

Grace Under Pressure: Immigrant Families and the Nation-State

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The night was pitch black. Here we were the *pollero*, my two children, and I walking on that desolated road. I couldn't even see the palms of my hands. At one point the *pollero* took one of the children and walked away, ahead of me. I finally caught up with him. Suddenly, we saw light beaming over our heads and immediately we ducked underneath an abandoned truck. I then tucked my two kids under my body, against the dirt. The reflectors were passing very near to us. And there I was with the little one under me, squeezing him so that no sound would come out. I almost suffocated him. But they found us. They took me with the kids to the women's detention center. There we all slept on the floor.¹

THIS FRAGMENT OF TESTIMONY IS FROM ANGELICA, A WOMAN CROSSING THE United States-Mexico border. Terrified and tired of her husband's abuses, she quit her two full-time jobs and crossed the border. The trip cost her more than one thousand dollars, paid to a network of *polleros*. She came to the Bay Area, hoping to start a new life with the help of a cousin. Five years later, her oldest son became one of the few Mexican students accepted at the prestigious Bridge High in the Bay Area,² and the youngest was also a top student who wanted to be a football star.

Although extraordinary, Angelica's story is not unique. There are countless women who have defied all odds to reinvent themselves and to open up new possibilities for their children. Contrary to the myth of first-generation immigrants' drive for success, Angelica's narrative weaves the multiple threads of a life of struggle for physical and cultural survival. Angelica encounters tremendous limitations and, at the same time, great possibilities for a new life in the process of becoming part of California's social environment. While she becomes acquainted with this society, she also becomes more rooted in her role as a mother and a Mexican woman living in a predominantly Mexican and Central American neighborhood in the Bay Area of Northern California.

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I propose that immigrants, in Angelica's circumstances, will continue to form social networks that will eventually sustain the cultural and linguistic foundations that contribute to their ethnicization, while participating in the building of the United States as a nation. In other words, no contradiction exists between the willingness of immigrants to keep their language and cultural attachments and their full participation as new members of U.S. society. I wish to explain my position by answering three questions: In what sense will Angelica, both as individual and as family, develop an ethnic identity? How will they become part of a Mexican-American/Latino community? Can they articulate their lives to the U.S. nation-state project?³

Angelica's narrative runs through the entire article, and I go back and forth between the theoretical implications and her voice. Thus, I first begin by talking about integration and assimilation as the two main approaches that have given form and content to the debate on national identity formation in regard to immigrants. This section ends with a discussion about the role of language and the political tensions around it. Second, Angelica's narrative again illustrates the process of ethnicity and the different survival strategies that first-generation immigrants invent. The article ends with a series of conclusions on some of the implications of this ethnographic study.

Integration, Assimilation, and Ethnic Identity Formation

According to Brass' (1991) national formation theory, the hegemonic control of a social group over the other peoples that share a common territory derives from the political and economic power of the leading elites of such a group. In Brass' framework the state becomes a mediating agent and a subordinating instrument. The state is neither simply an arena for group conflict nor an instrument for class domination, but instead a relatively autonomous entity that tends to favor some classes and ethnic groups at particular points and times and also to develop its own interests. "Every state," Brass (*Ibid.*: 255) argues, "tends to support particular groups, to distribute privileges unequally, and to differentiate among various categories in the population."

The formation of the United States as a nation-state illustrates Brass' theory, particularly when examining the treatment non-Anglo-Saxon immigrants have received throughout its history. Indeed, the antecedent of today's debate about the place of immigrants in society is found in the treatment that non-Western Europeans received from the Anglo-Saxon dominant group in the formative years of the United States as a nation-state (Crawford, 1992; Borjas, 1996; Kennedy, 1996). Referring to the need to assimilate non-British European immigrants, Calvin Stowe, a leading assimilationist at the beginning of the 19th century, summarizes the assimilationist view this way:

It is altogether essential to our national strength and peace, if not even to our national existence, that the foreigners who settle on our soil, should

cease to be Europeans and become Americans; and as our national language is English, and as our literature, manners, and institutions are of English origin, and the whole foundation of our society English, it is essential that they become substantially Anglo-Americans (in Olsen, 1995: 60).

Opposing the drive for cultural homogeneity and English-language hegemony of public discourse, other non-Anglo-Saxons (i.e., Germans, Jews, the French, and Nordic peoples) debated the merits of plurilingualism and cultural diversity. In this context, the debate over the legitimacy and usefulness of bilingual education in public instruction, for instance, became a point of contention in political debates and governmental policy. Thus, throughout U.S. history the struggle for language rights in a way synthesizes peoples' aspirations for cultural representation, and the institutions of the nation-state have been the arena where this tension has been unleashed. As such, the state apparatus has always been a contested rather than fixed entity, in Brass' terms.

The debate on the social, cultural, and linguistic makeup of the country emerged from divergent conceptions of the participation of immigrants in the state-building project and the nature of the country as a nation — one that proposes the notion of integration as the *sine qua non* basis for the nation-state building project, and another that conceives such a project as total assimilation. I use integrationism as a synonym for pluralism. Social commentators such as Babad (1983) have defined pluralism as the social organization in which peoples of different ethnic, religious, and linguistic backgrounds share equal political power in a common territory, respectful of each other. Thus, I use assimilationism as the exact opposite — the imposition of the language and culture of the majority upon the minorities.

