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UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA
GRADUATE COLLEGE

*BUSCANDO TRABAJO:*¹
SOCIAL NETWORKING AMONG
LATIN AMERICAN IMMIGRANTS TO
OKLAHOMA

A Dissertation
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

By
CARLOS E. GARCIA
Norman, Oklahoma

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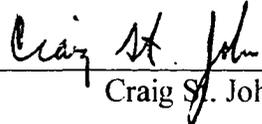
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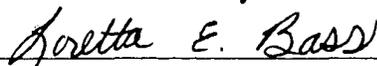
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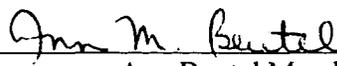
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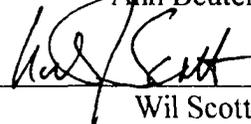
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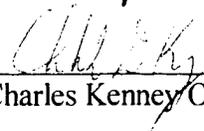
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Bear Down.

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Abstract

Previous research on immigration has taken for granted the existence of immigrant networks. This is a significant oversight given their importance in conveying social capital and in immigrant networks' contribution to the growth of *immigrant communities in the United States*. Using data collected in the summer of 2002, I look at the development of an immigrant network in a rural town in northeastern Oklahoma. I determine that the immigrant network in the community under study is composed of three distinct yet interconnected subnetworks, a traditional subnetwork, a church subnetwork, and a contract subnetwork. While each of these secondary networks is composed of different social arrangements, they all provide similar services in a similar manner. The services provided within the greater immigrant network have served to increase the size, strength, and density of the local immigrant community. I conclude with a discussion of immigrant quality of life in small town America and the possibility that immigrant decisions to move to rural locations are based on a search for a higher standard of living.

Chapter 1

Taqueria El Sonorense:

The Creation of Immigrant Networks

The taco stand is one of the greatest contributions to fast food dining in our lifetimes. Taco stands are very simple restaurants built around corn or flour *tortillas*, exotic fillings such as beef tongue and *carne asada*, *quesadillas*, and bottled soft drinks imported from Mexico. The restaurants are generally run and owned by Mexican immigrants or Mexican Americans.

From the late 1970s to the early 1980s it was very difficult to find a taco stand, or *taqueria*, in my hometown of Tucson, Arizona. This fact stands in contrast to what life was like just 60 miles to the south on Interstate 19. In Nogales Sonora, Mexico there were many taco stands and taco carts serving the local community as well as adventurous tourists. Farther south in the state of Sonora, in cities like Hermosillo or Guaymas, taco stands were also deliciously plentiful. What is remarkable about the lack of taco stands in Tucson in the late 1970s and early 1980s is that even then a significant portion of the population of Tucson was Latino, primarily from Mexico. In 1980, the Latino population of Tucson was enumerated at 66,107 or 20% of the total population (City of Tucson 2002). This demographic phenomenon was further accentuated by the tendency

of Mexican residents to live on the south side of the city resulting in an almost entirely Mexican section of the city.

By the mid to late 1980s, taco stands were a more common site in south Tucson, and by the 1990s, they not only were in the predominantly Mexican section of the city but also began to appear in the downtown and University areas. As it stands now, there is virtually no section of town, regardless of the ethnic composition of the people living in the area, that does not boast its own locally run taco shop.

I moved to Norman, Oklahoma in the Fall of 1998. When I arrived I was disappointed, although not surprised, to find no really good Mexican restaurants in the community and no taco stands. In approximately the beginning of March 2003, a taco stand opened in Norman and I was one of the first customers to visit the restaurant. The *taqueria* was similar to those I had grown up frequenting in Tucson, complete with murals and wobbly tables. The first couple of times I went to the taco stand there were not many people there, but since then the clientele has significantly increased. By the end of March, when I dropped by on a Sunday afternoon, there were several diners in the restaurant, none of whom were white. The diners were sitting in the booths of the taco stand eating tacos and *menudo* and watching a soccer game between two Mexican clubs on the television.

Several questions surrounding the taco stand come to light. For example, where did the taco stand come from, why did it open there when it did, and where

were my fellow diners from? These are all issues addressed in this project. I have endeavored to discover how an immigrant network forms and the roles they play in people's lives.

Given the increase in immigration from Mexico, the growth of the Latino population in the United States, and the emergence of immigrant communities outside of the Southwest, it is likely that taco stands will begin to appear in locations in which they had previously been absent. While the presence of taco stands in a community is not of any real social significance, they do signify a change in the way life in America has, historically, been led.

The social network forces that facilitate the spread of restaurants are also important in helping to understand immigration processes. The study of networks not only provides insight as to why people decide to immigrate to the United States, it also sheds light on how networks influence the lives of community members and the extent to which they do so. Ultimately, immigrant social networks succeed in institutionalizing the process of immigration.

Plan of the Study

In this project, I study the development of an immigrant network in a rural community in Oklahoma. For this project, an immigrant network represents the system of relationships that connects people in a community within which there

exists a free flow of information and resources. I look at the different forms the social network takes in this community, as well as how they influence the actions of members of the immigrant community. Social networks are remarkable and vibrant social phenomena that are critically important to immigration.

Studying the development of an immigrant network is made difficult by the dynamic nature of immigrant communities. It is not possible to adequately address the issue of social networks using traditional quantitative methods. In Chapter 2, I outline the qualitative methods used to study immigrant networks and how they form. I also address the need for such flexible methods when conducting research of this sort.

Chapter 3 looks at how the population of Oklahoma shifted between 1990 and 2000. Of particular importance to the population shift has been the increase in immigrants from Latin America. The growth of this population has served to negate declines in the general population during this time period.

In Chapter 4, the theories used to explain immigration are examined. Each of these explanations is not only considered as a theoretical perspective, but also in terms of how well it describes immigration to the United States from Mexico. Also addressed in this section is the lack of emphasis that immigration theories have placed on the formation of social networks.

The origin of social capital is examined in the first part of Chapter 5. I examine what social capital is and why it is important to immigrant communities,

as well as the role it plays in social networks. The importance of social networks to immigrant communities is also considered, paying special attention as to how they influence immigration and immigrant networks. The final two sections of this chapter address three different components of immigrant social networks and how they function in the community studied in addition to the mechanisms that enable them to continue growing.

The next chapter hypothesizes about the motivations of Mexican immigrants for selecting a rural community as a place of residence. In Chapter 6 I discuss how the search for a higher quality of life that is typically associated with suburban living, but unavailable to immigrant residents in urban settings, may be at the root of residential mobility to nontraditional locations such as that studied here.

In the final chapter I provide a broad summary of some of the major findings from the research project in addition to addressing some areas and issues ripe for future research on immigrant networks.

In sum, this research aims to provide a glimpse of how immigrant social networks develop and influence the actions of network members, and to document what is now an inevitable change in racial and ethnic relationships in this country. Inevitably, because as the population of immigrants continues to grow and as these immigrants continue to enter areas not historically considered “immigrant areas,” we as a nation will encounter new and significant challenges in racial and

ethnic relations. These are challenges that will soon become too large and too important to ignore. It is my hope that the topics addressed here will contribute to the dialogue on immigration and immigration policy.

As a final note, in keeping with the practices of the Institutional Review Board of the University of Oklahoma and the protection of research subjects, the names of research participants, locations, and businesses have been replaced with pseudonyms.

Chapter 2
Measuring the
Immigrant Network:
Description of Study

Between 1990 and 2000, the Latino population of the United States grew by 57.8 percent (U.S. Census Bureau 2000). This change translates into an increase of close to 13 million people. Given the demographic transformations that have taken place and the increasing tendency of immigrants to settle in nontraditional locations (Hernandez-Leon and Zuniga 2000), the study of immigrant networks is of current and growing interest and importance. The study of immigrant networks presents certain challenges not easily addressed by traditional methods. For example, while the study of existing data, such as Census data, would record a change in the population, it would not help to explain how communities or networks develop or are maintained. Survey research is similarly problematic. Because of the transient nature of the population being studied and the need to study both documented and undocumented workers, developing a sampling frame with which to draw respondents is a nearly impossible task. While the Mexican Migrant Project was able to develop a sampling frame for use in survey research, it examined how immigrant networks function, not how they form (Massey et al. 1987). Because survey research is

typically cross-sectional, it is not well suited to the exploration of networks because they are more dynamic and longitudinal in nature. Furthermore, survey research generally does not consider the context in which phenomena occur. Very few survey instruments can adequately measure social networks and the role they play in immigrant communities; consequently, they are not precise enough to examine the topic to an adequate depth. Given these limitations, I collected data for this project using qualitative/ethnographic research methods.

Qualitative research methods are particularly suited to studying the development of immigrant communities because they provide greater flexibility than do other methods. They are highly effective for studying attitudes and behaviors that may be too subtle to be recorded using other methods and, consequently, they produce a greater depth of understanding of a phenomenon. While qualitative methods do not lend themselves to producing data that can be readily analyzed statistically and are not generalizable to a population, issues such as these are not a significant concern given the exploratory nature of this project. Ethnographic methods provide a system to describe the emergence and persistence of an immigrant network.

Site Selection

I selected El Tree, Oklahoma, a rural community of 25,919 residents as the research site for data collection. I chose El Tree as a research site for both practical and academic reasons. From a pragmatic angle, El Tree was a place where I was able to maximize pre-existing connections to facilitate data collection. In the course of discussing my research ideas with faculty members in late Spring 2002, I was introduced to a farmer, Eric Hubbard, residing near El Tree. Mr. Hubbard was an associate of Melvin Brown, a local businessman and key player in the local Latino community. Mr. Hubbard briefed me on the role of Mr. Brown in the community, and we discussed the possibility of Mr. Brown aiding me in my research. Following this discussion, Mr. Hubbard put me in contact with Mr. Brown and, after a brief correspondence, I met with Mr. Brown and began to arrange interviews. Mr. Brown's position in the community and willingness to aid me in my research helped to build rapport with initial research subjects.

The community of El Tree is also a convenient and practical location for research on immigrant social networks because it is an attractive destination for immigrants, resulting in El Tree having a sizable Latino population. El Tree is an appealing destination for workers for three key reasons. First, El Tree boasts an abundance of low-skill and entry-level jobs. In the immediate El Tree area, there is a meat packing plant that relies heavily on immigrant labor and has actively recruited Latino workers from other parts of the country. In addition, the

neighboring agricultural communities and local informal labor market sector provide unregulated work opportunities for undocumented workers. Finally, El Tree is a community with little Immigration and Naturalization Service presence and a community tolerant to both documented and undocumented workers. In El Tree, I found an abundance of research subjects who were willing to participate in the study.

From an academic perspective, El Tree is an ideal location for research on immigrant social networks for several reasons. To begin with, it is a community that has experienced a significant growth in its Latino population over the past decade. In 2000 the Latino population of El Tree was 1,149. This is an increase of more than 100 percent over the 1990 population of 509. The importance of this change is enhanced by the general stagnation in the growth of the native-born population. El Tree is also an attractive research site because it is a nontraditional migration destination for Latin American immigrants. Latino immigrants have tended to exhibit high levels of spatial concentration. Latinos in general, and Mexicans and Mexican Americans specifically, have tended to settle in nine, mostly Southwestern states (Marger, 1996). The tendency to live among fellow countrymen is especially notable for Mexicans and Mexican Americans of whom approximately 85 percent live in Arizona, California, Colorado, New Mexico, and Texas (Bean et al. 1984; Marger, 1996). Of these, almost 80 percent are estimated to live in California and Texas alone. Since El Tree is a nontraditional

migration site and has a relatively new Latino population, the early stages of the social network and development can be traced and observed. Furthermore, since El Tree is a rural community, many of the social services aimed at assisting recent immigrants adapt to their new homes, such as bilingual education programs or human services programs, are not present at all or available only in a limited form in the community.

Questionnaire and Interviews

I conducted interviews using a semi-structured interview design. The questionnaire consisted of three parts. In the first section, I examined the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Here, I collected basic data including respondent's age, marital status, number of children, information on family members living in the United States, and place of origin. The second section included, arguably, the most important part of the instrument. In this section, I looked at the work history of respondents. I endeavored to record all the jobs that respondents had held in the United States as well as the specific cities where respondents had lived and worked. In this section, I also explored how respondents were able to find the jobs they had held, including not only personal skills, but also social networks and special skills that facilitated the job search. The final part of the questionnaire addressed quality of life issues.

Respondents discussed why they came to the United States, generally, and El Tree, specifically, as well why they choose to stay or go back to Mexico and how they arrive at these decisions.

I personally conducted all interviews over eight days between July 19, 2002 and August 24, 2002. Of the 51 interviews, two were conducted in English while the remainder were completed in Spanish. The interviews lasted between twenty and ninety minutes. They generally were conducted in the respondents' homes, although several were completed at Melvin Brown's place of business. Interviews were very informal in order to maintain an easy and comfortable discourse with research participants. I made no effort to ask the questions in any specific order, preferring instead to let the interview take a conversational tone and leaving specific issues to emerge in a natural manner. With each research respondent's permission, interviews were audiotaped in order to facilitate interview transcription. Only three of the final 51 respondents asked that their interview not be taped, and this request was honored.

Sampling and Research Participants

Clearly, an equal probability selection method of sampling (EPSEM) is the ideal method for selecting research participants when conducting research. However, a nonprobability sampling method was necessary for this project. I

used a nonprobability sampling technique because the nature of the research project and the population being studied did not allow for the creation of an effective and comprehensive sampling frame from which to draw research subjects. Furthermore, since this project is exploratory in nature and no attempt at generalization of findings to the population is being made, an EPSEM based sampling method was not necessary.

I employed a sampling technique that lies somewhere between purposive sampling and snowball sampling. The selection technique was purposive in that I actively sought research participants who were Mexican immigrant workers. It became a snowball sample when initial research participants were used to recruit additional research participants. This combination of techniques was particularly useful in that I was able to observe community members from common social networks who had arrived in El Tree at different times, thus ensuring different experiences and roles among people from the same social network. It is important to note that Melvin Brown, my El Tree contact, was instrumental in recruiting the first set of research subjects. It was from these initial contacts that all other respondents followed.

Melvin Brown

Melvin Brown was a key player in the completion of this project. It was because of his good nature, generosity, and willingness to help that data collection proceeded in a reasonably unfettered manner.

