



Here to Stay: Case Studies of Civic Participation Among Mexican Immigrants In Central Valley Communities

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July 15, 2003

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Acknowledgements

Thanks should go first to Craig McGarvey, former Director of the Civic Culture program at the James Irvine Foundation, for making this research possible and for ongoing dialogue and insights as we moved along. Marty Campbell, the foundation's Director of Evaluation, and Lande Ajose, our current Program Officer, have been engaged and collegial, throughout the project. I greatly appreciate their support.

The project's field research team interviewing Mexican immigrants in the Central Valley-- Anna Garcia, Ana Rodriguez, and Rick Mines--brought years of experience, insights, and energy to the project. Santiago Ventura introduced me to several Mixteco civic activists and helped with translation at key points. Special thanks are due to Holly Mines for a marvelous job preparing the profile of one of the civic activists in Chapter 7.

The immigrant activists who appear in this report were generous with their time and patient in allowing us to ask them so many questions about their lives, their thoughts and their hopes. I am grateful for their insights and inspiration and hopeful that I adequately portrayed their perspectives. They are: Luis Magaña, Filemon Lopez, Polo Chavez, Jorge San Juan, Raquel Velasco, Gustavo Dominguez, Herlinda Gonzalez, and Gloria Hernandez. The stories and reflections of other insightful immigrant activists and community leaders also informed the current analysis although their experiences are not explicitly mentioned in this report. They include: Miguel Donoso, Preciliano and Tomas Hernandez Velasquez, Ana Lemus, Rafael Flores, Leonel Flores, Jose Loa, Teo Parra, Adalia and Jesus Luevanos, Antonio Flores, Fausto Sanchez, and Antonio Cortes Garcia.

Other Central Valley community activists whose insights and/or critiques have been helpful in thinking through certain themes include: Jesus Martinez-Saldaña, Samuel Orozco, and Mark Miller. Thanks also to Eric Cohen and Mark Silverman for sharing with me entries in the ILRC-sponsored student writing contest on the DREAM Act.

An October, 2002 conference organized by Jonathan Fox of the University of California at Santa Cruz, Gaspar Rivera Salgado of the University of Southern California, and Rufino Dominguez of the Frente Indígena Oaxaqueño Binacional provided a wealth of opportunities to learn more about the transnational dimensions of Mexican civic activism from a wide range of leading researchers, activists, and journalists.

I am especially grateful to Anna Garcia and Aline Doignon for their detailed ethnographic observations and interviews conducted as part of our “New Pluralism” project community case study in Arvin, to my Aguirre International colleague, Susan Gabbard, for her insights and analyses of National Agricultural Worker Survey data on constantly-changing patterns of Mexico-U.S. migration, and to James Glasnapp, also at Aguirre, for ongoing dialogue about the nature of social capital in Central California communities.

Chapter 1

Introduction and Overview

Introduction

Immigration is changing the face of rural California and America. About one out of every nine persons living in the U.S. is an immigrant and about one in every five children in America is the child of an immigrant.¹ Although the majority of immigrants to the United States immigrate to and settle in urban areas, the pace of social and community-level transformation is fastest in rural areas of the country. In 22 rural states, this population has grown by more than 90% during the decade from 1990-2000. Mexican-origin immigrants are the largest component in this growth.

This report from The Aguirre Group's Central Valley Immigrant Civic Participation Project study focuses on the experiences of Mexican immigrants who are the majority of newcomers to rural California and other rural areas of the United States. As such it complements the project's inquiry and analyses of the dynamics of Hmong immigrants, the second largest new immigrant population in the Central Valley.

Project research has focused on the Central Valley because the region is a microcosm of rural regions throughout the country, a crystal ball for considering how all of rural America will be demographically, socially, and politically transformed by immigration in the coming decade. An additional practical reason for this focus is that the region is one where the Aguirre team has now worked for more than 5 years and because the Central Valley continues to be a focus for the James Irvine Foundation's philanthropic efforts. This report is meant to make both practical and theoretical contributions to efforts to move forward proactively and creatively in California's journey toward becoming a multi-cultural, multi-lingual, pluralistic society.

In the case of Mexican immigrants to rural California, there has been something of a policy vacuum regarding proactive strategies to facilitate their social integration. The *de facto* locus for social integration has, for many years, been the workplace. The basic notion of the Special Agricultural Worker (SAW) provisions of IRCA (that immigration policy might be crafted to get Mexican workers into the labor force but discourage their families from joining them) turned out to be wrong. As Mexican immigrant settlement in rural areas has continued, it has become clearer that comprehensive strategies will be required to integrate immigrants into the economic, social, civic, and political life of local communities.² By

¹ Analyses are from a presentation by Michael Fix and Jeffrey Passel to "The Changing Face of Rural California" conference sponsored by The Urban Institute/University of California, Davis, Asilomar, CA May 18, 2003.

² The politically polarized California debate about the cost of services to immigrants reflects the problems inherent in a policy dialogue where the primary issue has been access to a standard menu of program services. David Hayes-Bautista of the UCLA School of Public Health began, early in the 1980's, exploring ways in which Latinos' sociodemographic profile differed from other populations and suggesting that "cookie cutter" designs for public health and social programs would not be adequate..

“integrate” is meant not simply “incorporate” but a more challenging objective—to collectively engage in a process which systematically seeks to work toward social, political and economic equity in those communities. This is an area where the James Irvine Foundation has been a leader for more than 15 years and our hope is that the report will be of assistance to the foundation in its ongoing strategic planning for the coming decade.

Beginning with the applied research in The Changing Relations Project sponsored by the Ford Foundation from the late 1980’s through the early 1990’s there has been impressive progress in applied research on immigrant social integration (e.g. Bach et al 1993; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Suarez-Orozco and Paez 2002).

During the same period, there has been a separate strand of applied research inquiry on the changing nature of community life which focuses on the dynamics of civic and political participation. Much of this research has consisted of analysis of trends at the national level (Verba et al 1995; Putnam 2000; Clagett and Pollock 2000; Jenkins et al 2003). It has provided the foundation for a lively social policy debate. Yet there has been little attention to the specific ways in which civic life in communities with especially high influxes of immigrants might differ from the overall national patterns although the line of inquiry on immigrant social integration suggest that the type of economic, social, civic, and political environment in a community, makes a major difference in processes of integration and outcomes (Menjivar 2000; Hagan 1998; Cano 2002)

The Aguirre Group’s decision to focus the project inquiry at the “micro-level”--the experiences of individual immigrants, their families, informal social networks, neighborhoods, and local communities-- was meant to enhance the study’s utility as a basis for designing local “place-based” initiatives, as well as an effort to provide insights into the social dynamics which give rise to the macro-level regional and national patterns of immigrant integration. The distinct contribution of the current report is that it examines the personal and social dynamics of immigrant integration and civic participation in rural communities where change is proceeding more rapidly than in urban areas—because the flow of Mexican immigrants migrating north to work in agriculture is ongoing. As such it may complement the findings from the research on urban immigrant integration.

The hope is that it will give a human face to more abstract, over-arching analyses of sociopolitical trends in these communities, thereby providing assistance to program planners, community-based organizations, local government entities, and funders seeking to find concrete and innovative solutions to address the range of issues related to the social and civic transformation of rural communities.

The goal, in the Immigrant Civic Participation Research project and this report on that inquiry has been three-fold:

- to articulate a textured framework for understanding how individual migration experiences, economic circumstances, and network affiliations in rural California communities with concentrations of immigrants might affect the development of immigrant civic participation,

- to introduce into the policy and program dialogue, immigrant activists' own voices and reflections about their personal development, values, perspectives, and objectives,
- to examine some of the implications of existing research on civic participation, immigrant integration, and migration, to build on the experience in the Central Valley Partnership for Citizenship (CVP) initiative, and to explore the insights from our own inquiry as the basis for innovative program design and policy initiatives

The emphasis on individual immigrants' personal experiences and perceptions and the analysis oriented toward micro-ecology of sociopolitical change, provides a solid platform for further question-posing, articulation of possible directions for further research, and some preliminary insights into the ways in which the small rural communities where Mexican immigrants to the Central Valley settle are different from urban areas.

Exploring the Dynamics of Civic Participation as a Strand in Inquiry about the Overall Processes of Immigrant Social Integration

Attention to the issue of civic participation in a rapidly-changing multicultural society is not a luxury; it is a necessity. Policy analyses which fail to address the roles which immigrants themselves play in their own social integration into community life have two equally serious drawbacks. The first drawback is that very broadly-sketched reductionistic models based only on econometric or broad sociological analyses will diverge dangerously from day-to-day realities. The second drawback is that if we fail to recognize how routinely and persistently humans engage in creating personal and social identities and "meanings" in social and, thus, civic life, we may limit our ability to identify strategically promising policy options for immigrant integration and efforts to enhance overall community well-being. Individual perspectives, and life experiences in immigrant communities are rich and varied. Community life in rural California is complex, and diverges significantly from an abstract "default" model of social and civic life in "Mainstreet, USA". Without attention to the fine-grained texture of community life, uni-dimensional, macro-level "solutions" and policies will generally fail because the implicit assumptions about "other things being equal" are seldom justified.

Immigrant/Community Co-Evolution—The Dynamics of Accommodation

The vision of a strategy for catalyzing immigrant civic participation which would be implemented by creation of a collaborative learning network of community-based organizations, initially articulated by Craig McGarvey, as Director of Irvine's Civic Culture Program, resonates strongly with the insights from the emerging body of inter-disciplinary research on immigrant integration. Recent research in the field examines how cultural context, personal experiences, overt and covert communication, tensions and conflicts, between immigrant and native-born populations, and among groups of immigrants themselves, shape the ongoing processes of immigrant integration. Robert Bach explains the ongoing process of co-evolution in reporting on the findings of his team's research and articulating a sound set of social policy principles to foster successful immigrant integration,

*The Changing Relations Project research focuses on accommodation, a process by which all sides in a multifaceted situation, including established residents and groups at different stages of settlement, find ways of adjusting to and supporting one another. Accommodation embraces an entire community in collective change.*³

I have focused on how immigrants at different stages of settlement, with different sorts of personal constraints and aspiration, take on various roles within their own informal community networks as well as on their interactions with native-born populations. In the context of rural California communities with ongoing Mexican immigration, the dividing line between “native-born” and immigrant populations is blurred because, in many cases, the largest groups in “migrant-receiving” communities are, themselves, earlier cohorts of now-settled immigrants, or the children of those immigrants. The Central Valley is a virtual “borderlands” in terms of social and civic geography. This makes the issues related to establishing one’s personal social and civic identity challenging because personal circumstances, sociopolitical framework, and community character are in a process of constant flux.

Understanding the Dynamics of Informal Social Networks

In addition to the research on immigrant integration into the social life of U.S. urban communities, there is also an extensive body of research on the important roles played by informal and semi-formal social networks in the process of migration and in the dynamics of community life—in immigrants’ communities of origin and the communities in which they settle (Lomnitz 1968; Levitt 2001; Wilson 2000). Migration networks facilitate the movement of millions of migrants globally and, in the case of California (even in the post-9/11 era) the career trajectories and life choices of hundreds of thousands of Mexican immigrants are determined within the domain of these transnational networks (Massey et al 1987; Johnson and Reyes 2002). These transnational dimensions of community life are particularly important in the case of Mexican settlement communities in rural California..

Immigrant social capital is a powerful force in the day-to-day life of communities where immigrants settle. Immigrants’ social networks play a major role in determining which immigrants find employment, what kind of employment, and where (Hagan 2000; Wilson 2000), in establishing and maintaining successful businesses (Portes 1995), in preparing families to survive economically in the face of insecure and seasonal employment (Griffith and Kissam 1995), and in helping immigrants confront health-related problems in an environment in which many, despite very low incomes, are barred from receiving publicly-funded services (Bade 2000). It should be no surprise that these networks’ influence extends into the domain of community civic life (Grenier and Stepick 1992; Bach 1993; Marwell 2000).

The idea that immigrant social capital can make a valuable contribution to enhancing the well-being of individuals, families, and entire communities is particularly compelling in the case of California’s Central Valley. If not social capital, what other resources can be brought to bear? These are very poor communities (Rochin and Allensworth 2001; Taylor et al 1997;

³ p. 4, *Changing Relations: Newcomers and Established Residents in U.S. Communities*, report to the Ford Foundation, 1993.

Lopez 1995). With low per capita incomes, a low tax base, challenged schools, crowded housing, seasonal unemployment, and high proportions of community residents ineligible to vote) these rural communities face serious challenges and have few resources to confront them. Yet, despite the extent of poverty throughout the region, communities are remarkably healthy in some respects—as assessed by objective indicators and by community members themselves. This suggested that immigrants may be making significant contributions to overall community well-being.

Immigrant Social Capital as a Community Resource

Determining the exact connection between social capital and civic engagement is a central concern. It is generally agreed that the extent and type of social capital in a community is an important factor contributing to individual, neighborhood, and community-level well being and that, at the same time, social capital serves as the foundation for widespread and effective civic participation.

Although there is general consensus that immigrants' informal social networks represent rich stores of social capital, most of this research has been urban. There has, to date, been little attention to the distinctive context of rural communities where Mexican immigrants are settling. The time is ripe for attention to this region—especially given the macro-level social transformation of the rural United States. Most of the smaller Central Valley rural communities where Mexican migrants settle are already Latino-majority communities. Many others are close to that point and will reach a “tipping point” in the coming decade

There has recently been growing interest in the California about developing a proactive cross-agency strategy for immigrant integration.⁴ This led to a comprehensive analysis (Garcia y Griego and Martin 2000) responding in part to the anti-immigrant policies proposed via Propositions 187 and 227. More recently, the state's Little Hoover Commission, after extensive research and hearings, published *We the People: Helping Newcomers Become Californian*, a ground-breaking effort to advance dialogue about state policy vis-a-vis immigrant integration (LHC 2000). A key strand in the strategic response recommended by the Commission is to go beyond policy debate about immigrants' service needs and the cost of providing such services to address the common goal of helping immigrants to become responsible community members—self-reliant, resources for collective efforts to improve community well-being.⁵

The premise that civic engagement can be an important factor in contributing to community well-being is a broad one. Extending that idea further to the proposition that immigrant civic engagement can do more than move communities toward racial and economic equity but, also, contribute tangibly to overall progress in otherwise disadvantaged communities, is

⁴ This interest is driven in large part by the inexorable process of demographic change. On June 18, 2003 the San Francisco Chronicle reported that Census Bureau data showed Hispanic population growth, stemming from both immigration and birthrate was faster than had been projected.

⁵ A recent report commissioned by the James Irvine Foundation, Emily Goldfarb and Amanda Berger, “Opinion Leader Response to Little Hoover Commission Report”, June, 2003, provides a good review of some both immediate challenges and next steps in this process.

appealing. But the best strategies and processes to make this happen are not so evident—in part because research and policy analysis have been focused elsewhere.

While social networks have played a key role in determining settlement patterns and facilitating immigrants' ability to cope in adverse environments, there is also evidence (Menjivar 2001) that contemporary socioeconomic conditions may erode their social capital and the power of networks to even take care of their own, much less contribute to positive community change. As Menjivar observes, the extent to which immigrants are politically disenfranchised will hinder the process of accommodation or co-evolution.

It should be expected that distinctive strategies would be needed to make good on the promise of converting or translating immigrants' social capital into a resource for Central Valley community development. At the same time, such an endeavor holds out great promise because it seems that what has been learned about the Central Valley might be relevant to the broader challenge of the demographic transformation of most of rural America. Below I enumerate some of the most notable of these conceptual and practical challenges as they relate to building immigrant civic participation and facilitating social integration in the rural communities where the primary flows of immigrants are of rural Mexican migrants who have come to work in California agriculture.

Demographic Change and Civic Integration in Smaller, Rural Communities

One important difference between the urban multi-ethnic immigrant communities in which immigrants settle and the smaller rural communities in California (and throughout the U.S.) where community transformation is driven primarily by Mexican immigration relates to the basic calculus as to how demographic transformation eventually results in political realignment in communities.

With a smaller population base and powerful “pull” forces drawing immigrants, the rate of immigration-induced change in many of these rural communities is higher than in most urban areas. For example, immediately after World War II, the population of the small town of Arvin, in Kern County was 6% Mexican and 85% White Non-Hispanic (Goldschmidt 1947). In 2000, the town's population was 88% Hispanic and about 10% White Non-Hispanic. All of the 48 Central Valley communities in the CARUCOM database of rural California communities now have Latino majorities as a result of Mexican immigration but none did in the 1950's. While these are Latino-majority, and, in fact, Mexican-majority communities, there is diversity within the Mexican immigrant population---since Mixtec, Triqui, and other indigenous-origin migrants make up a substantial minority (about 11%) of the current California farm labor force. The experience of indigenous-origin Mexican immigrants in settling in rural California is of particular interest because, while less abrupt than Hmong settlement, large-scale settlement from these networks has been underway for only 15 years and is accelerating rapidly. At current rates of change in the composition of Mexico-California migration flows, more than one in five California farmworkers and at least

that proportion of rural Mexican immigrants will belong to a Mexican indigenous ethnic minority in 2010.⁶

Genesis of the Current Research

The Aguirre Group research team's interest in immigrant civic engagement as an ongoing multi-generational process also emerged from the initial evaluation research on the Central Valley Partnership for Citizenship (CVP). An exciting finding from the study (Kissam et al 1999) was that the community members (often the 2nd generation children of immigrants) who became involved in helping 1st generation immigrants with the naturalization process reported that they had, themselves, gained greatly from this experience. Throughout their accounts we heard from these volunteers (and from those who were the beneficiaries of their efforts) that one of the most important impacts of these programs was to bring these 2nd generation Mexican immigrant youth and young adults together with 1st generation immigrants from their parents' generation.

This finding echoes various analyses from the civic participation research delineated the benefits to volunteers accruing from community service (Clary and Snyder 2002; Barber et al. 2000; Aguirre International 1998). However, our initial evaluation-oriented cross-sectional analysis of impacts of volunteer community service on immigrants in 1999 clearly could not tell us all we wanted to know about different modes of civic participation or about future trajectories for immigrants' civic participation. This interested us in the possibilities of a retrospective inquiry-- asking immigrants who were civically-engaged (whether or not they were CVP program participants) how they had come to be involved in the roles they were currently playing in civic life.

Early on, I was intrigued and moved by these immigrants' own descriptions of how they saw their civic responsibilities, the civic space of their communities, and how they navigated between different cultural contexts, their motivations for being or not being involved, their own "voices", and personal style of civic involvement. I came to believe that efforts to actively listen to immigrants' own modes of self-expression and efforts to establish their own personal and civic identity would be an important element in following up on the initial evaluation research.

In this process, I have come to a deeper appreciation of the soundness of the Irvine Civic Culture Program premise that the challenge in building immigrant civic engagement would not be simply to orient immigrants to pre-existing "mainstream" institutions and engage them in the civic recruitment networks they maintained but, rather, to engage Central Valley community residents—immigrants and native-born residents-- in the process of creating their own organizations and institutions.

⁶ Settlement increased rapidly in the post-IRCA period. A May, 2003 analysis of National Agricultural Worker Survey data from 1993-2000 suggests a 19.5% annual increase in the proportion of Mexican indigenous-origin farmworkers in the California farm labor force.

Contrasts within the Central Valley

The overwhelming majority (95%) of Latino immigrants to the Central Valley, are farmworkers of Mexican origin. This California farm labor force is very similar to that in the rest of the U.S. in many respects—communities of origin, educational attainment, residential patterns, housing conditions, earnings, demographic structure, ratios of legally-authorized and unauthorized immigrants, etc (USDOL 1993; USDOL 2000). The stark reality is that there are tremendous economic, social, and political inequities in the Central Valley and other California rural communities—because the global disparities distinguishing first-world “core” from third-world “periphery” are replicated at the micro-level in Central Valley communities (Kearney and Nagengast 1988).

While I characterize the Central Valley as “rural” the region includes several important urban areas—Bakersfield, Fresno, Modesto, Stockton, Sacramento.⁷ And spatial patterns of settlement are related in complex ways to ethnicity. While Mexican immigrants’ experience in the Central Valley is primarily one of settlement in small rural communities or hamlets (*colonias*), they are also concentrated in the poorest areas of Central Valley urban communities. In these areas, inter-ethnic dynamics, not a major factor in the life in the smaller Central Valley communities, becomes an important issue. The Mexican immigrants interviewed for this report include both urban and rural civic activists.

Data Sources for the Current Report

The main conclusions of this report have been drawn from the Irvine-funded Immigrant Civic Participation Research Project. At the same time, my understanding of the dynamics of Mexican immigrants’ involvement in community life has also been informed by my team’s research in Aguirre’s USDA-funded applied research project “Towards A New Pluralism: Strategies for Rural Communities Impacted by Immigration” The analyses, insights, conclusions, and recommendations are also based on the Aguirre Group team’s experiences as participant-observers engaged from January, 2000 through March, 2003 in collaborative efforts with Central Valley Partnership for Citizenship affiliated organizations to develop a logic model of their individual organizations’ efforts to promote immigrant civic participation as well as the collaborative efforts of the overall network.

Figure 1 on the next page presents an overview of the primary data collection efforts which are the core of this project.

⁷ In fact, standard tabulations of census data regarding the Central Valley can be misleading as most of the region consists of urban metro areas. In some respects, the Central Valley is less “rural” than the rest of rural America, but, as in the Central Valley, light manufacturing and service industry employment is growing rapidly in many rural areas, although, at the same time, the value of labor-intensive agricultural production and farm labor demand continue to increase.

Figure 1
Overview of Immigrant Civic Participation Data Collection and Analysis

Data Collection Activity	Description/Details
<p>Community Scan/Short Interviews</p> <p>Winters, Yolo County Madera, Madera County Fresno, Fresno County Parlier, Fresno County Selma, Fresno County Patterson, Stanislaus County Riverbank, Stanislaus County Exeter, Tulare County Lindsay, Tulare County Porterville, Tulare County</p>	<p>22 interviews with civically engaged Latino immigrants. Purposive sample to represent cross-section of immigration cohorts, ethnic sub-groups and different modes of civic involvement</p> <p>Cohorts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tejano/as, • 1970-1988 • 1989-1990 • 1991-present <p>Ethnic Groups/Social Networks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oaxacan indigenous and various mestizo
<p>Extended in-depth interviews</p>	<p>13 interviews with activists from each immigrant cohort and two ethnic sub-groups of Mexican immigrants (4 Mixtecos, 9 <i>mestizo/as</i>)</p>
<p>Community Surveys:</p> <p>Lindsay, Tulare County Winters, Yolo County</p>	<p>*re-analysis of data collected in 1999 as part of The Aguirre Group Central Valley Partnership for Citizenship evaluation research</p>
<p>Community Ethnographic Observations, In-Depth Interviews</p> <p>Arvin, Kern County</p>	<p>* contextualizations from ethnographic observations, key informant interviews September, 2001-June, 2003 from Aguirre International, “New Pluralism” Project</p>
<p>Secondary Data Sources</p> <p>San Joaquin Valley region and selected communities</p> <p>Mexican immigrants in CA farm labor force</p>	<p>Census 2000 SF-3</p> <p>Special analyses, National Agricultural Worker Survey (NAWS) Public Use Dataset</p> <p>CARUCOM database</p>

Community-Level Indicators of Central Valley Mexican Immigrant Civic Engagement

In this section I present a general model of civic participation, describe the distinctive structural characteristics of Central Valley communities, and provide a summary assessment of the current levels of immigrant civic engagement. This provides framework for the subsequent qualitative analysis which presents and interprets the experiences and perceptions of individual civic activists working in Mexican immigrant communities in the Central Valley

A General Theoretical Model of Civic Participation

The Civic Voluntarism Model of civic and political participation developed by Sidney Verba, Kay Schlozman, and Henry Brady based on the national Citizen Participation Survey provides a sound and widely-accepted general model of civic participation — in relation to available resources of time, money and civic skills, levels of engagement, motivation, and civic recruitment networks.⁸ Verba, Schlozman, and Brady stress that the primary determinants of civic participation are “structural”, that is, all things being equal, race/ethnicity plays much less of a role than is tacitly believed in day-to-day analyses of ethnic politics. Education and income level play a much larger role.⁹

Given this structural analysis of the individual resources (time, money, civic skills) and contextual factors which affect individual civic participation, the expectation might be that levels of immigrant civic participation in Central Valley communities would be very low in comparison to the national average--because they are communities with high proportions of working poor, concentrations of 1st generation immigrants with very low levels of educational attainment, limited English-speaking skills, and little familiarity with the U.S. system or the “civic skills” to participate effectively in this sociopolitical environment

Utility and Limitations of the Civic Voluntarism Model

The utility of the Civic Voluntarism model is that it provides a framework for considering what the “pressure points” might be for proactive efforts to increase immigrant, and/or overall civic participation.¹⁰ One of the most important practical insights to be derived from this model of civic participation relates to the role played by “recruitment networks”, i.e. civic and political institutions, social networks, and civic organizations in catalyzing and

⁸ The model is succinctly described on pp. 15-16 of Verba, Scholzman, and Brady (1995). Subsequently, several researchers have developed cogent critiques of some aspects of this model. Nonetheless, the Civic Voluntarism model developed in their research, based on the national Citizen Participation provides a very useful overall framework for understanding civic participation.

⁹ Race does not, however, disappear from the analysis.

¹⁰ This framework also reflects a shared frame of reference regarding the sorts of behaviors which enter into civic and political life. While there have been several very useful reassessments of the clustering and taxonomy of different types of civic activity, there is broad agreement among political scientists about the major dimensions of civic life.

sustaining individuals' and entire social groups' civic engagement. Civic participation does not stem simply from "good moral character" or sense of duty but, also from the circumstances of one's social life. The Civic Voluntarism model confirms the basic community organizing insight that building "affiliational networks" is a critical component in efforts to build civic participation (Shirley 1997; Miller 2000). At the same time, that the Civic Voluntarism model suggests priorities and identifies options for catalyzing immigrant civic participation and, thereby, community development. The model has particular utility in identifying factors related to civic participation which we probably cannot reasonably expect to change in the short-run, e.g. income and available time.

Although the Civic Voluntarism model is a powerful one, it was developed to provide a national overview of civic and political participation using aggregate data from a national survey, and was not designed to describe the "micro-dynamics" of civic participation in rural California immigrant communities. On the one hand, the model seems to be generally applicable; but, on the other hand, it does not provide a finely-textured enough analysis to fully understand how and why patterns of civic participation differ from community to community in the region or from one group of immigrants to another.¹¹ Thus, the regression model based on data from the Citizen Participation Survey is not optimized to describe the dynamics of civic participation in such communities.

The model also does not give much attention to the full consequences of immigration status as it affects civic life in communities. In communities where about one out of three adults are politically disenfranchised due to their unauthorized immigration status but, nonetheless, guaranteed freedom of speech and association—the model's projections regarding civic and political behavior is unclear.

The model also fails to give attention to the ways in which civic life in communities where almost half of the residents speak a language other than English at home differs from life in English-dominant communities. Aside from its limitations in describing how the structural characteristics of diverse communities affect immigrant civic participation, the Civic Voluntarism model does not provide an easy means to incorporate information about how immigrants' experiences in their home country may have affected their overall civic attitudes—trust in government, visualization of civic processes, ideas about appropriate modes of individual civic participation.¹²

¹¹ For example, the Citizen Participation Survey sample did not even permit analysis of broad Asian civic and political participation. The racial/ethnic analyses compare and contrast Whites, African-Americans, and Latinos only. There is, however, a public access database maintained by the Inter-University Social Science Consortium which can be used to further explore the texture of civic participation in America. This exploration was beyond the scope of the current project.

¹² A ground-breaking study by Leticia Calderon Chelius and Jesus Martinez-Saldaña, **La Dimension Politica de la Migracion Mexicana**, Instituto Mora, 2002, provides a thorough analysis of how some of these factors affect the civic and political activity of urban Mexican immigrants in California. This research provides a sound general framework for understanding both patterns of political perspectives among Mexican immigrants and the evolution of their perspectives over time in the U.S. A parallel study in the rural areas of California would be valuable as a means for providing additional depth to analyses of community context on Mexican immigrants' civic and political participation California.

Central Valley/San Joaquin Valley Community Demographic and Socioeconomic Context

The primary focus for the project's research on Mexican immigrants' civic participation has been the southern half of the region--the San Joaquin Valley---where the majority of the Central Valley immigrant population live.¹³ There is a longer history of Mexican migration to the San Joaquin Valley than to the Sacramento Valley, higher immigrant/native-born ratios, and more mature immigrant community organizations. However, community change is proceeding more rapidly in the more sparsely-settled Sacramento Valley sub-region because the rate of growth of the Mexican immigrant population in San Joaquin Valley, as in other "mature" migration network destination areas, seems not to be increasing.

About one quarter(24%) of the San Joaquin Valley population in 2000 were immigrants and at least one-third (probably about 40%) of this foreign-born population are unauthorized residents.¹⁴ The regional-level Central Valley socioeconomic and demographic indicators understate the concentrations of Mexican immigrants in the more rural communities. The CARUCOM sample of 65 rural California communities (48 of which are in the San Joaquin Valley) show that in the average rural town about 31% of the population is foreign-born, that 37% of persons over 5 years of age are limited in English and that 27% live in households below the poverty level (Taylor, Martin, and Fix 1997; Taylor 2003).¹⁵ There are some other "structural" characteristics which are important in understanding the context of these communities. At least one in five families (21%) lives in a very crowded household. Also, as in other areas of the United States with high levels of immigration, the gross data on proportion of immigrants in the population does not fully reflect the full impact of immigration —because so many immigrant-headed households are of mixed status with one or several U.S.-born children living in them. More than one in four U.S.-born children is the son or daughter of immigrant parents, i.e. a Generation 1.5 or 2nd generation immigrant (Fix and Passel 2003). In the Central California communities, the prevailing levels of educational attainment among immigrants are very low since about one-third of Mexicans migrating from rural areas in Mexico to rural California are elementary school dropouts

¹³ One set of in-depth interviews were conducted with Raquel Velasco, an immigrant activist in Winters, in Yolo County. Winters, however, appears to be a community with a mature migration network which leads Mexican immigrants to settle in the area.

¹⁴ About 40% of the foreign-born population arrived after May, 1986, the last date at which immigrant farmworkers could qualify for status adjustment under the SAW provisions of IRCA. There is a modest flow of post-1986 legal immigrants but most post-1986 immigrants cannot qualify for legal status. It is likely that the proportion of Mexican immigrants in most Central Valley communities has increased by about 2% per year since 2000. Thus, many communities are very evenly divided in terms of numbers of native-born and immigrant populations. The urban areas of the Valley, however, have much higher proportions of native-born.

¹⁵ The estimate of foreign-born in the 65 communities is based on **Table 3.1** providing summary information on the CARUCOM-based econometric model developed by Taylor using 1990 census data (in Martin, Taylor, and Fix 1997)

There is one additional contextual indicator which must be considered in understanding the civic life of Central Valley areas with high concentrations of Mexican immigrants. The Public Policy Institute of California developed a detailed analysis of patterns of naturalization in California (Johnson and Reyes 1999). This report estimates proportions of the overall immigrant population in the rural counties who have achieved citizenship and analyzes national, state, and county naturalization patterns in relation to ethnicity, educational attainment, and other contextual variables. The PPIC analysis shows that a much lower proportion of San Joaquin Valley immigrants are naturalized than in other areas of the country. Proportions of the overall immigrant population in the San Joaquin Valley who have naturalized range from 23% in Merced County to 32% in Kings County. The overall rate of naturalization in the San Joaquin Valley is about half the national average of 53%.—because so many Mexican immigrants are not eligible due to unauthorized immigration status and because low educational attainment and limited-English make the naturalization process very difficult (since naturalization applicants must demonstrate oral English competency and basic writing skills).

Consequently, the demographic profile of the Central Valley voting-eligible population diverges sharply from that of the overall population in local communities. This disconnect, then, between the social life of immigrant majority neighborhoods and communities which is the foundation of civic dialogue and community action and the political life of communities where more than one-third of adults are denied the opportunity to participate poses unique challenges.

The Central Valley as Microcosm of Rural America

In some respects, the Central Valley is more akin to the rural areas of the “new growth” states than it is to urban California.¹⁶

The Central Valley is like other rural regions in that there is a great deal of variation in concentrations of immigrants from community to community.¹⁷ As in other rural areas of the U.S., agriculture continues to be a major industry but there is increasing growth in non-agricultural employment in light manufacturing, warehouse distribution, and construction. While 1st generation Mexican immigrants continue to be concentrated in agricultural employment in these areas, there is also occupational migration as immigrants gain a growing share of employment in construction and other low-wage industries and the 2nd generation of immigrants move into the blue collar labor force, and into technical and public service sector employment.

¹⁶ It is estimated, based on data from Census 2000, that about 26% of all immigrants in the nation are undocumented (Passel and Fix 2003). The predominantly rural states with 40-49% of the overall immigrant population being undocumented are: Arizona, Idaho, Nevada, Colorado, Nebraska, Kansas, Arkansas, Georgia, and North Carolina. Since the decennial census consistently underrepresents recent immigrants with low literacy levels living in crowded housing who are farmworkers (Kissam and Jacobs 2001), the actual proportion of undocumented Mexican immigrants is higher.

¹⁷ This is the result of network-based recruitment of migrant farmworkers for agricultural employment. The labor market intermediaries play an important role in facilitating many other aspects of Mexican immigrants' settlement in rural communities.

Levels of Immigrant Civic Participation in Two Central Valley Communities

The Central Valley community context appears to be one in which structural constraints do negatively affect community civic participation. However, it appears that, to some extent, immigrants' informal social networks have been successfully transformed into "civic recruitment networks" to mobilize pre-existing immigrant social capital in order to address collective community problems. The central challenge in efforts to build immigrant civic participation have to do with the specific ways in which this powerful store of social capital can best be deployed to identify, address, and resolve community problems, i.e. how it can be converted into "civic capital". Here I examine four summary indicators relating to the levels of Mexican immigrants' civic participation in Central Valley communities—volunteerism, contacts with public officials, informal discussion of community/policy issues, and voting behavior.

Voluntarism

About one-quarter of the immigrants surveyed in our 1999 Central Valley Partnership community case studies (22% in Lindsay and 28% in Winters) were currently volunteering in some community service effort as contrasted with a national average of 36%.¹⁸ However, the level of volunteerism we saw in the Central Valley is, in actuality, very close to the national level adjusted for ethnicity and education. In fact, the Civic Voluntarism regression model suggests that Central Valley levels of volunteerism "should" be lower than it actually is. In the Citizen Participation Survey national sample slightly more than one-quarter (27%) of the Latinos said they had given time to charitable work over the course of the previous year—but the national Latino sub-sample is better-educated, more affluent, more likely to speak English and includes fewer undocumented immigrants than our Central Valley case study community sample.

The Civic Voluntarism model identifies resources of time and money—neither of which is in abundant supply in working poor households in Central Valley Mexican immigrant communities-- as critical ingredients in civic and political engagement. Not surprisingly, the detailed Civic Voluntarism regression model shows that work constrains civic participation even more than lack of income—when there are pre-school and school-age children in the household and when both spouses are working.¹⁹ Thus, the model suggests that neither ethnicity nor immigration status directly constrain immigrants' involvement in non-electoral modes of civic participation but that, indirectly, Central Valley immigrants' civic participation is constrained by the fact that most are "working poor" families. The Civic Voluntarism model also shows that gender roles still play a significant role in determining time available for civic participation; generally, women have less free time than men.

¹⁸ The Citizen Participation Survey question was slightly different in that respondents were queried about volunteer involvement over the past year while we asked about current involvement.

¹⁹ There are high levels of fertility among both Hmong and Latino immigrant populations. Thus, households in both groups are particularly likely to have both pre-school and school-age children.

A further structural constraint likely to negatively impact immigrant civic participation in volunteer work which was not examined in the Citizen Participation Survey is access to transportation. Just as lack of transportation constrains inner-city minority workers' access to employment and is considered an important structural facet of "underclass" membership, lack of transportation constrains otherwise interested rural immigrant household members' ability to engage in volunteer work. Virtually none are two-car households and the most recent immigrant households, in particular, often do not have cars at all. Undocumented immigrants face huge economic risks if they do have a car and drive (as their inability to secure a drivers' license keeps them from having car insurance). Given these multiple constraints, there is a higher than expected level of immigrant volunteerism in the Central Valley.

We asked community survey respondents in Lindsay and Winters to tell us whether they were regular volunteers, occasional volunteers, or informal helpers in organizing some type of community or church event. We found that 11% were regular volunteers. This is not perfectly comparable to Verba, Schlozman, and Brady's reporting of national levels of volunteer involvement for persons working >5 hours per week (8% do so) but it would appear that, with respect to volunteerism, the Central Valley case study communities may be close to the national average.

Informal Discussion of Community/Political Issues

The issue of informed consideration of community issues as a basis for civic engagement and action is a particular concern in the context of immigrant community life in general and in the Central Valley in particular, because language barriers, as well as unfamiliarity with the U.S. "system", interact to isolate immigrants from becoming aware of the political or civic agendas and, thus, presumably, constrain their ability to become engaged in the issues which are the subject of collective community decision-making and/or action.

We, however, consider discussion of community issues as the substrate for civic participation—the "glue" which serves to connect separate and, possibly, sporadic episodes of civic activity into ongoing full-fledged civic engagement. If one does not know what the "issues", e.g. most prevalent community problems or policy or program options for solving them, are, it is then unlikely one will become engaged in community efforts to "manage" such problems.²⁰

The Citizen Participation Survey measured the extent to which Americans discuss issues. They found that 60% of Americans had discussed national issues and 52% had discussed local issues during the previous year. We found that in the Central Valley communities we surveyed there was, in fact, quite extensive discussion of public affairs and community issues—with 55% of the Lindsay and 61% of the Winters immigrant respondents saying they

²⁰ Even disengaged community members can be "recruited" or "invited" into some modes of political participation, e.g. letter-writing campaigns, demonstrations. However, it is likely that one or two episodes of such "civic activity" does not result in sustainable civic participation and, in many senses, "recruitment" will have failed.

had, on occasion, talked over community, state, or national issues with people in their social networks.

This is an interesting finding because it suggests that, with the barrier of language reduced in these rural communities where Spanish is spoken extensively, immigrants' level of motivation and concern about issues is comparable to that of the native-born population. Given this situation, the Civic Voluntarism analytic model implies that the missing component may be "recruitment networks" to bring immigrants who are potentially interested in addressing civic issues into contact with civic action networks. However, language diversity creates barriers to dialogue even a single ethnic community. For example, in recent survey research in a rural California Mexican settlement community where the dominant language of 1st generation immigrants is Spanish (Salinas), we found that about 10% of 2nd generation Mexican immigrants speak only English and limited-Spanish and that about 5% speak Mixtec and limited-Spanish.²¹ Segmented assimilation is not simply a problem at the community-level. It is also, in some households, a family problem.

Mexican immigrants' use of news media and the nature of news/public affairs coverage is directly relevant to the processes through which community members build "civic skills", i.e. understanding how "the system" works, getting information on what is going on in the community, and using such information to engage efforts to shape community civic life . Given the educational levels of Central Valley Mexican immigrants and their limited-English, an important element in local-level discussion of civic issues is that of native-language media—newspapers, radio, and television. Because of the low levels of literacy among Mexican immigrants to farmwork it appears that aural/oral communication is of particular importance to Central Valley immigrant life.

Although we have not looked in detail at immigrants' reliance on local newspapers or television we have looked at the Mexican immigrant communities' reliance on community radio. In a series of studies we have found that 50-65% of Spanish-speaking immigrants in the Central Valley listen regularly to three or four Spanish-language radio stations and rely heavily on Spanish-language public radio for information on news and public affairs about local, national, and binational developments (Kissam, Intili, and Garcia 2003).²² Thus, native-language television, and talk radio provide, for the widely-dispersed Mexican-origin immigrant population of the San Joaquin Valley at least, a "virtual agora" for community dialogue and "staying in touch" with each other.²³

²¹ See Edward Kissam and Jo Ann Intili, "Findings from the Salinas Young Adult Survey", June, 2003, for discussion of the complexities of language use in the households where these "Generation 1.5" and 2nd generation young Mexican adults (18-24) live. See Edward Kissam, Jo Ann Intili, and Anna Garcia, "Findings from the California Endowment/Tri-Valley Tobacco Survey", September, 2002 for discussion of overall indigenous language prevalence in rural areas.

²² This survey research includes survey research in Kern, Tulare, Fresno, Madera, Stanislaus, Monterey and Imperial counties. The most comprehensive survey consisted of interviews with 602 Spanish-speaking respondents conducted during the summer of 2002 for Radio Bilingue.

²³ In the case of Radio Bilingue listeners, this "virtual agora" is a transnational one since news and public affairs are covered with a binational orientation and the station broadcasts in Baja California as well as in California. The service will be extended, late in 2003, to include a portion of the state of Oaxaca.

More interesting than our survey findings regarding native-language radio listenership is our finding that many Mexican immigrant radio listeners do not simply “receive” radio information passively. We found that more than one-third (39%) of the audience for Spanish-language community public radio who we have surveyed actively discuss program topics within their informal social networks of extended family members, co-workers, friends, and neighbors. So, in at least this context, native-language oral/aural media are not simply a source of information but, also, a catalyst for issue-oriented discussions. At the same time, geographic variations in access to native-language media oriented toward discussion of civic life is likely to result in varying levels of engagement.²⁴

From a perspective of community organizing groups in the Central Valley, social justice issues are at the center stage of Mexican immigrants’ civic engagement. Our community surveys showed that this perception was valid, in some respects, and misleading in others. Not surprisingly, social policy topics relating to jobs, the economy, or poverty were the top issues identified in both study communities. But infrastructure issues (sidewalk, streets, garbage, water) were also of concern to both immigrants and native-born community residents.

Contacts with Public Officials

The United States is unique among developed countries with respect to the numbers of citizen contacts with public official; more than one-third (34%) of Americans typically contact a public official during the year. Verba, Schlozman, and Brady consider contacts with public officials to be a particularly important form of civic participation because they are “information rich”. That is, they provide civic activists an opportunity to deliver to an elected representative a message which reflects their personal sense of priorities, and views about what should be done. In our Lindsay survey we found that only 7% of the immigrants living in the community had contacted a government agency or official to express their opinion; in Winters, 9% had. This is much lower than the overall national average but not so much lower than the national average for Latinos; The overall national rate of contacts for Latinos interviewed in the Citizen Participation Survey (a respondent population which included a higher proportion of citizens than found in the Central Valley communities) is 14%.

Taking into account two other factors which are particularly significant in the Civic Voluntarism model’s regression equations used to explain civic participation—years living in the community and working—it would appear that the level of contacts made by Central Valley Latino immigrants with elected officials and public agencies is actually somewhat higher than might be expected. It may be that the affiliational linkages which arise out of immigrants’ social networks and the small size of communities yield positive effects which, at least in part, offset the many barriers—education, language, civic skills—which usually constrain immigrant civic participation in general and contacts with civic representatives in particular. Spanish is very widely spoken in these communities. Conceivably, the extent to which limited-English is a barrier to contacting officials has decreased as more and more 2nd

²⁴ For example, Spanish-language newspapers are easily available in eastern Tulare County (News en Español) and Fresno County (La Vida en el Valle) but not in the Sacramento Valley.

generation Mexican immigrants who still speak Spanish are elected to office, begin to work as staffers for elected officials who are not of Mexican origin, or serve as employees of local municipal or county government agencies.²⁵

Voting Behavior

In the typical Central Valley community, there are about twice as many recently-arrived, undocumented Latino immigrants and half as many naturalized citizens as in the national Latino sub-sample of the Citizen Participation survey. Thus, we confine our analysis of voting to the small sub-set of naturalized Mexican immigrants who were eligible to vote in 1998, the last election prior to our survey.²⁶

Our community survey findings in Lindsay and Winters regarding naturalized citizens' voting are interesting in that their voting varied greatly in these two communities. In Lindsay, only 25% of the naturalized citizens interviewed had voted while in Winters 82% had.

It seems that the factors which affect voter participation among naturalized citizens of Mexican origin might be contextual in part—because only 36% of the U.S. born citizens we interviewed in Lindsay had voted while 73% of those in Winters had. Thus, general community characteristics appear to affect voting patterns of both naturalized and native-born citizens.

However, other factors may also play a role—since the analysis above shows that in Winters, naturalized citizens voted at a rate 10% higher than the native-born citizens while in Lindsay the naturalized citizens voted at a rate 10% lower than the native-born citizens. This also suggests positive impacts can result energetic effort to involve immigrants in the political process. One of the Irvine-funded organizations, the Sacramento Valley Organizing Community (SVOC), ran an aggressive “get-out-the-vote” campaign in the Winters Latino community (where even some immigrants who were ineligible to vote exercised their free speech rights to exhort others who were eligible to go to the polls) but there was no such effort in Lindsay.²⁷

Implications of the Quantitative Analysis of Mexican Immigrants Civic Participation in Central Valley Case Study Communities—Winters and Lindsay

²⁵ Issues relating to the role linguistic barriers play in contacting local officials is an interesting and complex issue as local community’ “friendliness” to limited-English immigrants varies from department to department (depending on staffing) and from community to community (depending on local political perspectives).

²⁶ Data from Census 2000 shows that about 33% of the immigrants in Winters and 40% of those in Lindsay were undocumented. Another 21% of the Winters immigrants and 18% of the Lindsay immigrants were likely to have had legal status but most were not yet naturalized at the time of the survey since the earliest possible date they could have qualified to apply for citizenship was 1994 and the naturalization process was, at that point taking 18 months to 2 years and half of the applicants were not being approved.

²⁷ Although a CVP-funded organization, Proyecto Campesino, was somewhat active in Lindsay they did not mount a get-out-the-vote campaign.

The quantitative analysis presented here highlights the importance of understanding that immigrant civic participation is the outcome of multiple factors, not just individual willingness and acquisition of “civic skills”.

Community to community differences in population and structural characteristics relevant to civic participation make it necessary to give greater attention to the issue of civic opportunity in formulating responses to the problem of civic disengagement in rural communities where immigrants are concentrated such as those in our CVP evaluation case studies. If “the problem” of civic disengagement is cast simply in terms of individual motivation and civic skills, there is the danger of using such analyses to design “solutions” (program interventions) which will not really provide work.

Investments in building immigrants’ civic skills, including English-language ability and awareness of the idiosyncrasies of U.S. civic institutions, processes, and division of responsibilities among different civic bodies, are indubitably well-justified. Such efforts can help lower some of the barriers to civic participation. However, whether they are sufficient to move communities a significant distance toward functional, participatory democracy is less clear. For example, in our ethnographic observations of voting in a highly-contested election in Arvin we saw numerous examples where individual immigrants’ lack of understanding of “technical” issues about the electoral system compromised their ability to vote but the central fact was that community controversy had successfully “recruited” both naturalized and native-born voters.²⁸

The Civic Voluntarism model and our observations suggest that “recruitment networks” for civic participation play a crucial intermediary role. Where this analysis goes beyond the model is in underscoring the importance of immigrants’ informal networks in catalyzing and channeling immigrant civic participation.

The strategic dilemmas between investing in short-term efforts to shift political control of community life (such as voter registration drives and get-out-the-vote campaigns) and more long-term investments in building the organizational networks of community-based civic groups as the best path toward “immigrant empowerment” is a difficult one. However, these initial observations suggest that priority must be given to the long-term task of building sustainable civic engagement by providing core support to nurture the development of affiliational networks among immigrants to sustain dialogue, informal problem-solving, and advocacy-oriented collaboration. Without a framework to articulate and pursue an agenda oriented toward community problem-solving, civic participation yields few returns to immigrants and, moreover, only a small proportion can become directly involved in electoral activities.

Spanish-language broadcast media, for example, play a crucial role in presenting an ongoing stream of “menus” for reflections, discussion, and civic action and contributing to civic skills development by explaining “how the system works”. “On the ground” civic groups play an

²⁸ In some cases, these “technical” misunderstandings reflected significant underlying problems related to representation. For example, there are some small clusters of immigrants living in the Arvin area who are serviced by Arvin agencies and who, therefore, felt they should have an opportunity to voice their concerns via voting but, in fact, they lived outside the city limits.

equally important role in providing a framework for individual and group initiative—establishing linkages between immigrants from different parts of the rural region and, thereby building “bonding” social capital and building the self-confidence of local immigrants that social/community change is, indeed, possible even without electoral power.²⁹ The organizational environment of community-based civic groups can be seen as being akin to a “sheltered workshop”, a safe place in which individual immigrants who have difficulties with English, little education, and ambivalence about their relationships with unfamiliar ethnic groups and established organizations can try out and refine their civic skills. Investments in strengthening immigrants’ “bonding social capital” and deploying it in the sociopolitical context of California should not be seen as “cultural separatism” but, rather, as investments in leveling the political playing field, at “fitting in” —since the players “at the table” are never simply individuals. Each represents one or several organizational entities with characteristic policy agendas, constituencies, and resources for exerting political influence.

What becomes clear in reviewing even the limited quantitative data we have on Central Valley Mexican immigrants’ civic participation is that the sociopolitical ecology of these communities is more complex than might be evident from a cursory analysis.

Many of the community activists in the highly-engaged immigrant community of Winters were, for example, *paisanos* and *paisanas* from the Teocaltiche area, a major migrant-sending community in the Jalisco highlands. In contrast, Lindsay has more diverse and fragmented immigrant networks. This suggests social network characteristics immigrants as a factor in explaining Mexican immigrants’ civic engagement—because the migration networks bringing immigrants to Winters are very mature ones and the community organizing strategy used in that community was based on actively engaging community activists in recruiting friends, neighbors, and others in their social networks

The Winters community case study also suggests that the workplace is an important venue for building “bridging” social capital (at least among Mexican immigrants) since the core group of SVOC activists were women who had worked together for a number of years at the local fruit and nut processing plant. In contrast, Mexican immigrants in Lindsay (which had once had a similar processing/packing establishment—the Lindsay Olive Co.—which went broke) worked mostly in citrus-related work organized by many different farm labor contractors and had less opportunities to be in touch at work..

The Lindsay and Winters community case studies also suggest that there may be important scaling issues relating to the kinds of contributions which immigrant social networks can make to facilitating immigrant civic participation. Cecilia Menjivar stresses the importance of the observation originally made by James Coleman that social networks can only be converted into social capital when the trust and expectations regarding mutual reciprocity which inhere in the relationships embedded in those networks can be maintained.³⁰

²⁹ A continuing problem in rhetorically-driven civic education efforts is that there is such a focus on voting as a mode of participation in democratic decision-making that few native-born or immigrant citizens discover that there are various other deliberative processes and bodies where individuals can make as big an impact as in the voting booth.

³⁰ This is sometimes referred to as “enforceable trust”.

While some of the negative factors Menjivar identifies as undermining immigrants' social networks in urban areas (e.g. resource-poor communities, stringent and hostile immigration laws) can also be found in the small rural communities of the Central Valley, migration networks' role in providing employment to newcomers may facilitate the workplace becoming a civic training ground and even extend beyond the workplace to mitigate the social forces of fragmentation in the rural setting.

The small size of many Central Valley communities seems to be a positive factor in facilitating social networks' continued integrity. For example, in Winters there are about 1,100 adult Mexican immigrants. In Lindsay, there were probably about 2,200. In smaller hamlets and *colonias* throughout the Central Valley there are even less. Assuming that each of these communities is connected to 2-3 "dominant" village-based Mexican migration networks, the typical social network of *paisano/as* probably has <500 persons making for much denser network connections in contrast to the anomie of urban life in areas such as San Francisco where Menjivar's research was conducted.

It is possible, that if pre-existing social networks from migrant-sending villages in Mexico can remain relatively intact in these small communities, then the challenge of transforming these migration/social networks into a community-level recruitment network for civic engagement becomes one of maintaining the "bonding" linkages inherent within in each of these village networks while concurrently building "bridging" relationships among the major migration networks represented in the community.

There has recently been much attention to the role played by Mexican hometown associations in strengthening and maintaining bonding social capital (Zabin and Rabadan 2001; Goldring 2002) but the continuing challenge is to adapt the traditional processes used to generate donations of volunteer time and money for hometown public works project to benefit immigrant communities in California. Antonio Cortes Garcia, the treasurer of the Madera hometown association of migrants from Santa Maria Tindu (one of the villages in the Sierra Mixteca sending migrants to Madera) recounted impressive successes such as the hometown association's voluntarism--purchase of an ambulance for the village and driving it 3,000 miles from California to Oaxaca to deliver it to the village but he noted that the social pressures for collaboration are still stronger with respect to "traditional" sorts of collective projects than to the new idea that community collaboration (*cooperacion*) to benefit the "virtual communities" of *paisanos* living in California.³¹

In urban areas, typical patterns of immigrant settlement where, to the extent possible, immigrants live in close proximity to other immigrants, are probably very important to civic dynamics. On the one hand, clustering of immigrant settlement leads to linguistic isolation and makes it harder to build bridging social capital; on the other hand, it facilitates accumulation and deployment of social capital. The very interesting case in which a number

³¹ An immigrant from San Agustin Atenango in the Sierra Mixteca explained also that it was relatively straightforward to secure donations, even from relatively dispersed California communities where villagers from San Agustin had settled to send a deceased person's body home for burial than to support an equally popular but "new" notion of sponsoring a celebration of the village's patron saint's day in California (personal communication, Rafael Flores, May, 2003).

of families from a Mixteco village network (that of San Miguel Cuevas) were relocated from an environmentally-contaminated residential site, the Tall Trees Trailer Park, to a new housing development, Casas San Miguel in southwest Fresno, shows early indications of facilitating civic participation. Even during the relocation, there was great interest in setting up a neighborhood association based on the village migration network's *comite* (council/committee).

The challenge is clearly an inter-generational one. The lowest voting rates in Lindsay were among the 2nd generation immigrants, young Mexican-American adults born in California. This finding is consistent from what we heard in our discussions with Mexican immigrants and their children and reinforces the concerns expressed by Portes and Rumbaut about the consequences of differential adaptation among in this group, whose lives have been spent straddling two cultures. As Anna Garcia and I were told by a group of *cholos* (gang-oriented youth) in Lindsay during our survey there, no one had ever “invited” them to City Council meetings. Until they were invited they were not interested in attending, although they had numerous well-formed opinions about civic priorities and ways to address them.

Establishing sustainable civic engagement in Central Valley communities like Winters and Lindsay will be problematic even if there are successful efforts to engage 1st generation immigrants in civic life. Approaches like the one used by SVOC to build civic participation among the 1st generation of immigrants to Winters are promising but efforts to bring about lasting change will be, at once, difficult and necessary as the foundation for building healthy communities—given the compelling research by Portes and Rumbaut about diverging alternative trajectories for 2nd generation immigrants’ integration into community life.

What our research on immigrant civic participation in the Central Valley shows is that the “national model” of the dynamics of civic participation based on the Citizen Participation Survey must be further explored, i.e. more completely specified, to fully explain the dynamics of civic life in diverse communities with high concentrations of immigrants.

Such inquiries need not be theoretical. In fact, the sorts of quasi-experimental designs commonly used in applied research for analyses of a variety of policy-oriented evaluations of federal social programs might well be appropriate for further action-oriented research vis-a-vis efforts to promote community well-being via strategic investments in building levels of civic participation among the most disadvantaged groups—both immigrant and native-born--in local communities.

Organization of the Report Narrative

In the next section of this report, **Chapter 2**, I present a general analytic framework for understanding the diversity of Mexican immigrants in small, rural communities in California and how this affects the dynamics of social and civic life. This discussion is organized to explain how two separate (temporal and spatial/network) dimensions of the social geography of Mexican immigrants’ lives structure community dynamics. I argue that interactions between successive cohorts of immigrants and between the multiple village-based migration/social networks which organize the overall process of migration to California are the framework used to mediate and modulate the civic processes which

eventually shape interactions among Mexican immigrants and native-born groups and social institutions.

Using the analytic framework laid out in this initial chapter I turn, in **Chapter 3** to explore how Mexican immigrants' historical consciousness of the Bracero program and their own initial contacts with U.S. society in the agricultural workplace, provide the "transition zone" for their subsequent perceptions about and navigation within a civic sphere which is, at once, local and transnational. Their experience in the "civic training ground" of the agricultural workplace where so many important social and economic transactions are negotiated, has both positive and negative impacts on their subsequent civic participation. For better or worse, this realm of conflict is a "hot zone" of mutual adaptation where Mexican immigrants discover that the California agricultural workplace has been transformed by Mexican migration and that traditional "social technologies" of mutualism and collective action have utility in the U.S. but that, even in a nominal democracy such as the United States, personal power and position are backed up by a legal and political system which diminishes immigrants' power to join together to pursue common goals or work collaboratively.