Integrationism differs from assimilationism in that the former proposes the incorporation of immigrants as a dual process — educating immigrants in the English language and into the majority host culture while letting these peoples maintain their cultural and linguistic differences. Assimilationist approaches, however, propose the obliteration of linguistic and cultural differences, homogenizing immigrants through English and imposing the hegemony of the host majority culture.

Integrationism and the Unified Multicultural Society

Integrationism suggests that immigrants' English-language development constitutes an ongoing process where students maintain the culture and language of their place of origin, while gradually becoming educated in the English language and introduced to the ways of the host culture. Thus, the project of a multicultural society would be possible because it allows people to preserve their languages and cultures while living within the boundaries of a singular and indivisible country

as a political project, with the English language as the glue sustaining the whole social fabric.

In the contemporary United States, no language other than English, with perhaps the exceptions of Spanish and Chinese, is spoken by a significant numerical group. Although some distinctive neighborhoods of European descendants still remain alive in their use of the language of origin and some cultural traits, the cultural and linguistic assimilation of all Europeans was completed by the end of the first half of the 20th century. Distinctive accents, food and dietary traditions, taste, music, the arts, and family names compose some of the few social markers left of these peoples' origin — markers that constitute surviving evidence of the social struggles fought by non-Anglo-Saxon peoples “over classifications, over the monopoly of power” through time (Bourdieu, 1982: 221). Language and cultural loss might perfectly be one of the first historical losses for U.S. society.

The nation-building schema of the past century did not include as full citizens either Native American or African-American peoples, even though both constituted two pillars of the economic power the country attained in the 20th century. They were systematically marginalized and segregated to specific geographies, and yet, in the realm of the culture, both peoples became centers of the definition of what is American (Zinn, 1980; Klor de Alva, 1992; Oboler, 1995).

With the incorporation first of most of today's Southwest and later of the immigration waves from Latin America and Asia (particularly China), throughout this century the project of a homogeneous society took a different spin. By the 1940s, the hegemonic axis of a Caucasian and Protestant society was already moving toward a new point of balance: a multicultural and multilingual society.⁴

Slave traders and owners could never have thought of their victims as potential participants in their nation-state project, other than as a labor force, when delivering Africans to the plantations in Virginia. In the same way, the occupying forces of today's southwestern part of the country and the labor merchants who brought in Chinese workers could not have foreseen these populations as full members of U.S. society. From the end of the Civil War in 1865 to the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, it took about 100 years for African-American, Latino/Chicano, Asian, and other peoples to make their own spaces in the national cultural and political discourses, and only after considerable mobilizations and suffering.

From this point on, the dominant discourse had no option but to yield the hard-earned space to those “Other” discourses. This is particularly true in the realms of the culture, i.e., multiculturalism and language or bilingual education. Given the centrality of language in the codification of cultures and the role cultural traits take in the process of social classification, multiculturalism and bilingual education have been two of the most hotly debated issues.

In the last quarter of the 20th century struggles for representation in the mosaic of the majority culture have crystallized in what is called multiculturalism. Certainly, there seems to be an agreement among integrationists that

multiculturalism, as a movement, seeks an equal representation of all cultures within the framework of the state and its educational system. Turner (1993: 425) puts it this way: “it is a demand for the dissociation (decentering) of the political community and its common social institutions from identification with any one particular cultural tradition.” Multiculturalism is rather a movement for inclusion and actual political and cultural representation in the structures of the state apparatus. In the long run, this movement will more likely strengthen the project of the nation-state, rather than lead to what some critics fear — the dismantling and substitution of the nation-state by a group of fragmented multiethnic, polylinguistic, and fragile societies.

What was intended as a means to advance the right to representation of non-European communities quickly became transformed into a new divide and conquer strategy. Indeed, the more widespread notion of multiculturalism is apparently one that emphasizes difference and offers little space for inclusion and the building of alliances based on commonalities among people. Difference-based multiculturalism builds on the notion that negating others is what defines a community. This notion does not assert difference as a means to reach out to others, but rather as a device for distancing one from the other. Consequently, celebrating difference without building a common ground separates people who otherwise could be together. Difference politics also conveys an oppressive notion of aesthetic values, and what is denominated a “higher form of art” is elevated to the position of high aesthetic form (Turner, 1993) held by the host, majority culture. Therefore, the construction of a canon of biographies, narratives, artifacts, and art forms from the “Other” is placed in a position of supposed equality with the Western European canon, thus dismissing the complexity, richness, tensions, and struggles within non-Western cultures. Ultimately, this difference-based multiculturalism reproduces the same asymmetrical relations of power within such cultures. As Turner (*Ibid.*: 41) notes, this form of multiculturalism:

has ironically led many academic multiculturalists, even as they call for a decentering of the dominant, Eurocentric notion of high culture, to adopt much of its schematic content as the form of their own, oppositional conceptions of minority cultures.⁵

Assimilationism, Language, and Political Tensions

The notion of one homogeneous nation has opposed integrationist thought throughout the history of the United States. According to Portes and Rumbaut (1990), homogeneity was perceived by white settlers and their ideological heirs as the foundation of national unity. Language was perceived as especially important. “In a country lacking centuries-old traditions and culture and receiving simulta-

neously millions of foreigners from the most diverse lands, language homogeneity came to be seen as the bedrock of nationhood and collective identity” (p. 184).

