

US Latinization



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EDUCATION AND
THE NEW LATINO SOUTH

Edited by

Spenser Salas and Pedro Portes

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Contents

	1
	2
	3
	4
	5
	6
	7
	8
	9
	10
	11
List of Illustrations	ix 12
	13
Foreword	xi 14
<i>Luis C. Moll</i>	15
	16
Editors' Introduction	xv 17
<i>Spencer Salas and Pedro R. Portes</i>	18
	19
	20
	21
	22
	23
	24
1 Building on Immigrant Parents' Repertoires: Scaffolding Online Home-School Communication in New Latin@ Diaspora Contexts	1 25
<i>Silvia Noguerón-Liu, Deavours Hall, and Peter Smagorinsky</i>	26
	27
	28
2 Increasing Immigrant Settlement and the Challenges and Opportunities for Public Education in Charlotte, North Carolina	23 30
<i>Paul N. McDaniel, Susan B. Harden, Heather A. Smith, and Owen J. Furuseh</i>	31
	32
	33
	34
3 Beyond Commodified Knowledge: The Possibilities of Powerful Community Learning Spaces	43 35
<i>Colleen M. Fairbanks, Beverly S. Faircloth, Laura M. Gonzalez, Ye He, Edna Tan, and Melody Zoch</i>	36
	37
	38
	39
4 Educating to Empower Latina/os in Mathematics in the New South	67 40
<i>Anthony Fernandes, Marta Civil, Altha Cravey, and María DeGuzmán</i>	41
	42



1	5	Ways of Knowing, Community/Technical College	
2		Workforce (Re)Development, and “El Mundo de Hoy”	89
3		<i>Mark M. D’Amico, Spencer Salas, Manuel S. González</i>	
4		<i>Canché, Cecilia Rios-Aguilar, and Gregory F. Rutherford</i>	
5			
6	6	Professional Development and Funded Interventions as	
7		Means to Improve Latino/a Student Achievement:	
8		A Research and Development Perspective	109
9		<i>Rolf Straubhaar, Paula J. Mellom, and Pedro R. Portes</i>	
10			
11	7	<i>Que las maestras hablaran más con ellos: Children Grappling</i>	
12		<i>With Documentation Status at School</i>	123
13		<i>Holly Link, Sarah Gallo, and Stanton Wortham</i>	
14			
15	8	<i>Topography of Trámites: Mixed-Status Families’ Map of the</i>	
16		<i>New Latino Diaspora</i>	141
17		<i>Ariana Mangual Figueroa</i>	
18			
19	9	<i>The Maya Diaspora Yucatan-San Francisco: New Latino</i>	
20		<i>Educational Practices and Possibilities</i>	161
21		<i>Patricia Baquedano-López and Gabriela Borge Janetti</i>	
22			
23			
24			
25		Part II	
26		Research, Policy, and a Postfirst Generation	
27	10	<i>A Research Agenda for Latin@ Youth’s New Media Use</i>	
28		<i>in the New South: ¿Common sense for the common good?</i>	187
29		<i>Donna E. Alvermann and Eliane Rubinstein-Ávila</i>	
30			
31	11	<i>Challenges to Policy as a Tool for Educational Equity:</i>	
32		<i>The Case of Language and Ability Difference Intersections</i>	205
33		<i>Adai A. Tefera, Taucia Gonzalez, and Alfredo J. Artilles</i>	
34			
35	12	<i>The Limits of “A Thousand Points of Light” Ideology for</i>	
36		<i>a Latino Postfirst Generation</i>	227
37		<i>Pedro R. Portes and Spencer Salas</i>	
38			
39	13	<i>The Latino Gender Divide in Education: Are Latinas</i>	
40		<i>Really Faring Better Than Their Brothers?</i>	241
41		<i>Patricia Gándara</i>	
42			



Contents

vii

14	Immigration, Social Change, and Reactive Ethnicity in the Second Generation	1
	<i>Alejandro Portes and Bryan Lagae</i>	251
		2
		3
		4
		4
	Afterword	273
	<i>Richard P. Durán</i>	5
		6
		7
	Contributors	281
		8
		9
	Index	291
		10
		11
		12
		13
		14
		15
		16
		17
		18
		19
		20
		21
		22
		23
		24
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Chapter 8

Topography of Trámites

Mixed-Status Families' Map of the New Latino Diaspora

Ariana Mangual Figueroa

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Within the past two decades, Millvalley, Pennsylvania—a postindustrial city in the Southwestern part of the state—has become home to an emergent, mixed-status community from Mexico and Latin America. While this Spanish-speaking community continues to grow, it remains relatively invisible within national media, public discourse, and scholarly investigations of Latino immigration and education in the U.S. And yet between 2000 and 2010—the period in which I conducted 23 months of ethnographic research in Millvalley—there was a 71% increase in the Latino population in the county where Millvalley is located. As a result of this rapid demographic change, Millvalley is an example of a New Latino Diaspora location that can help us to answer broader questions regarding immigration in the 21st century: how does one emergent Latino community fit into the broader context of Mexican immigration in the U.S.? How do mixed-status Mexican families situate themselves within the U.S. Latino Diaspora?