In **Chapter 4**, I explore the case of a Mexican immigrant who came to California with an unusual set of civic skills. His account of his development as a civic activist provides insight into the sorts of resources immigrants bring with them. His account also provides a sense of the barriers which stand in individual immigrants' way in seeking to fully deploying their personal civic skills in the context of a new and different sociopolitical system. Arguably these same barriers, more generally, impede transformation of immigrants home-country civic skills and social capital into civic capital which can be drawn down upon to make life better in California communities. His analyses transcend the more provincial perspectives of mainstream social policy discussion to correctly locate the social and civic life of California Mexican immigrant communities in a virtual "borderlands" between the core and periphery of a global economy. A central social policy issue is how California communities might recognize, properly value, and make wise use of such skills. A closely related issue, introduced here and pursued further in the subsequent chapters is the ways in which the power of the nation-state interacts with voluntary organizations and transnational affiliational networks which are, in principle, unbounded by borders.

In **Chapter 5**, the exploration proceeds to consider how two Mexican immigrants whose personal identity, social identity, and access to informal networks' social capital have been battered in the course of their transformation from being full-fledged community members of sending villages in Mexico to "mere farmworkers" in California. Their narratives describe how they reconstitute their personal and social identity as part of the process of settling in California communities. In exploring the problems faced by these two very different Mexican immigrants, a young, single Mixteco man and a middle-aged *mestizo* mother, it becomes clear that re-establishing one's personal and social identity must be considered a crucial first step in a journey toward full-fledged civic participation in California community life. Recovery, re-definition of personal and social identity and work as a civic activist to build bonding social capital within the immigrant community is an experience which provides the foundation for subsequently developing the communication skills to create "bridging" social capital and an important step toward participating effectively in the mainstream civic arena.

In **Chapter 6**, the inquiry extends to the challenge of building sustainable civic engagement among successive generations of immigrants. Consideration of a young Tulare County student's involvement in advocacy efforts relating to the conflicts between his "official" status as an undocumented immigrant and his personal identity and social status as a young Californian who has grown up in the Central Valley provides insights about the conditions which serve to support civic engagement among "Generation 1.5" and 2nd generation Mexican immigrants even in a social context which presents, for many, a pathway of "downward" assimilation and civic disengagement.

Finally, in **Chapter 7**, the inquiry takes a retrospective look at the inter-generational dynamics of Mexican immigrants' civic participation by examining the role played by cultural intermediaries to facilitate immigrant civic participation. This discussion is based on examining the civic efforts of a middle-aged *Tejana*, a Mexican-born woman who grew up in Texas, and a California-born Chicana, daughter of a Mexican immigrant farmworker who grew up in a community which was, in her youth, dominated by Texas migrant farmworkers but which now consists primarily of Mexican-born immigrants.

Chapter 2

Diversity within Central Valley Mexican Immigrant Communities

The Implications of Diversity for Civic Life

A central consideration in the current research and review of immigrant civic participation in rural California is the premise that the dynamics of civic engagement are tied into the overall social identity, “social technology”, individual and collective experiences of different sub-groups in any community. Here I focus on the sociological diversity among Mexican immigrants.

Continuing Mexico-California Migration Drives Community Transformation

The social universe of rural California is one in a state of constant re-invention—as a result of transnational migration, domestic migration, and global economic change. The dynamics and civic processes in this “brave new world” contrast sharply with the life of traditional American rural towns where everyone grew up with similar provincial perspectives on civic life. Just as the flora of California hillsides is, beneath the panorama of carpets of color, exquisitely variegated and constantly-changing, the social life of the communities of the San Joaquin Valley and other California rural areas is finely-textured and in rapid flux. We should not be surprised at the challenges encountered in trying to revitalize civic life in these economically hard-pressed communities or the difficulties inherent in taking even the first steps toward widespread civic dialogue and consensus-building, not to mention the subsequent steps toward working effectively and collaboratively in joint efforts to improve community life.

The California situation, at the beginning of the 21st century, makes it particularly useful to analyze Latino immigrant diversity within an overarching historical and sociological framework—because the demographics and social dynamics of communities with high concentrations of immigrants are changing so rapidly. Almost three-quarters of the Mexican immigrants in the San Joaquin Valley came to the U.S. in the past two decades (i.e. the duration of “a generation”) and almost half came in the past decade.³²

Beyond Race-Based Analyses of Community Diversity

Diversity within the population identified under the quasi-racial designation of “Hispanic” is usually discussed primarily in terms of national origin which is used a primary indicator of cultural/ethnic identity. National origin is, indeed, a sociological distinction of some importance in comparing and contrasting California’s Latino population to Hispanic populations in other states (e.g. urban Cubans in Miami) but it is still an inadequate basis for “zooming in” to discern the complex processes through which cultural identity is felt,

³² Census 2000 SF-3 data show that 41% of the Mexican immigrants to the San Joaquin Valley came in the 1990’s and that 31% came in the 1980’s. However there is a disproportionate undercount of the most recently-arrived immigrants which leads us to believe that there is actually a slightly higher proportion of Mexican immigrants who arrived in the past decade, closer to 45%.

asserted, and used as a fulcrum for defining social identity. A more finely-grained lens is needed to provide the resolution for understanding how civic engagement will develop and tracking the trajectory of immigrant social, economic, and political integration into California communities.

An effort to reduce ethnic identity to national origin, fails in a particularly dramatic way in the context of very large back-and-forth Mexico flows of migrants, a social landscape of transnational migrant circuits where the US-Mexico border is only a large boulder (some might say, a waterfall) in the midst of a rapidly-flowing river of humanity. But analyses based on race or national origin are not adequate to the task of understanding the civic life of rural California communities. The popular phrase/image of California's Latino population as a "sleeping giant" is wrong in many ways but the concern here is primarily with the mistake involved in assuming that Latinos or the sub-group of concerns to us here, Mexican immigrants, are a homogeneous group.

Regional analyses, many of them quite appropriately focused on the Central Valley, as a major developing region of California, have great utility for many purposes but, like the image of the Latino sleeping giant, they also lead us astray in efforts to understand the social and political ecology of this rapidly-growing immigrant-receiving area of California.³³ Seen through the flawed prism of macro-level analyses of the gross racial composition of communities and rural regions, this civic landscape seems uniform, featureless, perhaps dull, when, in fact, it is a dynamic one.

A view of the social geography of rural California as seen through the primitive camera obscura of a racial taxonomy severely constrains our understanding of interactions between immigrants and native-born populations and among different sub-groups of immigrants---in neighborhoods, in workplaces, in small clusters of settlement, the hamlets and colonias which dot the Central Valley and other areas of rural California. Understanding the varied micro-ecology of rural Mexican immigrants' lives is a critical step in moving to formulate a strategy to nurture immigrant civic participation and catalyze accumulation of "social capital" which can then be mobilized to make tangible, perhaps critical, contributions to improving the well-being of individuals, families, neighborhoods, and entire communities in rural California.

Each individual immigrant's "civic style", their decisions about how to be involved in civic life, reflections about what "being involved" means, and level of involvement is idiosyncratic. But these individual decisions, and the patterns of civic engagement which emerge from them, are the result of many factors.

The Dimensions of Mexican Immigrant Diversity in Rural California

³³ For example, the Public Policy Institute of California's, "Special Survey of the Central Valley in Collaboration with the Great Valley Center" (March, 2001) provides valuable detail on differences in the outlook of Latino and non-Latino survey respondents but such an analysis does not provide a basis for understanding the future civic dynamics of the region—because there are, in fact, huge differences in the civic outlook of U.S.-born and immigrant Latinos and among different immigrant cohorts.

The colloquial Mexican proverb, “Cada cabeza un mundo...” (In every head, a separate world...) is, of course, a truism. However, while enthusiastically acknowledging the beautiful creativity of thousands, millions of different individuals, several practical questions which arise, for example “What are the differences in civic perspectives and behavior among Latinos in rural California?” and “How might these differences impact efforts to strengthen civic engagement and collective efforts to improve community life?”, “How noticeable are these differences and how can we best observe and describe them?”

The social geography of Mexican immigrant diversity in rural California can best be with reference to two major axes—immigrant cohort/length of time in the United States and origin/migration network.³⁴ Within the social space defined by reference to these two major axes—the spatial and temporal dimensions of immigration—there are, clearly, other extremely important determinants of style and level of civic participation—among them gender, age, education, occupation, and earnings. Nonetheless, the analysis of Mexican immigrant diversity and its implications for civic life in rural California must begin with consideration of temporal and spatial diversity—because these dimensions are so important in explaining patterns of individual and collective immigrant experience and in understanding how they have shaped civic outlook and modes of participation.

These are not isolated dimensions of social/civic space in rural California; they are closely linked and constantly interacting as Mexico-California migration patterns shift. Like many macro-level phenomena, they are, at once, chaotic and patterned. The fact that the social universe in the rural California communities where Mexican immigrants settle did not emerge as the result of a “big bang”, some primordial point in when they came to live in California, but, instead evolved as the result of continuing migration makes the nature of community life quite different from neighborhoods or communities where a large cohort of refugees arrived over a relatively short period of time, or communities where demographic change is proceeding less rapidly.

Temporal Dimensions of Diversity—Immigrant Cohorts

Everyday life in the Central Valley (and throughout much of California) is permeated with a subjective sense of the temporal dimension of migration/immigration, even though there are, at the same time, chasms between different interpretations of patterns and, thus, varying definitions of “generations” or immigrant cohorts. The temporal dimension which divides immigrant cohorts relates not only to length of time in the U.S. as an indicator of acculturation but, just as importantly, to personal experiences, the nature of civic life in Mexico when a particular immigrant was growing up and when they came to the U.S., and, also, to immigration status (which in most cases is inextricably tied to when a Mexican immigrant came to the U.S.).

³⁴ There are technical difficulties in measuring this. Because of the high proportion of Mexican immigrants who are, or have been, back-and-forth migrants, challenging definitional issues arise in developing a taxonomy of different migration histories. For example, the standard census question, “When did you come to live in the U.S.?” presumes that immigration is a one-time, instantaneous transition when, for most Mexican immigrants, it is not. In the early 1990’s our research on Hispanic response to census questions (Kissam, Nakamoto, and Gabbard 1993) showed, for example that “coming to the U.S.” and “settling in the U.S.” were very different concepts for Mexicans and, in fact, that Mexicans considered “beginning to live in the U.S.” to mean either “getting a stable job” or “sending for one’s spouse and/or children”.

Defining the “Current” Era

The current diversity of the Mexican immigrant population in rural California is the result of a historical process. One perspective on Mexico-US migration is the historically correct analysis of Chicano scholars and activists who observe that California is, in reality, a sub-region of “greater Mexico”, a territory and society amputated from its sociopolitical capital, the City of Mexico, by the Treaty of Guadalupe, a mere century and a half ago. Even more mainstream historic analyses of Mexico-US migration trace the roots of the current “Latinization” of California to Mexican migration early in the century—in the aftermath of the chaotic and protracted Mexican revolution of 1910.

The analysis I present here of successive waves of Mexican migrants to rural California is primarily linked to the history of agribusiness, the “factories in the fields” as Carey McWilliams so aptly called them, which have drawn so many groups of immigrants to rural California-- Chinese, Indians, Japanese, Armenians, and only relatively recently Mexican-origin immigrants. For Mexicans in rural California, as for the waves of immigrants before them, “coming to America” means coming to work in the fields.³⁵

I limit the historical horizons of the analysis to a period which is still “alive” in community memory in narratives and discussions about “learning from experience” because the social networks which are the foundation of civic engagement are shaped less by formal, print-based history than by informal personal and family narratives about individual experience and collective social identity. For the Mexican immigrants currently living in rural California the dawn of the “current” era stretches back to the period of World War II and the Bracero program which set in motion the major patterns of contemporary migration to rural California. It is there that I begin.

1. The Braceros (1942-1964)

The Bracero generation of Mexican immigrants to rural California are men, now in their 70’s and 80’s, who were recruited as part of this massive binational government-to-government program designed to assure a steady supply of low-cost agricultural labor as Americans went to war in World War II. This cohort of immigrants, while very small in numbers, looms large in the historical context of Mexico-California migration

The Bracero program is a prime example of a central axiom of migration theory—the principle that migration flows do not emerge spontaneously; they are always set in motion by external forces, violence and war, structured recruitment of migrant workers, or both.³⁶ The Bracero program is both literally and symbolically the genesis of contemporary Mexican

³⁵ The loan word *el fil* from “the field” or *la labor* is a more common Spanish term among many immigrants to refer to farmwork. The “correct” term for “farmworker” (*campesino*) carries with it the connotation of “old country” agriculture in a peasant economy.

³⁶ The most thorough analysis of the Bracero program can be found in Manuel Garcia y Griego, “The Importation of Mexican Laborers to the United States, 1942-1964: Antecedents, Operation, and Legacy”, Working Papers in U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 1981.

immigrant civic life in rural California and the nation. Over the 20-year duration of the program it brought more than 4.6 million migrants to the U.S. farm labor market.³⁷

While the Bracero program, to some extent, simply formalized and accelerated pre-existing efforts by large-scale agricultural producers to recruit Mexican migrant workers, in some cases it appears to have played a major role in initiating migration. For example, in December, 2000, Don Felix Rojas, a community leader in the Mixtec community of Santa Rosa Caxtlahuaca, Oaxaca, explained to us that in 1943 he was one of the first three men to migrate north from his village (which at that point did not have a highway to it).³⁸ He and two friends, both now deceased, walked two days to Tlaxiaco and then travelled one day by bus to the capital city of Oaxaca in 1943. There are now, in California and Oregon, probably more than 1,000 migrants from his village.

Civic activist Luis Magaña's account of his childhood impressions provides valuable insights into the Bracero program's role in spurring migration from Jaripo, Michoacan, and the development of a community of migrants in the Stockton area in the core-sending area of Mexico.³⁹ Yet another of the civic activists whose personal stories make up the core of this report, Apolonio Chavez, is the son of a migrant farmworker, now retired in Fresno, who first came north as a Bracero from his hometown in the state of Guanajuato.

Although the historical reality is that Braceros' experiences were an admixture of positive and negative social encounters where, Mexican migrants from remote rural areas first encountered persons who were different from them, social injustice was the prevailing theme as can be seen from the following excerpt from one of the Bracero corridos—"El Corrido de los Desarraigados"⁴⁰ (The Ballad of Those Who Were Uprooted):

*Nos trabajan como esclavos
y nos tratan como perros.
No más falta que nos monten
y que nos pongan el freno.*

They work us like slaves
and treat us like dogs.
All that's left is to ride us like oxen
and put on the reins.

*Si alguno1 lo toma a mal
es que no lo ha conocido.
Que se vaya a contratar
a los Estados Unidos.*

If someone wants to take this wrong
it means they've never known
what it means to go on a contract
to the United States.

³⁷ Carlos Marentes, Sin Fronteras Bracero Project (1999). <http://www.farmworkers.org/introtbp.html> This extraordinary website has drawn on a variety of historical sources to provide a comprehensive sociopolitical and human account of the Braceros.

³⁸ Anna Garcia/Ed Kissam interview audio tape, Santa Rosa Caxtlahuaca, Oaxaca, December , 2000

³⁹ See also Omar Fonseca and Lila Moreno, **Jaripo: Pueblo de Migrantes**, Centro de Estudios de la Revolucion Mexican a "Lazaro Cardenas", Jiquilpan, Michoacan, 1984.

⁴⁰ This *corrido* is from María Herrera-Sobek, *Northward Bound: The Mexican Immigrant Experience in Ballad and Song*, 164-65 on the website of the University of Texas Migrant Labor Project, a group collecting and analyzing Mexican migrants' *corridos*. English translation by Ed Kissam.

*Y verá que va a trabajar
como un esclavo vendido.
Antes éramos honrados
Y de eso nada ha quedado.*

And they'll how they work
like a sold-out slave.
We used to be honorable men
but nothing's left of that.

*Con eso del pasaporte
nos creemos americanos
Pero tenemos el nombre
de ser desarraigados.*

With all that stuff about a passport
we think we're Americans.
But who we really are
is the ones they uprooted.

In the spring of 2001 when Mexican President Vicente Fox's first trip to the United States took him to Fresno to make a speech eulogizing Mexican migrants as "heroes", Braceros who had eventually settled in California rather than returning home, the last living cohort of 20th century Mexican migrant pioneer-heroes, turned out in great numbers to hear him celebrate them and their descendants. The mythological tension of heroism/martyrdom constantly re-emerges in narratives about Bracero-migrants and they are genuine Promethean figures—in popular consciousness and in the dynamics of Mexican politics as their remittances are a major source of foreign earnings.⁴¹

The culmination of the Braceros' experience and the keystone of how their story plays out as a strand in contemporary immigrant civic engagement is that part of the Bracero program design was that 10% of Braceros' earnings were withheld from their paychecks to be repaid when they returned to their home town (so as to assure they would not "jump" their contract and remain in the U.S.). Eventually, it turned out that hundreds of thousands were never paid the full sum due them. After decades passed, even as aging Braceros in their 70's and 80's were beginning to die, a federal class action suit to recover their earnings became a cause celebre in Central Valley Mexican settlement communities as their children and grandchildren came to see Mexican-U.S. government actions as lack of accountability at best or as collusion at the worst, as a unifying theme in their experience of the sociopolitical space of transnationalism.

Mexican immigrant activist, Luis Magaña, son of a Bracero, and pro-Bracero activist, profiled in **Chapter 3**, who has now worked for almost a decade in community organizing around efforts to redress this historical injustice. Magaña, born in Jaripo, Michoacan, is an example of a civic activist whose values, priorities, networks, and modes of engagement emerge from an experience base which is as much inter-generational and transnational as it is personal. Leonel Flores, another well-known and energetic Mexican immigrant civic activist in Fresno, has also been working for about a decade on this issue and, in the course of the work, has established personal contacts with about 1,000 Bracero families. The Bracero issue

⁴¹ The Mexican government's "Tres Por Uno" program of matching private funds remitted by migrants for hometown public works is a very active nexus for binational civic participation. Mexican migrants in California who contribute to such projects are financial stakeholders and have not been reluctant to use their leverage to push the Mexican state and federal authorities to be accountable for fulfilling their pledge to match the remittances. Just as decisions about the California labor market are made in Mexican sending villages, many decisions and debates about public works projects in Mexico take place in California.

and the discussion it provokes is an important strand in overall civic action by Mexican immigrants on immigration policy in general.

The account of a Bracero contemporary of Magaña's father gives a vivid idea of the ways in which these workers' perspectives may have communicated themselves to Luis and other children of his generation:

They treated you badly, they'd take you there to a big corral...and when your contract was signed you'd get there to Central California...like if I were buying a herd of cattle, or horses, or burros, and that have them there, as if I were to lock them up in a corral and have you go there to see which one you liked, so you could choose the one you liked, and that's how it was for us, we weren't animals but that's what it was like because we were people but that's how they chose us, as though they were selecting a pretty animal...⁴²

This worker's account of the lives of Braceros from Jaripo in the 1950's, at the same time, recognizes that California agribusiness treatment of workers could sometimes be good and that when workers were treated fairly, an ongoing relationship might develop and that this, in turn, was part of the genesis of shuttle migration back and forth between Jaripo and the Stockton area, establishing more than half a century ago, the ties which are strong ones.

...they sent us to a little camp near one of those islands around Stockton and Lodi. And there they did give us good food we couldn't complain about, enough to fill you up, there they treated us like people not like animals the way they treated us in other places. The smallest check I'd get in any 2-week period was for 300 dollars in that period. That's what made it possible for me to get married and that's how I got to build my house, I bought my lot and I built my house...I worked for [the ranch on] that island for 6 years, six months here [in Jaripo] and six months there [in California]⁴³

A simple, but profound, theme in Magaña's efforts as an engaged immigrant civic activist is recurring reference to the contradictions of formalized migration flows—the theme of the pasaporte in the “Corrido de los Desarraigados” that the “passport to prosperity” of legally-sanctioned migration to U.S. farmwork is, at once, an irresistible, seductive, promise and a cruel hoax. This immediately, personally accessible “community fund” of historical knowledge, thus, becomes a powerful tool for interpreting ongoing efforts to “solve” the problem of unsanctioned northward migration to work in an agricultural industry which literally and metaphorically “invites” Mexican migrants to come work in the north to creation of a formalized government-to-government program (The Guest Worker Program) to its historical antecedents and the experiences of the Bracero generation of immigrants.

2. “Tejano/as”—Children Growing Up in Households of New Immigrants (1950-1970)

Maps can be tremendously confusing conceptual tools. As geographer Carl Sauer has noted, the traditional Mercator map drawn on north-south coordinates deeply confused our understanding of the 16th century genesis of a New World region which had its political

⁴² p. 180, Omar Fonseca and Lilia Moreno, **Jaripo: Pueblo de Migrantes**, Centro de Estudios de la Revolucion Mexicana “Lazaro Cardenas, Jiquilpan, Michoacan, 1984. (Translation, Ed Kissam).

⁴³ op. cit. p. 185

center of gravity in the Caribbean. A lesser, but similarly misguided, image of the transnational space of Mexico-US community life has compromised national social policy vis-a-vis Mexican immigrants to rural America for almost half a century—the mapping of national “streams” of migrant farmworkers as originating in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas—a “hand” in which fingers spread from south Texas to Florida, and to Washington, and California. But the hand is amputated at the wrist as though migrant farmworkers emerged some southwestern kiva/anthill and, from there, diffused throughout the United States. In reality, the South Texas migrant farmworker families who traveled the long-haul migration circuits in the 1960’s and shocked the American conscience with the specter of 3rd-world poverty “at home” in the continental U.S were Mexican families who had migrated from northeastern Mexico, the states of Tamaulipas and Nuevo Leon primarily, but, also, from the older “core” sending regions of Mexico, San Luis Potosi, Queretaro, and Hidalgo, to work in the burgeoning south Texas citrus industry.⁴⁴ This post-World War II, post-Bracero cohort of *Tejano/as* played an important role in creating the national networks of migrant farmworkers—in Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, Ohio, Michigan, Idaho, Washington, Oregon, and California—but they were, first and foremost, Mexican immigrants.⁴⁵

As can be seen in the stories of two middle-aged *Tejana* civic activists profiled in **Chapter 7** of this report, Herlinda Gonzalez and Gloria Hernandez, this “Texas experience” has played an central role in the evolution of the life of communities in the Central Valley. The social and civic consciousness of the *Tejana* and *Tejano* citizen-activists of this immigrant cohort, was also forged by growing up in families of migrant farmworkers. As children they were engaged in backbreaking work picking cotton (a crop harvest task finally mechanized in the mid-1960’s); like most contemporary immigrant children they went to mediocre schools and many did not graduate. But at least they were citizens and, in an era when civil rights was at the forefront of social policy, they were prepared to actively assert their right to social, educational, economic, and political equity. For both Herlinda, who grew up in the lower Rio Grande Valley, and for, Gloria, daughter of migrant farmworkers from Texas, who grew up in Parlier, California, their parents’ experiences and their own sense of their intermediate position in U.S. society, contributed to their development as civic activists and to their eventual modes of civic engagement..

The historical context of this *Tejano/a* cohort emerges clearly in the account of another civic activist and community role, Adelia Luevanos. Adalia first came to California from Donna,

⁴⁴ Elizabeth Briody found that the majority (58%) of her household sample of informants in a lower Rio Grande Valley *colonia* were immigrants. See Elizabeth “Household Work/Subsistence Strategies Among Mexican Americans of the Lower Rio Grande Valley”, Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 1985. See also Elizabeth Briody, “Mexican Household Immigration to South Texas” *International Migration Review* 21, 1987.

⁴⁵ Although the Bracero program was not terminated until 1964, the peak of Bracero flow to California was in 1959 when, according to Garcia y Griego 84,000 Braceros came to work in California An excellent account of this period can be found in Dennis Nodin Valdes, **Al Norte**, University of Texas Press, 1991. The westward flow of Texas migrants from the lower Rio Grande Valley to California and Washington (based in part on the history of a family from Weslaco, Texas, who eventually settled in Parlier in southeastern Fresno County) is discussed in detail in David Griffith and Ed Kissam, **Working Poor: Farmworkers in the United States**, Temple University Press, 1995.

Texas in the lower Rio Grande Valley in the early 1960's. She arrived in Arvin, a small farmworker community about 15 miles southeast of Bakersfield, as the teenage daughter of a Texas migrant farmworker and newly-married wife of a Mexican-born Texas farmworker.

Adalia still recalls vividly that when she arrived, Arvin (a community now struggling to define its cultural and sociopolitical identity) was a neighborhood with strong informal linkages within the Texas migrant farmworker networks from “El Valle”—where people had the time to help each other, where people trusted each other, where there were no fears of crime, although families were as poor as they are now. Adalia reminisces (together with her husband, Jesus) about how Texas migrant farmworkers’ networks shaped Arvin life only two decades after dust-bowl migrants first made the town and this whole area of Kern County famous,

We all knew each other because we worked together in the big crews—up to 100 people sometimes (picking cotton, grapes, peaches, green beans, corn). We didn't know anyone in town when we arrived....But you'd go out in the morning and you'd smell Mexican food...People cared more about each other, were more friendly...in the evenings when people sat outside you'd hear Spanish. We could both maintain our culture and participate in community life.

Inquiry into the experiences of the Tejano/a cohort of Mexican immigrants provides us valuable insights about ongoing processes of social and civic integration because it allows us to look retrospectively at the formative experiences of “Generation 1.5” and 2nd generation children of immigrant parents. While some of the Tejano/as, like other children of immigrants to the U.S., did not learn Spanish, the very high concentration of Mexicanos in South Texas *colonias* meant that many others grew up with an exquisite command of both Spanish and English—a skill which has been important in shaping the patterns of their civic engagement.

Tejanas and *Tejanos* are intermediaries, brokers, in a many different social and civic processes in rural California communities. Their personal and cultural consciousness is transnational and their role as “connectors”, to use Malcolm Gladwell’s phrase, as creators of “bridging” social capital is a very important aspect of civic processes in the Central Valley and other rural U.S. communities where Mexican immigrants have settled.

Teo Parra, a civic activist from the Tejano/a immigrant cohort, born in the state of Nuevo Leon and raised along the Texas migrants’ long-haul follow the crop circuit (Texas, California, Idaho, Oregon) criticizes her fellow *Tejano/a* neighbors complaining of their referring to new immigrants as “los mojos”. (i.e. *los mojados*, “wetbacks”). Teo’s view of her civic duty as a *Tejana* is clear-cut. She says, “When you are bilingual you need to speak up...when you know how to play the game you need to”. Teo’s articulation of her civic responsibilities in an all-American one but, of course, it is at the same time one which leads her into a realm of activism where she is becoming deeply engaged in civic issues related to the social integration of Mexican immigrants from more recently-arrived cohorts into local community life.

It is, to some degree, surprising but in other respects seemingly inevitable, that some of the most outstanding community activists from this *Tejano/a* immigrant cohort of Mexican immigrants are women. Herlinda and Gloria are both strong, independent, outspoken

women and of the intermediary roles they play in the community is as brokers is in realigning traditional and contemporary community perspectives about gender roles. Both are engaged in addressing “women’s issues” as part of their community activism but neither are feminists in the sense that their primary focus is on gender roles; both are eager, willing, and prepared to address whatever community issues arise

A common pattern—at once individual and, at the same time, part of the Tejano/as’ social identity and civic roles is their aggressive personal style. Outspoken, often eloquent in English and Spanish, demanding like others whose civic and political perspectives were formed in the heyday of the civil rights movement and the UFW struggle for farmworkers’ rights, this generation is the pool from which mainstream leaders as well as activists are drawn. However, despite a willingness to aggressively speak her mind and move forward with a broad social justice agenda, Gloria Hernandez, for example, constantly returns to what are basically “Mexican” cultural values, stressing her role not as an individual leader who is not “above” and “ahead” of a community constituency but as an activist, with valuable insights and skills, who works “among” others. Pablo “El Primo” Espinoza, a long-time Tulare County civic activist from the *Tejano* generation of migrant farmworkers, UFW organizer, radio broadcaster, and community leader is, on the one hand, outspoken. But, at the same time, he sees himself as working as a civic activist “within” a community social network of extended family relationships.

As a group, as an immigrant cohort from a particular period, the Tejano/as are sociologically divided—the outcome of segmented assimilation. Torn in different directions by the pressure of growing up in a society with conflicting values, some have chosen to emphasize their identity as Americans while others have chosen to emphasize their bilingualism and biculturalism. This departure from traditional social mores outlook and assimilation to the U.S. “mainstream” is most clearly seen in the case of farm labor contractors who, like the civic activists on whom I focus, are powerful as intermediaries. Unlike the civic activists among the *Tejano/as*, their objective is to organize co-ethnic workers as part of a business strategy, not as a means of altruistically advancing community well-being. Upward mobility creates class divisions and social fragmentation within this and succeeding cohorts of Mexican immigrants.⁴⁶

While Texas-born farm labor contractors and, now, established farm labor contractors from every Mexican immigrant cohort, deploy their bicultural skills to control farmworker crews, at the same time, some of the most altruistic and decent farm labor contractors also stem from the same group. Traditionally, the Texas *troqueros* (crewleaders) took responsibility for organizing and shepherding crews of migrant farmworkers from their hometown *colonias* in south Texas to piece together a long-haul itinerary which would allow them and their families survival.

It was, at once, both a business/workplace role and a civic role. Recently-arrived from Mexico, with characteristically Mexican perspectives on norms of mutual reciprocity—within

⁴⁶ A prominent Latina “community leader” in Houston, TX enthusiastically observed to me that “community networks” were powerful networks to organize community members. She went on to recount how her network of Mexican restaurant owners had collaborated successfully to keep the wages of Mexican busboys and cooks from rising.

extended families, in fictive kinship networks of *compadrazgo*, village, and regional networks of *paisanos*—these Tejano and Tejana crewleaders were seen by others in exemplifying and catalyzing civic collaboration. As crewleaders operating within the framework of informal social networks, they were bound by traditional Mexican values of mutual reciprocity to be responsible for “their people”. As one prominent female farm labor contractor told me in the early 1990’s, reflecting on her community importance and expressing prevailing norms, “Without my people, I’m no one!”. Even a decade later, a mayordomo active in the California Migrant Education Parents’ Association told me he felt it was his responsibility to urge his work crew to take the time to get involved in their children’s education.

But these norms have eroded under the onslaught of American values. Farmworkers and farm labor intermediaries alike now differentiate between the old, traditional community leadership roles of *troqueros* and *troqueras* and the contemporary exploitative labor management practices of *contratistas*—some of whom are the sons and daughters of the original generation of *Tejano/a troquero/as*. In the crucible of clashing cultural norms, the traditional values of reciprocity so powerful a generation back within the Texas-based networks, have given way to those of business expediency—a transition from mutualism to merchandising, an unselective mode of acculturation.

The *Tejanos* and *Tejanas* who chose a bicultural pathway of acculturation to U.S. life from the many options available to them, while culturally labile, are clear-cut in their critique of those who decided either to complacently stay with “Mexican ways” or to unthinkingly choose “the American way”. They remain committed to Mexican values about the civic duty of mutualism and, at the same time, to American values about self-expression and the importance of assertiveness, self-reliance, and independence. Their community activists’ critique of muddled assimilation are, in fact, very thoughtfully and carefully developed critiques of some pathways of assimilation and assertion of the general approach recommended by Portes and Rumbaut—“selective acculturation”.

In seeking to understand the particular trajectory of *Tejano/as*’ mutual adaptation as Mexican immigrants coming to live in U.S.-style communities, it becomes evident that the specific historical circumstances of immigrants’ lives comes into play in defining their identity as an immigrant cohort and, eventually, as civic activists. This cohort of Texas-born children of Mexican immigrants and Mexico-born children of parents who migrated to Texas were also a generation who experienced the full brunt of post-World War II racism.

The Texas-influenced activists central to our analysis of Central Valley civic life were born only a few years after the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1953. They were children during the early years of the civil rights movement, and teenagers or young adults as Cesar Chavez and the UFW burst on the national scene as a union organizer, civil rights activists fighting for the rights of Latinos. Now in their 40’s and 50’s, this generation is acutely conscious of the yawning chasm between the “official story” about constitutional rights and the day-to-day reality of civic life where all that is visible of a full “bill of rights” are the stalagmites and stalactites resulting from constant erosion of a civic reality which has never measured up to its rhetoric.

A well-know civic activist in rural California, Juanita Ontiveros, veterana of the UFW movement, work with the Royal Chicano Air Force popular art/cultural movement, and

now almost a decade of work in the California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation's Citizenship project, recalls a memory from almost a half-century ago when, as a child in the early 1960's she pressed her nose against the window of a "Whites Only" diner in South Texas and smelled the delicious aroma of a hamburger cooking, food forbidden to her because of institutional/societal racism. Jesus Luevanos, a warm and decent, but politically moderate, almost conservative, citizen, remembers the racism of the 1950's from being thrown out of a restaurant as a teenager because he asked for water for his baby brother who was outside in the car. The message received by many among the Tejano/a generation of children of Mexican immigrants was so conflicted as to whether immigrants would be "accepted" in U.S. life that it seems to have shaped the stance they take as civic activists. Their ability to straddle two cultures with such agility stems from a recognition of their linkages to past and future cohorts of immigrants but, also, a fine-tuned awareness of the chasm between democratic, egalitarian, ideals and real-world practices.

Consideration of the development of civic activism among the *Tejano/a* cohort of immigrants provides an important longitudinal "window" for understanding the inter-generational dynamics of civic life in California rural communities with high and growing concentrations of immigrants. The communities in which Tejana and Tejano civic activists grew up, their mixed experiences of racism, welcoming/acceptance, and mutual support among immigrants/migrants, deserve attention because they provide us with clues not only to the ways in which this generation's civic values and styles of civic engagement developed but because they provide insights into the ongoing process of immigrant integration. In the course of the past 5 years of research on immigrant civic involvement in rural California community life I have come to see these 2nd generation immigrants as a key group in determining current social policy, modes of civic engagement, sociopolitical dynamics of these rural communities. The ways in which the personal experiences of immigrant children born in Mexico and raised in Texas have shaped their civic participation provides guidance for the societal challenges which lie ahead.

The *colonias* of the lower Rio Grande Valley the mid-Valley area from Laredo to Eagle Pass, and in the El Paso area, first "discovered" and targeted for community development investments by the Ford Foundation in the 1960's as a shocking example of domestic underdevelopment, should not be seen as a unique or isolated phenomenon. They are simply a paradigm case of how communities are formed in a "borderlands" region, a transition zone in the sociopolitical ecology of the Mexico-US region.

Colonias, technically communities with crowded housing as a result of patterns of Mexican immigrant settlement, are a particular variant of the cultural/social/economic inter-zone in the social and economic integration of Mexico and the U.S., settlements where dirt-poor immigrants were able to convert hard work into convivial neighborhoods.⁴⁷ They dot the California landscape where Mexican immigrants are settling, not simply the Texas

⁴⁷ An important aspect of this neighborhood conviviality is that, without the interference of ethnocentric U.S. housing codes and planning bodies, extended families can build new low-cost housing in their backyard or frontyard for children, in-laws, or other newly-arriving relatives. Families can also raise animals and vegetables round the house and, if need be, afford to go spells without working in order to help out family members.

borderlands along the political boundaries between two nations. These communities cluster not only along the literal border, *la línea* (the physical, river-delineated, barbwire-divided border), but, also, the “virtual border” between Mexican life and U.S. life. They are continuing to evolve and continuing to be the homelands of an entire group of immigrant activists who routinely draw on diverse linguistic and cultural resources—*Tejanos* but, also, the California-born children of immigrants.

It is important to understand that these bicultural/binational households and the social space they inhabit, is not a small or unusual niche in the rural landscape. Urban Institute researchers estimate that about one-quarter of all California families with children live in “mixed status” households and that about 40% of all low-income families with children are mixed status.⁴⁸ While these tabulations refer to all California immigrants, in both urban and rural communities, it is likely that similar patterns are to be found in rural, predominantly Mexican areas of California.

A central research question, of both theoretical and practical importance, is whether it will be possible to intentionally guide the personal and civic development of the children of Mexican immigrants in these communities toward the sort of mutualist, helping roles played by some of the *Tejanos* and *Tejanas* and away from all-American role models based primarily on deployment of personal skills to gain economic advantage. As I discuss later, some strategies for this sort of inter-generational approach to building immigrant civic engagement have promise, but successfully replicating them will remain a challenging proposition.

3. “Migrantes del Crisis”--Long-Term Settlers (1971-1989)⁴⁹

This cohort of Mexican immigrants, most of whom now have children (and grandchildren) born and/or raised in California are probably the largest sub-group of Mexican immigrants in rural California. This era of immigration ended with the passage of IRCA in 1986. This was a watershed in Mexican immigration to rural California because the provisions of the statute made it possible for even recently-arrived farmworkers and settle in California if they wished. The SAW (Special Agricultural Worker) provisions of IRCA made it possible for solo migrant men who had come to work in California agriculture on their own to adjust their status, settle in California, and after a few years have their wives and children join them. About 1.1 million farmworkers, almost all of them Mexican immigrants to rural California,

⁴⁸ Michael Fix and Wendy Zimmerman, “All Under One Roof: Mixed-Status Families in an Era of Reform”, Urban Institute, June, 1999.

⁴⁹ The term “migrantes de la crisis” first began to be used to refer to migrants who came in increased flows in 1982 toward the end of the roller-coaster ride of the Mexican economy under the Lopez-Portillo administration. But, in reality, rural Mexico had been in economic crisis for years. For an excellent discussion of the complex interactions of macro-economic factors which affected migration during this period see Agustin Escobar Latapi, “The Connection at its Source: Changing Socioeconomic Conditions and Migration Patterns”, in Abraham F. Lowenthal and Katrina Burgess (Eds.), **The California-Mexico Connection**, Stanford University Press, 1993. The account of Polo Chavez, one of the sons of *Braceros* profiled in this report suggests that the urban Mexican crisis hit the less-skilled rural-urban migrants early in the 1970’s.

adjusted their status under the SAW provisions; counting their wives, this immigration cohort probably numbers about 1.7 million persons.⁵⁰ It is this group of immigrants who began to become eligible, in 1995, for naturalization and it is from this pool of Mexican immigrants that future naturalized citizens will be drawn.

In some respects, this cohort of immigrants were initially “welcomed” to California as they found safe harbor as economic refugees from the rural crisis in Mexico. The James Irvine Foundation, along with other leaders in California philanthropy such as the Rosenberg Foundation, supported a massive effort by churches and community-based organizations to help immigrants adjust their status under the provisions of IRCA. This effort was crucial in the legalization and settlement of Mexican immigrant farmworkers in rural California, most of whom were elementary school dropouts could not have managed the paperwork on their own.

It had been contemplated that the same sort of collaborative effort between community-based organizations, foundations, and federal officials would be available to this cohort of immigrants at the next stage of their journey toward civic integration—the naturalization process—but, by 1996, when the first applicants from this huge IRCA-era demographic “bulge” of newly-legalized immigrants got to this point in the immigration pipeline, the political climate had shifted and the INS was not able to participate in the sort of partnership which had been possible 10 years before.⁵¹

In 2003, this generation of Mexican immigrant settlers have now worked in California for most of their adult lives. They have raised their children here, found stable, if not lucrative, jobs, joined local churches, and developed long-term friendships with co-workers and neighbors. They are in their prime as potential civic collaborators, contributors, and decision-makers. Some have advanced in their careers in agriculture to the point at which they are now supervisors and managers. Others have left agriculture, gone to vocational school or college, and moved into a variety of jobs in community service. At the same time, many retain strong ties to their home villages, sending money home, returning frequently to visit, and, as part of the sea-change transforming processes of Mexican governance, some have run for local office in their hometowns.

For this generation of *migrantes del crisis*, migrants who left their Mexican hometowns to seek a better future in California, the process of social integration into California communities has been a perplexing one. In some respects and on some occasions, they found themselves welcomed by their native-born neighbors and earlier cohorts of immigrants. But in other circumstances and occasions (as, for example, in the UFW’s struggle to organize field workers) they found themselves in bitter conflict with earlier cohorts of immigrants, e.g. Armenian-American and Japanese-American growers.

⁵⁰ It is difficult to reliably estimate the numbers of farmworker spouses and teenage children who were not, themselves, working in agriculture and, thus, included in the SAW figures. Farmworkers’ non-working spouses and non-working minor children subsequently qualified under family preference provisions.

⁵¹ Robert Bach, then the Deputy Executive Commissioner of the INS, had originally envisioned a naturalization-oriented collaboration modeled after IRCA where the INS had certified “QDE” (qualified designated entities) to assist in the application process.

These 40-55 year old immigrants, some of whom have now achieved U.S. citizenship, represent the core “social capital” of Mexican immigrant communities in California where they live. They know “everyone”, and are firmly-invested stakeholders in community well-being. By and large, both their foreign-born children and their U.S.-born children speak English well, have grown up as Californians and have, in many cases, fulfilled their parents’ dreams in migrating to the U.S. “so my children can have a better life, better opportunities”. This generation of immigrants are avid consumers of news and public affairs programming on Spanish-language radio and that they talk extensively with extended family members, and to a lesser extent, with neighbors and co-workers on community issues of common concern.⁵² But they vary greatly in outlook, personal circumstances, and ability to participate in civic affairs.

Some have been able to buy comfortable homes in rural communities which are more convivial than either urban inner-city or suburban neighborhoods. Some are the proud parents of children who are now embarking on professional careers as doctors, lawyers, and engineers which would never had been feasible in their home villages in rural Mexico.

Many in this cohort have found that their education or personal circumstances did not allow them to move either upward in agriculture or out of agriculture. For them “the American dream” is a fitful purgatory, as they live an ongoing marathon of uncertainty. For example, several thousand of the most successful of the Tulare, Fresno, and Kern County Mexican immigrant settlers from this generation, who had achieved economic stability and well-being as citrus workers in communities such as Orange Cove, Lindsay, and Porterville were threatened by the prospects of losing their homes as massive unemployment and underemployment rocked their stable lives after a 1999 freeze.⁵³

While post-World War II immigrants to the U.S. could move upward economically despite their minimal schooling, lack of education has, in the past two decades become an increasingly serious problem for this cohort —particularly if age or illness keeps bars them from strenuous work in the fields.

Even those whose career paths have taken them upward or even out of agriculture into a relatively stable job niche live in an environment of constant uncertainty as the fragile economies of rural California communities are buffeted by changes which are out of their

⁵² See Ed Kissam, Jo Ann Intili, and Anna Garcia “Spanish-Language Community Radio as a Resource for Health Promotion Campaigns Targeted to Farmworkers and Recent Immigrants” in Californian Journal of Health Promotion, March, 2003. We believe the patterns of community dialogue about health carry over to discussion about immigration issues and other sociopolitical themes.

⁵³ Don Villarejo, then with the California Institute of Rural Studies, estimated that about 13,000 farmworkers, most of them citrus workers, were laid off as a result of the freeze. The crisis may have hit the best-established hardest. They could not move elsewhere because they already owned homes and would lose them if they defaulted on their mortgages. In reviewing the process through which Mexican farmworkers came to work in Florida citrus, we discovered that similar freezes are likely to have set in motion a shift from long-haul migration among Texas migrants to settlement in south Florida.

control. Soft prices for key commodities such as grapes, apples, and other labor-intensive crops continue to threaten the ability of even the long-term, experienced farmworkers who have managed to become the “core labor force” for their employers. The persistent recession and the resulting California budget crisis threaten the livelihood of some of the most community-oriented of this generation of immigrants, those working, for example, as aides in migrant education programs, health educators, promotora/es.

At the fringes of this large demographic group, there are also older farmworkers and employees in other immigrant-dominated sectors of the economy whose worklives were spent in the unstable world of farmwork, restaurant work, construction. About one-fifth of the SAW applicants were 35 years of age or older when they applied for legalization in 1988; thus, they are now 50-60 years of age or older and no longer able to easily earn a living in field work. And many are not able to qualify for Social Security because the widespread practice of using phony social security numbers meant that OASDI deductions were never posted to their Social Security account.⁵⁴

Although this generation of immigrants had grown up in an even more turbulent economic environment in Mexico than the current California one, they were not prepared for the harsh anti-immigrant backlash which appeared in 1994 in the form of Proposition 187—an initiative sponsored by California Governor Pete Wilson and passed by California voters in November, 1994. While the initiative’s supporters argued that the proposition was simply a fiscal initiative, Mexican immigrants themselves were able to read the governor’s lips and understood that this was an assault on them—as minorities, as immigrants, and as low-income working poor families.

The assault shifted from the state arena to the federal arena when passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reform Act of 1996 (PRWORA) sought to deny legal permanent residents who were immigrants (not just unauthorized immigrants) access to crucial programs such as Food Stamps, federal financial aid, TANF, and others. While all of the provisions of Proposition 187 and some of the provisions of PRWORA were invalidated by the courts, the message to Mexican immigrants was clear: California voters did not want them in their communities. Many responded by seeking, at the first possible opportunity, to begin the naturalization process—in large measure to “defend their rights”, “protect themselves from discrimination”, or to assure their eligibility to receive social program benefits.⁵⁵

The “mixed messages” they have received about social and civic integration appears to have generated a fair measure of ambivalence regarding civic participation within this 1970-1988

⁵⁴ The Social Security Administration has established a procedure for correcting accounts which is, in principle, a sound rational solution. In practice this process is very difficult for retired farmworkers.

⁵⁵ Of naturalization applicants receiving help from the Central Valley Partnership organizations we interviewed in 1999, 47% mentioned that assuring their eligibility for programs had been a consideration in seeking citizenship, and 25% mentioned their desire to “defend their rights”. More specific responses such as “I wanted to preclude being discriminated against”, were coded as “other”. The demand for naturalization from 1996 on as a strategy to defend one’s rights was so massive that in the late 1990’s the backlog of California naturalization applicants in the INS pipeline numbered about 800,000. Most, though not all were Mexicans.

immigration cohort. Although than one-third of the Lindsay and Winters Mexican-origin immigrants we interviewed in 1999 were involved in some sort of civic activity, there was a marked reluctance to become actively engaged in the political process.⁵⁶

While the Proposition 187 campaign generated marches of hundreds of thousands of immigrants in Los Angeles, the Central Valley Mexican naturalization applicants we interviewed in 1999 listed political self-expression (active involved in a political party or campaign, putting a political sign in one's window or yard, or a bumper sticker on one's car) at the bottom of a list of 16 different modes of civic involvement when asked which they would be willing to get involved in. While the overwhelming majority (80%) said that they would be willing to register to vote and, in fact, to vote, only 44% said they would be likely to become actively involved in a political organization or campaign. What is particularly suggestive is that involvement in self-expression where one might be individually recognized and suffer reprisals seemed to be worrisome to many. This cohort of immigrants cannot be said to feel entirely "safe" about civic engagement, much less "thriving". Their experience has not been the bitter one of the Braceros but neither has it been the full-fledged unrestrained civic and social engagement of the *Tejanas* and *Tejanos*.

This cohort of Mexican immigrants is generally well-integrated into the social life of their communities but political participation may not be an attainable dream for many—because current naturalization requirements, most notably the ability to speak "everyday English" has presented a challenging hurdle for many. In 2002, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (now, in the newly-created Department of Homeland Security, Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services) initiated an effort to "re-design" the naturalization process. It appears that the re-engineered process will be much more demanding—because it gratuitously adds English-language reading requirements to the previous formidable barriers and makes the oral English and writing requirements more difficult to satisfy.⁵⁷ Because the overwhelming majority of now-legal immigrants in this cohort are from rural Mexican migrant-sending villages and have only an elementary school education, the current low approval rate for citizenship applicants among "los migrantes del crisis" may decrease still further.⁵⁸ Thus, this cohort of immigrants will be "safe" in their new communities as legal permanent residents, free from harassment on the basis of immigration status, but politically disenfranchised.

⁵⁶ Our survey of naturalization applicants involved with Central Valley Partnership organizations showed a higher level of civic involvement in this sub-group—with 59% reporting some kind of civic involvement.

⁵⁷ The rationale for this sort of changes might be that the naturalization process is an occasion to "prepare" applicants to be responsible citizens and effective civic activists. However, the experience has been that such "mandatory" policies to stimulate learning (much like the reading requirements used by southern states to exclude voters) are, in essence, thinly-veiled efforts to exclude minority groups from the civic sphere. Easy access to naturalization and encouragement for civic participation would be more effective as social policy to bring communities together and enhance inter-ethnic collaboration.

⁵⁸ It is reasonable to believe and generally naturalization service providers believe that the first wave of naturalization applicants were the more educated ones who generally spoke better English. This issue has not been explored systematically. What we do know is that many potentially eligible applicants have not applied because they felt they could not meet the English, writing, and History/Government requirements.

I present, below a few illustrative comments drawn from these interviews with “migrantes del crisis”. While I do not consider the group of immigrants we surveyed as part of our evaluation of the Central Valley Partnership to be entirely representative of this cohort (since they were the “treatment group” who had benefited from relatively focused efforts to promote civic engagement) their perspectives provide insights into the outlook of this overall group.

A farmworker naturalization applicants told us the following about their civic involvement:

My husband and I have participated in community affairs for many years. My husband was in the UFW and we began working with them. We're also very committed to work with the church, in working with community issues. The courses at Proyecto Campesino only reaffirmed our interest and commitment. We're also participating in the Tulare County Civic Action League Census 2000 campaign giving out bumper stickers to whoever will take them.

Another farmworker, the illiterate mother of five children, now teenagers and young adults, told us,

I've volunteered in my children's schools. I've been on many committees to improve children's education. I've devoted my whole life to raising my children. Now that they are grown, I want to participate more in community affairs.

But, like other Californians, immigrants from this cohort are juggling many demands in their lives and do not necessarily find the organizational environment for civic engagement very welcoming. A middle-aged migrant farmworker described his ideas about his personal civic involvement as follows,

As far as the political process, one should vote. Other than voting I would not get too politically involved. Because, just like in other places, politics here are also very dirty. They just have more ways to cover their tracks. I would encourage others to vote and would help out once in a while in the community. But I don't think I would volunteer much of my time, because I need to work to feed myself. Also some organizations where friends of mine volunteer for, don't even help out with gas, much less feed them, yet they have them doing organizational work all over the place.

As I discuss below, social, economic, and political developments in Mexico are further modulating newer immigrant cohorts' perspectives on the integrity of the political process. This, of course, underscores the unique ways in which Mexican immigrants' personal constructs of what civic engagement is within the context of the life of the transnational communities of a contiguous nation can affect their level and mode of civic participation in California communities.

4. Post-IRCA Settlers—Disenfranchised and Culturally Stranded (1989-2000)

Immigrants in this cohort are very similar to the immigrants who came before them—“los migrantes del crisis”. They fled poverty in rural sending communities and they have now lived in California for a number of years. Most are, if not intentional, at least de facto, settlers. Like the cohort before them, their children are growing up in California communities, attending California schools, and learning English. However, unlike the cohort

before them, this cohort of Mexican immigrants does not have legal residence status. As unauthorized residents, their access to many publicly-funded services is seriously constrained. They live in “mixed status” households where, usually, parents and older children have no legal status but where younger children, born in California, do, and are U.S. citizens.

Because immigration control has, for several decades, focused on the actual border area, most can proceed with their lives without day-to-day fear but, in the post-911 era, there have been disturbing signs that this may not continue to be the case. In Fresno, and other Central Valley communities, the issue as to whether a Mexican consulate *matricula consular* would constitute a valid identity document has become a high-priority one for this group of immigrants because there have been occasions in which long-term residents have been deported as a result of encounters with local law authorities.⁵⁹

The values and life strategies of this immigrant cohort seem, in some overt and many subtle ways, more conflicted, more uncertain, than those of the generation before them. Our analysis of the process through which a young Mixteco activist from this cohort, came to be involved in California civic life, includes, for example, his account of personal identity crises which led to his current civic involvement.

As back-and-forth migration skyrocketed in the post-IRCA period, social disorganization in sending villages increased. The “push” factors which drove this cohort of immigrants northwards are the same they have been for the past several decades—but there were important changes—as *nortemización* continued to transform their villages. There has been to date limited research on what the “tipping point” is in terms of rural Mexican community life but clearly sending villages in many areas of rural Mexico underwent major cultural transitions in the late 1980’s. It is in this generation of immigrants where it is possible to see still stronger signs of an emerging sense of transnationalism as the civic space of Mexican immigrants in California becomes, paradoxically, less constrained at the same time that their civil rights and civil liberties in the communities where they settle become increasingly compromised.

I refer to this immigrant cohort as “disenfranchised” migrants because, in many respects, they are stranded between two countries—considered illegal in the U.S. but so transformed by U.S. life (at least by images of U.S. life is not the day-to-day reality) that return to the ranchos (rural hamlets) and villages where they had grown up was personally impossible. There are several factors, other than legal status, which make this particular cohort of immigrants (and the most recent cohort of very newly-arrived immigrants following them) different from those who preceded them. These factors, and consequences, deserve note and have significance for understanding the dynamics of Mexican immigrants’ integration into California social life and the differences in the level and style of civic engagement among different sub-groups of Mexican immigrants in rural California. Some of the most important

⁵⁹ There was an egregious case in Stockton, for example, in 2000, when a high school student who had lived in the area since he was a toddler was deported after a conflict with school authorities. The school called local law enforcement who, in turn, called the INS. The student’s father who had come to the school to deal with his son’s situation was also deported.

factors in the shifting patterns of Mexico-US migration affecting this immigration cohort (and future ones) are described below.

Increased Shuttle Migration from 1989 through 2001

The emergence of “transnational” communities inevitably has implication for the nature of civic participation. IRCA had been promoted as a law which would control immigration, but it had the opposite effect particularly in the migrant-sending regions most closely linked to rural California and the law appears to have had a significant impact on how this cohort of immigrants came to define the “community” in which they would be civic actors. The slow “treadmill” on which aging farmworkers who could no longer work at top speed in the fields (and who would no longer put up with the abuses they experienced) were replaced with new young immigrants became a wild merry-go-around as Mexico-US migration accelerated and, like any carnival ride, created chaos and confusion—in sending villages and in receiving communities in California.⁶⁰

The traditional identities of villages eroded. Graffiti from California barrios—“XIII Rifa!” and many others—appeared on the walls of adobe houses in Zacatecan and in Sierra Mixteca villages, returning labor contractors in mirror sunglasses could be found drinking late-morning beers in cafes in central Michoacan, and teenage boys and girls in tight jeans and Seattle Mariners windbreakers could be found giggling on the steps of churches in the Sierra Mixteca. At the same time linkages between migrant-sending and migrant-receiving communities became stronger and mid-way through the decade one would, with increasing ease talk with teenagers who had grown up and gone to school in a transnational world—a few grades in Mexico, a few grades in California.

Because the SAW legalization provisions had granted residency to a population with a very high proportion of solo male migrants but not to their non-working wives and children, many of these newly-legalized workers became “shuttle migrants”. They would work in California agriculture and return annually to their home villages to be reunited with their wives and families. The fortunate couples where both husband and wife had worked in farmwork (and, thus, were both legalized) would travel home for the holidays. This shuttle migration spurred further migration as young men (and some women) from these villages, the younger relatives of the legalized immigrants, realized they too could travel north—for a better life or, even more modestly, just to help their families survive. Those from villages with a history of migration, “mature” migration networks, could now more easily find a reliable coyote or guia from their village to help them with the dangerous task of border crossing, and could expect to find relative in the north “to arrive with”, welcoming families who, despite poverty, would give them a place to stay for awhile, and orient them to the “rules of the game” of life in California.

⁶⁰ There had been widespread concern that passage of IRCA might constraint agribusiness labor supply. It became evident by 1991 that the employment sanctions provisions of the statute were ineffective and that labor surpluses were increasing. An analysis of wage data by David Runsten, then at CIRS, provided compelling evidence that real wages were decreasing.

The process of *norteniización* (“northernization”) had long been observable in rural Mexican villages but it accelerated post-IRCA.⁶¹ Growers’ demand for Mexican labor—communicated both by earlier migrants and by farm labor recruiters and *contratistas*—came to make northward migration the leading career choice of many teenagers.⁶² The following account of a sending village in the state of Hidalgo, provides an overview as to how, by the late 1990’s, migration was no longer one of many options in a Mexican migrant-sending village but, rather, the primary option.⁶³

*Margarita, a psychologist at the local school, reported that there are busloads of migrants, including students, leaving all the time. Teachers try to hold students until they are 17, but that is becoming increasingly difficult. Last August a large group of 17-18 year olds left together right after they finished school. Two other large groups left in January, before completing their studies.*⁶⁴

While “pull” forces, the lure of greatly increased earnings in the U.S. began, in the 1990’s to draw younger and younger migrants northward, the faltering economic returns on education surely played a role also. As public sector wages stagnated, traditionally appealing professional careers, e.g. in medicine and teaching, became less appealing. This had two important impacts. As teachers in Tecozautla noted to our research team, education came to be de-valued and, at the same time, Mexican professionals in rural areas increasingly abandoned their careers.