Melvin Brown moved to El Tree in 1968 at the age of 18 from another small town in the area. He is an unassuming man, of average height and average build, who looks much younger than his 53 years. He is a white man who is married and has children and grandchildren, all of whom live in El Tree. Mr. Brown runs a successful small business in the community that employs two other workers. The walls of his business are covered with awards from the local Chamber of Commerce that provide testament not only to his abilities as a merchant but also to his generosity.

Because Melvin Brown is a long time resident of the area, he provides a unique perspective on the formation of an immigrant network in El Tree. His involvement in the network, however, does not end with tacit observation. Mr. Brown has been instrumental in attracting immigrant laborers to the area. His involvement began as a host to a foreign exchange student. From that beginning he has been responsible for bringing Spanish teachers from Mexico to teach in the local schools. Mr. Brown has also taken a more direct approach in his interactions with Mexican immigrants. He occupies a position in the community such that recent arrivals to the area seek out his help not only in securing employment but also in finding housing. Due to his position in the community

and his extensive business connections, Mr. Brown is able to tap into the local demand for undocumented workers and find jobs for those who seek out his assistance. He has even been known to allow recent arrivals to stay in his home and provide them with food until they become established in the community.

Melvin Brown's actions do not seem to be motivated by personal interest. He has been as willing to help non-Latinos find jobs and places to live as he has been to help Latin American immigrants. While many of the people he has assisted have attempted to repay his favors, their actions remain mere tokens and symbolic in nature. On the topic of why he puts himself at considerable risk to help people that he often does not know for very little personal gain, he remains an enigma:

“Why do I help people? I think it goes back to a personal thing that many, many, many years ago I was in a situation and I needed help and one lady helped me. I think that is why I do it. I don't know why.”
Melvin Brown, 53, thirty-five year El Tree resident.

Data Analysis

Preparation of data for analysis occurred in several steps. The first step involved transcribing interviews. To increase accuracy and aid in transcription, I audiotaped interviews whenever possible, as mentioned above. In addition, during the course of transcription, I translated interviews from Spanish to English when necessary. Finally, I transcribed interviews into Microsoft Word files and

later imported them into HyperResearch, a computer program for qualitative data analysis. It was also at this point that all research participants were given a pseudonym. I did so in keeping with policy dictated by the Office of Research Administration aimed at protecting research participants. Once transcription was completed, the next step was to engage in data analysis and coding.

Data analysis for this project relied on a variable-oriented analysis aimed at uncovering patterns in the data. By comparing different observations from different interviews it became possible to uncover some of the phenomena surrounding the evolution of immigrant social networks. Themes and their subsequent codes emerged both from a review of the literature on immigration and from the interviews themselves, creating a connection between previous research and interview data. During the course of coding, several themes not previously addressed or analyzed in depth emerged. The primary themes observed in this analysis are centered on the different social networks found in El Tree, how these networks are maintained, and issues surrounding quality of life.

Summary

It is very likely that the Latino population will continue to grow as we progress into the new century. Consequently, the study of immigrants to the United States will remain one of the important topics of our lifetimes. Studying

immigrants and the process of immigration, however, requires unique methodological considerations.

This research project employs a nontraditional approach for data collection on immigrant social networks. The research site was selected not only because it was an area amenable to research, but also because preexisting network connections allowed me entrée into a closely-knit community. The instrument used for interviews also needed to be flexible so as to actively engage research participants in a conversation where important issues could still be addressed. This flexibility allowed for relevant topics to be approached in a sensitive and discrete manner. Furthermore, while a nonprobability sampling technique was necessary to recruit study participants, the lack of generalizability is not a great concern given the exploratory nature of the research project. The most conventional element of the research design is the data preparation and analysis that employs typical qualitative content analysis techniques. While the research approach may be somewhat untraditional, it proved to be very effective for this project.

Chapter 3

The People of El Tree, Oklahoma:

A Community Profile

The shift in population that has occurred in El Tree is not unlike the changes that have occurred in many localities throughout the United States. It is a region that has been affected by international immigration and the subsequent shifts in the racial and ethnic make up that have changed the entire country. Like other areas, El Tree has seen its population grow significantly because of international migration. As a result, immigration has caused changes in the racial and ethnic composition of the town. The product of these changes has been a city where an immigrant community has developed quickly and been able to flourish in relative isolation from other immigrant communities.

Trends in Immigration to the United States

The foreign-born population of the United States was estimated at 28.4 million in 2000. This number translates into approximately 10.4 percent of the total population, up from 7.9 percent in 1990 (Schmidley 2001). In 2001, 1,064,318 immigrants were admitted to the United States (U.S. Department of Justice 2001). This reflected the highest number of immigrants admitted into the

country since 1991, when the number swelled to 1,827,167, thanks in large part to the Immigration Reform Control Act (IRCA) provision that granted amnesty to many previously undocumented residents. Of the 2001 total, 206,426 came from Mexico, also a post-IRCA high. The most common destinations for immigrants between 1992 and 1997 were the states of California, New York, Florida, Texas, and New Jersey. These areas received almost 70% of all immigrants to the United States (U.S. Department of Justice 1999; Schmidley 2001). These states continue to be the primary destinations of most immigrants. These numbers, however, mask the influence of undocumented migration to the United States.

In 1996 it is estimated that as many as 5 million undocumented immigrants made their homes in the United States. This is a population that has steadily grown over the past decade (U.S. Department of Justice 1999). Like their documented counterparts, undocumented migrants have tended to settle in California (2 million in 1996), Texas (700,000), New York (540,000), Florida (350,000), Illinois (290,000), New Jersey (135,000), and Arizona (115,000). Undocumented residents in these states constituted 83 percent of the total undocumented population in 1996. Of all undocumented persons living in the United States in 1996, it is estimated that 2.7 million came from Mexico, making that country the leading source of undocumented immigrants, and accounting for 54 percent of the total undocumented population (U.S. Department of Justice 2001; U.S. Department of Justice 2002)

Trends in Immigration to Oklahoma

Every state in the United States has experienced at least some positive growth as a result of international migration. Between 1990 and 1997, the United States population was boosted by an influx of over 5.5 million immigrants. Between 1998 and 2002, it is estimated that the United States population grew by 9.2 million people, of which an estimated 4.1 million were immigrants. Oklahoma has experienced immigration-based growth that is consistent with the rest of the country. Between 1990 and 1997, the state population increased by 45,000 as a result of international migration. Between 1998 and 2002, it is estimated that 15,000 more international migrants made their home in Oklahoma (U.S. Department of Justice 1999). While Oklahoma was only the thirty-third most common destination state for immigrants in general in 2001, it was the twenty-second most common destination for documented immigrants from Mexico (U.S. Department of Justice 2001). In 2000, it was estimated that 3.2 percent of the total state population was foreign born (Schmidley 2001).

Trends in the Composition of the Latino Population

United States

As a direct consequence of the persistent immigrant influx into the United States, the racial and ethnic composition of the country has been irreversibly affected. While changes of this kind are not exclusively contingent upon immigration, migrants have played a key role in the “color” of the country. Changes in the Latino population of the United States cannot only be observed at the national level, but also at state, county, and municipal levels.

Since the 1990 Census, the population of the United States has grown by 32.7 million residents, an increase of 11 percent (see Table 3.1). During the same time, the Latino population grew by almost 58 percent, jumping from the 1990 total of 22.3 million to 35.3 million in 2000. The Mexican population in the United States increased to 20.6 million in 2000, up from 13.5 million in 1990, an increase of more than 52 percent.

Oklahoma

The state of Oklahoma has also experienced growth in its population. Between 1990 and 2000 the state population increased by 9.7 percent for a net increase of 305,069 residents. While the growth of the state population was rather modest, the Latino and Mexican populations ballooned between 1990 and 2000, each growing by approximately 109 percent. Latinos accounted for almost one-

third of the total state population growth. This influence of Latinos on population growth is even more pronounced at the county and city level.

Saint Mary County and El Tree

El Tree is located in Saint Mary County. Between 1990 and 2000 the Latino and Mexican populations increased by over 58 percent each in Saint Mary County. During that time, the population of El Tree experienced a slight drop in its total population while the Latino and Mexican populations grew by over 125 percent. The county and local findings suggest the presence of Latino residents generally, and Mexican residents particularly, have blunted the general decline in population.

El Tree, Oklahoma

Founded in the late 1800s, El Tree is the largest community, in both area and population, in Saint Mary County. It is located approximately 100 miles from both Oklahoma City, Oklahoma and Wichita, Kansas. Since the discovery of petroleum reserves in the 1920s, the area has been an important location for the oil industry. It is currently the home to one of the major oil companies in the United States with both a refinery and corporate facilities located in El Tree (Oklahoma Department of Commerce 2003). The oil refinery is the major employer in the community, providing work for approximately 1,800 employees.

Table 3.1 Difference in Population by Total, Latino, and Mexican Origin, for the United States, Oklahoma, Saint Mary County, and El Tree: 1990 to 2000.

	1990	2000	Difference	% Change
United States				
Total Population	248,709,873	281,421,906	32,712,033	13.2
Latino Population	22,354,059	35,305,818	12,951,759	57.9
Mexican Population	13,495,938	20,640,711	7,144,773	52.9
Oklahoma				
Total Population	3,145,585	3,450,654	305,069	9.7
Latino Population	86,160	179,304	93,144	108.1
Mexican Population	63,226	132,813	69,587	110.1
Saint Mary County				
Total Population	48,056	46,159	-1,897	-3.9
Latino Population	851	2,045	1,194	140.3
Mexican Population	671	1,631	960	143.1
El Tree				
Total Population	26,359	25,919	-440	-1.7
Latino Population	509	1,149	640	125.7
Mexican Population	385	873	488	126.8

Source: US Census Bureau 2003

Like many other cities in the area, El Tree is the site of a meat processing and packing plant that employs approximately 500 workers. It is also the home to several manufacturing-based businesses and a computer software technical support center (El Tree Chamber of Commerce 2000; Oklahoma Department of Commerce 2001).

When in El Tree, it is virtually impossible to ignore the importance of oil to the region. The colossal tanks used to store oil greet visitors as they enter town from the west on the state highway. Immediately upon entering the El Tree town limits, the gigantic administration buildings of the oil company loom behind their security gates. Even well into the town and away from the shadow of the petroleum complex, the smell of oil permeates the air and drinking water. In local businesses, signs abound asking customers who work at the refinery to remove their shoes before entering.

There is, however, more to El Tree than oil. Like most cities in America, it is equipped with a Wal-Mart discount store and a Chili's restaurant, both of which sit just off one of the two major roads leading into and through the town. The small downtown area consists of several two-story brick buildings with large windows on the ground floor. While many of these are boarded up and abandoned, many more are open for business. Furniture and appliance stores, restaurants, a movie theater, and a barbershop are just some of the businesses in

the small commercial area tied together by bricked streets covered in a layer of red dust.

The neighborhoods in El Tree run from the luxurious and palatial to the simple and modest, to the neglected and uninhabitable. The town is divided with working class homes and apartments most adjacent to the town center, then large homes with beautiful lawns to the north, and trailers in muddy lots to the southeast. The homes stand in testimony to the disparity in income between the corporate oilmen and the immigrant ham stackers, *jamoneros*. In many ways, El Tree is identical to many other cities in America where downtown areas struggle to survive and the disparity between the rich and the poor is played out in homes and automobiles.

Respondent Characteristics

Most of the interviews discussed here took place in the same neighborhood adjacent to the downtown area. The area was composed of many small homes with multiple cars parked in dirt front yards. Here, immigrant workers blend in easily with their American counterparts.

Table 3.2 shows the characteristics of the sample. Of the 50 interviews conducted with immigrant laborers, 35 were completed with men and 15 with women. Ages ranged from 18 to 68 years, with the mean age being almost 40

years. Thirty-five of the 50 respondents were either married or cohabitating.

Forty-two respondents reported having children.

Several respondents reported being either blood relatives or related by marriage to other research participants interviewed. Of those reporting some relation to other participants, two were husband and wife pairs, one was a brother-sister pair, and one was a father-son pair. The two other groups were slightly more multiplex. One group included a brother, two sisters, and the husband of one of the sisters. The last group consisted of five sisters and one woman's husband. Many research participants reported having extended family networks residing in the United States, while only one respondent did not report having any family members living in this country. Forty-seven of the respondents lived in the immediate El Tree area and the remaining three lived in Wichita.

Of the 47 respondents who called the El Tree area their home, 13 reported that they currently worked at the local meat processing and packing plant and several more reported having worked there in the past. Eleven reported working in construction or similar general labor (one of whom was employed at the local refinery), nine reported working in restaurants (two of these were the co-owners of a local restaurant), three were engaged in manufacturing, two worked as mechanics, one worked as a temporary laborer, one worked at the computer software support company, and one respondent was recently retired. Finally, six reported that they were unemployed. While many research participants indicated

Table 3.2 Selected Characteristics of Research Participants.

