a sense of safety and who confront many dangers.

For the last two decades tighter border enforcement has been viewed as a solution for slowing undocumented migration to the US. In the last several years law enforcement to control immigration resulted in the Illegal Immigration and Immigration Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) of 1996 signed by former president Clinton. IIRIRA calls for greater border control and whose purpose is to discourage illegal immigration. Tougher law enforcement in the US-Mexican border means that illegal entry to the US is more difficult, often dangerous, definitely complex, and typically takes longer. This, however,

does not stop the flow of illegal immigration; immigrants find other dangerous clandestine terrains to cross the border.

Singer and Massey (1998) point out that most of the literature on undocumented border crossing has focused from three points of view: (1) organizational studies of border enforcement, (2) qualitative studies describing immigrant's journeys, and (3) quantitative studies that measure the probability of apprehension. Singer and Massey (1998) build on these prior studies to develop a theoretical model of clandestine border crossing that takes into account individual, community, and national-level factors. In their theory, border crossing is viewed as a well-defined social process where migrants draw upon various sources of human and social capital to cross the border. Yet, Singer and Massey along with previous research do not examine how immigrants develop identities in the process of crossing the border either legally or illegally. Given this omission, this research provides a new analysis and examines both illegal and legal migration to the US by drawing on immigrants' sense of self-protection and security.

Crossing the border illegally can be a traumatic and life-threatening experience. This was the case for Benito, a 31-year-old undocumented Mexican immigrant from Puebla, México who migrated in 2003. Without having either a paid (coyote) or unpaid (friend or relative) guide, Benito decided to embark alone on his journey to the US. Benito's journey from Puebla, México to the Tijuana border was filled with uncertainty. Luckily upon arriving to Tijuana, Benito was able to find a coyote to smuggle him to the US for \$1,100 dollars, which took him years to collect. Benito's passage took several days; he and twenty-one other undocumented immigrants had been traveling the

dangerous desert by foot for two nights. On the second night danger presented itself, when Benito and the rest of the immigrants were left without water and Benito was almost bitten by a rattlesnake. As Benito tells his story:

Benito: *La segunda noche estuvo todavía pesado, más duro, caminando se pasa el tiempo muy lento. Es triste y difícil mirar caras cansadas. Vez caras... y tal vez se vienen huyendo o con ganas de superar...con la ilusión de ver a su familia, de hacer algo. Cuando amaneció, ya no aguantaba mis pies, ya tenía ampollas en mis pies, en las plantas de mis pies ya las traía rompidas. Yo traía aspirina, me tome dos, dos las hice polvo para que se pudieran secar en mis pies, para sanar, porque todavía faltaba una noche más, esa fué la mas difícil, porque inmigración casi nos agarra.....El chiste es que nos topamos con dos víboras. Una casi le aplasta la cabeza el guía, casi lo muerde, una cascabel. Otro compa que venía muy distraído casi pisa a una. Son experiencias muy duras. Se me terminó el agua y sin agua es mas fácil que te pegue una crisis nerviosa. Los que tenían agua no querían convidar ¿porqué yo?, ¿yo que voy a tomar?, ¡no me quiero quedar sin agua!* [The second night was even harder, it was much harder to walk, time passes very slow, it's very sad, and it's hard to see tired faces. You see faces and maybe they are fleeing or they want to achieve something...with the hope of reuniting with their family, to do something. When morning came I couldn't stand my feet, I had blisters in my feet, my blisters were torn. I had aspirin, I drank two, then I dissolved two in my feet to heal my feet because we still had one more night, the hardest night because immigration almost caught us...the point is that we came across two snakes, the guide almost stepped on one of the them and the snake almost bit him, another person who was distracted almost stepped on another snake, these are very hard experiences. I ran out of water and without water it's easy to have a nervous breakdown, the ones that had water didn't want to share "Why me?" "What am I going to drink?" "I don't want to be without water!"]

Benito's story is grueling, dangerous, and filled with physical and emotional trouble. Immigrants often risk their lives by crossing the border through dangerous routes and run the risk of being left behind to die by their smugglers, or robbed or killed by border bandits. They suffer dehydration in desert areas in addition to many other hardships.

Legal vs. Illegal: identity shifts

From the beginning Benito's journey from his home in Puebla, Mexico to Tijuana was uncertain because he did not know what bus routes would take him to Tijuana. Benito's journey was also uncertain once he arrived to Tijuana because he did not have the social networks or guide needed to smuggle him to the US. Even when Benito found a guide to smuggle him, his journey was not secure since he could still be easily deported. Before migrating to the US, Benito was undergoing an identity shift from being a legal Mexican national in his home country to becoming an illegal immigrant in the process of journeying to the US. Unconsciously, Benito had to align himself to the identity category of illegal to cross the border because he does not have the necessary legal documents to enter the US. As Solis (2002: 28) indicates "the identity category legal/illegal immigrant is already available to Mexican immigrants before they cross the US-Mexico border." This was Benito's case.

Immigrants who enter the country legally position themselves with the identity category of legal and are not exposed to the same dangers of an undocumented immigrant who crosses the border illegally. Immigrants who enter the country legally often times feel protected and secure because they know when they are going to cross the border and what time they will arrive. They generally know what to expect from their trip. Even when immigrants enter the country with a legal document they often times experience harassment by border patrol officials. Although this does happen on a regular basis, this was not the case for the immigrants in this study. Several of the interviewees entered the country with a legal visa and indicated that they felt secure and protected. For instance,

Leonardo, a 49-year-old undocumented Mexican male from Puebla, México migrated for the first time to New York in 1998 with a tourist visa. Leonardo stayed for two years and then returned to México. On his second trip Leonardo also entered the country with a tourist visa and shortly thereafter went back to México. On both of his trips to the US, Leonardo expressed that he felt secure and protected with his tourist visa because it enabled him to enter and leave the country at any point in time. He also mentioned that with his tourist visa he felt that he was entitled to basic rights and could claim his rights if they were violated. However, on his third trip to the US, Leonardo no longer had a tourist visa and had no other choice than to cross the border illegally. It is in his third trip that Leonardo enters a precarious time. As he begins to narrate:

Leonardo: *Yo cuando llegué aquí, yo traía mi visa. Yo me sentía seguro, yo sentía que no me podían hacer nada porque yo podía salir del país y tal vez regresar. Yo con visa me sentía seguro. Cuando yo vine ya sin visa, yo sabía que por cualquier motivo si me detenía la policía me podían mandar para Mexico.* [When I came here, I had my visa, I felt secure, I felt that they couldn't do anything to me because I could leave the country and probably return. With a visa I felt secure, when I entered without a visa, I knew that if the police stopped me they could for any reason deport me back to México.]

Hortencia: *Ese papel(visa) hace una diferencia?* [That piece of paper (tourist visa) makes a difference?]

Leonardo: *A lo menos para mí el hecho de contar con una visa me daba la seguridad de que yo podía andar por cualquier lado sin ningún problema. Sentía que yo podía reclamar mis derechos como mexicano, pero cuando yo ya no tengo esa visa y entro sin nada, no tengo absolutamente nada, no puedo reclamar mis derechos, ni decir nada. Siento que estamos expuestos a que las leyes de este país dispongan de nuestra situación, de nuestra vida.* [At least for me to rely on a visa gave me security that I could go anywhere without any problem. I felt that I could claim my rights as a Mexican but when I no longer have a visa and enter with nothing I have absolutely nothing, I can't claim my rights or say anything. I feel that we are exposed to the laws of this country that decide our situation, our lives.]

Leonardo entered an uncertain existence on his third trip to the US. Leonardo felt that he could get deported back to Mexico; he felt that he was no longer entitled to any rights, and felt overtly exposed to immigration authorities. Leonardo's narrative reflects his knowledge of what it means to be an undocumented immigrant in the US and the idea that undocumented immigrants are not entitled to rights.

Both Leonardo and Benito's migration experiences are similar because both experienced an uncertain and precarious existence and both faced many dangers in the desert.

SETTLEMENT CHALLENGES

Domestic Violence

Once immigrants arrive to the US they are confronted with new challenges ranging from domestic violence, language barriers, to INS surveillance and police harassment. This was the case for the immigrants in this research study. Earlier in this chapter it was examined that Blanca migrated to the US due to domestic violence. Interviews revealed that domestic violence not only occurs in immigrants' homeland but also arise when immigrant women settle in the US. This was the case of 52-year-old Lupe, an undocumented immigrant from Nayarit, México. Lupe comes from a rural village where she lived from what her crops produced, while her former husband resided in the US. Lupe never imagined that by migrating to reunite with her husband she was going to live a life of physical, mental, and emotional violence. Unfortunately, Lupe's

settlement process was filled with an environment of domestic violence. As Lupe narrates:

Lupe: *El me estaba esperando acá para golpearme...mi esposo está regáñeme, y regáñeme, maltratándome. Haciéndome la vida imposible, que porque me había venido para acá* [He was waiting for me to hit me...my husband was constantly scolding and ill treating me, making my life impossible because I had migrated.]