Pressures on Family Life, Gender Roles and Civic Processes in Mexican Sending Villages

The increasing migration of men has changed the social fabric of villages in innumerable ways. As travel becomes more difficult, solo male migrants stay away for longer and longer periods and migrant-sending villages come to be populated primarily by women, children, and older villagers. It is now widely recognized by the wives of migrants that the strategy of waiting for their husbands to return home may not be their best or only option.

In our research in Tecozautla, Hidalgo, teachers spoke of having parent/child meetings at schools in the evenings where only women and children were in attendance, a change from several years ago. Concern over the impact on families came from a variety of sources. While

⁶¹ This concept, first articulated by Rafael Alarcon, is now recognized as an important factor in the changing nature of Mexico-US migration. The classic discussion of this is Douglas Massey et al., **Return to Aztlan: The Social Process of International Migration from Western Mexico**, University of California Press, 1987.

⁶² A recent study of Chavinda, Michoacan, a community with a well-established tradition of migration found that in 2001, more than half (60%) of a 1982 sample of residents now lived in the United States. See Belinda Reyes, Hans Johnson, and Richard Van Swearingen, “Holding the Line”, Public Policy Institute of California, 2002 for details.

⁶³ This is drawn from Ed Kissam et al, *No Longer Children: The Youth Who Harvest America’s Crops*, report prepared by Aguirre International for the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Policy, U.S. Department of Labor, 2000.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

not the norm, there were many stories of couples splitting up after years of the husband migrating, or men simply abandoning their families after several years up north:

Sometimes men go up north and forget about their families. They meet women and even start families. When they stop sending money, their wives and children in Mexico go hungry. Of course, it works the other way. One man was sending money home regularly, but his wife had taken up with another man. She took money from her husband, then left for the United States with this other man.⁶⁵

Most of the teachers mentioned increased problems with school discipline as a result of the lack of a paternal presence in the household. And, there were several instances when both parents migrated, leaving the children with grandparents or with the eldest child to provide care to his or her younger siblings. Some parents took young children with them when they migrate north, but this was not the usual decisions, due to the dangers of border crossing and the difficulty in finding housing once in the United States.

Teachers in Tecozautla also observed that even those men who leave their families and travel to the United States and return to their home villages are changed.⁶⁶ They have a new sense of independence and autonomy and find it difficult to readapt to what they have come to see as the constraints of village life. In the case where children travel north and return they also are changed:

Many children who leave find that they can't fit in when they come back. They return feeling independent. They don't want to be so close to their families, so they go back north again. The culture they are exposed to in the north has a lot of influence. Children see they can be independent and thus they cannot readjust to the family norms and structure in Mexico.⁶⁷

At the same time that the teenagers and young men in the migrant-sending villages which have been transformed by *nortinización* find traditional village life increasingly confining, men's protracted absence has led to changes in gender relations and roles. Stay-at-home women were becoming more self-reliant, increasingly accountable for civic responsibilities, and, not surprisingly, more insistent on gender equity in all aspects of life. Researchers studying traditional village governance in indigenous villages of Oaxaca are, for example, describing how village after village has come to agree that women, who traditionally could participate in civic dialogue but not hold office, or be charged with important ceremonial responsibilities, could and should now be drafted into these roles.

And women who find themselves on their own as single heads of households find new fortitude and more commonly succeed in garnering support to make decisions which formerly could only be made by men. One of the immigrant civic activists profiled here, Raquel Velasco, from a part of Aguascalientes with a very long history of migration to California, first came to the United States searching for her husband with whom she had lost touch. There is little doubt that the increasing social chaos in villages such as her hometown

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ruben Hernandez's excellent book on migration from the Purepecha village of Cheran to the United States, **Crossing Over**, provides detailed accounts of this process.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

was an important factor in her willingness, ability, and enthusiasm in taking on new, demanding, and unfamiliar roles as a civic activist in the California community where she lives.

Raquel is chronologically part of the former generation (since she came north in 1984 and was legalized as a result of qualifying farmwork in 1986) but sociologically she is part of the newer generation of Mexican immigrants in that she has moved into a personal social space which is midway between traditional rural Mexican life and contemporary Mexican life. Raquel's biculturalism, stems from her own intellectual agility but, also, from the circumstances of life in the community in which she grew up and her personal experiences. It has been important an important resource to her in her efforts to make a new life for herself in California and in the course of her civic involvement as a housing advocate.

Perceptions of Stalled Progress and Hopelessness in Mexico

As California-Mexico communications became easier (e.g. as the tedious, formal arrangements for expensive calls home gave way to the era of the international calling card), as cultural styles—clothes, entertainment programming on TV and radio, career aspirations, sexual mores—converged, teenagers and young adults came to have new expectations and a new sense of awareness about the “smoke and mirrors” of the official rhetoric of political life and the day-to-day realities of governance. For example, teachers interviewed in Tecozautla, Hidalgo in 1999 were clear about how some of these cultural/civic “push” factors began to contribute to the changing career aspirations and life plans of teenagers in the village:

Another very important factor that causes children to lose hope is the level of corruption in Mexico. Good jobs are obtained through political connections, as is most else. Students quickly find out that they do not have a chance of getting the few jobs that are available, and so they are unable to advance. This extends to other things as well. Some people get seeds and water because of their political activity or connections, whereas others can't get these. As a result, parents lose their fighting spirit and communicate this hopelessness to their children.

This theme, in both its economic and civic dimensions, is an important one. Although Mexican immigrants to California are guardedly optimistic about the integrity of civic processes in the communities they now live in, they are also attuned to the possibility of “things not being what they seem”. For example, the majority of Mexican immigrants interviewed in a 1996 Los Angeles survey (about evenly divided between the pre-IRCA “migrantes del crisis” and this generation of “disenfranchised” migrants) felt you could bribe officials in Mexico to solve an administrative problem and that more than two-thirds (71%) said they did not trust Mexican politics. When asked about government responsiveness to voters, 76% said that Mexican government was not responsive while only 16% said that U.S. government was unresponsive (Calderon Chelius and Martinez-Saldaña 2002).

Language barriers exacerbate distrust and a common, superficially objective question asked by immigrants learning about new civic structures or processes, “What’s that about?” (*No se de que se trata eso...*) always poses as sub-text the implicit hypothesis that a complex and unintelligible civic process is a cover for a hidden agenda. And since this is, in fact, often the case, it should be no surprise that Mexican immigrants’ shaky trust in the integrity of American governance can rapidly dissipate.

It is likely, also, that, in the context of increasingly dense networks of transnational ties, current political developments in Mexico are also having a negative impact on this generation of Mexican immigrants' willingness to participate in civic life—in California or Mexico. As is often the case in political dynamics, the optimism engendered by President Vicente Fox's strong commitment to opposing corruption and putting an end to (corrupt) business as usual in Mexican public life has now swung toward intense pessimism as evidence grows that Fox's crusade for integrity and social equality is, at best Quixotic, at worst, another “smoke and mirrors” scheme.

At the same time, continued experiences of political corruption in Mexico may, in some cases, bolster new immigrants' willingness to speak out and assert their rights in the United States. A farmworker participating in a hunger strike in Orange County (to pressure Taco Bell to increase payments for the tomatoes it buys by a penny a pound) told us that, although the “authorities” were clearly on the side of companies in the United States, not on the side of workers, at least he could demonstrate in the United States without being thrown into jail. He went on to explain that his uncle, who had been politically active in Chiapas, had been incarcerated for 3 years, primarily to keep him from being able to run for public office in the future.⁶⁸

5. Very Recently-arrived Immigrants (2001-2003)

Newly-arrived immigrants are an important sub-group within the Mexican immigrant population in rural California communities. My team's radio-related survey research in the San Joaquin Valley and other rural areas of California during the summer of 2002 suggests that in the typical rural California community, perhaps one out of eight Mexican immigrants fall into this cohort of very recently arrived transnational migrants.⁶⁹ They are mostly young male solo migrants but they, also include other distinct sub-groups—wives joining their husbands in California after a period of months or years of separation, children who had been left behind in migrant-sending villages with their grandparents, or other relatives rejoining their parents, couples migrating together to the U.S., or older relatives—usually parents—coming to live with their children.

Migration research has long distinguished between “sojourners” and “settlers” among populations of migrants. Much of U.S. immigration policy and policy analysis is crafted around the idea of “settlement” as the inevitable and immediate consequence of immigration. But, of course, this is not necessarily the case with respect to Mexican immigration to California (or the rest of the U.S.).⁷⁰ Historically, many Mexican migrants to California have been sojourners

⁶⁸ Ed Kissam field notes, February 26, 2003.

⁶⁹ Tabulations by Edward Kissam of data from the Radio Bilingue Endowment/Tri-Valley survey (conducted in *remates* throughout the station's rural service area). The research generated a large sample—602 respondents. The sample should be understood to represent primarily low-income, Spanish-speaking immigrants.

⁷⁰ This is the case, also, for other Latino migrants, for example, Dominicans and Puerto Ricans (although they are not, technically, immigrants). Patterns, of course, depend on the ease of travel from one country to

and an important agribusiness objective vis-a-vis immigration policy has been to continue this pattern. This is the objective of the current H-2A program and the binational negotiations regarding the possibility of a dramatically expanded Guest Worker program.⁷¹ But the reality is that, as social and economic integration of Mexico and the U.S. proceed forward, the relatively clear-cut distinctions between two distinct patterns of migration, just like the cultural distinctions are becoming less clear, as newly-arrived immigrants' plans, perspectives, attitudes and aspirations change shape from day to day.

Many of the recently-arrived solo male Mexican immigrants to rural California aspire to be sojourners. Like others from their villages before them, their plan is to work in farmwork, earn enough money in the course of several trips to the U.S. to return home and set up a small business, go to college (or both) and raise a family. But they find themselves, without it having been their original plan, settling in California. Over the years, they have not been greatly oriented toward civic participation (although they have been concerned about community problems, responses, and collective efforts to resolve those problems). Conversely, community dialogue and processes of decision-making have not included sojourners as stakeholders—even in communities where they make up a sizeable minority of the immigrant population. Yet the reality is that a significant number of migrants who came to California as sojourners do become settlers. While they may not be “community stakeholders” when they first arrive, many do, eventually, become such stakeholders. Their well-being, the future well-being of the communities in which they settle, and the extent to which they are involved in local civic life (whether or not they ever secure legal status) may well rest on how communities respond to them.

It is tempting to say that some of the newly-arrived young male solo migrants are sojourners while others are settlers but it is too soon to tell. What has been learned over years is that these newly-arrived migrants' nominal plans are fluid and that their trajectories may change. Some may find, to their surprise, that they like the new freedom, personal and occupational horizons of California life while others may find that the crowded housing, the constant nagging fear of deportation is too much for them. Or they may find themselves consumed with loneliness and nostalgia and return home having abandoned the dream of better earnings. The common strand in all of the very recent immigrants lives—the wives rejoining their husbands, the children joining their parents in California, the young *aventureros*, coming on their own or with teenage friends to work in the fields-- is that they are unfamiliar with California community life. Some are disinterested in civic life, as their lives are consumed by the struggle to survive and get ahead but others are eager explorers and potentially active participants in civic life.

In the past, many sojourners decided they wanted to settle in the U.S. after all. Some families who have settled in California, after a few years of experience with California community life, now want to return home. In early 2001 I interviewed a couple from San Miguel Cuevas, Oaxaca who had settled in the community of Parlier, about 20 miles southeast

another. The ambiguities and tensions about migrants' status as sojourners or settlers also emerges in European social policy, for example, about Turkish migration to Holland and Germany.

⁷¹ Michael Hedges, “Cornyn set to outline guest worker program”, June 16, 2003, Chronicle Washington Bureau, Hispanic Vista.

of Fresno.⁷² The head of the household and his wife both had steady jobs in farmwork and their children were doing well in California schools. Nonetheless, disillusioned by an increasingly unstable farm labor market, deteriorating working conditions, and concerned about the negative facets of California youth culture (i.e. drugs, gangs) they talked with us not about civic participation in Parlier (a topic I had hoped to explore together as they had been active in a group of Oaxacan immigrants beginning to meet informally) but instead about their dream of going home before their children were completely Americanized. Their current dream was a transnational one, focused on the idea of bringing water to a fertile area of communal lands near their village where they hoped it might be possible to grow semi-tropical fruit for the export market.

I have identified the cohort of “very recent immigrants” as being persons who came to California less than 3 years ago because, typically, new sojourners coming to work in farmwork plan to work for only one, or, at the most, two seasons before returning home.⁷³ However, post-9/11 developments appear to be having a dramatic impact on the numbers of sojourners in California, and other U.S., farm labor communities. In the post-IRCA period, shuttle migration became less attractive for unauthorized migrants than for the farmworkers who got legal status as SAWs. However, even with border crossing costs ranging from \$300-\$1,300 in the 1999-2000 period, the high cost of life in the U.S. and family ties in sending villages, led many transnational migrants to work in California for a season or two and return home. Now, in the post-9/11 period, as border control is tightened, the costs of border-crossing have increased by about 100%. This situation is probably convincing many young migrants who, in years past, might have returned home, to remain for longer periods in the U.S.⁷⁴ With longer time spent in the U.S, the proportion of sojourners who find themselves settling in the U.S. will probably increase. This further heightens the urgency of looking at these migrants as “members of the community”. Very recently we have heard also that more young couples to migrate north together as the costs of shuttle migrant are now too high.

Summary—Immigrant Cohort as a Determinant of Civic Perspective

In the preceding discussion, I have identified five distinct cohorts of Mexican immigrants to rural California. **Table 2-1** below provides a rough estimate of the size of each of these cohorts in relation to the overall rural Latino population

⁷² This couple spoke Spanish but felt more at home in discussing issues of personal and civic importance in Mixtec. I am grateful to Santiago Ventura for participating in this discussion as a translator.

⁷³ Certainly others have “no idea” how long they will stay. However, it is rare to hear a recently-arrived sojourner say that he “plans” to stay in California for 3 or 4 years.

⁷⁴ This assessment is based on ongoing Aguirre Group field research in the “New Pluralism” project. There is not yet adequate data to definitively tell about this pattern. However, Aguirre International’s analysis of data from the National Agricultural Worker Survey will allow us to examine this issue empirically in retrospect (as several more cycles of interviews will be needed to permit statistical analysis).

Table 2-1
Mexican Cohorts and Overall Latino Immigrant Population in Rural California

Time in U.S.	Estimated % San Joaquin Valley Latino Immigrant Population
Very Recent Immigrants (2001-2003)	11%
Disenfranchised Post-IRCA Settlers (1989-2000)	35%
Migrantes Del Crisis (1970-1988)	38%
Tejanas/Tejanos (1940-1970)	5%
The Braceros (1942-1964)	1%
Others (Non-Mexican, non-Texan, non-Bracero, pre-1970 Mexican)	10%

This taxonomy provides a framework for analyzing how migration experience and historical context contributes to the diversity of civic perspectives, styles of civic involvement, skills, and willingness to become involved in community life. Length of time in the U.S., in turn, interacts with family, village, and ethnic network identification to further modulate Mexican immigrants' perspectives on how and why they might participate actively in California civic life.

While the immigrant sub-populations identified here as “Tejanos/Tejanas” and as “Braceros” are small, it should be remembered that they are the parents and relatives of large numbers of California-born children and grandchildren who, to varying degrees, are affected by the dramatic elements of their stories and experiences. Inter-generational family ties cut across the immigration cohorts as defined here. Some Oaxacan immigrants who came to California quite recently are, for example, the grandchildren of Braceros; others, identified here as the “migrantes del crisis” cohort are the children of Braceros. While small in numbers these immigrant pioneers loom large in community consciousness. Their extensive social networks make them important “connectors” in community life and, structurally, the “smallness” of these communities stems from their social relationships/linkages. This makes them important creators of social capital resources which include both “bonding” and “bridging” relationships. As in virtually all societies, marriages establish “weak ties” which also bridge networks. In California, the patterns of Mexico-U.S. migration seem to result in these alliances emerging mainly among the “Generation 1.5” and 2nd generation children of immigrant parents.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ I am not aware of California research on marriage patterns among Mexican immigrants but, for example, Ruben Hernandez’s account of migrants from Cheran, Michoacan settling into Norwalk, Wisconsin in **Crossing Over** (Hernandez 2001) emphasizes Mexican immigrants’ marriages to Anglo-Americans as an important factor in community change.

The taxonomy used here to structure the analysis of ways in which length of time in the U.S. gives rise to diversity is idiosyncratic. It is, however, useful as a framework for considering the modes of civic participation adopted by diverse sub-groups within the overly-homogeneous designation of Latino immigrants. Like the constructs used in research on market/audience segmentation, this taxonomy reflects multiple variables which define the individual perspectives and sociological behavior of different sub-groups among Mexican immigrants. It should be recognized that the semantic and cultural component involved in drawing these distinctions have civic and political realities. For example, the official perspective of the Mexican government is that the group usually referred to in English as “immigrants” should properly be referred to as “migrants” in order to reflect (and assert) their continuing participation in a transnational community of individuals linked by their Mexican origins. From the Mexican perspective, individual social identity, also, has inter-generational dimensions, extending the status of migrants and the rights of civic participation to the U.S.-born children of Mexican-born immigrants to the U.S., i.e. 2nd generation Mexican immigrants⁷⁶

Spatial Dimensions of Mexican Immigrant Diversity—Village and Regional Networks

In rural California where about 95% of all Latino immigrants are of Mexican origin, the composition of the immigrant population in any particular community and in the state as a whole is determined by the dynamics of the migration networks which continually send migrants north from Mexico to California and all of the U.S. Inevitably, the social context and processes of these immigrants’ civic participation in California communities is shaped, in part, by the particular character and functioning of each network. Researchers have found that the political perspectives of the Mexican immigrants are significantly correlated with region of origin (Calderon Chelius and Martinez Saldaña 2002).⁷⁷

Mexican social networks, among them “migration networks” can be conceptualized as being concentric circles of “domains” of social interaction, each cluster delineated by the frequency of interactions among persons in it and the strength of the bonds linking them together into an “affiliational network”. This virtual geography is easiest understood in terms of egocentric networks in which an individual immigrant’s social universe is structured to consist of concentric circles of interactions—rippling outward through the dense thickets of nuclear family ties and interactions, through extended family ties and interactions, village networks, into ethnic/regional networks of *paisanos*, with bonds becoming increasingly attenuated but,

⁷⁶ Thus, both Mexican-born immigrants to the United States and their U.S.-born children (who, after all, grew up in immigrant households) are eligible to serve on a newly-established Advisory Council for the Institute for Mexicans Abroad, the organization charged with the task of maintaining Mexico’s affiliational ties with the very large population of Mexicans abroad who make up at least one-quarter of the entire population of persons of Mexican origin of voting age. (See Leticia Calderon Chelius and Jesus Martinez-Saldaña, **La Dimension Politica de La Migracion Mexicana**, Instituto Mora, 2002.

⁷⁷ Even while the PRI was the dominant political party and portrayed itself as a “large tent”, Mexican political perspectives were never monolithic. Mexican engagement in politics and political perspectives have intensified over the past 15 years due to many factors. It is likely that the burgeoning transnational political movement to include Mexicans abroad in the electorate will strengthen the overall linkage between Mexican immigrants’ political perspectives within the Mexican context and within the U.S. context and, thus, the diversity of political orientations among newly-arriving immigrants.

nonetheless, functional as they move farther outward in social space. While Mexican immigrants subscribe to a national identity, the final, outermost circle of these domains of social identity, the quasi-racial label as Latinos or “Hispanics” is a late, “American” addition and it is only relatively late in the acculturation process that it comes to convey even a minimal sense of affiliation.

Mexican Social Networks -- their Relationship to Migration and Creation of Civic Space

A particularly Mexican institution which, however, exists in variant modes in many other cultures, is the social technology of *compadrazgo*, that is, networks of social ties based on deliberately-created fictive kinship relationships which tie *compadres* and *comadres* together. For Mexican immigrants, extended family and fictive kinship networks imply strong obligations of mutual reciprocity. Persons in the same social network—either of kinship based on blood or marriage or fictive kinship—are obligated to provide economic support, advice, and assistance to each other and to their *abijado/as*. In hard times, immigrants draw heavily on the resources of social capital residing in these networks to confront adversity.⁷⁸

While it is this domain of “private” social and economic transactions that the most intense ties of reciprocity are forged, the entire Mexican social, economic, and political landscape is colored by the power of obligations generated as a result of principles of mutual reciprocity. While social interactions are inherently personal, the social norms about processes of interaction and delineation of expectations about the “syntax” of reciprocity (i.e. what sort of exchange is required, in what circumstances) is a “public” resource, part of a cultural inventory, a “social technology”. Ultimately, these Mexican networks and the shared set of assumptions which govern their functioning, serve to connect the “private” social space and processes of family life and individual economic transactions to the “public” social space of civic life in which associational life, community collaboration, and local political decision-making take place. At the same time, it is on this same stage that the recurring drama of individual, family, neighborhood, and community perspectives emerge and come to shape decisions about life plans, including migration.

While social service agencies and policymakers tend to think of individual migrant trajectories and population flows as being governed primarily by economic pressures or legal frameworks, the reality is that much of the locus of control of migration processes resides within the migration networks themselves. It is within these informal networks that newly-arriving migrants are oriented to the “rules of the game” of the new social universe in which they find themselves.

Variouly constructed social networks are deeply involved in facilitating migrants’ journeys to the United States—from the initial decision to come north, to the decision about how to cross the border, border-crossing itself, choice of destination, place of employment, and neighborhood one settles in as an immigrant. These networks include extended family and

⁷⁸ Larissa Lomnitz’s classic study, **Networks and Marginality**, describes how, in the 1960’s, migrants from rural areas of Mexico came to the urban center of Mexico, DF relied on extended family networks and fictive kinship networks to engage in problem-solving.

village social networks but, also, the ad hoc networks of mutual obligation that have been deliberately constructed to link farm labor recruiters and their “trusted” workers together.⁷⁹

One of the most interesting facets of the co-evolution of U.S. farm labor recruitment and Mexican migration networks is that native-born U.S. Anglo-American employers have now been culturally-conditioned by Mexican intermediaries (farm labor supervisors—including both *mayordomos* and legally-independent *contratistas*) who coach them about appropriate behavior within this social universe and recruit them into these constructed networks. These agribusiness employers then engage in a variety of ceremonial activities to solidify the bonds between them, their labor recruiters, and prospective migrants. Several agricultural employers we have interviewed, for example, have accompanied a trusted worker who has his own well-developed social network (based in part on his ability to promise jobs to newly-arriving northward-bound migrants) to their home village for the Christmas and New Year holidays.

It should not be a surprise that these same network relationships used to recruit new migrant farmworkers serve to modulate immigrants’ civic participation once they settle in California. In discussions with Gloria Hernandez about her time as a CRLA community worker, she recalls that several landmark class-action cases she worked on were ones where networks of *paisanos* were of crucial importance. She remembers, for example, that the plaintiffs in the important Oberti case were Oaxaqueños while the group she worked with several years later in the Garawan case were Sinaloenses. She recalls a Farmersville case as being mainly one with plaintiffs who were *paisanos* from Michoacan. Her account of the dynamics of workers’ collaborative and active engagement in these class-action lawsuits provide valuable insights into the ways in which the social and proto-civic processes of the workplace come, eventually to be translated into the public sphere of community civic and political life. Within the cultural context of Mexican immigrants, it is natural for these networks, of literal and fictive kinship, village identity, and *paisanos* to provide the model for managing future social interactions and structuring civic processes. Thus, some of the ways in which Mexican immigrants visualize civic engagement, decision-making about community priorities, and day-to-day dynamics of civic participation are deeply influenced by network affiliation.

While network-based models of mutual assistance are one of the great resources of Mexican “social technology” they have, at the same time, a dual face. While these networks are used to “create” substantial resources of “bonding social capital”, this social capital is then often used, in turn, as a means to gain control of scarce resources. Inevitably the power of networks to include is also mobilized to exclude. While this network-based process is, arguably, a universal feature of sociopolitical dynamics, within the realm of Mexican civic space, it gives rise to *caciquismo*, the tendency of strong authoritarian leaders to emerge through reliance on their social networks, rather than on merit, or democratic processes. This process,

⁷⁹ In the course of our 1998-1999 research on teenage Mexican and Guatemalan transnational migrant farmworkers, that personal social networks played an important role in determining both the economic costs of migration (amount paid to smugglers) and the personal costs (risk of dying in the desert). We found, also that there are networks within networks and that, even in a single village, some extended family networks could draw on more “social capital” resources than others. Agricultural employers directly or indirectly subsidize the costs of some transnational migrants’ unauthorized immigration while less well-connected migrants must subsidize their own journey—often at terrible personal and economic cost. (Kissam et al 2000).

transplanted from migrant-sending villages in rural Mexico takes root in the fertile soil of California community life and, for example, leads to tensions among farm labor supervisors who are often seen by their workers as playing favorites, giving prime jobs to relatives, or to persons tied into their social networks as a result of economic or social obligation to reciprocate for past favors. In the realm of civic life, it allows the development of charismatic leaders whose prestige and influence stems as much from their personal social and economic interactions with their constituents as from their ability to engage in innovative problem-solving in confronting community problems.

Structural Issues Related to Mexican Migration Networks and the Community Context of California Civic Life

There is a rapidly-growing and analytically powerful literature on social networks, the processes through which they generate “social capital”, and the ways in which social capital affects overall community well-being and civic life. I do not review this literature here due to space limitations but I should note that the concept of “social capital” used here and throughout this report is quite close to the original concept as articulated by James Coleman and Pierre Bourdieu—as relating to “relationships between people” and norms of trust and reciprocity.⁸⁰

My hypothesis is that Mexican immigrant communities in the Central Valley and other rural areas of California are rich in social capital but that immigrants face barriers in trying to draw on this social capital to engage in effective civic action. The further hypothesis is that, internally, the Mexican immigrant communities in rural California are highly-structured and that these structures serve to modulate the dynamics of social and civic life in distinctive ways. The heterogeneity of these communities, even within a population seen by outsiders as homogeneous, i.e. Mexican immigrants, has paradoxical effects on civic life by creating internal divisions within the community (based on network affiliation, length of time in California, legal status, ethnicity) while, at the same time, providing many opportunities to develop and refine skills in creating both bonding and bridging social capital, the raw material for building effective civic engagement.

A central issue which emerges from the current research is the possibility that immigrant communities and, in the current context, specifically Mexican immigrant communities in rural California, may be significantly different from the urban communities in which most of the research to date has been conducted. An equally important issue relates to the way in which the transnational sending-village migration networks, farm labor recruitment networks, and local “place-based” networks interact to shape civic life in the California rural communities of interest to us.

The dynamics of social network functioning, like the interactions of particles in sub-atomic physics, are systematically governed and visualized in terms of fields of force/influence which are affected by “social distance”. Migration theorists write of strong ties and weak ties

⁸⁰ Alejandro Portes has been very critical of what he sees as unjustified expansion of the use of the term “social capital”. The primary type of expanded definition of social capital I intend not to imply is a version of the concept which seems to have come to refer to “neighborhood social environment” including infrastructure. Such uses of the concept seem close to tautological.

governing large-scale patterns of behavior much as physicists write of electromagnetic and gravitational fields.⁸¹ The findings are that interactions among networks of strong ties (i.e. those with a good deal of “bonding” social capital) and networks of weak ties (i.e. those consisting primarily of “bridging” social capital) play very powerful roles in determining individual and community outcomes. My hypothesis is that their influence extends also to the realm of civic processes.

“Small World” theory provides very powerful insights as to how structural characteristics of communities and the networks within them determine their social and civic dynamics. This type of analysis also provides, useful tools for examining how community change takes place over time—e.g. by examining processes such as “ripple effects”, “diffusion of innovation” and structural parameters of networks such as clustering, average degrees of separation in the network, etc. (Young 2002; Bowles and Ginnis 2000; Newman 2000; Buchanan 2002; Gladwell 2000). Features generally recognized as being critical in measuring and describing the sorts of social networks which are visualized as being the source of “social capital” are network density (clusteredness), network reachability (ability to communicate/interact with all persons in a network), and network size (number of nodes). Given these parameters, it is likely that scaling issues (i.e. consideration as to whether larger networks behave like smaller ones) are important to understanding how social and civic life proceed in rural California communities in which immigrants live.

There are upper limits on the effective size of social networks, the cluster of people who can be considered to be part of a real-world social network. Thus, the concept of small clusters of persons living near each other, “neighborhood”, does have day to day reality in Mexican immigrants’ lives as in the lives of most people of most cultures.

Research on social networks, for example, shows that the average American’s ego-centered network consists of about 1,500 informal weak social ties (persons recognized well enough to strike up a conversation) but only about 20 active ties to individuals who are significant in their lives based on frequent social contact, supportiveness, or feelings of connectedness.⁸²

A study of two urban Latino neighborhoods which was oriented specifically toward looking at social networks in the community as a resource for “community-building” (Marwell 2000) developed a definition of social network based on four types of “strong ties” (talking about family issues, seeking help in accessing public services, seeking help in resolving a immediate personal or community problem, talking about issues which affect the community). In these neighborhoods, using this definition of “social network”, community members had, on the average, a social network of 11 persons. However the size of these individual networks varied from 4 to 20 persons.

⁸¹ One of the most impressive theoretical discussions of social network ties in relation to migration is Willson, Tamar Diana. 1998. “Weak Ties, Strong Ties: Network Principles in Mexican Migration”. *Human Organization* Vol. 57 (#4):394-403.

⁸² Michael Walker, Stanley Wasserman, and Barry Wellman, “Statistical Models for Social Support Networks” in Galaskiewicz and Stanley Wasserman (Eds.) **Advances in Social Network Analysis**, Sage Publications, 1994.

This finding (also from Nicole Marwell's research in Brooklyn neighborhoods where Dominicans and Puerto Ricans are the largest ethnic groups) reminds us that all immigrants are migrants and that Mexican immigrants' networks, unlike those of a static population, may vary with length of time in a new community and/or length of time since leaving their community of origin. Given the ongoing and constantly varying flows of Mexico-California migration, the shape of California community social geography clearly begins to be complex.

Although migration networks are primarily "horizontal" networks, i.e. based on clusters of individuals and families from the same *ranchos*, *municipios*, *districtos*, or state there are also temporal "vertical" dimensions of social contexts in migrant-sending villages as in migrant-receiving communities in California.

This visualization of the "community context" in which Mexican immigrants live is multi-dimensional in referencing immigrant cohorts (the temporal dimension of immigrants' experience in one or many geographically-defined communities) and sending village networks, as well as "local" or place-based social networks. It differs from standard ways of visualizing neighborhoods in that one dimension of community life is membership/belong /"residing in" virtual neighborhoods conceptualized as extended family and village networks of *paisanos*. These project themselves transnationally because they are the wellspring of migration.⁸³ From this perspective, then, the distinctions which researchers such as Putnam make between old-fashioned geographic social networks and affiliational networks take on a new light in the context of Mexican immigrants' social and civic life because, as migrants, their "virtual community" membership may be the locus for stronger ties than their "local" geographic neighborhood. At the same time, the power of the socially-defined virtual network affiliations may create divisions within even small neighborhoods. For this reason, it turns out that what might, ideally, be a well-defined objective means of distinguishing between "bonding" and "bridging" social capital is relative because concepts of "sameness" and "otherness" are in flux.

Practically, the task of mapping these actual "micro-networks" which so pervade Mexican immigrants' lives become almost impossible at the level of a state as large as California. Here, I use as a proxy for the actual functional family and village social "micro-networks, the much larger geographic unit of "state of origin" as a vehicle for discussing the diversity of California immigrant communities in rural areas of California.

While I use these state/regional descriptors as a framework for discussing diversity in relationship to migration networks and Mexican-origin immigrants in rural California, it is useful to recognize how, as in social or physical landscapes of fractals, there are actually networks within networks within networks and that the most powerful interactions take place within the smallest domains within these networks. For example, one of the major Mexican sending states with close ties to California is Oaxaca. There are, within Oaxaca, 30 *districtos* (areas about the size of a small California county). A typical migrant sending *districto* (e.g.

⁸³ One of the first and most detailed studies is on migration linkages between Aguililla, Michoacan and Redwood City, CA. See Roger Rouse, "Mexican Migration to the United States: Family Relations in the Development of a Transnational Migrant Circuit", Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 1989.

Tlaxiaco) has 34 *municipios* (e.g. Santo Domingo Ixcatlan) which, in turn, has 6 hamlets or *ranchos* (a social/spatial unit, a neighborhood where, in fact, “everyone knows everyone”). Thus, within the smallest migration “network” unit that can be mapped in a region the size of California, i.e. the state level--Oaxacans, there are probably 600-2,000 sub-networks of the rancho/neighborhood size.⁸⁴ In general, persons from the same *municipio* definitely consider themselves *paisanos*, that is, to be persons sharing a strong social identity (e.g. they are very likely to know each others’ extended family) while even persons from the same *districto* or state feel they are at least weakly bonded together as *paisanos*.

Macro-Level Measures of Mexican Immigrant Diversity

Table 2-2 on the next page shows the macro-level diversity of regional migration networks sending migrants to California—using the composition of the California farm labor force as a proxy for the composition of the Mexican rural immigrant population (since farmwork is the primary entry occupation). **Table 2-2** shows that migration patterns established early in the century continued to affect the mix of Mexican immigrants to California.

The early sending areas in Northeastern Mexico which sent so many migrants to Texas have greatly decreased in importance. But the “core sending areas” of Michoacan, Jalisco, and Guanajuato, as well as the adjacent mountainous areas of Zacatecas, Aguascalientes, and Durango, still send the majority of migrants northward. At the same time, migration from the Pacific Coast area is becoming increasingly important. While there are few migrants from the heavily industrialized “northern tier” of Mexican border states, there are increasing numbers of migrants from the Pacific northwestern agribusiness regions of Mexico—Sinaloa, Sonora, and Baja California which are staging areas, for example, for Oaxacan migrants’ subsequent migration to California.

⁸⁴ The Mexican census, for example, recognizes 9,826 “places” in the state of Oaxaca, slightly more than 500 of which have 1,000 or more inhabitants and, thus, are more or less comparable to a U.S. town. Slightly more than 5,000 of these places are settlements of less than 100 people, more or less the size of a typical “rancho” or a typical California community block—but not all send migrants to California. In the case of our example, the *districto* of Tlaxiaco has a population of 97, 829 persons, the *municipio* of Santo Domingo Ixcatlan, a population of 857 persons, who live in 7 “places (*localidades*) ranging in size from 23-291 persons.

Table 2-2
Diverse Origins and Changing Composition
of Mexican Immigrants in Rural California

Region/Macro-Level Migration Network	NAWS Pre-1988 Arrivals (N=4,921)	NAWS 1988 onward (N=3,580)
“Core Sending Area”- Michoacan	30%	26%
“Core-Sending Area”- Guanajuato	19%	21%
“Core Sending Area”- Jalisco	16%	13%
“Core Sending -Zacatecas, Durango, Aguascalientes	7%	5%
“Pacific Agribusiness” Sinaloa, Sonora, BC	12%	8%
“Pacific Coast” Oaxaca	3%	7%
“Pacific Coast” Guerrero	3%	5%
“Pacific Coast” Nayarit and Colima	3%	4%
“Gulf Coast”-Veracruz, Tabasco, and 6 others	1%	4%
“Norteño”—Tamaulipas, Nuevo Leon, Coahuila, Chihuahua	4%	1%
“Urban”-Mexico, DF and Edo. de Mexico	2%	2%

Traditional migration research has stressed the idea of one-on-one transnational linkages between Mexican migrant-sending villages and California migrant-receiving communities — analyzing migration primarily in terms of “migrant circuits”. These village-to-village linkages are real and significant. There are strong “sister-city” ties between communities such as Gomez-Farias, Michoacan and Watsonville; Jaripo, Michoacan and Stockton; San Miguel Cuevas, Oaxaca and the Selma-Parlier-Fresno area.

However, this picture must be modified to include an overlay which shows that rural California communities have a “vertical” dimension of social geography in which multiple social/migration networks converge and are juxtaposed in immigrant-receiving communities. Scores of individuals who would have known only members of their own extended family and village networks had they remained in their communities of origin in Mexico find themselves in California meeting and interacting with compatriots who are initially socially distant from them but now de facto *paisanos* by virtue of shared experiences, goals, and problems to face.

In these California communities where migrants settle, the networks, typically include a mix of old, mature migration networks and newer, less mature ones from “newer” sending regions of Mexico. These diverse networks compete, for resources and power in an elaborate dance of interactions which are usually invisible to the outside observer who is unaware of these distinct clusters of affiliations. At the same time that competition continues, there is, simultaneously, exploration of modes of collaboration to achieve common goals. The civic environment of the small rural California communities in which Mexican migrants settle is not a “melting pot” where all blend into a single new community/national identity. Instead, it is a new and rich social ecological niche where there is a good measure of experimentation and innovation as immigrants struggle to discern a common agenda and define a new common identity.

For example, the Kern County neighboring communities of Arvin and Lamont have significant sub-populations of Mexican immigrants from two core sending regions (Guanajuato and Jalisco), another significant sub-population of Tejanos from Donna, Texas, and neighboring communities in the lower Rio Grande Valley, and a newer network of Oaxacan migrants (from San Juan Mixtepec, Oaxaca. In a town with Arvin’s population (about 11,000 persons) these immigrant networks probably number in size from 1,000 to 3,000 persons each. This means that *paisanos* from each network tend to know each other much better than their fellow immigrants from other networks but, since there are a limited number of migration/social networks even a few cross-network “bridging” ties can greatly amplify a community’s social capital. At the same time the fact that the Arvin high school serves both communities also has an influence on social life—bringing teenagers and their parents into closer contact with each other.

What makes the social and civic environment of Arvin and communities like it so distinctive is that there are relatively dense linkages within each of the village and regional networks. At the same time, individuals in each of these networks, finding themselves in a new, unfamiliar, and sometimes hostile, environment, are forced to enter into new relationships, establish new connections, build “bridging” social capital. Consequently, the civic space of Central Valley communities such as Arvin, typically, have some of the characteristics of a social universe with “small-world” geometry—clustered social networks based on relatively strong ties embedded in a social context which favors the establishment of weak ties.

It is for this reason that Central Valley communities such as Arvin can be considered to be “civic hot spots”—because these conditions favor the creation of social capital. That is not to say that the tasks of preserving traditional social capital or new accumulating social capital are easy or that the subsequent task of deploying that social capital to generate “civic capital”—the skills and mutual understanding needed to join together in collective efforts to improve

community life—is easy. Mexican immigrants to communities such as Arvin find that the “bonding” social capital inherent in their social/migration networks is constantly threatened, at risk of evaporating under the harsh, stressful conditions of living in poverty in California communities. At the same time, efforts to build “bridging” social capital are impeded by histories of racial conflict, language, and cultural perspectives.

One of the paradoxes of the overall socioeconomic environment of the Central Valley is that the same macro-level socioeconomic forces which create economic inequality and social injustice also contribute to immigrants’ accumulation of social capital. As I discuss in **Chapter 3** of this report, the nature of California agribusiness, in particular the industry’s reliance on labor contractors to organize the farm labor force exerts strong pressures toward the development of weak ties creating connections which link distinct migration/social networks together. These farm labor contractors’ recurring need to reach beyond the boundaries of their own social networks to recruit workers to meet peak harvest labor demand is one important factor which leads to social mixing and, thus, to the formation of new ties of “bridging” social capital.

Another mechanism of migration/social network mixing which augments “bridging” social capital is the formation of solo male households of unrelated co-workers; as I have reported in prior research (Griffith and Kissam 1995), these function as “switching nodes”, information exchanges, through which migrants come to find their way to new farm labor employment and destinations. At the same time they are “hot zones” for the development of civic skills when young migrant farmworkers not related by ties of kinship or social identity as *paisanos* learn to collaborate together. Workers living in the same household learn to help each other out in crises, share resources, and negotiate, drawing on shared traditions of mutualism but, at the same time, extending them into new domains (e.g. chipping in to buy a car to go to a new state to work, to share the costs of sending a deceased acquaintance back to his home village, or joining together to complain to the landlord).⁸⁵

Ironically, the macro-level structural factor (farm size) which Walter Goldschmidt saw as having negative consequences for social life in Arvin and other Central California agricultural communities appears to contribute indirectly to the formation of “bridging” social capital linking otherwise divided sub-groups of Mexican immigrants together. The business choice made by Central Valley agribusiness to rely increasingly on labor market intermediaries for recruiting, supervising, and facilitating the life of arriving migrants, as the average size of production units increased, has not precluded the development of social capital but it has tipped the balance toward the development of community civic life which is closer to that of Mexican communities than to that of non-immigrant rural communities.

The socioeconomic picture of “poverty amidst prosperity” which emerges from standard macro-level analyses of the Central Valley community character must be modified to show that, in terms of social capital, there is also “prosperity amidst poverty”, that, in some respects, the immigrant enclaves of rural California, in *colonias* such as West Parlier, in communities such as Arvin, and immigrant neighborhoods of Fresno and Madera, there are

⁸⁵ There is, at the same time, as Alejandro Portes puts it, a “dark side” to the social capital in these households as collaboration in social life also includes sharing in drinking, procuring prostitutes, etc.

oases in which social capital can be accumulated. The challenge, then, becomes to forge strategies to effectively convert these resources of social capital into civic action to improve community life. Although the nation-state's control of social and economic life in Central Valley communities is tenuous, its control of civic and political institutions is tenacious.

Shifts over Time in Migration Networks Sending Migrants to Rural California

The spatial and temporal dimensions of Mexican immigrant diversity are also inter-related, as Mexico-California migration patterns are shifting. About two-thirds of the Mexican migrants to rural California are still from the traditional core sending areas of Mexico—but there is a gradual decrease in migration from these areas and a corresponding increase in the proportions of Mexican immigrants from Oaxaca and Guerrero. This shift is significant because most of the migrants from these areas are of indigenous origin. Consequently, the ethnic and linguistic diversity of the California rural Mexican immigrant population is increasing steadily. **Table 2-2** does not provide a definitive basis for estimating the proportion of Mexican immigrants of indigenous and mestizo origin but I estimate that about one in seven Mexican immigrants in rural California is now of indigenous origin.⁸⁶

Indigenous-Origin Mexican Immigrants to Rural California and Civic Impacts

One of the most important aspects of Mexican immigrant diversity in California is the rapidly-increasing numbers of farmworkers of indigenous origin in rural areas such as the Central Valley. This is not, by any means, a new trend, but it is a process which is accelerating. This development is changing the cultural and civic texture of local life and, at the same time, modulating California immigrant communities' relationship to the Mexican rural villages to which they are linked by migration networks.

The proportion of the Mexican immigrant population in California made up of indigenous-origin families probably exceeds the national concentration in Mexico—where 10% of the population speaks an indigenous language. In many of the “transnational communities” originating in the Sierra Mixteca, for example, very large minorities or, in some cases, majorities of the total population whose social identity is defined informally and formally as a “community member” of the sending village actually reside in the United States. These are in very tangible senses, “network communities”.

The Bracero program from 1943-1964 first emblazoned California on the “radar screen” of Oaxacan Mixtec and Zapotec communities. However, during the two decades from 1960-1980, the primary Mixteco migration flows continued to be internal—to the urban labor market of Mexico, DF and, via well-organized labor recruitment by large-scale agribusiness into northwestern Mexico, first in Sinaloa, and, subsequently, into large-scale tomato

⁸⁶ Our TVT/TCE sample of foreign-born Spanish-speaking survey respondents frequenting flea markets (*remates*) in five rural California counties shows a similar pattern of Mexican migration networks but with a still-higher proportion of Oaxacan indigenous persons because the majority of the interviews were conducted in Fresno and Madera counties, areas known to have higher than average concentrations of Mixtec immigrants. In the TVT/TCE, more than one-quarter of the respondents were of indigenous origin—in part because the flea markets are one of the few areas of “free territory” where very poor, recently-arrived migrants can spend a bit of free time on the weekend.

production in the adjacent states of Baja California, and Sonora.⁸⁷ It was only in the 1980's that migration from rural Oaxaca began to change the face of immigrant communities in rural California.⁸⁸ Radiating from regional "core" sending areas in central Oaxaca and the western Sierra Mixteca region of the state, adjacent indigenous communities in the neighboring states of Guerrero, Chiapas, and Veracruz are now also sending migrants northward to California. This influx of indigenous-origin migrants from southern Mexico has consequences for civic life in California—in part because these social/migration networks now have—as a result of their extensive internal migration within Mexico—gone through an extensive period of experimentation and refinement of strategies to maintain community identity within a migrant population.

I estimate that now there are more than 100,000 Mixtec-origin farmworkers and family members in rural California. It is likely there are perhaps another 10,000 Triqui-origin farmworkers and family members, and perhaps 15,000 indigenous immigrants from various smaller populations of indigenous migrants from Oaxaca—including from Zapotec, Amuzgo, Chatino, Huave, and Mixe-speaking villages.⁸⁹

The increase in the indigenous-origin population in rural California has somewhat paradoxical implications for the future of Mexican immigrants civic engagement in the rural communities where indigenous-origin immigrants are concentrated.⁹⁰ On the one hand, growing linguistic and cultural diversity presents barriers to efforts to develop strategies to develop more inclusive and responsive institutions. On the other hand, the growing proportion of indigenous-origin immigrants promises to enhance community resources of social capital because the indigenous migrant-sending villages have well-established traditions of civic voluntarism and active self-governance.

⁸⁷ Agribusiness development in northern Mexico was made possible by massive infrastructure development in the mid-1950's. Angus Wright, relying on a study by CIDRI, estimates that 115,000 emigrants left the Mixteca in the 1960's and that 240,00 had emigrated in the 1970.s and that most of them went to work in agribusiness production in the Culiacan Valley and Baja California. See Angus Wright, **The Death of Ramon Gonzalez: The Modern Agricultural Dilemma**, University of Texas Press, 1990.

⁸⁸ Although one prominent Mixtec community leader, Don Rafael Morales, settled in rural California as early as the 1970's. Both of his sons, Hugo Morales and Candido Morales, are now prominent transnational leaders, with Candido directing the Institute of Mexicans Abroad, the federal government's primary vehicle for promoting transnational civic engagement while Hugo directs Radio Bilingue, a Latino public radio network broadcasting in both Mexico and the U.S.

⁸⁹ We tabulated the ethnic/linguistic distribution of teenage farmworkers interviewed in our Department of Labor study of teenage farmworkers (1999) and found that about 80% of the indigenous Oaxacan youth were Mixtecos and 20% of Triqui or Zapotec origin. Since then, we routinely encounter a few farmworkers, perhaps 3-5% of survey respondents, from other villages. However, in our Census 2000 undercount research with CRLA, we found an entire hidden labor camp of farmworkers from San Pedro Amuzgo.

⁹⁰ Mixtec and other indigenous-origin migrants are clearly important ethnic minorities in the Latino populations of at least 10 rural California counties: Fresno, Kern, Madera, Monterey, Riverside, Santa Barbara, Sonoma, Tulare, and Ventura. See David Runsten and Michael Kearney, **A Survey of Oaxacan Village Networks in California Agriculture**, California Institute of Rural Studies, 1994. Since then, indigenous Oaxacan immigrants have probably settled in all of rural California, as well as in urban Los Angeles.

The Oaxacan systems of community indigenous community self-governance are particularly relevant in considering the future of rural California communities because they provide well-tested models for active civic engagement—not simply in decision-making, but in community leadership (through traditional rotating systems of volunteer office-holders chosen by councils of elders), in community collaboration (in communal public works projects organized under the institution of the *tequio*) and in use of informal volunteer-based quasi-judicial processes to resolve disputes. Indigenous organizations involved in the Central Valley and other areas of rural California, most notably the Frente Indígena Oaxaqueño Binacional (FIOB) have correctly identified these traditional civic practices as resources of potential value for community improvement in California.⁹¹

There remain intriguing questions about the eventual consequences of the rapidly broadening scope of Mexican immigrants' transnational civic space. Transnational civic engagement might be a zero-sum game which splits Mexican immigrants' civic engagement between potentially competing goals—civic participation in the life of “hometown” migrant-sending communities or new “settlement” communities in California. But the evidence suggests that, over time, Mexican immigrants' civic involvement actually expands—shifting from a focus on home-country issues to a binational focus, i.e. all “neighborhoods” of the transnational civic space (Calderon Chelius and Martinez-Saldaña 2002). As might be expected, civic and political interests and activities seem to configure themselves to the “shape” of the original transnational migration/social networks which brought migrants north to California.

In the case of indigenous immigrants to California, there appears to be positive synergism. Exploring the possibilities of a “new federalism” in Mexico as Oaxacan communities of origin negotiate with the federal government to determine boundaries of authority and modes of collaboration builds excitement and optimism about the possibilities of active civic engagement in California as well. This renaissance of traditional indigenous governance within the context of 21st century transnational life appears to be contributing to civic empowerment throughout the transnational migrant circuits. The same village-based migration networks which gave rise to the development of “transnational communities” are now asserting their identity as institutions in California civic life (although from the Oaxacan immigrants' perspective the region should properly be called “Oaxacalifornia”). Arguably, these developments are unique ones, seldom seen before on such a scale.

Interactions Between Dominant and Other Networks in California Communities

Below I summarize some of the further implications of the superimposition of diverse migration/social networks of Mexican immigrants in rural California communities.

⁹¹ The traditional Mixtec systems of community governance, including monitoring of volunteer and/or financial contributions to community public works projects (*el tequio*), and self-governance including collective decision-making and dispute resolution appear to fulfill a number of formal, technical criteria identified by Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis as requirements for successful community governance. See “Social Capital and Community Governance”, December 22, 2000 (on-line at Santa Fe Institute website).

Among a population civically-disadvantaged by illegal immigration status, language, and lack of familiarity with U.S. institutions, Mexican immigrants from networks which are not the locally-dominant one are the most isolated of all. Because the informal social networks provide the structural framework, for organizing efforts toward civic collaboration among immigrants, individuals or families who live in a community where there are few of their paisanos have fewer opportunities to engage in the informal sort of teamwork which makes things happen and which is the foundation for civic skills development.

In communities where there are relatively large, well-established networks associated with a specific migrant-sending village in Mexico, it is much more likely to have these informal ties give rise to a formal institution, a “hometown association” or “club” formed to provide a locus for collaborative efforts to accumulate money to send home for public works improvements (which, in turn, elevate the social status of the donors, as is the case among a range of groups including the urban elite). The volunteer treasurer of the hometown association of Santa Maria Tindu, a village in the Sierra Mixteca which has a long history of migration and which is well-established in Madera explained to us that he maintains records of several hundred donors in this large and well-established network.⁹²

Mixing Between Networks and the Emergence of Pan-Ethnic Networks

As discussed earlier in this section, migrants from many different village-based networks who come to work in the U.S. farm labor force bond together as a result of their experiences in the workplace, their experiences exchanging information about work conditions, their understanding of “how the system works”, sharing crowded housing quarters, and updates on availability of work. Another force contributing to the development of these affiliational networks as a result of new “bridging” social capital is the experiences of discrimination in the “melting pot” of the transnational workplace of multi-national agricultural corporations.

Indigenous-origin farmworkers from different villages and ethnic groups in Oaxaca, most obviously Triqui, Mixtec, and Amuzgo-speaking migrants, came to realize that they shared a social identity as indigenous peoples as a result of their experience with racial discrimination as migrants to the agribusiness regions of Sinaloa and Baja California and, then, California. These experiences have made an important contribution to the formation of both informal linkages and the development of formal, structured organizations. These organizations have grown up in the social context of terribly difficult life in the famous labor camps of northern Mexican agriculture and in the sociopolitical crucible of struggles to confront the “corrupt” alliances between powerful agribusiness interests and civic authorities in areas such as Culiacan and San Quintin.⁹³

⁹² The size and prominence of this village network in Madera stems in part from the successful efforts by an early labor contractor who was originally from Santa Maria Tindu in gaining control of worker recruitment for a number of local agricultural producers and recruiting workers from his hometown village.

⁹³ The interviews in this study included a long discussion with Filemon Lopez, a long-time Mixtec civic activist and a friend, now a migrant farmworker, about their experiences with labor organizing in Baja California and the development of civic and political perspectives among Mixtecs of their generation (i.e. “los migrantes del crisis”). These interviews support the analysis in **Chapter 3** of the relationship between the agricultural workplace and civic activism but extend the analysis to the transnational sphere of Sinaloa

The development of these organizations is partially the result of ‘new’ analytic perspectives—ideological worldviews which introduce migrants from isolated peasant communities to a new social universe, the conceptualization of a socioeconomic framework in which identity and linkages are shaped as much by economic factors and class as by traditional affiliational networks based on kinship, language, and cultural identity. At the local level, organizations such as the Frente Indígena Oaxaqueño Binacional have brought migrants from communities in conflict (most notably Triqui and Mixtec immigrants from the Juchitán area) together around a shared indigenous identity, or as farmworkers (in the case of the Pinos y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste—PCUN and the Coalición de Trabajadores de Immokalee—CIW). At the regional level, a newly-created federation—FOCOICA (the Federación de Organizaciones Comunitarias Oaxaqueñas Indígenas en California) has bridged rural-urban gaps so that there is now, at least for Oaxacans, a “vertical” dimension to civic organizations as local organizations came to be incorporated within the federation.

A Final Dimension of Mexican Immigrant Diversity

Immigration from Mexico to California inevitably involves changes in gender roles. These transitions are, by no means, simple or straightforward—as changes were already underway in Mexico and continue in California. The changes in women’s roles and civic participation in migrant-sending villages are driven by various developments—women’s increasing participation in the market labor force, growing opportunities and support for women’s education, efforts within the Mexican political system to move toward gender equity, new role models of women active in political affairs, and the processes of *nortinización* which are changing village life in even isolated, rural villages.

However, the ongoing transformation of immigrant women’s social and civic roles is very much accelerated by participating in the U.S. labor market—even in rural communities. In most couples, both partners work for wages. Although many women spend a period of time in raising children, many others need to become working mothers and arrange for child care. A 1988 survey we did of applicants for legalization under the SAW program found that more than half (52%) of the women in a rural North Bay sample of SAW applicants (who were, by definition, working in the cash economy in California) had not worked in the cash economy before coming to the U.S.⁹⁴ As women come to assume equal status as economic providers in rural California immigrant households, there is acknowledgement of the appropriateness of their active involvement as family decision-makers and as participants in civic organizations and political activities.

At the same time, there are increased stresses as women juggle work and family responsibilities. Meanwhile, gender roles are also changed by the U.S. social service system’s tendency to assume women are not employed and, thus, commandeer inordinate amounts of their time in waiting for service, paperwork related to accessing services (e.g. completing the

and Baja California, important mid-stream areas between Oaxaca and California in the circuits of migrants from the Sierra Mixteca.

⁹⁴ Edward Kissam and Jo Ann Intili, “Preliminary Results—CHDC Survey of Legalization Applicants”, California Human Development Corporation, 1988.

original application from for Healthy Families enrollment which ran about 34 pp in length). In this domain, then, women come to be familiarized with the idiosyncrasies of U.S.-style bureaucratic processes. This experience includes access to much of the “know-how” about how administrative systems work, clients’ rights and responsibilities, including opportunities to understand the inequities and inflexibilities of current “helping” programs.

While Mexico’s path toward gender equity is still a long one, progress is rapid. Women are still underrepresented as elected officials in Mexico (as they are in the U.S.) but the women who hold elected office (or appointments in the government) have made it a priority to encourage other women to move into more expanded roles of civic engagement.⁹⁵ Binational organizations such as the Frente Indígena Oaxaqueño Binacional, have made special organizational efforts to enhance the likelihood of active civic participation by women—in California, Baja California, and Oaxaca.

Family breakup under the stresses of life in California has also given rise to steady increases in the numbers of female-headed households among California’s Mexican-origin immigrants. As I discuss elsewhere in this report, our observations suggest that women who have become accustomed to their role as the head of a household may be particularly well-prepared to take on roles of active civic engagement in addition to their household and workplace responsibilities. This apparent paradox (since civic participation is, in part, related to available time) is worthy of note in analyses of future efforts to spur Latina immigrants’ civic engagement. At the same time, married Mexican immigrant women, like the women living on their own, are ready, able, and willing to participate in both traditional civic activities (e.g. as volunteers at church-related events) and non-traditional activities (e.g. as union activists, community organizers, and advocates).