These complex questions require interdisciplinary answers. In order to address them I draw from government and research reports, print and digital media, artifacts from community meetings, and ethnographic field notes and recordings of conversations with the focal families. This chapter is organized into four sections: first, I situate Millvalley and the Rust Belt within the New Latino Diaspora by drawing on analyses of U.S. Census data; second, I offer a set of disciplinary and methodological perspectives rooted in anthropology for considering the themes of diaspora and community explored in this chapter. I then organize four mixed-status families'



1 descriptions of their travels throughout the Latino Diaspora into a visual
2 and narrative map of the goods, services, and people that they found most
3 significant. The chapter includes a discussion of the insights gained from
4 the focal families' talk about their experiences of migration to Millvalley
5 and their perspectives on immigration reform in the U.S.

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The New Latino Diaspora in the Rust Belt: A Demographic Perspective

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11 There were more than 45 million Latinos living in the U.S. by 2007 and
12 of these, more than 29 million were Mexican or of Mexican descent (Passel
13 & Cohn, 2009). The latest American Community Survey showed that this
14 number had increased to almost 53 million Latinos by 2012—of which
15 the largest number, almost 34 million, were Mexican (Brown & Patten,
16 2014). There is only one country with a larger Spanish-speaking popula-
17 tion than the U.S. and that is Mexico itself (Rumbaut, 2006). Mexican
18 migrants and their children are defying traditional immigration patterns by
19 moving from urban settings into rural and suburban areas within the U.S.,
20 engaging in democratic and grassroots forms of political participation, and
21 developing transnational identities facilitated by new forms of communica-
22 tion and travel (Bloemraad & Trost, 2008; Singer, 2008; M. Suárez-Orozco,
23 C. Suárez-Orozco, & Qin-Hilliard, 2005).

24 Three characteristics of the recent Mexican migrant population are
25 particularly relevant to this study of mixed-status families living in the
26 New Latino Diaspora. First, Mexican migrants make up the largest share
27 of the undocumented foreign-born population, in addition to being the
28 largest group of Latinos in the U.S. (Passel, 2005). The undocumented
29 foreign-born population now includes nearly 13 million individuals (Brown
30 & Patten, 2014), with Mexican-born migrants accounting for more than
31 half of the population (Passel & Cohn, 2011). Second, mixed-status fami-
32 lies whose members include both U.S. citizens and undocumented Mexican
33 migrants make up a significant number of the undocumented population
34 (Fix, Zimmerman, & Passel, 2001; Passel & Cohn, 2009). About a quar-
35 ter of all children who have undocumented parents live in mixed-status
36 families (Passel, 2006). Seventy percent of the children living in the U.S.
37 with at least one undocumented parent have parents who immigrated to
38 the U.S. from Mexico (Passel & Cohn, 2011). Third, Mexican migrants
39 have begun to leave traditional receiving states like California and New
40 York to move to nontraditional settlement areas across the U.S. (Fix et al.,
41 2001). Within the past two decades, undocumented migrant populations
42

have grown in states such as North Carolina that have historically had small numbers of foreign-born residents (Passel, 2005).

According to a study published by the Pew Hispanic Center during the period in which this study was conducted, many new Latino migrants began to settle in counties that were considered “slow-growing” in the 1990s but became “fast-growing Hispanic counties” within the first decade of the 21st century (Fry, 2008, p. 18). Slow-growing counties were defined as those with fewer than 1,000 Latino residents and included parts of the Rust Belt region including Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, western Pennsylvania, and northern New York. Allstate County, where Millvalley is located and where this study was conducted, is within western Pennsylvania. Allstate County, along with other counties in the Rust Belt that contain cities like Columbus, Ohio and Detroit, Michigan, is now considered one of the fast-growing Latino counties. They have seen a 41% increase in the Latino population since the year 2000 and most of this increase is due to growth in the Mexican population. As a result, these cities now constitute an emergent part of the New Latino Diaspora.