Characteristic	Number	Percent*
<i>Sex</i>		
Male	35	70
Female	15	30
Total	50	100
<i>Marital Status</i>		
Married	30	60
Cohabiting	5	10
Divorced	5	10
Separated	1	2
Widowed	1	2
Single	8	16
Total	50	100
<i>Children</i>		
Yes	42	84
No	8	16
Total	50	100
<i>Place of Residence</i>		
El Tree OK	47	94
Wichita KS	3	6
Total	50	100
<i>Occupation**</i>		
Meat Processing	13	28
Construction/General Labor	11	23
Restaurant Service	9	19
Manufacturing	3	6
Auto Maintenance	2	4
Temporary Labor	1	2
Technical Support	1	2
Retired	1	2
Unemployed	6	3
Total	47	100

Table 3.2 Continued

Characteristic	Number	Percent
<i>Year First in USA</i>		
1969 or earlier	6	12
1970-1974	6	12
1975-1979	8	16
1980-1984	5	10
1985-1990	5	10
1991-1994	5	10
1995-1999	7	14
2000-2002	6	12
Don't Know/No Answer	2	4
Total	50	100
<i>Year First in El Tree*</i>		
1969-1979	2	4
1980-1984	5	11
1985-1990	3	6
1991-1994	4	9
1995-1999	17	36
2000-2002	15	32
Don't Know/No Answer	1	2
Total	47	100
<i>Mean Age</i>	39.9 years	

*May not sum to 100% due to rounding

**Includes only respondents who reported El Tree as their place of residence.

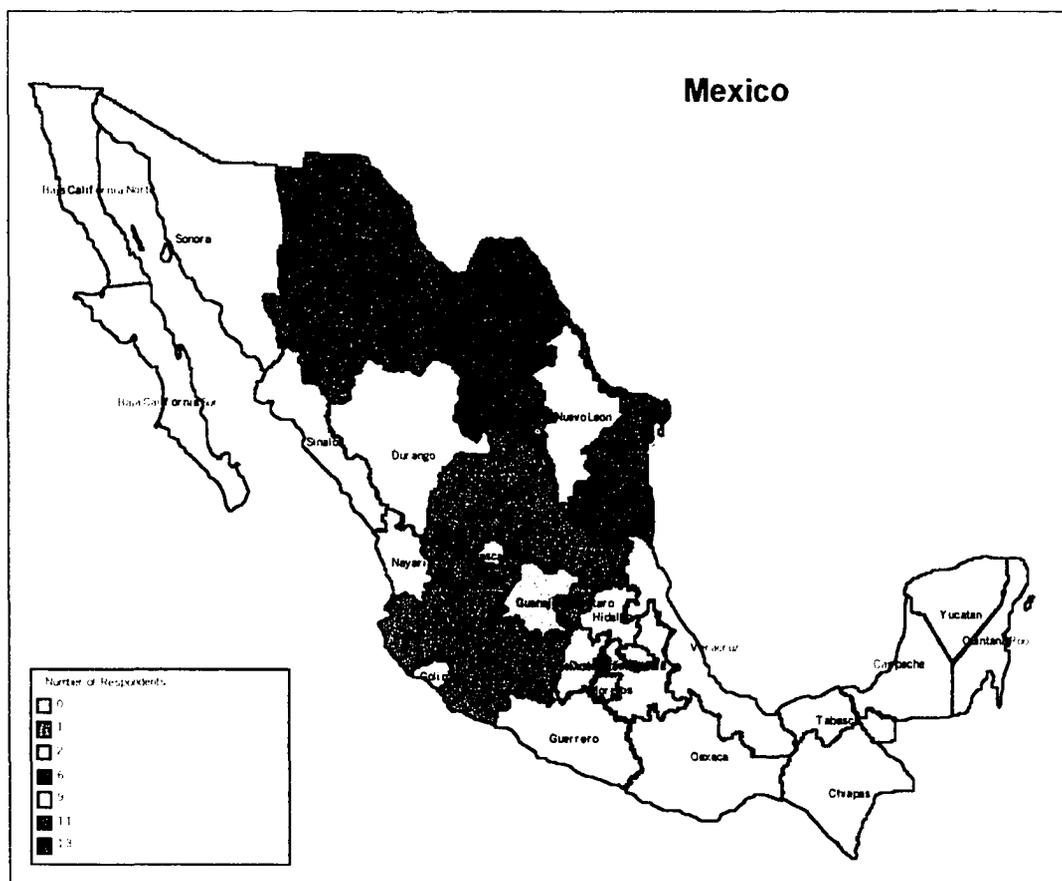
they had lived and worked in other cities in the United States, about one-fourth of respondents (13) reported El Tree as the only place they had lived in this country.

Of all respondents, only one, in addition to Melvin Brown, reported having been born in the United States (Sebastian Abreu from El Paso, Texas) and two others were originally from Cuba (Paolo Wanchope from Guantanamo Bay and Edison Mendez from La Villa Clara). As Figure 3.1 shows, more than half of respondents (29) are from the Mexican states that border Texas: Chihuahua, Coahuila, and Tamaulipas. Nine respondents also came from the Mexican state of Durango that is directly to the south of Chihuahua. This stands in sharp contrast to what Massey and associates (1987) found; that most immigration to the United States from Mexico originates from states in western Mexico. Among research participants for this study, only six originated from that geographic region.

When asked in what year they came to the United States for the first time, respondents gave a wide range of answers. While the tenure of many dated back to the mid-1950s, half of all respondents were able to trace their first trip to the United States to 1986 and later. Only fifteen reported having come to the United States for the first time in the past ten years.

When a similar question was asked to research participants regarding their time in El Tree, only ten reported having come to the town prior to 1990. Twenty respondents reported having arrived between 1990 and 1999 and 13 since 2000.

Figure 3.1 Respondents State of Origin



Enter the Mexicans

According to Melvin Brown and Juana Maradona Veron, two long-time local residents, the entrance of Mexican immigrants to El Tree can be traced to the construction of a power plant in a community south of the town in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

“There was a company that came into El Tree...it was called Olson and Elliot. That is where it all started, when Olson and Elliot came in to build the plant. They (Mexican laborers) would bring their cousins and uncles and brothers. They lived here, lots of them in one house. When the company shut down the people liked it here so they stayed. Some left but some came too. That is how it all started.”

Juana Maradona Veron, 56, thirty-three year resident of El Tree.

Although prior to that time the oil refinery had frequently employed Mexican laborers, they did so mainly for short periods of time. It was the power plant that was responsible for the early Mexican settlement in the area. Olson and Elliot was the first company to bring in employees for extended periods of time. Within five years, however, Olson and Elliot completed construction of the power plant and left the area and its immigrant laborers behind.

The second influx of immigrants came when the meat processing and packing plant opened its doors in the early 1990s. It not only provided employment for the displaced Olson and Elliot workers, it also offered contracts

to workers from Mexico who lived along the border. For those not able or not eligible to work at the meat processing plants, many opportunities still existed and continue to exist in the community.

“We have ranches. We have people that take pride in their yards. We have rich people that don’t really like to do manual labor. So there is always a need. A lot of times they will come up and think they can work here illegally. They find out they can’t and they send them to me and we take care of them.”
Melvin Brown, 53, 35 year El Tree resident.

Thus, the entrance of immigrants into El Tree has been the product of two threshold events, the construction of the power plant in the early 1980s and the opening of the meat processing plant in the early 1990s, in conjunction with the availability of unregulated employment opportunities. As the result of these serendipitous occurrences, an extensive and effective immigrant network has emerged in the community.

Summary

The United States has experienced vast changes in its population over the last ten years. Shifts in the population have resulted in dramatic changes to the racial and ethnic composition of the country. Some of the more notable trends relevant to this research include increases in the number of foreign-born residents and increases in the number of immigrants. Most immigrants over the last decade

have come from Latin America, with Mexican immigrants representing the vast majority. These immigrants have tended to settle in traditional locations including California, Florida, Texas, New Jersey, and New York. The last decade has also seen a steady increase in the numbers of undocumented immigrants coming from Latin America, in general, and Mexico in particular. Like the rest of the nation, Oklahoma has also seen growth in its immigrant population and is now in the top half of states as a destination for Mexican immigrants.

International migration is one of the key sources for shifts in the Latino population in the United States. Over the last ten years the Latino population in the United States has increased by almost 58 percent. The Mexican population has experienced a similar increase, growing by close to 53 percent during the last decade. In Oklahoma, increases in the Latino population have far outpaced the growth of the general population. In fact, while Saint Mary County and El Tree have both experienced declines in their general populations during the last ten years, the Latino and Mexican populations have increased by well over 110 percent during the same time.

Despite declines in the general population, El Tree remains a viable community for its residents. It has respectable job opportunities for its residents in the form of the local oil refinery, meat-processing plant, manufacturing-based businesses, and informal job sector. Research participants were a diverse group of individuals coming mainly from Mexican states that border Texas and were

engaged in labor-intensive occupations. The stories of the community residents aptly describe the creation and growth of an immigrant network in El Tree.

Chapter 4

¿Porque?²:

Understanding Immigration

Decisions

It is estimated that between the years of 1820 and 2001 over 67 million immigrants were legally admitted into the United States. In 2001 alone the number of legal immigrants is estimated to have been over one million, the highest number allowed into the country since 1991 (U.S. Department of Justice 2001). Several theories have been developed to understand the factors that influence immigration decisions. Many of these theories have proven to be directly relevant and applicable to immigration to the United States.

Theories of Migration

Neo-classical Economics Theory

For many years the neo-classical economics theory was the archetypal explanation for migration. It is a classic push-pull theory that operates on both a macro and micro level. On the macro level, it suggests that regional variations in the supply and demand for labor drive migration. The movement of people from areas with low wages and high unemployment to areas with high wages and low unemployment is the primary cause of international migration. In this scenario,

people migrate from areas with high labor supplies to areas with low supplies of labor until international wage equilibrium is achieved (Massey et al. 1998).

The micro level extension suggests that individual actors make a rational choice to move based on a cost/benefit calculation. The decision to move takes into account wages in the new area, cost of living, and the cost of movement, as well as social costs, cultural costs, and emotional costs.

While neoclassical theory presents a reasonable explanation for international movement, many of its propositions have been widely criticized. For example, a logical outcome of international migration is the stabilization of wages between immigrant-sending and immigrant-receiving countries. However, labor market and capital equilibrium is rarely achieved. Furthermore, neoclassical theories suggest that immigrants make migration decisions based on the costs and benefits associated with international movement. This proposition is also problematic in that it is unlikely that migrants have enough knowledge of the receiving country and the migration journey to make a truly informed decision (Massey et al. 1998). Essentially, what we see is a chasm between perception and reality that may lead actors to either overestimate or underestimate the benefits associated with migration. Despite having imperfect information individuals act based on their calculation of costs and benefits of migration.

Recently, other theories have emerged that are more efficient in the study of migration. New household economics, segmented labor market, and world

systems theories have been used to explain the start of migration. These theories are particularly relevant and applicable to the migration of Mexicans to the United States.

New Household Economics Migration Theory

The new household economics of migration theory is based on the idea that groups of people, not individuals, make the decision to migrate. Larger groups, typically families or households, collectively develop a strategy to distribute labor in a manner that maximizes expected income and reduces financial risks. It also serves to provide opportunities in an environment where few exist. Lack of crop insurance, futures markets, retirement insurance, unemployment insurance, access to capital or credit, and deprivation relative to others in the community are all incentives to send a worker into the international migration network. Often international migration is only one of the ways in which labor is diversified. Other household members may be targeted for internal migration or local industrial or agricultural work. Unlike neoclassical theory, in this scenario wage differentials play an insignificant role since migration, as well as the other labor strategies, are used to supplement deficiencies in the local economy such as the lack of unemployment insurance or ready access to capital (Massey et al. 1998).

In *Return to Aztlan*, Massey and associates (1987) note that for many Mexican households international migration serves the same function as internal migration, the diversification of household labor. Doing so insures that households will be able to weather difficult economic times. How a household uses immigrant labor varies depending on the stage of the lifecycle in which a family finds itself. For example, whether an individual is a temporary, settled, or permanent immigrant depends on his role within the family. Men with children to support and heavy family responsibilities are likely to be temporary immigrants. Men with grown children are less bound to the family and are more likely to engage in recurrent migration. Similarly, settled immigrants are likely to be those with very little familial attachment. Income earned by immigrants also has a large impact on the household. Massey and associates (1987) estimate that between 65 and 86 percent of total Mexican household income is earned by immigrants in the United States. How this income is spent is also guided by a family's stage in the life course. Households in early stages are likely to purchase consumer goods while those in later stages are more likely to spend money on land or other types of investments. Immigrants then use their labor and income to respond to both economic and social conditions.

Segmented Labor Market Theory

Segmented labor market theory suggests that migration is rooted in the labor demands of modern industrial cities. It proposes that the economies of modern societies are composed of primary and secondary labor markets. Jobs in the primary sector are characterized by high wages with the possibility for promotion and are highly sought after and valued. Conversely, secondary labor market jobs are less desirable and have little potential for advancement. Because of the low status of these jobs, native workers are unwilling and unlikely to fill these positions. For immigrants, these low wage jobs are attractive because, not only are they better paying than the jobs in their home country, often they are not regulated. Immigration is caused by the demand for low skilled, poorly paid work. Unlike the new household economics theory that suggests pushes from the sending country are important, segmented labor market theory posits that the pull from the receiving country is most essential. Given the appropriate circumstances, geographic concentration and class-selective migration, ethnic enclaves are likely to form. Segmented labor market theory suggests that immigration is heavily influenced by recruitment from the destination country (Massey et al. 1998).

To a certain extent, the current flow of immigrants from Mexico to the United States can be traced to the shortage of labor in the American southwest during World War II (Massey et al. 1987). As a response to the labor shortage,

the *Bracero* accord was implemented between the U.S. and Mexico. The program initially granted Mexican laborers 45-day work contracts during which time they were allowed to seek out agricultural employment in the United States. It is estimated that as many as 4.5 million Mexicans took part in the *Bracero* program and that at its peak 400,000 workers per year were allowed into the country. The accord was not only well received by the agricultural industry in the United States but also by Mexican laborers who needed the work. The legacy of the *Bracero* accord has been significant. Well over 50% of all *Bracero* workers came from western Mexico (Cornelius 1976). As Massey and associates (1987) show, to this day this area continues to be the primary source of out-migration from Mexico. Furthermore, like their World War II era counterparts, recent immigrants from Mexico settle in large numbers in the state of California.

World Systems Theory

World systems theory suggests that there are two main types of nations in the world, developed (core) and developing (periphery) countries. International migration results from the formation of capitalist markets in periphery countries. Core powers enter developing nations and disrupt the local economy by introducing new industries. Penetration of this sort results in ideological and cultural connections between people from the developing country and the core country. Displaced workers then look to the urban centers of the core nation for

employment. Core and periphery relationships are most likely to exist when countries share a colonial and/or political history. According to world systems theory, when corporations enter into periphery countries and set up industries many of the jobs created are for women. The result of this disruption is that male workers are displaced and must search for work. Men unable to secure employment in the disrupted agricultural economy look to the core for subsistence (Massey et al. 1998).

Like many other countries, Mexico is linked to the U.S. through both military and political engagements. Therefore, following the propositions implicit in world systems theory, it is not surprising to see a significant American corporate presence in Mexico. Presence of this sort has shifted traditional agricultural practices. Commercial crops and capital-intensive methods have been introduced, replacing existing systems. Similarly, agricultural employment has been replaced by manufacturing. The result of these changes has been increased out-migration and a reduction of costs associated with migration. Migration costs have dropped as a result of the creation of social networks and transferring of information about opportunities available in the United States. Furthermore, Mexican immigrants have tended to flock to global cities like Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, and Houston. These areas have experienced shifts in their populations as native blue-collar workers have increasingly left despite rapid

growth. The absence of native workers has allowed Mexican workers to fill vacant positions in these areas (Massey et al. 1987).