The rationale of the assimilationist view is simultaneously socioeconomic and ideological. It equates social mobility and acceptance in the mainstream society with the degree of adoption of the majority culture, including English monolingualism. For Native American peoples, this process has meant the systematic application of restrictive regulations prohibiting the use of their languages even in their own schools⁶ in their own territories. For non-English-speaking Europeans, this process has meant the abolition of bilingual programs organized by these communities.⁷ For Asian and Latino/Chicano communities, this process has meant aggressive punitive actions against them for using their mother tongue in schools and public spaces. As for the African languages, they were among the first great losses at the hands of slavery.

Language, more than any other cultural trait, has played a powerful role in the homogenizing of this society and in the constitution of the American nation-state.⁸ Classical assimilationist theory argues that once primary language is gone among immigrant communities, their articulation into mainstream society is certain and irreversible (Park, 1950).

This assertion raises a two-part question, which I attempt to answer below. First, what are the forms that such articulation takes (and what is the actual meaning of this articulation in the collective identity of ethnic communities)? Second, what is the role played by the state and the extent of its intervention in the process of language loss?

The actual degree of participation in the production and control of mainstream culture is not guaranteed by the action of immigrant communities, or by the speed or level of English-language competence.⁹ According to the available literature, the state has played a central role in ensuring the hegemonic power of the majority culture’s political class and elites. This hegemony, in turn, is perpetuated and nurtured through and by the English language.

Embedded in the notion of assimilation is the social stratification of languages. With regard to the status of the Spanish and English languages in the United States, for instance, Escamilla (1994: 22) asserts that schools “have traditionally perpetuated the unequal relationship between the two languages and has maintained the dominance of English.” She concludes:

thus, it might be feasible to assume that the larger school environment must consciously take on the task of equalizing the status of Spanish and English, if the dominance of English and subordination and eventual elimination of Spanish is to be avoided (p. 22).

To become politically viable, Escamilla’s vision would necessarily imply a change in mindset of a nation educated on the virtues, false or real, of monolingualism and the enormous and indisputable international privilege the English language

today enjoys. This paradigmatic change cannot be achieved without challenging fundamental political and social structures, as well as undertaking substantial change in the international exchange of technology, science, and trade.

Wong Fillmore (1991) and Hernandez-Chavez (1993) have pointed out in their respective work that children who entered school speaking Spanish often come out speaking only English at the end of their formal schooling. Delgado-Gaitan (1993: 423) asserts that “not only had English become the first language in one generation, but Spanish language loss was significant in most cases, where its use was restricted to conversation with family elders.”

Furthermore, in their extensive study comparing highly concentrated immigrant communities in South Florida’s Dade and Broward Counties, Portes and Schaufli (1994) found that children overwhelmingly preferred English over the parental language (over 80% of the sample). In their multivariate study the researchers found that there was a continuous and persistent primary language loss and the progressive predominance of English in the long run. They concluded that, contrary to nativist fears, English is very strong even in communities heavily affected by immigration, such as Dade and Broward Counties. The authors state that:

only in places where immigrant groups concentrate and manage to sustain a diversified economic and cultural presence will their languages survive past the first generation. In the absence of policies promoting bilingualism, even these enclaves will be engulfed, in all probability, in the course of two or three generations (1994: 659).

Whether as groups or individuals, past and present immigrant populations daily experience the drama of the cultural and linguistic negotiation described thus far. Angelica’s story reenacts the lives of previous generations of women who migrated to the United States seeking better futures. Yet, when she decided to emigrate north, along with unknown thousands of others, she never thought she would inadvertently enter the debate on cultural and linguistic assimilation and integration. The next section follows Angelica’s settlement process as the thread for explaining how the issues just discussed are played out in one woman’s narrative. Her story embodies the struggle and resilience lived by immigrants adjusting to their new environments.

The Baptism of Ethnicity

Angelica was sent back to Tijuana along with the other women captured that day. Yet she was determined to come north and immediately went to the house of the man in charge of the network of *polleros*. She told him what had happened. That same day he arranged a new try, using a different method. Angelica had to cross the border alone and meet another woman on the other side. However, her two children traveled separately in two cars.

A woman took one of the children and another woman took the other one. Then I met this other woman who was already on the other side, right next to the immigration checkpoint. She called me and once I was with her she asked me to go to her home and to act normal. Meanwhile I had no idea where my children were.¹⁰

Angelica did not have problems with the border patrol this time, but not knowing her children's whereabouts made her feel anxious and lost. She repeatedly asked herself: What if they stole my kids?