Lupe's former husband sexually, physically, and emotionally harassed her for having migrated without his consent. As a recent undocumented immigrant with no former education and without knowing how social institutions function she endured several years of domestic violence. Even if Lupe wanted to escape her abuser she could not because she was afraid of getting killed. Lupe did eventually leave him. As she narrates:

Lupe: *Un día que me arrastró por toda la casa. Primero me aventó un plato de comida caliente. Yo quise ir a agarrar el telefono y no me dejó. Me agarró a mí y me arrastró: El rápidamente que agarra el telefono y que lo avienta, lo desconectó. Al fin de que llegó la policia. Me decía: "si tú dices algo, te voy a matar"* [One day he dragged me all over the house, first he threw a hot plate of food at me, I tried to grab the phone and he didn't let me, he grabbed me and dragged me. He quickly grabbed the phone and threw it, he disconnected it; at the end the police came. He would say, "if you say something I will kill you.]"

Lupe's words illustrate how her immigrant identity shaped how she experienced domestic violence. She perceived herself as an immigrant that was not entitled to protection or rights. As an undocumented immigrant, Lupe was vulnerable to domestic violence because she lacked the language skills of the host country, and did not understand how the institutions that might have helped her operate. She did not know that she could obtain help and support from the police and community agencies. This reflects Lupe's perceptions that being undocumented meant not having basic rights and

protection. Lupe's undocumented identity led her to tolerate violence long after she should have because she was undocumented and afraid. Similarly, Menjivar (2002: 904) indicates that when immigrant women are in a foreign country where they do not know the "language, culture, or physical geographic area the men often gain control over them and control over the resources that are available to women". This is clearly the case of Lupe whose settlement story also captures her emotional, physical, and mental challenges. Her story also contributes to a better understanding of the relationship between immigration and domestic violence. Her story has aimed to link immigration and domestic violence given the scant literature attention.

Language barriers

Speaking English arose as a settlement challenge as immigrant women and men interacted in social service institutions. Language barriers ranging from not being able to read, write, and speak English. It is often through social interaction with broader society that immigrants become aware of their limitation and ability to speak English.

In the case of this study, Spanish is the native language immigrants speak at home, in the community, and often times at work. Being unable to understand or speak English is extremely stressful and challenging for many immigrants. Language then becomes an obstacle for many immigrants, in particular immigrant women in accessing public health services. This was the case in this research where recent pregnant immigrant women were seeking prenatal care. For example, when 25-year-old undocumented Xitla was two months pregnant she was afraid to seek prenatal care

because she did not speak English. Eventually she went to the doctor and found herself perplexed with the English information she was given. As she narrates:

Xitla: *Se me hacía difícil porque los doctores me chequeaban en inglés y yo no entendía como estaba mi bebé. Tenía que regresar con las enfermeras y preguntarles como estaba mi embarazo.* [It was hard because the doctors would try to communicate with me in English and I did not understand how my baby was doing. I had to ask the nurse how my pregnancy was coming along.]

Xitla did not have a family member or a close friend to take her and translate for her. Xitla had no other choice but to rely on the good nature of a bilingual nurse because the doctor did not speak Spanish, as is standard in most hospitals. This made Xitla very uncomfortable and insecure when the doctors were explaining the progress of her pregnancy. Even when immigrants have a nurse, staff, or a family member translate for them, they continue to feel skeptical about the accuracy of the information. This was the case of Maribel, a 24-year-old undocumented Mexican immigrant from Nayarit, México who was also pregnant and seeking prenatal care. In Maribel's case, the doctors had placed an English prenatal care video that had Spanish subheadings. As she states:

Maribel: *Los videos que me ponían para el cuidado prenatal estaban en inglés y traducido, ya no era la misma percepción, o estaban en inglés y la enfermera me traducía en Español y ¿Como sabía si realmente me estaba diciendo la información correcta?...en esos lugares me sentía como fuera de círculo* [The prenatal care videos were either in English with spanish subheadings or the nurse would translate in Spanish. This was not the same perception. How did I know if the nurse was interpreting the correct information?...I felt out of place in those situations.]

Maribel indicates that even though the English prenatal care video had the Spanish subheadings it did not convey the same message; she felt that the essence was lost. She also indicated her difficulty in watching the prenatal care video and at the same time reading the Spanish subheadings. Even when there was a nurse to interpret, Maribel

felt skeptical and insecure because she did not know if the information being presented to her was accurate. Maribel felt out of place and powerless because she did not speak English. In this case, language is seen as a tool of power that can oppress immigrants who do not know the dominant language, in this case English.

In the absence of the host language skills, immigrant women not only rely on the good nature of nurses and translated material but also on family members. This was the case of 36-year-old undocumented Veronica from Michoacán, México. Veronica took her youngest child to Kaiser Hospital where he was seen by a nurse who only spoke Chinese and English. Veronica had to rely on her teenage nephew who acted as an interpreter as is often the case for many Spanish monolingual immigrants. As she narrates:

Veronica: *Yo mas bien, cuando llevaba a los niños al doctor; uno tenía tuberculosis y lo lleve al Kaiser. Y me tocó una chinita que no le entendí nada. Yo no sabía lo que me decía y un sobrino que me llevó entendió poquito pero yo me vine insegura, ¿me dirían en realidad la verdad?* [When I took my children to the doctor, one had tuberculosis and I took him to Kaiser and I didn't understand the Chinese nurse. I didn't know what she was telling me and I took one of my nephews who understood a little but I came home uncertain, did they really tell me the truth?]

Veronica was at the mercy of her nephew limiting her ability to be self-determining. Her nephew was also forced to take an adult role where he probably lacked the knowledge of how medical institutions work, leaving Veronica in a precarious situation.

The three narratives represented have common themes: (1) all three women were monolingual Spanish speakers who did not understand or speak English, (2) they had to

rely on a staff and or family member for interpretation and (3) they expressed concern about the accuracy of the information, making them vulnerable to any negligent or misleading information. These narratives have revealed the powerful role of language in repressing immigrants whose language is other than English.

The focus here was on settlement challenges of immigrant women seeking health care. Health care represents just one among the many social institutions in which immigrants must interact. Language is also a settlement challenge for many Mexican immigrant men in the context of work.

Language and employment

Language barriers are also significant as immigrants look for work as in the case of Oscar. Oscar, a 59-year-old naturalized US citizen from Nayarit, México does not have a car and must rely on public transportation or his bicycle to get to work. Oscar views his lack of transportation as a minor barrier getting to work or searching for work because one way or another he will get to work. As his excerpt illustrates:

Oscar: *¿Tienes transporte?, ¿Tienes carro? Les he dicho que sí, porque de una manera o otra lo puedo solucionar. Si me han preguntado, ¿sabes hablar inglés? Sí me hallo confuso...sí me hallo difícil de entender. En el carro, el transporte no, yo llego en mi carro, yo llego en el bus, yo llego en mi bicicleta. [Do you have transportation? Do you have a car? I say yes because one way or another I can find a solution to get to work. I have been asked do you speak English? I find myself confused...it's hard for me to understand. The car, transportation is not a problem; I can arrive in my car, in the bus, in a bicycle.]*

Above all else, Oscar identifies language as the most potent barrier, surpassing his transportation situation. When employers ask Oscar if speaks English, he feels disadvantaged because he understands and speaks very little English. Thus, for Oscar

English becomes the primary determining force in getting a job and his transportation and citizenship status becomes secondary.

This story resonates with Pedro's experience in searching for jobs. Pedro, a 55 year-old permanent resident from Nayarit, México upon receiving his green card believed that he was going to find a job, but when employers asked him if he spoke English he said no and found himself searching again. As Pedro indicates:

Pedro: *Me dio gusto pensando yo que ya iba a trabajar, pero ya cuando tuve la green card me pedían el inglés y pues “caí” en lo mismo. ¿Si hablas inglés? “Pues no.” Yo pensé que iba a ser mejor porque ya tenía la residencia porque ya iba a poder trabajar. Se lleva uno un chasco porque uno piensa en lo bueno, no piensa en lo negativo...entonces, a veces yo decía para que buscar, si no hablo inglés. [I was happy thinking that I was going to work but once I had the green card they asked if I spoke English and I was back in the same situation. Do you speak English? “well no”. I thought that it was going to be better because I had my green card and was going to be able to work. I was surprised because you would think positively not negatively...I would say why look for a job I don't speak English.]*

English is the primary factor for Pedro in obtaining a job and his legal status as a permanent resident become secondary. This is similarly expressed by Yolanda, who recently obtained her permanent green card. Yolanda thought that by having her green card she was not going to have trouble searching for a job. This was quite the contrary:

Yolanda: *Ahora ya no es el problema el seguro sino el idioma. He metido muchas aplicaciones ahora que he recibido mi seguro y no me hablan porque no hablo Inglés. Y no lo agarran a uno. Ahora, el detalle es el inglés...ahorita por el inglés. Ya no es por los papeles. [The problem no longer is the social security but language. I turned in many applications since I received my social security and they don't call because I don't speak English and they don't hire me. The matter now is English...now it's English, it's no longer the papers.]*

Like Pedro and Oscar who have legal binding documents to work, so does Yolanda who found herself struggling to find a job due to her limited English skills.

Language becomes the primary settlement challenge for Yolanda in searching for a job. Her immigration status as a permanent resident becomes secondary. In this sense language acts as a social marker that defines immigrants based on class, education, race, and immigration status because immigrants who do not speak English are often times working class immigrants of color. In the case of these interviewees, their identity is largely shaped by their lack of knowing the dominant language.