Although it is the case that the theories discussed above can explain certain elements of migration decisions better than others, it would certainly be unwise to completely disregard any one of the theories. In fact, it is likely that if we take the advice of Robert Merton (1968) and use each of these theories to explain different elements of the migration question, it will help to create a fuller understanding of the greater process of migration.

Motivations for Migration

Whether taken individually or in conjunction with other theories, theories of migration effectively address why migration occurs. However, they shed very little light on why an individual ultimately makes a migration decision. The benefit of having engaged in ethnographic research is that I have been able to develop an understanding as to some of the motivations behind migration. While the stories of respondents remain consistent with theoretical models, they also provide insight that might have been lost had another data collection method been used.

Consistent with both neo-classical economics theory and new household economics theory, for the people of El Tree, the decision to immigrate to the

United States was most often based on financial decisions. But for many, other more personal reasons also emerged.

Many of the residents of El Tree suggested that their decision to migrate to the United States was a financial one because in this country they would be able to earn wages far superior to those in Mexico. However, the end they hoped to achieve with those higher wages varied somewhat. Some respondents saw employment in this country as an opportunity for saving money that they could put to use in Mexico. Gerrardo Torrado and his wife Jesusita both commented that their time in the United States was limited and that they hoped to earn and save enough money so that they could each open a business in Mexico.

“...we came here with the idea of working and saving money. To come here and save enough money to take care of our children and start a business in Torreon. Before we came here my wife and my mother-in-law had a day care, my wife wants to have one again and I would like to start a restaurant.”
Gerardo Torrado, 29, cook

Similarly, Rafael Marquez and his sister Manuelita both indicated that they hoped to earn enough money in El Tree so that they could continue their studies at the university.

“I was thinking about saving up some money and getting back into the University. It is not very expensive there like it is here.”
Rafael Marquez, 22, farm hand

Most respondents, however, indicated no desire to save money for use in Mexico. Their financial plans were more immediate.

Several of those interviewed indicated that the financial crisis in Mexico and the subsequent lack of job opportunities is what drove them to migrate to the United States. Respondents often cited the difficulty of life in Mexico and the inability of people, even those with good jobs, to earn livable wages as prime motivators for immigrating.

“We come here with the illusion that life could be a little bit better here if you just work at it... You come here because you are disillusioned with your home.”

Oscar Perez, 27, laborer

“I am tired of being here but I live well here. In Mexico I can work and I will make enough money to eat but that is all. I will stay here.”

Carlos Hermosillo, 39, construction worker

Others remarked that the economic crisis in their homes was such that migration was not an option but a necessity. As Joaquin del Olmo, a 21-year-old cook, suggested, “People are not coming from somewhere because they want to, they are coming because they need to.” Or as another El Tree resident remarked:

“I think people come out of necessity to work. There are not many opportunities to work in Mexico...and the generations like mine... very few of us received any sort of education.”

Cesareo Victorino, 47, factory worker

For others, however, the decision to migrate was only partially motivated by financial gain; personal troubles also played an important role. Several respondents indicated that marital problems drove them to leave their homes and families in Mexico while several others indicated that they came to the United States to reunite with their spouses or parents.

“So in case I came to the United States, not so much...well I did come to earn and save some money...but when I decided to come here I had problems. Personal problems with my spouse and the option came up to come here. This option came up and my mom told me about it and I thought ‘why not?’ It was also beneficial in that I would be able to make a little money.”

Rafael Marquez, 22, farm hand

“We came because my husband and I were having marital problems. He came because we were unhappy with one another. After he had been here for a while he thought better and he called me and told me to come. So I came.

Daniella Osorno-Mercado, 42, waitress

“Originally, we came here from Mexico City when my dad divorced my mother. He worked for an American company...that is when he met my stepmother. They got married and everything and we came to live here.”

Paco Palenica, 19, unemployed slaughterhouse worker

Summary

The United States is a nation of immigrants. As such, the study of immigrants and the factors that influence immigration have been the source of

significant study. Several theories have emerged to try to explain the process of migration. Neoclassical economics theory suggests that immigration is the product of both regional variations in the supply of and demand for labor and the corresponding variations in wages and calculated cost/benefit decisions by individual actors. New household economics theory suggests that international migration is a technique used by larger groups, families or households, to maximize financial gain and reduce financial risks in areas of economic instability. Segmented labor market theory suggests that migration is rooted in the unwillingness of native populations to fill employment vacancies in the secondary labor market. Finally, world systems theory proposes that migration is caused by the disruption of local economies in developing countries by corporations from developed countries.

While theories such as these are effective in explaining migration, they are built on the assumption that institutionalized networks for finding and securing employment are already in place in the receiving country. What both the theoretical perspectives and personal accounts lack is an explanation of how the social networks that support immigration emerge and develop.

Chapter 5
Social Capital and Social Networks:
The Development, Growth, and Persistence
of an Immigrant Network

To understand the formation of social networks it is necessary to recognize how those within a common network share information. By developing an appreciation of how social capital is transmitted among members of a common social network, it becomes possible to understand the different forms which networks can take as well as how they grow and persist. Studying El Tree, Oklahoma, a community that has experienced tremendous growth over the past twenty years, it becomes possible to observe how changes in local employment opportunities had contributed to the establishment and growth of the local immigrant network. Furthermore, in this community we are able to see how immigrant networks grow and persist.

Social Capital

An immigrant network is not something that emerges naturally. As Bourdieu (1985 cited in Portes 1998) suggests, a social network is created by individual investments made available to the group ultimately leading to the

creation of a useful and reliable source of benefits. Plainly stated, personal investments of social capital are at the root of the creation of social networks.

Lin (2001) traces the roots of social capital to Marx's writing on the emergence of capital – surplus value generated by investments. It is from this early idea that other types of capital are built. These different types of capital are what Nan refers to as neocapital and include human capital – investment in technical skills or knowledge for expected returns, and cultural capital – reproduction of culture aimed at socializing members to values, symbols, and meanings of culture. Social capital is an extension of these other forms of capital.

Lin (2001) suggests that social capital be defined as “resources embedded in a social structure which are accessed and/or mobilized in purposive action” (p. 12). This definition not only encompasses the resources within a social structure, it also underscores the importance of access to and use of these resources. Lin proposes four attributes of social capital that make it useful to network members. These attributes include the transmission of information regarding opportunities or choices, the influence of capital on agents who play a role in critical decisions regarding the actor, references for individual actors, and the reinforcement of group membership and identity.

Similarly, Portes (1998) argues that social capital emanates from three distinct sources. One source of social capital is the “accumulation of obligations from others according to the norm of reciprocity (p. 7).” Here an actor provides

resources for others based on an expectation that repayment will be received. This is not a purely economic exchange since neither the form nor the time frame for repayment is specified. Social capital is also the product of bounded solidarity. In this scenario, actors who are thrown together in a similar situation learn to empathize with and support each other's plight. Altruism is bound by group membership in this circumstance, not by philanthropy. Finally, social capital can result from a desire to be integrated into a group. In this situation, a donor's gifts are not made with an expectation of payment per se, rather they are made with the hope of currying favor within the community and improving one's social standing. Alternatively, payment in a situation such as this can be insured by social pressure placed by the community on the donor. As Portes (1998) notes, "Trust exists in this situation precisely because obligations are enforceable" (p. 9).

Portes (1998) and Portes and Landolt (1996) also note that while the benefits of social capital are frequently evoked, some limitations to social capital exist. These restrictions include strong ties that can exclude those outside of the group, group demands for conformity which stifle individual action, and the possibility for downward or negative pressure being placed on group members.

Ultimately, there is more to social capital than just group membership and the ability to call upon resources in the community. It is a multiplex concept rooted in various aspects of social life with many advantages and disadvantages.

The Importance of Social Capital

The importance of social capital in the lives of individual actors has frequently been underscored in social science research. Issues of the extent of support and the importance of tie strength have been studied, as has the utility of social capital in finding and securing employment.

Wellman and Wortley (1990) find that family and friends provide support extending beyond mere reciprocity. Much of the social capital that individuals come to rely upon and benefit from is the product of these primary and secondary relationships. Networks are composed of both immediate kin with densely knit and broadly supportive relations and specialized, more loosely knit relationships composed of friends, neighbors, and coworkers. However, in their study of middle class suburban residents from Toronto, Wellman and Wortley argue that perhaps strong ties do not provide as much support as is commonly thought.

Wellman and Wortley's conclusion is similar to that presented by Granovetter (1973) in his argument on the strength of weak ties. He argues that relationships characterized by weak ties are more effective in transmitting information. Strong tie networks are tightly bound and limited in scope and promote isolation, while weak tie networks, because of their greater reach, promote integration among community members. It is the presence of both strong and weak ties in the same network that make weak tie networks superior in

providing information and resources to community members. Strong tie networks, because of their intense solidarity simply limit the options available to actors.

Waldinger (1999) proposes that concentration on weak ties is inappropriate when discussing the mechanisms through which people find and secure jobs. He proposes that in these circumstances strong ties should be emphasized because community members with these types of ties not only are able to provide information about jobs to potential employees, but they also allow workers to vouch for one another. Waldinger argues that recommendations of this sort are crucial in securing employment for immigrant workers. This kind of information or recommendation helps workers to compensate for deficiencies in other areas such as job skill, experience, documentation, or language barriers. As Waldinger (1999) suggests, strong ties are of much greater importance to immigrant populations than they are to native populations because of their low skills. This is because immigrants often possess little in the way of resources aside from what they procure from kin or fellow countrymen.

Fernandez and Castilla (2001) have explored the relationship between social networks and social capital. Their focus is on social capital as a device capable of producing returns on investments. Fernandez and Castilla suggest that similar to employers viewing and deriving benefits from networks, so too do workers. While their research focuses on a referral incentive hiring system at a

call center, several key findings are pertinent to the study at hand. For example, minority employees are more likely to make referrals for employment, high-wage workers are less likely to make use of the referral system than low-wage employees, and having been hired as a referral or having previous work experience in the industry are both related to referring.

Social Capital, Cumulative Causation and Immigration

The influence of social capital on immigration and the lives of migrants is of primary importance to the study at hand. Regarding immigration, social capital theories suggest that an individual's likelihood of migrating is increased if he or she is related to someone with prior migration experience or is connected to someone living in the destination country. The presence of a network also allows migrants to reduce the costs associated with migration and ease adaptation into a new culture. Costs include not only travel and living expenses, but those associated with looking for employment and obtaining appropriate documentation. Once begun, these networks tend to get stronger and more efficient in attracting migrants. Social capital has the effect of institutionalizing migratory behavior and making the network itself a beacon for migrants (Massey et al. 1998).

It is not difficult to see the importance of social capital in the migratory patterns of Mexicans to the United States. Research on migrants from Mexico has found that having a father who is or was a migrant increases an individual's likelihood of migrating (Massey et al. 1987). Furthermore, Massey and associates found that each trip taken by a migrant increased the likelihood of making another trip. A prolonged migration history results in higher levels of integration for Mexican migrants. Higher integration helps not only by reducing social costs associated with migration, but also with increased language acquisition and assimilation to life in the U.S. Strong social ties not only help predict future movement, they also increase wages earned and hours worked by immigrants. Immigration by Mexicans also has the effect of building on itself. Remittances not only increase a family's income, they also increase the relative deprivation of other households in the community. This, in turn, results in other families deciding to emigrate. Also, as better off migrant families purchase additional land, other community members find their opportunities for agricultural work decreasing. Furthermore, in heavy migration communities, migration to the United States has come to be expected of migrants during certain times of their lives.

The importance of social organizations and networks for individual action cannot be overstated. As Portes (1995) illustrates, networks are necessary for economic activity to occur since human beings are involved in relationships of

reciprocity. Beyond issues of economics, Granovetter (1985) argues that the level of embeddedness within a network helps to bridge the gap between the actions of the individual and the influence of social organizations. Coleman (1988) considers the role of social organizations in individual action, suggesting that intangible resources emerge from these types of interactions. Coleman argues that closed social networks, such as those found in ethnic communities, are built on commitment, trust, and obligation between community members. Because of the high density of networks and the intense relationships of community members, closed social networks are able to generate expectations and apply negative sanctions when these expectations are not fulfilled.

Coleman's conclusion is, ultimately, similar to that of Portes (1995) as it highlights the importance of bounded solidarity. Portes argues that bounded solidarity emerges from immigrants' shared language, culture, and familiarity with one another as well as their willingness to share information. From bounded solidarity appears an enforceable trust and the ability to coerce others in the group based on group membership. It follows, then, that from group membership and bounded relationships emerge the ability to call upon scarce resources for assistance and expectations of collective action, or social capital (Coleman 1988; Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993; Portes 1998; Fernandez-Kelly 1996).

Social Networks

As Massey and associates (1987) illustrate in *Return to Aztlan*, social networks are crucially important to the immigration process. These researchers argue that migratory patterns tend to grow quickly and become widespread in migrant communities. This growth is due to the social nature of migration in communities and the creation of a system whereby international employment is easily accessible to community members. The findings from Massey and his colleagues' research clearly illustrate the importance of social networks in migration. For example, they found that having a father with previous migration experience or the presence of a relative in the receiving country increases an individual's likelihood of migrating. The high integration and community cohesion created in social networks helps not only to initiate immigration but also to reduce some of the costs associated with international movement. As Zolniski (2000) notes in his ethnographic study of informal workers in Silicon Valley, immigrants frequently draw upon family resources not only for their day-to-day existence, but also for employment opportunities.

Social networks are not only key in the process of immigration, they are also important in immigrants' adaptation to and assimilation into the host country. Nowhere is the importance of networks more apparent than in the case of finding and securing employment (Granovetter 1974).

Portes and Rumbaut (1996) suggest that in addition to facilitating migrant movement, social networks also help to economically establish workers. Because of the density of immigrant communities in the host country, information about potential employment can be quickly disseminated to potential employees, thus allowing workers and employers to meet with relative speed and ease. Rogers and Henning (1999) suggest that high levels of spatial concentration and low levels of spatial mobility among immigrants may be attributed to their heavy reliance on people of similar ethnic origin for economic survival. They point out that Latin American-born and Asian-born immigrants exhibit higher levels of spatial concentration than other foreign born populations. As noted in Chapter 2, this concentration is so great that Latinos, in general, and Mexicans and Mexican Americans in particular, have tended to settle in nine, mostly southwestern states (Marger 1996). It has been reported that approximately 85 percent of all Mexicans and Mexican Americans live in the traditional immigration states of Arizona, California, Colorado, Texas, and New Mexico, with the majority of those being concentrated in California and Texas (Bean et al. 1984; Marger 1996; Portes and Rumbaut 1996). Spatial concentration of this sort, as well as a strong reliance on network hiring, has resulted in an over-representation of Mexican and Mexican immigrant workers in certain industries in the United States. Rosenfeld and Tienda (1999) report that Mexican workers have been able to take control of the maid and domestic labor force in Los Angeles. They attribute this change in

the labor force to network employment recruitment. They suggest that network hiring favors immigrants because of their strong social networks and immigrants' greater willingness to perform tasks deemed undesirable by native workers.