Summary of Mexican Immigrant Community Diversity

Beneath the bland veneer of standard statistical profiles of Central Valley rural communities where Mexican immigrants settle, there is a rich and complex social ecology as different cohorts and migration networks of immigrants mingle in these upstream nodes of what are really regional transnational social and economic networks. Over a relatively short period of time, the dynamics among these groups, as well as interactions between immigrants and native-born populations, are transforming scores of communities in rural California and throughout the U.S.

In the succeeding chapters of these reports, I focus on individual immigrants’ accounts of their life experiences, social and civic perspectives, and modes of civic involvement to illustrate, at a concrete level, the processes through which immigrants become engaged in the civic life of the California communities in which they live. These communities are very poor in terms of financial capital but they are rich in social capital.

⁹⁵ We observed an interesting example of this systematic campaign for gender equity in Cuautemoc Cardenas’ campaign for the presidency in a speech in a rural community in Guerrero in which he very pointedly revised the typical gender order of the phrase “compañeros y compañeras” to put women first.

Yet there are many challenges to be faced in maintaining bonding social capital and building bridging social capital. Some of these challenges stem from the heterogeneity of the nominally homogenous population. Other challenges stem from the fact that the nation-state has been able to deny immigrants access to political capital by its control of the power to grant or deny citizenship status.

The immediate challenge in the rural Mexican-majority communities will be to find strategies to promote widespread and effective civic engagement, including political advocacy, despite the barriers to electoral participation. The long-term challenge will be to invest heavily in strengthening inter-generational “bridging/bonding” social capital within the Mexican community so as to assure that the 2nd generation children of immigrants will become and remain engaged in community life even though many of their parents have been banned from the electoral/political realm.

If it is possible to maintain “solidarity” between successive generations of Mexican immigrants, then sustainable civic engagement in these communities is a real possibility and the positive impacts on community well-being a dramatic demonstration of the communitarian ideal. In these small, economically impoverished rural communities, local collaboration and systems of local community governance have great promise, even if they cannot be effectively used to overcome the chronic community problems of urban areas. In this transition zone, this sociopolitical borderlands, dominated by transnational agribusiness interests and populated by transnational communities of Mexican migrants, local communities can, despite the ominous implications of analyses by rural sociologists such as Goldschmidt, become civic oases.

Chapter 3

The Agricultural Workplace and California Civic Perspective

The civic consciousness of the Mexican immigrants in rural California emerges from their individual and collective experiences as transnational migrants who grew up in rural migrant-sending communities and first came to California, as teenagers or young adults, to work in agriculture. Because California's farm labor system is, in fact, a transnational one which transcends the official U.S.-Mexico political border, the social networks which play a leading role in spurring actual, physical migration re-emerge as powerful forces in the civic processes of local communities.

Transnational migration and labor recruitment networks pervade the California agricultural workplace, social system, and the conceptual framework within which workers and employers negotiate their economic and social relationships. This environment is, however, a novel one-- a "hybrid" domain. It diverges sharply both from the conditions found in immigrants' hometowns and also from the "mainstream" of the U.S. workplace (Martin 1988). Thus, the California farm labor workplace is a distinct "edge" biome within the sociopolitical ecology of this region's "borderlands". The dynamics of these workplaces and the communities which have grown up around them are a fascinating example of a newly-emerging sociopolitical order in an era of 21st century global trade, communication, and social "epidemics" .

The general model of civic participation developed by Verba, Scholzman, and Brady acknowledges but does not highlight the workplace as a locus for building civic competencies. However, the demarcation between "civic space" and "private space" is an increasingly blurred one in the 21st century world. In particular, Mexican immigrants' learning about "the rules of the game" in each of these apparently distinct realms of California life—workplace and civic agora-- is invariably informed by their learning in the other. This dynamic stems, in part, from the fact that they are highly oriented toward oral learning in the course of informal dialogue with relatives, friends, and co-workers. Nonetheless, the Civic Voluntarism model is a useful framework for analyzing the situation in California communities and how different venues for developing civic skills —childhood environment, school, workplace, voluntary organizations, and religious organizations—are the stage for developing civic skills and the self-confidence and experience to use them as the basis for active participation.

While the generic Civic Voluntarism model of civic participation does not "zoom in" enough to examine the details of the process through which perspectives on civic engagement are developed and how people learn "civic skills" there is a sound body of research stemming from sociolinguistic studies of literacy development which provide valuable insights about "functional literacy", i.e. how individuals' interactions with information, enters into overall social interactions, including those of civic life. There is less research on the social parameters for the development of analytic thinking but, clearly, these factors are important also. These provide a basis for understanding how skills developed in the workplace context are transferred into the public sphere of civic life and deployed in the course of issue-related advocacy and in political processes.

The specific analytic and communication skills which are the foundation tools of civic interactions (e.g. persuasive argument, collaboration to achieve common goals), when developed in one domain of human interaction are inevitably transferred from old into new contexts. This process of skills transfer, deploying skills developed in one functional context into a new one, has limitations in that mental models developed in one domain may or may not be appropriate for the other.

For example, mental models of workplace teams or governance processes which depict the civic realm as being analogous to traditional parenting roles within family networks can be sources of conflict—especially in the case where there is general consensus that civic space should be illuminated by norms of equality and inclusiveness. In the agricultural workplace, for example, some labor contractors’ approaches to teamwork and crew management often refer to “punishing” (*castigando*) workers as though they were errant children. But aspects of agricultural workplace life which involve coaching and teamwork within crews responding to novel problems do contribute directly to building the skills set needed for effective and sustainable civic engagement.

Structural analyses of the analytic and communication competencies deployed in the course of participating in California civic life, make it clear that the interactions which take place in the domain of workplace interactions are quite similar to those required for active participation in the civic life of California communities (EFF 2003; Packer 1996). Both functional environments require “high-performance” skills in both analytic thinking and communication.⁹⁶ Farmworkers’ talk about their work, their preoccupations, and the workplace problems they face make it very clear that the environment is a demanding one in terms of strategic communication, negotiation, and decision-making.

At the same time, the demands of civic decision-making in communities with ethnic and class divisions also require higher-level “civic skills” than are required in homogeneous communities. It is almost inevitable that a population of “working poor” families of Mexican immigrants would develop their first and, perhaps, most indelible images of “how things are in the U.S.” within the framework of workplace interactions and communication exchanges.

In this section of this report I explore how the dynamics of the farm labor system have shaped Mexican immigrants’ perspectives about civic processes and provided a venue in which activists would gain experience and build skills to be put to use later in the context of community life. I go on, then, to highlight examples of ways in which these perspectives, problem-posing, and problem-solving, are seen and talked about by Mexican immigrants themselves.

⁹⁶ I have drawn on three established analytic curriculum frameworks, one developed by the National Institute for Literacy’s “Equipped for the Future Project” (EFF), one developed by the Secretary’s Commission on Achieving the Necessary Skills (SCANS), and one developed by the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) to propose a comprehensive “civic skills” matrix as a component of a Community Leadership EL/Civics course being offered by the Sacramento Valley Organizing Community (SVOC 2003).

Farmworkers' Experiences—The Common Strand throughout Community Life

The vision of farmworkers' experience as being on the center stage of Mexican immigrants' community life is not a metaphor but a tangible societal reality in rural California. The Mexican immigrant population in these communities consists primarily of emigrants from small villages or hamlets in rural Mexico who came to California to work in the fields. Most have come to work and work is the fulcrum around which the rest of their lives revolves. Farmworker issues and concerns shine brightly on the civic "radar screen" of local, county, and state government and their networks of relatives and *paisanos* are the substrate for much of social life in these communities.

The importance of farmworkers in rural California community life is an subjective and qualitative phenomenon as well as an objective and quantitative one. The *remates*, the large open-air flea markets which are one of the important venues for the weekend social life of most low-income Mexican immigrants living in rural California communities, provide a particularly good example of farmworkers' presence in Central Valley social life.

These *remates* are the modern-day agora for Mexican immigrants to California, functionally, the transplanted *tianguis*, the rural village market, the cultural equivalent of the suburban mall. In Madera, for example, the archtypical icon of American life in the 1950's, the drive-in theatre has been transformed into a weekend *remate* where local families and groups of young, solo farmworkers mingle as they stroll through aisle after aisle of vendors selling nopales, bootleg ranchero audiocassettes or CD's, or cowboy boots and belts. In Fresno, the former "Cherry Auction" has been transformed into a Mexican village marketplace with everything from fighting cocks to blocks of chocolate or plastic bags of mole is sold. At another *remate* in Fresno, on Saturdays the agora is for the Hmong of East Fresno; on Sundays it becomes a Mexican marketplace.

We conducted a large survey in *remates* throughout rural areas of California in the summer of 2002 and found that about half (47%) of the people meandering through these *remates* were currently working in farmwork; we believe that another 15-20% are former farmworkers or the spouses or children of farmworkers (Kissam et al 2002). Thus, hundreds of thousands of native-born Latinos in these communities who are not, themselves, farmworkers are the children or grandchildren of farmworkers. Statewide, it is likely that somewhere in the order of 2 million 1st and 2nd generation Mexican immigrants have strong social ties to farmworker networks.⁹⁷

Table 3-1 below provides another indicator of the prevalence of farmworkers as a component of the typical California rural community (based on a sample of 4 San Joaquin Valley towns)

⁹⁷ About 800,000 farmworkers work in the California farm labor force at some point each year. It is difficult to definitively estimate the size of these workers' extended family and social networks but, taking into account the likely number of former farmworkers, spouses, and children, 2 million persons in farmworker families is a conservative estimate.

Table 3-1
Profile of Sample Blocks in Low-Income Mexican Immigrant
Neighborhoods in 4 San Joaquin Valley Communities

<i>Community</i>	San Joaquin Valley			
	Arvin (Kern Co.)	London (Tulare Co.)	Parlier (Freno Co.)	Madera (Madera Co.)
% Latino	98%	90%	100%	91%
% Limited-English adults	78%	65%	65%	41%
Mean Schooling (Adults 18+)	5.3 yrs	5.9 yrs	8.2 yrs	6.6 yrs
Mean HH Size # of persons	3.9	4.6	4.6	4.0
Farmworkers (# and % of total)	17 (61%)	13 (76%)	20 (49%)	23 (55%)

Adapted from: Ed Kissam and Ilene Jacobs, "Undercount of Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers in Rural California Communities in Census 2000", Report to The California Endowment, 2001

It is inevitable that rural California communities' farmworker roots run deep and that their social and economic communities have transnational dimensions. There are variations in the extent to which these roots are acknowledged and conscious in everyday life and in the strength of transnational linkages. Despite these variations, understanding immigrants' perception of civic processes and, thereby, strategies for engaging them in civic life, is a key issue in considering how personal and collective social history contributes to contemporary civic participation in rural California communities where immigrants are concentrated.

The Bracero Myth as a Tool for Creating Bonding and Bridging Social Capital

From a practical perspective, the current social consciousness and civic life of any community is multi-generational, meaning that the center stage of civic activity typically has three generations of active players/storytellers and a "civic memory" of about 60 years. Thus, the Bracero era is, in the rural Mexican immigrants' historical consciousness, the dawn of the contemporary transnational sociopolitical universe in which they live, the "beginning" of the evolution of the communities which are the locus of civic participation and the object of change which will result from it.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ In point of fact, the historical reality is more complex. For example, Fonseca and Moreno trace the first migration from Jaripo, Michoacan, the home village of Luis Magaña on whose story we focus in this section, to U.S. reliance on Mexican workers for railroad construction in the 1890's, demand for substitute labor during World War I, and post-revolution migration in the face of social unrest and change. In any case, it is, at least at this point in time, the dawn of the current sociopolitical context in which Jaripeños in the Stockton, California, area live.

The Bracero program, itself, consisted of a discrete set of historical events, but the mythic theme of Braceros' lives is one which permeates the consciousness of all Mexican migrants to U.S. farmwork—in part, because the program was a reification of informal migration network processes which had preceded it and which persist to this day. Anthropologist Michael Kearney invented a provocative phrase to describe the overall process of rural Mexico-rural California migration-- “from invisible hands to visible feet”. Kearney’s reference to Adam Smith’s market forces is particularly incisive because his contribution to our understanding of this process is that there are powerful informal, i.e. semi-visible, structural mechanisms and social processes which drive Mexico-US migration. Macro-level analyses referring simply to the interplay of market forces, the “push” and “pull” factors involved in migration are inadequate to explain what migration really is, how it works, or how it shapes the social/civic “borderlands” of migrant destinations in California.

Reference to civic tradition as a determinant of present-day civic processes is, in part, a ceremonial endeavor—the stuff of 4th of July or college graduation speeches. But at the same time “civic consciousness” and, in fact, the processes of civic engagement really do emerge from a society’s history. History, our collective memory, is not literal; like the physiological processes of individual memory, the “record” is constantly re-invented, re-imagined, re-generated from skeletal schematic representations which stand in for the full-fledged flood of memories. The narratives of Braceros remind everyone in the Mexican immigrant community that, although the individual players change, as farmworkers age out of field work and return home to Mexico or settle in the U.S., that “the system” remains unchanged, a standing wave giving shape to the social universe inhabited by Mexican immigrants in rural California. Two forces interact here —divisions separating each immigrant cohort in the wave train of ongoing replacement of California’s farm labor force and common recognition that they are part of a macro-level migration flow.

Below, I explore the ways in which “the Bracero experience” serves as a template, a “seed”, a mental model, for rural California Mexican immigrants’ interpretation (construction) of their current community dynamics and civic reality. The term “myth” is not meant to imply falsehood. To the contrary, it refers to the Ur-reality, the underlying mental structuring of social experience, “myth” as the foundation, the gold standard, for understanding current experiential realities.⁹⁹ The Bracero myth is the vehicle which presents a perspective which provides a framework for knitting together successive generations of Mexican immigrants to rural California, bringing together each of the successive cohorts we have outlined (Braceros, Tejanos, long-term settlers: “migrantes del crisis”, post-IRCA settlers: “the disenfranchised”, and very recent immigrants). Thus, narratives of the Bracero experience are a powerful tool for creating bonding social capital—for assisting immigrants to affirm their links with each other, for understanding their commonalities, for developing a common mental language, and asserting their common identity. An important function of the mythical/narrative structure is also to create bridges between different networks of *paisanos*, as well as to create continuity among successive cohorts of immigrants.

⁹⁹ The evolution of the term “myth” is an important chapter in the history of philosophy. In fact, the term stems from the Greek term *μυθησις*, the “mouth”, mother, of reality, the ocean which surrounds human beings. Plato, for example, is clear in distinguishing “myth” from the statements of opinion-mongers.

This Bracero-oriented conceptual framework is characterized by a preoccupation with rights and obligations in the context of farmwork. It articulates a vision of “immigrant voice” as a voice raised on behalf of workers’ rights, and an image of civic space, the agora, as consisting of the informal gatherings of workers talking together, on their way to and from the fields, in brief instants and breaks in row upon row of crops, and after work in farm labor camps.

The most powerful images of togetherness, of identity as a group, and the most powerful images of identity as a source of conflict in the course of collective pursuit of “community” well-being stem from the experience and stories of Mexican migrant farmworkers, workers joining together informally to even the balance in the David and Goliath pitting their interests against the linked forces of agribusiness and American government. The Bracero myth is the substrate where these images crystallize.

The Private-Public Sector Nexus

One of the most notable “discoveries” of Mexican migrants, lore soon emblazoned in the consciousness of their family networks and sending communities’ funds of collective knowledge, relates to the close linkage between private sector agribusiness and the power of the nation-state. In the case of the Bracero program this private-public linkage was one which officially sanctioned migration. Yet it is widely understood that this is the same linkage subsequently resulted, for many years after the program ended, in a tacit “wink and nod” collusion, a public-private sector collaboration to place Mexican migrants at a disadvantage in their dealings with their employers by making it illegal to migrate without actually deterring them from coming to work in the fields of California. There were Border Patrol sweeps of the fields where farmworkers worked—but only after most of the local crop harvest had been completed, and often before the final harvest bonuses were paid to workers. As a leading scholar of US-Mexico border control has observed (Andreas 2000) the exigencies of public policy made it necessary to create the illusion of border control (to satisfy anti-immigrant groups) while assuring that border control would be merely an illusion (to satisfy agricultural employers and others relying on Mexican immigrant workers).

Recognition of the ambivalence of their “host” society pervades the civic consciousness of Mexican immigrants in California; in discussions with undocumented Mexican immigrants in the early 1990’s about their perspectives on census participation, for example, a number of them expressed the view that they were not “supposed” to be counted (Kissam, Nakamoto, and Herrera 1993). As I discuss in **Chapter 6**, the policy debate surrounding legislation to declare that undocumented teenagers graduating from California high schools are, indeed, “residents” of the communities in which they grew up reminds us that such definitional issues are not trivial. As the decade progressed, new “evidence” accumulated about how things were “supposed” to be as California voters approved Proposition 187 and the Congress passed legislation which was increasingly hostile to immigrants —IIRIRA and PRWORA in 1996. However, this mounting evidence of anti-immigrant public sentiment did not resolve the ambiguity—because there continued to be strong demand for Mexican immigrant workers. They were welcomed as good workers—cheap, energetic, and

conveniently without access to legal redress for workplace violations to bolster any possible negotiations for higher pay.¹⁰⁰

The Farm Labor System—A Gravitational Field Shaping Social Space

The agricultural employers, *mayordomos*, *contratistas*, *raiteros*, friends, and relatives who facilitate Mexican migration to California fields—from recruitment in hometown rural Mexican villages, the long bus ride north, crossing the border, passing check points, delivery of the *pollos* (captive immigrant border-crossers) to their relatives or employers loom large in the social and civic landscape of Mexican settlement communities in the Central Valley and throughout rural California. Seen through the prism of lore and community “funds of knowledge” about Braceros and the waves of immigrants who followed them, these “labor market intermediaries” are important public figures within the Mexico-California transnational world of Mexican immigrants.

The following anecdote from civic activist, Luis Magaña, about the considerations which entered into his interactions with the Stockton area community of Mexican immigrants from Jaripo, Michoacan, highlights vividly how closely the realms of civic public space and informal private space are linked, how the prominence of farm labor contractors is interpreted, and the consequences of private power distorting civic decision-making. At the same time it reflects the ways in which class divisions threaten the social ties which are the basis of Mexican immigrants’ social and civic capital.

In this group [of 2nd generation immigrants] there are also farm labor contractors, maybe 5 of them. I am worried about that because when they had a meeting of all of the people from Jaripo to get money together to rebuild the church.... Well the meeting was in a restaurant of a paisana from Jaripo..... when I arrived, there were 3 of those farm labor contractors there and I figured I was not in the right place. But I was obliged to be there because they're my paisanos. And we were talking about the 3-1 program.¹⁰¹ And the [Mexican] Consul says, “Luis is really who knows most about this”—because I’m working with three different migrant groups [hometown associations]. So they ask me some questions and so on and I explain about by-laws and tax exempt status, etc., and I suggest some ideas about how to name the organization and I tell them that a lot [of the hometown associations] have “migrant” in their name. Later, a friend explains to me, “They don’t want anything about ‘migrant’ in the name of their hometown association... And that scared me because it’s a new generation who doesn’t want to have anything to do with the word “migrant”, like a laborer working along the road and saying “Bye!” to his co-workers.

Within this social universe of California communities which are, in turn, located within a newly reified binational political universe, it should be no surprise that, Antonio Bermudez, the first successful California-based candidate for local political office in Mexico (running for

¹⁰⁰ There were further benefits to the agricultural employers of undocumented Mexican immigrant farmworkers. While the California unemployment insurance system adjusts employers’ premiums based on experience-based modifications, despite high levels of seasonal unemployment, there have relatively few unemployment claims from these workers because they are not deemed as “available for work” under California law (since they lack employment authorization). This is a good example as to how public sector policies may yield as their primary outcome, private sector benefits.

¹⁰¹ The Mexican government’s commitment to migrants working abroad that remittances earmarked for home village public works projects will be matched by the government.

mayor of Jerez, Zacatecas) had been, first, an illegal immigrant smuggled into the U.S. in a car trunk, later, a farm labor contractor, and finally an inventor/millionaire —“El Rey del Tomate”.¹⁰² It should not be surprising that a farm labor contractor seen by his employer in Oregon as a mere farmworker crewleader is, in fact, a prominent figure when he returns home, expected to fund a good deal of holiday festivities (food, fireworks, music, *danza*), or that a long-retired Oaxacan crewleader in Madera continues to receive visits from streams of supplicants, much as a Chicago ward operative in the reign of Mayor Daley.

In many but, of course, not all, cases, a labor market intermediary is more or less a collaborator in creating a new satellite community within a migrant network because, in many cases, it is he or she who has “invited” prospective migrants to come north. At the very least, the labor market intermediary is a co-conspirator, in the powerful, regional processes through which the social network of *paisanos* of a migrant-sending village in Mexico come to be part of rural California communities.¹⁰³ The mere fact that the English-language equivalents of distinctions among the different players in the agricultural workplace do not capture the “social syntax” embedded in the primary language for talking about the agribusiness workplace is part of the evidence that this social space is not firmly located within U.S. cultural or sociopolitical borders.

Semantic Evidence of the Structure of the Social Universe

One window into the semi-visible universe of the Bracero myth as the symbolic referent of contemporary farmworkers’ experiences is, indeed, semantic. The mere term “*bracero*”, now a familiar one to many Californians, should itself give pause—a term both familiar and strange. “*Bracero*”—a laborer, one who works hard with their hands (the term not simply referencing “hands” but, rather “arms”/ *brazos*) is historically, ostensibly a well-defined term.

However, plumbing the semantic depths of the term *bracero*, other connotations arise. The syntactic device *-ero*—on the one hand, is a common one, used to create terms referring to various occupations, “one who does X, Y, or Z” as in *alfarero* (potter), *camionero* (truck/bus driver), *arriero* (animal driver). The suffix *-ero* focuses attention on the object—the pottery shaped by the potter, the truck steered by its driver—implying dominion over “dumb” matter, human willpower driving, guiding, shaping, brute force. Yet here is where the strangeness arises. In the case of “*bracero*” what is being driven is one’s own arms. One’s occupation is to drive one’s own arms, to keep them moving—a Mexican version of the American legend of John Henry. One’s essence is reduced to “arms”, and, in truth, the true measure of one’s worth becomes production—how many buckets of tomatoes (@ 50 cents per 35-lb bucket) one has picked, how many “trays of grapes” one has cut (@ 20 cents per

¹⁰² Julie Watson, “U.S. Resident Wins Mexico Mayor Race”, Associated Press, July 2, 2001. More details and information on followup efforts can be found on Antonio Bermudez’s personal web page at <http://www.andresbermudez.net/>

¹⁰³ Immigration lawyer, Mark Silverman, of the Immigrant Legal Resources Center, is always met with a round of laughter in his presentations to Mexican immigrants in rural California when, in describing different types of visas, he refers to the “Visa C de *coyote*” as being the visa the typical farmworker immigrant received. The joke works brilliantly, in part, because of its implicit recognition of the power of informal migration processes as pitted against the power of the nation-state.

“tray”—now a 6-foot strip of paper), how many tubs of oranges (@ \$7 per 1,000 lbs.) one has “made” for the grower.¹⁰⁴

In the late afternoon, in parks and at street corners throughout rural California’s agricultural counties, the idle chat among off-work farmworkers who are cogs in the piecework production system often turns first to how much one made, how much others have made a tacit discussions about the nature of “equality”, “fairness”, and “justice” in a economic system which is, in some respects arbitrary and fickle, and in other respects, boringly uniform. The recognition of the huge gap between what the worth of what one made for the agribusiness owner and what one made for oneself is always close to the surface in such talks. While cast in the narrative of public policy as “dumb” animals, or in a chillingly neutral voice as “economic inputs”, farmworkers are, in fact, active counter-strategists, analyzing the strategies their employers have used to cheat them (e.g. falsified time cards to evade minimum wage requirements) and discussing creative new strategies to even the playing field (e.g. where best to place the rocks in a field lug to increase the weight of the freshly-cut underpaid asparagus).

Within the mindset of Mexican immigrants to rural California, virtually all of them from small ranchos or slightly larger migrant-sending villages in rural Mexico, the term “*bracero*”, then evokes images as powerful as those accessed by an idle elite in alluding to Charlie Chaplin in Modern Times—except that the reference is to the historical reality of generations of Mexican migrant farmworkers, not a Hollywood confection.

When contemporary reality, a reality still conveyed primarily orally, through storytelling or songs, is added to the dialogue, the stream of images bubbling up out of the cornucopia of thinking about work is “enriched”, highlighted, contextualized by memories of the *bracero* experience. Included in the images: worker recruitment (beginning with the worker’s payment of a bribe to the recruiter to be chosen), transportation by crowded train and then truck (“like animals”), the de-lousing showers (fear), processing (paperwork, the power of literacy, state bureaucracy), distribution like inanimate objects (more paperwork a stock auction-like process out of the realm of government into a rancher/grower’s domain), confinement (in barracks), hard work (then, much as it is now), and return home (the exhausting day-to-day reality of farm labor fading into the mythology of triumphant , returning warriors (economic “heroes”).¹⁰⁵ And, then there is the denouement. As is still the case, after the first trip north, for most the process of migration became a cyclical one, returning to work season after season, until one was injured, maltreated, or, perhaps, until the celebratory overlay of homecoming could no longer paper over the memories of the real *bracero* experience—endless production-driven work, under difficult conditions, being reduced to the disembodied, supposedly unthinking pair of arms, countered with constant striking to assert one’s identity. But which identity? As animal or hero? The struggle to define this new California identity begins in the agricultural workplace.

¹⁰⁴ Growers and farmworkers alike, from time to time, use the verb “make” to refer to harvesting, a subtle reminder of the aptness of the “factories in the field” metaphor and the value added by farmworker labor inputs to the grower’s contributions to the enterprise—land, access to capital, and management.

¹⁰⁵ An incisive analysis of President Vicente Fox’s rhetorical sallies into this semantically-powerful realm can be found in Jesus Martinez-Saldaña, “*Los Olvidados* Become Heroes: The Evolution of Mexico’s Policies Towards Citizens Abroad”, (unpublished draft, August, 2002).

In short, for Mexican immigrants to rural California, the *bracero* experience provides a referential scaffolding, a mandala for reflection on and discussion of the nature of exploitation. One could not say “slavery” because the *braceros* were paid, and well-paid in comparison to economic alternatives in their villages, but not without an ample measure of coercion. In contrast to the semantic and political framework of reference for mainstream Americans, the idea of “exploitation”, talk of exploitation, and collaborative action to oppose exploitation are not at all extreme or inflammatory in the worldview of Mexican immigrants to rural California.

The consequence vis-a-vis formation of models of civic space has been to heighten the wariness of prospective civic players—given the overt intersection between private sector interests and public sector policies. This, at once, reinforces migrants’ popular civic perspectives about Mexican civic processes and governance, i.e. that they are corrupt, and leads to an escalation in their underlying distrust of the “transparency” of governance. The sense of unease often referred to as *dudas* (doubts) is transformed in the U.S./California context to a central question often posed as “*De que se trata esto?*” (What’s this about?), a question which is not meant simply to convey a lack of understanding but, additionally, a suspicion that things are not what they seem—distrust in the integrity of the civic process.

The *Corrido* as a Tool for Building Bridging Social Capital to Link Immigrant Cohorts

On an afternoon in early April, 2003, a retired farmworker named Jose Loa dropped in to the American Friends Service Committee office in Stockton where Luis Magaña (whose story we discuss below) works as a community organizer. Don Jose dropped into Luis’ office, in part, for a simple social visit, but, also, to followup with Luis about a variety of community issues including talk about a pending meeting with Congressman Cardozo to discuss the situation of asparagus harvesters in both the Sacramento Delta area and Mexico and a new low-income housing project being developed south of Stockton. Don Jose, now a naturalized U.S. citizen, is an active binational citizen, having voted in 2000 in the presidential elections in the U.S. and having gone to Mexico in 2000 to vote (as voting from abroad, a prospect which is now pending has moved forward only slowly).

As we talked about the current situation of farmworkers, Don Jose confessed that, throughout his life, he has always loved singing, and that he has, over the years, composed many *corridos*. His *corridos* deal with the important things in life—love, loneliness, adventure, but also the sociopolitical universe. Subsequently, Don Jose, who continues to sing from time to time in informal gatherings of family members and neighbors, shared two *corridos* he had written about farmworkers’ experience.

While accommodation with U.S. life and culture may lead to increasing social distance between former and current migrant farmworkers (as in the case of many farm labor contractors), in Don Jose’s case, his personal perspective and social identity and network affiliations “locate” him as an immigrant who is part of a continuum of migrant farmworkers. His *corridos* about the experiences of current undocumented farmworkers are both an expression of his own social/civic values, and a tool for building bridging social capital among Mexican immigrants—a critically important task in a social context in which

cultural/social fragmentation can create deep divisions within a community which is (from an outsiders' viewpoint) homogeneous.

The first of these *corridos* focuses on the relationship between the power of the state (as instantiated by *la migra*, the Border Patrol) and the private sector, agribusiness (as instantiated by the farm labor contractor), pointing to the linkage which undermines workers' ability to "defend themselves", to assert their rights.

CORRIDO DE LOS ILEGALES

*Porque somos ilegales
el patron nos paga menos
y así hemos de trabajar.
De otro modo no comemos.
Porque nos carga la migra
y no podemos defendernos*

*Los que ya tiene papeles
no quieren los ilegales
Nos miran con diferencia
nos tratan como animales.
Si nos veen no nos conocen
porque no somos iguales*

*Si andas con un contratista
y un día le pides aumento
te dicen, deja el trabajo
descansa por el momento
de la lista hoy te rebajo
si es que ya no andas contento.*

BALLAD OF ILLEGAL WORKERS

Because we're illegal
the boss pays us less
(and that's the way it is in our work.
Otherwise, we won't get to eat)
because the *migra* will cart us off
and we can't defend ourselves.

Those who already got their papers
don't like those who are illegal.
They look at us differently
and treat us like animals.
When they see us they act like
they don't know us
because we're not their equals.

If you end up on a contractor's crew
and one day you ask him for a raise
he'll tell you to stop work,
to rest a minute, and that
he'll take you off the payroll
if you're not happy with your lot.

The *corrido's* explication of the well-known asymmetries of power in the agricultural workplace is nothing new but the disapproving reference to workers with papers, once illegal immigrants themselves, looking down on illegal workers, makes a new contribution to civic dialogue, condemning fragmentation/assimilation and affirming a perspective oriented, instead, toward solidarity, that Mexican farmworkers are indeed "equal", i.e. part of the same social group. Although Don Jose was a Bracero and is now an American citizen, nominally separate, "elevated" in status, his *corrido* affirms his lifelong identity as a Mexican migrant farmworker, bound to present-day cohorts of farmworkers by "the system". For him and for his listeners, the *corrido* affirms the continuum of wave after wave of unauthorized immigrant workers, thereby reinforcing an affiliational network constantly threatened by assimilation—abandoning one's ties to other farmworkers.

The second of Don Jose's *corridos* points to a different pattern in the immigrant workplace and takes a different approach in carrying out its implicit task as an instrument for strengthening an affiliational network, directly exhorting listeners to join together.

CORRIDO

*Ya no quieren ilegales
estos gueros usureros.
Hoy quieren profesionales
en lugar de los braceros
para sacarles provecho
a médicos y ingenieros
la mano de obra barato*

*Patrones y contratistas
ya no tendrán ilegales,
cuando se vengan las piscas
para sacarles el jugo
y ellos vivir como artistas.*

*Campesinos mexicanos,
obrerros o tomateros!
Mientras no estamos unidos
como amigos, compañeros,
nos seguirán explotando
patrones y quitacueros*

In this second *corrido*, as in the previous one, Don Jose's analysis is clear in asserting the importance of social ties as the basis for collective action to assert one's rights as a worker. What is interesting in this particular take on the relationship between private sector exploitation and power of the state is the recognition of the way in which the H-1 visa program bringing professional workers to Silicon Valley is structurally analogous to the Bracero program which brought farmworkers to California fields. Implicitly, the *corrido's* analysis suggest an even more ambitious exercise in building bridging social capital, solidarity among both "laborers" (urban workers) and "tomato pickers" (farmworkers) and, perhaps, even between underpaid immigrant professionals and Mexican farmworkers.

Don Jose Loa's *corridos* about farmworkers serve to bridge divisions among different cohorts and networks of Mexican-born immigrants to rural California. While we refer to these *corridos* as tools for building "bridging" social capital as distinct from "bonding" social capital, the distinction is somewhat blurred in the context of Mexican immigrants' lives—because group identity is not immutably established. The challenge, the "civic problem", which the *corridos* address is the pressing problem of social fragmentation among immigrant cohorts within a stream of Mexico-California migrants and the resulting problem that, without numbers and

CORRIDO

Those cheating Anglos
don't want illegal workers any more¹⁰⁶
Now they want professionals
instead of Braceros
so they can exploit them,
to get doctors and lawyers
to work cheap.

Bosses and labor contractors,
you won't have illegal workers any more
when its time for the harvest
so you can squeeze them dry
and live in leisure!

Mexican peasants,
laborers or tomato pickers,
as long as we're not united
as friends, as comrades at work
they'll keep on exploiting us,
those bosses and rip-off artists.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ The phrase "gueros usureros", literally "usurious blonds" is one of several slightly pejorative terms used to refer to growers. Others are "gabacho" and "bolillo" (essentially white bread). These terms are not primarily racial epithets but, rather, referents to class distinctions.

¹⁰⁷ "Quitacueros" means literally "one who will strip your skin off your back".

group cohesiveness, one's ability to defend one's right and negotiate for economic survival is jeopardized.

But it should be recognized that popular demand in the marketplace for individual and social identity is, ultimately, even broader. Jesus Martinez-Saldaña argues in a brilliant analysis of the commercial market of Mexican music that *corridos*-based themes using narratives whose fulcrum is the experience of illegal migrants extends even further. He shows this influence extending into different musical genres (e.g. cumbia, rock en español) and even so far afield as to assert social and cultural continuity overcome divisions among rural/urban Mexican immigrants, 1st generation migrants and 2nd-generation immigrant youth. I return to Martinez-Saldaña's over-arching analysis again in discussing strategies being used by immigrants who are forced to re-interpret, reify, and re-assert their individual and social identity within the "borderlands" context of transnational lives. But, even within the broader realms of these "constructed" social identities, the "Bracero" themes of tradeoffs between money and pride, money and loneliness, and cooperation between the state and the private sector in worker exploitation persist—to bridge the experiential gaps between Mexican transnational migrant farmworkers and urban Chicanos.¹⁰⁸

Conflicting Nuances in Contemporary Farmworkers' Civic Perspectives

In popular American consciousness, the struggle for farmworkers' rights, for Latino equity is equated with the United Farm Workers. And, as the union has consistently recognized, workplace-based affiliational networks can serve as the fulcrum for leveraging not only economic equity for Mexican immigrants but, also, as the platform for an emerging civic voice, and political power. Indeed, the UFW has, historically, been a powerful force for farmworkers over three decades.

However, workplace-based affiliational networks of workers spontaneously organizing in response to economic exploitation precede and resonate with Mexican immigrants to rural California even more powerfully than invocation of Cesar Chavez's legacy and the United Farm Worker movement. In the social universe of Mexican immigrants to California, the "natural" social networks of extended families and villages exert as powerful a cohesive force as the more formalized, more "American" affiliational networks established by organizations such as the UFW. In fact, in the contest for the allegiance of the workplace communities of Mexican farmworkers, farm labor contractors who play skillfully on the strength of migrant-sending villages' social networks using what are essentially community organizing techniques are closely matched with UFW union organizers armed with similar tools of "social technology".¹⁰⁹ The outcomes are uncertain in many cases, because the entire agribusiness worker recruitment and supervision system, based on delegation of authority to labor market intermediaries (mayordomos or farm labor contractors), rests on the creation of "artificial"

¹⁰⁸ Jesus Martinez-Saldaña, "The Tigers in the Golden Cage: The Songs of Mexican Immigrants in Silicon Valley", Chapter 4, Ph.D Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1993.

¹⁰⁹ Accounts of a bitterly contested union election, Coastal Berry, an election initially lost by the UFW but then subsequently won suggest that mayordomos and crew leaders relied heavily on informal extended family and village social networks in their efforts. The UFW has subsequently won the election. See Fox and Brooks 2003.

networks designed to masquerade as the familiar traditional ones of mutual support.¹¹⁰ These are powerful lures, carefully designed to assert their friendliness and to establish quasi-feudal social bonding in an environments where social allegiances are tools for control as well for collaboration.

The UFW's recognition of the farm labor workplace as a primary venue for building an affiliational network, a center of "community" among Mexican farmworker immigrants, is an important insight. But, at the same time, it is also critical to recognize the implications of farmworkers' workplace community as not a static one but as one constantly refreshed by transnational migration. Worker organizing efforts such as the Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC),¹¹¹ the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW), and Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste (PCUN) have led the way in exploring ways to overcome the difficulties of maintaining affiliational ties within a transnational labor force which was in a process of constant change —sometimes referred to as "churning" in the labor force or as "a treadmill".¹¹²

Writing about the organizing effort which led to formation of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers in southwest Florida, an incisive analyst of specific strategies for farmworker organizing, Brian Payne, argues that understanding the transnational dimensions of farmworkers' lives is critical as part of the process of building a workplace-based organizing effort. Payne notes that workers "*converge* in one central area and have the opportunity to *discover* mutual problems and work as a community to resolve them" (italics added).¹¹³ As affirmed in Loa's *corridos*, building a sense of "community" among farmworkers is a tenuous and never-ending enterprise. Fragmentation within an affiliational network based primarily (though not exclusively) on workplace ties, is an ever-present danger and whatever social pressures can be brought to bear to strengthen solidarity, group cohesiveness, and collective identity are valuable tools in any collective enterprise within the "civic" space of the workplace.

In Payne's analysis, the process of migrant workers' collective "discovery" of a new, albeit ephemeral, community, exploring the common experiences and problems ("grievances") which farmworkers experience, is an essential part of the process of building bonding social

¹¹⁰ For more on this process see E. Kissam, D. Runsten, and A. Garcia, "Networks and Farm Labor Dynamics in Parlier, CA", in **Proceedings of the Agricultural Labor Research Symposium**, Employment Development Department, State of California, June, 1991.

¹¹¹ Jonathan Fox and David Brooks (2003) point to Baldemar Velasquez's recognition that FLOC could and should address the shifts in vegetable production from Ohio to Mexico as one of the first examples of union's recognition of the true transnational realm in which they functioned (well before passage of NAFTA).

¹¹² For details on PCUN's development and strategies, see Lynn Stephen et al., "The Story of PCUN and the Farmworker Movement in Oregon", Department of Anthropology, University of Oregon, 2001.

¹¹³ Brian Payne, "Taking the Reins of Identity: Formation of A Grassroots Farmworker Organization in Southwest Florida", Master's Thesis, Department of Latin American Studies, University of Florida, December, 2000. This is a detailed and brilliant analysis of the specific strategies used by the Coalition of Immokalee Workers' to establish an affiliational network among a constantly-churning workforce.

capital. While migrant farmworkers in the U.S. farm labor market may not have learned about civic processes and built a sense of unity growing up together, they can forge such bonds through the process of learning together about the *de facto* community in which they live.

Payne goes on to detail the “codification”, the visual and narrative representation of the farm labor workplace used as an analytic tool by the Coalition of Immokalee Workers to build migrants’ awareness of the socioeconomic framework in which they are situated and his analysis shows how densely packed this is with acknowledgement of the transnational dimensions of contemporary farmworker experience—the *coyotes*, *raiteros*, indentured servitude, and exorbitant charges for food at work.¹¹⁴

Finally, authenticity, trust, *confianza*, spring from the evocation of the specific concerns and problems facing migrants (e.g. “After several long days of traveling you arrive at the place where you are going to work. You look for a soft and clean bed in a comfortable room. But is that what you see when you arrive? In fact there are 8 people per room and there are only 4 dirty mattresses. You will have to sleep with a stranger in the same bed, or else sleep on the floor”). Crucial to the use of such social codification as a tool for marshalling social capital is its authenticity. As in the case of *corridos*, the popularity of the message and its power stem from the social and linguistic cues embedded in the narrative the re-presentation of experience for collective reflection, the extent to which this “interpreted” reality is seen as genuine and, thus, trustable.

The nature of migration is also leading to new challenges in building affiliational ties in the workplace. Luis Magaña observes, in the course of discussing the challenges of workplace organizing in the Sacramento Delta area:

And now things have changed. In the early days we were groups-- people from Jaripo, from La Piedad, from Granados. There were lots of us from Jaripo—families, groups of people (travelling together) After 20 years now there’s a big diversity of immigrants coming—crews of Mixtecos, Guatemalans, others. And they have their own leaders—who don’t speak English and who aren’t in touch with institutions, organizations. But they do have their leadership....and it’s a mistake not to recognize them.

Magaña’s proposed solution is to focus on leadership development, in the face of increasing diversity, to identify newly-arrived informal leaders within the ever-changing community of migrants. This challenge is one which the Coalition of Immokalee Workers has taken on, with ongoing efforts to assure that the organization remains a populist, horizontal one, rapidly recognizing, engaging, and working to build the leadership skills of new migrants. But their experience, and that of PCUN which faces similar challenges in Oregon, is that this is a long-term, resource-intensive process.

The dilemma faced by the UFW in its effort to achieve a critical political mass to advance the well-being of farmworkers in California and in the U.S. is one which is inherent in all efforts to bring Mexican immigrants together within the macro-level context of ongoing migration. The search for an optimal balance between investments in “bonding” and “bridging” capital is a difficult one. Despite the vigorous efforts of a now-aging first

¹¹⁴ This portion of Payne’s analysis refers a section of the CIW’s worker rights materials “Field...or Jail?”

generation UFW activists to establish strong ties with newly-arriving farmworkers, there are some disconnects—because the reality is that the UFW emerged as an institution which reflected a particular historical context, the civil rights movement of the 1960's, a broadly-based Chicano renaissance, a Mexican-American America with many less newly-arriving immigrants than the world of 2003. This is a theme I return to at various other points in this report—because it is a fundamental practical challenge in efforts to establish, sustain, and “grow” affiliational networks of Mexican immigrants. And the existence of such networks is essential as the substrate for building their civic engagement.

Newly-arrived Mexican immigrants, like the *braceros* before them, instantaneously come to realize that the domain in which they now live, their new community of residence, organized around the farm labor workplace, is a civic and legal no-man's land where workers may unfairly be cheated out of their wages, verbally or physically abused, extorted, and coerced. They then learn that they have no more rights outside the boundaries of the workplace than within it. There is always, in principle, recourse, a farmworker's right to invoke his or her legal rights, relating to either obvious or arcane violations of a multitude of laws and regulations. But this “official story” is universally recognized to have only a weak relationship to the world as it really is.

In the California context, then, reference to the Bracero experience and, inevitably, to the process of “informal” unauthorized migration which preceded and which followed it, and California agribusiness' exploitation of cheap labor for more than half a century serves to underscore an important recognition--- that the California agricultural workplace is part of a transnational Mexico-US hybrid civic space, not simply a domain of “private” life, or even a realm which is fully under the jurisdiction of US civil authority. This recognition, that there is a very tenuous “rule of law” in the California agricultural workplace is critical to understanding Mexican immigrants civic orientation and uneven participation in other realms of California civic life.

The Agricultural Workplace as Agora and Venue for Learning Civic Skills

The agricultural workplace is not simply a place to work. It is, at the same time, a rich social environment with complex interactions among different social networks and ad hoc alliances as well as the venue for a broad range of debates and negotiations about power relationships, fairness vs. injustice, rights and obligations. The workplace is the stage on which workers test and practice alternative modes of communicating with others, mediating or provoking conflicts as a means to achieve individual or collective ends, where they make their reputations. At the same time, the workplace is the agora in which, during leisure moments, there is sometimes time for reflection, philosophizing, or sharing tentative analyses of “what's going on”—at work, in the community, and in the world.

Not surprisingly, then, the agricultural workplace serves as a civic training ground which teaches several partially conflicting lessons in practical civics for California life. On the one hand, in the legal no-man's land of the agricultural workplace, one can be proactive, take initiative, do what one wants—negotiate with those in charge, join with others to improve one's negotiating position, engage in exchanges of insults, walk off the job, or acquiesce to the status quo. One can do what one wants but there are always consequences —both personally and economically.

As seen through transnational migrant farmworkers' eyes, the "brave new world" of American democracy is not so different from the "old world" of home villages permeated with noble rhetoric and the daily need to cope with the dismal economic, social, and political immediacy of yawning gaps between the "haves" and the "have-nots", between the official story and the day-to-day reality of civic life.

Luis Magaña's Story—Son of A Bracero Becomes Community Organizer

I explore the *bracero* dimension of Mexican immigrants' California experience through the reflections of Luis Magaña, a long-time civic activist, workplace and community organizer. Luis' story, while extraordinary in many respects, provides useful insights about the typical development of the civic perspectives of Mexican immigrants of his generation (the immigrant cohort I refer to as "los migrantes del crisis", i.e. from 1970-1986). Almost all of this generation of Mexican farmworkers were fortunate enough to have achieved legal status. Now, as they near middle age, many have become citizens; others are seeking citizenship and, unfortunately, some have not been able to make it through the demanding naturalization process.

In Luis' case, being the son of a Bracero father from a migrant-sending village, Jaripo, Michoacan, gives a particular sense of meaning to his community work, as well as providing him a special inventory of resources of "social capital" and a special understanding of Braceros' experience. His experiences as the son of a Bracero and as a farmworker during his teenage and young adult years, provides him valuable insights into the situation of the immigrant cohort after him (the disenfranchised post-1988 migrants who have now lived in California for more than a decade) and even the most recently-arrived, disoriented transnational migrants. Luis' experience and perspectives are strongly affected by his social identity as part of the transnational community of Jaripo and his belonging to an immigration cohort "in the middle". These contribute to his thinking and personal style but don't seriously constrain them, because his broader identity as part of a transnational farmworker population provides him bridges for easy interaction with a diverse population of farmworkers in the Sacramento Delta region around Stockton, Manteca, and Lodi where he is currently working—with a large community of Jaripeños but, also, with indigenous Oaxacan and Guatemalan migrants who are now settling in the area.

First Childhood Impressions of Braceros

Luis, now in early middle-age, was born in 1957 in Jaripo, Michoacan at the height of the Bracero program. Luis explains that Jaripo became an important part of the *bracero* program because a local government official, Manuel Carrillo, was related to many people in town and would arrange contracts for prospective migrants—but, without charging them a bribe, as other intermediaries did. Luis does not literally remember much of his father's experience as a *bracero* because the program ended when he was very young. But he does remember his father's stories and the stories of others from his father's generation.

As was the case with many *braceros*, Luis' father's migration to California, to Stockton, did not end when the *bracero* program ended but continued afterwards as an authorized migrant from 1963 onwards. Luis' earliest memories of the *braceros* and Michoacan-California

migration stem from the early 1960's when he and other children in the village would run out to greet the returning migrants,

I remember how popular they were, those migrants who [eventually] got green cards as a result of being in the bracero program. They came to be seen as very special people, my dad, and others...like returning kings, they'd come back successful, like those indian warriors who would go out to hunt and come back with game...There were lots of them. My mom would say, go on, go run and ask that guy, ask him when you're dad's coming home.

And all the kids would be around, because they would hand out candy....actually the candies were bought in places like Saguayo [in Michoacan]....but they had to give us something. And that's where the expression "la cajeta" (a sweet) came from, when they'd see someone in the streets after their being 3 months in the U.S. they say "adonde esta mi cajeta" (where's my sweet) and they [the migrants] would say, "Oh, I have them at home, I'll go get them". The braceros had to give people something. Obviously they weren't people with lots of money but they had to share something.

So that was my childhood, and we'd look at those cars, those bat cars, those cars with wings [fins]. I would dream of them because they were so pretty. And they'd give you a ride in them.¹¹⁵

Luis explained that then, even after his father and the other *braceros* from Jaripo were legalized, they would still just go north for the working season and return, but then they began to bring their wives and children north with them. Luis' father started to bring his mother north first, leaving Luis and his brother to finish school in Jaripo. After Luis finished elementary school in the summer of 1970 that was the end of his schooling. His father thought Luis had gone to school long enough and that it was time to bring him north too.¹¹⁶

The Shock of Coming To California and Discovering a New Social Order

Being an experienced migrant, when spring came, Luis' father brought his family to Stockton a week before the state migrant labor camp, French Camp, opened, rented a house and waited with other migrants who would line up along the side of the road to get housing at the state camp.¹¹⁷ It was that spring, as a 13 year-old, that Luis got his first experience as a California migrant farmworker and his first understanding of the social dynamics of the agricultural workplace as a new and unfamiliar universe for social interaction and negotiation of power relationships.

¹¹⁵ These marvelous cars were, of course, second-hand cars. Even the apparently wealthy migrants could not afford new cars.

¹¹⁶ Moreover, the nearest *secundaria* (middle school) was in Jiquilpan, 15 kilometers away. While Mexico began, in the 1990's, an aggressive program of TV-based distance learning to improve rural students' access to *secundaria*, up until that time, there were strong pressures against continuing beyond elementary school. About half of California farmworkers have attended only elementary school—because they grew up in small communities like Jaripo.

¹¹⁷ California's state-operated farm labor camps provide better than average living conditions for migrant farmworkers at reasonable cost. However, these camps have housing capacity for only about 5% of the California farm labor force. Thus, the jockeying to get in. Anna Garcia and David Runsten have noted that these camps are in large measure controlled by the social networks of Mexican sending villages.

First came the cultural shock of what life as a California farmworker was going to be like. Luis recalls:

It was peach thinning time...My dad worked for a farm labor contractor, Jose Garcia here in Stockton, I think he was from Jalisco....So, he called on Sunday. For me Sunday was a very special day—to rest, and you had to go to church, and then there was the movies, and the plaza, so many things to do on Sunday, as a child...We had an agenda for Sunday, a mixture of religion and fun..., it was our first Sunday in the U.S. at 4 or 5 in the morning and my dad wakes me up and says, “Hey, hey, wake up” and I say, “What’s up?” and he says, “Get up! Let’s go!” and I say, “Where?” and he says, “to work, like everyone, so you can help me, because I think tomorrow you’re going to go to school..” And I say, “to work? no, no, no... like he’s asking me to go to Iraq...I’m not ready for this” and my dad says, “One comes here to work” and my brother starts to cry...

Luis recalls he had never seen anything like the peach orchard before. There were peach trees in Jaripo, but ones the children climbed in, played in, small trees, along with fruit trees like *chirimoyas*. He remembers they arrived to the Stockton orchard before dawn and it was still dark and one couldn’t even see the trees and workers began right away to start putting the ladders up. They told him he would have to learn “to ladder”, *escalerear*, that is, to strategically place the ladder in the tree, a term he remembers to this day as a strange one, part of his initiation into the Chaplinesque speed-up push of the world of piece rate pay.¹¹⁸ But the peach orchard was also a place to learn about community. Luis remembers,

...you’d hear the fruit [the tiny peaches being thinned] falling...tat, tat, tat...bouncing off what were then wooden ladders, and you’d start to hear voices, people calling out to each other. I couldn’t see anything beyond the branches of the tree I was working in...and I’d hear them calling my dad “La Balita” [his nickname]...very affectionately because he’s popular, always smiling, kidding, no enemies, “What’s up, La Balita? [Little Bullet]..come on sing out,¹¹⁹ uuy...where are you.” some of them people who are now labor contractors.... so nowadays when I go to the fields they call me that too, bearkening back to my dad, to try to remind me they were good friends with him to convince me not to notice any of the bad things they’re doing.

But the second shock for Luis, which he recalls vividly more than three decades later, was to understand about power relationships in the agricultural workplace, when a Mexican guy, mustache and all, the *mayordomo* (Luis, as a boy thought he must be the owner) came by and brusquely told his dad to teach Luis how to thin the peaches the right way. Luis remembers he was amazed, “And my dad obeyed him...”. amazed that his dad had yielded up his power and rights as a father to correct his son, and giving in, urging his son, “Go on, hey, learn to do it!”. Luis remembers that the *mayordomo* was built like a bodyguard (and later reflects that it seemed that growers used to hire field supervisors mostly on that basis), that that’s what gave him the right to boss people around, to demand things. Luis says this had a big impact on him—because he discovered he would get nervous even when one of the *mayordomos* would come around.

¹¹⁸ The reality is that many supposedly “unskilled” farm labor tasks actually require experience, knowledge, and strategic thinking. Ladder-setting is a good example of the more challenging tasks and skill in this task or lack thereof can make a difference of 60-70% in daily earnings in a variety of crop-tasks.

¹¹⁹ Luis goes on fondly remembering the banter between his father and his friends.

Luis concludes this story reflecting that these two authorities—the *mayordomo* and the *migra* (the Border Patrol)—were two ruling forces in California life, something he had never even known existed when the migrants would bring home the candy, the nuts, the toys to give out to the children of the village. As a child in Jaripo, he had never dreamed there would be this power hierarchy—the mayordomo, the farm labor contractor, and on top of it all, the grower and that one had to obey them all, the representative on each rung of the ladder of power. He had never heard grown men saying in fear, “Watch out, the old guy [the farm labor contractor] is coming!” and that, then, there would be even another person to watch out, the grower who would drive up in his pickup truck.

The revelation Luis experienced on his first day as a teenage farmworker in Stockton (and has surely refined over years of reflection), the recognition of a vertical power hierarchy is an important reminder that, even though Mexico has never been thought of as a particularly egalitarian society, the actual social interactions in migrant-sending villages were more populist and more mutualistically oriented than the hierarchical agricultural workplace in California which became for Luis, as it has become for millions of newly-arriving Mexican migrants after him, an introduction to the first rungs of a Jacob’s ladder of authority extending upwards into hardly-imaginable realms of social distance.

The intimate relationship between the economic power of agribusiness and the boundaries of Mexican immigrant farmworkers’ civic universe, while less explicitly addressed by Luis in this particular discussion, are still part of his account and deserve to be kept in mind. Luis’ father’s ability to work in the U.S., reside in the U.S., and travel back-and-forth between Jaripo and Stockton—rights we generally think of as part of the civic sphere—actually derive from his private economic relationship with his employer. During the period of the late 1960’s when Luis’ father got his green card and his family members’ green cards, and subsequently, as part of the mechanism of IRCA, the right to grant immigration status was delegated to the California agribusiness industry.¹²⁰ What Luis had not understood as a child growing up in Mexico but his father surely understands (as Luis now does) is that the social compact between worker and grower could yield benefits (money, immigration status) but that it also entailed costs (relinquishing one’s authority and one’s dignity).

Luis’s reflections about the relationship between work, identity, economic and civic power also reveal another facet of the complex dynamics of rural California communities and Mexico-based migration networks of *paisanos* from villages such as Jaripo. Luis observed that personal economic benefit was not the only factor driving his father, and his fellow farmworkers, to push himself and his sons to work harder to work better, to produce more. Luis recounts that Jaripeños thought of themselves and characterized themselves as good workers, that this was part of their community identity and collective

¹²⁰ Actually, the key players in formulation of the provisions of IRCA included a range of agribusiness interests, from both Florida and California, as well as their Washington representatives and lobbyists. Then-Congressman Leon Panetta played an important role, working closely with now-Senator Charles Schumer to develop the compromises which made the perennial Simpson-Rodino bill into the eventual Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986.

responsibility, to make themselves stand out from the crowd. This reputation was useful because farm labor contractors (who had the power to provide access to often-scarce work) would say, “Oh he’s from Jaripo” and give the Jaripeño preference over other workers. So, then, “killing oneself”, working harder than anyone else, was both part of the experience of exploitation and an affirmation of community identity, a civic duty. And this too is part of the multiple, conflicting images of the *bracero* era, as a golden age –of workers who were exploited but who, as an integral part of the process of exploitation, worked harder than anyone has since.¹²¹

Thus, Luis’ first civic skills and perspectives were formed within the dense network of *paisanos* from Jaripo. However, the next phase of Luis’ continuing development as a community organizer required him to move beyond his social network as a Jaripeño. Although he was then only a teenager he began to take on the role of intermediary, speaking for the community of migrants from Jaripo who had settled in a *colonia* south of Stockton, Sierra Vista.