Immigration surveillance

Fear of deportation based on immigrants' geographic location emerged as a settlement challenge. This was the case of Efrain who lived in the border town of Calexico, California, unlike most of my interviewees who were settling in San José, California when they arrived to the US. For recent immigrants who settle in border towns like Calexico, finding a job is greatly influenced by their immigration status rather than knowing English. This was the case of Efrain, who was living in Calexico as an undocumented immigrant in 1982. It was a challenge for Efrain to maintain his job due to the proximity of the US border and Calexico. Efrain felt uncomfortable and insecure going to work because he constantly feared deportation. Efrain indicated that many jobs were available but immigration authorities conducted raids regularly. It became impossible for Efrain to stay in the same job. As Efrain states:

Efrain: *Había trabajo, no mucho, pero por ser la frontera hay una base de la inmigración y casi todos los días, las 24 horas había redadas. Y pues el miedo que lo agarren a uno trabajando.* [There was work, not a lot because there was an immigration base and almost everyday 24 hours a day there were raids and the fear of being caught while working.]

Efrain's undocumented identity was constantly reinforced by the border patrol that constantly maintained surveillance over his work site. Efrain's story represents the countless stories of undocumented immigrants who live in constant fear of getting deported and it also reveals something about Efrain's identity. His fear of getting apprehended by immigration authorities constantly reminds him of his immigration status and social location in society.

Police harassment

In addition to navigating social service agencies, language barriers, immigration surveillance, immigrants with few material resources face other economic challenges. Immigrants are without many of the amenities that make a smooth life in San Jose, as in the case of day laborers. Day laborers¹¹ are for the most part men seeking work on a day-to-day basis in street corners, storefronts, and parking lots (Valenzuela 2003).

Day laborers soliciting work at street corners are constantly harassed by police authorities, which makes for day laborers getting money difficult. For example, Leonardo is an undocumented male from Puebla, México. He holds a physician degree from Mexico but due to his undocumented status and the challenges of obtaining a job, Leonardo had no other choice than to become a day laborer. Leonardo has been a day

¹¹ A day laborer can work various jobs such as plumbing, painting, roofing, working in a meatpacking plant, washing dishes, moving furniture, flipping burgers, building a house, etc. (Schlosser 2002). In Spanish a day laborer is known as a jornalero or esquinero (Malpica 1996).

laborer for the past two years. He has had trouble obtaining a stable job due to constant police harassment. As he indicates:

Leonardo: En el caso de la ciudad de San José, en “La Tropicana”, un lugar muy conocido, ahí, me pude dar cuenta que la policia implacablemente trata de hechar a la gente de allí y pues ellos no ven si estan cometiendo un delito o alguna infracción, simplemente los ven y los hechan. Ellos dicen que es la gente que se molesta por su presencia. No sé. Pero eso es algo muy característico. Fue lo primero que me hizo sentir humillado, realmente humillado. La actitud de la policía es como tratando como si de antemano nos vieran como delincuentes, y realmente no somos delincuentes por el solo hecho de estar pidiendo trabajo y eso me hizo sentir muy mal. De verdad me sentí humillado. No sé. Como si mis valores hayan caído tan bajo. Que bueno. Yo en México era otra persona y acá pues no era nada. [In the case of the City of San Jose, in the Tropicana, a very well known place, I found out how the police mercilessly try to get rid of the people, and they don't see if they are committing a crime or an infraction, they simple see them and run them off. They say that it's the people who are bothered by their presence, I don't know but that's something that's characterized, that was the first thing that made me feel humiliated, really humiliated. The attitude of the police is that of treating us like criminals and we are not criminals for the simple fact of soliciting work and that made me feel bad. Really, I felt humiliated, I don't know, like if my values were worthless, that well, in Mexico I was another person and here I was nothing]

Leonardo is facing multiple and intertwining challenges; he lacks the language skills, is an undocumented immigrant, and his difficulty finding and maintaining a stable job is exacerbated by regular police harassment. These practices have meaningful consequences on identity as the regular harassment by police authorities remind Leonardo of his social location in society based on his immigration status. Equally important is the experience of downward mobility that Leonardo undergoes from being a doctor in México to becoming a day laborer in the US. The high status Leonardo had achieved in México is lost in immigrating to the US. As a result, Leonardo acquires a new identity that is shaped by his immigration status and his social marker as a day laborer.

Leonardo becomes aware of his social location in society through the humiliating and degrading treatment that he and other day laborers receive from police authorities. Rouse (1992) points out that “police and the INS affect settlers not only as enforcers of law and order but also, and in some ways more powerfully, as agents of class related discipline” (Rouse, 1992: 36). That is, Leonardo not only is reminded of his social location in society based on his immigration status but also of his lower social class. Hence, Leonardo’s downward mobility is directly intertwined with his immigration status, language skills, race, and social class.

Benito, a 31-year-old undocumented male from Puebla, México similarly resonates Leonardo’s story. As Benito indicates:

Benito: *En “La Tropicana” hay policas y nosotros los jornaleros les llamamos placas. Llegan con un perro grandote Pastor Alemán. Nos intimida. Haz de cuenta que deja el perro y nos puede dar una buena corretiza. Ha habido veces que uno se pone en la banqueta y llegan para emplearnos y el policía les da ticket y te toca bajarte y la bronca es contra el que nos va a emplear. Por eso ya no se paran allá.* [At the Tropicana, there are police and we the day laborers, we call them placas, they arrive with a big German Shepherd dog, and they intimidate us. Imagine if they leave the shepherd dog that could give us a nice run down. There were times that we would be on the sidewalk and they come to employ us and the police cites them and you have to get out of the vehicle and the problem is with the person who was going to hire us, that’s why they don’t stop here any longer.]

With the constant police harassment, Benito is afraid that one day the police will unleash their dog on them or scare away potential employers. This has serious consequences for Benito because employers are discouraged to pick up day laborers soliciting work under these conditions, which makes getting a job and earning money difficult for Benito.

Both Leonardo and Benito share similar settlement challenges in that both are undocumented and monolingual Spanish speaking immigrants who are constantly harassed by the police. Moreover, Leonardo's and Benito's self-image, perception, and actions are constantly negotiated within the context of police harassment and contingent employment. This makes Leonardo and Benito feel humiliated and marginalized based on their social position.

Settlement challenges based on language and employment, immigration surveillance, and police harassment, all come to bear on both undocumented and legal immigrants' ability to make an income. Settlement challenges among immigrant women arose out of domestic violence and language barriers within the context of public health clinics. In addition to these challenges, immigrants confront negative stigmas that certain immigration labels carry. It is to this issue that I now turn.

Immigration labels -the label Mojado

Central to immigrants' settlement process is managing the stigma that certain immigration labels carry. Labels such as "*mojado*/ wetback," are regularly used to define immigrants, often stigmatizing them. Immigrants must deal with immigration labels that carry a negative stigma. Immigrants recognize that some of these labels carry a negative stigma and as a result try to reject this label and embrace their own national identity. The immigrants I interviewed expressed that immigration labels are a kind of symbolic violence.

The term *mojado*/wetback refers to people who enter the country without inspection. It is used in literal terms to identify an individual who crosses the border through the Rio Grande River and gets wet. The immigrants I interviewed define *mojado* in literal terms and as a result distance themselves from this label since this does not reflect their immigration experience. They viewed the label *mojado* as offensive, humiliating, and in large part inaccurate since it fails to represent how immigrants actually cross the border. Just as the label Hispanic has become homogenized, so has the label *mojado* that serves to homogenize immigrants as solely crossing through the river. Many of the immigrants in this study are aware of how *mojado* has been homogenized, as is the case of Mayra, a 41-year-old permanent resident. As she states:

Mayra: *Que pase el Rio Bravo nadando. Por eso le llaman espaldas mojadas porque se mojan la espalda...No me llamen mojada porque ustedes no saben como llegué aquí. Puede ser que crucé por Arizona caminando, no me mojé. [Someone who swims to cross the river. That's why they call them wetbacks because they wet their back...Don't call me wetback because you don't know how I got here. I could have crossed Arizona by foot, I didn't get wet.]*

Mayra defines *mojado* literally but challenges it by arguing that not everyone crosses the border through the river. Mayra argues that immigrants could have crossed in some other way. Similarly, Xitla, a 25-year-old undocumented immigrant also defines *mojado* in literal terms and attaches a negative stigma:

Xitla: *Tratan de ofenderte con esa palabra, es ofensiva, no pues es mojado, es mojarra. Tratan de humillar a la persona, a las que no tienen sus documentos. Eso es lo que hacen cuando la gente no quiere que hagas nada, envidia, no te quieren en otras palabras, de ahí viene el racismo. Son mojados, son mojarras y lo peor del caso es que es tu misma gente, tu misma raza, tus mismos paisanos, son los que te dicen. [They try to offend you with that word, it's offensive, well look he/she is a wetback. They try to humiliate the person who doesn't have documents. That's what they do when they don't want you to succeed, their jealous. In other words they don't like you, that's where racism comes from. They*

are wetbacks and worst of all it is your people, your same race, your same nationals that tell you this.]