Network hiring is not a phenomenon unique to Latin American immigrants. In her study of West Indian workers in the food service industry in New York City, Waters (1999) also found that network hiring is an important factor influencing the success of immigrants. Managers at American Food interviewed by Waters reported that the overwhelming majority of their new hires came as a result of referrals and network hiring. In addition to the simple ease in hiring associated with network hiring, managers opted for this more informal form of employing workers because they believed that the type of employee they could obtain through this avenue was of higher quality than could be found via more formal hiring practices. Waters reports that at American Foods, network hiring had become so important that more formal employee-seeking practices had been discontinued in favor of the informal referral system. Network hiring, however, does not just work on the local level; it can also take a national and international flavor.

Sassen (1995) suggests that local labor markets in receiving countries are tied to communities in sending countries. She argues that immigrants' migration decisions are influenced heavily by the location of other immigrants in the receiving area. Immigrants tend to move to areas where their countrymen live,

even if economic prospects are poor. The information passed between the receiving and sending country may be of such a specific nature as to connect a particular labor supply with a particular job. This connection occurs regardless of distance. The result can then be an ideological and employment-based connection between a community in the sending country and a community in the host country hundreds, if not thousands, of miles apart. Zhou (1992) further illustrates Sassen's idea of a connection between host and sending countries in her study of Chinatown in New York City in which she found that many Chinese immigrants were drawn to the city by the existence of specific jobs.

Tilly and Tilly (1994) also note the benefits of network hiring for both employees and employers. For employees, networks lower the cost of labor market information and provide jobs. Furthermore, once a supply network is established for a particular job, a stream of migration is likely to emerge to fulfill that demand. In addition, lodging, companionship, and a feeling of collective identity are also offered through the network. For employers, networks provide a flexible and cohesive labor force from which a certain level of performance can be guaranteed.

A focus of this kind on social networks does an admirable job of explaining the usefulness and utility of social networks in the immigration process, in general, and the finding and securing of employment in particular. However, it fundamentally ignores how immigrant networks first emerge. Portes

and Rumbaut (1996) discuss the importance of pioneer immigrants who blaze a trail for subsequent migration by their countrymen. But they never address exactly how they are making job searching and employment easier for their *paisanos*³. In El Tree it is possible to develop a sense of how the network has emerged, as well as, exploring the various forms the immigrant network has taken.

The El Tree Immigrant Network

The introduction of Mexican-Americans to the United States and, by extension, the first immigrant networks, can be traced to the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848. In addition to ending the war between Mexico and the United States, this treaty also turned over much of what is now the American Southwest from Mexico to the United States. Furthermore, and most important to the topic at hand, it politically recognized Mexicans living in those areas as being part of the American population (Alvarez 1973). These early immigrant networks were then reinforced by the *Bracero* accord in the mid-1900s. The *Bracero* accord was a program instituted between the United States and Mexico. The project was aimed at providing temporary workers from Mexico to fill agricultural labor demands in the American Southwest (Massey, et al. 2002). While this knowledge tells us something about the time frame during which Mexican immigrant

networks first began to appear in the United States, it does not speak to how these networks emerged.

As discussed in Chapter 3, the emergence of the Latino community in El Tree can be traced to a large-scale construction project in a neighboring community in the early 1980s and the opening of a meat packing plant on the outskirts of town in the early 1990s. It was as a result of these two events that an immigrant network began to develop in El Tree. I found the El Tree immigrant network to be composed of three separate secondary networks: a traditional subnetwork, a church subnetwork, and a contract subnetwork. These subgroups are drawn together by different types of relationships and connections but they all function within the same immigrant network and provide similar types of resources and social capital. The traditional subnetwork is composed of primary group relationships such as family members and close friends. The church subnetwork is more secondary in nature than the traditional subnetwork. It is based on religious associations. The relationships in this subgroup are not as permanent as those found in the traditional subnetwork. Finally, the contract subnetwork is centered on the meat packing plant and its hiring practices. In this final subgroup there is no real connection between network members other than working at the same location and having arrived in the community under similar circumstances. While each of these secondary networks has unique characteristics that distinguish it from the others, they all function together with

significant overlap among them and operate within the greater El Tree immigrant network.

Traditional Subnetwork

The traditional subnetwork in El Tree is composed of family members and friends. Both new and long-time residents in the community drew liberally on the resources made available within this network. Residents relied on this network not only for employment but also for support of daily needs and activities. While the advantages of membership in the traditional subnetwork were numerous and aided many community members, some problems associated with this subnetwork also emerged.

The residents of El Tree were keenly attuned to the importance of network connections. Many realized and acknowledged outright that employment opportunities depended upon who they knew in the community. Victor Gutierrez, a 52 year-old employee of the meat packing plant, suggested that finding a job in El Tree was contingent on network connections: "You find work by getting set up by your friends. They tell you who is hiring." Ramon Morales, a 28 year-old construction worker, added that the ease of finding work depended on who a person comes into contact with: "Here there are few Hispanics. If you meet somebody that knows all of the Hispanics, at most it will take three or four weeks (to find work)." Similarly, respondents were quick to point out that not having

relatives or friends made the search for employment, and life in general, more difficult.

“You struggle when you do not know people who can orient you to what is going on. When you know people I think you struggle less. When one can’t help you others will. You can find work quickly.”

Javier Aguirre, 52, meat packing plant employee

Family members and friends play an important role in the traditional subnetwork. They are the source not only of information about jobs but also serve as references for their countrymen. Respondents frequently indicated that family and friends had been responsible for them securing employment. Carlos Hermosillo, a 39-year-old construction worker, attributed finding many of his jobs in the area to the information and referrals he received from his family members. His first job in the area, manufacturing accessories for riding horses, came from information passed to him by his sister. Hermosillo found his next job at an iron foundry through his brother-in-law: “He knew they needed somebody and he gave them my name.” His most recent job working in construction he attributed to the support of his *compadre*⁴. Like Hermosillo, Cesareo Victorino, a 47-year-old factory worker, and Ramon Morales, a 28-year-old construction worker, also relied on family referrals to find employment in El Tree. Morales noted: “He took me to the person that he had spoken to about me.”

As Waters (1999) demonstrates, referrals of this kind are extremely important to immigrant workers as they search for employment. Rafael Garcia, a 31-year-old mechanic, attributed the importance of referrals to the relationships that workers developed with employers. “I think it has to do with the confidence they (employers) have with the friend.” This was an idea echoed by a local restaurant owner who frequently relied on immigrant labor and referrals:

“...if they are working there I am confident that they know...nobody knows the load they carry at the job better than they do ...if the person they bring in is not a good worker they are the ones that will suffer and struggle to get the job done. Because a lot of it is teamwork, I am guided a lot by their opinion. If they want to bring somebody in that is okay.”

Deliah Maradona-Wanchope, 51, restaurant owner

Maradona-Wanchope understood that if employees were bringing in other workers they would be aware not only of the job tasks, but also the expectations associated with employment at the restaurant. This predetermined performance expectation was beneficial both for employers and employees.

New El Tree residents are fortunate in that in the community they found many people willing to help new immigrants become integrated into the community. According to respondents, individuals in the community are even willing to help those they did not know or who were new to the community.

“Here there are many different kinds of jobs and there are lots of Latinos. We are all friends being here and we all help each other

out...so if we are out of work we can ask people for a hand and they will help us out.”

Tavo Valdez, 30, seasonal roofer

This idea stands in contrast to previous literature that emphasizes strong ties (Granovetter 1999) and lends support to those theories that emphasize weak ties (Granovetter 1973; Wellman and Wortley 1990).

The product of such network intensity has been the growth of the Latino community in El Tree. As one 10 year resident of El Tree commented:

“It seems that Hispanic people here help one another out to find jobs. I think that is good...that is why it has gotten full here so quickly with a Mexican population.”

Rafael Garcia, 31, mechanic

The assistance available in the traditional subnetwork extends beyond that of employment and employment referrals. Often the aid provided by family and friends is of a more immediate nature. Several research participants indicated that family members provided them with temporary housing, food, and transportation when they arrived in the community. As Manuelita Marquez, an 18-year-old fast food employee succinctly stated in regard to living with her sister and brother-in-law, “I have a place to stay, transportation, food...everything.” Coincidentally, Manuelita Marquez’ sister, Jesusita Torrado, also relied on similar help from her brother when she and her husband first arrived in El Tree. Antonio De Negrís

relied on the hospitality of his sister and aunt when he first arrived in the community.

“I had \$80 and it cost me \$70 to get here so I only had \$10 left over. My sister and aunt were able to help me. I told them I had \$10 and that is what I pitched in for food. At that they did not even accept the money. They said they would help me for a week and that the next week we would settle up.”

Antonio De Negrís, 47, meat packing plant employee and mechanic

Because of the help he received from community and network members, De Negrís was able to get established in El Tree despite his lack of capital.

These living arrangements rarely are permanent or even long-term. New residents in the community use these temporary living arrangements as springboards for starting their lives in El Tree. Tavo Valdez, a thirty-year-old migrant roofer, who was only temporarily living in El Tree, explained that whenever he came to the United States he sought out his uncle in Houston who provided him with a place to stay and a job until he was able to earn enough money to travel to different places to work.

However, while the traditional subnetwork provides migrants with support, it can also be perceived as being limiting and confining.

“...it was the only option I had because to arrive in a place where you don't know anybody it seems to me would be a lot more difficult. Especially if you don't have money and you don't have a job and you arrive and you can't rent a place to live or you can't get

a car. I came to this town because it was the only option I had because my uncle and aunt lived here.”
Rafael Marquez, 22, farm hand

Similarly, Tavo Valdez, a seasonal roofer, noted that his first stop in United States was with his relatives in Texas because they were able to provide him with the support necessary to begin working in the United States. “He (his uncle) works doing what I do. I go there because he extends a hand and helps out with food, work, and a place to stay.” Valdez used this initial help as a springboard for employment.

One El Tree resident noted at least one concern when it comes to the way a traditional subnetwork operates. Cuauhtemoc Blanco, a 45-year-old, factory worker, suggested that immigrants brought with them bad sentiments from their homes that often manifested themselves in an unwillingness to help their countrymen.

“People come here and they say, ‘There is a friend of mine from my hometown. He is going to help me.’ Many times it is not like that. It is not like that. The same people keep you down. Your own people keep you down. That is why there are so many bad things between people.”
Cuauhtemoc Blanco, 45, factory worker

It is worthy to note that Blanco was the only respondent to express this sentiment. This however, should not necessarily be taken as an indication that others in the community did not feel constrained within the traditional subnetwork.

Church Subnetwork

Also present within the immigrant network in the community of El Tree was a church subnetwork based on membership in the local Church of Christ. In many ways, the church subnetwork is an extension of the traditional subnetwork. The primary difference lies in a greater reliance on friends made through the church as opposed to family members or other types of friends. Another difference between the traditional subnetwork and the church subnetwork has to do with scale and scope. The traditional subnetwork in El Tree is larger and more extensive than the church subnetwork. Only eight respondents made mention of its existence. However, its system of operation is worthy of note and analysis. Like a traditional subnetwork, the church subnetwork provides information on employment opportunities and assistance with daily needs and activities. As in a traditional subnetwork, however, several other problems are associated with this type of network.

In El Tree the Church of Christ serves as a meeting place for Latinos in the community. This is an interesting situation given the tendency for Mexicans and Mexican Americans to be Catholic. In El Tree, however, the Catholic Church

serves a congregation composed primarily of upper class White community members. In contrast, the Church of Christ appeals to the working class immigrant population. For many, the local Church of Christ is a place where information about employment can be shared. Josefina Hernandez Morales, a recently unemployed, 29-year-old restaurant worker, Sigfredo Mercado, a 44 year-old waiter, and his wife Daniella Osorno Mercado, a 42-year-old waitress, indicated that they had been able to find employment through contacts made at the Church of Christ. Paolo Wanchope, a 44-year-old restaurant owner, suggested that his desire to help others find work was a direct result of his church membership. When asked why he helped people he responded, “Because recently I am a Christian and I don’t want anybody to be unemployed. I want them to have jobs so they can have a life.”

Rafael Marquez, a 22-year-old farm hand, noted that, like the traditional subnetwork, assistance from the church subnetwork went beyond the search for employment and also included more immediate aid like temporary housing and furnishings. Interestingly, Marquez further noted that often community residents attended church services and events to seek out assistance even if they did not belong to that particular religion.

While formal church membership is not required to receive assistance, social pressure is placed on those who receive help from the church or church members:

“...the church does expect something (in return). They do not exactly pressure you but they insinuate that since they helped you find a job you need to continue coming to church...so there is something there, an expectation.”

Rafael Marquez, 22, farm hand

Involvement of this nature, whether coerced or voluntary, has created network ties for some and further engrained them in the community.

“I had always been anxious to leave but we have become more centered on the word of God and I think that if we go back I won’t be able to find that.”

Josefina Hernandez-Morales, 29, unemployed restaurant worker

For some, the ties that they have created within the religious community have caused them to distance themselves from their families. Both Deliah Maradona Wanchope, a 51-year-old restaurant owner and Abril Caballero-Aguirre, a 52-year-old employee of the meat packing plant, noted that their family relations had become strained.

“Since we came from a very Catholic family in Mexico and since we no longer belong to that church or the same religion as they do, it seems like there is this distance between us now.”

Abril Caballero-Aguirre, 52, meat packing plant employee

Thus, while many residents have been able to draw upon the existing church subnetwork for both employment and existence needs, assistance of this sort has often caused prior family relationships to become strained.

Contract Subnetwork

The third part of the immigrant network present in El Tree is a contract subnetwork. This secondary network is centered on the meat packing plant and its hiring practices. Like the other secondary networks, it helps new residents to the community secure employment while at the same time providing for other more immediate needs such as food and housing.