She took me to a house in National City. There I saw my kids and felt greatly relieved. Both crossed the border in cars with a family, with false names and papers. That was June 29, 1990, six days after the border patrol had caught us.¹¹

The same day they crossed the border the *pollero* took them to Los Angeles and from there to the Bay Area. That was a lucky day; they had no problems on the road. Once at her cousin's studio Angelica felt safe, but to her surprise, there were already eight adults living together. Now, with her family, 11 people were sharing a small bedroom, one bathroom, and a tiny living room/kitchen. "My cousin helped me a lot. The day after my arrival, I went to a job interview he had arranged in a restaurant, but I did not get the job since I had no legal documentation."¹² In exchange for her stay and food, Angelica became the cook, housekeeper, and maid for the working men in the house. Jobs were scarce and the lack of documentation made things worse. For the first months, fear of persecution and of being stopped in the street and asked for documentation made her and the children sleepless. In her dreams Angelica was chased and captured by immigration officers, sent to Tijuana, and left without sight of her sons.¹³

Angelica was born and raised in a border state, and although she had never been in the United States before immigrating, she had information about life there. Her extensive network of relatives and *paisanos*¹⁴ from Los Angeles to the Bay Area operated efficiently once it was known that she wanted to emigrate. The network gave her the *pollero* contacts, helped raise some of the money to cover the *pollero*'s fee, and provided her with food and shelter for several months. Once in the Bay Area, this network facilitated the necessary information about schools, jobs, immigration, and the police, and provided a good supply of clothing, shoes for her and the children, and some initial cash to survive. What they had worn crossing the border constituted their only material possessions.

Before emigrating Angelica had had two full-time jobs and worked 12 hours a day as a pharmacist. Her first husband disengaged himself from the essentials of life. He almost never came home, rarely provided economic support for the children, and thus did not help in the daily chores that raising a child entails. Angelica's parents lived nearby and fortunately played a central role in providing

her with logistical help throughout. Coupled with instinctual entrepreneurial skills, her experience as a single mother, and a strong drive to overcome difficulties, Angelica had the determination to build a new life for herself and the children.

Angelica repeated the social pattern of thousands of immigrants who had walked the road of immigration before her. In his ethnography of undocumented immigrants, Chavez (1992) established the immense role that networks of friends, country folk, family, and neighbors play in guiding immigrants to residential and working areas in California. The author underlines the frequency with which these networks are activated by those wishing to go north, giving migration its “social” character. Chavez notes that “when recent migrants join more established immigrants, they are provided with a place to stay and their host often helps them find work” (p. 136). These networks render great benefits to the migrant worker by filling the need for a family and alleviating the uncertainties and despair created by the new environment. This social network simply extended Angelica’s immediate family, particularly because she came to the Bay Area to stay. By migrating with her children, Angelica stated her will to reside in and re-create her life in a new place. At this point she had no ties to Mexico, other than to her parents and her memories.

The second half of 1990 was a hectic period for the family. Besides looking for a job, Angelica’s main priority was her children’s schooling. Through her cousin’s friends she learned about schools in the area and got her two children enrolled at the beginning of the school year. Julian, Angelica’s oldest son, said:

They kept me in the same grade I had completed in Mexico, because I didn’t speak English. So, instead of fifth grade they put me in fourth. I was assigned to an ESL class for one year. Later I was placed in an English-only class.¹⁵

Throughout the year he made not a single friend whose native language was English, due to his limited English skills and his social isolation from most of the school’s population. During his first middle school year Julian’s social life did not change substantially. He only met students who shared the same English as a Second Language (ESL) program. Once he was placed in a course for bilingual and native English speakers, he came into contact with native English speakers and developed some friendships outside the ESL group. His brother Mario repeated this experience almost exactly, with the difference that Mario played basketball and quickly learned American football. Sports made it possible for him to socialize more quickly with a wider population in the fifth and sixth grades. In this sense Mario never felt the same degree of isolation experienced by his more bookish brother.

Once a student is placed in a bilingual or ESL class, shedding ethnic markers becomes practically impossible. This fact actually adds one more label to the

ethnic markers. Bilingual or ESL students face not only the social isolation described by Julian and, to some extent, Mario, but also are placed in an academic track that will remain with them all the way through high school and college. Transferring to the regular English curriculum requires, on the part of parents, a certain degree of familiarity with the workings of the education system and often demands a proactive teacher or counselor to redesignate a student to the regular English program.

Piecing Life Together

Angelica met Alfredo at her house. He was her cousin's friend and almost daily visited their dwelling. They became friends and Angelica received from him great support for her children's school assignments. Alfredo was born in California, but at a very early age his parents took him back to Jalisco, Mexico, their place of origin. He did not return to the United States until he was 15 years old. Alfredo went to a high school in his neighborhood where, not knowing English, he was placed in an ESL class. He dropped out of school the following year due to boredom and a need for money. He got a job fixing car bodies in a neighbor's shop. Earning money and learning manual skills gave him a sense of accomplishment and independence, something he says he never would have gotten in the classroom. Of course, he never went back to school.