Xitla like Mayra also views *mojado* as a negative stigma that is used as a tool to humiliate and oppress immigrants. Xitla recognizes that being *mojado* is not having a green card, which makes immigrants vulnerable to racism. This is important because the label *mojado* is viewed as a negative marker that racializes immigrants in terms of social class and national identity, which leads immigrants to have a stigmatized identity. It presumes that being Mexican is associated with *mojado* by referring to someone as barbarian, uneducated, filthy, and ignorant, in the same way that the term Chicano once had in the 1960s. The label *mojado*/wetback presents a meaningful obstacle in immigrants' settlement.

This chapter examined reasons for migrating and the settlement challenges that arose for the Mexican immigrants who participated in this study. Some of the challenges discussed in this chapter ranged from domestic violence, language barriers, immigration surveillance, police harassment, to stigmatized immigration labels. These situations create an especially tenuous position for immigrants when understood in the context of reasons for migrating. The people interviewed migrated to escape troubling conditions and not out of any real "choice." It was not because they expected the "American Dream" and the prosperity; they just hoped that it would be slightly better here. While they had hopes of a better life, what they found was a set of different challenges. How they come to cope with these challenges is the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

MEXICAN IMMIGRANT IDENTITY AND LA FAMILIA: FROM INFORMED NETWORKS TO COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

Chapter 3 examined the struggles that arose as immigrants found their way to the US and settled. This chapter seeks to understand how immigrants come into contact with *Unidos X la Justicia* and *Mujeres Fuertes*, two community grassroots groups. The purpose is twofold: to examine what immigrants gain from participating in these organizations, and analyze the role these organizations play in creating a civically involved community. Relatedly, this chapter also examines how these organizations serve as a space for immigrant women to redefine gender relationships by challenging patriarchal notions that a woman's place is in the home as they become active in the community.

The Organizations

Unidos X la Justicia and *Mujeres Fuertes* are grassroots groups that were formed in 2001 to address the needs of immigrants in the community. Both groups are managed by a non-profit organization called Immigrant Voice¹² in Santa Clara County that advocates for immigrant rights.

Unidos X la Justicia is a community group that was formed by neighborhood residents in the Riverview neighborhood of San José, California in 2001. *Unidos X la Justicia* was formed in March 2001 to educate and assist immigrant families in the 245i

¹² The organization has been given a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality.

legalization process. Act 245i a legislative act was passed by former President Bill Clinton in January 2001. The passage of 245i provided immigrants with citizenship and/or residency status with the opportunity to petition their family members to migrate to the United States as permanent residents¹³. The passage of 254 also provided immigrants already in the US a way to adjust their status¹⁴ without having to leave the country. The sudden implementation of the law meant the majority of legal service providers were overwhelmed with work as hundreds of immigrants petitioned their family members to come to the US. Many of these immigrants were unaware of what the actual law meant, who qualified, or the procedures on how petition family members. Recognizing that many immigrants would be unable to seize this opportunity, a group of Mexican immigrants in the Riverview neighborhood in eastside San José responded by providing educational workshops to eligible immigrant families as they moved through the four-month application period.

Since its emergence *Unidos X la Justicia* has also offered leadership development training to immigrant community members. By offering leadership training immigrants are educated about human, immigration, and civil rights. *Unidos X la Justicia* believes that by educating immigrants, immigrants will become active agents of social change and social justice because they have acquired a consciousness regarding their rights. Members of *Unidos X la Justicia* organize residents to sign petitions, write letters to public officials, attend political meetings, and other cultural and community events. The

¹³ Permanent green card holders.

¹⁴ Adjustment of status if for immigrants who entered unlawfully or if they entered with permission but did not stay in lawful status, they would normally have to leave the US to apply for an immigrant visa.

organization promotes civic involvement and cultural citizenship that unites families and neighbors.

Mujeres Fuertes was formed by Mexican immigrant women in the Middlefield neighborhood in San Jose, California, in January 2001. The goal of *Mujeres Fuertes* is to educate and empower immigrant families, in particular immigrant women. *Mujeres Fuertes* aims to improve the quality of life of immigrant women by identifying and finding solutions to issues concerning health, physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being. This is accomplished through direct action. *Mujeres Fuertes* offers leadership training dealing with an array of issues including nutrition, building female self-esteem, community advocacy, applying for food stamps, and ending domestic violence.

Both organizations often become sites for collective struggle, ideals, values, and cultural citizenship. Cultural citizenship can be expressed as:

A process through which a subordinated group of people arrives at a common identity, establishes solidarity and defines a common set of interests that binds the group together into action. Critical to this process is the affirmation and assertion of perceived collective rights which have been ignored or denied by the dominant society and its legal canon...cultural citizenship is clearly oppositional, articulating the needs of people who do not hold state power (Cited in Fine & Weis 1998: 89).

For immigrants in both of these organizations, family invokes mutual trust, respect, honesty, support, and responsibility that immigrants feel toward these organizations. This is examined later in the chapter where Mexican immigrants in both of these organizations claim rights within the context of legal citizenship.

Social networks

Both *Unidos X la Justicia* and *Mujeres Fuertes* play a critical role in the establishment and creation of social networks among its old and emerging members. Social networks are critical for immigrants because they enable immigrants to navigate a complex and confusing legal system. Recent immigrant arrivals seeking legal advice often have little knowledge about immigration law and immigration process. This makes immigrants vulnerable to fraudulent immigration consultants who can charge upwards of hundreds and even thousands of dollars to process their immigration cases (United Press International 2003). This can leave immigrants without any resources and vulnerable to deportation (Lim, 2002). Literature has documented the countless cases where lawyers vanish with immigrants' money and never follow up with their immigration case (India in New York 2000). These con artists target monolingual clients through advertisements in newspapers, magazines, or in the yellow pages (Ma, 1999). Immigrants are vulnerable; gaining accurate information is vital to their survival and stay in the US. Social networks help to minimize this deception by providing resources for immigrants to find reliable immigration services. Network of friends or family members leads immigrants to a more reliable and trustworthy referral, as was the case for many of the interviewees in this research study.

The immigrants in this study relied heavily on social networks. For example, Veronica, a 36-year-old undocumented immigrant from a rural village in Michoacán,

Mexico had recently migrated with her four children on a V-visa¹⁵ to reunite with her husband. Veronica has little former education and very little knowledge about her and her children's immigration case. Through a friend, Veronica was referred to Norma, the founder of *Unidos X la Justicia*. Norma conducts free monthly immigration clinics where lawyers and paralegals volunteer their time to help *Unidos X la Justicia* members and low-income immigrants of the Riverview neighborhood. Through one of the monthly immigration clinics, Veronica obtained assistance and was able to have a better understanding of her immigration case. As she points out:

Veronica: Le platiqué de mis papeles (refiriendose a Violeta) porque no sabia si me hiban a pedir mi seguro porque acababa de llegar. Me dijo, “vamos con Norma ella te puede ayudar”. Hay voy con todos los pasaportes de mis hijos. Me fueron diciendo, para aca, para allá, me fueron guiando. [I spoke to her (referring to Violeta) about my immigration papers because I didn't know if they were going to ask for my social security because I had just arrived. She said, “lets go ask Norma, she can help you”. I took all my children's passports with me. They began telling me go here, go there; they guided me.]

Through her social networks, Veronica was able to contact Norma who subsequently helped her with her immigration case. As a result Veronica was able to understand what her social security card could be used for. Native born people may view this as common sense but for many recent immigrants who do not understand how immigration law and immigration procedures operate, this can become a very complex issue. This is not to underestimate immigrants' knowledge but to acknowledge and emphasize that immigration law is difficult to comprehend even for highly educated

¹⁵ V visa is available to spouses and children of permanent residents who are waiting abroad for an immigrant visa. It allows them to enter the United States as non-immigrants, re-unite with their family, and then apply for immigrant status while in the country.

lawyers who have been practicing for years. Lawyers can still find themselves befuddled by immigration law.

The case of Lupe is similar to Veronica because she too was referred to Norma by a network of friends. Lupe is a 52-year old undocumented immigrant from Nayarit, Mexico who unlike Veronica migrated without a visa. Lupe comes from a rural village in Nayarit with no formal education and with little knowledge of immigration law. Lupe wanted to know how she could legalize her status and become a permanent resident.

Through her church friends Lupe was referred to *Unidos X la Justicia* to speak to Norma.

As Lupe narrates:

Lupe: *Yo iba a la iglesia Guadalupe y ahí la miraba (refiriendose a Mercedes) y como yo siempre queria saber sobre inmigración y me dijeron que ella (Mercedes) me podia ayudar. [I would go to our Lady of Guadalupe Church and I would see her (referring to Norma) and because I always wanted to know about immigration and they told me that she (Norma) could help me.]*

Lupe's church friends were the basis of her social networks, ultimately directing her to Norma. Her networks of church friends steered Lupe as she navigated a stressful immigration process and potentially prevented her from being scammed by fraudulent immigration consultants. This shows the dynamics of inside help versus outside help. That is, Lupe's inside network of friends led her to contact another inside group. This makes a difference for an immigrant who does not have inside networks of friends that can guide them.