Since it first opened its doors, the local meat packing plant has been sending agents to the Texas-Mexico border area to contract workers to relocate to El Tree and work at the plant. Many of the research participants attributed their presence in El Tree to the contracting system.

“I came with a contract. Like fourteen people came but only five stayed. [It was back when the meat packing plant loaned money.] I was able to get \$500 to find a place to live.”
Claudia Suarez, 57, meat packing plant employee

“Well, a friend suggested...he told me that there was this guy in El Paso that contracted workers for different places in the United States...I went to that guy and he sent me here.”
Alberto Rodriguez, 57, meat packing plant employee

“I came with a contract from El Paso. When we came here from there

they loaned us some money to rent an apartment or something. They sent us to a motel and the next day we went to the factory.”
Oswaldo Sanchez, 47, meat packing plant employee

Although the process is common, the hiring agencies are informal and clandestine. Ramona Ramirez, a 40 year-old employee of the meat packing plant currently working on a contract, suggested that everybody in her community is aware of the hiring agencies and agents but when questioned on whether or not it was possible to find them in the phone book she answered “no.” Other workers who had experienced contract work, however, noted that it was often advertised in border newspapers or on Spanish radio stations.

Once the contract expired, workers were given the option of continuing at the plant or returning home. Initially, workers who signed a contract were provided funds for transportation to El Tree and were temporarily housed in local motels. They also received advances on wages so that they would be able to find permanent residences in the community. Because many workers began to default on the loans, this practice has been scaled down somewhat. But contracts continue to bring new immigrants to the area. When asked why contract work was so common, one resident suggested it was due to the unwillingness of native workers to engage in certain types of secondary market labor.

“They (company agents) go to the border because in the interior of this country Whites and Blacks do not want to do those jobs.”

Beto Aspe, 51, meat packing plant employee and contract worker.

Another research participant suggested that American business created this type of system because it benefits its interests.

“It is what they have created because as the people around here like to say, “Americans don’t like to work.” It is true. I am not the one who says it. Business owners say it, managers say it, bosses say it. The owner of [the restaurant where I work] says, “Americans don’t want to work. If they could they would take money and stay home.”

Gerardo Torrado, 29, cook

Antonio De Negris echoed the thoughts of Torrado:

“In reality, Americans here they do not want to work. It seems that they have no desire to work. It seems like they only do the easy jobs. They start to complain that their hands hurt and that they can’t bend over, they hurt. Mexicans come willing to put forth the effort. That is the type of person that gets hired the most here.”

Antonio De Negris, 47, meat packing plant employee and mechanic

Contracts are not unique to El Tree or the meat packing plant.

Respondents indicated that they had been contracted to do work in Oklahoma, Kansas, Alabama, Mississippi, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, California, New Mexico, and Washington. The jobs being contracted also ranged from working in hog farms and chicken slaughterhouses, to construction, from field agriculture and forestry to factory work. Approximately one dozen respondents indicated that

they had come to the United States on a contract although only five indicated that they were currently contracted laborers.

Several key ideas emerge from the discussion of the El Tree contract subnetworks. First, given the tendency of the meat packing plant to recruit along the border and the presence of a traditional subnetwork in the community, it becomes clearer as to why so many of the town's immigrant workers came from Mexico-United States border states. In addition, in examining how the contract subnetwork system works, it becomes apparent that a corporation such as the meat packing plant is taking over many of the roles and responsibilities often associated with the traditional or church subnetworks. In the process, it is providing opportunities to migrants with no connections in the community. In other words, because the meat packing plant provides advantages similar to those of family, friends, or church, immigrants are able to move into an area despite not having any network ties in the area.

It is important to reiterate that the El Tree immigrant network is not a monolithic institution. Instead, it is composed of three important secondary subnetworks. The first subnetwork, the traditional subnetwork, is centered on primary relationships, the second, the church subnetwork, focuses on religious denomination membership, and the last, the contract subnetwork, is based on the hiring practices of the local meat packing plant. Membership in any one of these subgroups does not preclude membership in another sub-group. In fact, the

subnetworks were tied to one another, as many community residents were actors in multiple networks. Figure 5.1 shows the observed connection among El Tree immigrant network members. As can be seen several respondents (Ramona Ramirez, Antonio De Negris, Claudia Suarez, Javier Aguirre, Abril Aguirre, Sergio Almaguera, and Deliah Wanchope) were members of two subnetworks. These individuals lend support to the idea that membership in one subnetwork does not preclude membership in another subnetwork.

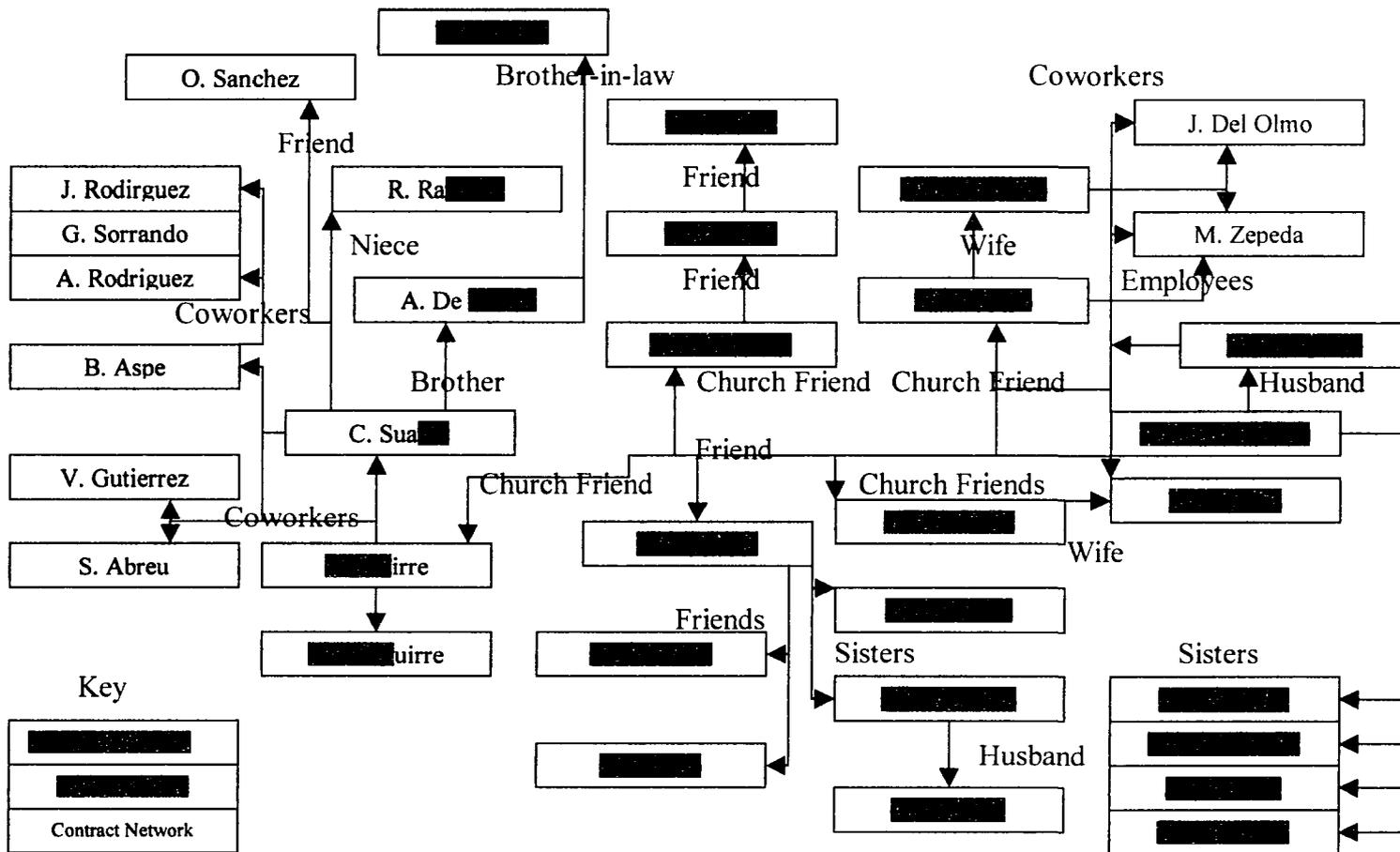
The Growth and Persistence of the El Tree Immigrant Network

The immigrant network in El Tree has been able to grow thanks in large part to the abundance of social capital in the community. In addition to having high levels of contact between friends and family members, individuals within the network are willing to engage in a process of resource exchange.

Frequency of Contact

The potential for the exchange of social capital within the El Tree immigrant network is extremely high. The overwhelming majority of residents in the community (32) indicated they had high levels of frequent contact with other members from their families. Contact ranged from every day to every eight days

Figure 5.1 Network Connections Among El Tree Residents



for family and friends living in the community. Contact was high not only with family members in the United States but also in Mexico.

“The ones that live here I see everyday. The family members that live in Mexico I call on the phone. It had been three years since I had been in to Mexico but I went in December.”

Paco Palenica, 19, unemployed slaughterhouse worker

Respondents who did not report high levels of contact with family members frequently attributed the lack of contact to the transient nature of their lifestyles. When asked why he did not speak with his family often, Antonio De Negrís, a 47-year-old meat packing plant employee and mechanic, responded:

“Because I have been in many different places...I move a lot looking for work.”

Pablita Rodríguez-Alves, a 48-year-old meat packing employee, echoed:

“Because they have changed their phone numbers and I don’t know them. When I lived there (El Paso) we were very close.”

Other respondents suggested that contact with family members, both in the United States and Mexico, was negatively affected by work schedules. Sigfredo Mercado, a 44-year-old waiter, and his wife Daniella Osorno-Mercado, a 42-year-old waitress, both indicated that their busy daily schedules did not match the busy schedules of their relatives living in the United States; consequently, they had very little contact with these relatives. Interestingly, this was not the case with the

Mercado's family members who lived in Mexico, with whom they reported having frequent contact.

Another El Tree resident suggested that the distance of El Tree from his home limited his ability to communicate with relatives.

"In Mexico, I have not had much contact with them recently. I did when I was in California. Before when I lived in California I had more contact. Here everything is farther away. When I lived there I had more contact with my family members, with my mom and dad but here, recently, every week or two, it depends."
Joaquin Del Olmo, 21, cook

Family versus Friends

Despite reporting high levels of contact between themselves and their family members, many respondents indicated a preference for helping friends rather than family members. This is an interesting finding given Granovetter's (1973) strength of ties argument and his emphasis on the importance of weak ties.

To some residents of El Tree, the prospect of lending a hand to family members was a less attractive option than providing aid to friends. Some respondents indicated feeling attached differently to friends than to family members. As Oscar Perez, a 27-year-old general laborer succinctly noted: "Sometimes you are more attached to your friends than to family members." This greater attachment manifested itself in an increased willingness to aid friends and countrymen over blood relatives.

“Sometimes you feel more toward a friend than a family member. Sometimes in a family there is envy, jealousy, or anger. When you are far away from family people are very friendly and help each other out more. It is true sometimes you are more likely to help a friend than family.”

Johan Rodriguez, 42, construction worker

For other El Tree residents the desire to help friends before family came down to a simple issue of need. Some respondents saw family members as being in a less vulnerable position than friends.

“...family members are set. One way or another I know they are okay. But friends...some of them you don't know how they are going to make it. You see a person living on the street without a roof over their head and that is ugly.”

Beto Aspe, 51, meat packing plant employee and contract worker

Curiously, the generosity of some El Tree residents was not due to a desire to help friends; rather, it was born from the fear of helping family.

“I would say that with a family member it is easier to have that person come back and complain because they don't like the job or because they don't like where they are working. A friend won't. He will stay quiet and not say anything. If he does not like it he will stay quiet. A family member won't because they are under too much pressure because you got them the job. It is more difficult for both of you.”

Hilda Maradona-Crespo, 54, factory worker

Sigfredo Mercado took a similar view toward helping family:

“It is better to help a friend than it is a family member... they are family and if something happens to that person you take it personally. You feel for your family member. It is better with a friend with whom there is distance.”
Sigfredo Mercado, 44, waiter

Or as Gabriela Maradona-Batistuta, a 49-year-old factory worker stated, “They say that when you hire family and work with family it doesn’t work out.”

Still other El Tree residents indicated assisting family was a priority over assisting friends. For some, the kinship tie to family members is what influenced the decision to lend help. When explaining why she thought it was more important to help family over friends, Ramona Ramirez, a 40 year-old employee of the meat packing plant, emphasized kinship ties. “They are your family, your blood.” Another respondent suggested individuals should be especially willing to honor these blood ties.

“...if you are willing to help a friend you should be even more willing to help a family member...I’d say it is the same helping a friend or a brother but you have some interest in helping out your family member. A friend will help you as much as he can but a brother or a family member you feel for them if they are not working...and with good reason.”
Javier Aguirre, 52, meat packing plant employee

Others noted the advantages of providing help to family members instead of friend.

“With your family member you know if they are a good employee and hardworking. With another person you do not know. They might work, they might mess around. They might make you look bad.”

Ariel Maradona-Ortega, 49, factory worker

Most El Tree residents, however, viewed it as equally important to help family members and friends. Pablita Alves-Rodriguez, a 48-year-old meat packing employee, suggested, “you help everybody. Friends, family members, people you don’t know...everybody.” The issue for many community members is not blood tie but need.

“You need to help those that need help. Look, there is this phrase ‘Hace el bien y no mires a quien.’ (Do a good deed without considering who you are helping.) What, should we only help those we know? No. We all have a right to receive help and we all need the help of others so we have to lend help whenever someone else needs it.”

Alberto Rodriguez, 57, meat packing plant employee

Other respondents resonated this sentiment.

“...we all have to help one another. Especially if you see somebody that is really in need...they are married or have a family. I am more willing to help a person in those circumstances than a young person because a young person can get by without

very much but that person has others to support.”
Jorge Campos, 50, construction worker

“I like to help people I meet along the way. It doesn’t matter to me what race they are...for me that has never made a difference. We are all brothers. We are all God’s children. I feel good helping out how I can. If I have a dollar I will give it, if I don’t I won’t.”
Braulio Luna, 42, unemployed laborer

“(I)t is terrible when someone tells you that they have a family... because lots of time among friends we get to talking and comment on how the rent is due and their kids are in school and the government doesn’t help and ‘I am not getting food stamps,’ under any circumstances whether they be legal or illegal. You think to yourself, ‘just because I am okay does not mean lots of other people don’t need help’.”
Claudia Suarez, 57, meat packing plant employee

Whether through family members or friends, the residents of El Tree indicated their willingness to share with other community members their resources. Perhaps the greatest exchange of social capital can be observed in the search for employment among El Tree residents.