During the time of this study, there were ongoing efforts in Millvalley to clarify how many Latinos comprised the emerging community in that city. The 2006 American Community Survey reported that Latinos totaled 1.8% of Millvalley’s population and that Mexicans made up 1,537 of the reported 5,466 Latino residents. However, service providers in the Latino community estimated that the numbers were much higher. Dr. Daniel, a Columbian pediatrician who founded the first bilingual health clinic in Millvalley, estimated that there were closer to 10,000 or 15,000 Latino residents at the time of this study. He also claimed that the Latino community was growing rapidly due to high fertility rates in Mexican families (D. Correa, personal communication²) that are consistent with the national trends in Mexican population growth (Durand, Telles, & Flashman, 2006). Millvalley activists were taking an active role in encouraging Latino residents to participate in the 2010 Census. Sister Elise, a Catholic nun who was an outspoken and trusted advocate of many members of the Mexican community, conducted outreach for the Census Bureau in order to assuage undocumented migrants’ fear of being reported to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) by explaining that their responses to the questionnaire would remain anonymous (E. Smith, personal communication). This mirrored a national phenomenon, in which church leaders of Spanish-speaking congregations worked to encourage undocumented migrants’ participation in the census (Preston, 2009). The results of the 2010 Census showed that the Millvalley Latino population had reached 2.3% of the city’s population, but the figures continue to represent a group that is actually much larger.

1 Conducting Research in the New Latino Diaspora: 2 Theoretical and Methodological Perspectives

3 4 Key Terms

5
6 The statistics presented earlier tell only one part of a complex story about
7 the New Latino Diaspora. The family members who participated in this
8 study of mixed-status households were assigned statuses such as undocu-
9 mented, B-2, or citizen by regulatory bodies like Immigration and Customs
10 Enforcement (ICE), national governmental agencies in both the U.S. and
11 Mexico, and the local law enforcement agencies that implemented federal
12 and state immigration policies on a daily basis. And yet, the sociohistori-
13 cal and political significance of living in a mixed-status family is not an
14 abstract label; rather, it is relevant to the lived experience of the indi-
15 viduals and families who are sorted into undocumented migrants (who are
16 therefore deportable) and U.S. citizens (with all of the attendant rights
17 and privileges).

18 While “social identities have a sociohistorical reality independent of
19 language behavior,” they are also constantly redefined by individuals who
20 “in any given actual situation, at any given actual moment . . . are actively
21 constructing their social identities rather than passively living out some
22 cultural prescription for social identity” (Ochs, 1993, p. 296). Through talk
23 and interaction during daily routine activities, the mixed-status families
24 in this study coconstructed locally situated understandings of what terms
25 like *undocumented* and *citizen* meant to them. There exists a tension, then,
26 between the macro categories of juridical status or nationality assigned to
27 groups of people and the ways that those same people reproduce, resist,
28 and negotiate their social identities during micro interactions (Bourdieu,
29 1991; Wacquant, 2004). As cultural and legal anthropologist De Genova
30 wrote in 2002,

31
32 The conceptual problems embedded in terminology are symp-
33 tomatic of deeper problems of intellectual—and ultimately
34 political—orientation. Remarkably, little of this vast scholarship
35 deploys ethnographic methods or other qualitative research
36 techniques to elicit the perspectives and experiences of undocu-
37 mented migrants themselves, or to evoke the kinds of densely
38 descriptive and interpretive representations of everyday life that
39 sociocultural anthropologists tend to relish. (p. 421)

40
41 De Genova called for a rigorous study of the terms *migrant*, *citizen*, and
42 *undocumented* that prevents the reification both of the categories themselves

and the ideologies that they engender by documenting the emic perspectives of the communities to which they are applied. This chapter takes up De Genova's charge by tracing the ways in which mixed-status Mexican family members talk about the ways in which their migratory status shaped their experiences in the New Latino Diaspora.

The term *unauthorized* is used largely in the policy literature (see Passel, 2005, and reports on immigration published by the Pew Hispanic center) while the term *illegal* is prevalent in public debates about immigration reform. Several discourse analytic studies have explored the impact of the term *illegal* in public discourse, including: Mehan's (1997) study of the term's use by proponents of Proposition 187 in California, Santa Ana's (1999) analysis of metaphors used to describe Mexican immigrants, and Bartolome and Macedo's (1997) examination of the relationship between the ideological and institutional impact of the term. These studies trace the dissemination of anti-immigrant discourse by newspapers, government entities, and politicians in order to expose the ways in which representations of immigrants taken for granted in public discourse are socially constructed through mass media. Solis' (2003) ethnographic study showed how the construction of Mexican illegality was a form of "societal violence" constructed through media, law, and public discourse that shaped the identity development of Mexican families living in New York City (p. 28).