Luis initial civic involvement in this role stemmed from efforts to address tensions and conflicts between the new Mexican migrants and low-income African-Americans in the Section 8 housing shared by the two ethnic groups and in the neighborhood. The Mexican immigrants settling in the area complained about muggings, and shootings and burglaries. The Mexican migrants wanted more security, more policing. In the course of addressing problems which he and the Jaripeño migrants first saw in terms of ethnic conflict, Luis came to realize that the underlying problems were socioeconomic, that the Mexican migrants and low-income African-Americans with whom they shared Section 8 housing, were in the same situation. This recognition led to Luis’ beginning to build a base of “bridging” social capital, understanding that both ethnic groups had been relegated to second-class status. Luis describes this personal and collective realization as follows,

It took us time to understand that it was a poor part of the city, not well kept up or taken care of, not paid attention to, and there we were coming as migrants, showing up to become part of that, inheriting what the African-Americans had been dealing with all this time—no attention from the city, no attention to public safety, and then there was the economic issue.

Luis’ analysis of the power hierarchy and the intimate relationship between the realm of private economic transactions and public civic transactions is the sort of consideration which must be taken into account in practical efforts to catalyze active and effective civic participation among Mexican immigrants in rural California. The fields were the venue for his initial understanding of the vertical hierarchy of the social, economic, and political universe in which he and his fellow *paisanos* lived and his understanding of bonding social capital as a resource for surviving in this universe. Yet the second phase of his civic development was equally important, coming to understand that different ethnic groups were

¹²¹ The mythology of recently-arrived Mexican farmworkers as the most productive workers is a story subscribed to by California agribusiness and workers alike. Like most “official”, broadly or universally accepted stories, the reality is more complex than the summary. On the one hand, transnational migrants are less demanding, less aware of their rights, less likely to complain of bad working conditions, more desperate for work, whatever the piecerate. On the other hand, they have no experience in many of the crop-tasks of California agriculture. In interviews with recently-arrived teenagers (Kissam et al, 2000) we heard a good deal about their struggles to learn to do California farmwork.

linked together in that they had both been relegated to the same enclave in a sociopolitical geography with “peaks” of wealth and “valleys” of poverty. This recognition informs his work as a community organizer to this day. Luis’ subsequent involvement in the work of an Alinsky-affiliated community organizing group, the Temporary Organizing Committee for a Unified Stockton, also contributed to his development as a civic activist but his social identity as a member of a transnational community of Mexican migrant farmworkers is the experiential foundation which gives him the distinctive outlook and skills that shape his modes of civic involvement.

Final Reflections on the California Fields as Civic Training Ground

Mexican migration networks, shaped by ongoing recruitment of farmworkers for California’s fields, in turn shape the civic perspectives and collaborative practices of the Mexican immigrants who settle in rural California communities. The Bracero mythology is a cultural artifact which reminds, instructs and illuminates listeners about the semi-hidden geography of their social universe. It reminds Mexican immigrants from rural villages with relatively non-hierarchical social structures of the vast vertical dimensions of the power structure in California. It reminds its listeners about the close horizontal linkages between agribusiness and government and underscores the reality that, in the contemporary global economy, agribusiness corporations are multi-national entities “tied in” to both the government of Mexico and the United States.

Luis Magaña’s reflections about how upward mobility fragments traditional social bonds within village migration networks, separating farm labor contractors from “ordinary” community people is one strand in the recurring saga of tensions between acculturation and social or ethnic solidarity, i.e. maintenance of strong social bonds. His experience in coming to recognize that shared concerns among low-income residents of California communities could be the basis for building bridges across ethnic divisions was a crucial step in extending a worldview of “community” as transnational network to one which had local dimensions also.

Labor market researchers describe the agricultural workplace as the vestibule of Mexican immigrants’ movement into the U.S. labor market. It is also the vestibule of their movement into the civic life of U.S. communities. Their eventual vision of “the house”, the social and civic environment in which they live is one in constant flux—as new social and political ties are built by bridging differences with other community groups and as *paisanos* split off from the transnational community in the course of assimilation into middle-class American life.

Bracero-related *corridos*, narratives, and similar accounts of migrant farmworkers’ experiences and struggles in a familiar tug-of-war with growers present cautionary tales of the dangers of the sociopolitical environment in which Mexican immigrants find themselves but, at the same time, celebrate the power of language and personal perseverance to bring farmworkers together, the power of aggregate social capital to at least begin to level the playing field in the face of social and political injustice.

Chapter 4

Deploying Home Country Civic Skills in California Community Life

Immigrants bring with them to California, a range of skills developed in their home countries. A problem they all face is how to overcome language and cultural barriers which make it difficult for those around them to recognize those skills. The first challenge is to have their skills recognized. Then, the second challenge is to explore how they can best deploy their foundation skills to navigate the new social universe of the communities where they find themselves (Kissam and Intili 1994).

The “skills deployment” problem which emerges in such a clear-cut fashion in the agricultural workplace, also emerges in immigrants’ efforts to manage family life, and in the course of getting involved in the civic realm. As in every case where an adult (or a child) finds that they must “translate” a set of functional competencies developed in one environment to a new environment which differ from the familiar one in many ways, some amount of exploration is required. In the case where an immigrant has the well-developed analytic, communication, and collaborative skills which are the foundation for effective civic participation, the stakeholders in this endeavor are not simply the individual immigrant but, also the community at large.

While a substantial portion of research and debate about immigration policy hinges on analyses of the “quality” of immigrants from different countries, as measured by mean educational attainment of newly-arriving immigrants, there has been inadequate attention to the very substantial variations of human capital among arriving immigrants or to the complex issues as to whether educational attainment is a valid indicator of immigrant “quality”. This debate is particularly intense in discussions of Mexico-California immigration because, in fact, the majority of Mexican immigrants to rural California communities do have low levels of educational attainment. The difficulty is that this key indicator is so flawed—inadequate to recognize or adequately capture the “cultural capital” of real-world skills which individual immigrants or sub-groups among immigrants bring with them.¹²²

All immigrants must confront the problem of gaining recognition of their abilities and, then, translating and redeploying skills they’ve developed in their home country to a new setting. However, the problem is particularly challenging for Mexicans to rural areas where agriculture is the leading industry—because labor demand is for “unskilled” workers and it is, thus, assumed that the migrants who come to work in farmwork have few skills. Even when agricultural employers observe that a new worker has real competencies, they are sometimes not clear exactly what those skills may entail. It is not unusual for employers to remark with surprise about how a newly-arrived worker had a good idea about more

¹²² This problem led the U.S. Department of Education to initiate a major research effort in the 1980’s to develop better indicators of literacy than educational attainment. This effort to develop a sound framework for assessing functional competencies in analytic thinking, information management, and communication is an ongoing one. Analysis of data collected by the Educational Testing Service in the course of the National Adult Literacy Survey shows a good deal of variance in the actual reading competencies of persons who completed the same grade level—even without taking into consideration a broader range of skills which are relevant to civic competency.

efficiently loading a truck or how effectively they engage in teamwork without having any idea of the communication and analytic skills the worker brings to the job. Over the past decade, we have interviewed Mexican farmworkers who are former archeologists, agronomists, teachers, bookkeepers, health care workers, or small business entrepreneurs. Their employers seldom knew about this human capital.

In this section of the report, we examine the issues which arise when a highly-skilled immigrant with a strong orientation toward civic participation seeks to carve out a role for himself in his new life in the Central Valley. This case deserves careful consideration because it is clear that one of the functions of sound immigrant social policy might be to facilitate the process of recognizing the human and civic potential of new immigrants and moving rapidly to “recruit” them into civic networks, and to engage them in California community life, particularly when they are already inclined to “get involved”. In these cases, the benefits of such efforts will accrue to both the individual and the society at large.

“Polo” Chavez—An Atypical Community Activist

I focus here on the story of Apolonio Chavez, commonly known as “Polo”, a Fresno community activist associated with a regional organization, “Comite Pro Uno”, as well as several other informal civic groups in the Mexican immigrant community of Fresno—El Comite de los Pobres (The Poor People’s Committee), El Comite No Nos Vamos (“We’re Here to Stay” Committee), and the San Joaquin Valley Coalition for Immigrant Rights. His tiny office in a run-down building at 328 North Fresno street, next door to a tire repair store, across the street from the local bar, is in the heart of the Mexican barrio of central Fresno. Neighborhood women stroll by pushing baby strollers on their way to the grocery store, farmworkers wander past in the afternoons when work is over, children ride bikes. People go about their business deliberately but many have an air of exhaustion. It’s clear this neighborhood is one of the poorest in Fresno, with the poverty being accentuated by the emergence, two blocks south of Polo’s office, of the Fresno Regional Medical Center, a huge, newly-built complex, still in the process of construction, carefully walled off from the neighborhood surrounding it by a metal fence—like the moat separating mythical palace from mythical villagers.

Although the office which Polo, as sole representative of the Comite Pro-Uno, shares with the San Joaquin Valley Coalition for Immigrant Rights is run down, it has a large parking lot where, on many afternoons, there are three or four old cars belonging to Polo’s clients, Mexican immigrants coming to seek advice on the immigration issues they face. It is often the case that one or two families will be sitting in the office common space, under a huge blown-up poster of the “Proposition 1” manifesto from which the Comite Pro-Uno got its organizational name. The manifesto outlines the rationale for allowing everyone in Los Angeles, including undocumented immigrants, to vote on local issues.

Polo is, in some respects, a typical immigrant to Fresno. He is the son of a farmworker from Guanajuato, a state in the Mexican region known as “El Bajío”—a core-sending area for migrants coming north to work in California. Like hundreds of thousands of other Mexican migrants, children of Braceros, Polo followed in his father’s footsteps and settled in Fresno to remain part of an extended family. As has been the case for many other Mexican families, his family did not come directly north but migrated first to Mexico, DF. in the early 1970’s

when rapid development led to job creation in urban areas. But then, as the Mexican economy stalled, his family came north as one part of the cohort we refer to as “Migrantes del Crisis” (Migrants from the Crisis). In contrast to many Fresno-bound migrants of his generation, Polo is a graduate of the prestigious Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico, where he received his degree in economics.

Polo’s ancient car, typical garb of blue jeans, cotton shirt, and ancient briefcase suggest (correctly) that he’s a populist—from and for “the people”. His values, perspectives on civic life, and style of engagement reflect the formative experiences of his childhood and his youth in urban Mexico, D.F. but his analytic and communication skills are the same ones deployed by negotiators and diplomats—“universals of culture”, or, at least, a now-embedded aspect of global society, economy, and media. True to the mythical overtones of his Apollonian namesake, Polo, appreciates the power of language and revels in travelling through level after level of sub-text—in poetry, government regulations, or idle conversation. Paradoxically, despite his consistent return to analysis of macro-level historical and economic forces as determinants of societal experience, he considers language an extraordinary resource—a free tool available to anyone, for managing personal life, for navigating the complexities of social and political life, a key resource for self-determination.

These personal characteristics and apparently paradoxical traits are an important aspect of understanding Polo and why his story is important, because it is reasonable to suspect that these are essential to his ability to inhabit such an extraordinary sociopolitical space—as intermediary between powerless Mexican immigrants (most of whom come to him because of their problematic immigration status) and a powerful national bureaucracy, once the INS, more recently the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services, in the Department of Homeland Security. Polo’s personal, experiential, curriculum vitae, his journeys through many worlds, is, as it is for most, an important part of understanding how he came to be where he is, in the role he’s in, and, consequently, highlighting important dimensions of the complex process through which skills developed early in life become the foundation for subsequent civic engagement—even in a new, unfamiliar, and somewhat hostile environment.

Childhood—Becoming a Social Entrepreneur

Polo’s family left their rural rancho, El Toro, to come to Mexico, DF in 1964, when he was 3 years old. He is the third of nine siblings but the oldest son in the family. He refers to himself as an adopted *Chilango* (slang for Mexico, DF resident), “adopted because of migration”. In retrospect, he notes that the move wasn’t too traumatic, but that at the time it surely seemed difficult. He reflects on this issue of migration and identity,

Chilangos tend toward racism...What happens is that lots of people want to hide their origins. But not me! That’s how they raised me. I’m proud of where I’m from. Lots of people, when you ask them, “What rancho are you from?” say, “No, I’m not from a rancho, I’m from a town” Being from a rancho diminishes you. But, yes, I come from a very little rancho.

Polo stresses that his family’s arrival in Mexico City is really part of a macro-level transformation of Mexican life, as peasants were displaced by the growing problems Mexico encountered with a program of agrarian reform which was in the process of collapsing. The

family came first to Tlalnepantla, a neighborhood on the outskirts of Mexico City near the huge Pemex refinery complex but soon moved across the city to a new part of the city, Ixtapalapa, a shantytown growing up out of cornfields, a neighborhood which frequently flooded, but, nonetheless, grew within a decade or two to have a population of several million residents.

The family finally settled in a tenement. Polo remembers how many children there were, about 50 families in the apartments and “a ton of kids” (*un monton de niños*). He goes on remembering, “There was a really well-developed social life there...in city, well, that was natural...it was a really rich life.” Polo made many friends

You know, since our households were so poor and there wasn't much to eat we'd all go hunt grasshoppers. We'd take paper bags, jars, bottles and catch them....We'd try them up in oil, with chile and tortillas, to have something to eat—because we were big families. The smallest family had 5 people but some had 15 people, can you imagine? And we'd all play soccer and we'd fight, we were able to fight, we had to, to learn how to defend ourselves.

It was then, he remembers, when he was about 7 years old, that he had his first experiences of teamwork, like other children in these desperately poor neighborhoods, always looking for a way to help their families survive.

So, there we were, grasshopper hunters...And then, at one point, we made our own circus. We got some old discarded rubber and made our own tent and so we figured that's a way to get some money, to charge people to get in, me, my siblings, and Dona Luz's kids (we're still friendly). So I got to be the fire eater. I'd grab a can of kerosene and a stick and an old rag, and that was our magnum opus. Spouting fire out of my mouth. So we'd be there and we'd get money to buy the things we needed—onions, cooking oil and all...

Life on the Edge—Child Labor, Migration

Polo goes on to say, of course, he had to work. Everyone did. He reminisces that he had his first paid job, when he was 8 years old. He explains what it was like. Like many of the other challenges in his life, this was one which were part of Polo's experiential learning and building the self-confidence that's an essential part of leadership,

They were building lots of factories in the neighborhood....where I lived it was surrounded by factories, across the street they built...a popsicle factory. So when they started building, there where we'd catch the grasshoppers and butterflies, they were building, you know how it is, all the systems for steam and boilers. And right there, I went to ask Don Miguel, and Don Antonio (who was the master mason) to give me some work. They all were staring at me .because I was a kid..."Yes, give me work, I'll help you with whatever". So, he said "Yes", and I took the job. So we were digging there and they'd tell me "bring this, bring that, whatever they wanted". Every week, Don Antonio would make the rest of the workers in the crew pay me...I was really content, an 8 year-old kids, making 26 pesos a week, it was like 25 dollars, a pile of money. And I gave it all to my mom. It was like a salary. And I liked that a lot. Because they respected me.

The first job ended when the popsicle factory construction was finally completed. So then, Polo went on to get his second job. They were worried about hiring him, but he convinced them. So they let him work at night checking the popsicles that would come off the assembly line to pull out any which ended up being dirty. He would fall asleep behind the

factory sometimes, where they stored palettes and boxes and they would give him some of the leftover popsicles. Polo chuckles, “I was the most popular kid in the neighborhood”. But eventually, the factory management got worried about being fined for child labor law violations, even though Polo was working at night when they thought there wouldn’t be any inspector, so that job ended.

Like other children from poor families, he went on to other work, more work as a construction helper for a family friend who was a mason, to shining bureaucrat’s shoes in downtown offices, selling newspapers on the bus, selling gum on the street. While he doesn’t want to romanticize it, Polo sees his time as a child laborer being an important part of his learning responsibility,

On the one hand, I wanted to play. But we were very poor. Supporting 11 people, a family with 9 children....A person like my dad with no schooling, it wasn’t very practical. I didn’t feel he made me work, he didn’t tell me I had to.

When he was 10 Polo and his family became migrants again. His father had been working for a vendor in the city’s central market, La Merced, but he was laid off. He tried then to make a living on his own, a small business hauling produce with a pickup truck, but that didn’t work out either. Polo’s father (who had been a Bracero in the mid-1950’s before Polo was born) talked to a cousin who had just married a woman in Fresno was invited to go back to California farmwork and he did. Polo remembers the day clearly. His father work him up early. Polo was scared, wondering what he’d done wrong, if his dad was going to hit him. But his father wen walking with them—Polo, his mother, and his older sister—and said “Well, I’m going to go... ”. He remembers his mother and his sister crying.

Building One’s Own Institutions

The family remained a few months in Mexico, DF but then were forced to move back to Guanajuato (probably because his father hadn’t accumulated enough money to send home). After a year, the family managed, once again, to return to the capital and begin, once again, to carve out a life at the edges of the city.

Like scores of other urban youth, when the family returned from Leon, Polo continued to work and go to school. At 14, he graduated from *secundaria* (middle school) and got his first “official” job, at a plastics extrusion factory. After a few months, he began to think about continuing his education. After running into a few friends, they convinced him to go consider enrolling in Vocational School #5, one of the trade schools operated by the national polytechnic university. After becoming dissatisfied with that school, largely because of the hierarchical school social environment filled with cliques, he enrolled in another school and tried hard to combine a full-time work schedule in the plastics factory with education but this was exhausting. Polo decided to drop out of school---it was just too much. As he talked to friends about his plans, one told him of a new school his brother had graduated from—La Prepa Popular (The Populist Preparatory School). Always curious, willing to try something new, Polo and a few friends went downtown to check out the new school. It turned out to be a experience which would be a central one in his life, and to his vision of civic possibility. Even two decades later it is the foundation for his abiding faith

that poor people, anyone, can take initiative to regain a measure of control over their lives, their communities—even when it seems the deck is stacked against them.

As Polo explains it, the Populist Preparatory School (and others like it) emerged from macro-level forces which were transforming Mexican life in the 1960's, mass migration of rural peasants (like Polo's parents) into the urban centers driven by labor demand in the manufacturing sector, and with this migration and a changing socioeconomic context, new pressure on an already fragile system of public education, as financial resources were completely inadequate for responding to the greatly increased demand. These demographic and economic developments had important implications for Mexican educational policy and civic life—because these displaced workers and their children were deeply aware of the tensions between Mexico's nominally egalitarian social policy and the realities of a hierarchical sociopolitical system based primarily on class. "Popular education" was not a marginal aspect of the country's sociopolitical arena but, instead, center stage. Is not surprising that the most dramatic sociopolitical conflict in the second half of the 20th century, other than the rural Zapatista movement in the southern state of Chiapas which arose out of the glaring disparities between indigenous communities' lives and the Mexican mainstream, was the 1968 Movement which was based at the Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico (UNAM), bringing students and urban workers together.

The Populist Preparatory School model was a daring but immensely practical one which had emerged from the 1968 movement at the Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico (UNAM)—the national university which had already expanded the basic idea of "autonomy" in education to include student governance in "workshops" (*talleres*) as a mechanism for assuring relevant and responsive education. The extension of this educational strategy to the secondary school level meant that university students would volunteer to teach in inner-city popular schools (as one mode of fulfilling their social/community service obligations) and the students in those populist preparatory schools would be eligible to enroll in the UNAM after completing their 3 years of study. Instruction was organized into a few broad areas—economics, philosophy, physics/mathematics, history/social science, architecture/engineering.

After much negotiation, a few years before Polo enrolled, it had been agreed that, because the populist preparatory schools were, essentially, part of the university network, there would be no examinations required to graduate from the school and enter into the university, only the requirement of providing at least 30 days of social/community service.

Polo still recalls vividly his first impression of the Prepa Popular.

There was a building. It didn't have the classical school look, at least not the look of the schools we knew about. For example, the vocational schools were sharp looking (bien bonitas). This was a really old building. (Years before it had been used by the university chemistry department). There were huge, thick walls, two stories high and I liked that. Somehow the atmosphere felt different...I felt, I don't know, it was strange...So we were there and everyone was young. So we asked where do we go to enroll and everything was different from the beginning. There was nothing about entrance exams. What did they need? Just your name, a photo, and your middle school (secundaria) paperwork.

...they explained the whole organic structure of the school. They explained that in the classic sense of the word, there would not be any school authorities. The governing body of the school was the general assembly of students and teachers. I said, "Great! (since I had come from a school where the school director was in charge of everything and one couldn't do anything), how good!"

It is hard, within the context of U.S. experience, to imagine how powerful this experience must have been for Polo and students like him, youth from families who were not simply "economically disadvantaged" but so poor that parents and children worked constantly (as Polo and his sisters had) to make ends meet—because urban Mexico was not simply a stratified society, it was a society where class, status, and who was "in command" meant everything. The Prepa Popular model not only ran counter to the established hierarchical order in Mexico by being egalitarian—students and teachers on the same footing vis-a-vis governance—actually taking the rhetoric of participatory democracy seriously. It also was serious in its commitment to the basic principles of collaboration—equal "voice" and equal accountability. Polo explains the process of school governance which was used,

One of the most interesting things there was that we didn't have a budget for our school. All the administrative activities, maintenance, instruction, rested on students. [In the orientation assembly] they explained to us that there were six Commissions, but that we could create more, if we needed to. [They said] "You, each student among you, has to take responsibility because this is your school. There are no directors, no personnel who will clean the bathrooms, no one who will clean for us or paint, or fix blackboards". So our responsibility was to deal with the whole set of problems facing the school.

He goes on with his account of the orientation to school governance,

[They said] "This is what you have to do (decide) which Commission you want to belong to. You're free to choose which one, but you have to choose one". I liked that Then we went back to our classes. So, one of our responsibilities was to set up those Commissions. And the Commissions were in charge of determining the roles everyone would fill, the activities of the group...So once a month, the group I was in, the Publicity Commission, would take a day off (to deal with their responsibilities).

The notion of an educational institution which functioned in large measure based on the labor of students is unusual (in fact, illegal) in the United States. But, for this generation of impoverished youth who had, of necessity, become economically and personally self-reliant as child workers, the idea of hard work was not particularly daunting. And the excitement of deciding, oneself, what had to be done, who had to do it, and how the work would proceed was new and liberating.

Participation in the school "community" was not, in any sense, metaphoric. The issues the "community" needed to address were concrete, the participation was practical. In this environment, "popular education" was not an abstract ideal and the difficult gap between an arbitrary curriculum and day-to-day life which erodes so many contemporary American teenagers' commitment to learning, had been successfully bridged—by the mere fact of acknowledging (to a student body of impoverished youth from urban slums) that the institution, too, would have to be self-reliant.

The experience seems to have been exactly what Polo had been looking for, after a childhood where his own inclination and economic circumstances had encouraged him to be

practical, social, curious, and creative. He remembers with enthusiasm, the work and how he felt about it,

We were in the basements, on the roofs, everywhere...We had to build classrooms where there had been flowerbeds—with wood and those sheets of tar-impregnated cardboard...The year I entered the number of students almost doubled. There were 36 new groups of students—50 or 60 students in each...

The interesting thing is that the students wanted to get an education so they didn't care what the conditions were. Their interest, or their level of need, brought them to this. It was what they wanted. We made the blackboards, we painted them green. That's how it was, "Hey, how are you going to educate yourself" There was a sense of solidarity, brotherhood, struggle....but most of all struggle. It was beautiful to see your fellow students (compañeros) creating their own school, their own classrooms....

If we had to buy supplies, we'd go to both big companies and small businesses and they would help us a lot. Another option was to go directly to the community for support. We'd do publicity campaigns throughout the barrios, the markets, business centers. And that was part of the education about how to run our school....

But it wasn't just building the classroom but also the teachers. They weren't paid anything, nothing at all, absolutely nothing. How did you satisfy the need for teachers? Our Commission on Publicity and Press Relations would organized a recruitment campaign. [They told us] "You are going to have to get your own teachers. To do that, you're going to have to go to the universities, even private ones like the Ibero[americana], wherever you all want to go. And you can offer the students who are finishing up their post-graduate studies, their degrees, the opportunity to do their social/ community service requirements, ,there was a requirement.

And many were delighted (to do it). They said, "OK, we'll go there" and many stayed—because they saw that it was an interesting experiment. And others stayed because of their commitment...Many had come out of curiosity. But then they would see that it was the opportunity they were looking for. They felt, and it was justified, the Prepa [Popular] had done a lot for them....All of them from that period were very satisfied, they felt they had to do it for us.

Polo's account of his experience at the Prepa Popular highlights both the strengths and the weaknesses of the Civic Voluntarism model for explaining immigrant civic participation. On the one hand, the model accurately points to the important role played by teenagers' school experiences in developing the foundation for civic activism in later life. On the other hand, the model implicitly assumes that such experiences occur within the general framework of social life in U.S. communities. While it might be assumed that Mexican immigrants, coming from a developing country with a strong system of authoritarian political control of civic life might have less experience as teenagers to build civic skills than U.S. students, this is not necessarily the case.

Polo's experience as a teenager involved in the governance of a student-run school (where he was eventually elected as the representative of his student group) was a tremendously rich one which provided him a broad spectrum of experiential learning opportunities to build a foundation of civic skills. The structure of the Prepa Popular model is of interest because it provides a strategy for balanced development of skills in building bonding social capital (via formation of a multitude of small "Commissions" of students charged with the task of self-governance) and bridging social capital (as a result of the need to research out for resources—recruiting volunteer teachers, small donations, and in-kind supplies).

Arguably, the instructional design of the Prepa Popular was one which may have over-emphasized the development of civic skills at the expense of building other sorts of skills. However, to the extent that student motivation and engagement in learning are the key ingredient in educational success, the Prepa Popular model is likely to have contributed to skills development across all areas of instruction. Here too, the model is an interesting one in that the process of student-led recruitment of university students willing to teach in an inner-city school as part of their social service requirement, in that this process would seem to strengthen bonding between teachers and their students—based, in part, on age, but, just as importantly, on the basis of genuine personal relationships.

In drawing the connection between the experiences of a single immigrant civic activist and overall patterns of immigrant incorporation in rural California communities, it is important to observe that Polo is an extraordinary individual and to remember, as always, that a huge range of individual factors become intertwined with social factors in determining the course of any person's life. At the same time, Polo's assessment of his own individual, extraordinary experiences as "typical" of the experiences of an entire cohort of Mexican immigrants is convincing. Son of a Bracero father, childhood migration from rural to urban Mexico, constant economic crises in family life, semi-skilled employment in Mexico, subsequent migration to California—Polo's sociological profile is one shared by a significant group of Mexican immigrants. Extraordinary, yes, unique, probably not.

More importantly still, the development of the Prepa Popular "solution" to the problem of educational demand outstripping the society's economic resources, as well as coping with the lack of political will in Mexico's hierarchical society to assure equal access to educational opportunity, is quintessentially "Mexican". A defining aspect of the Mexican inventory of cultural resources is mutualism and Mexican urban life was rich in these resources (Lomnitz 1968). Thus, the idea of mutualism being used as a "social capital" resource to leverage a collaborative solution to conditions which affect the well-being of the entire society, while ideologically and politically controversial, resonated strongly with Mexican's values and processes of social interaction. The institutional contribution to the initiative was really only a formalization of the underlying principles of mutual reciprocity which are the basis of Mexican extended family and village networks—the official requirement that university graduation require a year of social/community service.

Interestingly enough, due to the ongoing process which Saskia Sassen refers to as "peripheralization of the core", the conditions of the Central Valley communities in which Mexican immigrants have settled, are remarkably akin to the conditions Polo's generation and their parents faced as parents migrated to the Mexican capital—rapid population growth, escalating need for education as the basis for economic advancement, inadequate infrastructure, and inadequate funding for schools (Kearney and Nagengast 1988; Lopez 1994; Rochin 1995; Taylor 2003). Within this context, it is not surprising that a central strategy for three of the Central Valley Partnership for Citizenship organizations' (Proyecto Campesino, El Colegio Popular, Sacramento Valley Organizing Community) efforts to respond to the tremendous demand for assistance in preparing for the naturalization exam was reliance on volunteer teachers. Nor should it be surprising that this same approach was used, during the same period of wrenching change Polo describes in Mexico, in rural California, as part of the Chicano movement's efforts to address the inadequate resources

available for education by creating local institutions such as the Universidad de Aztlan in Del Rey and DQ University near Woodland.

The idea that Mexican immigrants' resource of social capital might be used, if there were a means to "translate" them into the California sociopolitical framework, into widespread civic collaboration to address intractable community problems, is not a speculative proposition but, rather, a potentially valuable initiative. From this perspective, then, the "resources" which formal bureaucratic systems see as a means to "solve" problems by creating an organizational and structural framework for quality assurance are at the same time the barriers Polo and other Mexican immigrants face in seeking to deploy their resources of social capital to address the educational problems in the communities in which they live. What Polo's account makes clear is that the extreme pressures being experienced by the Mexican sociopolitical system at the point that the Prepa Popular movement began were actually an important factor in the successful use of civic voluntarism to solve a pressing social problem.

As it turned out, the "civic style" Polo developed as a student leader at the Prepa Popular was one he later transferred directly to his education-oriented civic engagement in California—working in grassroots adult education, literacy, and citizenship campaigns mounted by community groups. The inventory of civic skills he developed as a teenage activist, coupled with the "cultural capital" stemming from growing up within the social networks of very poor Mexican migrants, clearly contributed tremendously to his current ability to be engaged in civic life in Fresno, California, counseling Mexican families on their immigration problems, and constantly seeking to catalyze civic engagement within a socioeconomic context where no one has the time or money, or even the transportation, which would normally be considered the prerequisites for civic participation.

In a more general way, Polo's account of his teenage years also highlights the limitations of research which might, in principle, provide a basis for a deeper understanding of the ways in which prior experience might enter into the process of immigrants' civic integration into California community life. There is, however, some disagreement in this realm.

Limitations of The Current Comparative Research on Civic Participation

A review of analyses of the structural context of civic engagement based on several international surveys (Schofer and Fourcade-Gourinchas 2001) tabulates data suggesting that Mexico has very low levels of citizen involvement in voluntary associations. The analysis, relying on data gathered by Almond and Verba and published in 1963, reports that about at the time Polo was born only 24% of Mexicans belonged to a voluntary association while 57% of American did. Subsequent surveys (World Values Survey, 1981; World Values Survey, 1991) showed higher levels of voluntary association involvement by Mexicans—42% in 1981 and 30% in 1991—but the country still trailed the U.S.—where 72% of the survey respondents said were involved in a voluntary association in 1981 and 68% in 1991. Moreover, these authors report the conclusion of one researcher (Inglehart 1990; 1997) that "postmaterialist' values of well-being, tolerance and trust—values which in turn support the development of associations (especially 'new' social movement associations) and other democratic institutions" are linked to increasing levels of education and affluence. If this

were, in fact, the case there would be little hope for Central Valley communities—given the prevailing levels of education and family income.

However, as in the case of the Civic Voluntarism model of civic engagement, the general analytic framework and metrics used in comparative studies of civic participation may not be problematic, but the actual research and its conclusions are because they fail to recognize the value of powerful informal social networks as civic resources by relying on what is, essentially, an ethnocentric concept of associational networks as delineated by membership in formal organizations.

The deficiencies of current efforts to analyze the antecedents of civic participation at the macro-level, either internationally or nationally, are also problematic in that they, essentially ignore social and cultural diversity, imputing macro-level characteristics to local community contexts, thereby eliminating any hope to understand how the very specific conditions of social ecology can contribute to the emergence of civic activism.

Some analysts (Bowles and Gintis 2000) argue, in fact, that the combination of flexibility, agility, and low “overhead” or transactional costs in such structured non-formal networks make them unique resources for community governance. They see them as having some of the structural characteristics which have generated widespread interest in “market solutions” to civic problems while guarding against market failures by incorporating strong mechanisms to insure accountability. Arguably, the sorts of institutional frameworks such as the Prepa Popular initiative in which Polo participated are exactly the sorts of structures need by Central Valley communities which are economically impoverished but in possession of a “social technology” designed to facilitate mutualism.

The Microecology of the Social Universe of Rural California

Do social networks need to be formalized as organizational networks to have an influence on social dynamics in a community? Certainly not. Particularly in small communities such as those of the Central Valley, informal networks of all types (e.g. extended family networks, informal working relationships among farm labor contractors, affinities among *paisanos*) are highly visible. The standard analytic model used in macro-level analyses of civic participation fail because they implicitly assume that the veneer of formal organizational systems and processes might in some almost magical way be the most important force in community social life. Surely formal associational ties and organizational structures do exert some influence on behavior. Voters, indeed, vote the party line and churches do, indeed, routinely mobilize their congregations to lobby elected officials. In the particular context which most concerns us here, the civic life of Central Valley immigrant communities, the idea that organizational affiliation is what matters and the consequent implication that tinkering with organizational structures might be the best way to foster civic involvement is a dangerous fallacy. This view is like that of Plato’s cave dwellers chained to look in only one direction and, thus, believing that shadows are the fundamental reality, when they are, in fact, watching a shadow-puppet drama, a pale reflection of the essential dynamics of community civic life. Formal organizational frameworks do leverage civic activities and shape civic behavior. However it is necessary to distinguish “civic behavior” from “civic engagement”, the deeper connections which give rise to sustainable, ongoing civic involvement.

As the contrasts of life in rural California become increasingly extreme due to the processes of peripheralization of the core, as gated communities grow up, side by side with *colonias* of Mexican immigrants living in dilapidated housing (or, as in northern San Diego county, encampments of recently-arrived migrant workers living in cardboard shantytowns in canyons), imputing the “general” characteristics of any particular geographical unit (e.g. county) to a particular population will become increasingly tenuous. From a strictly technical perspective, the difficulty is that variance in standard socioeconomic indicators (e.g. family income, education, persons living in crowded housing) within even very small geographic units of analysis are as great as the variance from community to community.

The contrasts of “poverty amidst prosperity” in California are large and real but there are a multitude of micro-environments such as those which gave rise to the Prepa Popular movement in Mexico, D.F. The challenge is to discover how to nurture civic life in these economically impoverished communities, how to turn the rich oases of social capital into resources of civic capital which can be “harvested” to drive civic participation and community improvement.

The real success of endeavors such as the Prepa Popular movement clearly make it necessary to find ways to support the efforts of immigrant activists in rural California communities, who are like the self-reliant students like Polo and his peers in Mexico, DF in that they are prepared to persevere in solving fundamental “community problems” when provided a basic model for civic capital accumulation and guaranteed “ownership” of the endeavor and its outcomes.

The enemies of a new populism are the “community leaders” whose concept of leadership is more closely linked to “command and control” management systems. The valuation of professionally-certified “expertise”, technically complex and demanding processes of civic decision-making and collaboration, and the corresponding devaluation of the outcomes of experiential, inquiry-oriented, or project-based learning are a serious barrier to deploying Mexican immigrants’ skills and energy in efforts to improve community life.

Contemporary society’s delegation of the power to initiate and move forward in addressing chronic problems to public sector entities and private sector formally-organized non-profits (forced to operate on standard business models of balancing revenues and expenditures) is a structural barrier to “community-building” in Central Valley communities.

Social Capital vs. Financial Capital--The Limitations of both Formal and Informal Networks in Catalyzing Civic Participation

The dilemma is that, in the context of contemporary community life, efforts to catalyze civic participation require both social and financial capital and that financial resources flow only to organized non-profit entities, not to informal social networks.

From a cross-cultural perspective, the same ethnocentricity that contaminates applied researchers’ analysis of civic participation, by relying unduly on tabulations of formal organizational affiliation, threatens efforts to promote immigrant civic participation in the Central Valley—because this focus on formal organizational dynamics, devalues the resources of social capital inherent in immigrants’ informal networks and shifts the center of

gravity to reliance on financial capital (program funding) as the driving force in building community.

The advantage of civic “transactions” within informal social networks is that they can be responsive and that there is little overhead. There are not explicit procedures to determine what kind of help one individual or group can provide to another or when it will be repaid because the syntax governing such transactions is part of the fabric of the network. The more formal organizational structures of non-profit organizational life are driven by program funding priorities and the obligations of grant workplans and less responsive to the wide range of people in the community—less flexible, less agile. They are, also, more costly in terms of operating overhead.

The displacement of social capital and community dialogue by programs operated by non-profits is an endemic problem. The difficulty is that the business model of social program management, the demand for well-elaborated “paper trails” to document “community-building” initiatives, generate the illusion of progress when what has been accomplished may simply have been the creation of an elaborate shadow-play of organizational structures, meetings, and activities. The grassroots “civic engagement” which such organizational endeavors purport to facilitate are precluded by the formalism of their structure and processes.

The current fad of “regionalism”, coupled with an emphasis by funders on multi-agency “collaboration, is a particularly serious threat to the development of a robust environment of civic activism in the Central Valley and other rural areas of California and the U.S. Regions do share common problems but the larger entities which emerge to address these problems inevitably generate more “vertical” social distance between the regional initiatives and the local populations and communities they are designed to benefit.

The development of regional networks and inter-agency collaboratives which are growing up as a “solution” to Central Valley community problems are, moreover, in fundamental opposition to principles of participatory democracy because whenever the process of discussion, deliberation, and decision-making requires English-language facility, huge segments of immigrants in the community are left out in the cold as an English-dominant cadre of community service personnel drift inexorably toward processes which are exclusionary. Inherent in the formalization and professionalization of community civic processes is the hidden but ever-present tendency toward one-way, top-bottom information flow as “experts” and “specialists” teach their less-educated clientele or constituents about an abstract reality without the countervailing influence of “bottom up” information flow, without a culture of inquiry and curiosity about the actual social ecology of community life.¹²³

¹²³ The creation of county-level Commissions on Children and Families is an example of the ways in which the promise of locally-responsive, “authentic” processes of identifying community priorities have been subverted. Fortunately, in some cases, local community-based organizations have been proactive in insisting on “bottom-up” input. A good example is Greater Bakersfield Legal Assistance’s recent work to assure that undocumented Mexican immigrant parents organize and express their views to inform the Kern County Commission’s deliberations.

At the same time, increasing reliance on strategic planning as a tool for building organizational efficacy in community-based non-profits' work in addressing community problems threatens to further disenfranchise immigrants unless the process is managed with meticulous attention to cultural diversity—because these processes of dialogue and deliberation draw on systems analysis approaches and are inevitably couched in abstract language and technical terms which are difficult and distasteful for immigrants with little schooling.¹²⁴

It is also not clear whether these processes of dialogue and deliberation are ceremonial or substantive. Polo, as usual, described the drawbacks of this process in his usual concrete terms.

I've always thought that the problem is.... (and now I don't even want to go to meetings any more)... I don't know if it's the way meetings are organized or if they're a way for justifying ourselves, is that whenever we get together we start over again and that seems to me like the politics of a donkey walking around in circles to pump water out of a well. One is just there going around and around and always coming back to the same point...We do get water, although it depends on how much water there is in the well, but there we are....So we always come back to the same place

In addition to seeing the collective processes of non-profit organizations' meeting as an impediment, Polo addresses the problem of social capital being driven out of the “marketplace” from which civic participation emerges, by financial capital

These projects always hinge on resources. And when the money runs out, the project's over. And that's very sad...that's the main mistake we make, not thinking about being self-reliant, thinking that there will always be someone who will pay, a foundation or the state, or someone....The other day a guy came to me and he said, “There used to be a project over at that Center and now I always see that it's closed”. And I said, “What are you going to do?” And he said, “I don't know, I wanted to learn about that but not any more”. It's so easy to say to the community that there's no resources any more....

However, at the same time that Polo believes, in principle, in the idea that commitments to social service and civic engagement should transcend funding, he recognizes, how critical funding is to get things moving and keep them moving. He points to the huge influx of federal funding for ESL/civics instruction after passage of IRCA as a case in point. It was this funding which supported the rapid development of a range of pro-immigrant community-based organizations, including those which served as the “recruitment networks” which engaged Polo, as a recent immigrant to California, in using his communication and analytic skills to help other immigrants.

In many respects, Polo's first experiences as a community activist in California were akin to his experiences as a teenage activist in the Prepa Popular movement in Mexico. He describes

¹²⁴ The best example I have seen of processes to overcome educational barriers to participation in strategic planning was a workshop conducted for Mixtec civic activists working with the Frente Indígena Oaxaqueño Binacional/Centro Binacional Para el Desarrollo Indígena Oaxaqueño by a facilitator who spoke Spanish as his native language, who worked very slowly and with user-friendly graphics to engage participants. Similar approaches have been used by the Pan Valley Institute in facilitating group meetings.

the post-IRCA period from 1988-1990 when he began to work with Reedley Social Services and, later with One Stop Immigration as exciting ones.¹²⁵ The funding base for English-language and literacy instruction for immigrants sparked widespread interest in expanding adult learning opportunities to become more multi-dimensional ones—venues for theater, music. Polo, for example, remembers starting a baseball league and recognizing that even such recreational programs could provide a platform, a locus to start building a sense of informal community talk and new personal connections within frayed migrant networks.

Building outward from the core curriculum of English/literacy provided a clear-cut way to create the sorts of “civic hot spots” where immigrant civic engagement would emerge naturally—by providing an infrastructure for social networking. Polo remembers visualizing the SLIAG-funded ESL classes as opportunities to identify community activists and find out who had leadership skills. The experience contributed to his own development as an effective civic activist by providing him opportunities to know a range of local people in the communities around—Parlier, Orange Cove, Sanger, Madera, Hanford. By virtue of his ideological commitment to populism and inclusiveness, during the time when he was an adult education *promotor*, Polo rapidly added to his inventory of “bridging” social capital—the personal relationships which provide the knowledge, mutual trust, and practical teamwork skills to work effectively in a collaborative civic endeavor.

However, in the California context, poverty amidst prosperity, even within the immigrant community, funding was needed to maintain momentum. And, in fact, the evidence was clear that the federal SLIAG funding was needed to drive community collaboration. As the brief but intense period of federal funding for ESL and literacy classes ended in the early 1990’s, community groups such as One Stop Immigration could not maintain their levels of operations. When these community-based organizations attempted to get local school districts which received regular adult education support from the state general fund to allocate funding to maintain the program services their former community-based partners had collaborated with them in providing, technical reasons were soon found to argue that such partnership arrangements would be infeasible. When confronted with the prospects of an open “market-driven” system for delivering adult education services, the K-12 schools districts which are charged, in California, with the mandate to provide adult education services, uniformly decided that public sector monopoly was a more important goal than effective service *per se*.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ The provisions of IRCA allocated substantial amounts of federal impact assistance (SLIAG) funding to states and local communities where large numbers of immigrant had achieved legal status. The provisions of the law required legalized immigrants to demonstrate they had enrolled in ESL courses. This gave rise to an explosion in level of services and diversity of service providers.

¹²⁶ Here too, debate about alternative service delivery system models hinged on the mythology of professionalism as K-12 schools asserted that their “certified” instructors were more effective than those working for community-based organizations. In actuality, both types of organization drew on the same pool of labor and there was little evidence that the sort of training which led to certification was actually correlated with instructional efficacy. The rigid instructional model necessitated by the K-12 organizational environment seriously impeded exploration and refinement of promising alternative models of instruction such as team teaching, combinations of instruction and mentoring/coaching, investments in counseling and guidance.

Faith-Based Organizations as a Fulcrum to Leverage Civic Participation

The dogma of church congregations as the paradigm of voluntary associational networks and potentially valuable community resources for leveraging civic activism cuts across the ideological spectrum—forming the basis for program designs espoused by groups on the left of the American political divide (e.g. the Industrial Areas Foundation affiliates) and the right of the divide (e.g. the Bush Administration).

There is, indeed, a substantial body of applied research that suggests that churches play an important role as “civic recruitment” networks which are the basis for community activism in the secular realm-- both in voluntary civic activities and in political action. However, it is not clear whether this research, like the research which relies on tabulations of memberships in formal organizations as an indicator of civic engagement, is flawed—at least with respect to the role of the Catholic church in the Mexican immigrant community in the Central Valley.¹²⁷

In the course of the past five years of discussions with immigrants to the Central Valley and in some aspects of Polo’s experience as a community activist, it seems that the same tensions between “authentic” ties to informal networks and formal guidelines governing their linkages to funders which secular “community-based” non-profit organizations must face, seriously constrain the Catholic church’s potential utility as an affiliational network which serves as the fulcrum to counter the power of the nation-state. The potential attractiveness of the church as a fulcrum for “building community”, transforming social capital into civic capital, is indubitable. Like the Mexican immigrant communities it serves, the Catholic church is transnational. In principle, the church is answerable only to moral principles and the cause of social justice. But, the church is, in actuality, both a spiritual and a secular institution and, like the community-based organizations, is experiencing difficulties in reconciling it’s role as an “authentic”, responsive populist affiliational network with its hierarchical, authoritarian organizational structure and its ambivalent role in secular, public, civic space—as a social service provider and advocacy organization.

Like most other pro-immigrant observers, Polo is impressed with the Catholic Church slogan, “No human being is illegal!” as a powerful example of language and moral conviction as a force in social, civic, and sociopolitical life. But he points also to the contradictions inherent in church-affiliated organizations’ practical efforts to augment voluntary mutual assistance with reliance on government funding within a social context where about half of the immigrant population are, in fact, illegal immigrants. The concrete example in his mind stemmed from an encounter he had while he still was on the staff of El Colegio Popular, an organization closely affiliated with the Catholic Church, and responsible for providing immigration counseling,

¹²⁷ In the course of ethnographic research in Arvin, it has become clear that evangelical Protestant churches are successfully filling a niche which was once monopolized by the Catholic church. In interview after interview we have heard from Latino immigrants that the evangelical churches’ more informal organizational structure, higher level of engagement with families in confronting crises of family life, and more extensive social activities are important in maintaining a sense of community.

I remember a time, and it's sad, this was around when Hurricane Mitch [had hit Honduras]. I went out to the waiting room and there were three young guys sitting there. I said, "What are you guys doing here?" And they said, "Well, they sent us from the church saying they couldn't help us...and I asked where they were from and it turns out they are two young Hondurans and a Mexican....so as I tried to get the information out of them [to help deal with their immigration problems]....he says, Well, the problem is we came in through Tijuana and the Border Patrol caught us and gave us an order to show up in court" So, it was a [voluntary] deportation order but, of course, they kept on going until they got here [to Fresno].

So they went to the cathedral to ask for help in getting to Michigan where they had relatives. But they told me, "Things are tough; there they gave us this piece of paper". And the piece of paper was a referral to Catholic Charities. But the problem is that to be eligible [for emergency assistance] you have to give them a social security number. So I said, "You're talking to the priest and telling him you came from Honduras and the first thing they ask you for is a social security number? That's where the contradictions arise. So, OK, no human being is illegal but the first thing they do in your case is see that you are illegal"..

.It was hard for them to deal with that shock. They're talking and one of the young men says, "Well I'm Catholic but one of my parents died there [in Honduras] and so I'm demoralized, sixty days of traveling, and no money, and nothing, and I go to the only place they can help me, and..." So I said, "Didn't they give you anything? Come on with us"...I figured it was going to be very difficult to help them. So I told them, "Well, you know it's hard to get to Michigan. You need a lot of money to get there. No one's going to give you travel money from here to Michigan. But at least while you're here, why don't you try to get some work?" So I went to Edwin Peraza [a fellow civic activist, very involved in the Catholic Church] and he had a friend in Corrales (Carruthers) and he talked to him. So we went there and he fed them and all I could do was give them a little bit of money....But the bad thing is they're young guys. And you lose that energy....I've seen lots of cases of young guys like that.

As Polo's account indicates, even as a church-affiliated organization, Catholic Charities is constrained in its ability to make unilateral, morally impeccable decisions about who to help when the funds used to provide help are provided by the nation-state, within the legal framework of its non-egalitarian policies. The concurrent reality is that immigrants' informal networks can, even in California, be responsive and flexible and draw down on social capital to help others in need. But while the resources of social capital in these networks is significant, they are outshadowed by the magnitude of need. Responding to economic crisis by drawing down on the social capital inherent in personal networks based on friendship, putting the stranded migrants in touch with an intermediary who would feed them and find them a bit of work shows the strengths and limitations of informal social networks.

These practical dilemmas about the relationship between immigration status and pro-immigrant organizations' interactions with their clientele are well-understood, albeit difficult to manage. But the point Polo raises in concluding his reflection is less commonly recognized, that the statutory limitations placed on organizational networks' ability to be responsive to the majority of Mexican and Central American immigrants who are illegal undermines the entire immigrant community's faith in these institutions. Similar federal statutory and regulatory restrictions are compromising the Central Valley Mexican immigrant community's trust in community-based organizations. A case in point is the situation of multi-service agencies funded by federal WIA 167 funds to provide training to migrant and seasonal farmworkers. While the constraints of the federal guidelines are real and inevitable, the reality is that less than half of the current farmworker population has legal status.

Inevitably, farmworker community ties to these organizations, despite their long history in the community, is weakened. And, just as inevitably, their organizational priorities, while tempered with altruism and civic concern, are driven by funding and funders' performance-related expectations.

The sub-text of Polo's story of his encounter with the trio of undocumented young men is that it saps not only their faith the power of their own immigrant-oriented institutions such as the Catholic Church but, also, Polo's. The "loss of energy" of the young men is a threat to Polo's own unflinching devotion to community involvement. At another point in our conversation, talking about an occasion when he had to tell an older couple he was counseling on immigration issue that they would need to leave the country he reflects, "It's difficult when I find words of defeat coming out of my own mouth...it's sad!". Polo's antidote to this dynamic, here manifested in his reflections on his own communication with clients, is not to deny the power of language but to reaffirm it, using language as a weapon in the immigrant community's struggle against the nation-state's intervention in the social lives of immigrants who, after all, were "invited" to settle in California—drawn by promises of work.

Summary Reflections

Polo's case reminds us that the over-arching process of immigration driving social and civic change in Central Valley communities is one of mutual adaptation. Strategies to assist Mexican immigrants in dealing with the "official" institutions and processes imposed by the nation-state on the communities where the majority of residents are immigrants and their children are crucial. But they must be accompanied by a "balancing investment" in helping civic institutions adapt to the rapid pace of change.

This process is, of course, underway, coming about, in part, "naturally" as mainstream institutions hire immigrants and incorporate them into organizational processes. However, institutional evolution is not moving as rapidly as it must if it is to take advantage of the sorts of human and social capital available in even economically disadvantaged communities. Although Polo is highly visible in the community in which he lives—as a pro-immigrant advocate and community activist—he is "invisible" as an institutional resource for advancing community change, in large measure due to local institutions' lack of curiosity about plumbing the depths of the immigrant community or in exploring the social ecology of a Spanish-speaking population. That lack of curiosity, as noted above, stems in part from the peculiar societal arrogance of developed countries such as the U.S. in believing that mainstream processes of developing and certifying expertise can extend into the realm of a community social ecology which is a new "borderlands"—different from the mainstream in either Mexico or in the U.S.

While mainstream public institutions deserve criticism for their tepid and narrowly-conceptualized responses to the challenge of facilitating immigrant social and civic integration, Polo's story also points to the need for pro-immigrant organizations to become more committed to the nominal ideal of participatory democracy. Ideally, civic engagement would allow for presentation of immigrants' perspectives and mental models of promising solutions to community problems. But the unfortunate reality is that, in the quasi-market of social policy dialogue, there is little demand for "bottom-up" involvement. Mainstream civic

and political institutions are more comfortable with advocates presenting them with “standard” products, legislative or regulatory proposal crafted to respond to gaps in the fabric of social policy than they are with requests or demands which “don’t fit in”, which reflect different cultural perspectives or concepts of the “right” process for addressing social and community problems. In order to fully draw upon the ample resources of human and social capital, the “community-based” and immigrant advocacy organizations, like their mainstream counterparts, will need to give greater attention to their role as mediators of two-way information flow.

In the next chapter, I turn to the processes through which Mexican immigrants who, like Polo, whose migration has taken them far from their “native” social and civic environment proceed to re-discover their individual and social identity, work collaboratively to affirm that identity, and by so doing, amplify their collective “voice” so as to be heard—by other immigrants, by native-born community residents, and by established civic and political institutions.

Chapter 5

Individual and Social Identity: The Fulcrum for Civic Engagement

Overview

A central challenge facing Mexican immigrants to California is to re-discover and re-assert who they are in the new world in which they find themselves. Individuals', families', and social groups' identities are not, in any sense, inherent or immutable; they are, instead, created, or at least shaped, in the course of negotiating one's relationship with others in one's social universe. This process which permeates immigrants' lives, is also, a key strand in their efforts to move from civic isolation to active engagement. This means that an analysis which reduces the challenge of developing immigrants' civic participation to the task of teaching them "how we do things in America", i.e. cross-cultural training about "the system", fails to capture some of the important dimensions of the process. Developing local, culturally competent civic skills is, indeed, part of what needs to be done, but this process is inextricably intertwined with the task of asserting who one is, where one is going, and how to move forward in navigating the complexities of civic life.

It is difficult to find the ideal term to refer to the complex process of establishing and asserting one's identity—as an individual or as part of a group. This process, referred to by some as "constructing" a social reality is, indeed, personal and self-initiated but, at the same time, it is dynamic, interactive, and in part, reactive. The mirror in which an immigrant sees his or her identity is, in part defined by the community in which he or she lives and, within that community, his or her social networks. Farmworker's ambivalence as to whether their identity can really be reduced to life as *braceros*, working machines, or, whether there is more to life than that is inevitable. Mexican immigrants' ambivalence expressed by as to whether they should be left out of the decennial census and remain statistically invisible because they "don't belong", is equally predictable. However, effective civic engagement implies an identity—a perspective, hopes, dreams, ideals, a personal style. One's personal identity, or one's social identity as a member of an informal or formal group is the fulcrum for social interaction and, thus, for civic participation.

The process of defining and asserting one's identity is a lifelong one and it is fairly obvious that for most of us it is something of a struggle, a never-ending work in progress, punctuated with fitful starts, experiments, adjustments, and modulations. As Verba, Schlozman, and Brady point out, the process of developing civic skills is affected both by personal experience in informal settings and by learning experiences in formal educational settings. However, the Civic Voluntarism model tacitly assumes that the social context in which all of these learning experiences take place are the same one. This is not the case when it comes to immigrants. Because immigrants find themselves transitioning from one civic environment to another, the basic assumptions which govern our overall model of civic skills development do not hold true. Past experience, knowledge of civic processes, styles of communication, and understanding of how "civic systems" work must be adjusted to a new reality and the inferences which govern this "translation" involve much more than just "acquiring a new skills set"; they involve creating a new personal identity, a new social identity (i.e. *persona*), and developing a new "voice", that includes personal style and modes of communication.

At the level of community life, this dynamic process of re-invention is not simply a personal one but, also, one which may engage an entire family, an entire social network, or, an entire ethnic group (since ethnicity, by definition, refers to self-identification and network relationships). We focus on two particular cases, each of which exemplifies a more general challenge relating of immigrants' adaptation to California society and development of civic activism.

My analysis highlights the experiences and reflections of two quite different immigrant civic activists. One is Jorge San Juan, a young Mixteco construction worker who is also the volunteer coordinator of a Mixtec cultural group Se'e'Saavi, and a member of the Board of Directors of a community-based organization, the Centro Binacional para el Desarrollo Indigena Oaxaqueño (CBDIO). Jorge's story is relevant not simply to his individual development but to the more general challenge of Mixteco immigrants' re-assertion of their cultural, social, and political identity in a transnational civic space now referred to by some researchers as "Oaxacalifornia". The second of these community activists is Raquel Velasco, a middle-aged mother of two teenager daughters and a grown son, who was, for several years, the informal but charismatic unpaid leader of a group of immigrant activists seeking to secure affordable housing in Winters. Her story, too, transcends her personal struggle, to reflect on the challenges faced by Mexican women in negotiating new gender roles in the course of their life in California. Through these two civic activists' accounts of their experiences and perspectives, we explore both the process through which individual immigrants' re-invent their identity in the brave new world of California civic life and the process through which groups of immigrants engage in the process of creating or strengthening bonding social capital and deploying it within the arena of local civic life.

Both of these activists have been involved in the organizational activities of one, or several, of the organizations which the James Irvine Foundation funded as part of the Central Valley Partnership for Citizenship (CVP). However, it would not be accurate in any of these cases to say that their civic activism stemmed from or was "caused" by the CVP program intervention. The theme running through their stories is that the CVP-funded project with which they were involved advanced their civic activism but did not "create" their civic activism; their activism arose out of their autonomous involvement in asserting their own personal vision/identity, and in working within affiliational networks to help groups of immigrants assert their collective identity and achieve a defined set of objectives. The primary functional role of the civic promotion organization was to provide a venue, a context for coming together, combined with coaching about how to effectively navigate an unfamiliar, sociopolitical, and organizational environment.