Helping Others and the Search for Work

The search for work is an important aspect of immigrant adaptation to a community. In El Tree, community residents play a key role in helping other community members find employment. Thirty-five of the fifty-one respondents indicated they had helped others find employment in the United States. Help was not reserved for family or friends or even acquaintances; rather, as suggested

above, it was something willingly given to those in need, regardless of relation. In addition, while employment information was typically only passed on to others in the community, it often extended to other locations in both the United States and Mexico. This information, however, was not passed around in a completely free manner. Issues of character and work ethic were also considered.

“You also have to consider the person because you can get yourself into trouble bringing in people whose bad habits you don’t know. They say you can see the good and bad in a person by how they look...you need to do that first so you don’t create trouble for yourself by recommending someone you don’t know that well.”
Braulio Luna, 42, unemployed laborer

“I pay attention to the person that is looking for work. If somebody asks me and I see that he is a good person then I recommend them, but you don’t recommend just anybody.”
Sigfredo Mercado, 44, waiter

Concern was also placed on issues of nationality and common culture.

“There have been times when I don’t find Hispanic workers and I tell Americans. It does not matter whom but I prefer to tell Hispanics.”
Jorge Campos, 50, construction worker

El Tree community residents suggested many reasons why they were willing to provide aid to their fellow community members. Some indicated that

they felt a need to help others “because they are a friend” as Oscar Perez, a 27-year-old general laborer noted. For other respondents, family took precedent.

“First and foremost is my family. They are my sisters and brother-in-law. It is logical that if my brother-in-law is not working then my sister won’t have anything. So if you help other people why not help your family?”

Ramon Morales, 28, construction worker

For other community members, willingness to share resources and information was tied to ethnicity and a shared sense of peoplehood.

“Well because you see that they are Mexican and they say, ‘I don’t have a job.’ And you tell them, ‘Come with me and I will talk to them and put in a good word so you can get in.’ Then I will tell the manager. I do it for the race. (Es por la raza.)”

Carlos Hermosillo, 39, construction worker

Others in the community feel the need to pass on the goodwill of which they have been recipients. Antonio De Negriz, a 47-year-old meat packing plant employee and mechanic, stated, “Somebody helped me, too. I have to pay with the same coin...you know for good fortune.” Desire to help others comes from the recognition of the difficult situation people find themselves in. When asked why he felt compelled to help others one research participant responded tersely:

“Because they are fucked. They don’t have work and they need to eat.

They come and some don't have papers and they have trouble getting jobs , so I have to speak for them.”

Tomas Campos, 38, former meat packing plant employee

These individuals were able to remember the times in their lives when they were vulnerable and needed help and had a desire to ease the transition of others.

“I helped them because I remember where I come from. I have not forgotten. Everything that I have, when I started to look back, it is because God has helped me. When I was in need my sisters helped me. When I was in need when I came here people that I did not even know would help me. So when I finally had something I could not close my heart to the needs of others because I was in the same position.”

Deliah Maradona-Wanchope, 51, restaurant owner

“I came here without clothes or shoes and she (Deliah Maradona Wanchope) has been the one who helped us out a lot. She always told me that if I could help somebody I should do it.”

Josefina Hernandez-Morales, 29, unemployed restaurant worker

The responses of community residents as to why they are willing to help others are similar to that of Melvin Brown, who felt a need to repay favors granted to him by others. For community members like these, there exists the desire to ease the struggles of new members to the community.

“[You help] so they won't suffer much. You already know where the jobs are and so they won't be struggling. They are people that do not know the town. They don't know what companies are here and since you already know where they are you refer them to them.”

Sergio Almaguer, 26, unemployed meat packing plant employee

Some respondents were simply interested in helping countrymen find jobs that would be more to their liking.

“Because they were working at the meat packing plant and they told me they were unhappy with their jobs. So I told them that when they were hiring I would tell them. Since I had experienced the injustice of working at the meat packing plant I felt for them and I thought that they were in the same situation I had been in. So I thought if I can help them get started where I was at there would be less problems for them. Less pressure. That is why I helped them. I would barely call that helping them.”

Victor Gutierrez, 52, meat packing plant employee

Gutierrez, like many other respondents, did not see his contribution to others as help. For he and others it was the logical way to respond to a situation.

Interestingly, one respondent indicated that he made a conscious effort not to pass on information about employment opportunities. His position is somewhat justified given the seasonal work he engaged in.

“If I can bring in more employees that means that they have quite a bit of work available. I know there is plenty of work because that is why he is bringing in more workers.

Tavo Valdez, 31, seasonal roofer

For Valdez it is not an issue of helping others; rather, it is a desire to insure his own economic survival.

*Papeles Chuecos*⁵

El Tree residents provide one another with a myriad of services for finding, securing, and maintaining employment. These services range from simple orientation to employment streams and providing references, to providing transportation and temporary shelter. One of the more significant forms of aid provided in the search for employment was the clandestine facilitation of access to immigration or work documents.

There was a fair amount of disagreement among El Tree residents as to the importance of immigration documents for finding work in the United States. A small group indicated that documents were not important or terribly necessary because it was still possible for workers to find jobs even without immigration documents.

“Because if that person really wants to work they will work. Maybe in the beginning they will not find the exact job with the exact pay they want but I think that with time they can move up and find better jobs. But finding jobs, he (an undocumented migrant) will find one. There are lots of jobs.”

Juana Maradona-Veron, 56, office worker

Another respondent also indicated that many jobs available do not require immigration documentation.

“If it is to clean a house you don’t get asked too many questions if somebody recommends you. If I have sisters or in-laws, people that know me, you can say ‘I know people that can clean your house that I know.’ Through that person you can get a job, you can clean the house. For that reason I don’t think papers are important.”

Daniella Osorno-Mercado, 42, waitress

Echoing this idea, another respondent indicated that the presence of a social network and the ability to draw upon resources from it decreased the importance of documents.

“Because there are many friendly and helpful people here. Despite the fact that we come to this country, kind of as invaders. Not as invaders necessarily but many people see it that way. Despite that there are many people here that have good hearts and worry about other people. There are people that have gone through that experience themselves. There are people that hold those people in high esteem that come from other places. Because people are not coming from somewhere else because they want to, they are coming because they need to. Because they are living in a desperate situation maybe, I don’t know...That is why I say documents are unimportant, because there are many friendly people that are willing to help.”

Joaquin Del Olmo, 21, cook

One respondent went as far as to indicate that not having documents may make the search for employment easier.

“Because here in the United States there is the possibility...if a boss knows that you are undocumented...he will accept you more than another person who has their documents. (T)here is the possibility that that boss will not pay as well. He will not have any rights, so logically the boss would prefer him than somebody who

has documents. (I)t is easier for an undocumented person to find work.”

Victor Gutierrez, 52, meat packing plant employee

Other El Tree residents viewed possession of documents as crucial to leading a productive life in the United States. One advantage of having documents is the ability to travel freely between Mexico and the United States.

“In 1988 with amnesty I stopped suffering. I stopped coming across in trains or on foot. That is ugly. When you have your papers you come across in a car and it is completely different.”

Carlos Hermosillo, 39, construction worker

Illustrating a similar point, two respondents indicated that because of their lack of immigration documents and the difficulties associated with crossing the border without them, they had been unable to visit their family in several years.

“Also there is my family. I have not seen them since I moved to the United States...because we don't have papers.”

Pabilta Rodriguez-Alves, 48, meat packing plant employee

“I have lived here for 13 years and for me...we have been alright because we have been blessed with work and our kids have been happy here but the reason is we have been here 13 years and the truth is we can't go and come back. We can't go back and forth. Many people are blessed like that but we don't have that.”

Daniella Osorno-Mercado, 42, waitress

For some El Tree residents holding immigration documents was essential for finding work.

“You need them to get a job. Without them you can’t get a job everywhere.”

Oswaldo Sanchez, 47, meat packing plant employee

“The first thing they ask for...if you come from Mexico and you have never been here before...the first thing that employers will ask you for is your Social Security card and ID. So if you are not here legally you are not eligible for those documents.”

Rafael Marquez, 22, farm hand

“You need them to find a job, well to find a good job not just cleaning houses. Those that have better papers can get better jobs.”

Jesusita Marquez-Torrado, 24, restaurant worker

Residents saw immigration documents as giving them a right to work in the United States.

“They give more of a right to work, they give you priority for better jobs. You are taken more into account and the jobs pay a little better too.”

Jorge Campos, 50, construction worker

Some El Tree residents felt that having documents meant they were not limited in the jobs they could hold.

“With those (documents) you can look for a job anywhere. If you have them you can direct yourself to a particular career

whether it be carpentry or construction. With papers you can get a job anywhere.”
Sigfredo Mercado, 44, waiter

Many felt that the jobs those with documents could get were of higher quality because they afforded them security and benefits.

“Without them you can work somewhere for ten years and you will never be able to get insurance. You can’t get benefits if you are unemployed. If I earn a dollar today that is great but if I don’t earn anything in a month I don’t have anything...and you can’t ask for anything.”
Cesareo Victorino, 47, factory worker

One respondent noted the symbolism behind documents and everything that they represent to immigrants.

“Oh, it makes all of the difference. If I had documents...first I would feel freedom. I think I would be able to experience different things. Aspire to different heights. Feeling like you have rights makes all of the difference. To feel like you are somebody because while you don’t have papers you are nobody. You don’t exist. I have had four names here in the United States. Four names. Very few people know my real name.”
Cuauhtemoc Blanco, 45, factory worker

It becomes clear that whether authentic or fraudulent, access to documents in many ways insured that the lives of immigrants were of a higher quality and that their potential as workers could best be maximized. Through the immigrant

network, El Tree residents were acclimated to the methods by which they could purchase fraudulent documents if necessary. Residents readily admitted that it was possible to get documents for as little as \$300. This included a state identification card, a fraudulent resident alien card, and a Social Security card. Regarding access to fraudulent resident alien cards, one anonymous El Tree resident remarked:

“\$150 and four pictures. You give them the money today and in three days you have them. Unless you want it faster then they will be done in two days. If you know English I can get them to you in three hours.”

Anonymous El Tree resident

Another El Tree resident indicated that for \$700 she had been able to secure a fraudulent birth certificate from which she was able to apply for and receive her own documents.

Returning the Favor

Surprisingly, given the frequency and extent to which community members drew upon the resources from their social networks, most respondents indicated they felt no need to reciprocate directly to those who had aided them. Rather they indicated that they could best honor the generosity of others in a

variety of different ways. One such technique was simply to hold onto their new jobs.

“First thing I would do is hold onto that job. I would try not to cause them any problems, not do any damage to their record. ...Many times you think about recommending somebody at your job but you have to worry if they are going to make you look bad. If you have a good record they can mess that up.”
Cuahtemoc Blanco, 45, factory worker

Finally, respondents suggested they could best repay any assistance given to them by helping others who might be in need. As Oswaldo Sanchez, a 47-year-old meat packing plant employee indicated, “If somebody helps me get contracted I will help some friends of theirs.” Another El Tree resident further illustrated this point:

“When we have been able we have shared with others but without expecting anything in exchange...simply because at one time other people have helped us and we are trying to do the same.”
Gerardo Torrado, 29, cook

Deliah Maradona-Wanchope, a 51-year-old restaurant owner, succinctly stated, “I pay forward because I remember my need.”

Not surprisingly, residents did not expect any sort of payment for aid they had given. They indicated that any service they may have been able to provide for their fellow immigrants was done with no self-interest.

“I really don’t think there are people that do things expecting something in return. Up to this point I have not met anybody like that. It is just something that comes to us naturally.”
Francisco De Anda, 44, unemployed recent arrival to El Tree

“You don’t do something thinking that you are going to get something in return. You do it because you want to and because the person needs it. You do it because it is your pleasure to help somebody else find a job.”
Hilda Maradona-Crespo, 54, factory worker

On this topic, El Tree residents echoed many of the sentiments expressed above. They suggested that the best way to show appreciation for their generosity would be if those they helped would help others.

Summary

Ideas of social capital are rooted in the Marxist ideas of capital, the idea that surplus can be created. Social capital refers to the ability to draw upon available resources, drawing upon what others have as surplus. It is the ability to draw upon these assets even if an individual has nothing to offer. Implicit in this idea, however, is the expectation that aid will be reciprocated. Reciprocation is important because the resources made available make the lives of others easier and more productive. An exchange like this is particularly important for immigrants who come to this country in vulnerable positions with little human or

cultural capital. When enough people exchange resources a social network is created.

Generally, social networks are important because they increase the web from which people can draw social resources. Social networks are also critically important to the immigration process. Not only do they facilitate movement to the receiving country, social networks also help ease adaptation by making the process of finding and securing employment easier. Support also includes the provision of food, shelter, and information.

The El Tree immigrant network is not a one-dimensional institution. In El Tree, three secondary networks were noted: a traditional subnetwork based around primary subgroup relationships, a church subnetwork based on membership at a local church, and a contract network based around the hiring practices of a local meat packing plant. While each of these subnetworks operates in a slightly different manner, they all serve to make the transmission of social capital easier and more efficient within the greater immigrant network. The most impressive of the three subnetworks is the contract subnetwork. It is the most important because it represents the weakest of all possible ties yet has the greatest potential to affect future immigration and the greater immigrant network. Within the contract network a single unattached person is able to enter into a community, become established in the area, and bring in new residents to the community based on his/her own strong and weak ties, resulting in a much more dense and

multiplex network. The networks in El Tree grew because of the frequency of contact among members and the subsequent willingness of members to share information with family and friends.

As suggested by Lin (2001), social capital is something that emerges from the ties created in a social network. In many ways the research presented here supports Granovetter's (1973) and Wellman and Wortley's (1990) assertions that weak ties are of greatest importance in networks. However, the importance of strong ties is also supported as suggested by Waldinger (1999). In the end it seems that both type of network connections are important in the community but for different reason and in different stages of network development. In El Tree the weak ties are extremely important in getting the immigrant community started, however, strong ties help to make the social network stronger and denser. It becomes apparent that both strong and weak ties are important to the social network but each has a distinct outcome.