I use the term *undocumented* to refer to the Mexican-born family members who do not have legal permission to reside in the U.S. because it most closely reflects the language that the focal families used when referring to themselves. When adults talked about a group of migrants and included themselves, they said *nosotros los indocumentados* (we the undocumented). Parents and siblings talked about the citizenship status of specific family members by using the metaphorical adjectival phrase *tener papeles* (to have papers). This denoted those who were in the U.S. with visas and legal resident status (individuals who had *papeles*) versus those who were living in the U.S. without legal permission (individuals who did not have *papeles*). The phrase foregrounds the idea that migratory status is dependent on and describable in terms of legal documentation or paperwork and the term *undocumented* most accurately reflects this emphasis.

In their 1996 book, *Immigrant America: A Portrait*, Portes and Rumbaut distinguished between *migrants* who crossed the border into the U.S. by land and *immigrants* who entered the U.S. with legal documentation by land, air, or water. However, the term *migrant* not only describes the mode of entry into the U.S. but also refers to the temporal and spatial relationships of the individual(s) to the host country. *Migrant* includes people with residential impermanence who have active cultural frames of reference that cross national borders while *immigrant* describes those who

1 have permanently relocated to a new country and have begun a process of
2 cultural assimilation that entails adopting the mainstream practices of the
3 host country at the expense of their home culture (Arzubiaga, Noguérón, &
4 Sullivan, 2008; Lukose, 2007). The Mexican-born family members in this
5 study entered the U.S. without legal permission by crossing the Mexico-
6 U.S. border by land, maintained active relationships with family in both
7 Mexico and the U.S., and had family members or friends who returned to
8 Mexico throughout the course of this study; therefore, I refer to them as
9 migrants or undocumented migrants but not immigrants.

10 The use of the term *Diaspora* to describe the social contexts of migrant
11 and immigrant communities marks a shift away from studies of minority
12 communities that represented groups in monolithic and homogenous terms
13 toward a more fluid conceptualization of “space, time, and classification”
14 (Kearney, 1995, p. 549) that situates cultural groups in dynamic global and
15 transnational contexts (Levy, 2000). Clifford (1994) claimed that commu-
16 nities in diaspora: (1) live outside of their homeland yet have an ongoing
17 cross-border relationship to people and cultural practices located there,
18 (2) forge an identity through positive affiliation to or negative distancing
19 from the homeland, and (3) are susceptible to the commodification of their
20 cultural modes of production. While on the one hand Clifford and oth-
21 ers have sought to outline the defining features of diasporic communities,
22 on the other hand, they have claimed that there is not one “ideal type”
23 (Clifford, 1994, p. 305) of diaspora or one “generic immigrant experience”
24 (De Genova, 2002, p. 124). The tension inherent in classification and
25 identification is strongly felt in the literature on diaspora, which both docu-
26 ments the movement of cultural groups and practices across borders while
27 also recognizing the heterogeneity of experiences among individuals who
28 undergo migratory processes (Kearney, 1995).

29 One growing area of research that brings together anthropological
30 and educational approaches to studying Latino communities’ experiences
31 in the U.S. is ethnography of the New Latino Diaspora (Murillo & Ville-
32 nas, 1995). The studies presented in *Education in the New Latino Diaspora:
33 Policy and the Politics of Identity* (Wortham, Murillo, & Hamman, 2001)
34 tracked that ways that Latino migration to the U.S. South and Midwest
35 has changed the social and educational landscape of those regions. This
36 research exemplified the shift that Levy and Clifford suggested is significant
37 in diaspora studies by situating the study of Latino education in the U.S.
38 as a global and transnational phenomena instead of a homogenous minor-
39 itized experience. Still, Villenas (2007) has called for ethnographers working
40 in this field to identify the unifying characteristics of Spanish-speaking
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diasporic communities in the U.S. in order to strengthen the theoretical foundation of this emergent research paradigm.

In the latest edited volume of studies focused on the New Latino Diaspora, Hamann and Harklau (2015) identify three defining features of the region. Researchers interested in learning more about the New Latino Diaspora can also consider these three areas of inquiry focusing on: “**who** (Latinos), **where** (places where Latinos have not previously lived in significant number), and **encountering what** (improvised interethnic interaction)” (p. 5, emphasis in the original). The editors and contributors guard against simplistic renderings of these terms (for example who is “Latino” or what counts as “new”), by meticulously describing the dynamic nature of immigration and education practices across national and local sites. The focus on emerging forms of “interethnic interaction” that occur in sites of rapid demographic change and the novel “habits and expectations that will steer that interaction” (Hamann & Harklau, 2015, p. 11) are a central concern in this chapter, which offers ethnographic evidence of the ways in which mixed-status Mexican families develop social networks necessary for everyday survival in the New Latino Diaspora.