Similarly, 40-year old Leonardo contacted *Unidos x La Justicia* to find out how he could legalize his status:

Leonardo: *Yo me comuniqué para que me diera información y ella me dijo claramente cual era mi situación y que era lo que ella veia para solucionarla”...*

“fue importante que me disiparan esas dudas para no crearme falsas expectativas. [I got in contact in order to obtain information and she clearly told me what my situation was and what she considered a solution...This was important to dispel my doubts in preventing on having false expectations.]

Through his social networks Leonardo was able to contact Norma who told him that he could not become a permanent resident unless there was an amnesty or if he had a family member who could petition for him. Obtaining accurate information was important for Leonardo because his doubts and expectations were clarified. This has important implications for immigrants who know that obtaining wrong information can jeopardize the advancement of their case and lead to deportation.

Though Veronica, Lupe, and Leonardo differ based on gender, immigration status, education, and religion, what unites all three is the similarity of experiences in searching for legal advice and the reliance on social networks as the basis for obtaining legal advice. Their social capital comes from an informal network of friends, family, and community members that help mitigate the search for immigration help. It is through an informal network of other immigrants, that my interviewees find their way to *Unidos X la Justicia* in search of immigration help.

Informed networks to community empowerment and action

These organizations provide immigrants with legal advice but also through their work provide a space where immigrants can develop and gain leadership skills, make new networks of friends and subsequently feel part of a family. This was the case of all the interviewees who stayed and became involved in these organizations. According to

Montoya (2002) immigrants have more opportunities for participation because they have broader social networks.

Efrain, a naturalized citizen from Michoacán, México obtained immigration help from *Unidos X la Justicia* where he stayed and became a member. Efrain indicated that he stayed because he received free legal assistance in a friendly manner and because he began to see the great need in the community. As he points out:

Efrain: *Estoy envuelto porque cuando yo vine que había una oportunidad de aplicar por nuestros padres, por nuestros familiares, como ciudadano, y pues vine aquí con Unidos X la Justicia cuando comenzó. Empezó a ayudar a la gente, me ayudaron, fueron muy amables y me ayudaron sin ningún costo. De ahí, nació la necesidad de que yo podía ayudar, haciendo juntas, en los foros comunitarios, dando información a la comunidad de como pueden tener sus beneficios estando en este país. [I'm involved because when I came to this group when it was founded, there was an opportunity that I as a citizen could petition my parents, my family and I came to Unidos X la Justicia for help. They began helping other people and they helped me for free and in a friendly manner. From that point I felt a need, I felt that I could help, by coordinating town hall meetings and providing information to the community on how they can obtain benefits in this country.]*

Upon receiving legal advice, Efrain began to notice that his personal struggle was also the struggle of countless other immigrants seeking immigration help. This motivated him to get involved and help others. Efrain began attending the regular meetings and later began coordinating town hall meetings, organizing informational meetings, and distributing information in the immigrant community regarding benefits that immigrants could obtain. Efrain was able to coordinate and organize meetings but he lacked the knowledge or leadership skills to do so. What Efrain learned in *Unidos X la Justicia* was new to him. As he indicates:

Efrain: *Este grupo nos dan mucha información sobre derechos es en la forma que a través de este grupo podemos obtener información que nunca teníamos idea*

que existía. Esa información me gusta pasarla a los demás que se interese en saberla [“This group provides us with a lot of information regarding rights, through this group we are able to obtain more information that we didn’t know existed. I like passing this information to other people who are interested”]

As a result of being involved in *Unidos X la Justicia*, Efrain was able to take advantage of the organizations’ various leadership training sessions. He learned how to organize meetings, public speaking, door to door soliciting, phone banking, and other important skills central to community organizing and personal survival. The determinant factors for Efrain in becoming involved in this organization were the immigration resources he obtained and the leadership skills that he acquired. This ultimately benefited him as he became more knowledgeable and educated. Consequently this helped him to educate other immigrants. Efrain’s story challenges the assimilationist paradigm that once immigrants arrive to the US they will assimilate and adopt the dominant culture. This was not the case of Efrain who became politically active and maintained strong ties to his kin family in México and community.

Efrain’s story also reflects how he informally transmitted the knowledge he gained to other immigrants in the community. A common saying by members of these organizations is “*El grupo se esta educando para poder educar a la comunidad*”[the organization educates itself in order to educate the community].

This is similarly seen in *Mujeres Fuertes*, where Mexican immigrant women also acquire new knowledge and leadership skills. As pointed out earlier, *Mujeres Fuertes* sponsors trainings on diverse issues such as: public charge and public assistance, STDs, domestic violence, family support, and child rearing in the hopes of developing leadership skills for women. These leadership skills are determinant factors that lead

many women to stay and become active in *Mujeres Fuertes*. For example, when Maribel, a 25-year-old undocumented immigrant began attending the weekly meetings sponsored by *Mujeres Fuertes* she felt overwhelmed by the amount of information she was receiving because it was new to her. As she indicates:

Maribel: *Cuando ingresé al grupo estaban hablando de Healthy Families, era un rollo, no entendí...me dí cuenta que iba haber constante información, que nunca tenía que dejar de ir, para mí el dejar ir era, “como es posible que no pueda ir”...necesitaba estar ahí para informarme, para ver que esta pasando, empecé a ver que licencias, que amnistía, todo eso, y sobre todo sobre mi estado. [When I came to this group they were getting a training on Healthy Families, it was very complex for me to understand...I noticed that there was going to be constant information and I didn’t want to miss a day, “how could I miss a day”...I needed to be there to get educated, in order to find out what’s happening, they began talking about drivers license, legalization, everything that had to do with my immigration situation.]*

Maribel was able to take advantage of the leadership training sponsored by *Mujeres Fuertes*. This training enabled Maribel to become more knowledgeable not only about health but also about immigration. This made Maribel feel confident and secure which enabled her to help other immigrant women. Just as Efrain became educated and transmitted his knowledge to others so did Maribel:

Maribel: *Me senti mas segura, senti que puedo ayudar a mucha gente, a que se quite esos miedos que tienen. A que pida los derechos que tienen, que pueden obtener seguros medicos de salud y bien estar, todas esas cositas. [I felt more confident; I felt that I could help many people loose the fear they have. To exercise their rights, that they can obtain public benefits, health, and well-being, and all those things.]*

Maribel’s narrative illustrates how acquiring knowledge was empowering her, which she subsequently transmitted to other immigrant women. Maribel’s own personal struggle and experience enabled her to educate, and encourage other immigrant women to seek public services and to exercise their rights and feel entitled to do so. The

immigrants in this research steadily begin to feel that they are entitled to certain rights regardless of their immigration status. For example, having access to basic health care services and to be treated with respect. This is significant given that people who do not feel a sense of entitlement are generally people who are the disempowered, and disenfranchised.

In a similar way, Xitla, a 25-year-old undocumented immigrant from Durango, México has been involved in *Mujeres Fuertes* for the last two years. Xitla has come to think differently about her role as a woman in society because *Mujeres Fuertes* offered her a space to learn and develop her leadership skills. Like Maribel, Xitla also participated in leadership trainings such as public speaking, door knocking, health, and public benefits. Ultimately, this space gave Xitla a sense of empowerment and entitlement. As she narrates:

XITLA: *Me di cuenta que ahí me iban ayudando y me fui desarrollando con ellas y hasta la fecha sigo en el grupo y me gusta porque he aprendido muchas cosas y sigo aprendiendo y ya me he relacionado con otros grupos. Estoy en un comité de Healthy Families. [I realized that they could help me and I began developing with them and up to this day I continue to be part the group and I like it because I have learned and continue to learn many things and I have network with other groups. I'm part of the Healthy Families committee.]*

This has important implications because Xitla is altering and redefining gender relationships for women, who take up new activities in the community. Xitla is a committee board member for Healthy Families. Xitla is challenging traditional patriarchal notions by demonstrating that the role of a woman is not confined and limited to the home. Xitla's story illustrates how she redefines gender relationships by being an

active immigrant woman, acquiring knowledge, and tapping into a new network of organizations in the process.

The case of Violeta is similar to Xitla in that she too redefined gender relationships by becoming involved in the community. Violeta, is a 40-year-old undocumented female from Nayarit, Mexico and has been part of *Unidos X la Justicia* since its founding in March 2001. Violeta became involved in *Unidos X la Justicia* because they offered her a space where she could learn and acquire grassroots leadership skills. She is also involved in other organizations, which she attributes to the skills that she acquired in *Unidos X la Justicia*. As she points out:

Violeta: *Pues a traves de Unidos X la Justicia, todo esto es gracias a Unidos X la Justicia, me fuí extendiendo de ahí.* [Through *Unidos X la Justicia*, all this is thanks to *Unidos X la Justicia*, I began growing from here.]