Among other things, not being called by his full name bothered Alfredo. "In Mexico, I'm Alfredo Ramírez Ruiz, but here I'm only Alfredo Ramírez. In some cases I've even been called Al Ramirez, can you imagine?"¹⁶ This last name change annoyed him. "Everybody always calls me 'Al.' 'No, no,' I say to them, 'it's Alfredo'! Many people call me by phone and ask: 'Is Al Ramirez there?' 'Oh, no. No Al Ramírez lives here,' I say. Oh yea! Many times this has happened to me everywhere. 'Al? No Al Ramirez lives here! Here lives *Alfredo* Ramírez!" He said his mother's name was no longer in his name, but that was fine with him. But "Al" for his name was unacceptable. By clinging to the original Spanish spelling and sounding of his name, Alfredo was making a point — assimilating his name to the English spelling and sounding meant the disappearance of an identity he considered to be fundamental. He wanted to integrate himself into society, but not to become invisible.

Eventually, Angelica and Alfredo became romantically involved. Her previous experience in Mexico made Angelica cautious this time around. "He [Alfredo] drank a lot and I didn't want that; the experience with my children's father had taught me. But Alfredo was changing until he stopped drinking completely."¹⁷

Angelica found in Alfredo not only some economic relief and support for her children, but also, and more importantly, a solution to her immigration status. In October 1990, they got married. Then they had to move out of the cousin's studio and get a place of their own. Marrying Alfredo was perhaps one of the most important strategic steps in Angelica's new life. She realized that through him she

could take care of her legal problems, as well as find support and affection for herself and the children. Soon she and the kids became documented residents and the haunting fears of deportation stopped.

Crossing the border then became a routine for Angelica. Four years after her immigration experience she created a small business. She bought used clothes and other artifacts in the Bay Area, transported them in her mini-van to Baja California, and brought back a whole array of industrial goods (from tequila and rum to toilet paper and cookies) that, for her Mexican customers in the neighborhood, were less expensive than buying them from the store.

Until this day, however, finding a steady, full-time job has proven an impossible task and her attempts at learning English have failed more than five times. "I'm too old to learn a new language,"¹⁸ she tells me, and admits being already behind her sons' schooling. This fact, though, is a source of both great pride and concern. She believes her children can become professionals, but in the meantime she knows her academic limitations in helping them with homework might affect their school performance. "I always tell my kids to work hard at school, since there is no choice for them."¹⁹ The *echarle ganas*²⁰ is a daily reminder, the family's mantra.

Making Spaces and the Quest for Survival

Angelica profoundly believes that her two sons must make it in society through good education. She undertakes any kind of personal sacrifice to assure that they will be at school on time, finish their homework assignments, and be in good standing with all their instructors and school administrators. At least twice a month she travels to Baja California to sell used clothing. Then, upon returning home to the Bay Area at five or six in the morning, and after driving the entire previous day and night, she takes both youngsters to school that same morning. Taking her sons to and from school daily is part of her routine. She wants no distractions for them. In the same way, she reduced their home chores. The two boys only take care of the tiny room they share. Everything else is done by Angelica, and again her explanation is that she wants both boys to fully concentrate on their school work, nothing else. Her attitude mirrors what Delgado-Gaitan and Trueba (1991: 131) concluded in their study of families in Secoya, Northern California. One of their findings was that "all parents" in their study "believed that education was important. The importance of schooling differed for the families only in emphasis. Generally they expected their children to take advantage of every day of their schooling so that they could find a good job."

Although Julian and Mario became totally fluent in English, they only occasionally use it to speak among themselves or with Alfredo at home. Spanish dominates the conversation. It is the transmitting nerve of culture, of tradition. After living in the United States during five important formative years, their spoken Spanish proficiency remains well up to their schooling level. However,

their literacy in the Spanish language remains at least two years behind their grade level.

In the same way, they feel proud translating or interpreting for neighbors. Both youngsters feel great about helping their mother in multiple tasks as “cultural brokers,” i.e., dealing with the landlord, taxes, and with the English-speaking world in general, and as sophisticated communicators, i.e., translating English and Spanish, informing their mother about paperwork at school, the traffic laws, the physician’s advice, answering phone calls, filling out forms, etc. Benjamin (1993: 243) established that families like Angelica’s help children to articulate their thoughts and feelings and to “relay important information and experiences, and guide their thinking and actions through self-talk,” and that this process does not affect their English competence. On the contrary, the author concludes, the role of parent education at home needs to be strengthened particularly in what concerns the transmission and maintenance of the home language, since this is directly linked to ethnic identity.

Families such as Angelica’s also seem to provide a social basis for their children to claim their membership in a culture and a linguistic community. During one of the interviews with Julian and Mario (which they chose to do in English), they compared life in their Bay Area neighborhood and their former Mexican home. “Here people are nicer,” said Julian. He continued:

Food in Mexico is more homemade. It is being passed from generation to generation. While here, you know, pasta is Italian, and so is pizza; most restaurants offer food from other countries: China, Japan, France, Mexico, and stuff. In Mexico no, everything is Mexican. But here or there I like it the same.