Ethnographic Methods

In their first programmatic statement delineating the methodological tenets of Language Socialization, Ochs and Schieffelin (1984) defined ethnography as “descriptions that take into account the perspective of members of a social group, including beliefs and values that underlie and organize their activities and utterances” (p. 283). Ethnographic descriptions include field notes and audiovisual recordings that capture the implicit and explicit understandings shared by members of a community as expressed through their actions and talk (Baquedano-López, Solís, & Arredondo, 2010). Sustained observation over time is needed in order to capture rich interactional data—including oral and body language as well as the physical organization of people and objects in the setting—that shows the ways in which participants learn from one another over time in multiple settings (Ochs, 2002).

Increasingly, language socialization researchers are conducting multisited ethnographic research that documents the complexity of learning and development in multilingual and multicultural settings (Garrett & Baquedano-López, 2002). This study’s focus on the experiences of members of mixed-status families and the tensions they negotiate when confronting the relevance of their different citizenship statuses across multiple settings makes it a multisited ethnography (Marcus, 1995). In his defining statement

1 about the method, Marcus (1995) wrote that “strategies of quite literally
 2 following connections, associations, and putative relationships are thus at
 3 the very heart of designing multi-sited ethnographic research” (p. 97). By
 4 examining mixed-status family members’ interactions in the private sphere
 5 of the home as well as public settings, this research has tracked how and
 6 when speakers evoked discourses about citizenship that indicate the rela-
 7 tionship between macro political processes and micro everyday interactions.
 8 I have attended to the three-part research agenda that Marcus outlines
 9 by following discourse throughout the social landscape (the focal unit of
 10 analysis), by contrasting discourses from different sites as I have done with
 11 school and home conceptualizations of citizenship (the analysis of discourse
 12 from multiple social settings; Mangual Figueroa, 2011, 2013a), and by being
 13 a participant-observer in domestic and educational institutions (conduct-
 14 ing data collection in more than one field site; Mangual Figueroa, 2013b).

17 *Topography of Trámites* in the New Latino Diaspora

19 Let us now examine the focal parents’ accounts of how they crossed the
 20 border from Mexico into the U.S., the cities they visited on their way to
 21 Millvalley, and the social networks they established in those places. I have
 22 visually represented these narratives in Figure 8.1, which represents the
 23 places where the focal families lived, visited, or made contacts. This map
 24 illustrates two things: the *topography*, or characteristics of locations within
 25 the Latino Diaspora; and the *trámites*, or the kinds of social and material
 26 exchanges that the focal families had with people in other parts of the U.S.
 27 The focal families did not use terms like *Diaspora* or (*non*) *traditional settle-*
 28 *ment areas*, when accounting for their migratory experiences, and yet they
 29 talked about how Millvalley was unique because of its relatively small and
 30 emergent Latino population. In that way, they described the city in terms of
 31 some of the characteristics that make it unique to the New Latino Diaspora.

32 The dotted lines indicate the routes that the families took from the
 33 Mexican-American border to Millvalley, Pennsylvania. The diamonds pin-
 34 point the locations of specific resources that the families sought in tra-
 35 ditional and emerging settlement areas within the Latino Diaspora. The
 36 solid lines radiating out from Millvalley identify places in the New Latino
 37 Diaspora that the focal families mentioned and visited in the Rust Belt
 38 and surrounding regions throughout the course of this study.

39 The border crossing stories that the focal families shared with me,
 40 indicated by the green dotted lines on the map, are rich narratives that I
 41 have distilled for the purposes of demonstrating how they moved through
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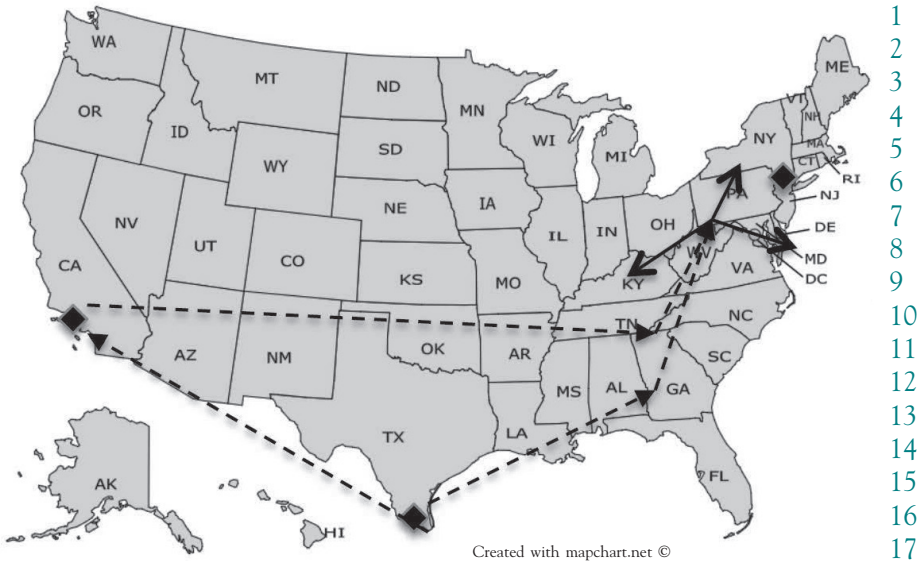