Violeta sees her involvement in the community as a block captain and other activities as a direct result of being involved in *Unidos X la Justicia*. Her role as a block captain is to keep order and make sure that her neighborhood is clean. As she describes:

Violeta: *Estoy en capitanes de cuadra en Carlsview neighborhood...es vijilar su vecindario, mas bien sus calles que esten limpias que no haya pandillas, que no haya carros estacionados por mucho tiempo sino reportarlos y pues uno esta en contacto con la comunidad.* [I'm a block captain in Carlsview neighborhood...my role is to surveillance the neighborhood by making sure that the streets are clean with no gangs or cars parked for long periods of time, otherwise report them, I'm in contact with the community]

Thus, Violeta's involvement in the community not only benefits her but also the larger community since she now serves as a role model for other immigrant women. In many ways, Violeta went from a student to an educator where she informally transmitted her knowledge to the community and to her family. Violeta's work in the community

challenges the patriarchal notion that women's place is in the home and the stereotypical image of women as submissive, and weak. Violeta is no longer an object that is used at her husband's expense but a social actor rewriting patriarchy notions of domination. This is illustrated in how Violeta is able to involve her husband and her nine and thirteen year old daughters in *Unidos X la Justicia*. When asked Alfredo, Violeta's husband, why he became involved he said:

Alfredo: Al ver a mi señora de que ella andaba envuelta. Se mete aquí y se mete allá. Para mí ha sido bueno porque he conocido a personas que antes no conocía cuando no participaba en anda. Sale uno, platica y se desahoga uno de lo que trae y ve las cosas diferentes [Seeing that my wife was involved. She is involved here and there...for me it has been a good thing because I have met people who I didn't know before when I didn't participate at all. I go out, I talk and share my personal struggles and begin to see things differently.]

Informally, Violeta transmitted her knowledge to her husband, which led to his becoming involved. Involvement in *Unidos X la Justicia* offered him a space where he could acquire leadership skills and meet new people and gain different perspectives.

Unidos X la Justicia provides immigrants with knowledge of leadership skills, immigration, public services, and new social networks to other organizations and community members. This appears to lead to their empowerment on two different levels: as immigrants and as women. *Unidos X la Justicia* offers women a space to redefine their gender roles to become active women in the community. Immigrants stayed in these organizations because they acquired new and built on existing social networks. They also obtained leadership skills that helped them in becoming community organizers.

The stories presented thus far illustrate how through an informal network of other immigrants my interviewees found their way to *Unidos X la Justicia* and *Mujeres Fuertes*. Once there, they were able to expand their base of networks.

From community empowerment and action to a “Nueva Familia”

These organizations also provide immigrants a sense of belonging, in which immigrants come to define and describe as “*como una nueva familia*” [like a new family]. The word *familia* is a common metaphor used among immigrants especially in the context of migration. Both immigrant men and women referred to *Unidos X la Justicia* and *Mujeres Fuertes* as a new *familia* where they develop common bonds that unite them based on national identity, struggles, goals, and action. It is a *familia* that is shaped by similar immigrant status, language, and gender. Religion, social class, and education give this *familia* a diverse richness that is appreciated by many members.

Their narratives reveal a deep sense of connection to these organizations. Immigrants conceptualize these organizations as *familia* and rely on it as social network as in the case of Maribel. Maribel, a 25-year-old undocumented immigrant indicated that she felt part of a family because it was a social space where other women like herself could discuss an array of issues from health care services to other pressing issues like domestic violence. As Maribel indicates:

Maribel: *Te encuentras con gente que no conoces pero te sientes como en familia, se siente la confianza. Yo veía que se platicaban problemas de mujeres, decían “me duele esta parte, tengo que ir, donde me hago lo de los senos”(examen). Hay esa confianza, yo sabía que aunque no las conosco se que esta bien, me senti segura, me senti agradable, me senti aceptada.* [You come across people that you don’t know but you feel like family, trust can be felt. I

would hear them talk about women problems, they would say, “this part hurts, where do I go for a mammogram”. Trust is there, I knew that even though I didn’t know them, I knew that it was o.k. I felt secure, I felt pleasant, I felt accepted.]

Like a *familia*, *Mujeres Fuertes* offered Maribel warmth and trust where she was able to express her concerns as a woman who would not be judged as a result of their undocumented status. She felt accepted regardless of her immigration status even when other Mexican immigrant women were permanent residents:

Maribel: *Por ejemplo en el caso cuando yo llegué ahí al grupo y no me miraban feo, como, “mira esta acaba de llegar”. A lo contrario eso era padre, se sentía bien, no les importaba. Yo pensaba tal vez son como yo por eso no les importaba, fue lo que pensé, pero después con el tiempo me fui dando cuenta que algunas de ellas estaban legalmente y no se notaban. No se como explicarte, no se notaba, si no que no te miraban mal, te ayudaban, había comunicación.* [When I joined the group they didn’t look at me like “look she’s a recent immigrant”. On the contrary that was awesome, I felt good, they didn’t care. I thought that they were like me that’s why they didn’t care. This is what I initially thought but then I found out that some of them were legally here and I couldn’t tell. I don’t know how to tell you, I couldn’t tell, I mean, they didn’t look at you awful, they would help you, and there was dialogue.]

Maribel experienced a feeling of *familia* despite her difference in immigration status. It became apparent for Maribel that other immigrant women did not care about her immigration status but rather recognized the common experiences they shared as “strangers in a strange land”. The case of Pedro is quite different, for he conceptualizes *familia* in terms of emotional support enabling him to overcome feelings of loneliness.

As he states:

Pedro: *Hay veces que uno se siente solo, no tiene amigos, no conoce a nadie. Ese grupo es como estar en familia, platica, basila, charla, la pasa. Por lo menos no esta pensando otras cosas.* [There are times that one feels lonely, I don’t have friends, and I don’t know anyone. This group is like being part of a family, we talk, joke, time goes by. At least you are not thinking other things.]

For Pedro, *Unidos X la Justicia* is a space to meet and make new friends. He is able to manage his loneliness and his missed family in Mexico through the social and emotional support the group provides. His loneliness diminishes as he becomes part of a warm environment where he can talk, joke, and have a good time with other members.

Alfredo, a naturalized citizen from Nayarit, Mexico similarly expresses *familia* as a social network where he meets new people and a space where he can share his problems. As he states:

Alfredo: *Para mí ha sido bueno porque he conocido a personas que antes no conocía cuando no participaba en nada. Sale uno, platica, se encuentra uno a un amigo y se desahoga uno de lo que trae y ya ve uno las cosas diferentes.* [For me it has been good because I have met people that I didn't know before when I wasn't involved. We go out, we talk, we meet a friend and you talk about your problems and see things differently.]

This *familia* becomes meaningful for Alfredo and for many immigrants who often do not have someone to listen to their anxieties and problems, *Unidos X la Justicia* offers this space without judgment. This is especially important since immigrants are often without the social and emotional support that is traditionally provided by a family member and they do not trust other people to share their concerns. Being able to openly share their anxiety and fear with others in similar situations provides members a way to maintain a sense of emotional and psychological stability, as in the case of Oscar.

Oscar is a 59-year-old naturalized citizen from Nayarit, México. His wife and five children are in México. He has been living in the US since 1988 and generally goes to México every other year. For Oscar *Unidos X la Justicia* is a therapeutic space where he is able to avoid feeling lonely. As he indicates:

Oscar: *Para mi ha sido como terapia de no sentirme solo. Con Unidos X la Justicia me la paso mas contento con las amistades que están en el grupo.* [For me it has been like a therapy in order to prevent from feeling lonely. With *Unidos X la Justicia* I have a pleasant time with my friends in the group.]

In the absence of Oscar's immediate family connection, this organization becomes *familia*. In the end *familia* becomes a shared space where immigrants share common struggles, emotions, and ideals. This is illustrated in the case of Leonardo, a 49-year-old undocumented immigrant from Puebla, México who has been living in the US since 2000. His wife and two sons reside in Mexico. Leonardo recognizes that *Unidos X la Justicia* is a *familia* that shares similar ideals and goals, which ultimately strengthens his bond to the group. As he points out:

Leonardo: *Mi primera razón de quedarme en ese grupo es porque yo también comparto esas ideas de que tenemos que hacer algo por nuestra comunidad.* [The first reason why I am part of this group is because I also share the same ideals that we have to do something for our community.]

Familia is also characterized by the sharing of common ideals to strive for the common good of the immigrant community and also for immigrants themselves. That is, *Unidos X la Justicia* stimulates members to succeed, to identify goals, and strive for those goals as in the case of Benito. Benito is a 31year old undocumented immigrant from Puebla, México who has been living in the US since July 2003. His wife and two children live in Puebla, México. For Benito *Unidos X la Justicia* strengthens his morals and motivates him to succeed:

Benito: *Tengo la oportunita de convivir con gente que ha vivido la misma experiencia, de hacer amigos, tener con quien conversar porque la verdad no cuento con nadie. Este grupo es como una familia en San José, CA más, osea, es una familia que te invita siempre a quererte superar, lo que puedes hacer por tí y por los demás. Te crea una moral, un pensamiento mas firme, en que tu tienes derechos a vivir mejor, tienes derechos a trabajar a una oportunidad de trabajo.*

[I have the opportunity to socialize with people who have lived the same experienced, make friends, and have someone to talk to because honestly I don't have anyone. This group is like one more family in San Jose, California. I mean, it's a family that invites you to succeed, what you can do for yourself and for other people. It creates morale, a stronger conviction that we have the right to live better, that we have the right to a job.]

Having a *familia* such as *Unidos X la Justicia* encourages Benito to strive for his goals and to claim the basic rights he and other immigrants are entitled to but which often remain unrealized. In this sense *Unidos X la Justicia* plays an important role in investing immigrants with the idea that they are entitled to certain rights, in Benito's case the right to have better living and better working conditions.