Both asserted that buying food and other daily staples remained almost the same in their Mexican town of origin and in their Bay Area neighborhood. They saw a difference only in music, dancing, and style. “Say that if you dye your hair orange, like punks, people over there [Mexico] will make fun of you,” Mario asserted. However, wearing baggy, sagging pants has become popular among youth in Mexico as a result of the United States influence. Youngsters in Mexico “love *la quebradita*, banda music, some heavy metal rock and rap in Spanish.” “The difference I see,” Julian continued, “is that here there are lots of shootings, drive-by shootings (not near my house), more homeless people.” Mario interjected: “It’s dirty here, trash in the streets, more drugs in the streets.”

While they readily identified themselves with Mexico’s traditions and as Mexicanos, Mario and Julian showed great pride in their bilingual competence and a keen awareness of the difference between the immigrant first generation and those born on this side of the border. According to Mario, two features constitute the main difference. First generation immigrants “know more about [Mexico’s] holidays, religion, the independence, and the traditions. They also know the

language.” Julian put this last element of difference more categorically: “If you don’t speak Spanish, you are not Latino.”²¹

The Mexicano and Latino categories seem to represent little difference to Angelica’s family. This suggests that the construction of a panethnic identity — that is, the leap from identifying oneself as “Mexicano(a)” to “Latino” — parallels keeping their country of origin as an essential piece of the family’s imaginary, symbolic nostalgic denominator, rather than an expression of political loyalties. Along with keeping the authenticity of personal names — such as the case of Alfredo — and Spanish-language fluency as identifiers, the connection of people from different places in Latin America creates a sense of group. From sharing language traditions and the immigration experience springs the ties of a common culture. In Angelica’s family, no definite transition exists regarding an ethnic name, i.e., from calling themselves Mexicanos to Latinos, or Mexican Americans to whatever denomination they might choose. It remains in a fluid state and perhaps will stay as such, as part of the cultural attachments characteristic of first-generation immigrants.

In the meantime, while Angelica’s sons have a great possibility of attaining high school and even college educations, doubts remain about their immediate economic survival. This latter variable can change the prospects for the children’s education and thus in the long run might determine their prospects of moving up the social scale. For the time being, however, having a sense of ethnic identification might give Angelica’s sons an edge. Schauffler (1994: 39) argues that “classical assimilationist theory would predict that the best course for immigrants is to shed their ethnicity as quickly as possible, but [recent research is showing that] ethnicity can be a positive resource.” In any event, certain cultural and linguistic markers will be perceived as relevant by the majority culture, for purposes of stratification, for a long time.²²

Although Angelica and Alfredo somehow know they won’t be able to advance beyond their current socioeconomic position, Julian and Mario know they have an entire life to build. In an interview about aspirations and goals in life, Mario said with no hesitation that he wanted to become an American football star, like one of the San Francisco 49ers. Julian wanted to be a Navy pilot. Their dreams of a better future have nothing to do with the recognition that their cultural roots lie in Mexico, or with their status as immigrants. For them, no conflict exists by virtue of these seemingly contradictory elements of identity. Those aspirations were consistent with comments in an earlier interview with them about heroines and heroes. Mario’s ideal person was a 49er’s player, while Julian’s were their mother and maternal grandparents.

Conclusion

As I have tried to show, the process of ethnicity formation, nationality, and citizenship overlap and are extremely complex and contradictory. Perhaps under-

standing the way in which immigrant families articulate their lives with the larger nation-state context will arise from the specific and limited features of every group within every community. In the case of immigrant children with Angelica's drive and will, becoming a member of the host society is more an issue of time than one of language and culture. She will probably only become identified with major features of the host culture, but her children have definitely positioned themselves in such a way that articulating their lives with the life of the host culture is not out of reach. Yet, effecting change in such a culture remains in doubt, even if the trend of demographic change proves to be correct — in about two decades Latinos will constitute the numerical majority in California.

There is no way back to Mexico for Angelica and her family. She will probably keep traveling back and forth, for business or family reasons. Yet that continuous crossing does not imply a return to the culture of her origin. The culture back there changes while she changes. She is not and probably will never again be an abused Mexicana wife, for instance, in the same way that her children will probably embrace a Mexican-American/Chicano ethnic membership rather than that of a Mexicano, while becoming full citizens of the United States.

The network and the ethnic enclave remain a viable source of support. As a new member, Angelica adds to that network's ability to help other newcomers. Her sons are and will remain, in all probability, part of the network when the time comes for them to help others. This social network constitutes what Chavez (1990) calls the "first line of defense" against the economic and political limitations on the lives of undocumented immigrants. However, beyond defense this network forms a social response that benefits not only the immigrant community, but also the host society.

In the history of most communities,²³ social networks of support for new immigrants have stopped with the second generation. However, given the ongoing migration from Mexico to the United States, the loss of such networks seems impossible, even if first-generation immigrants alone continue to nurture them.

Social networks of support become strategically important in light of the confusion and inconsistencies of immigration law and policy, the political climate of hatred against immigrants, and the uncertainties of employment. This is particularly true for people coming from countries with large numbers of potential immigrants, such as Mexico, the Philippines, and Central America. Getting legal residency is practically impossible for them, given the extremely long backlog at the Immigration and Naturalization Services offices.