FIGURE 8.1. Topography of Trámites.

the various parts of the Latino Diaspora before settling in Millvalley. Table 8.1 introduces the four focal families of this study by name, kinship relation, birthplace, and age. In all of the families except for the Mendez-Castro family, the parents met in Mexico and decided that the father would be the first to cross the border into the U.S. The mother or another adult female relative subsequently crossed the border with the eldest undocumented child. All of the families said that they chose their U.S. destination according to where they had family and could find employment.

Three of the four families lived in other parts of the Latino Diaspora for short periods of time before moving to Millvalley. The only exception were the Medina-Castillo parents, who traveled directly from the border to Millvalley to reunite with family members already living there. The father in the Utuado-Alvarez family, Carlos, crossed the border into California and went to Atlanta, Georgia to stay with a cousin who had promised to help him find work there. After several months working as a day laborer, Carlos was recruited by a Korean factory owner to move to Millvalley to work in his clothing factory. Shortly after Carlos moved to Millvalley, his wife Marta and her eldest son José crossed the border into Arizona and traveled directly to Millvalley to reunite with him. The Marinero-Chavez father, Ignacio, moved to Millvalley from Mexico to live near his father.

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1 Table 8.1. Focal Family Members Living in the U.S. at the Time of the Study

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Family	Names and Relations	Birthplace	Age
4 Medina-	Antonio Medina, father	near Cuernavaca, Mexico	39
5 Castillo	Marilu Castillo, mother	near Cuernavaca, Mexico	38
6	Juan Medina, eldest son	near Cuernavaca, Mexico	17
7	Xotchil Medina, youngest daughter	Millvalley, Pennsylvania	7
8 Marinero-	Ignacio Marinero, father	Acapulco, Mexico	28
9 Chavez	Inés Chavez, mother	Acapulco, Mexico	27
10	Pedro Rios, eldest son	Acapulco, Mexico	9
11	Fani Marinero, middle child, sister	Millvalley, Pennsylvania	4
12	Hernán Marinero, youngest son	Millvalley, Pennsylvania	2
13 Mendez-	Oscar Mendez, father	Acapulco, Mexico	36
14 Castro	Laura Castro, mother	near Cuernavaca, Mexico	31
15	Dulce Mendez, eldest daughter	near Cuernavaca, Mexico	12
16	Nancy Mendez, daughter	Millvalley, Pennsylvania	10
17	Felipe Mendez, son	Millvalley, Pennsylvania	8
18	Julissa Mendez, daughter	Millvalley, Pennsylvania	6
19	Oscar Mendez, youngest son	Millvalley, Pennsylvania	2
20 Utuado-	Carlos Utuado, father	Chiapas, Mexico	40
21 Alvarez	Marta Alvarez, mother	Chiapas, Mexico	35
22	José Utuado, eldest son	Chiapas, Mexico	8
23	Igor Utuado, youngest son	Millvalley, Pennsylvania	4

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28 Subsequently, his wife Inés crossed the border into the U.S. with her eldest
 29 son, Pedro, and moved to Orlando to join her father. Ignacio and Inés
 30 reunited in Orlando and, after several months of working there, decided
 31 to move to Millvalley together.

32 Laura Castro and Oscar Mendez were the only two parents who
 33 met in Millvalley. Oscar first settled in Texas where one of his brothers
 34 lived. The brother worked at a Chinese restaurant, and when the owner
 35 recruited him to move to Millvalley to work in a new restaurant, he left
 36 for Millvalley and Oscar followed soon thereafter. Laura first lived in Los
 37 Angeles with her uncles and moved to Millvalley with them when they
 38 relocated in search of work. Once Laura and Oscar met and started a
 39 family, they sent for Laura's eldest daughter who migrated to Millvalley
 40 under the care of an aunt. As we can see, the points of entry to the U.S.

41

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were located in traditional Mexican settlement areas along the border and each family took a different path through the Latino Diaspora on their way to Millvalley.