Neither of these activists became civically involved out of a sense of duty. Nor did they become involved entirely out of self-interest. As we will see, there were surely important personal benefits accruing to both from their civic involvement. But these were not economic benefits; neither holds a job as a "community organizers". As they talked about their experiences, the theme we consistently heard was that self-actualization, seeking, pursuing, articulating, and implementing their "dreams" was a crucial element in what drove them to be involved. Their modes of civic engagement strongly suggest that traditional distinctions between "community leaders" and "civically-engaged citizens" have marginal utility in the context of Central Valley Mexican immigrant communities. Regular, active civic

participation seems to become de facto leadership within the most important domain of civic life, informal social networks. Jorge and Raquel are as good listeners as they are speakers. In articulating their perspectives, they are reflective and careful to consistently return to examination of their relationship to the groups to which they belong. Their sense of their civic participation as community activists and “grassroots leaders” resonates more with contemporary thinking about leadership roles than traditional images of “leaders” as persons who are widely or universally recognized as “movers and shakers” as a result of their family connections, position, affluence, or membership in a multitude of civic organizations. Their modes of civic engagement at once give hope for a revitalized sense of rural populism and give pause in considering the challenges in strategic efforts to mobilize established mainstream non-profit organizations towards community leadership development.

Ethnic Identity, Community Identity, and the Deployment of Social Capital—The Context of Mixtec Civic Participation

The efforts of Mixtec immigrants to California to affirm a sense of community and develop widespread civic engagement deserve special attention as part of efforts to understand the implications of immigrant diversity for building immigrant civic participation in California. The Mixtec experience is important—because they are the largest ethnic minority among Mexican immigrants to California, because they have been aggressive and creative in their efforts to explore ways to sustain community life within the context of a spatially fragmented “virtual communities”, and because they have extensive experiencing in translating social capital into tangible community development (via the institution of the *tequio* and reliance on traditional processes of volunteer-based governance to address and resolve a wide range of community problems).

The Mixtecos, known from the time of the Spanish conquest as the people of the Land of Clouds, Nuñuma, have more than a millenium of struggle to assert their cultural and political identity. Mixtec culture and written history precedes the Gutenberg Bible by more than 500 years, with Mixtec documents from the time of the Conquest going back to the dynasty of a ruler 9-Wind-Stone-Skull, born in AD 692.¹²⁸ Mixtec culture precedes the Aztec southward migration from the southwestern area of the U.S. to the Valley of Mexico by more than half a millenium and is, or shares much in common with, one of the three great cultures of Mexico, the culture of Teotihuacan and Tollan (Tula) already invoked in the 16th century as the apex of classical Mesoamerican society and knowledge.¹²⁹ Mixtecos are, obviously, a resilient society, given centuries of resistance to centralized economic and political authority.

One reason why ethnic/cultural identity is so important to Mixtecos is that Mexico is, by no means, an egalitarian society. Despite an abundance of progressive rhetoric, Mexico has been as fragmented by racial/ethnic and class divisions as the U.S. has ever been. Mixtecos’ coherence as an ethnic group has been an important strategy for achieving the critical

¹²⁸ Fernando Benitez, “En el pais de las nubes”, Book 3, Vol. 3, **Los Indios de Mexico**, Siglo XXI, 1968. Benitez’s discussion of Mixtec culture in pre-Columbian times relies heavily on his interviews with a leading Mexican scholar, Alfonso Caso.

¹²⁹ Angel Maria Garibay K (Ed), **Historia General de las Cosas de Nueva España**, Editorial Porrúa, 1987.

political mass to advocate for cultural, social, and economic equity. The racial/ethnic divisions separating Mixteco from *mestizo* migrants did not evaporate as Mixtec migrants came to work in California farmwork. The class-based divisions in the agricultural workplace described in our analysis of the Bracero myth are, for Mixtecs and other indigenous immigrants, exacerbated by ethnic tensions (within a population defined arbitrarily by outside analysts as “racially homogeneous”).

More than 20 years ago, Filemon Lopez, then a young farmworker and Mixtec community activist, shocked a gathering of progressive foundation staffers who asked about the relationship between a grassroots organization he had founded, the Asociacion Civica Benito Juarez, and the UFW, by noting that he and his fellow workers did not feel the UFW could or would represent their interests because they were *mestizos* and Norteños.¹³⁰ By the same token, Mixtecos still feel the need to assert their ethnic identity. And this need is by no means a purely subjective need. Two decades after Filemon Lopez articulated what was then a politically-incorrect view about the need for and cultural responsiveness to diversity among Mexican immigrant farmworkers, a variety of community organizations and service delivery systems continue to overlook the fact that hiring Spanish-speaking staff is not all that is needed to create responsive, culturally-competent community institutions. Now, as then, the de facto perception persists in some sectors of the social service delivery system that interactions which force Mixtecos into reliance on their second language are “good enough” to get by.¹³¹

Another important reason why Mixteco efforts to strengthen “bonding” social capital is so important to Mixtecos themselves and to all of us is that Mixtecs’ recent history as migrants, the “Mixtec diaspora” as University of Southern California researcher, Gaspar Rivera-Salgado refers to it, is that Mixtec “social technology” has the potential of providing valuable insights for promoting and sustaining civic engagement in the context of 21st century global society where geographic proximity means less and less and virtual affinity networks mean more and more. Cultural identity is an invaluable framework for maintaining group cohesiveness but, at the same time, Mixtec social processes exhibit a remarkable openness to pragmatic innovation. Researchers Michael Kearney and Federico Besserer have described in some detail, for example, how villages such as San Juan Mixtepec are re-inventing community processes to cope with: a) transnational migration as an ongoing process which separates families as pioneer male migrants travel north leaving women behind and b) the parallel lives of the original sending community and a network of “daughter communities”—in Mexico and in the U.S. (Kearney 1995; Besserer 1998; Kearney and Besserer 2002).

Besserer, whose research has focused on the community of San Juan Mixtepec in the Mixteca Alta, presents two alternative perspectives on transnational citizenship as the consequence of community economic strategies based on migration— his own view that

¹³⁰ This event, a special event convened by Sandy Close of the Pacific News Service in 1983, included a wide range of grassroots Mixtec community leaders and activists, several of whom continue to be involved in a wide range of activities

¹³¹ However an excellent step forward has been made by development of national guidelines. See the Office of Minority Health , U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, “National Standards for Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services in Health Care,” March, 2001.

transnational civic space is proactively created by migrants and the alternative view that transnational civic consciousness is the result of nation-building and migrant-receiving countries' exclusion of migrants.

Both perspectives have merit—in that each highlights important aspects of the overall sociopolitical reality. However, Mixtecos' own sense of community as a series of “virtual neighborhoods” within a very large migrant circuit is that their creation of continent-spanning affiliational networks is, indeed, an important cultural/civic achievement, a community resource maintained by language and ties among *paisanos*. Here is how the phenomenon is described by Filemon Lopez, originally a migrant farmworker from San Juan Mixtepec, who, as well as being a long-time civic activist is the radio host of the popular Hora Mixteca on Satellite Radio Bilingue,

I think that what's going on here, the advantage we have as Mixtecos, is a tradition of being very much together, communicating a lot among people. The people who live here in Lamont, [CA], in Kerman, [CA], or in Washington are in touch with people in North Carolina....A Mixteco, after leaving his village, especially if he's financially marginalized, is in touch wherever he goes. He knows what's going on. We don't tend to set ourselves apart. People who do are different, they become mayordomos or farm labor contractors, or take advantage of others and, then, they make money and once they have money they don't care any more. In contrast, we think about the problems that affect us as migrants—housing, labor rights, pesticides—but we also think about our communities' development. So there are two reasons, two linked concerns—how to better our lives here and how we can make use of our earnings—for electrification, potable water, schools, collaboration. There are things we have to do there and also here too....

It deserves note that Filemon's description of how Mixtecos' proactive creation of what are essentially “network communities” (from which individuals can exile themselves if they make too much money and decide to abandon their community identity and membership) is quite consistent with a more theoretical formulation articulated by a fellow migrant from San Juan Mixtepec, Gregorio Santiago (a radio host like Filemon but based in the San Quintin area of Baja California). Besserer quotes Santiago as follows:

Traveling is part of the particular ways of life [plural in the original] of us the people of the Ñuusavi world. We have become people who are in perpetual movement. Such is the case of those of us who have come to live permanently in the working camps in the Valley of San Quintin. It's a matter of our everyday life to change from being a ã Nuusavi (“a person of the people of the rain”) to become a Tacu Ndavi (literally “poor person” or “migrant”).

As Besserer, Rivera-Salgado, Kearney, Stephen, and others note, then, Mixtec strategies for establishing affiliational networks and sustaining community identity are recognized as a valuable item in an ethnic inventory of social capital. At the same time, the value of this intangible store of “goods”, Mixtec language and traditions is seen as contrasting sharply with economic value. Having money breaks a migrant off from his or her fellow community members.

A key strategic concern then becomes whether this inventory of social capital can: a) be maintained in the hostile conditions of California life, b) whether it can be readily drawn down upon in collectively addressing the issues central to civic life in California, and c) how

Mixteco's creation of their own transnational civic space might play out in terms of relationships to the civic space of the established domains "owned" by the civil authorities of local communities, states, and nation-states.

Se'e'Savi--Recreating Mixtec Identity in California

On a warm Saturday afternoon in May, 2003, in the balloon-festooned backyard of a suburban home in Madera, a small group of four young Mixteco men changed out of their street clothes, blue jeans, T-shirts, and sunglasses, into their dance clothes, spurs, chaps, cowboy jackets, cowboy hats, and masks. These young men are from Se'e'Savi, a group which had been formed slightly less than a year before to engage young adults and youth in affirming their cultural heritage. The dance they performed at this event is "Los Rubios", a dance which is, in a sense, a form of historical narrative. As the young men put on the ceremonial dance masks (and accompanying bandannas which hide their black hair) they immediately become transformed into old men. Of the masks they put on, two had been made by traditional craftsmen in the Juxtlahuaca area but two have been made in Madera—by a farmworker who now lives in Madera.

After some logistic problems in setting up an audiocassette (solved by bringing a pickup truck with 50-watt amplifier up the driveway to play the music) the dancers begin to dance and dust rises up as "Los Rubios" is re-created in California in celebration of the first communion of Marcos, an 11 year-old boy who is himself one of the members of Se'e'Savi. As the dance progresses and kicked-up dust drifts up in the course of dance, reminding the celebrants of the cattle drives, two young boys join in enthusiastically. This is not a "performance" or a "presentation". It is recreation of Mixtec culture, a reaffirmation of Mixtec identity in California.

The young dancers' enthusiasm, the boy's eager willingness to join in the dancing suggests that despite the incongruities (e.g. the fact that the traditional dance is being videotaped by three of the Mixtec families in the backyard, despite the blue-and-white helium-filled party balloons), what is going on is really an integral part of the life of a "virtual community". There is further evidence of the robustness of the effort to re-create, preserve, affirm Mixtec culture in that a number of the people in the Madera backyard have driven 3 hours from Santa Maria to the event and are talking about local efforts in this sister community of Mixtec Oaxacalifornia to establish a dance group.

The Madera backyard cameo described above as illustrative of Mixtec cultural revival is put forward as a concrete image of the ways in which it is possible, in a material world permeated with SUV's, hot dogs, and credit cards, to sustain a cultural tradition which is now in its 2nd millenium. The outcome of the contest is, indeed, very much in doubt. For example, Marcos, the center of the celebration, who will enter middle school next year remains bilingual—in Spanish and English. Asked about whether he speaks Mixtec still, he says, "I understand of some of the things they [parents, sisters, relatives] say to me...and I'd like to learn it better".

The Genesis of Se'e'Savi

A persistent issue in considering strategies for catalyzing immigrant civic participation is how the process gets started. One possibility is that an external “community organizing” group must, like some *deus ex machina*, appear on stage to get things going. To some extent, this may be true. But there are probably significant trade-offs—as community organizing groups, like all organizations, themselves have “corporate cultures”. To what extent will there be an inevitable culture clash? What happens when an organizational culture which has, perhaps 30-40 years of history comes up against a Mixteco social technology which has existed and evolved for 1,400 years?

In some respects, the primary thrust of our entire effort in the current inquiry has been to better understand this issue, how it is that efforts to build bonding social get started in the first place, how small social networks are formed and how they grow--more or less the microcosmic processes of civic life in immigrant communities. The general answer that, at least in the case of Mexican immigrants, individual's linkages to family members, extended family networks, village networks, and *paisanos* are ready-made structures which, inevitably, bring individuals together in collective action, is a partial explanation of the genesis of bonding social capital. In a parallel way, the analysis in the previous section of this report, of the Bracero mythology and the agricultural workplace as the genesis of bridging social capital provides additional insight into the dynamics of civic life in immigrant communities. Jorge San Juan's reflections about how he came to be involved as a civic activist provides another piece of the puzzle—an understanding of why.

Jorge came north on his own, “out of necessity”, coming as a teenage migrant, right after his 17th birthday, to work in the California fields. He summarizes his time in the U.S. as follows,

Now I've been here for 10 years. I came while I was still a minor. It was hard for me. When I tried to go to work, they'd say, "Go home, go to school!" But there wasn't anyone to support me, to feed me, to put a roof over my head. Like they say, it was like using your fingernails to eat meat. I'd work for 2-3 days a week—because they realized they were breaking the law by hiring me. So I had to go to work in farmwork.

Life was not just economically hard, it was personally hard. He says later,

It was very tough at times. I think solitude was what made me fall down and what made it possible for me to get up again, recuperate. I think I'm lucky because I didn't let myself fall too far. And when I got myself together again I remembered my parents' words. If I hadn't done that, I might have ended up as a drug addict, or as a drunk sleeping in the streets

In one of his recent poems, “Se Quien Soy”¹³² (“I Know Who I Am”) Jorge describes in even more depth, his experiences as a migrant teenager, and how they gave rise to his current involvement as a Mixtec community activist,

....The change was very drastic from one day walking in my homeland and, then another day in a place I hadn't known. It was like a dream or really more like a nightmare because I couldn't believe my eyes and my ears. For the first time I understood the word “RACISM” and saw how they humiliated my people, and I

¹³² El Tequio: La Voz Binacional del FIOB, November-December, 2002.

couldn't do anything because I had a knot in my throat and my heart was destroying me with those words which wounded me. That kept echoing in my ears and demeaned me but I wouldn't accept any of it and I said, "Why such insults if we're all humans one like another, if the same blood runs through everyone's veins?" I was still in my own country and I felt like a stranger. What happened to that phrase "SOVEREIGN AND FREE" and at that instant I thought a madman from an insane asylum had said those words. I never thought that some day all I had learned would get confused in my mind. Where had that white god who gave one love and peace, in whose eyes we were all equal, been left behind? Why wasn't he there to defend my people?

There were so many unanswerable questions that maybe it was because of that and to avoid any more humiliation that I denied my people, my origins, but time and distance change things. One day, lost in the streets some voices made me react, it was the echo of my parents and grandparents who through Mixtec words could give me, when finally I came to value my Oaxacan land. I looked at the sky and those stars which were there with me every night guarding me while I slept and I asked their forgiveness because I never valued them when I was little. I closed my eyes and cried out and asked my mother to forgive me for the times I'd denied my people, my land, my origins. I understood and began to value the richness that ran through my veins, the cultural worth of my language Mixteco. Today I proudly am a Mixtec Indian, lonely for my family and even though I'm not with my parents I carry them always in my heart and I'll pray to the God Sun and the God Moon for them.

For Jorge San Juan, then, his volunteer work coordinating Se'e'Savi is a crucial part of life, shield against loneliness, connection family. In talking about how he feels about the work he is doing with the group he says,

Needing to have a family is what got me started at working with the group...What gets me excited are my parents' words, and through them [the group] I find a family I can't have with me right now. Jokingly I'll sometimes say, "I have 40 children" and then, "No, I have 40 brothers and sisters". Every week I wait to see them. That's what motivates me. We're all a family. If someone leaves it's like breaking the ties which join us together.

This account is, on the one hand, uniquely Jorge's story but it is, at the same time, an experience shared by many others. Cecilia Falicov, writing from the perspective of a family therapist, makes a valuable contribution to understanding the true dimensions of the experience of migration itself as part of immigrants' formative experiences and subsequent perspectives on social and civic life.¹³³ Falicov sees migration as being an experience of "ambiguous loss" because the separation is similar to the grief and mourning of irrevocable loss such as death but different in that reunion is possible. The idea of the U.S.-Mexico border as a divide as extreme as the break between life/death is not an exaggeration. Family life is ripped apart as Jorge San Juan's poem states so forcefully. Talking with an undocumented Mixteca community activist in 2002 about her impending return to Putla, Oaxaca for her daughter's *quinceañera*, I was reminded that her decision to celebrate this important rite of passage in her daughter's life might mean permanent separation from her teenage son who lived with her in northern California. We should, then, see Jorge's experience as being as much an archtypical one as that of the Braceros. Falicov observes that, clinically, ambiguous loss can give rise to the construction of a binational identity, or

¹³³ Cecilia Jaes Falicov, "Ambiguous Loss: Risk and Resilience in Latino Immigrant Families", in Marcelo Suarez-Orozco and Mariela Paez, **Latinos: Remaking America**, University of California Press, 2002.

alternatively, a sense of not belonging in either place. Jorge San Juan's experience of falling apart, dissolution, and recovery, remembering and relying on his parents' words, and finally affirming his cultural identity may be an extreme case but not an idiosyncratic one, much closer to a universal one. Both from his own perspective, and within the context of Falicov's theoretical framework, Jorge's proactive approach to finding personal fulfillment is one of constructing a binational identity, not just surviving but prevailing. Asked about his future plans/directions, Jorge said,

First I need to learn English, and aside from English, bring my culture with me wherever I can. When I feel my culture is strong, and I see how strong it is here in the Valley, I'll move on to another county, maybe another state, to do the same as I have, so my culture will go on expanding—so they don't just say, Fresno, so they don't just say California—so, in other states, perhaps throughout the U.S., my culture will go on expanding there too. That's the future I want—for myself and for my community.

Mixtec ingenuity and flexibility may, as Besserer suggests, make it possible for Mixtecos to construct a transnational community which rivals the nation-state in terms of civic space. But whether or not the nation-state is a dying type of social entity, it still has the power to inflict on migrants deep, personal pain. The emergence of groups such as Se'e'Savi, and the functional role it plays in the lives of the community activist who pushed so hard for it, in the lives of his fellow volunteer-activists, in the lives of Mixtec parents and their children, suggests that such efforts may be crucial tools in the "toolbox" of social technology to foster immigrant civic participation. The theme which runs through the experiences of all is "continuity"—for Jorge, connection/continuity with family and community, and for intact Mixtec families settled in Fresno and Madera counties, inter-generational continuity to keep 1st and 2nd generations of immigrants from losing touch with each other and their community. But assertion of cultural identity, transnational continuity, and strengthening of bonding social capital, can also impact civic life in general.

Se'e'savi's First Public Appearance—from Cultural Identity to Civic Presence in Arvin

Se'e'Savi is a new and fragile initiative. Informal talk about organizing this sort of group began in the early spring of 2002, continued for several months. The volunteer organizers scrambled for audiocassettes with the music for traditional dances, parents and community members began to try to remember hometown dance celebrations which some had not seen for years. The process was one of re-creation, not "maintenance" because, in truth, traditional community "funds of knowledge" about dance had been seriously eroded. During its first 6 months of development this effort, which took place under the aegis of the Centro Binacional de Desarrollo Indígena Oaxaqueño (which, however, had no budget or available funds to support it) probably went forward with less than \$500 in small donations and in-kind contributions (e.g. for gas to take youth to the first few events), loaned costumes (from a Oaxacan dance group in Los Angeles). At that point, 10-15 parents and 10-20 youth were involved, although the group has grown in the past year to have 40 or so youth and about 20 parents.

I was fortunate to be able to observe how, even at its first public appearance, the Se'e'savi group made a subtle contribution to the development Mixtec civic life in the California

sociopolitical arena. This first appearance was to celebrate the festival day of San Juan Mixtepec in Arvin (where many Mixtecos from this town and its surrounding *municipio* live) in late June, 2002.¹³⁴ This was itself something of a historic event because it was the first occasion in which San Juan Mixtepec's festival day had ever been celebrated in California. There had been, inevitably, much discussion about where this event should take place—a discussion eventually settled by general agreement that, in future years, the festival day should be celebrated in Santa Maria or Fresno where many in the village network also live.

The celebration took place in a newly refurbished Adobe Plaza in Arvin, the jewel in the crown of the town's new economic development plan—a combined community center/small-business incubator. It was an important community event—seen politically as an important opportunity to demonstrate that the several hundred thousand dollars spent on this public works project actually did have value “for the community”

The picture is very similar to that seen in summer events throughout rural America. There are perhaps 30-40 families, about 150 people in a semi-circle of folding chairs on a green lawn—some of them Mixteco families, some *mestizos*, Jaliscienses, Guanajuatenses, some Tejano/as from earlier waves of migrant farmworkers who came to Arvin. Children are playing. Announcements are made. Mixtec women are selling chicken *mole* and *clayudas*¹³⁵ under an awning to one side.

After the five couples--some of them teenagers or young adults, some parents in their 40's--who make up the core group of Se'e'savi danced, there was a public dance competition of *chilenas*, a popular Oaxacan music/dance style. As one would hope and expect in any such event, the dance contest winners include an older Mixtec couple who dance beautifully but sedately, the young couple who are really the most spectacular dancers, and an 8-year old Mixtec boy who had enthusiastically danced the *chilenas* on his own. The MC, of course, decides to wind up the prize-giving with a “special” award--\$10 dollars—and a few questions for the boy. The boy's answer to the final question (in Spanish), “*Vives aqui en Arvin?*” is emphatically “Yes!” (in English) much to the amusement of the entire crowd.¹³⁶

After Se'e'Savi's presentation, and the dance contest, the Arvin's mayor, Juan Jose Olivares makes a speech to the crowd, in which he congratulates the festival organizers for the great job they have done in putting the event together. He goes on to commend Se'e'savi for their beautiful dancing and reiterate his excitement at having the opportunity to join with immigrants from San Juan Mixtepec in celebrating this very important event. And, of course, the mayor takes the opportunity to note that it was he who had pushed for the new Adobe Plaza complex where the event is being held and that events such as the San Juan Mixtepec festival make all the work worthwhile. The mayor's speech is absolutely within the mainstream of small-town civic life in America—except for the fact that the mayor is seeking to survive a recall (popularly seen as being motivated by anti-Mexican sentiment) and

¹³⁴ More correctly, Nuu'savi, as San Juan is a Hispanic overlay, the name of the town's patron saint, St. John the Baptist, and an earlier Aztec overlay—Mixtepec, i.e. “the place where Mixtecs live”.

¹³⁵ A traditional type of Oaxacan tortilla.

¹³⁶ The Master of Ceremonies who is now living in California is well-known as he was formerly a bilingual (Mixtec-Spanish) radio announcer in Ensenada, Baja California. Not surprisingly, his Mixtec is excellent.

the fact that a substantial portion of the virtual community of San Juan Mixtepec in Arvin, California are ineligible to vote.

The celebration of San Juan Mixtepec's patron saint day and Se'e'savi's role in creating a "critical mass" for the celebration are, arguably, small "blips on the radar screen" in the immense panorama of transformations of civic life in California. However, these sorts of "micro-initiatives" may well be the sort of "small things which make a big difference" as social analyst Malcolm Gladwell puts it.

On August 15, 2002, six weeks after the San Juan Mixtepec celebration, a special election to recall Mayor Olivares was held. The election generated great regional interest, in part, due to the stark conflict between the demographics of the community (88% of Arvin's population is of Hispanic origin, 10% White Non-Hispanic) and of the electorate (with a disproportionate representation of Anglo-American voters). The other element is that the mayor's main opponent, Joet Stoner, had based her campaign, in part, on allegations that Mayor Olivares was trying to drive Whites out of town. Ultimately, Olivares survived the recall with a margin of 81 votes and the mayor remained in power.

What is interesting in this case is that, ultimately, about 70% of the votes in this racially-divisive election were cast by Latinos, and about 28% were cast by Anglos, the remaining 2% by African-American or Asian voters.¹³⁷ In actuality, the balance of political power in the community was held by Hispanic-origin voters (despite the disproportionate representation of Anglo voters), and it is quite conceivable that support for Olivares from the few Mixtec residents who were citizens and eligible to vote might have resulted in the crucial handful of votes the mayor needed to remain in office.

The outcome of this election, in turn, shifted the City Council from a raucous, squabbling, dysfunctional entity which had been addicted to 3-2 votes accompanied with personal invective into a collaborative body which has now at least found common ground in efforts (which may or may not be successful) to improve community life in Arvin.¹³⁸ Whether or not, Se'e'savi's Arvin presentation might have been an instance of the phenomenon whimsically referred to in writing on chaos theory as "the butterfly stamping its foot and turning the universe upside-down" is unknowable. What is knowable, in terms of civic life, and political responsiveness is that the mayor of Arvin and the Arvin City Council consider Mixtecos to be an important constituency—even though most cannot vote. Disenfranchised or not, they are visible in community civic life due to Se'e'Savi's efforts, along with those of

¹³⁷ Two ethnographers from Ed Kissam's "New Pluralism" project, Anna Garcia and Aline Doignon, observed the voting at 2 of the 4 polling places and tabulated the ethnicity of 735 voters—slightly more than half of the Arvin electorate.

¹³⁸ Interestingly, in a political conflict described by newspapers, Kern County political observers, and, sometimes, by local politicians themselves, as a struggle of ethnic politics, one of the new City Council members working closely with the council's Latino majority is African-American. Arvin has significant stores of "bridging" social capital as evidenced by cross-ethnic political allegiances in which sub-groups of Latinos and Whites are closely allied in opposition to the current Latino majority on the council.

local Mixteco community workers, Fausto Sanchez and Hector Hernandez from the CRLA Arvin office.¹³⁹

Outward-moving Ripples—The Maskmaker and Onward to Civic Participation

Efforts such as Se'e'Savi have the potential of generating ripples which move outward from the group of parents and children throughout loosely-organized networks of Mixtecos--perhaps even igniting a "social epidemic". A clear-cut direct objective of the Se'e'savi dance group is cultural continuity, engaging Mixtec children growing up in the cultural world of their parents and the virtual, transnational "network community" of Mixtecos.

A more tangential and, perhaps, equally valuable impact is to strengthen parents' and other Mixtec adults' participation in, engagement in their virtual community. Jorge San Juan considers this an important part of the effort and is excited by what he sees as immediate results. Here is how he describes what happens at the weekly rehearsals/gatherings of the group of parents and youth and why it is important,

Many farmworkers get done in from fieldwork...there's no chance to even talk to their children...Even though they're here with their wives and children, not all their family is here...When we get together it's like a big family—yelling, smiling, joking, everything. So they get excited also about showing up—even if there's not been time to take a bath or eat, they go straight to the rehearsals. It's fun, there's an atmosphere of tranquility and I think their exhaustion evaporates...¹⁴⁰

The process leading up to Se'e'savi's re-creation of the "Los Rubios" dance in California presents another example of how "small things can make a big difference". In order to perform "Los Rubios" Se'e'Savi needed to have four masks. These are fairly small, hand-carved masks, painted with lacquer paint. They are a crucial part of the stagecraft of transforming young men into the dance's image of mature men celebrating their return from the month-long trek driving cattle from the highlands of the Mixteca Alta to the Pacific Coast. Jorge San Juan tells of his interaction with the maskmaker as follows:

He was distant—from his neighbors, even from his own family. When he got involved with the group everything changed...Now he's laughing all the time...We needed the masks for the dance, and he said, "I can make them, but the problem is I don't have any tools". So I told him, "That's not a problem" so he explained "I've been looking around here for the kind of trees you use to make the masks and finally I found them, but they're by the river. So I can't use an electric saw with a cord". So we bought him a little chain saw with a gas motor. So he cut some tree limbs and took them home. He's told us he now has finished 3 masks and that he's willing to make more".

¹³⁹ Fausto Sanchez, a former farmworker, has been extensively engaged in building "bridging" capital via events such as a local library presentation co-sponsored by FIOB/CBDIO on Mixtec culture. However, Fausto and his family are also maintaining their cross-border ties to the extended Mixtec community. On the most recent occasion when I talked with Fausto, he and his wife had just returned from a round trip, 12 hours or so of driving, to take donations of clothing to a Mixtec labor camp in the San Quintin area.

¹⁴⁰ This term (*tranquilidad*) in Spanish also conveys a sense of calmness, freedom from anxiety, worry. Thus exuberance and tranquility are not contradictory emotions.

So Se'e'Savi has been, in that regard at the very least, an example of the "Cultura Cura" sort of program design. But Jorge goes on to share his thinking about the next steps in building outward and upward from the mask maker's involvement in the group, saying,

I'd like to find an opportunity to help him more—to have an exhibition of his masks. He's a farmworker who works in the fields and I want people to know that he's [also] an artisan, that he makes art. And more of the youth have gotten excited about this...I'm going to talk with him and, if he has the time, say to the youth, here we have an in-house artist, this is how he works, and hopefully he can teach the youth how to do this sort of artisanry.

Jorge is clear that the cultural affirmation is not an end in itself but a first step in building the bonding social capital which will provide the foundation for building a sense of community. While the Mixteco community may be a virtual one emerging from the framework of extended family and village networks, there must be an actual locus for community life—the Friday nights which bring tired, hard-working parents together with others and their children. He sees the next step toward full-fledged civic participation as a necessary one and he sees it as being based on self-expression and oriented toward "making a mark" on community life. He contrasts Se'e'Savi's efforts to build civic participation with more frankly political ones as follows,

Civic participation is a duty. It's when we start to work together, to talk, and to listen. Before, I wasn't involved in anything and I'd say this law they're passing doesn't matter to me, I don't have time, I'm tired from work...But there are good opportunities which get lost...If there's a law that's negatively affecting me, of course I'll oppose it..[But]...many people think that civic participation is to complain, to file suits, about laws, about bad things, but civic participation is also about positive things. I say to the youth, "Going out to clean the streets [a community service project suggested to the group by a girl who is a high school student] isn't having a demonstration, it's something positive. But I see all kinds of participation as positive, it makes changes...

So, in actuality, Jorge's vision of civic participation is not one which is opposed to civic activism, self-assertion, but, rather, one which strives, also, toward meaningful civic engagement, not just ceremonial participation. We go on to talk schools' role in civic education and the possibility that teachers may be worried about whether they are sanctioned to teach about active civic involvement. San Juan's impression of the situation is the following:

The reason they [teachers] are scared, like politicians is that they are afraid that these people who have gone along blindly will open their eyes. So if one started to organize, to build organizations and everyone in the community were to participate in them, they would think that it would lead to their downfall [su derrota]. What they're scared of—both teachers and politicians—is that we'll all take initiative, that we'll all talk, that we'll not just show up to sign a paper [to register] to vote and leave it at that, that we'll come to the point of expressing ourselves, and start yelling, saying "No, not that!" What would become of a teacher if a student shows up in their class and says, "Teacher, I don't like your class. You don't know how to teach!" If a youth becomes an activist and is given the chance to say how they feel, the teacher's not going to like it.

Jorge San Juan's recognition of the inevitable conflict between popular self-expression, the ideal vision of participatory democracy and hierarchical institutions of social control echoes, at a concrete and practical level, the more abstract efforts by researchers and academics to

understand the dynamics which give rise to the development of transnational ethnic communities such as those of Mixteco migrants. Within this context, the strategy of starting by strengthening bonding social capital as the basis for self-expression and moving on, using that accomplishment as the fulcrum to gain power to begin to act to advance one's goals makes total sense. At the same time, Jorge's recognition of the forces arrayed against this sort of exercise by immigrants (or other disadvantaged groups) of their collective "voice" is judicious.

A Resonant View—*Danza*/Cultural Revival as Workshop for Building Civic Skills

A discussion on a Mixtec-oriented public radio program "La Hora Mixteca" on March 30, 2003 provides yet additional insight into current Mixtec community leaders' thinking on the issue of how transnational migrant networks can give birth to "local" place-based institutions and how we should visualize civic responsibilities in a transnational community. Santiago Ventura, a well-known Mixtec community activist, originally from San Miguel Cuevas, who, after several years in Fresno, now lives and works in Oregon, explained to the radio host, Filemon Lopez, that he considered his return from Woodburn, Oregon to Fresno to dance in a traditional dance, "El Acharreo" to be an essential civic commitment—because the dance event was part of San Miguel Cuevas' first village celebration in California.¹⁴¹ This was interesting in its own right, because the celebration was a huge gathering, cars lined up along the road for almost half a mile. Also, if there is, indeed, a trend toward home villages' traditional celebrations in California and other parts of the U.S. this must also be seen as a shift in Mixtecos' thinking about the extent to which "community" is really a network phenomenon—whether "home" may indeed be where one has settled.

Ventura went on in his on-air remarks to argue an even more interesting proposition, that the teamwork required to organize such community celebrations has value not only as a contribution to maintaining and asserting Oaxacan village identity but, also, as a locus for dispersed migrants to learn how to work effectively in the context of long-distance collaboration. Not surprisingly, Filemon agreed enthusiastically, as did a range of listeners who called in to the show. At the same time, it was illuminating to find *La Hora Mixteca*, itself a vehicle for networking among Mixtecos (and other indigenous Mexican migrants), serving as the "virtual agora" for a range of Mixtecos from many village networks to voice their approval of the San Miguel Cuevas' decision for a California celebration.

A Woman's Story—From Mother to Civic Activist

Raquel Velasco, a fruit-processing plant employee in Winters, California, is, from a sociological perspective, a typical Mexican immigrant. From a personal perspective she is an extraordinary woman whose perspectives and civic involvement routinely transcend everyone's expectations. I met Raquel when I was introduced to her in 1998 by Sacramento Valley Organizing Community (SVOC) staff who told us she was a good example of the "community leaders" with whom they were working on housing issues. In this regard also, Raquel represents a paradigm, yes, but she is not "typical"

¹⁴¹ This celebration is on the feast day of the community's patron saint, St. Michael Archangel.

Raquel is a petite middle-aged mother of three. At the point we first met, her two daughters were still living at home, Raquel was working at the fruit-processing plant (sometimes on a split-shift schedule), and she was juggling the roles of full-time mother, full-time worker, and full-time community activist—advocating for low-income housing for Mexican immigrants to Winters (most of them, also, working at the fruit-processing plant) and serving as the driving force, inspiration, coordinator/whip, and reflective voice of the SVOC Winters immigrant activist group.

Raquel's story also reminds us of that community organizing projects and other programs designed to promote civic participation do not “create” activists or “community leaders” but, do provide support and mentoring as a civically engaged citizen such as Raquel forges their own path forward. This sort of dynamic interaction is one which the Civic Voluntarism model predicts in that SVOC's role as a “recruitment network” was crucial to Raquel's emergence as a civic activist. The model also demonstrates that, ideally, the same organizational network which recruits a potential civic activist, can serve, also, as a training ground for building civic skills—in analytic thinking, persuasive communication, and collaboration. Raquel Velasco's emergence as a civic activist is a success story for SVOC and a success story for her personally.

Character As an Element in Civic Competency

Raquel's story underscores a fundamental difficulty which policymakers and program planners find challenging. As it turns out “civic skills”, when we consider them as the functional competencies required to be effectively engaged in civic life require not just cognitive abilities but, also, a variety of less easily defined competencies which we think of as relating to character—integrity, personal style, personal values, modes of social interaction. Raquel's story is as important one about who she is and how she came to be that person as it is in terms of what she does or how she does it. These very real aspects of one's personal identity are difficult to address as an aspect of social policy because they are, on the one hand, intensely personal and, to some extent, “private”. On the other hand, they are clearly publicly visible. And they are clearly an important facet of any individual's functioning as a civic activist in a variety of roles: as role-model, as counselor/supporter, as source of encouragement, as strategist, as communicator.

Analysts, researchers, and theorists in the field of leadership development are quite willing to consider these personal dimensions of social interaction and teamwork as a legitimate subject of inquiry, so there is not much debate that these aspects of character can legitimately be considered of as part of the “bundle” of skills addressed in personal development. But in the context of “educational policy” there is, correctly, much more apprehension as to whether “character” is something to be addressed legitimately as part of public social policy efforts or political process.

Social Roles and Opportunities for Civic Activism

The process of juggling the difficult task of raising children with work and participation in community life is, in no sense, incidental to the overall challenges of becoming, and remaining, civically engaged. The paradigm of the civic activist as “little old lady in tennis shoes” has fairly obvious messages about gender and civic participation: no child care

responsibilities, not deeply preoccupied with image, experienced and, by implication, financially independent to make the burden of long hours of civic work feasible and the likelihood that the middle-aged men who are also engaged in civic affairs are much more likely to be well-paid staff—political appointees or technical/managerial specialists.

At the same that Raquel must be seen as an individual and her personal story considered as part of public learning about how to promote civic engagement, it is necessary to see her story as providing insights into a multitude of untold, unrecognized stories of Mexican women who have come as immigrants to California. Her story is one which has important implications for thinking about how gender roles enter into the development of civic activists.

Formative Experiences in the Life of a Civic Activist

Like most Mexican immigrants to farmwork, Raquel Velasco was born in a small hamlet, Rancho La Barranca, outside the community of Ojo Caliente, Aguascalientes. This region of Mexico, like the Jaripo area of Michoacan, is a very well-established migrant-sending region. The nearby community of Nochixtlan is a major migrant-sending village and Teocaltiche, Jalisco, the community of origin of many Winters immigrants has, also, sent migrants north for many years.

Raquel's father, like many men in the area, began migrating to the U.S. as a teenager, as a Bracero. After the program was over, he continued migrating north as an undocumented farmworker. While Raquel was growing up, her father would spend 6 months of the year working in California farmwork and 6 months working his lands at home. Although he was caught from time to time by the Border Patrol, this was a stable way of life—even though the family remained in poverty. Raquel remembers her dad bringing her shoes on his return home. She, like other children in Mexican villages, saw these gifts as something from the mysterious northern lands of California but, laughingly, she told me that they actually were from Leon, Guanajuato, a famous leatherworking center in the Bajio.

Childhood experiences as the foundation for civic activism

Raquel's father did not know how to read or write but he played an important role in her development of civic skills, her civic education. The family's house was far from neighbors and Raquel's father would take her with him to the hillside plot he farmed; she remembers beginning to help with planting when she was only three or four years old. She fondly remembers, also, riding horseback to the hills. Her father played an important role in making Raquel the courageous and proactive woman she is today. In talking about her personal development Raquel remembers vividly one example of how her father helped her become brave,

When we got to the hillside plot, my dad went to look for the team of oxen, and he'd lift me up onto a large boulder so that an animal wouldn't eat me—because it was an isolated area in the mountains. I would keep calling out to him so he'd know I was still there....Sometimes it would rain and there would be lightning. I was very scared of the lightning bolts and would try to get under the cart, but my dad would tell me that wasn't a good idea either.

At the same time, Raquel reflects that she wasn't an unusually brave child. She recalls, laughingly, that she would whine a lot and have nightmares. She says, "I would even scream when my uncle would tease me by sneaking up and dropping a cigarette pack on my neck (like an insect alighting)". But she was (at least in her memories) an assertive child. She remembers that while she was sowing with her father, she would sometimes stop halfway down the furrow and make a stand telling him she wouldn't work any more. He would hit her when he got annoyed but Raquel mentions this as only a small part of a flow of fond memories. She remembers, also, that halfway through the workday, her father would stop and build her a little shelter out of branches and cornstalks and that she would drink fresh milk from the cows they had.

Eventually, Raquel's family sent her to school and her life went on like other children's as she grew up. But her father's migration, the family's poverty, in combination with her parents' encouragement provided a sound foundation for the roles Raquel now handles with ease. She remembers that the family was so poor it was hard to buy pencils and paper and that she didn't want to go to school because of that. But, once again, she emphasizes the, almost inevitable, combination of apprehension and perseverance:

I always knew unconsciously that even though you never can be completely sure, you have the illusion that that things will turn out. I'm not scared of that. I never think that things will turn out badly. My daughters keep on asking me (about her community involvement), "Aren't you embarrassed?". I tell them, "Sure I'm embarrassed, but I have to do it and I'm not scared. I'm going to do it!"

So, Raquel's story is one where early childhood experiences make a difference but so do adult experiences. Pursuing our conversations about courage at one point I asked Raquel, "When did you stop being scared of things" and her answer was, "When I crossed the border...although I still would do things even though I was crying inside (before I crossed the border)." So, for Raquel, and many women like her "crossing the border" is not simply a move through space and time but, also, a tremendous change in social geography. What is not easily captured in tabular data or regression equations is that the process of "crossing the border" a journey which also requires her to navigate from traditional to new gender roles.

Living in Changing Times

Raquel remembers thinking as a girl that she would never marry a migrant farmworker — because of the loneliness and emotional ups and down of wives and children being left alone for months on end before a migrant came home again. But, like most girls in her village, she did marry a migrant.¹⁴² Raquel's migration story begins as her husband disappears into the north. She remembers, "My husband came to the US but then I didn't hear anything from him for a year". To make ends meet Raquel began borrowing money to support herself and her children. So finally she said to herself, "Am I married or not". So, being the proactive sort of person she is, Raquel came north as a female solo migrant, an almost unthinkable phenomenon years before.

¹⁴² See **Table 10.1** (Massey et al 1987) Massey and his colleagues estimate that in the established migrant-sending villages at the point when Raquel got married, about 70% of the men would migrate at some point in their lives.

In making her decision to come north or stay at home in Ojo Caliente, Raquel reflected long and hard about her life and the life she wanted for her children. She asked advice from a Mexican official, asking what she needed to do to get a visa to go to the U.S. and he gently and obliquely told her that would not be possible (U.S. consulates are reluctant to issue visas to persons who are very likely to become visa overstayers), that she should find “another way”. She went to a friend, an older woman and asked her advice about what to do given that she’d have to cross the border illegally. The woman suggested she borrow the money for the border-crossing from her father. She remembers she thought of the famous folk song, “Cuatro Caminos”—about the decisions one makes in life, which road one should take, and made her decision to go forward.

Crossing the Border

Raquel went to her father, who continued to migrate to California and asked him to let her accompany him to the U.S. and lend her the money to pay a *coyote* to cross the border. Raquel’s mother didn’t want her to go to the US but, also, she thought she should find her husband. Raquel was a mother with three children already, the eldest a son, and two very young daughters. Her mother didn’t want Raquel to leave her daughters behind and she didn’t want to leave them either, but she decided this was a step she had to take. It was a difficult and traumatic decision. As their mother left to go north, Raquel’s daughters started crying. For a moment, Raquel thought she couldn’t do it, that she wasn’t going to go. At the brink of taking off, her mother told Raquel, she shouldn’t leave her daughter behind, that she should take her too. But that was impossible. Finally, her father said to her mother, “Well you encouraged her too!” So they went forward with the plan. Her mother took her sobbing daughters into the house and Raquel set off with her father and her son.

After arriving in Tijuana Raquel stayed for 2 months with an uncle while she was waiting to find a safe way to cross. Her father could not wait for her as he had to return to work at the ranch in San Diego County where he worked so he went on alone and crossed. An American friend of her father’s sent for Raquel’s son and crossed him easily but she was still left waiting in Tijuana. Raquel and her uncle talked about crossing the border with family friends who worked as coyotes—but they finally decided that the wisest course would be to pay an experienced, reliable *coyote*.

She remembers that her uncle took her to see a classic movie ‘La India Maria’ —kidding her about how she would have to dress like a man to go with the party of migrants. She dressed like a man in pants and went through the mountains near Tecate even though it was already winter. She was, indeed, the only woman in the border-crossing group. The *coyote* told her, “No matter what happens, even if we have to run, stay close to me”. Raquel laughs as she tells of running into another group in the dark and guys saying, “At least we can go fast since there’s no friggin’ women with us” not knowing she was, in fact a women. She says, “I always was a good walker”.

After they had successfully crossed the border, the guide left Raquel alone in San Isidro at the trolley station right after dawn while he went off to make contact with people in a safe house who would pick them up. It was a traumatic experience .(Raquel started to cry as she recounted the experience for us). The guide had left her there without any money at all

though he gave her the address of the safe house (but she knew nothing about the layout of the town and, thus, had no idea where the house was) just in case. She was wet and cold from walking all night. She waited there a long, long time. Winos would come by begging and she would say, “Well, I have less money than you do”. Finally the guide found a man who ran a restaurant but also worked transporting migrants who would take her to the ranch where her dad worked. The guide charged the intermediary to take good care of her. When Raquel was delivered to her father, he paid the restaurant worker with a crate of avocados from the ranch where he worked.

Subsequently, she sent for her daughters to join her. After the girls had arrived in Tijuana, it was necessary to figure out how to get them across the border. A family friend, who had papers said she’d not charge much to cross the girls as though they were her own daughters. But then, after hearing of Raquel’s situation as a mother on her own, she said she wouldn’t think of charging her, and finally brought the girl across at no charge. Raquel says that, from time to time, talking with her daughters they tell her, “You should have left us back there [in Ojo Caliente]” but then they agree that, no, she did the right thing. Her daughters know there was no work, no way to make a living back there.

Traditional Values and Network Flexibility

Raquel’s journey north provides a good idea of how the changing dynamics of migration are forging a new cultural mix of mutualism and independence. Raquel embarked on her journey driven, in part, by social values which stress the importance of lifelong marriage and child-rearing, but her journey, initiated by the breakdown of the values which allowed her husband to cut off contact with her and his children, took place within a new framework of values. Within this new framework a woman’s right to be independent, take risks on her own, and make key life decisions on her own was respected—by her father, her mother, her uncle (and eventually her children). While her fellow migrants still clung to gender stereotypes (e.g. “Women are fragile, they can’t take the hardship of walking across the mountains and running from the *migra*”) her migration took place within the traditional mutualist context of support from male relatives.

Throughout the ordeal of her journey from being the married wife of a migrant and stay-at-home mother to settling in Winters, California, Raquel was helped by the people in her social networks. The help she got was not simply to walk all night across a formidable mountain range to come to California but, also, the help she need to move out of a dead-end life as a woman waiting passively year after year for the husband who would never return. For Raquel and others like her, even the most self-reliant and courageous of immigrants, reliance on social networks, the social capital of affiliational networks, in this case, traditional extended family and village networks, is also a key resource in “crossing the border” from social and political isolation into active civic participation.

Getting Involved in Community Activism—Women’s Networks

Raquel’s involvement with SVOC began because her next door neighbor, Mrs. Ramirez, told her she should get involved, that it was something she should do even if she didn’t have any free time. Another friend, Lydia Montiel, also was part of the group. Yet another, friend, co-worker, and member of the SVOC group of activists, Aurora Borges, also, urged her to get

involved. Raquel says, admiringly, of Ms. Borges, “She was always pulling people in and getting them enthusiastic about being involved [in organizing for a low-income housing development] even though it turned out she didn’t, herself, manage to qualify [for one of the homes which were eventually built]”.

While the social networks of extended family members, *paisano/as*, helped hold the group together, what SVOC’s deliberate community organizing efforts did was to build a pre-existing informal social network—which appeared to have developed around a core of women working at the processing plant—into a group of civic activists who had the skills to be noticed by mainstream civic leaders and institutions. As for male farmworkers for whom the agricultural provides an opportunity to develop social capital, for the SVOC women working on affordable housing in Winters relationships with packing plant co-workers were the basis for building *confianza*, mutual trust. These ties, based on gender and workplace friendships, bridged migration networks—bringing immigrant women from Yucatan (Ms. Borges), Michoacan (Ms. Montiel), and neighbors (Ms. Ramirez) together in leading a common cause. Interestingly, the stereotypical view that Mexican women’s civic engagement is constrained by male reluctance to accept women’s participation in active roles is eroded by the Winters situation where the majority of the civic action group leadership consisted of women. In talking with at least two male participants in the community action group and querying them about their thoughts on Raquel’s leadership of the group, neither expressed any reservations. From their perspective, it was natural for her to assume a leadership role because they considered her to have leadership qualities.

Organizational Strategies for Building Immigrants’ Civic Skills

The community organizing model used by SVOC to guide its work to actively engage Winters immigrants in a wide range of civic initiatives worked well for Raquel because it was experientially oriented, because it was structured to provide immigrants like Raquel with opportunities for civic interaction which they would not, otherwise, have and helping them to prepare to take advantage of those opportunities, and followup on them. Essentially, the SVOC organizing approach envisions the organization’s role as a “recruitment network” for civic action as one in which the organization offers local immigrants a “menu” of possible areas for collective community action. The model draws on Mexican immigrants’ “cultural capital”, i.e. the social technology of mutualism, to set in motion a process whereby the bonding social capital inherent in Mexican immigrants’ networks and the bridging capital developed in the workplace are combined to provide the fulcrum for developing “civic capital”, that is, the ability of immigrants to draw on the resources they already have to engage in effective civic action in the new context of California communities and the U.S. political system.

In Winters, the particular campaigns which Raquel and others finally became involved in addressed two major areas of community concern: availability/affordability of housing and children’s education. In terms of civic activities these campaigns included: voter registration, efforts to pass a school bond (in part to give immigrant parents political leverage in discussing, “negotiating”, with school officials about ways to improve their children’s school experience), advocacy for local ESL/Citizenship classes, and advocacy for low-income housing. For Raquel, part of the motivation was the enjoyment of “getting things done”, having a real impact on the community. Enthusiastically she said, “People themselves are

doing it! I like doing things, not just talking!” When asked what she thought about how to best involve people in civic action she said, “Have a big agenda!”

Talking about her civic skills development, Raquel told me, “I like what I’ve learned....and I’ve learned well”. She points to several factors which make a difference. One factor, she notes, is that she didn’t, at first, know the technical information about how systems work but that once she was provided the information she needed to understand the environment she was working in, then she enjoyed the process of strategizing on her own, of analytic thinking. In this regard, Raquel’s very Mexican sense that “things are usually not what they seem to be” served her well. She told us that she likes the process in which one question, leads to another, and finally, to the point at which one can really know everything about what’s going on “inside the system”.

Building Self-Confidence

Raquel often returns to consideration of the ongoing tensions in her life between lack of confidence and a proactive outlook and between traditional and contemporary roles. She explained that at first, she was shy. Laughingly, she noted that, at first, she was even scared to talk to the local priest. And certainly she was afraid of talking to strangers (in English, at least). In Raquel’s development, part of the impact of SVOC’s intervention stemmed from structured training—which helped her learn how to speak in a well-organized way in public, and to speak without notes. The value of involvement in SVOC’s “civic recruitment network” included the opportunity to test and master those skills.

Raquel identifies a key point in her personal skills development as being an opportunity to have dialogue with the local Catholic priest on a one-to-one basis (not as a parishioner per se). Raquel told us (and others subsequently confirmed it) that the local priest had many reservations about “mixing politics and religion” but she goes on to say, “...but finally we brought him along”. For Raquel, and we believe many others, the critical issue is, in large part, dynamics, a “mastery-oriented” experiential curriculum in which successes serve to build self-confidence, and self-confidence contributes to success. The SVOC model is particularly thoughtful (and well attuned to people like Raquel who struggle to achieve the ideal balance of self-confidence and apprehension) in that a highly formalized process of group review and reflection on each “action”, each civic event, is used as a tool to build individual and group self-confidence. If one understands the syntax of success and failure, it is obvious that one can experience a greater “locus of control”, ability to working perseveringly to achieve difficult, ambitious objectives.

Transcending the Boundaries of Class and Position

Based on Raquel’s account of her development as an activist, another aspect of personal growth and growing civic engagement, is the fairly straightforward process of bringing engaged civic activists, especially those who are potential community leaders, in contact with established political players. In talking about her personal development Raquel enumerated the people who she had had an opportunity to talk with personally, in her role as Co-Chair of the SVOC Winters Committee, about one of the several issues of concern to her and her group: the Mayor of Winters, Antonio Villaraigosa (then Speaker of the California Assembly), Congresswoman Helen Thomas, Henry Cisneros (then Secretary of the

Department of Housing and Urban Development), the Bishop of the Diocese of Sacramento, and the President of the Bank of America. Her generally interactions with these well-known local, state, and national figures, reasonably enough, contributed to her self-confidence about her ability to be effective in her civic involvement.

SVOC's community organizing model further levels the playing field for immigrant civic activists by engaging new immigrant activists in organizing events where they control the social/political environment. Essentially, this sort of event skillfully decreases the power asymmetries between low-income immigrants and other interest groups in the sociopolitical environment by initiating and/or hosting events of their own—individual meetings, group meetings, and public assemblies. This provides another sort of learning opportunity for the development of civic skills. During the year before we first met her, Raquel, for example, had chaired and spoke at a SVOC-sponsored celebration of the successful conclusion of a voter registration campaign, spoke at a celebration of the conclusion of a campaign to pass the local school bond measure, and introduced the priest who had initially seemed to her such a formidable figure at an SVOC assembly. The key to this strategy seems to be a careful balancing of guidance/support from experienced community organizers combined with an insistence that developing immigrant activists have genuine “ownership” of the organization, that the environment for civic skills development be an “authentic” one.

Popular Ownership—The Value of Bottom-Up Civic Action

From Raquel's perspective, the value of the SVOC approach to building leadership skills can most clearly be seen by contrasting her experience within its “civic recruitment network” with her experience as a member of the local Migrant Education Parents' Advisory Council, a program design feature which is also intended to provide farmworker parents with an experiential base for civic engagement. Raquel's critique of the Migrant Education Council was simply that the role of parents was to be a “rubber stamp” for courses of action proposed by staff. In this sort of situation where the ritual of deliberation and civic process predominates, the skills-building impact is minimal. Experience only serves as a sound foundation for civic action if participants' experience provides opportunities for activists to “own”, to design, actually pursue, and achieve their objectives.

Communication Skills—Individual and Social Identity in Gathering Information and Sharing Perspectives

It is useful to consider the competencies which immigrants need for effective civic participation as consisting of two related but distinct skills sets—general communication competencies and English-language ability. The challenge of learning to be an effective communication—to be a good listener and a good persuasive speaker—are skills which native-born activists and immigrants must both develop. But for Mexican immigrants there is the additional challenge of developing the specific 2nd language skills needed in California civic life.

Raquel's experience with civic activism suggests that a two-phase strategy for building communication skills is underway as immigrants move toward civic activism and that it makes sense to design programs to contribute to these pre-existing natural processes. That involves, first, focusing on building the strategic skills related to analyzing the context of

persuasive communication and effective verbal or written presentation of one's perspective or arguments, and secondly, focusing on building the actual practical skills of actually speaking or writing lucidly. The first set of skills is closely linked to articulating and expressing one's identity, what analysts such as Vygotsky refer to as "voice" in language. The second relates more to practice and language-learning proper. It is likely that investment in building the first set of skills, the analytic/strategic competencies result in ongoing civic engagement in a variety of roles while the second set are part of the skills which contribute more to specific roles (e.g. as public representative of a group, as an effective debater).

Raquel sees her limited English as an impediment to getting more involved and moving upward to take on still more demanding roles in community affairs. But at the same time she considered the public SVOC-sponsored events as having been a good way to practice English. Within the traditional realm of education, she had done well also—having successfully prepared for her GED and passed the exam (during a period of personal crisis) and having successfully studied for and passed her naturalization test to achieve citizenship. Even when we first talked to her, she thought it conceivable that one day she might run for City Council (and she knew it was, like the rest of her work, unpaid).

The final area of civic skills development we talked about with Raquel related to analytic thinking and teamwork. She stresses her sense that a good community leader has to listen as well as speak persuasively—a view closely paralleling current leadership "experts" who see effective leadership more in terms of catalyzing teamwork than as top-down management. Raquel observes,

Lots of times we listen but we don't understand, right? My daughters say, "Mom, you always keep wanting to find out what's really going on, underneath everything". At times I don't ask a question; I just observe. I do listen but I'm always anxious to know if I understood things right. I keep wanting to interrupt..."

So, finally, Raquel is a leader who does not behave "like a politician", i.e. a leader engaged in teamwork and helping others. She says, "When people aren't at the exact point you are, the thing you have to do is keep on telling them what's going on—step by step".