As was the case with Angelica, networks often provide not only possible solutions to the problem of legal status, such as marriage with immigrant citizens, but also vital survival information and new ways to reunite missing pieces of their families. As Fernandez-Kelly and Schaufler (1995: 686) suggest, "once established, immigrant networks acquire a degree of relative autonomy from market

forces, reducing the cost and risk of migration and promoting the flow of information.”

As for immigrant children, research shows that bilingual education helps them to become fluent in the English language and knowledgeable of the host culture. The price of this success has been the erosion, and often the loss, of these children’s primary language and their low academic tracking. Although recent research shows that ethnicity can contribute to immigrant children’s resilience (Rumbaut, 1994), the role of bilingual programs in reproducing ethnicity remains a subject for an in-depth investigation.

The use of the Spanish language, social networks, continuous crossing of the border, food, and family relations have had a positive effect in Angelica’s family cultural negotiation with the host society. Angelica’s family undoubtedly feels *Mexicano* at this point in their immigration experience. Being *Mexicano* is a source of immense pride. This pride, in turn, anchors their daily experiences as they negotiate their cultural hybridization. Besides his English fluency, Mario wishes to become a star in a sport not even played in Mexico, American football, an activity that nonetheless has become the bridge between his two sources of cultural identification. Moreover, both youngsters are emerging with a definition that only the power of the U.S. majority culture could have created: *Latino*.

Ultimately, their school success and noninvolvement in youth gangs has to do not only with their mother’s zealous advocacy and their sense of *Mexicanness* (and to certain extent, *Latino* identity), but also with their ability to transition into and become part of the majority host culture and society. In other words, becoming *Americanized* has not necessarily implied losing their original cultural identity.

Both Julian and Mario maintain Spanish almost intact. They migrated with a high literacy level. The daily *eharle ganas* of their mother, their Spanish-speaking social networks, and their travels to Baja California contribute to their keeping and developing Spanish. Yet, English is increasingly becoming the language they communicate in as they work their way through the larger society, as cultural brokers for their mother and neighbors and as individuals in their personal, social relations.

In closing, what Angelica’s experience shows is that the insertion of immigrant families in the host culture is an ongoing, endless process, where individual agency and social networks play a central role. These could also play an important role in articulating schools and communities, particularly for the inclusion of the languages and the cultures of these communities into the making of both their communities and the nation-state.

NOTES

1. Hereafter my translation of Angelica’s oral testimony. Interview series January to December 1995. “La noche estaba muy oscura y aquí estábamos el pollero, mis hijos y yo, caminando por esos caminos desolados. Ni siquiera me podía ver las palmas. En algún momento, el pollero se llevó a uno

de mis hijos bien hasta adelante. Finalmente lo logré alcanzar. De pronto, vimos luces sobre nuestras cabezas y nos tiramos todos al suelo, debajo de un camión abandonado. Yo me metí a los dos niños bajo el cuerpo, en la pura tierra. Los reflectores nos pasaban cerquita. Yo con el más pequeño de los niños, apretándolo debajo de mí, para que así no hiciera ningún ruido. Casi se me ahoga. Pero nos descubrieron. Me agarraron y nos llevaron con ellos a una cárcel de mujeres. Allí durmieron ellos en el suelo.”

2. All names in this article are pseudonyms.

3. Lind (1995: 4–5) asserts that the United States is a “liberal and democratic nation-state,” and that “a real nation is a concrete historical community, defined primarily by a common language, common folkways, and a common vernacular culture.” He then concludes that “most Americans, of all races, are born and acculturated into the American nation, most immigrants and their descendants will be assimilated into it.”

4. Lind (1995: 97) argues that there have been three republics: an Anglo-Saxon one that ends by 1850, before the Civil War, a Euro-American republic that ends by the mid-20th century, and a multicultural society whose “legal and political underpinnings were assembled in the late 1960s and early 1970s.”

5. Interestingly enough, in a recent study conducted by the Multicultural Collaborative in Southern California (January 1996), it was found that interethnic conflict among Latino and African American youth explodes around February, the Black History Month, and in May, around the Cinco de Mayo Celebration. Racist epithets, fist fights, and animosity fill many high school campuses at the end of both events. The fact that most multicultural school curricula seem to be based on difference politics, rather than on a critical engagement of culture, might yield some explanation as to the reasons for such confrontations.

6. According to Jon Reyhner (1992: 42, 44), “Secretary Schutz issued regulations in 1880 that ‘all instruction must be in English’ in both mission and government schools, under threat of loss of federal funding” as a reaction against the successful use of the indigenous languages in some teaching experiences by missionaries. It is important to note that missionary efforts to educate the Native population were an orchestrated effort, cheaper than war, “to pacify the frontier [and] convince [the Indians] that reducing the size of their land holdings and moving farther west was in [their] best interest,” as Reyhner states. In fact, after independence, settlers moved aggressively into the Native American lands, since now they did not have the restrictions the British government had imposed to slow down the settlers’ takeover of native lands.