Once in Millvalley, the families sought out services and goods in traditional or new parts of the Diaspora depending on the relationships they had established with people living in those locations. As the diamonds in Figure 8.1 show, the families made contact with people in areas where both Mexican and Puerto Rican migrants traditionally settled. The focal families had connections to trusted individuals who had experience in preparing the types of documents that undocumented family members needed to survive in the U.S.: false social security cards and visas and Individual Taxpayer Identification Numbers (ITINs). The Mendez-Castro family would drive several hours to a town outside of Philadelphia to meet with a Puerto Rican accountant who knew how to file income taxes using ITINs for the undocumented family members. The Utuado-Alvarez family would send their tax documents to a Mexican woman near Los Angeles who they trusted to declare their income using their ITINs. When the father in the Marinero-Chavez family was deported and subsequently returned to Millvalley without legal documentation, he sent a money order and photograph to his cousin in Dallas, Texas, who arranged to have a new false social security number and identification card made for him.

The focal family members tended to visit family members, take short family trips, and buy durable goods in nearby cities in the Southeast and Midwest. The parents and older siblings in the focal families were constrained by the fact that they, as undocumented family members, could not travel by plane. Because these locations were accessible by car, they had easier access to them. The Mendez-Castro Family, for example, would visit extended family in North Carolina and Tennessee on special occasions like *quinceañeras* and weddings. The Medina-Castillo and Utuado-Alvarez families would drive to Columbus, Ohio to buy cars because the laws for purchasing a car were less strict and there were more Spanish-speaking car dealers in Ohio than in Pennsylvania. On those trips, they would often stop at a large, well-known Mexican store called *La Mexicana* for food and household items from Mexico. These kinds of *trámites* show that the focal families found ways to access the familial, cultural, and material connections that they needed. Despite the emergent nature of the Latino community in the Rust Belt, they established relationships with family members living there and discovered places to purchase the goods that they used on a daily basis.

Discussion

1
2
3 The topography of *trámites* reveals two things about the focal families: first,
4 because of the emergent nature of the Latino community in Millvalley, they
5 did not know anyone locally with the expertise or trust to handle their
6 financial and personal transactions. As a result, they contacted individuals
7 living in traditional settlement locations within the Latino Diaspora to help
8 them. Second, they lived with the contradiction of being active participants
9 in U.S. civic life who worked and paid taxes but were nevertheless banned
10 from full membership and inclusion due to their undocumented migratory
11 status. The impact of living in this liminal state (Gonzales & Chavez, 2012)
12 becomes particularly evident when examining the economic, social, and
13 familial motivations for families seeking help throughout the Diaspora. For
14 example, filing taxes was a significant transaction for each of the families
15 and, in order to accomplish it, they needed to contact a trusted individual
16 to whom they could reveal their migratory status. Families assumed an eco-
17 nomic responsibility expected of U.S. citizens and residents—contributing
18 to the local and national economy by obtaining employment and paying
19 financial dues—yet they also needed to remain invisible from authorities
20 that could detain and deport them for their undocumented migratory status.
21 This tension—between filing paperwork to declare their taxes and living in
22 hiding for not having the legal documents associated with migratory sta-
23 tus—lies at the heart of the everyday experiences of mixed-status families.

24
25 *La Reforma*

26
27 The focal families in this study, along with many other mixed-status families
28 that I have met, pursued opportunities for legitimate and lawful participa-
29 tion in U.S. civic life even as they were legally banned from key forms of
30 engagement associated with obtaining U.S. citizenship and its attendant
31 rights (such as obtaining voting rights, health care, and more). The fami-
32 lies did so in part to ensure that they would be eligible to participate in
33 immigration reform if and when the federal government created pathways
34 to citizenship for undocumented migrants living in the country. During the
35 course of this study, President Obama was elected the 44th president of the
36 United States. A central part of his 2008 campaign included a promise to
37 institute “comprehensive immigration reform” for the “12 million people
38 living in the shadows” (Farnam, 2008). The focal families in this study
39 followed news of this campaign very closely, often referring to *la reforma*
40 in conversations that took place during my visits to their homes. In one
41 conversation with members of the Mendez-Castro family, Laura Castro and
42

her brother—both undocumented parents from Mexico—talked with me at
length about *la reforma*. Laura began the conversation by telling me about
the relationship between immigration reform and the national economy:

*Ahorita nosotros hablamos mucho de la reforma porque dicen que
si hacen la reforma, Estados Unidos se va recuperar mas rápido.*

Now we talk a lot about the reform because they say that if
they do reform, the United States will recover more quickly.

Laura and her brother viewed themselves as part of the solution to
the economic crisis that the United States was experiencing at the time
of the study. This view of immigrants as economic contributors upholds an
instrumental view of immigration (“we should welcome immigration because
it’s good for the economy”) as it also expresses a belief in the American
Dream ideology that has endured for centuries (“if we are allowed to stay
in the country, we will be able to contribute to the nation and make it a
better place”). Laura and her brother explained their understanding of the
eligibility criteria for the proposed 2008 immigration reform:

LAURA: *Nada mas van a ver el tiempo—*

They’re just going to see how long—

MAX: *Y quién también va por dependent . . . porque ya tienen
familias y tienen sus niños. Creo que los van a dar mas
rápido porque . . .*

And it also goes by dependent . . . because they already
have families and their children. I think they’ll get it
faster because . . .