This chapter examined how through informal networks, immigrants were able to find their way to *Unidos X la Justicia* and *Mujeres Fuertes*. These organizations not only provided both immigrant men and women with (1) information, (2) leadership skills, and (3) new social networks. These organizations also served as (4) a space where immigrant women redefined gender relationships by challenging patriarchal notions that a woman's place is in the home as they become more active in the community. Ultimately what led immigrants to stay in *Unidos X la Justicia* and *Mujeres Fuertes* was the sense of belonging that these organizations offered. Immigrants conceptualized these organizations as *familia* where common struggles, concerns, emotions, ideals were shared and trust, respect, support and responsibility was felt toward each other. Although immigrants differed in social class, education, immigration status, and religion, they lived through very similar realities of oppression and discrimination in the US and found ways to unite across those differences.

Both *Unidos X la Justicia* and *Mujeres Fuertes* facilitated immigrant men and women to have a smoother transition to settlement. These organizations also helped immigrants affirm and assert their identity as Mexican immigrants and to articulate their needs and the needs of other immigrants through political participation. This might be characterized as a new identity based on acquiring a critical consciousness (West 1993). This is examined in the concluding chapter that follows.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

This research study has been concerned with how documented and undocumented immigrant men and women negotiate their identity as they undergo a process of passage and settlement. This study has examined how Mexican immigrants become politically active in both *Unidos X la Justicia* and *Mujeres Fuertes*.

Immigrants endured many hardships that were grueling, dangerous, and filled with physical and emotional trouble. Some ran the risk of dying, being robbed, or killed by border bandits or smugglers. Once in the US they confronted a new set of challenges. Some of the core challenges that arose for the Mexican immigrants in this study ranged from domestic violence, language barriers, immigration surveillance, police harassment, to stigmatizing immigration labels. These challenges differ for undocumented, permanent resident, and naturalized US citizens. Immigrants also had to confront and negotiate negative stigmas that certain immigration labels carry that are adopted by society.

Oboler (1995) indicates that labels are used to prevent immigrants from incorporating into society who are in search of full citizenship rights and social justice. This is the case with the label *mojado* that is viewed as derogatory, humiliating, offensive, and oppressive. The label *mojado* racializes Mexican immigrants in terms of social class and national identity, causing them to have a stigmatized identity. Immigrants can either reject this stigmatized label and redefine it or accept it without contesting it. The immigrants in this study rejected this label due to its negative

connotation and generally aligned themselves with their Mexican national identity. By doing this, immigrants were reclaiming their identity, their entitlement to be treated with respect and dignity, and entitlement to basic rights. In this process, immigrants are becoming advocates and community activists.

In Chapter 4, immigrants through informal networks were able to participate in *Unidos X la Justicia* and *Mujeres Fuertes*. These groups provided information, leadership skills, and new social networks allowing easier settlement and encouraging active participation in the community.

Ultimately, what immigrants gain from these organizations is a critical consciousness that is characterized by their political activism where they affirm their identity as Mexican immigrants and articulate and advocate the needs of other immigrants. This is achieved through a collective process whereby many immigrants use their cultural, national and political struggles to claim a space and visibility for themselves and for other immigrants. In this process they are claiming basic entitlement rights, and respect. Immigrants are redefining who they are and what place they have in society, as members of a majority and powerful group. This leads immigrants to develop a new identity as immigrants characterized by an emerging critical consciousness.

This chapter seeks to highlight these new findings and delineate how immigrants acquire a critical consciousness that leads to a new political immigrant identity. Obtaining a critical consciousness is central to immigrants' political participation. This critical consciousness does not arise as immigrants cross the border and settle; it is acquired through an elaborate process as described in Chapter 4.

This critical consciousness is particularly apparent among immigrant women. Immigrant women in this study do not reflect the stereotypical role of women as passive wives who follow the orders of their husbands. On the contrary, the women represent the foundation of the immigrant family and community where they juggle and balance multiple roles in the home, work, and community (Moser 1987). Their participation in the immigrant community transforms their individual female identities. They are no longer objects but political actors. That is, they work in developing community networks, drawing other family members into the process. This re-writes history, a new history of women, and of the community. They transcend the traditional female role as they become community leaders and organizers. They also bring part of that role with them, as they are unable to separate between their community role and their familial role. In the process, they are redefining gender relationships by challenging traditional cultural frameworks discarding elements they find oppressive and adopting new ones (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994). As Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994:15) points out “women...may take up new activities such as working for wages, attending meetings in the evenings, driving, and they may exert authority over family matters previously out of their control.”

This is clearly demonstrated in this research. As it has been highlighted, this position of action is a direct cause of acquiring a critical consciousness. They come to see themselves entitled to basic rights and having an influence over community life. In the process they come to realize they have power. Their participation leads to a transformed identity. As Cornel West (1993) indicates a critical consciousness is a new-perception in which a person no longer view themselves as objects of history, but rather

as subjects of history. This is demonstrated in my research where immigrants are objects of forces beyond their control in their journey and settlement to the US.

The emergence of this critical consciousness as they become political agents has a price for this new female identity. Women have the double burden of work and family that becomes a triple burden of work, family, social, and community struggle (Moser 1987). As immigrant women become more immersed in the community as activists they run the risk of losing both their job and family support. Although none of the interviewees explicitly indicated that their husbands prohibited them from community work, their husbands did not like the idea of them being too involved and some even refused to acknowledge their participation, as was the case of Xitla. Xitla had mentioned that her husband did not want her to be too involved in *Mujeres Fuertes* or other community organizations because it took time away from her family responsibilities. Thus, Xitla ran the risk of losing her husband's support if she ever had it.

The immigrant women's situation provides a particular interesting case of developing a critical consciousness. Many women come to think differently not just about life as an immigrant but also life as a woman. This particular finding is significant given the scant literature on immigration and gender. Very few have examined how immigrant activism work might lead to an emerging feminist consciousness.

The findings from this study reveal how certain settlement challenges prevents Mexican immigrants from incorporation and political participation. This study also challenges the traditional paradigm of assimilation that emphasizes the loss of cultural ties to homeland as new immigrants are incorporated into society. In the case of

interviewees, Mexican immigrants became incorporated into society through their participation in these grassroots groups. They affirm their identity as immigrants. They develop a critical consciousness that at once leads to greater demand for basic human/civil rights.

Future research might examine both Mexican immigrant men and women with different immigration status who are not politically involved in the community in order to see if they acquire a critical consciousness. Future research can also examine other immigrants from Central and South America and compare it to this current research to see if there are commonalities and/or differences. Also, future research may look at other geographic locations with large concentration of Latino immigrants.

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APPENDIX A

Consent Form

San José State
UNIVERSITY

Department of Sociology
College of Social Sciences

One Washington Square
San José, CA 95192-0122
Voice: 408-924-5320
Fax: 408-924-5322
E-mail: socio@email.sjsu.edu

Agreement to Participate in Research

Responsible investigator Hortencia Jimenez

Title of Protocol: Immigration status as a form of identity formation among Mexican immigrants.

You have been asked to participate in a research study investigating how Mexican immigrants' construct their identity based on their immigration status; that is, undocumented, permanent resident, and U.S citizen.

The time and place of the interview will depend on your availability. You will be asked open-ended questions that pertain to your experience as an immigrant. Most of the questions will be based on your own response. I will use a notebook to hand write my notes and use a pseudonyms name.

There is a risk that if you, the participant, are identified and you are not a legal permanent immigrant, you could be arrested or deported. However, I, the researcher will do everything I can to prevent you from being identified. I will use a pseudonym name, which is not similar to your real name. I will keep no key connecting the pseudonym with your real name. I will not group data or quote you in such a way that you can be identified. Moreover, the interview questions can make you feel uncomfortable and you may not wish to answer the question or participate in the interview. In order to minimize the risk, you will be informed before the interview about the research, what kind of questions may be asked and the duration of the interview.

By participating in this research study, you may be able to understand how immigration status shapes identity formation among Mexican immigrants differently based on their undocumented and legal status. By participating in this research you will be contributing to a new study done on Latino immigrant identity.

Although these results of this study may be published, no information that could identify you will be included. In order to ensure confidentiality you will be given pseudonyms. All the information that will emerge from this research along with hand written notes will be locked up in my home safe and destroyed upon completion of the research. Under no circumstances will anyone have access to these materials other than myself, the investigator.

The California State University:
Chancellor's Office
Bakersfield, Channel Islands, Chico,
Dominguez Hills, Fresno, Fullerton,
Hayward, Humboldt, Long Beach,
Los Angeles, Maritime Academy,
Monterey Bay, Northridge, Pomona,
Sacramento, San Bernardino, San Diego,
San Francisco, San José, San Luis Obispo,
San Marcos, Sonoma, Stanislaus

San José State UNIVERSITY

Department of Sociology College of Social Sciences

One Washington Square
San José, CA 95192-0122
Voice: 408-924-5320
Fax: 408-924-5322
E-mail: socio@email.sjsu.edu

Questions about this research may be addressed to Hortencia Jimenez at (408) 586-8737. Complaints about the research may be presented to Amy Best, Ph.D, Sociology (408) 924-5756. Questions about subjects' rights, or research-related injury may be presented to Pam Stacks, Interim Academic Vice-President, at (408) 924-2480.