Sustainability of Civic Engagement

After three years of intense effort, the SVOC community group's efforts to force the City of Winters to build a low-income housing development which would provide the very high level of subsidies required to make home ownership feasible for very low income immigrant workers like Raquel failed. The City of Winters' Housing Advisory Council came to believe that heavily-subsidized housing was not "good" for immigrant workers—in part because the alternative strategy for meeting the municipality's obligations under the housing element of its General Plan cost less. There was, privately, a good deal of rhetoric about the positive moral impacts of "sweat equity", of immigrants' pride in helping to build their own homes—although Raquel and other women who worked at the nut and fruit-processing plant had

explained that the challenges of juggling work and family life, especially with split-shift schedules, made it difficult to reliably engage in yet another role as house-builder.¹⁴³

Instead of the heavily-subsidized housing development which Raquel and others had worked towards, the City of Winters moved forward with a self-help model of housing development and the houses were built and occupied by immigrant families. Although Raquel had opposed the “sweat equity” model of housing development, she and her daughters eventually became one family among the new homeowners. They had approached the daunting challenge of combining work, family life, and school and home-building with as much energy as they had others. One of our last discussions with Raquel was cut short because she and her daughters had to leave to go pick up hardware for installation of the air-conditioning unit in the house which was under construction.

One of the parts of Raquel’s full life which was truncated by the difficult undertaking of home-building was her community activism. When we last talked, Raquel was encouraging her neighbors in proactive efforts to get the Winters Unified School District to add a school bus stop near the new low-income housing development so that their children would not have to walk along the side of the main highway into Winters to catch the school bus. But she was not as directly involved in the group as in the past. Raquel reflected on her diminished involvement emphasizing how good she thought it was for others to be taking on leadership roles, that she was happy to see others, including her friend, Lydia Montiel, who had first involved her in SVOC’s work, taking the lead.

Whether the story of the 4 years of Raquel’s life as a civic activist is a story line to be summarized as one in which the civic activist or “the system” won, is not entirely clear. The thought that any community might be deprived of the communication, analytic thinking, and teamwork skills of a civic activist such as Raquel Velasco is a sad one. On the other hand, this individual story reflects the reality captured by the Civic Voluntarism model that resources of time and money enter into the equation of civic participation.

My conclusion is that it should be expected that immigrants’ civic participation will be sporadic—as life crises such as Raquel’s needing to devote her time to working to support her daughters and sweat equity to acquire a home, cut short a “career” of civic activism. At the same time, the related recognition must be that the personal strengths, skills, and perspectives of a woman like Raquel, the personal transformations she underwent taking on a new role as mother on her own, female head of household as part of her move to California, and the intense experience of being recruited into a civic action network such as SVOC’s and using that venue as an opportunity to develop her civic skills, have forged in Raquel a “civic character” which she will never lose. We do not know if she will become visibly active in community affairs again, what her priorities will be if she does (as her youngest daughter is now out of high school), or what roles she will explore. What is fairly clear is that Raquel is likely, even in “invisible roles” as a responsible citizen and community activist, to make significant contributions to improving community life in Winters. Despite the uncertainties associated with the James Irvine Foundation’s investment in the Central

¹⁴³ This emerged in an interview with an advisory council member Ed Kissm interviewed as part of the Aguirre evaluation of SVOC’s community organizing work in Winters and the overall effectiveness of the housing campaign.

Valley Partnership for Citizenship, the uncertainties about SVOC's ability to consistently implement its plan of action, and the uncertainties about outcomes for even the "best and the brightest" among popular activists, this sort of long-term investment in sustainable civic engagement is well-justified.

Final Reflections on Social Identity as the Foundation for Building Civic Skills

The stories of activists such as Jorge San Juan and Raquel Velasco should serve to remind us of the need for strategies to foster civic participation which transcend crude sociological analysis. Sound theoretical models of the underlying social processes which give rise to civic and political participation in community life, tabular data confirming and refining the initial model, and regression models providing an understanding of the dynamics of civic participation have utility. But the "micro-level" analysis of how things play out in the lives of individuals and in the genesis, development, and ongoing efforts to nurture and "grow" fragile organizational networks to involve low-income immigrants in California community life is also needed.

How efforts to catalyze social change, including increased levels of immigrant civic participation will play out always involves probability functions. Like analyses of children's development and family life, technically adequate analyses will require complex and expensive longitudinal research efforts to generate pathway analyses of individual and group changes over time.

Immigrants' own stories, while "scientifically" inconclusive, provide valuable signposts—guidance in both program design and policy analysis. Jorge's assertion that his work as a community volunteer and activist is a means to assert a personal and social identity is an important point of guidance. Raquel's affirmation of her ability to transcend the sociological constraints on her "position in life" – as a low-income woman raised in a traditional culture is equally instructive. Both Jorge and Raquel were, in many significant ways, engaged in their own individual journey of personal skills development and efforts to "make meaning" and "make change".

Jorge's and Raquel's individual stories are, in a sense, didactic tales in that they provide examples of the ways in which individual immigrants have worked to convert human capital (their own skills and energy) and social capital (their relationships with others) into "civic capital", the resources needed to work collaboratively to improve community life. Both Jorge and Raquel are "outliers". They have overcome substantial odds—lack of disposable income, lack of free time, limitations in English, incomplete knowledge of how U.S. civic and political systems work—to make things happen, to contribute to group efforts toward making positive changes in community social and civic life. It is not likely these stories will become miracle plays in which Jorge and Raquel go on to become nationally-recognized figures—but the value of their efforts is that they suggest that, to some extent, popular democracy is feasible and that, in some respects, civic life in very poor rural communities with high concentrations of immigrants can have oases of healthy interaction.

The James Irvine Foundation's support of two community-based non-profit organizations' efforts to catalyze immigrant civic participation made significant contributions to both Jorge San Juan's and Raquel Velasco's development as civic activists. In a very real sense, this sort

of work is a collaboration between individual immigrants with very limited resources and very personal aspirations and large organizations with ample resources and aspirations to effective positive macro-level social change. It would be a mistake to attempt to exclude non-cognitive traits from the inventory of civic skills needed to improve community life or to focus too narrowly on a “technical” model of civic participation which purposefully or inadvertently serves to de-value individual vision, individual initiative, and a wide range of efforts to create new personal, group, and civic identities. Jorge’s and Raquel’s stories, because they are personal also have dimensions of excitement, enjoyment, at the what might be considered to be the aesthetic dimensions of learning and effective action—the marvel that one can actually do something that makes a difference.

An important consequence of such a recognition should be the idea that there is no “magic wand” which can be used to transform the civic life of communities—anywhere in America, but particularly in the economically and educationally disadvantaged communities of the Central Valley. High-school civics classes, voter registration campaigns, get-out-the-vote campaigns, leadership workshops, educational television and radio, are all useful tools for working towards solutions. There must be a broad range of educational opportunities for civic skills-building because there is a broad spectrum of individual interests and competencies.

The critical recognition, as often forgotten by “community-based” organizations, even “grassroots” organizations, as well as by municipal government, schools, universities, is that participatory democracy is driven by a wide range of efforts to create and assert meaning—as individuals and as groups of like-minded individuals. The most effective contributions to the shared objective of micro-level individual efforts toward “making meaning, making change” will be ones which respect individual analytic insights, aspirations, and creativity while building on a sound analytic foundation and powerful models of the processes of civic participation to highlight the particular sorts of contributions large and somewhat impersonal institutions can make to a process which is inherently personal.

The model of interventions to build “civic skills” will necessarily be more akin to tutoring, mentoring, and programs structured to provide a diverse range of learning opportunities more than toward rapid and efficient communication of a core set of “teaching points” about civic principles. To be sure, the ideal skills development program is one which is structured, which takes a systems-oriented perspective toward capacity-building and leadership. Community organizing models such as the one used by SVOC have the advantage of building on a well-defined set of principles about how to “organize” individual experiences to best build civic effectiveness but it appears that even the endeavors such as Se’e’Savi which are closest to the “popular education” model of collective inquiry, self-directed learning also have great promise.

The current inquiry suggests that in the face of uncertainty about the ideal balance of structured learning and learner-driven experiential learning, the strong linkage between development of a personal and social identity and sustainable civic engagement, the most effective interventions will be those which lean toward “authenticity” and learner engagement and less toward teaching about “how the system works”. In either case, the experience in a range of educational contexts emphasizes the need to articulate expectations of excellence, that immigrants’ involvement in even the first stages of civic involvement will yield tangible and valuable outcomes, not just “provide practice” for responsible citizenship.

Chapter 6

Building Sustainable Civic Participation

In this chapter I examine the rationale for attention to the multi-generational dynamics of civic engagement, the benefits of such a focus, and the particular challenges and possibilities in the Central Valley communities where Mexican immigrants settle. The story of a teenager, Gustavo Dominguez, who became involved in civic activism as a means of addressing the conflict between his immigration status as an undocumented immigrant and his de facto social identity as a California child growing up in a Central Valley community is at the heart of this chapter.

The value of efforts to promote civic participation do not simply stem from the fact that voluntarism provides an affordable way to solve community problems which might not otherwise be possible to address. Civic engagement is also worthwhile as a process which yields benefits—to those who are involved, as well as to the community at large. Civic participation does seem to lead to future civic involvement (Barber et al 1999). The sort of positive social “epidemic” that has intrigued researchers examining the general properties of networks is very probably part of the dynamics of communities’ civic life, as well as many other domains of social interaction. It also appears that the “infection” of civic engagement spreads not only from individual to individual and from group to group but also from generation to generation. Here I explore the particular implications this process has for the Mexican immigrant communities of the Central Valley and other rural areas.

Gustavo’s story provides valuable insights into the ways in which organizational involvement can contribute to a teenager’s civic development while, at the same time, underscoring the is that social program interventions cannot be expected to “create” civic engagement, only to nurture the process through which an episode of civic involvement becomes an ongoing “habit”, a routine dimension of social life. This account suggests the need to seek to change the environment in a range of community institutions, not just to design effective interventions (such as service-learning programs) to foster civic involvement.

The Distinctive Challenges and Potential of Promoting Civic Engagement in Communities where Immigrants Settle

If the over-arching process through which immigrants and native-born populations come to find common ground, is mutual accommodation, active immigrant involvement, not simply passive acquiescence, can be expected to be critical. Such active involvement can be expected to contribute in the long-run to developing a sense of “ownership” and accountability as well as the short-term benefits of mobilizing immigrants’ social capital as a resource for community problem-solving. If effective community collaboration rests on discussion, dialogue, and informed decision-making, then immigrants’ voices obviously need to be part of the process—especially if effective leadership implies listening and responsive action, not simply top-down communication of mandates from some centralized authority.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁴ A central tenet of the national and community service movement, under both Democratic and Republican administrations has been the proposition that “devolution of authority”, more localized decision-making vis-a-vis community service priorities and strategies is essential. For a variety of reasons, this ideal has been difficult to fully implement but nonetheless there seems to be value to locally “customized” volunteerism.

Strategies to make civic participation an integral part of life in communities where immigrants settle must inevitably address the intergenerational dynamics of civic engagement. Even short, intense periods of civic participation, for example, local community service campaigns to feed hungry homeless persons, may well yield immediate short-term benefits to individuals, families, and neighborhoods. But the most promising possible return on investment in promoting civic participation would be those which spur lasting change, ongoing civic engagement—because they are bona fide “investments” in that benefits continue to accrue. Generating a “habit” of civic engagement, building it into a community’s “culture” (self-concept, values, collective priorities, modes of interaction, and institutions) has the promise of yielding real returns by having an across-the-board impact “community life”, on a multitude of individual social interactions.

Promoting civic participation in an era when most Americans have less free time and in a context where communities are increasingly stratified by income, education, language, and culture is a challenge for “mainstream” American institutions and for all communities. It is a particular challenge in immigrant communities because of the processes through which the children of immigrants who are growing up in the U.S. are incorporated into the social fabric of community life. Because of their demographics and the ongoing flow of immigration from Mexico, Central Valley communities are “at risk”—if an entire generation or several generations of children of immigrants are barred from full civic participation by immigration status. Survey research by Calderon Chelius and Martinez-Saldaña shows that, over time, 1st generation Mexican immigrants become increasingly more engaged in the sociopolitical life of the communities where they have settled. But it also appears that, over time, their children are at risk of becoming increasingly disengaged.

Rationale for Focusing on Immigrant Youth’s Civic Participation

It is critical to consider not only the process through which 1st generation immigrants initially become involved in community civic life once they have arrived as adults and settled in California, but, also, how it is that their children approach the broad area of civic involvement—civic values/social priorities, modes of discussion and deliberation, involvement in voluntary efforts to respond to community needs, and political participation. The 2nd generation, raised in immigrant households but educated in U.S. schools are in a pivotal position to affect “community culture”—to build bridges among diverse groups or to dig moats. In communities with ongoing immigration, it will only be possible to build sustainable civic engagement if communities manage to achieve “functional diversity”, that is, the ability for all immigrant cohorts and native-born populations to work together on common concerns, not simply to co-exist.

The Magnitude and Pace of Demographic Change

An important practical reason for special attention to the children of immigrants is that they are the fastest-growing segment of the U.S. population of children. In urban communities such as Los Angeles where immigrants have settled, the majority of the population is of “immigrant stock”, that is, either a 1st generation immigrant or the child of a foreign-born parent (Portes and Rumbaut 2001). In Central Valley rural communities where immigrants settle, the proportions of community residents who are of immigrant stock are similar in that 1st and 2nd generation immigrants make up a majority of all residents in the community —although there are many differences from community

to community.¹⁴⁵ As discussed in previous sections of this report, the demographic trends are inexorable; the dynamics of community life in Central Valley communities is changing and will continue to change dramatically, whether or not there are efforts to manage this transformation of social, civic, and political life.

Dynamics of Change in Communities with Ongoing Immigration

In areas such as the Central Valley, where wave after wave of immigrants settle in local communities, then there is special value to developing multi-generational approaches to immigrant civic integration as part of sustaining civic engagement. Immigrant and native-born populations in a community cannot simply “learn to get along together” once and for all and then proceed to work collaboratively forever. The process of “learning to get along together” must be an ongoing one—because new, distinct groups of immigrants will continue to arrive.

In this social context, then, an ongoing program of proactive promotion of civic participation among all generations of immigrants promises to yield a range of community benefits. Such efforts can, in a practical and immediate way, contribute to community harmony but they can also result in more diverse range of opinions, ideas, and problem-solving approaches generated in the course of civic deliberation, discussion, and debate. While it is not inevitable that there will be practical benefits from increasing levels of civic participation in decision-making in homogeneous communities, widespread and inclusive collective decision-making should be expected to make an especially valuable contribution to innovation and improved problem-solving in communities where there is more diversity.¹⁴⁶

Civic Collaboration and Segmented Assimilation

A final consideration stems from the dynamics of “segmented assimilation” that Portes and Rumbaut’s research addresses. The social integration process can lead to positive or negative outcomes for most “Generation 1.5” youth (foreign-born/US-raised) and 2nd generation youth (U.S.-born, U.S.-raised with immigrant parents). Outcomes for these youth rest, in large measure, on the dynamics of social interaction among different groups in a community. The situation in the Central Valley seems to be a mixed one. However, there is some evidence to indicate that many Central Valley communities are poised at the brink of a “tipping point” where either socially positive or negative changes may begin to ripple through communities with high concentrations of immigrants.

For example, many Central Valley schools are doing better than might be expected at responding to the educational challenges of rapid demographic change, given the linguistic, cultural, and

¹⁴⁵ I did not analyze the Census 2000 data relevant to this because the Public Use Microdata Set files which are the best source of data for such an analysis were not published until May, 2003. Alternative indicators include Table P-22 in the SF-3 (tabulations of household languages) and K-12 language census data from the CBEDS system. In Arvin, for example, only 16% of the Hispanic population from 5-17 speaks only English. In Fresno, only 57% of this age cohort speaks only English. This provides a rough indicator of the size of the 2nd generation immigrant population, although some children of immigrants speak only English and some 3rd generation children and youth speak a language other than English.

¹⁴⁶ Broad participation in civic dialogue and decision-making are, of course, valuable in a wide range of communities because socioeconomic traits are not the only dimension of diversity.

socioeconomic mix of student enrollment although, their overall performance is not impressive.¹⁴⁷ Gang involvement is one potential pathway of acculturation for 2nd generation immigrant youth, but, as in the case of the schools, Central Valley community conditions are better than in some of the urban areas in the state. These are very poor communities but they are not underclass communities.

On the other hand, the findings of a Fresno County mental health survey (Vega et al 1998) are disturbing in that they find a strong negative relationship between length of time in the U.S. and mental health. Much of the mental illness, at least in the Fresno County Mexican immigrant population, is stress-related, brought on, in part, by problems of family functioning in households experiencing periodic economic stress as a result of seasonal unemployment (Aguilar-Gaxiola, personal communication, 2003). Substance abuse in the rural counties is on the rise and, although there is inadequate statistical data, domestic violence is generally considered to be a serious problem.

Beyond the limited and ambiguous objective indicators of neighborhood and community well-being, many Mexican immigrant parents consider ubiquitous contemporary sociobehavioral problems such as teenage pregnancy, drug and alcohol abuse, sexually-transmitted disease to be immediate and tangible threats to both family and community well-being. In this context, then, the possibility of civic participation providing a means to bring parents and children together in collaborative efforts to improve community life seems attractive as a potential contribution to strengthening family life as well as improving the civic realm.¹⁴⁸

From Episodic to Sustainable Civic Participation

The reality is that the ways in which individuals are recruited into civic activism tends to be around high-profile events or issue-oriented campaigns—joining in collective efforts to help out after a local disaster, responding to an individual’s or a family’s crisis, organizing to protest an irresponsible decision by local government such as a new housing development, or advocating for what a group of community members considers to be a responsible course of action such as continuation of social services to the needy even in times of fiscal crisis.

Looking retrospectively at the current composition of communities and probing, even superficially, the ways in which Central Valley communities have changed over the past several decades makes it clear that attention to the inter-generational dynamics of immigrant acculturation is critical. Developing strategies to promote sustainable and sustained civic participation by immigrants is

¹⁴⁷ The California Department of Education has developed an innovative approach to performance-based accountability by assessing individual school districts’ and schools’ performance not only on “raw” student scores but on scores, as adjusted by student demographics. Many of San Joaquin Valley rural schools rank in the bottom half of the state in terms of actual scores but rank higher than demographically and socioeconomically comparable schools. There is great variability from school to school and community to community in the region but it is likely that general community social environment has multiple impacts on school performance—ranging from school management objectives and procedures, to parental involvement, to student attitudes and aspirations. It should be recognized however that the statewide testing scores are not as “rich” an indicator of educational experience or attainment as would be desirable.

¹⁴⁸ There is a growing body of research on the “epidemiological paradoxes” of Latino immigrants’ social integration into California life. This has given rise to widespread interest in various interventions based on the principles of “Cultura Cura” (culture heals) and growing demands for increased levels of cultural competency and even innovation in developing individual, family, and community level public health programs.

particularly important for Central Valley communities and other rural areas because of the rapid pace at which community social life is being transformed by immigration.

Factors in Immigrant Children’s Civic Participation: Origin vs. Childhood Experiences

The fact that Mexico-US migration includes a good deal of back-and-forth migration, not just a one-time process of “coming to America” complicates the dynamics of immigrant social integration and the development of civic consensus. Several quite specific factors (e.g. education, income, household language[s]) affect the development of civic values, attitudes, aspirations, and activities from generation to generation in Mexican immigrant families. Although it is customary to distinguish between “Generation 1.5” immigrant children and “2nd generation” immigrant children, the reality in Central Valley communities is that there is a continuum of in-between sub-generations of children in most families. This is because it is a more or less “accidental” fact that a child is born either in Mexico or the U.S.¹⁴⁹ Irrespective of his or her formative experiences, these immigrant children’s place of birth, coupled with his or her parents’ immigration status will determine his or her civic and sociopolitical status as an unauthorized, legal permanent resident, or citizen child.

The “social universe” which provides the framework for the development of civic perspectives and participatory strategies among the children of Mexican immigrants is, therefore, both transnational and local. Each Mexican immigrant child growing up in California can come to a personal cultural and linguistic accommodation to the contradictions of straddling two worlds but their civic/sociopolitical status is out of their control—determined by where they happen to have been born and when their parents came to California (since the overwhelming majority of pre-1986 immigrants were able to secure legal status under the provisions of IRCA).

One Central Valley Community’s Response to Immigration-Driven Change

In Arvin, a small community southeast of Bakersfield, for example, we know that four quite distinct generations—Anglos who came to Arvin as dustbowl-era migrants, Mexican-American farmworkers from the lower Rio Grande Valley who followed them, Mexican immigrants from “El Bajío”, and Mixtec migrants from San Juan Mixtepec and surrounding communities. Waves of immigration, inter-generational dynamics in “constructing” the social reality of Arvin make it evident that “community history” does not refer to some set of dusty, archival set of accounts but, rather, to a dynamic ongoing process of negotiations about life in a community, raising one’s children in the community, and also those children’s decisions to stay in town, leave, and, perhaps, return after some time in an urban setting.

In Arvin, as in other rural communities throughout the U.S., there is growing concern about the “brain drain” as local youth abandon their hometown and move to more exciting, more fulfilling urban lives. The structural problem the community faces is not “white flight” but rather the career and life decisions of 2nd generation immigrant youth. However, Arvin and other Central Valley communities, communities appear to be benefiting from their stores of social capital in this tug-of-war to attract the best and the brightest of each generation. Even the most occupationally mobile of 2nd generation children of immigrants are balancing competing factors of earnings vs. social

¹⁴⁹ Mexican immigrant families in rural California are of “mixed” immigration status both with respect to parents’ and children’s status and with respect to different children’s status. For example, a typical Mexican post-1986 farmworker family household might include: two immigrant parents who are unauthorized immigrants, one foreign-born child who does not have legal status, and two U.S. born children.

environment in their career and life decisions. And some are returning to settle in the towns in which they have grown up even when they have many other options— citing their desire to live near relatives, or to live in a calm, friendly community (as contrasted to urban life in Los Angeles, for example).

Although Arvin is one of the poorest towns in the Central Valley, the issue of education and youth recreation have become prominent as a “common ground” in community civic dialogue and action. In large measure due to a combination of local community leadership and volunteerism, progress is being made at bringing immigrants and native-born groups (Mexicans, Yemenis, Anglos) together in supporting children’s development—with the sorts of volunteerism, small business donations, and boosterism that are the hallmark of “mainstream” American life. The local karate club, for example, supported in part by donations from parents and concerned local business people, Kern County social programs, and volunteer efforts, provides a surprisingly rich environment for adults, teenagers, younger children to interact and work cooperatively (both in learning karate and community service projects). It is a fertile oasis for building bridging social capital as volunteers and involved parents come from all ethnic groups, social networks, and immigrant cohorts in the community. To a similar degree, the local high school, under the leadership of a high-qualified 2nd generation Mexican-origin immigrant principal who decided to return to work in the community she grew up in, has had some success in involving parents.

There is some hope of good outcomes—but there remain serious barriers to sustainable civic integration, among them the fact that a significant portion, if not the majority of Arvin residents, and many of their children, are unauthorized immigrants. In this community and hundreds like it, even before the economic and infrastructural problems it faces are resolved, it will be necessary to consider how the inter-generational processes of immigrant social integration will proceed and what how communities can encourage sustained civic involvement.¹⁵⁰

“Official” Identity and Socially-Constructed Identity-Policy Context

Here I explore how a Central Valley teenager, Gustavo Dominguez, became engaged in civic activism as a result of the conflicts between his own personal accommodation to growing up like most children in the small town of Exeter in eastern Tulare County and the accident of having been born in Mexico to parents who did not arrive in California soon enough to secure legal status. Sociologically, Gustavo is part of the immigrant cohort referred to as “Generation 1.5”— foreign-born but growing up in a California community.

Like the other personal accounts we analyze in this inquiry, Gustavo’s story is, at once, an individual one, and one which reflects the over-arching sociopolitical structures and conflicts which make the processes of immigrant integration so problematic. In Gustavo’s case, the forces which drew him into becoming politically and civically engaged arise directly from contradictions between national and local social policy vis-a-vis immigrants. This account of civic engagement emerging from individual and collective problem-solving suggests that individual self-interest and altruism can be closely inter-twined and yield a range of positive outcomes—at the individual level, the community

¹⁵⁰ Edward Kissam, Anna Garcia, and Aline Doignon, “Midway Down the Long Road: Baseline Observations in Arvin, California”, Working Paper for Aguirre International Project “Towards a New Pluralism: Case Studies of Rural Communities Impacted by Immigration”, August, 2002.

level, and, to some extent, at the state and national level. The specific issue which led to Gustavo's civic involvement is that of immigrant children's access to education and whether education is, indeed, a lifelong process.

The Issue of Educational Equity for “Generation 1.5” Immigrant Youth

While several social policy issues relating to access to education have emerged very prominently in the course of California and national debate, the prevailing view has been that access to learning is such a fundamental human right and has such indisputable social benefits that it cannot be denied. The language articulating the Supreme Court's decision in *Plyer v. Doe* which guaranteed immigrant children's access to K-12 education made specific reference to the social utility of such a policy. Despite the Supreme Court decision, however, California's Proposition 187 challenged this policy premise and sought to deny immigrant children the right to K-12 education. However, the provisions of the voter-passed Proposition 187 denying immigrant children the right to educational services were the first ones struck down by the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals.¹⁵¹

Within the context of a contemporary information-based society, recognition of the community benefits accruing from individual students' access to college or some other form of post-secondary education are as compelling as they were in the context of the Supreme Court's review of the issues raised in the early 1980's and decided in *Plyer v. Doe* regarding access to K-12 education. It is generally agreed, for example that 1960 was about the last point at which a high school diploma afforded access to a reasonable range of stable employment opportunities. This social policy proposition about the importance of post-secondary education is not very controversial, although issues related to strategies for assuring equitable access have been. Thus, Gustavo's story is one central not only to the social integration of immigrant children and youth but, also, to overall strategies to build human, social, and civic capital in the 21st century.

Community Membership—A Local or A Federal Decision?

Gustavo's story and that of students like him emerged in the context of political ambivalence as to who should be considered as a member of a California community and what entity should have the right to make such decisions.¹⁵² Immigrant children and youth growing up in California communities surely consider themselves “Californians” although their social identities also reflect the ever-present tensions of ethnic, racial, and class divisions in America. In the concrete context of their lives and contemporary social policy, the controversial legal issue as to how to define “residence” in a community, a state, or a nation boils down to whether undocumented immigrant youth's personal educational development will grind to a rapid halt when they have finished high school or whether they will be able to go to college like their peers who are U.S.-born or naturalized citizens. In

¹⁵¹ (Bernal 2001) This is the *LULAC v. Wilson* case. The court's decision rested on the provisions' being inconsistent with *Plyer v. Doe*.

¹⁵² The patterns of immigrant settlement have led to a sociopolitical situation in which there are huge and widening gaps between national and local public opinion. While the national policy remains an anti-immigrant one, local communities and states have stakes in promoting immigrant social integration. In California, a growing number of communities have decided that their local interests justify taking the initiative in recognizing immigrants as community members and diverging from federal policy. Current debate about immigrants' access to drivers' licenses and recognition of the Mexican “*matricula consular*” as a valid identity document are, essentially, federal-local control issues.

personal terms, this story is about career trajectories and future social roles for immigrant youth. In sociopolitical terms, the issue of immigrant students' access to college education is, in some respects, a "state's rights" issue linked to the possibility advanced by a range of civic groups in California and efforts spearheaded by Latino state legislators that the state could and should assert its role in determining who would be considered a California resident, i.e. a community member, despite counter-claims that only the federal government could make such a decision.¹⁵³

The California legislative approach to addressing this issue, AB 540, was, in principle, simple in that it defined a student as a "California resident" in sociologically rational terms as being a student who had gone to a California high school for at least 3 years and graduate from it (or received a GED). In practice, the legislation emerged from a turbulent legal landscape of conflicting court decisions on the issue. The issue of "residence" is of policy and practical importance for a number of factors: a) because in-state tuition at California institutions of higher learning is about twice as high for non-residents as for California residents, b) because the actual cost of educating students is, in fact, underwritten by California taxpayers, and c) because access to a college education is infeasible for most immigrant youth if they must pay out-of-state resident fees since most come from low-income families and are ineligible for federally-funded education benefits typically used to fund college attendance.

The successful campaign to make AB 540 a law is an example of civic involvement in which the final success of the legislative initiative stemmed not only from the involvement of legislators and public interest advocacy groups but, also, from the active involvement of immigrant students themselves and media coverage of the human consequences of barriers to immigrant students' college attendance.

Local Stakes in Equitable Access to College Education for All Immigrant Children

There are, it should be added, additional implications stemming from 21st century macro-level trends as society moves beyond the notion of education as one of many avenues to adulthood and worklife but as an obligatory part of "growing up"—an essential part of developing the information-handling skills needed to prevail in the workplace, in family life, or civic life. The apparently rhetorical assertion made by student demonstrators when the AB 540 campaign was at its height, "Education is a human right!" is, in fact, a sober assessment of the social, economic, and legal context of contemporary life. Arguably, the right to have local children have the maximum possible educational access and upward mobility is also a community right—as the community will clearly benefit.

Gustavo's Story

Gustavo's involvement in statewide efforts to advocate for passage of AB 540 are a response to the reality he, and thousands of California high school graduates, were in every practical way full-fledged residents of the California communities in which they had grown up, could not attend college if, as unauthorized immigrants, they were required, under the prevailing definition of residency, to pay out-of-state tuition.¹⁵⁴ After Gustavo got involved in the push for passage of AB 540 in the spring of

¹⁵³ The legislation was spearhead by Assemblyman Marco Firebaugh, a Democrat., however, it was co-sponsored by Assembly Member Abel Maldonado, a Republican Latino legislator from the rural Central Coast area

¹⁵⁴ Bernal quotes Urban Institute estimates that there is a pool of about 30,000 undocumented immigrants who have attended 3 years of high school in California and that there is a high school drop out rate of 15-20%. I assume the

2002 while he was a high school senior, the state legislation was approved and signed into law by the governor in the fall of 2002.

Gustavo's story suggests that civic activism among the children of immigrants yields both personal and social benefits. For Gustavo, the opportunity to take initiative in negotiating the contradictions between his identity as a rural California teenager and his identity as an "illegal alien" has been a personally healing one—but, like the other 20,000 immigrant youth who are the children of unauthorized immigrants and graduate each year from California high schools, his effective and relatively successful involvement in the civic arena has not yet fully solved the chronic and growing problem as to how to fulfill their potential as new Americans.

Conflicts Between "Official" and De Facto Social Identity in Gustavo's Experience

The contrasts between official and social identity are particularly striking in Gustavo's case. He was born in Michoacan and came to the United States when he was 7 years old, in 1991. He went to grade school and high school in Exeter. Gustavo describes his childhood and elementary school education and very early leadership experiences as follows:

I was basically raised here....I got used to it....And then you start to get more involved because of what you learn in school...[Ever since 4th grade when we moved over here, I decided to [learn English]... I had a choice of taking a class with someone who spoke Spanish or not. So I said I'll try my hardest and do my best and so I took a class with just English. You had two choices —all English or the group in the back with a translator so I put myself in the front group. After that grade I caught up, with most of it.... I just had to...I had a hard time communicating with some friends...so I thought "I need to end this!"; so, it's like, "I need to learn this.." You cram yourself. So I got excited. It was kind of surprising. By 5th grade I was translating already. They started using me as a translator. The teacher would say, "So you can translate" and I'd say, "Yeeaaah! OK I'll do it". There were subs, they wouldn't get a bilingual sub, so most of the time I would translate.

Gustavo, while technically part of "Generation 1.5", is quite similar to the 2nd generation immigrant students described by Portes and Rumbaut who have succeeded by adopting a strategy of selective acculturation.

Although Exeter is a community in the heart of the agricultural Central Valley, there is a surprisingly high proportion of the student-age population 5-17 who speak English only. Data from Census 2000 shows that more than two-thirds (67%) speak English. The community has slightly fewer immigrants than many of the nearby rural towns; slightly more than one-third (37%) of the Hispanic population is identified as foreign-born in the census data. However, many of these immigrants are quite recent; half are post-1984 immigrants and, therefore, it is likely that about half of the community's immigrant population are not authorized immigrants.

Ironically, Gustavo, drawn into civic activism by his status as an "unauthorized alien" of Mexican origin, while bilingual, is actually more at home in English than in Spanish. In many ways, his

high school dropout rate is higher, closer to 30%, but that a higher proportion of those who do graduate from high school would seek to go on to higher education—since this includes not only attendance at the University of California, or the a California State University, but, also, one of the 109 community college campuses. I also assume that very few could afford non-resident tuition—based on Bernal's report of non-resident tuition payers generated by the California Postsecondary Education Commission.

language and outlook mirror the demographics of the community he grew up in—bicultural/bilingual but slightly more oriented toward mainstream culture than other rural communities such as Arvin where local residents and outside observers alike would consider the town to be a “Mexican” one.

In truth, this small hamlet is somewhat ambivalent about its social identity. A downtown mural presents an extraordinary and bizarrely idealized romantic image of farmwork, complete with blonde children playing with dolls in the orange groves while their Anglo parents climb ladders to pick oranges. Another mural memorializes a leading rancher’s cattle drive while another mural across the street references the area’s Yokuts heritage. Mexicans are conspicuously invisible in the town’s iconography—a fact of some interest to an Anglo civic leader in a nearby community who told me she hoped there would soon be local murals like the ones in Exeter “with our symbols” on them. Exeter has a pleasant old-fashioned downtown; life seems calm. Beyond demographics, the community appears to be doing well in terms of social integration. The home where I first met with Gustavo and one of his fellow student activists (who was then another high school student living with her undocumented parents) is a quintessentially suburban household—spacious, immaculate, oriented toward child-rearing.

While Exeter may not provide the ideal sociopolitical environment to support the sort of selective acculturation envisioned by Portes and Rumbaut, Gustavo’s experience suggests that a responsive and supportive school environment is a key element in immigrant children’s ability to navigate the tensions and conflicts of life in two cultures, thought in two languages, two different sets of social networks. It seems that Gustavo was a good student throughout his school career, even perhaps too much of a “good” student to get along with some of his peers. He describes his situation as follows,

Teachers liked me. I never got into problems, where students would say that because I was the teacher’s pet, “I don’t like you”. There were two levels—one teachers, one students... I was kind of working both ends....When I was in high school, I was called a coconut—Mexican outside, American inside I knew all the principals and I was a school site counselor. I was remarked as a coconut ...

When asked about the antecedents of his getting involved in advocacy, Gustavo reflects and concludes that probably his current stance vis-a-vis civic activism stems from both his parents’ values and teaching and his school experience but then goes on to emphasize schooling and, in the process, suggest how his school experience contributed to building his civic skills. He assesses the influences on his thinking as follows:

A mixture....Most likely school. We were always competing—against the rest of the district. For us to get there we had to get all the clubs together, get all the students together. sign petitions and everything. At that point we all figured out ... no matter what race you were, you just had to put it to one side and just come together as one group. Our school was basically white and Mexican. Even though we were the worst, we just came together as one because we wanted the same thing. That’s where I kind of learned you had to put things to the side if you didn’t like someone you had to say if that person can help me and I can help them and make something useful, OK....

He goes on to explain more about his values and perspectives on civic involvement and advocacy,

When you see it one way, you either get together and do something about it so you can have a better future it or you just throw your future away. For me, basically, I was taught in school you always have to fight for what you want, you always have to work for what you want, you don’t get it for free. In Spanish they say “All Mexicans just want to have

their plates brought to the table, and in certain cases that's true, but we have to overcome that and say we want to bring our own plates to the table. We want to put what we want in it, not what you want us to have in it. That's what got me involved knowing that if I didn't get involved, I wouldn't get a college degree, because there's no money for any immigrants to go to college.

So, the story of the process through which Gustavo was successfully recruited to civic activism is, in part, a story of schooling which inculcated in him mainstream American values, i.e. the value of competing, collaboration and compromise as a means to achieve a common goal, the value of fighting for what one wants, the value of working for what one wants. But, ironically, the first civic issue which Gustavo was forced to confront with his toolbox of “American” values and aspirations, not to mention his agility in English was his status as an illegal alien who did not “deserve” to receive financial help in going to college.

It is likely that, in this respect, Gustavo is typical of the other unauthorized Mexican immigrants who are treated as “aliens” within the official scheme of things in that part of his well-balanced set of personal choices involved retaining traditional Mexican values relating to education and self-advancement while, at the same time, “assimilating” to mainstream culture well enough to be successful in school and graduate with excellent grades—although other youth confronted with these conflicting values drop out of school. Gustavo is one of the immigrant students who was upward bound but who would have been stalled if he could not go beyond high school. (He currently works in a typically “immigrant” sector of the economy—as a restaurant worker).

Thus, the effect of current policy vis-a-vis the access to higher education afforded students such as Gustavo probably tends to exclude the sub-group of students who have the best chances for succeeding in the difficult process of “upward” social integration—the Generation 1.5 immigrants. For example on Mexican immigrant children, research suggest that aspirations toward educational success are actually, in some respects, more a “Mexican” value than an “American” one. The overwhelming majority of a sample of Mexican immigrants (84%) said that school was the most important thing, that doing homework was more important than helping friends (68%), and 88% said that they always finish what they set out to do. (Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco 1995). The Suarez-Orozco team found that it is among 2nd generation immigrants, i.e. U.S.-born, Mexican-Americans where educational aspirations become attenuated as students become more skeptical and ambivalent about the value of schooling.

Maintaining Bonding Social Capital

Despite his peers’ accusations of “coconut-ism”, the centerpiece of Gustavo’s civic activism is based on his identity as a Mexican immigrant and eagerness to affirm his solidarity with other *Mexicanos* and students in his situation. Within the cultural and societal framework of an immigrant community, highly attuned to nuances relating to assimilation and fragmentation of home country cultural values as contrasted with assertion of one’s heritage and mutualist values, Gustavo has achieved a remarkably balanced perspective which, as it turns out, led him from purely individualistic efforts to solve the problems he personally faced toward civically-oriented efforts to altruistically address the problems others faced. For Gustavo, as for the other civic activists we have interviewed, civic involvement stems both from wanting to make the social universe in which they live a better one and from personal motivations. In reflecting on what got him involved and has kept him involved, Gustavo said,

... when you talk about the lives of not only one person but thousands of people across the state it's totally different you have to work because it's not just one person starting that thing, the person can help a thousand more. You need to have to realize in order to get anywhere you have get together and be one group, not individual, even if you have, at some points, different thoughts. You can compromise with one another and just bring it together and make it stronger and more useful.

What is important to recognize in this case is that one of the most powerful personal motivation is for Gustavo to “locate” himself within a social system which seeks to define him in a contradictory and conflicting way—as American, Californian, and as “illegal alien”. Civic activism which involves affirmation of both personal and group identity is not, from Gustavo’s perspective, as much a “duty” as it is an opportunity. By way of building the “habits of the heart” which will strengthen community life, this is an example of the ways in which immigrant civic activism can yield far more than immediate sociopolitical or community service benefits.

For an immigrant cohort “at risk” , children who have grown up in California with immigrant parents, or even more problematically, both immigrant parents and illegal status, modes of civic involvement such as the AB 540 campaign which provide opportunities for them to re-align the sociopolitical universe in which they live are crucial. Such opportunities for proactive civic involvement are the basis for building sustained civic engagement in this generation and, at the same time, ways to build the complement of specialized civic skills required to navigate the difficult “borderland” social geography of communities undergoing rapid transformation and encountering, in the process, a multitude of contradictions.

Their “ownership” of such efforts, which rests on opportunities to “take control” and shape such efforts will be a crucial ingredient not only in their future willingness to be involved in civic affairs, but, also, in their successful acquisition, via experiential learning, of the civic skills to navigate the challenges of working across social divisions to forge a new future for California’s pluralistic communities.

The Role of “Recruitment Networks” in Engaging Immigrant Youth and Building Civic Skills

An immediate and practical concern for program funders and program designers alike is how to “recruit” 1.5 and 2nd generation immigrants into civic participation. What we can learn from Gustavo’s experience is that there is no single ideal program design for accomplishing this end and that, instead, it will be necessary to promote and support development of “community systems”, that is a range of different interventions, each of which can play a useful role in the relatively long sequence of steps required to move from passive indifference to active and effective civic engagement. Gustavo’s account of how he got involved, first in efforts to promote AB 540’s passage, then, in efforts to extend its impact, and, finally, in community service efforts to build awareness of the opportunities provided by the new legislation for other immigrant teenagers who were unaware of it, shows that very different sorts of efforts and organizations played a role in supporting his transition from being a well-liked and talented high school student to a committed civic activist. Here is how Gustavo describes the process,

[I heard about AB 540] 2 weeks prior to June [2001], when I was a senior. I came home. I was tired. I was watching the news. That’s when Assemblywoman Sarah Reyes had a press release for AB 540. I had written to ask

her about AB 540 and when it would pass. She just sent me more information about AB 540 saying she hoped it would pass in December, January...In the letter I told her I was a student who got good grades and couldn't go to college because I wasn't legalized and I asked her exactly what could be done and exactly what the law was going to be. And she explained it would allow me to not pay out-of-state tuition.

Two weeks later when she came to our school she talked about it. We had her for an event they call "Despedida"—a graduation but they basically do it in Spanish. Students write their bios. At that time she announced AB 540 with me being one of those students not being able to go to college [without passage of the bill]. I was surprised. But since I had written her, she spoke more about it.

It is useful to consider how many factors were involved just to make this first step in the process of recruiting Gustavo into civic activism. Part of the context is clearly the active engagement of a local Latina state legislator in a campaign to advance the legislation and Spanish-language media (in this case, a commercial TV station) in building public awareness of the effort within the immigrant community

Another important factor, a largely “invisible” one, related to the support of an Exeter High School counselor, Margarita Reed who, amazingly, given the typical high school counselor case load (about 150 students), knew each of her students individually. Gustavo remembers that he was, in some respects, surprised that she was able and willing to deal with students on such an individual basis,

I wasn't part of the migrant group. But the migrant counselor, she was my counselor in sophomore year. The counselor in my school knew who would benefit and who not. I was surprised. Most people don't take time to get to know them, but she took all the time she needed to get to know them. She talks with their parents to make sure when grades come out she has the parents in the office right away. Even if the grades are good, she has the parents in to let them know their kids did really good. Good or bad news she'd always let the parents know about their children.

Yet another factor, to some extent obvious but, also, difficult for non-immigrants to appreciate, is the courage it requires for teenagers to get involved when they can lose so much from publicly acknowledging their immigration status. This is a formidable barrier since there is a real basis for apprehension. A Colorado honors student, Jesus Apodaca, who made the news in the course of addressing the problems he faced in going to college was faced with a local U.S. Congressman, Tom Tancredo, mounting a statewide and nationwide campaign to have him and his family deported.¹⁵⁵

But aside from the objective reality, this is another area in which the community context provides youth with conflicting messages. In the course of talking with other undocumented students we have heard numerous accounts of the tensions within the Latino student school population between U.S.-born and recently-immigrated students. As one student put it, “coming out” as an undocumented teenager is difficult decision in a Central Valley teenager’s social life and a potential source of actual conflict.

Parents’ courage in supporting a son or daughter in jeopardizing their lives in the U.S. also deserves to be recognized as an important factor in making it possible for students such as Gustavo to become involved. Gustavo describes his parents’ reaction to his decision to get involved as follows,

¹⁵⁵ Gwen Florio, “College Dreams Face Harsh Reality”, Denver-Post, October 20, 2002.

They said, OK, don't be ashamed you're not legalized. Don't let that be something that's used against you. You might not be legalized but you might be able to do things other people can't. They might be willing to take the risk to hire you instead of someone else instead of the risk with another employee. who doesn't know what to do.

So, Gustavo's willingness to get involved in fairly high profile and personally risky advocacy was not a decision which ran against his parents' wishes.

Things moved forward rapidly in June, 2001. Another important step in Gustavo's progression toward civic activism involved the Central Valley Partnership for Citizenship. Armando Valdez, the Fresno-based outreach worker for the California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation, invited Gustavo and a fellow student, Elizabeth to attend one of the quarterly meetings of the Central Valley Partnership network of community organizations. Valdez's experience as a youth program instructor, television producer, and artist, led him to develop, with Gustavo and Elizabeth, a powerful dramatization of their situation. Gustavo and Elizabeth came into the CVP network meeting dressed in graduation gowns and accompanied by the strains of "Pomp and Circumstance" but the music cut off midway through their entrance to give way to a brief presentation about why it would be impossible for them to attend college unless AB 540 was passed. The presentation was a moving one and one which turned out to be one of a series of events which helped Gustavo gain confidence and poise in speaking publicly about his situation.

Media coverage was an important and inevitable complement to individual students' willingness to talk publicly about their situation. This sort of coverage is important both in terms of political persuasion but, also, in helping to make it seem safer for individuals to tell their personal stories. On July 3, [The Sacramento Bee](#) wrote an editorial strongly supporting the bill, referring to the story of Gabriel, a 16 year-old Los Angeles bilingual student enrolled in Advanced Placement classes who hoped that when he could graduate it would be possible to go to Humboldt State University to become a botanist.

Other stories of students' whose lives would be affected by passage of the AB 540 legislation emerged. [The Contra Costa Times](#) ran a story on a Richmond teenager who wanted to pursue his education to develop computer-related skills, and the [San Jose Mercury-News](#) published a story on an immigrant mother's dream of higher education for her son. Mary Jo McConahy of the Pacific News Service, came from San Francisco to Exeter to interview Gustavo and Elizabeth and another undocumented college-bound student and subsequently returned again with a television crew for a New California Media story. After the legislation was approved by both houses of the California legislature (2 days after 9/11), the campaign shifted to efforts to convince Governor Gray Davis to sign the bill (as he had vetoed Assemblyman Firebaugh's bill in the previous year). The bill was signed into law a month later on October 11 (the eve of Dia de La Raza). The "human interest" stories of youth such as Gustavo played an important role in California reflection and discussion about resolving these ambiguities about the status of "Generation 1.5" students and in creating an environment for a chronically cautious Governor to approve legislation which would surely be seen as controversial in a state where in the past decade voters had approved two anti-immigrant ballot measures.

In the fall of 2001, Gustavo enrolled in College of the Sequoias to start his college career with the hope that passage of AB 540 might make it easier to actually complete his college education and with a small amount of tuition support from private donors who had been put in touch with him via the Central Valley Partnership network.

As a result of contact with California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation staff and Immigrant Legal Resources Center staff, fellow community college students involved in MEChA, and others, Gustavo put together a small project proposal to move forward further in addressing the issue of undocumented students access to education. It was perhaps as clear to Gustavo as to anyone that, without an energetic outreach campaign, the legislation would have little impact—since the undocumented students who could benefit from the in-state tuition provisions of AB 540 might well be unaware that it might make it possible for them to go to college. Asked what the Central Valley Partnership network had provided him in his growing involvement in civic and political issues as follows,

[They provided]...just support....and like being there, saying, you know what...basically we're like newcomers. We didn't know how to work together. They'd say, here's our number, call us if you need help. And that was really useful. Armando helped us organize things together. He was always there when Juanita would call us to come up to Sacramento. CVP helped us with the small grant [for HOLAESE's outreach work]which made it a little bit easier. They helped us with the newspapers...We were willing to fight for it but they brought the bigger details to it, how to do it, knew how to get attention, so it made a bigger impact, that's what we wanted since we were a small group

In considering the implications of Gustavo's experiences, it is useful to remember the need for mentoring and ongoing support for even the most outstanding youth. It is hard for many adults to realize how fast teenagers' perspectives are changing during this critical period of their lives. For example, I spoke casually with Gustavo in December, 2002, as he had been invited to another CVP quarterly meeting which took place in Sacramento and inquired how things were going with his studies toward a degree in business administration (his career goal 6 months before). With his usual understatement he said, "Well, I'm getting more interested in politics, that's very interesting..."

By January, 2002, a new issue emerged in connection with the issue of undocumented students' access to higher education. The California State University system and the California Community College system had proceeded forward with regulations to implement the provisions of the new legislation regarding determination of students' residency. The new fee structure was in place as required by the legislation on January 1. However, the University of California system (which had, in fact, been successfully sued for implementing an earlier court decision allowing undocumented students to pay resident tuition) was reported to be moving quite reluctantly toward implementing the provisions of AB 540.¹⁵⁶

Gustavo's experience as part of the CVP affiliation network's involvement in the University of California policy discussion on whether or not to adopt regulations to implement the provisions of AB 540 provides a good example of the critical role of such networks in facilitating ongoing civic engagement. While it is likely that hundreds of thousands of California immigrants were aware of the general implication of the AB 540 legislation, i.e. that immigrant students graduating from California high schools would be considered state residents for the purpose of determining tuition and fees even if they were undocumented, it is likely that few were aware that the flagship institution, the University of California, had not put implementing regulations in place. Gustavo, like many other students, heard about this newest problem as a result of collaboration between UCLA MEChA and

¹⁵⁶ A 1985 case, *Leticia A vs. Board of Regents of the University of California* had required the UC system to allow undocumented students to pay resident tuition. But this policy was reversed in 1990 in the *Bradford* decision (*Regents of the University of California vs. Los Angeles County Superior Court*).

the Immigrant Legal Resources Center who facilitated the attendance by a group of about fifteen concerned and engaged Central Valley students to the Los Angeles meeting of the University of California regents, among them, Gustavo. Although the trip did not go perfectly, Gustavo was, nonetheless, delighted,

... there was an accident on the freeway so that delayed us. So America [a fellow undocumented student activist from CSU-Fresno working with the CVP-affiliated San Joaquin Valley Coalition for Immigrant Rights] was the only person to testify. Since we got there late, Mark Silverman [of ILRC] tried to get us more time on the agenda but they had a lot of other things so it was like “No!”... It was exciting because there was another Chicano youth group in the UC system supporting AB 540. We got together to say what we needed to do, what they were doing... We got excited on the way home because we got a phone call bearing that it was going to be implemented. So that’s when everyone became more excited. We were really tired because we had got up at 5AM. We were just laughing, having a great time....

This process of meeting new people, sharing the excitement of being part of a group of like-minded people working toward a shared dream is the human reality of being involved in a “civic recruitment network”. The impact of such experiences seem to stem primarily from their strengthening motivation, aspirations to be involved. But they also serve to build “civic skills”. Describing the group’s planning Gustavo describes it simply, “we got together to say what we needed to do, what they were doing”.

In 2002, his first year of college, Gustavo moved forward with the small OLAESE project spreading the word about new possibilities for going on after high school to higher education. He summed up the OLAESE outreach project as follows,

There was a group of about six of us. We tried to hit Fresno, Kings, Tulare County.... Because I was the one from Tulare County I ended up being scheduled here for several different schools.... we found out some kids were ashamed they were not legalized here. We spoke in front of Farmersville High School and you could tell really who was not legalized here. The ones who were legalized would just put their heads down and say “Don’t talk to me I don’t want to see you”. We were kind of trying to say, “Hey. what can we do here... students wanted to talk to us but they had their friends around and they didn’t want them to find out. They put us in the middle and they just hung around us and around us... so what we ended up doing is we handed more flyers to the migrant counselors. We left the scholarship list and thought they’d go running to them. They would know who qualifies and who doesn’t.

It was at the same time that MALDEF came out with its scholarship [Hispanic Scholarship Fund’s AB 540 Program]. As far as we know there are a lot of students at College of the Sequoias and Fresno Community College who are on AB 540. We kind of give ourselves the credit. There were other groups too. Fresno Pacific College even helped us. When they went out to recruit students they would talk about AB 540.

Gustavo’s experience at Farmersville High School highlights the importance of recognizing the diversity of even those communities which seem to outsiders to be homogeneous. Gustavo and his fellow student activists re-discovery of undocumented students’ reluctance to “come out” and have their immigration status be known by their peers appears to have been a disappointing one. At the same time, the solution to overcome this problem suggests that this experience too was part of the skills-building process as the HOLAESE decided to work with the educational system rather than to pursue a course of independent outreach—a decision perhaps which stemmed in part from Gustavo’s, and perhaps other students’, positive experiences with concerned and knowledgeable school counseling staff.

The Prospects for Sustainable Civic Engagement

An ever-present challenge in understanding the impacts of social program interventions or assessing how a particular set of experiences may affect an individual's life or the lives of a group of individuals is to determine the appropriate "end point". A reasonable question in our inquiry is whether Gustavo's experiences—in school and as part of the CVP's community-based network—provided a sound foundation for sustainable civic engagement is, "How do we know?"

In Gustavo's case, two years after he first became actively engaged in addressing the issue of how California social policy would affect his own life and the lives of teenagers like him, the likely answer is that Gustavo will, indeed, be engaged in civic affairs on an ongoing basis. Gustavo extended his civic involvement still more broadly during the summer and fall of 2002 to include work at the Catholic Church's Good News Center in Visalia where, along with other community people, he helped clients in dealing with a multitude of immigration issues.

When asked in February, 2003, what he thought funders should do to help Mexican immigrants in the Central Valley such as himself, his thoughts did not turn first to the initial issue which had sparked his involvement but, to the general issue of access to help with immigration problems (in part because he had learned about the serious problems some immigration assistance clients were facing as a result of having followed the advice of unqualified *notarios* who had charged them thousands of dollars for dangerously incorrect immigration advice).

At that point, Gustavo had dropped out of college for a semester, in large measure to help his extended family confront serious health problems but, also, to take stock of where he was in his life. He had continued working at the Mexican restaurant where he had worked as a high school student and had negotiated a postponement of a Central Valley Partnership fellowship he had been awarded as a means of continuing to develop his skills as a community activist.¹⁵⁷ Energetic, optimistic, analytic, and engaged, Gustavo seems to be a good model for the sort of citizen any community would hope to have.

From Local and State To National Efforts

This social policy issue of educational access for the foreign-born students who have grown up in local U.S. communities first arose, not surprisingly, in states with high levels of immigration— e.g. California, Texas (which, in fact, passed the first such legislation), North Carolina, Illinois, New York. Texas passed the first such state legislation and California, after two years of public and legislative passed the second such state law, shortly after the Texas state legislation

This has now become a national debate and still more far-reaching federal legislation, the DREAM Act, has been proposed as a means of resolving the conflict between narrower federal immigration policy definitions of "residency" in cases such as Gustavo's and more inclusive "community" definitions of residency. The DREAM Act would modify federal immigration policy to respond to the situation that "Generation 1.5" students are essentially American citizens by virtue of having grown up in American communities and would allow those who go on to college to adjust their

¹⁵⁷ He resumed his position as a CVP fellow in July, 2003. The CVP Fellowship's accommodation of Gustavo's juggling of competing responsibilities is a good example of the kind of flexibility needed in this environment

immigration status based on this evidence of commitment to the American dream of education as a pathway to economic self-sufficiency and social responsibility. It is to be expected that local pressures in the 22 “new growth” states where immigration is so rapidly changing the demographics of rural communities will assure that this issue arises in those states also. There is evidence of this, for example, in the fact that one of the co-sponsors of H.R. 1684, the House version of the legislation is Congressman Cannon, from Utah, not a state generally thought of as an “immigrant state”.

The difference made by passage of the DREAM Act will have nothing to do with the social policy issue as to whether the United States can control its borders but it will have a great deal to do with the question as to whether Gustavo and other immigrant youth like him can fulfill their full potential by pursuing a college education and how easy it will be for them to give back to the communities in which they grew up by becoming actively engaged in civic affairs.

As pro-immigrant advocates move forward with a campaign to build awareness of the DREAM Act and support for the sensible provisions for status adjustment for students graduating from U.S. high schools, it has become clear that there are many students as motivated as Gustavo. The Immigrant Legal Resources Center came up with a creative strategy to involve some of the students by sponsoring a writing contest inviting students (or adults) to write about what passage of the legislation would mean to them. The responses (written in English) show both the mixture of pain and optimism among this generation of immigrant youth who are illegal aliens despite growing up in U.S. communities. A young woman working her way through college writes as follows,

Your stars and stripes are bars that borrowed my freedom. America taught me what it means to be free. Inspired me to say these five hundred and twenty-three words. My name is Alicia and this is my life. I am the third world living in the first....In fourth grade I learned Martin Luther King Jr. died because he had a dream. Dreams, nocturnal phenomenons, until you make them a reality. I will do that eventually...I was a junior, straight A's thought I would go to any school I wanted....If you don't have a social security number you are nobody, but I'm still breathing. No driving permit when you turn sixteen...I can't get the fifty dollars they took out of my paycheck, this week, back. Well at least my salary hides the debts. A national debit it seems I owed before I was born. Would you call me a criminal. Would you call a six year old a criminal? How about a two month old? I broke the law on June 28, 1991 [when her parents brought her to the U.S.] so crucify me; don't let me buy clothes at the mall. If my grades aren't good enough for a two year university, then surely my blood type, A positive, isn't good enough to donate, and give to people who are somebody.

Alicia's bitterness is closely tied to her awareness of her social identity as an American, as well as the analytic skills to understand the contradictions in her status as a contributor to the Social Security Trust Fund and her ineligibility for the benefits which citizens receive due to her illegal immigration status as the U.S.-raised child of immigrant parents. In this context, her awareness of her official non-identity and the contrast/conflict with her eligibility as a blood donor.