LAURA: *—y también los que ya tienen que estar pagando la ren-
ta . . . de que sí se pagan los impuestos.*

—and also those that already have been paying rent,
that are actually paying taxes.

Laura and her brother identified having children, paying rent, and filing
taxes as key requirements for being able to apply for U.S. citizenship. Like
the other families that I met, Laura and her brother had begun fulfilling

1 these requirements well in advance of any legislation being passed. While
 2 they waited for one legal process to be realized—proposed federal legislation
 3 that would become law and provide them with an opportunity to obtain
 4 legitimate immigration status—they participated in those processes that did
 5 lie within their control such as filing taxes and making regular mortgage
 6 payments on their home.

7 Adults in the Mendez-Castro family closely followed the news about
 8 *la reforma* because they believed that becoming U.S. citizens would confirm
 9 what they already felt—that they were active members of Millvalley, the
 10 city that they called home, and that they were raising children whose future
 11 depended on being able to stay united with their family and access educa-
 12 tional and economic opporutnities in this country. A meaningful pathway
 13 to citizenship would dramatically change the family's *topography of trámites*
 14 because they would be able to come out of the shadows and stop living
 15 their everyday lives in fear of being detained and deported. They hoped
 16 that the newly elected president and congress would:

17
 18 . . . *dar una prioridad a esa gente que ya tienen sus hijos, que ya tienen*
 19 *sus casas, que ya tienen toda su vida aquí. Y eso somos . . . decían*
 20 *antes que por el fin de este año iba a estar todo hecho.*

21
 22 . . . give priority to those people that already have children, that
 23 already have houses, that already have their whole lives here.
 24 And we are the ones . . . they said before that all of this will
 25 be done by the end of the year.

26
 27 The family felt a sense of urgency—they needed the immigration system
 28 to be fixed so that they could resolve the challenges associated with their
 29 undocumented migratory status (as they said colloquially—*queremos arreglar*
 30 *uno a la vez*—we want to fix one [family member] at a time. As Laura and
 31 her brother explained, the positive effects of comprehensive immigration
 32 reform would be felt both on a national level and on an interpersonal one.

34 35 Conclusion

36
 37 Ten years later, members of the Mendez-Castro family and all of the other
 38 mixed-status families that I have met continue to hope for *la reforma*.
 39 While some significant legislative changes have granted undocumented
 40 migrants to access educational and economic opportunities in the U.S.,
 41 the federal government has still not instituted a law that would provide a
 42

way for undocumented migrants to obtain U.S. citizenship. At the time of writing, 18 states have approved Dream Act legislation that would allow undocumented students to be eligible for in-state tuition that could make higher education more accessible for them (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2014). Arizona also offers in-state tuition to undocumented students enrolled in public universities, but limits eligibility to those participating in the federal Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program (Inside Higher Ed, 2015). DACA provides opportunities for eligible migrants who moved to the U.S. before the age of 16 to apply for work permits and has increased economic and social opportunities for youth (Gonzales & Terriquez, 2013). Yet neither of these measures has resolved the question of legal status for the nearly 13 million undocumented people living in the U.S. nor alleviated the fear of detention and deportation that these individuals face on a daily basis. While an executive order issued by President Obama in November 2014 would have extended the provisions of the DACA program and created a parallel program for the undocumented parents of children who are U.S. citizens or lawful permanent residents (known as DAPA), these reforms have been stalled by a U.S. District Court ruling that issued a temporary injunction in favor of 26 states seeking relief from the federal mandate (Center for Migration Studies, 2015).

In light of the current impasse between federal and state governments and between immigrant advocates and restrictionists, mixed-status families continue to live with the double bind described in this chapter. While these families defy easy categorization due to the incredible richness and resilience that they exhibit—evident in the *topography of trámites* and in their faith in *la reforma*—they do share a commitment to integrating themselves and their children in the everyday civic life of the U.S. Researchers, educators, and policy makers in a position to advocate on their behalf also share an important responsibility—to call for meaningful and lasting immigration reform that would enable families to realize this goal.

At the time of publication, the U.S. Supreme Court had just issued a ruling in response to the challenge issued by these 26 states. The justices declared that they were equally divided on the issue—offering no clear judgment on the question of presidential power and national immigration reform while also allowing the state-led injunction to remain in place.

Notes

1. All proper nouns used to describe Millvalley, the county it is located in, and the people who reside there, are pseudonyms.

1 2. In order to protect the anonymity of the participants, I cite personal com-
2 munications without including the month, date, and year.

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