No service of any kind, to which you are otherwise entitled, will be lost or jeopardized if you choose to "not participate" in the study.

Your consent is being given voluntarily. You may refuse to participate in the entire study or in any part of the study. If you decide to participate in the study, you are free to withdraw at any time without any negative effect on your relations with San Jose State University or with any other participating institutions or agencies.

At the time of your sign this consent form, you will receive a copy of it for your records, signed and dated by the investigator.

The signature of a subject on this document indicates agreement to participate in the study.

The signature of a research on this document indicates agreement to include the above named subject in the research and attestation that the subject has been fully informed of his or her rights.

Signature	Date
-----------	------

Investigator's Signature	Date
--------------------------	------

The California State University:
Chancellor's Office
Bakersfield, Channel Islands, Chico,
Dominguez Hills, Fresno, Fullerton,
Hayward, Humboldt, Long Beach,
Los Angeles, Maritime Academy,
Monterey Bay, Northridge, Pomona,
Sacramento, San Bernardino, San Diego,
San Francisco, San José, San Luis Obispo,
San Marcos, Sonoma, Stanislaus

APPENDIX B
Spanish Translation Consent Form

San José State
UNIVERSITY

Department of Sociology

College of Social Sciences

One Washington Square
San José, CA 95192-0122
Voice: 408-924-5320
Fax: 408-924-5322
E-mail: socio@email.sjsu.edu

CONSENTIMIENTO PARA PARTICIPAR EN INVESTIGACIÓN

Investigadora responsable: Hortencia Jiménez

Título de Protocolo: Estado migratorio como formación de identidad hacia los inmigrantes Mexicanos

Le han preguntado si le gustaría participar en una investigación que estudia a los inmigrantes Mexicanos en cómo construyen su estado migratorio basado en su identidad como inmigrantes indocumentados, residentes permanentes y ciudadanos naturalizados.

El día y la hora de la entrevista depende de su disponibilidad. En la entrevista le harán preguntas de sus experiencias como inmigrante en este país. La mayoría de las preguntas serán basadas en su respuesta. Usare una libreta para tomar notas usando un nombre seudónimo.

Hay un riesgo de que sea arrestado o deportado, si usted el participante es indocumentado. Sin embargo, yo la investigadora haré todo lo posible para prevenir que su verdadera identidad no sea identificada en la entrevista. Usaré un nombre seudónimo que no es similar a su verdadero nombre. No agruparé datos o citas de tal manera que lo puedan identificar. Tal vez las preguntas que le haga en la entrevista lo hagan sentir incómodo y usted tal vez no quiera responder las pregunta o continuar con la entrevista. Para reducir cualquier tipo de riesgo, usted será informado antes de la entrevista sobre la clase de preguntas que se le harán y la duración de la entrevista.

Al participar en esta investigación, usted tendrá mejor conocimiento de como el estado migratorio de un inmigrante forma su identidad. Incluso, al participar en esta investigación, usted estará contribuyendo a un nuevo estudio de identidad de inmigrantes Mexicanos.

Aunque los resultados de este estudio serán publicados, ninguna clase de información que lo pueda identificar sera incluida. Para asegurar su confidencialidad un nombre seudónimo será usado. Toda la información que resulte de esta investigación y notas que tome serán guardadas en mi casa y serán destruidas al completar mi investigación. Nadie podrá bajo ninguna circunstancia tener acceso a estos materiales, sólo yo, la investigadora..

Preguntas tocantes a esta investigación pueden ser presentadas a Hortencia Jiménez al (408) 586-8737. Quejas tocantes a la investigación pueden ser presentadas a la profesora Amy Best, Ph.D, Sociologia (408) 924-5756.

The California State University:
Chancellor's Office
Bakersfield, Channel Islands, Chico,
Dominguez Hills, Fresno, Fullerton,
Hayward, Humboldt, Long Beach,
Los Angeles, Maritime Academy,
Monterey Bay, Northridge, Pomona,
Sacramento, San Bernardino, San Diego,
San Francisco, San José, San Luis Obispo,
San Marcos, Sonoma, Stanislaus

San José State
UNIVERSITY

Department of Sociology
College of Social Sciences

One Washington Square
San José, CA 95192-0122
Voice: 408-924-5320
Fax: 408-924-5322
E-mail: socio@email.sjsu.edu

Preguntas tocantes a los derechos de los participantes o daño relacionado con la investigación pueden ser presentadas a Pam Stacks, Vice Presidente Interino Académico al (408) 924-2480.

Ningún servicio de cualquier clase, al que usted de otra manera tenga derecho, será perdido o puesto en peligro si usted elige "no participar" en este estudio.

Su consentimiento está siendo voluntario. Usted puede rehusar el participar en parte del estudio o en todo el estudio. Si usted decide participar en el estudio, usted puede retirarse en cualquier momento sin ningún efecto negativo en sus relaciones con la Universidad Estatal de San José o cualquier otra institución o agencias participantes

En el momento que usted firma este consentimiento, se le proporcionará una copia para sus archivos, firmada y fechada por la investigadora.

La firma del sujeto en este documento indica su consentimiento para participar en este estudio.

La firma del investigador indica el consentimiento del sujeto nombrado arriba atestiguar que ha sido informado de sus derechos.

Firma

Fecha

Firma del Investigador

Fecha

The California State University:
Chancellor's Office
Bakersfield, Channel Islands, Chico,
Dominguez Hills, Fresno, Fullerton,
Hayward, Humboldt, Long Beach,
Los Angeles, Maritime Academy,
Monterey Bay, Northridge, Pomona,
Sacramento, San Bernardino, San Diego,
San Francisco, San José, San Luis Obispo,
San Marcos, Sonoma, Stanislaus

APPENDIX C

Table of Participants

TABLE OF PARTICIPANTS

Name	Immigration Status	Year of migration	Age	Occupation	Education
Efrain	Naturalized US Citizen	1982	40s	landscaping	Middle School
Ismael	Naturalized US Citizen	1958	60s	case worker	University equivalent
Javier	Naturalized US Citizen	1983	60s	community organizer	BA Business
Alfredo	Naturalized US Citizen	1988	40s	construction	BS Agronomy
Oscar	Naturalized US Citizen	1979	60s	Janitor	Elementary School
Leticia	Permanent Resident	1981	50s	homemaker	High School
Eva	Permanent Resident	1996	20s	Admin. assistant	High School
Mayra	Permanent Resident	2000	40s	Coordinator	BA Business
Norma	Permanent Resident	1994	40s	Director	BS Economics
Pedro	Permanent Resident	1980	50s	Janitor	Elementary School

TABLE OF PARTICIPANTS <i>(continued)</i>					
Name	Immigration Status	Year of migration	Age	Occupation	Education
Jose	Permanent Resident	1971	50s	Construction	Elementary School
Yolanda	Permanent Resident	1995	40s	domestic service	Elementary School
Benito	Undocumented	2003	30s	Day laborer	Elementary School
Xitla	Undocumented	1999	20s	Homemaker	High School
Maribel	Undocumented	1996	20s	domestic Service	Elementary School
Leonardo	Undocumented	1988	50s	day laborer/ Organizer	Physician
Lupe	Undocumented	1989	50s	janitor	Elementary school
Blanca	Undocumented	2002	30s	cook	University
Veronica	Undocumented	2001	30s	homemaker/ Nany	Elementary School
Violeta	Undocumented	1989	40s	organizer/ Homemaker	Nurse

APPENDIX D
Consent Approval Letter

San José State
UNIVERSITY

**Office of the Academic
Vice President**

**Academic Vice President
Graduate Studies and Research**

One Washington Square
San José, CA 95192-0025
Voice: 408-283-7500
Fax: 408-924-2477
E-mail: gradstudies@sjsu.edu
<http://www.sjsu.edu>

To: Horencia Jimenez
133 North Temple Drive, Apt. #46
Milpitas, CA 95035

From: Pam Stacks,
Interim AVP, Graduate Studies & Research

Date: December 18, 2003

The Human Subjects-Institutional Review Board has approved your request to use human subjects in the study entitled:

“Latino Immigrant Identity”

This approval is contingent upon the subjects participating in your research project being appropriately protected from risk. This includes the protection of the anonymity of the subjects' identity when they participate in your research project, and with regard to any and all data that may be collected from the subjects. The approval includes continued monitoring of your research by the Board to assure that the subjects are being adequately and properly protected from such risks. If at any time a subject becomes injured or complains of injury, you must notify Pam Stacks, Ph.D. immediately. Injury includes but is not limited to bodily harm, psychological trauma, and release of potentially damaging personal information. This approval for the human subjects portion of your project is in effect for one year and data collection beyond December 18, 2004 requires an extension request.

Please also be advised that all subjects need to be fully informed and aware that their participation in your research project is voluntary, and that he or she may withdraw from the project at any time. Further, a subject's participation, refusal to participate, or withdrawal will not affect any services that the subject is receiving or will receive at the institution in which the research is being conducted.

If you have any questions, please contact me at (408) 924-2480.

cc: Dr. Roberto Gonzalez