7. See excerpts from a letter by Benjamin Franklin to Peter Collinson (in Crawford, 1992: 18, 19). Also, see Shirley Brice Heath’s discussion about a national language in her article “Why No Official Tongue” (in Crawford, 1992: 20–31). At the beginning of this century, the German community had created one of the most effective organizations (the German-American Central Alliance) in the country to fight for their own rights as a community. Portes and Rumbaut (1990: 107) quote Theodore Roosevelt’s angry remark that synthesizes the political resentment at that time about German-Americans’ ability to re-create their culture of origin and the use of their mother tongue:

The men of German blood who have tried to be both German and Americans are no Americans at all, but traitors to America and tools and servants of Germany against America. Hereafter we must see that the melting pot really does not melt. There should be but one language in this country — the English.

8. Current school reform initiatives, among other things, consider the teaching of English to be a central organizing principle. Top state administrators (governors included) plan, for instance, to create a set of evaluation instruments and procedures to assure that students will not need “remedial English or mathematics” once in college. See news clips from *The Chronicle* (October 30 and 31 editions). This is a recurrent theme in national politics, like the most recent meeting on education between the president and governors of the 50 states during the third week of March 1996.

9. In the same way, a certain degree of economic prosperity does not necessarily lead to state and national political and economic arenas. For instance, according to a recent publication of the Glass Ceiling Commission, a low participation rate of ethnic minorities and women was found in the top management tiers of the country's large corporations. (The Commission is a bipartisan effort dedicated to studying the situation of ethnic minorities and women in U.S. corporations.)

10. "Una mujer se llevo a uno de los niños y otra al otro. Entonces me junte con otra mujer que ya estaba del otro lado, cabal junto a la garita de la migra. Me llamo y cuando llegue a donde ella me dijo que me fuera a con ella a su casa y que actuara normal. Mientras tanto yo no sabia donde estaban los niños."

11. "Me llevo a una casa en National City. Allí vi a mis chiquillos y sentí un gran alivio. Los dos cruzaron la linea en un carro diferente, con familia, nombre y papeles falsos. Esto pasó el 20 de junio de 1990, seis días después que nos agarro la migra."

12. "Mi primo me ayudo muchísimo. Después de mi llegada me fui a una entrevista de empleo a un restaurante, pero por no tener papeles no pude conseguir el empleo."

13. Angelica's account coincides with a number of written and taped testimonies I have collected from immigrants who entered the country without inspection. Massive INS raids in the workplace, residence areas, and entertainment centers reinforce this collective paranoia.

14. The concept "*paisano*" means in Angelica's version not only the immigrant from the same country of origin (who therefore shares a similar history, values, and experiences), but also those who offer help and support.

15. "Me retuvieron en el mismo grado porque no hablaba ingles. En lugar de 5to me pusieron en 4to. Me pusieron en una clase de ESL por un año. Luego después en una clase de puro ingles."

16. "En México soy Alfredo Ramírez Ruiz, pero aquí soy solo Alfredo Ramírez. En algunos casos hasta Al me han llamado, imagínate!"

17. "Tomaba mucho y yo no quería eso, ya que la experiencia con el papa de los niños me había enseñado. Pero él fue cambiando hasta que de una vez dejo el trago."

18. "Estoy muy vieja para aprender un nuevo idioma."

19. "Yo siempre le digo a ellos que le echen ganas, pues no les quedan de otra."

20. "*Echarle ganas*" is a difficult expression to translate into the English language. It implies giving one's best, putting one's heart, energy, and dedication to accomplish a task or desire.

21. I heard this last statement among many middle schoolers I interviewed. These students complained that they knew more about Malcolm X, Harriet Tubman, Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks, and much more biographical data concerning Afro-American heroines and heroes, than they did about their own people's history. That includes the history of immigration and of Mexicano/Chicano men and women who contributed to the building of the United States and who, like Cesar Chavez, have contributed to the betterment of Mexicano/Chicano people.

22. Two recent cases illustrate this last issue. First, commenting on the duration of the O.J. Simpson trial, Senator Alfonso D'Amato (*San Francisco Chronicle*, Thursday, April 6, 1995: A2) attempted to portray Judge Lance Ito as inept, and imitated what he believes is a Japanese-American English accent, to underscore his remarks. Second, in the *San Francisco Examiner's* "Sunday Magazine" (November 26, 1995: 19-61) staff writer Iby Jane Ganahal's portrait of world-class ballerina Evelyn Cisneros talks about the famous dancer's difficult beginnings. "Her back, [Cisneros'] broad from years of playing boyish sports like basketball and softball, was slightly rounded, because she got serious about her dancing so late in life (at 14), her muscular legs were not yet properly turned out. And because she was Hispanic, her olive skin clashed with the whiteness of the legions of girls at the ballet school" (p. 20). Here it is not English accent but physical appearance. The writer equates complexion with ethnic labels and establishes a relation based on negation. Because Cisneros was Hispanic, she had olive skin pigmentation; therefore, she clashed with the whiteness of the legions of girls in the ballet school. Perhaps the dancer does not even care to define herself in such terms. What does Hispanic mean in the specific context of the San Francisco Ballet?

23. The Jewish experience is a remarkable example of continuity beyond the second generation.

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