Despite her bitterness, even Alicia, as well as others such as Gustavo, are willing to contribute to U.S. society. The practical social policy issue is how to recruit them and the somewhat unexpected answer to be found in Gustavo's case is that one solid first step toward civic involvement and eventually community service might be to exercise one's first amendment right to freedom of speech and assembly and work actively to advocate for change in a cruel social policy.

Policy and Program Design Insights from Gustavo's Story

Gustavo's story makes it clear that immigrant social and civic integration are very closely intertwined. The program planning and policy implications of Gustavo's story is that efforts to promote the development of sustainable civic engagement among "Generation 1.5" and 2nd generation immigrant youth should not focus on finding the "best" program design but rather toward development of community initiatives which provide a broad and diverse range of opportunities for civic engagement and experiential learning of civic skills. The story of Gustavo's development as a civic activist really seems to begin the moment he arrived in California. It seems to involve his parents and home environment, his early school experiences, his high school experiences, and the immigrant-oriented community organizations which provide him a "workshop", an organizational framework for trying out and refining his skills and becoming increasingly engaged as one successful endeavor led to another. Gustavo's energetic and successful involvement as a civic activist emerged from a community environment which nurtured his personal development and encouraged him to establish a social identity which encompassed both solidarity with other Mexican immigrants and agility in navigating the U.S. system.

If "raising a child" includes not simply physical nutrition but, also, nourishing a child's social development and shepherding children through the rites of passage from childhood to full-fledged membership in the community, it does indeed seem to take a village to raise a child. It is heartening to see that through the shared efforts of responsive school system personnel, concerned legislators, public interest groups, local community-based organizations, and undocumented youth themselves have contributed to solutions to a national problem. One of the banners carried by immigrant student marchers as part of the AB 540 campaign to afford undocumented California teenagers easier access to higher education puts it well, saying, "We Are The Future!"

The Family Level Dynamics of Civic Integration

Differential rates of acculturation are a threat to all immigrant families—as children's rapid integration into the social life of the communities in which they are growing up can often outpace their parents, creating chasms in parent-child relationships which are difficult to bridge. The inter-generational conflicts which threaten many immigrant families, have not appeared in Gustavo's life. He describes his parents' assessment of his current involvement as follows,

At the beginning they had a hard time understanding...because they're not used to politics or anything. But then after awhile, they're like "Go ahead" "What are you doing?" Kind of actually wanting to know what I was doing. And I was surprised, I said "OK, I don't mind telling you. This is what I'm doing...". They really like it. They know I'm working not just for me but for many other people.

So, at least in Gustavo's case, there is really an instance where a child can give back to his or her parents something of the energy and concern which went into child-rearing. It is not clear how often things are likely to work out so well but the accounts we have heard from Central Valley civic activists such as Luis Magaña and Polo Chavez, who regularly talk with their Bracero-era fathers about how things are going and community-related issues, with Raquel Velasco who has an ongoing open exchange with her daughters about the circumstances where their mother is the one who is involved in civic affairs, and the collective engagement of Mixteco parents and their children in the Se'esavi cultural revival effort suggest that it is possible for inter-generational harmony and civic

participation to co-exist. The idea of supporting immigrant youth in helping their parents into the future makes a great deal of sense.

Summary-Building Sustainable Civic Engagement in Immigrant Communities

Gustavo's story suggests that efforts to build civic engagement among the children of immigrants cannot be based on a "just in time" approach. Because civic participation is one aspect of overall social interactions, it is likely that attention should not focus simply on "civic education" but, rather, on broad consideration of how the nature of community life and local institutions' roles in those communities can facilitate the development of civic engagement among Generation 1.5 and 2nd generation children of immigrant parents.

Civic efforts in Central Valley communities such as Arvin and specific institutions such as the Exeter High School provide examples as to how immigrant community involvement and institutional responsiveness can each make a contribution to what is really a collective endeavor, building the foundations of sustainable civic engagement. The theme of maintaining cultural continuity, strengthening the bonding social capital keeping 2nd generation Mexican immigrants concerned about and involved in efforts to contribute to the well-being of their peers and other succeeding immigrant cohorts is a central one.

As was reported in The Aguirre Group's evaluation of the Central Valley Partnership, the program model of involving Generation 1.5 and 2nd generation immigrants in efforts to help their parents' generation achieve citizenship despite language and educational barriers demonstrates how community service can yield individual and community benefits while, also strengthening bonding social capital within the Mexican immigrant community. The AB 540 campaign provides another model showing how involvement in activities related to political voice can also provide a sound foundation for subsequent civic engagement.

Within the typology defined by Jenkins and her colleagues to describe different modes of civic involvement, the 2nd generation Mexican immigrant teenagers and young adults volunteering to teach ESL/Citizenship classes to their elders are "civic specialists" while student activists like Gustavo, Elizabeth, and scores of others involved in the AB 540 and DREAM Act campaigns are "political voice specialists". Investing in efforts to promote either mode of civic activism is worthwhile because there is such strong evidence of cross-over, with skills developed in one domain being deployed in the other and engagement in one mode of civic activity encouraging engagement in others.

Presumably, efforts to increase the range of "civic opportunities" available in communities where immigrants have settled, providing easier access to all modes of civic participation—service, advocacy, and political voice—will benefit communities in both the short-run and the long-run.

As I explore in the next chapter, based on retrospective analysis of the stories of two now middle-aged daughters of Mexican immigrants, it appears that the ideal of full-fledged across-the-board civic involvement is viable one, although it is clear that sustainable lifelong civic involvement requires character, stamina, and personal agility—since the stream of social issues which must be solved collectively is a never-ending one.

Chapter 7

Roles Played by the *Tejano/as* in Civic Life

In this final chapter of the current inquiry into the dynamics of Mexican immigrant civic engagement in Central Valley community life, I explore the special role played by two Tejano activists in the social and civic life of these communities and the ways in which their experiences growing up and as young adults gave shape to their civic activism and their interactions with successive cohorts of Mexican immigrants and with the established civic and political power structure.

I argue that a retrospective look at the experience of this Tejano/a cohort of U.S.-raised children of Mexican immigrants provides us not simply another dimension of understanding about contemporary dynamics in civic life in the Mexican settlement communities of the Central Valley but also valuable insights about the future multi-generational dynamics of civic life in the rural communities where Mexican immigrants settle. Many of the processes which took place in the “classic” *colonias* of south Texas as Mexican immigration transformed civic life in the border region are currently underway throughout rural California.

Unique Circumstances and Recurring Patterns

My argument that the Tejano/a experience is a useful paradigm for understanding 2nd generation Mexican immigrants is not meant to distract us from the recognition that the perspectives of this cohort of Mexican immigrants to U.S. farmwork were shaped in important ways by the social, economic, and political context of the times. The post-World War II world that Mexican immigrants found when they came to settle in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas and as they migrated throughout the U.S. in the heyday of long-haul migrant labor from 1950-1970, was a period of social and political change as rapid as the current one we are experiencing. However, the civil rights movement was at the center of national social policy after *Brown v. Board of Education* (1953), the country was immersed in the Vietnam War, and there was still labor market mobility for motivated workers with minimal education. These two decades were ones of social and political crisis and conflict but they were also ones of hope while the current era is one of diminished expectations. But, in other respects—most notably, shift in the demographic composition of the population--California in the period from 1980-2010 has important similarities to Texas in the period from 1950-1980.

Biculturalism, Bridging Social Capital, and Civic Linkages

In general, the roles Tejano/as currently play, as the U.S.-raised sons and daughters of migrant farmworkers who settled in Central Valley communities reflect their locus as dwelling in a “borderlands” of social geography as much as the fact they were born near the official US-Mexico border. The Tejanos’ and Tejanas’ biculturalism, their ability to “code-switch”, their agility in functioning within two disparate social systems, allows them to confuse friends and foes alike. This makes their civic styles and roles quite different from those of traditional community leaders. Like the knights on the traditional chessboard, the Tejano/as’ sociocultural complexity allows them to “jump” out of the usual patterns of social interaction and come to develop new perspectives, try out new ways of getting things done, and add innovation to the ongoing process of community change.

Thus, their involvement is essential as part of the process of community co-evolution of Mexican immigrants' and native-born populations' mutual adaptation. This does not, however, mean that the process is an easy one.

Reflecting their locus in the highly-conflicted clash of two cultures, the civic activists from the Tejano/a generation have unusual abilities to build bridges between groups who do not understand each other. Yet, at the same time, their awareness of the U.S. "system", the ideals of democracy and the harsh contrasts in communities divided by race, class, and immigration status make their civic involvement volatile. Bridge-building—helping diverse groups better understand each other—goes hand in hand with bridge-burning because, with awareness, comes an abiding anger at social and institutional injustice. Yet surprisingly, after conflict, comes collaboration but then, too, conflict emerges from collaboration. This creative, angry, impatient generation is always "pushing the envelope", making change wherever they go.

The two Tejanas on whom I focus in this chapter, Herlinda Gonzalez and Gloria Hernandez, are both lifelong civic activists, each with their own distinctive personal style, modes of expressing themselves, and networks of fellow activists. Both are well-known in their communities and are, inevitably seen in very different light by the different groups with whom they have alternately (or sometimes simultaneously) collaborated with and had conflict with. By pushing the envelope of conventional wisdom both have made individuals, constituencies within communities, and entire communities look deeper into the nature of their ways of interacting with each other, into the processes of civic life which are all too often taken for granted.

Network Theory and Implications for Promoting Civic Engagement

Herlinda and Gloria are the sort of people who Malcolm Gladwell refers to as "connectors" and "mavens", that is, individuals who are in touch with many people and involved in connecting them with each other but, also, connecting different bodies of knowledge and disparate types of information (Gladwell 2000). Both exemplify the ways in which even a few persons, by serving as "bridges" connecting distinct social networks (in the Central Valley, especially networks which are culturally and linguistically separated), can make a large, impersonal world which is difficult to navigate into a much more connected one, "a small world" (Buchanan 2002). This dynamic process of "community-building" is of particular importance in the Central Valley and other rural areas in the United States where immigrants are concentrating because we know there are pre-existing barriers of culture, language, and class which, together with patterns of residence, keep them apart.

This kind of "networking", this process of social catalysis, might conceivably bring people immediately toward working together to address common problems of community life but, more often, it seems that this process of contact between different sociocultural networks includes tension, conflict, and months or years of learning, mutual adaptation, exploration of ways to navigate differences, before collaboration emerges. Such processes are often painful and turbulent but this is, after all, the nature of democracy. Where network theory diverges from classical planning is that change is generally recognized to be a dynamic process which is not easily predictable because multiple feedback loops tend to make complex systems behave in unexpected ways. From this perspective, the process described by Bach as mutual accommodation involves an elaborate dynamic "dance" as waves of immigrants change and are changed by the processes of U.S. life.

Much of the current excitement about the functioning of social networks stems from understanding the mathematical properties of networks and how changes ripple through all networks—the neural networks of our bodies, large-scale ecological systems, and human communities alike. The proposition Gladwell poses is that it is possible, even with fairly rudimentary understanding of network dynamics to move deliberately to create “social epidemics” which will have positive effects. From the perspective of network theory then, classical concepts of “community organizing” are useful in that they acknowledge social dynamics. However, at the same time, their limitation is that they tend to understate the extent to which communities are self-organizing.

From this perspective, the sorts of linear models used in strategic planning by non-profits and by policymakers in designing social programs and articulating “theories of change” are overly simplistic since there is good reason to believe that social dynamics, like other network phenomena are non-linear. Even where the complexity of social dynamics is recognized, it is generally agreed that the “hard-edged” sort of flow chart models are, at best, optimistic sketches of possible outcomes which may or may not emerge. The “tipping point” at which a family’s life or an entire neighborhood’s life, or a community’s “character” transitions from one “state” or “culture” to another, either in terms of positive or negative social change, is, therefore, not easily predictable—especially when the only analytic tool being used is “common sense”.¹⁵⁸

The idea that one can deliberately seek to accelerate what may, indeed, be ongoing, “natural” processes is a useful one—particularly when it is recognized that the role of a social policy intervention or program design is more to nudge social change forward than to “create” social change.

A corollary is the one which underlies democratic theory, which is that, “creativity” must be part of the process, that the civic involvement of a range of community members has practical value in that new and better insights and solutions will emerge. Such perspectives lead inevitably toward interest in and valuation of experiential learning, the recognition that civics cannot be “taught”, that it must be learned. The ideal curriculum for building civic skills is like Dante’s metaphoric journey, the course of one’s life, but, as in Dante, guides and by implication, the organizations which support them in these roles can make valuable contributions to the traveler’s learning and eventual transformation.

The Role of Civic Recruitment Networks

In fact, both Herlinda’s and Gloria’s trajectories, priorities, and modes of civic activism were significantly affected by the community organizations with whom they came in contact—in Herlinda’s case, California Rural Legal Assistance and in Gloria’s case, the United Farm Workers (UFW). Having learned valuable skills from these “civic incubators” each set her own priorities and followed her own course which took them beyond their involvement in these networks to making their own individual and distinctive impact on community life.

¹⁵⁸ The federal government has designed several large-scale social policy experiments (most notably collaborative efforts by the U.S. Department of Labor in the Carter administration and, subsequently, in the Clinton administration to explore the social dynamics of changing the sociocultural context of entire neighborhoods or communities.. However, there has not to date been the political will to stay the course in seeing if such place-based strategies will work as expected or even to explore the micro-dynamics of community social change.

Network theorists, like community organizing specialists, believe in the power of personal relationships but where the proactive vision of community organizers focuses is on the particular role played by organizations in catalyzing the personal interactions which build personal relationships and, consequently, “recruit” community members to civic action. Where theory and practice converge is in recognizing that some of the most powerful learning experiences come from “horizontal” interactions –with peers and, also, with adversaries. Where theory and practice both need to advance is in developing a better understand of how informal social networks and formal organizational structures interact and discovering if there are more effective ways to use the blunt tools of organizational interventions to kindle “authentic” change, that is, change which does more than create a new veneer overlaying the same tired civic processes, change which goes on to kindle meaningful and lasting transformations in the ways in which community members interact with each other.

Herlinda and Gloria, as persons who straddle different worlds, who “get it” when it comes to understanding subtle differences of cultural perspectives and values and differing ways of conceptualizing community problems and the strategies for resolving them, often express frustration about how long it takes for them to help others “get it”. At the same time, they are good examples of sustainable civic involvement since both have been active in their respective communities for more than three decades. As in the previous accounts, it is clear that civic involvement is not something which is “grafted” from outside into an activist’s personal life. It emerges from personal concerns and experiences. Both are involved in multiple arenas of community life and it should not be surprising that both, at times, get tired.

We begin with an account of Herlinda’s development as a civic activist and current involvement and end with an account of Gloria’s insights, and development.

Herlinda Gonzalez-Westside San Joaquin Valley Community Activist

The small town of Patterson, population 11,445, about 20 miles southwest of Modesto in Stanislaus County is, at once, a typical Central Valley agricultural community and, in other ways, unique. Although the town bills itself as the Apricot Capital of the World, cars speeding past the town on I-5 on their way from San Francisco to Los Angeles usually see only the Patterson exit sign, a huge fast food complex immediately downhill from the exit and slightly further downhill the private airstrip of an aerial spraying company.

Another two miles down the secondary road, past a large development of newly-built suburban homes, is the actual town of Patterson—an oasis of old-fashioned homes with sycamore trees providing welcome shade in the excruciatingly hot summers. The town was built with a grand plan of sorts as its founder, deciding to make it different from other Westside San Joaquin Valley towns, designed it (reportedly modeled after Washington, DC and/or Paris) to have streets radiate like the spokes of a wheel from the central park. Patterson is a graceful town and relatively affluent. Only 12% of the household incomes are below the poverty level and half of the households in the community have incomes of \$40,000 or more per year.

Patterson is a Latino-majority community, 56% Hispanic. However, there are slightly less immigrants to Patterson than other Central Valley communities. Only one-quarter of the town’s residents are foreign-born, mostly in Mexico, but immigration is an ongoing process; about 40% of the immigrants in the town have arrived in the past decade. As might be expected from this

summary demographic profile, the community is, at times, awkward in addressing its social and cultural transformation. For example, the town's Apricot Festival combines old-fashioned Midwestern country fair themes, bales of hay and apricot pies with its Mexican culinary heritage of taquitos, providing fair-goers of both Anglo and Mexican background brief flashes of cultural disorientation. The City Council and other local government commissions have Hispanic representation on them but the city's government does not yet reflect the ethnic composition of its population.

It is in this community context that Herlinda Gonzalez, a civic activist from the Tejano generation of Mexican immigrants has lived for several decades, raised her children, and worked steadily as a civic activist—as a pro-immigrant advocate, community helper willing to deal with whatever issue needs attention. While Herlinda works as the school liaison to Hispanic parents, her civic activism and work as a volunteer goes well beyond the boundaries of her job as a community worker. Her story is a good example of how women from her generation of Tejanas work as intermediaries between immigrants and native-born citizens.

When she was first asked how she became a leader, Herlinda replied, “You just start and before you know it they put you in the newspaper.” But as her life story unfolds, it becomes clear that she was “born different,” that from a very early age she refused to accept the traditional role of daughter, wife and mother in the Mexican culture. In other words, from an early age she was an activist waiting to act, a leader waiting for a cause, but before she began to lead her community, she exercised her activist inclinations in a more private way, within the family. “I always knew I was different. I am a different kind of Hispanic,” she asserts.

There was a point, when I was very young, that I noticed that I was different, that although I was a woman, and although I feared my father, I could confront him in defense of my mother. During the cotton harvest on his land in Mexico, he would leave for several weeks and never take my mother along. I protested, arguing that if they were a couple, they should go together, but both my mother and grandmother would become very nervous and tell me to be quiet. They always defended the ‘affairs of men folk’ and insisted that the woman’s role was to stay at home, to care for the children, to cook and most important, to maintain the ‘appearances’ of the husband and the family.

Many women (of my culture) suffer a great deal. I try to help them but they don’t understand how men deny them their own humanity, how they make them feel less than human beings, how they are good for nothing except to stay in the kitchen or to have children or to satisfy them in bed. I know that I was born crying, like any other child, but I have never taken a step backward. That’s what I have and have had my whole life and what I have taught my sons. If something happens to you, you are confronted with an obstacle, never turn back. Stop and stay still for as long as it takes. Look around you. Don’t move until you’re sure of the step that you’re going to take forward.”

At first glance one might not even guess that Herlinda's Hispanic, though she is proud of her heritage. She's quite fair (*guera*) and her bespectacled face framed by short curly gray hair suggests an Anglo woman, dressed in a brightly embroidered fuchsia Mexican dress simply because it's comfortable and pretty. This energetic woman, who has devoted her life to her two sons and to helping the poor and the underrepresented in her community, loves to remind you that she was once a “ *jovencita guerita clasicadora*,” (fair young maiden with a classic style) who attracted lots of attention in the store in Laredo, Texas, on the Mexican border, where she managed women's accessories and fine porcelain. All the young Mexican men who shopped there for items to take back home asked to be waited on by her. In fact, it was at that store that she met her future husband, a laborer and a *prieto* (dark skinned).

Herlinda was born in northern Mexico in 1937 to a father who owned a large property in the state of Coahuila. After the Mexican Revolution, in the late 1930's, a portion of his land was confiscated as part of the land redistribution which created the Ejidal system in northern Mexico, but he retained some agricultural cropland. Living with her younger sister, Lupe, born in 1942, her parents and grandmother she completed primary school in her village. In most ways, her early life and education mirrored that of thousands of other young women of her era who would later cross the Texas border and take up permanent residence in the US. But during those formative years the seeds of leadership were spreading their roots within her and beginning to firmly form an outlook that would later drive her to seek equal rights for herself and justice for her fellow farmworkers. Equipped with only six years of formal education, she had learned to read and write well enough to understand the power of literacy and self expression.

In those early years as she attended school, worked in her father's field, and kept the company of the women in her family, she developed a set of values that could not tolerate injustice. Her first notions of injustice were developed from witnessing the relationship between her mother and father. Probably it was no different from the relationships between the parents of her school mates but she was bothered by the independence of her father and the subservience of her mother. This pattern, which she surely recognized as an entrenched reality of Mexican culture, would repeat itself over and over as she moved through her life.

Because her mother was a US citizen, it was not difficult for the family to cross from Nuevo Laredo, Mexico to Laredo, Texas in 1952 when Herlinda was 15. Though the girls were still young, they joined their parents in the cotton fields of Corpus Christi, taken there by Mexican contractors.

We picked cotton from June until the end of November. We started with the 'clean cotton' That was easy to pick. I weighed only 105 pounds, but I carried a sack tied to my waist that would fill to 25 pounds. I walked behind the others in the fields. We would be taken there in trucks. The mosquitoes were so bad that we had to hide in our sacks to escape them. The conditions were unhealthy—no bathrooms or drinking water. When I worked in Corpus Christi, I learned a lot about how men abuse women.

From there they went to Plainview, Texas where they lived in cardboard boxes, and then went on to Hefford to work in potatoes. Although the contractors were Mexican, they were very dark skinned. There were also black farmworkers. During that period she encountered racial discrimination for the first time. The only people permitted to eat in the restaurants of the town were members of her own family. The rest were too dark.

They worked in West Texas and Colorado too. Her father couldn't take the strain. He stayed in the U.S. for two years and then decided to return to Mexico. "He couldn't stay here. I couldn't go back there. He wanted my mother to go with him but I persuaded her to stay with us. It wasn't that he was violent, but he controlled her too much and kept her isolated in the village. After he returned to Mexico he started another family. We never saw him again."

The girls and their mother continued to do farmwork, traveling for several seasons to Minnesota, Ohio, Wisconsin and Michigan. In the north, conditions were much better, but Herlinda left the fields temporarily in 1965 to work full time in department stores and boutiques on the Mexican border. She had not learned to speak English yet. Her fair skin and outgoing personality resulted in increased sales for her boss so she was invited to open and manage a new shop in Brownsville,

another border town. She speaks about her experiences as a coquettish young salesgirl with great relish. She loves people. She was very social and sensitive to their needs even as a young woman.

She and her mother maintained a very close bond, supporting each other through difficult economic challenges, through Herlinda's abrupt end to her marriage and the child rearing years. Though her mother continued to do field work for many years and never challenged the mores of Mexican culture, she was fiercely loyal to her daughter, even when she seemed too outspoken or aggressive in her pursuit of justice.

Today she regrets that she was too proud to accept public assistance so she could continue her education. She couldn't stand to be dependent and feels, ironically, that welfare is breaking the spirit of her culture that has been traditionally independent and self sustaining. However, she is the first to help a neighbor in need to apply for public assistance or to enroll in the Salvation Army's Thanksgiving and Christmas food basket programs. In fact, last year she oversaw the distribution of 260 baskets—not just for Hispanics, but for all people in need. Between Thanksgiving and Christmas, she personally spends many hours standing in front of various local grocery stores ringing the familiar Salvation Army Christmas bell to help fund the food basket project.

Though she is proud of her heritage and culture, there are aspects of it which she sees as harmful, particularly for children growing up in the United States. For example, when fathers teach their sons to be “machista,” they perpetuate abusive behavior toward women. Herlinda left her husband very early in their marriage. She was nearly 32 when she married her dark skinned husband of whom her mother strongly disapproved. Not to be dissuaded, she married and soon left Texas for California, with her new husband and first born son. From the beginning he was unable (perhaps unwilling) to control his possessive, controlling nature. Herlinda, who had always loved people, was not allowed to leave home or to have friends over. She wasn't even permitted to go outside to hang up her laundry

Soon after arriving in California Herlinda found herself pregnant again. When she told her husband, he didn't believe her. He flew into a rage. He accused her of having sex with another man. She insisted that they go see a doctor to confirm her pregnancy. They went to the clinic together but left separately. Though she was soon to have her second son, Herlinda knew she could no longer share her life with someone who denied her her own humanity. Soon Herlinda, now separated, was back in Patterson with her mother so they could be near her sister, Lupe, and her family.

Herlinda found her first leadership role quite by accident. Her oldest son, Jorge, was near preschool age when her sister Lupe began to complain of the problems her children were having at school. Lupe felt helpless to right the wrongs she saw and thus enlisted her sister's help. They attended a school meeting at which Herlinda asked many questions. The principal was Hispanic, so her message was quickly understood. She wondered why all the poor children were at one school and all the middle class children at another. She wondered why the other school had better teachers and more equipment. She soon discovered that there were Federal programs to supplement school district budgets to bring materials and services to poor children, so she spoke louder, especially in the presence of influential visitors. From the first meeting, parents formed a parent organization to support the school and raise funds for small projects. She served as the treasurer, but she didn't stop there. She began to attend school board meetings where she noticed that all the trustees were white *rancheros* (growers).

As she enlarged her circle, Herlinda soon discovered the CRLA (California Rural Legal Assistance) Program and began to seek their help in righting years of discrimination. “It didn’t matter to me if they didn’t understand. I would speak in Spanish and they would take off flying looking for an interpreter. I was mad. I don’t speak English but I’m a citizen of this country. I’m poor but I still want the best for my sons and I think my children have the right to mix with the sons of our bosses. If none of them send their children to this school it must mean that this school is no good”. There was a journalist at the meeting where she began to speak of the discrimination she saw. “If you don’t want to help this school then we’ll run it. I don’t speak English but I’m not a fool.”

When a “teacher’s aide” position became available, funded by a federal program, Herlinda applied. All the other candidates were from the same social class but she was the only one who didn’t speak English. Those in charge of deciding whom to hire objected to her because the teacher for whom she would work did not speak Spanish and would have difficulty communicating with her. Herlinda responded, “but I’m not going to be serving you, I’m going to be serving the children.” She got the job and has been employed by Patterson Unified School District for about 30 years. The teacher’s aide job eventually evolved into a community liaison position in which she worked primarily with Spanish speaking parents in need of community resources or help understanding their children’s progress in school. At first she worked only at Grayson Elementary School where her children were enrolled. Later, she was assigned part time to the high school. Now she works with families district wide.

Herlinda understands all too well the difficulty that parents with little or no education have in raising their own children in this country. They cannot effectively advocate for them in school and they have little power in shaping their character as they approach adolescence. Even the problem of maintaining a strong cultural identity is exacerbated by a lack of education.

While her work as Community Liaison kept her more than full time employed during the school year, she could not adequately support her mother and two sons on a nine month per year paraprofessional’s salary. So Herlinda’s mother continued to work in the fields for as long as she was able and Herlinda worked summers in the fields and packing houses for another twenty years. During her work hours throughout the year, in the community and in the fields, she kept constantly abreast of the issues facing the poor of her community. And surely her effectiveness as an “off hours” activist was enhanced by her credibility as a fellow farm worker. Patterson Frozen Foods, where she often worked, is the largest employer in her city with about 750 workers, well over twice the size of the next largest employer, the Patterson Unified School District. But it wasn’t just her credibility or her listening skills which so thoroughly equipped her as an activist. It was primarily her personal life experience in the areas of health housing, employment and education which catapulted her from a victim to a defender of human rights and law in her community.

Herlinda tells a story of her early years in Patterson when she and her mother were struggling to provide a stable home for her infant and toddler sons. Her mother worked days in the onion fields and she worked the night shift at a packing plant. Both children were sick so she set out very early in the morning for a clinic in Modesto about twenty miles away by bus. When she finally arrived she was shuttled around from station to station and made to wait for several hours for service. At that time there were no Spanish speaking personnel to assist with patient registration or to explain procedures to new and poorly informed clients so she sat anxiously waiting for most of the day with two feverish children. Finally when she calculated that she had only enough time to return home before going off to her night shift, having had almost no sleep since her previous night’s work, that

“differentness” in Herlinda erupted and she approached the registration desk with a new found purpose. She had a “right” to health services in a timely fashion for her small children. She began to express her dissatisfaction sufficiently clearly in Spanish to alert the staff that there was no choice but to find a translator and resolver her concerns. They located a custodian on another floor who was of Mexican descent but hardly proficient in Spanish. Nevertheless, through language, gesture and body language the communication resulted in immediate attention to her needs and the discovery that a satellite clinic existed only a few blocks from her home in Patterson. If this was her experience, what was happening to other less assertive farm workers in similar circumstances?

Not long after this incident she was employed by a rural health clinic to orient and assist low income Spanish speaking clients. This early personal experience helped frame her later advocacy efforts which led to the establishment of a health clinic located at Grayson Elementary School where she worked and where the majority of students are from farm worker families.

Another similar experience of the early 70’s when she was persuaded to accept welfare for a brief period introduced her to the housing crisis most poor people and nearly all farm workers face. Once enrolled in welfare she found herself in need of housing. She reported her need to the case worker who informed her that subsidized housing was only available to intact families. When it appeared necessary for her mother and herself to crowd in with her sister’s family she was told that welfare recipients were not allowed vouchers to pay relatives for housing. Enraged, she threatened to plant her mother and children on a median strip of a well traveled road between Patterson and Modesto with signs and an invitation for media interviews to advertise her plight. Not wanting such attention, social services promptly found accommodations for Herlinda and her family.

As she personally faced dilemmas and as her community witnessed her effective advocacy techniques Herlinda began to discover new tools available to advance her causes. Perhaps the one which has gained her the most respect and recognition was her understanding of the power of numbers. Many years later, in the mid-eighties, Herlinda, who had spent years working on a small scale trying to help her clients fight their landlords for safety and sanitary improvements, or who had reported landlords for code violations or illegal threats to tenants to report them to INS, met an experienced housing advocate, Miguel Donoso. Miguel was living in Modesto, but had developed expertise on the Housing Element portion of municipal master plans while he had lived in San Jose and become a community activist. He agreed to review Patterson’s Housing Element and quickly discovered it did not include the legally mandated requirement for low income housing. He called the city administrative office and requested a spot on an upcoming City Council agenda.

At that meeting, twenty five residents, recruited by Herlinda, attended. Three representatives of the group testified to the lack of and need for low income housing in their town. The City Council readily accepted their testimony and agreed to form a committee to design a plan. Herlinda understood that the law states that housing vouchers must be issued or that land must be reserved for future low income housing development.¹⁵⁹ There was no land set aside. This was the basis of a fight which lasted for a year and a half and required constant vigilance. Herlinda’s greatest contribution to the cause came in the form of providing a large audience for the twice monthly meetings. In fact, the crowds soon grew so large that they could not fit into the council chambers, so

¹⁵⁹ This issue is a recurring theme of political conflict throughout Central Valley communities as municipal government and low-income community residents, often Mexican immigrants, clash about the municipality’s responsibilities under the housing element of the prevailing general plan.

they were moved to the high school cafeteria. Whole families faithfully attended throughout the long battle a feat rarely matched in other communities or by other organizers. During this period, Herlinda led voter registration drives in her community to increase Hispanic representation (though it must be noted that all poor and underrepresented citizens were beneficiaries of her advocacy on all fronts.) At a large gathering she would remind City Council members that the audience needed housing but that they were also voters listening to and judging those who might best represent their issues in upcoming elections. Of course she also endeared herself to those politicians who could benefit from a larger Hispanic turnout.

When the series of meetings began, Miguel and Herlinda requested interpreters during housing discussions to which the council replied “no.” Since English is the language of this country, English would be the language of the meetings. Not to be intimidated, Herlinda and Miguel invited the local Spanish TV station to the next meeting and thereafter professional interpreters from the courts were present to translate.

Why did families faithfully appear throughout this process? Perhaps because of her position at school. Perhaps because she had helped them over the years with emergency food, clothing and utility programs, or perhaps because they recognized the critical need for affordable and safe housing.

The plan was ultimately implemented by Self Help Housing of Visalia, a non profit organization which has managed scores of self-help housing projects where a group of families willing to invest a small amount of money and a large chunk of sweat equity in a cooperative effort which completes all homes before any are occupied. About 150 homes were built. One City Council member said of her efforts, “Herlinda’s like a hunting dog that never gives up. She’s a great one to have on your team...She comes across strong, but if you don’t come across strong, you don’t come across at all.”

Once Herlinda found her voice in the community and began to work full time with families, she widened her network and began to notice injustice outside of the school community as well. She could not remain silent and continued to marshal all her resources: the press, CRLA, and most of all the power of a group of poor people with a strong spokesperson. She once held a public meeting outside of the Catholic Church to decry a Hispanic police officer who was harassing Hispanic youth for parading their “low riders” through town, while he ignored the antics of the middle class youth who behaved similarly in their big pick-up trucks.

On another occasion, she took up the cause of those under represented in the census. A neighbor of the principal at her school objected to her activity and he called her in to reprimand her. She seized the opportunity to make clear to him the difference between his authority to monitor the quality of her work from 9-3 and her right to exercise her rights of free speech and assembly during her non work hours. Of course, despite his threats to terminate her, she remained on the job. Herlinda is not embarrassed or ambivalent about her problem-solving style. She says,

I am an activist. I always knew that I had a calling, but when I began my leadership outside of the home I went to the dictionary to look up the meaning of the word. I wanted to know who I was. We all need to engage in some self analysis. Otherwise we become frustrated. Sometimes you think you’re losing your identity. If you don’t act intelligently you can end up defeating your purpose, even when you’re trying to help your people. They put me in a position of leadership. They said I was a radical and now even the gueros (Anglos) defend me.

As for her sons, who are now independent adults, following their own paths, Herlinda says, “I showed them my roots, but I never forced anything on them. I always let my sons choose what they wanted for themselves, not what I wanted for them. The obligation of the family is to teach them their traditions, so that they might become honest, compassionate; so that they can learn to share and not turn to violence, but not to turn them into something that their parents want. They have to think for themselves and find their own identity.”

Herlinda has a young friend who grew up in her community but received a scholarship to study at the university. The friend, Patricia came to her one day before she left for school and asked “Ms. Gonzalez, what must I do to be just like you?” Herlinda replied,

Listen, Patricia, I'm going to give you some advice. Look elsewhere because copies are not good. The world is full of duplicates and they're weak and tired. You must be an innovator, you must be different. Don't be like me. Don't try to copy me. I know that you, too, are a leader, so be different. You might not be better, but you'll be different. “

Herlinda's idea that the next generation of community leaders should be different from the current generation is perhaps the most remarkable aspect of her style as a “community leader”, as a broker of social change, and the real testimony to her integrity as a civic activist who specializes in bridging capital, bringing people in the community together and insisting on innovation, not on empire-building.

Gloria Hernandez-Urban Activist/Fresno

Gloria Hernandez is a civic activist involved as volunteer in such a broad range of community service efforts, issues, and causes that a central challenge in her life is to juggle , on an ongoing basis, her community work and her job, a job (as advocate for mentally ill persons) which she also loves and approaches with energy and creativity. She is outspoken and blunt and, at the same time, curious and reflective. One of the strongest impressions one gets, after talking with her about different facets of her community involvement is that she is one of the people for whom the abstract ideal of “lifelong learning” is a day-to-day reality.

One reason Gloria can maintain this pace is her excitement in thinking analytically and creatively about a range of issues. For example, she became involved recently in talking with a group of six Fresno-area Catholic priests about the difficult challenges in addressing a vexing problem relating to pressures to marry teenage Mexican couples who might, in another cultural context, simply be “living together”. The problem arises because these teenage youth, who are eligible for legal permanent status because their parents qualified under the SAW program, would lose their immigration status if they marry another immigrant who does not have status.

The problem facing the priests was that church doctrine is that the priests should marry them but that the state's doctrine is they marry, they suffer negative immigration statuses. After advising the priests on this difficult conflict between state and church doctrine, they asked her if she could write up an issue statement on the problem to help them. Gloria refused, saying it would just take too much of her time (which she didn't have). But several weeks later, she amazed one of the priests pointing out to him the similarity between the teenagers' situation and the situation of aging people who are reluctant to marry because it might jeopardize their benefits and suggesting an “alliance on this issue with old folks”. The priest commented that she had said she didn't have time to work on

this. Gloria's response was, "I didn't tell you I would stop thinking about it; I just told you I didn't have time to work on it".

This kind of situation where Gloria draws simultaneously on her what she knows of otherwise unconnected bodies of knowledge (immigration law and church doctrine) makes it clear that Gloria is not simply a "connector" in Gladwell's terms, but, also a maven. Switching from role to role as she moves from arena to arena, Gloria contributes to a variety of mini "social epidemics" which are the process through which communities such as Fresno becomes socially, civically, and politically transformed.

The Genesis of Civic Activism

Gloria grew up in a Texas migrant farmworker family. She was born in east Texas, another sister was born in west Texas, and another in Little Rock, Arkansas. After migrating for years, the family finally settled in 1959 in Del Rey, a small hamlet in Fresno County about 10 miles southeast of Fresno and 4 miles north of Parlier. Gloria's parents played an important role in developing the values and skills which have led her to be a civic activist. She says this of her earliest childhood memories work in the fields and her parents,

The earliest I remember was putting paper out for la tabla...the annual yearly trips to Texas...the infiltration of the annual influx of migrantes from Texas that used to come back and forth! They're still there....Parlier is like Little Texas, even though we weren't going back and forth.

My mother was illiterate. She's a hard-working woman, very religious. She doesn't speak English. The earliest memory I have is working in the fields, in boysenberries and having her tell us stories, real creative stories...She had a crew of us girls always chasing after her to tell stories— in the grapes, in the packing plant, wherever.

My dad was an immigrant. He and an uncle who was never married came over when they were young during the revolution. They started in the railroad and worked there for a long time...and migrated all over the place until we ended up in ... Del Rey. Dad was one of the first people who would allow Chavez to come to our house. Dad was not religious. Mom, on the other hand, used to make us go to church but when the priest decided to move the church from "La Colonia" [West Parlier] into Parlier we didn't have to go any more.

So, like other Texan families, Gloria's family both remained connected to its immigrant roots but, also were inclined to assert their 1st amendment right to self-expression and free association by allowing Cesar Chavez and the UFW to come to their house (although others thought this might not be safe). When we begin to talk about how she got involved in immigrant causes and community organizing, Gloria immediately turns first to her involvement with the UFW as a teenager who had just graduated from high school.

We used to go boycott Safeway in Selma. There was a political campaign, I guess it was in 1972, and I was just out of high school. I went to work in the fields for the summer. I was pregnant...I remember working in the fields in November. I was very pregnant and I had the baby in March. I went back to school. By then the picketing is going on at Giannini's with UFW and my mom tells me, she calls me [to take food out to the pickets]... So I take the food and then I started expanding my time out there. I would take the food and come back but then I'd start going on the picket line.

It was getting bigger and bigger. And that's when they called the general strike. By then I was already helping out—translating you know. That's when the judge did that order that people had to stay 15 feet apart but I was a capitan by then so I would get to walk back and forth. And I got to learn a lot. It was a good experience

And then they call a mass injunction to break the picket line and arrest the men. We were in Reedley or Kingsburg or somewhere and they showed up and they took all the capitanes [captains] and then they took all the men. And I was standing there and I said, "Fuck this, nosotras tambien![us too!]" and I made all the women get onto the bus and we self-arrested ourselves. They took us over to the boot camp. They weren't ready for us women, right?

.....And the union wasn't ready for us. They hadn't even bothered to educate us women about what was going to happen when we got arrested and end up in boot camp and we all signed OR's [released on their own recognizance] and we got released. And then the next day again. This time they took the capitanes and they didn't even bother to wait for the men, and they were dragging my ass onto the bus. And I said to the women, "Nos van a dejar solas!"(They're going to leave us all by ourselves!)" and so the women followed me and we went again. This time we were there a couple of days. There were less campesinas. But then, after 15 days, all the famous people started showing up.

I learned civil rights that year.

Like other Mexican immigrant farmworkers, the “training ground” for Gloria’s parents and her own civic skills development was the agricultural workplace. But, clearly, Gloria’s experience was not delineated by what she learned from the UFW about community organizing techniques. Just as importantly as learning from the UFW she was trying out her own persuasive communication and analytic skills—developing and deploying her own ironic sense of humor as she goads the women to take initiative on their own and later, observes the women farmworker protesters being replaced by famous supporters.

At the same time, Gloria’s civic skills development, like that of many other U.S.-born and raised children was affected by her school experiences. As we discuss the community context Gloria grew up in and the “Parlier revolt” which soon led to Latino community rule, she remembers that, two or three years before she had first gone to the UFW picket line, she had also been drawn into the political ferment around the local high school.

I was an activist even in high school. Going back before the strike. You know the history of Parlier, right? We did the boycotts and all...we changed the system...It started with the students. We had international day and they'd bring speakers from the Armenian population, the Japanese-Americans, and us. We had ours and they didn't have theirs. They were threatened by ours, we had them from the Universidad Nacional Hispana so they threatened to cancel International Day and we got pissed and walked out to the bleachers. And then we got even more pissed and walked out to the park. I was 16 and, at the park, Chicano students from Fresno State started teaching us about Pancho Villa and all, about our real heritage.

Our parents got pissed! They thought we had ditched. So they went to the School Board meeting Some parents already knew what was going on—so they had made a list of demands—affirmative action was hot then. This was 1970. Affirmative action was going on and we wanted more culture-oriented classes. So our parents had demanded that. Our parents demanded this. The school board told them, “You can't demand that!”. So our parents walked out and we walked out with them. It was a White School Board with some Japanese. So we were out of school for two weeks and the parents started the recall. We got them all out and put our own people in It started with the school and then expanded to the City Council....when the Chief of Police died they didn't give it to a Mexican cop who should have gotten it.

It is interesting and useful to note that the Parlier school board confrontation was, in fact, an inter-generational collaboration, bringing students and parents together, despite initial distance between parents and their children, to act together to change the governance of a key school institution and that, in fact, the school walkout by parents and students seeking to have more responsive education contributed to the subsequent overthrow of “minority control” of the Parlier City Council. Interestingly, the “minority” control of the Parlier City Council had included two representatives of former waves of immigrants, an Armenian Councilman and a Japanese-American Councilman, both of them prominent local growers.

As it turned out, the traumatic Parlier revolt, despite litigation, rash accusations that Chicano student-activists were “Communists”, and racist letters from local Anglos, made some progress in the mundane business of running municipal government responsibly. Even some of the former City Council members acknowledged that the new council was doing a good job (Trujillo 1978).¹⁶⁰ Parlier municipal government, with a new commitment to responding to the needs and priorities of community residents, not the private goals of leading landowners and businesses made tremendous objective strides in addressing chronic community problems (especially in crime reduction and affordable housing) but the school system, despite the ethnic shift in staffing, did not manage to make much objective progress in providing education for Parlier students.¹⁶¹

Clearly, no clear-cut set of necessary conditions can guarantee success in responding to community problems but what Gloria and others learned in these exciting days of the early 1970’s was that equitable political representation and more responsive municipal government could at least begin a serious and committed endeavor at community problem-solving. What we are discovering in the course of an in-depth study of Arvin, a small community where, as in Parlier, political power shifted dramatically in 2002 from a divided city council to a pro-immigrant city government is that even the symbolic shift in power has significant impacts—in that immigrants see some hope of their issues being addresses although they agree there is to date no evidence of tangible progress. What Parlier and other communities such as Lindsay where there has been a shift toward Latino control of municipal government have learned is that the challenge once there is Latino political control continues to be one of bringing disparate groups together to address common concerns, even when the more powerful, majority group consists of immigrants and the children of immigrants.

Gloria Hernandez’s Role as A Community Catalyst

Gloria is very clear in her concept of her role as a community leader in the populist mold as opposed to the model of “community leadership” as charismatic orator or deliberate “owner” of a political machine. She describes her role as follows,

¹⁶⁰ Larry Trujillo’s dissertation, “The Quest for Chicano Community Controls”, University of California, Berkeley, 1978 provides an excellent analysis of both the macro-level forces which led to the Parlier revolt and a detailed and authoritative ethnographic account of this important historical event in the Central Valley’s progression toward majority rule. The racist letter to the new Chicano Parlier City Council cited by Trujillo which had stated “..Well you half breed Americans let that no good alien Viveros get you into a job which you bit off more than you can chew...” is interesting in historical context since Arcadio Viveros has gone on to be an outstanding rural California community leader and the political reality is that it is indeed the U.S.-born children of Mexican immigrants who are becoming the swing block for control of municipal and county-level elections.

¹⁶¹ Ed Kissam, “Parlier’s Prospects”, paper presented to “Changing Face of Rural California conference”, University of California at Davis/Urban Institute, Parlier, CA, July 1999.

Change agent?..... I think people change themselves. I think more of myself as a bridge between people...If you'll give me an idea about what you want to create, I may not be the answer, but I'll help you find the answer ... So I say, mire, I was raised gringa. I was raised American. I know the education system. I know the political system. Use me! Use me to teach you how to shoot down the political system. I may know it. That doesn't mean I have the answers. If I teach it to you, you have a different way of looking at things, and you can help me. And I can help you.

At the same time, Gloria recognizes the inherent difficulties in the role she has defined for herself. Although she seeks to serve as a bridge, she also understands how difficult it is to build understanding between very different groups,

I'm on the Police Chief's Advisory Commission. So we get these quarterly reports and on the face, the front page shows they're stopping more White people because that's where the money is with the tickets, but then you look on page two or three and who are they arresting more? Who are they searching more? It's still racial profiling, whatever you say. How do you translate those documents to L across the street who doesn't have a high school education who probably gets profiled left and right? How do you translate it to H who doesn't speak English, doesn't understand, who's fairly new in this country. When I sit there and tell him what I'm seeing, wow!

I am so grateful I have time to talk to these guys [the police]. It helps me understand....But they don't want to listen. The Chief screwed himself putting me on this Commission. Now he has to listen to me. But he doesn't understand me. He thinks I'm anti-cop. I'm anti-bad-cop... And so, what we've done with this other committee Central California Justice Committee, I belong to, is to ask for oversight. And we've gone beyond, changed the complaint forms in a way that people can understand them. And now we're taking on the standing order because the cops don't understand what they have to do, and I want them to understand. I'm doing it, I'm doing it for them and they're not threatened by it.

Clearly, this is a substantial cultural gap to bridge and one of the most important insights from Gloria's experience is the recognition that structural change in community processes of decision-making are an important element in working toward better and more responsive government. However the process of bringing about cultural change, wholehearted acceptance of new ways of doing things, new relationships between antagonistic groups, is one which requires perseverance and day-to-day efforts. The commonplace idea that changes in the legal framework or social policy framework will bring about actual social change has merit. Such steps are important but they are only the first steps toward negotiating an often-difficult of mutual accommodation where "official" proclamations, statutes, regulations, and program plans are only one small element in defining a constantly-changing set of relationships.

As a *Tejana* and daughter of immigrants, as a community member, Gloria has a wealth of social capital and access to community "funds of knowledge" for being an active and response listener and, thus, a persuasive communicator. As a woman with an analytic mind, legal training, and decades of experience in the realm of public interest law and policy issues, Gloria is facile in "getting the big picture". But the process of brokering change is still slow as is suggested by her answer to a question about how she would talk to parents of the undocumented students working on the AB 540 and DREAM Act issues of access to higher education about the real risks of agreeing to their children's becoming involved in public advocacy and, thus, potential recrimination. She comments as follows,

I am sensitive to that. I won't do certain things at certain times. I am very sensitive about the consequences. I don't want to be responsible if something happens. It's like when I worked with the union and people would say, "Chavez no quiere que los niños vayan a trabajar" (Chavez doesn't want children to work in the fields)and I'd say, "Es porque

Chavez quiere que los niños lleguen a tener una educación. Y si el patron te pagara suficiente, tus niños no tienen que trabajar...yo no quisiera que mi hija sufriera lo que sufrí”(It’s because Chavez wants children to get an education. And if the boss paid you enough, your children wouldn’t have to work...I wouldn’t want my daughter to suffer through what I had to experience)

In framing her answer to farmworker parents’ complaints about the possibility that their children might not be able to work and contribute to family income in very traditional terms (e.g. *yo no quisiera que mi hija sufriera...*”) Gloria is acknowledging the past while, at the same time, moving parents onward to better understand and accept the future. But progress is slow. The “big picture” is not always an easy one to take in, given the deep-level apprehension we all face in deciding that our traditional values and collective experiences in the past do not, now, have much relevance. More Mexican immigrant parents do encourage their children to make education a priority but not all do—even with persuasive communication

Prospects for the Future

The experiences of civic activists such as Herlinda Gonzalez growing up in the Lower Rio Grande Valley and Texas-born activists such as Gloria Hernandez growing up in a California community whose culture was dominated by Texas migrant farmworker culture suggests that these cultural inter-zones in what is, essentially, transnational civic space play an important role in the social ecology which is the context for Mexican immigrants’ social and civic integration into California and other rural communities. There is a measure of hope that connectors and social policy mavens such as Gloria and Herlinda can make valuable contributions by catalyzing the process of co-evolution of different social networks in these diverse communities. At the same time, the situation faced by Gustavo Dominguez and other undocumented students seeking access to a college education suggests that the community and organizational climate of the 1960’s and 1970’s had some important ingredients which are, if not absent, at least, attenuated in contemporary communities. Tejanos and Tejanas were at least able to become citizens—an unlikely prospect for countless Mexican immigrants who have settled in California communities and plan to make their lives here.

From Civic Participation to Sustainable Civic Engagement

Both Herlinda’s and Gloria’s stories underscore the need for more passion, more daring, more willingness to consider, discuss, and work actively toward real change (as distinct from the ritual of democratic deliberation and discussion leading only to affirmation of a previously established policy or course of action).

Passion is one of the ingredients in effective and sustained civic involvement. Most discourse in the public policy realm is uncomfortable with terms such as “passion” (although management guru Tom Peters successfully urged corporate executives to develop “a passion for excellence” as a basis for managing their companies). However, returning to the underlying social dynamics of civic engagement, it is clear that “affiliational networks”, if they are to endure the inevitable centripetal forces, personal and professional distractions, people moving out of town, must seek to establish “strong ties”.

Herlinda’s and Gloria’s stories also provide valuable guidance in considering what kinds of experiences contribute to “experiential learning” of civic skills. The sort of strategy used by some political and purportedly civic organizations, loading constituents onto a bus and taking them to

Sacramento to lobby legislators, reviewing a pre-prepared set of guidelines, a script for discussion, are not the sort of experiences which teach much, because the nominal participant has little ownership of their own experience and, thus, like the typical student in the back row of seats in a classroom, is somnolent, disengaged. Numbers of “civic experiences” or catalogues of “civic activities” fail as disastrously as much as tabulations of “seat time” as a metric for experiential learning of civic “skills”.

Civic engagement can only be expected to arise from experiences of civic engagement, that is, opportunities to proactively address issues of personal concern, opportunities to interact in new ways with peers and with opponents. Problem-solving competency arises from solving actual problems, not from copying solutions to problems—the sound insights stemming from Herlinda’s advice to the young woman who wanted to be “like her” and of Gloria’s emphasis on her role as a “helper”, a guide, mentor.

The experience of being in a demonstration, part of a large crowd joined together to advocate policies they favor, part of a group meeting with a legislator are, indeed, part of building civic experience and, thus, expertise, but the necessary condition for learning is for participants to be personally and actively engaged. The experience in “frogwalking” learners through “educational” experiences which are meant to teach and illuminate without being engaged, the experience of the disengaged somnolent high school student, can be personally damaging and counterproductive, serving only to assert organizational control. This is, in turn, the preparation for machine politics and, perhaps even more dangerously, the citizenry’s acceptance of media-based framing of social agendas, problem statements, and the tacitly agreed upon “correct” solution. Herlinda’s and Gloria’s willingness to be engaged, their forceful expression of their own perspectives, coupled with a commitment to constrain the leadership role to one of mentoring, guidance, and, indeed, exhortation to take action, but refusal to control, to take “ownership” of those with whom they collaborate are important ingredients in setting sound role-models for civic activism.

Self-Expression and Viable Democracy

The Tejana/o generation’s self-confidence (bolstered by their awareness that, while discriminated against, they were U.S. citizens with fully-guaranteed constitutional rights), self-reliance, and assertive voices are an important element in fostering civic engagement, dialogue, and participation. Demonstrations, marches, picket lines, confrontations, and even violence, the processes of the 1960’s through which a generation expressed themselves, are, indeed, less eloquent than the heartfelt presentations by the undocumented students seeking access to a college education. But, as the gap between local dreams, aspirations, and hunger for egalitarian democratic processes and an official anti-immigrant sociopolitical rhetoric grows, there will be increasingly powerful social forces for the sort of assertive action Herlinda and Gloria have undertaken.

Immigrants living in California communities, whatever their legal status, may well come to tire still more with the rhetoric of inclusion and the reality of sociopolitical exclusion. Investments in developing the skills the generation of Tejana/as who have deliberately chosen to affirm their bicultural/bilingual heritage, a mode of “cultural separatism” are paradoxically, the strategies needed to bring diverse communities together.

If democratic processes are to have any practical social utility, it will be necessary to provide ongoing support for individual and group assertion of their distinct identity, values, perspectives, and

priorities and to encourage open dialogue—even if it is contentious. The idea that public policy objectives will be met by restricting community investments to “safe” modes of civic involvement which fail to provide means for assertion of content-oriented “robust” messages about immigrants’ hopes and aspirations is an understandable but dangerous mistake. The first amendment right to self-expression and free assembly does not mean simply the right to express platitudes and assemble to engage in community service devoid of social change agenda.

The extent to which civic activists such as Herlinda and Gloria who seek to contribute to their community as volunteers but, also, change community life to be more egalitarian, need to develop, reference, rely and deploy specialized technical knowledge to make any headway is cause for concern. Gloria’s worries about how difficult it will be for her to orient her neighbors to “what’s going on” in local civic processes are well-founded. Obviously, local, county, state, and federal governance will need to become more user-friendly—not just for immigrants, but, also, native-born community members.

Local, State, and Federal Government Responsibilities vis-a-vis Civic Engagement

A fundamental principle of nation-building that there is a need for “transparency” in local, regional, and federal government institutions and processes as the foundation for democracy. This is not a principle which has guided domestic policy vis-a-vis government institutions’ responsibilities to their civic stakeholders. The extent to which local, county, and state government have decided to disinvest in serious processes of participatory democracy and replace genuine, “authentic” processes of civic dialogue with highly-structured ritualistic modes of interaction is worrisome. The increasing frequency with which always ill-defined concepts of “democracy” or “democratic ideals” or “democratic processes” are invoked increases the anxiety of anyone who believes that democratic processes have practical utility and can do more than magically better our character.

The illusion of civic participation is more dangerous than no participation at all. Yet the civic landscape is increasingly littered with the symbols of government openness to public dialogue and debate which are pasteboard caricatures of genuine community discussion. Even theoretically useful processes such as cable TV coverage of public hearings, publication of notices of planning bodies’ and quasi-judicial bodies’ hearings are dysfunctional in the context of an information-overloaded populace with dwindling amounts of free time. Proactive strategies will need to be developed for civic institutions to bridge the gap between them and their constituents. They will be time-consuming but not necessarily exorbitantly expensive. Investments in exploring the possibilities of “user-friendly community governance” which affirmatively seek to involve immigrants in community-wide dialogue and decision-making would benefit not only immigrants but all community members—native-born, foreign-born, citizens and non-citizens. The small size of the rural communities in which Mexican immigrants in the Central Valley live and the small size of their bureaucracies suggest the possibility that such communities might be ideal “civic laboratories” to see if the notion of participatory democracy can be revitalized and made into an actual reality and rescued from the rubbish heap of government by and for lawyers and other technical specialists.

Even with dramatic progress in making local, county, state, and federal government more constituent-friendly, there will be an ongoing need for civic activists such as Herlinda Gonzalez and Gloria Hernandez who constantly build bridges among different sub-groups in the community and who then go further still by serving as intermediaries, conceptual brokers who explain to ordinary

citizens what government processes are about and who explain to those who are conceptually imprisoned in government processes what people's lives are like and what's on their minds.¹⁶²

The reality that confrontation and collaboration are two sides of the same coin, that both are essential facets of truly passionate civic dialogue and negotiation is not an easy one to be accepted by existing institutions. Civic activists such as Herlinda and Gloria whose sense of their first amendment rights to freedom of expression and freedom of association is deeply embedded in every action they take will have ongoing roles in catalyzing community change. Fortunately, the dynamics of social networks do not require there be many people like Herlinda and Gloria to catalyze change in social, civic, and political life. Their ability as “connectors” makes them a powerful force in the civic dynamics of small communities.

¹⁶² A 2-year dialogue between the Fresno Police Department and a small group of civic activists in the Fresno immigrant community (among them Gloria Hernandez) generated a resolution in July, 2003, terminating collaboration between the Fresno Police Department and immigration authorities on enforcing immigration law so as to strengthen community-department collaboration in combating bona fide crime.

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