In the El Tree immigrant network it becomes apparent that not only are there many assets for community members to draw upon, there is also a willingness to tap into these veins and use the available resources. In El Tree, social capital is created from a sense of reciprocity between community members. These are individuals who help others because they have been helped. Social capital further grows from bounded solidarity. People in the community help each other because they are countrymen, *paisanos*, who have been in similar

positions as those to whom they lend aid. These notions are in keeping with Portes' (1998) ideas of social capital presented earlier.

In El Tree, community members are able to look to their countrymen and find many of the resources necessary for life in the United States. Members of the community are so committed to passing on information to their countrymen that an expectation has arisen in the community that if help could be given, it should be. In short, avenues for the transmission of local labor market information have become institutionalized in El Tree. The institutionalization of movement to El Tree is substantiated by two key events. First is the increased tendency of immigrants to come from Northern Mexico, an area not historically associated with migration to the United States. Second is the presence and growth of a Mexican and Mexican American population in an area that had virtually no presence of such a community as late as 1980. As proposed by both Sassen (1995) and Tilly and Tilly (1994), this demographic shift is influenced by the presence of countrymen in the area who are able and willing to share network resources with friends and family. Given the abundant and free exchange of information available in the community, it begins to become clear why El Tree is an attractive destination for immigrants.

Chapter 6
The Middle of Nowhere:
Urban Flight and the Move to
El Tree, Oklahoma

In many ways the creation of the El Tree immigrant network is quite remarkable. It is, after all, the product of labor market and social network good fortune in the form of the construction of the power plant by Olson and Elliot, the founding of a meat packing plant, and the willingness of people to transfer information to one another in a free flowing and reciprocal manner. Still unanswered, however, is why immigrants have selected El Tree as a place for settlement. This is a particularly striking question given the likelihood of Mexican immigrants to settle in the Southwestern United States as discussed in Chapter 3. Perhaps the key to understanding this question is to consider issues of quality of life that affect all people living in the United States, yet work to influence the financially disadvantaged in a unique manner.

Suburban Allure

Movement out of the central city to suburbs by Whites has been part of American culture since the end of World War II. While many of the explanations

for “White flight” have been based on race, recent explanations have focused on quality of life issues.

Frey (1979) conducted one of the earliest studies on racial and nonracial causes of white flight. In this study, Frey hypothesizes that White movement to the suburbs was attributable to the deteriorating economy and social environment of the central city rather than the race of the White residents’ new neighbors. While his findings ultimately suggest that race remains an important variable affecting suburbanization, it is primarily as a proxy for other feelings and stereotypes. He finds evidence that fiscal disparities between cities and suburbs and the movement of jobs out of the inner city are also important.

More recent research has been able to support Frey’s original thesis. Harris (1999) found that race is not what matters in selecting places to live or deciding to move. Instead, Harris suggests that race is used as a proxy for other factors. He argues that when people select a neighborhood, racial preferences represent a “desire to live in an area free of crime, deteriorating buildings, ineffective public schools, and other social ills (p. 464),” not an aversion to certain racial or ethnic groups. Motivations to flee the city for the suburbs are centered on desires to avoid areas of crime and neighborhood deterioration. Harris’ findings indicate that neighbors’ income, employment status, and educational attainment are of greatest importance. Krysan (2002) further illustrates Harris’ findings. She suggests that Whites flee integrated

neighborhoods not because of race per se. Rather, they are motivated by their perceptions of minorities and stereotypes. Whites flee urban areas because of factors such as perceptions of crime, graffiti, drug problems, and property upkeep. These are variables that Krysan found Whites frequently attribute to minority residents.

More generally, research on residential mobility shows that various factors affect decisions to move. Some research indicates that stage in the life cycle dictates mobility with age, home ownership, and length of residence being negatively related to residential mobility (Barrett, Oropesa, and Kanan 1994). In studying factors that influence movement out of distressed neighborhoods, South and Crowder (1997a) also found that age was inversely related to movement and while children impede movement in a general manner, the authors suggest it is reasonable to assume that when movement does occur it is from poor areas to non-poor areas (an idea substantiated by South and Crowder 1997b). South and Crowder suggest that any differences in racial and ethnic rates of movement can be attributed to variations in socioeconomic status and life cycle characteristics. Alba and Logan (1991) suggest that family, socioeconomic status, and household income are positively associated with suburban movement. While the authors find that being married or being in a family with children increased the likelihood of suburban residence, their effects were smaller for Blacks, Mexicans, and Puerto

Ricans. Interestingly, despite structural impediments, such as poor employment options and high housing costs, Latino movement to the suburbs continues.

Massey and Denton (1988) have found that suburbanization rates of Hispanics, while lower than those of Whites and Asians, are higher than those of Blacks. They suggest that upwardly mobile members of a group move to suburban locations in an attempt to find areas with “greater prestige, more amenities, safer streets, better schools and higher home values (p. 613).” In related research, the authors found that the suburbanization rates of Hispanics were positively related to socioeconomic status and percent of the population that is native born and negatively related to rates of immigration to the area from Mexico (Massey and Denton 1987).

If the suburbs surrounding American cities are not accessible to immigrants, perhaps these individuals are choosing to improve their quality of life by relocating to rural settings in nontraditional locations. In these new settings immigrants are able to attain a standard of life not possible in other areas with higher costs of living.

Moving to El Tree

As discussed in Chapter 3, of the 50-immigrant research participants, 35 had indicated they had lived somewhere else in the United States beside El Tree.

For these respondents, and many others who had fled Mexico's big cities, the community represented an attempt to lead a new kind of life. They strive for a life absent of many of the difficulties associated with living in an urban center. In El Tree these people found a peaceful and tranquil life with jobs and affordable housing, a community with virtually nonexistent police and Immigration and Naturalization Service presences, and a relatively crime free community ideal for raising a family.

Peace and Tranquility

As a town of only 26,000 inhabitants, El Tree has few of the pressures associated with living in a large city. Residents repeatedly indicated that they were attracted to the slow pace of life in El Tree. For these individuals, the quiet nature of the city was one of the most attractive aspects of living in the area.

“This town is very peaceful. What I like about this place is that it is very peaceful.”

Jesusita Marquez-Torrado, 24, restaurant worker

This pace of life is something that some had not experienced before.

“Yes I like it because it is a very peaceful town. It is a town that compared to other places that are faster paced is a tranquil place ...In Denver life is very fast paced.”

Javier Aguirre, 52, meat packing plant employee

This slower and more casual style of life, however, was much more in line with the way they presently want to live.

“California seemed so crowded and full of people. I am more of an easy-going person. I like the peace and quite...life there is too fast. Life there is not peaceful like it is here. It is very calm and peaceful here.”

Francisco De Anda, 44, unemployed recent arrival to El Tree

Unimpressed by the style of life in urban centers, residents of El Tree appreciated the different benefits associated with small town life.

“Too many people, too much traffic (in Northern California). You are always going back and forth. To go to work you have to spend an hour or two on the road.”

Dulio Davino, 36, painter

Life in El Tree provided individuals with a different way of leading their lives. A way that for many was better than the lives they previously led.

“I like this little town. Laredo is a big city and I don't like it. I can't find myself in the city.”

Hugo Sanchez, 26, truck maintenance worker

While for many in this small community life is undoubtedly different than it might be in other areas of the country, residents do not see it as a negative. Rather, they embrace the difference and appreciate what the small, close-knit community offers. This is particularly the case in regard to employment.

Employment Opportunities

Another attractive aspect of El Tree for residents was the availability of work in comparison to other areas in the country. Several respondents recounted the difficulties they had in finding gainful employment at other locations.

“I came because along the border there is a phenomena ...there are work shortages...I don't mean a lack of work, there are lots of jobs ...what happens is that a lot of people that are residents of the United States commute (yet live in Mexico). They come from Mexico, with their legitimate papers, and cross daily...it causes people that have their papers arranged to have difficulty finding good jobs along the border.”

Victor Gutierrez, 52, meat packing plant employee

Another respondent, Antonio De Negris, a 47-year-old meat packing plant employee, made a similar point regarding work in border communities, “There are jobs (in Texas) but the people that have them do not give them up.”

Given the difficulty of finding work along the border, other respondents, like Gutierrez, made the move to rural Oklahoma after other options failed.

“Because he (respondent's husband) did not have a job in El Paso. He worked in the fields but that was seasonal. He would get desperate. We went to the employment office and he was contracted.”

Pabilta Rodriguez-Alves, 48, meat packing plant employee

Similarly another respondent noted,

“I had worked here five years before and I liked the work. Since there was no work in El Paso we decided to come out here.”

Ramona Ramirez, 47, meat packing plant employee

Employment prospects in El Tree made it an attractive destination for those unable to find work in places characterized by greater job competition.

Another advantage to El Tree was the variety of work available to community members. One respondent, a frequent visitor to the area, noted the diverse types of work available despite the size of the town.

“It is a small town but there is work, and the work that is available I like because it varies. I like variety in the work I do. One person will ask me to lay down cement and another to put a rock walkway down, plaster a wall, paint, garden, wash cars. I like to clean the insides of houses as well.”

Braulio Luna, 42, unemployed laborer

As a result of the availability of attractive employment opportunities, community members have been able to settle in El Tree and access goods and services not readily available in other locations.

Housing

Also an attractive aspect to life in El Tree is the availability of inexpensive housing in the area. Rafael Marquez, a 22-year-old farm hand, noted the advantages of living in El Tree relative to other locations. “I like, and it benefits

me, that the rents are really cheap...not like in a city like Dallas.” Renting, however, is only one option available to residents as one respondent observed.

“Not only are the rents cheap there are lots of places to live... lots of different options for housing. Houses here are very cheap to buy here.”

Antonio De Negris, 47, meat packing plant employee

Unlike other locations in the United States, in El Tree the possibility for homeownership is a reality despite the lack of high-wage employment.

“I have seen lots of Mexicans that have bought their own houses. Old ones but they fix them up. Then they bring more family members.”

Rafael Garcia, 31, mechanic

The ability to own a home in the community is another element that makes El Tree an attractive place for immigrants in the area.

“I have my little house and my yard. I am comfortable here. Nobody complains because I am using too much water or too much electricity like when you pay rent. From that angle I feel really happy.”

Luis Garcia, 62, warehouse worker

The sense of permanency entailed in homeownership is one of the main draws of El Tree. Respondents recognize the advantages afforded by homeownership and are reluctant to trade in that security for a different place of residence. When asked how long he planned to live in the area one respondent noted:

“I plan on staying here for more time...we own our house here.
(We will stay here) until we own a house in El Paso. That is where
we want to go...so that we won't have to deal with paying rent.
Bills and foods that is one thing but rent, no!”
Luis Alves, 48, meat packing plant employee

Immigration and Naturalization Service

Several of the study respondents indicated they felt comfortable living in El Tree because it did not have an Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) or Border Patrol presence. This made it possible for community members to move about freely in the community despite lacking documents. One respondent noted the lack of INS as a key factor in his decision to move to the area. When asked why he decided to move to the area Salvador Carmona, a 22-year-old leather worker and horse outfitter, noted, “We heard that it was a place with very little immigration (INS). It was a calm place.” Another respondent remarked that the absence of INS was an important variable in enhancing the quality of his life in the area.

“I also like that there are no immigration problems like there are in bigger cities where Immigration has a greater presence. Since there are very few of us it is difficult. They have come before but it is difficult for them to come often.”
Rafael Marquez, 22, farm hand

The *laissez-faire* attitude toward immigration has also been adopted by local law enforcement agencies.

“It helps that the town is small because there are not many police here. Here the police...like they once told me...the police know that there are people here without documents from Mexico but they don’t care because they are not Immigration.”

Juana Maradona-Veron, 56, office worker

The relative isolation of the community and the lack of an INS presence have contributed further to making El Tree an attractive destination for immigrants.

Crime and Violence in El Tree

Respondents repeatedly suggested that El Tree was a safe place to live with very little crime occurring in the community. Respondents noted the relative safety of the community compared to other communities.

“El Paso is a very stressful place to live. Not here, here it is easy. You can leave your doors open and your car unlocked and nothing happens. In El Paso you can be shut up in your home and still be assaulted.”

Beto Aspe, 51, meat packing plant employee

When asked what she liked about the community one respondent offered,

“It is a small town, there is very little crime here...my children can walk down the street or go to the park and play. I can walk at night without worrying about being assaulted. My doors are never

closed, my car is never locked and my purse and wallet are inside. I lived in New Orleans and the newspaper there looked like the phone book here. The killed, the raped, the assaulted...full of death and crime.”

Deliah Maradona-Wanchope, 51, restaurant owner

Maradona-Wanchope touches on one of the main reasons why El Tree is an attractive destination for families with children. It is a place where kids can live and play in relative safety and parents are keenly aware of this fact.

“When I arrived here 30 some years ago the town was very small. It was very clean and peaceful. There is very little crime. Nobody is killing anybody. I liked the schools for my kids and everything.”
Juana Maradona-Veron, 56, office worker

While Maradona-Veron’s observation is based on her experience more than 30 years ago it still holds true.

“Since it is a small town it is easier to raise a family. Away from drugs and everything. There are no gangs for kids to get into. There are problems everywhere, they are just less prevalent here. Less chance for a child to get into that than in a big town.”
Carlos Hermosillo, 39, construction worker

While the lack of crime and violence in the community makes it an attractive destination for many, issues such as these only begin to scratch the surface in regard to advantages to families with small children.

Raising a Family in El Tree

Perhaps El Tree's most attractive feature is the perception of the community as a good place to raise children. They see it as a community free of many of the negative factors associated with living in a large city.

"I have never liked big cities, that is why I left Chicago. When I lived there it was better than it is now. In that time there were no gangs or anything like that. That is what bothers people because you worry about your family. You worry that your kids will fall in with a bad crowd. Small towns are calmer, more peaceful."

Jorge Campos, 50, construction worker

For many, El Tree's greatest asset is the school system and the education it has to offer their children. Josefina Hernandez-Morales and her husband Ramon Morales reported that access to education was a prime factor in their decision to relocate to El Tree from Dallas.

"We came here because we were having trouble getting the kids registered for school in Dallas. Here at the schools it was easy and they have interpreters. The kids had only been in the United States for four months and they did not speak any English."

Ramon Morales, 28, construction worker

Morales and his wife were given information from a relative about the ease with which they could enroll their children in the local school district.

“My husband’s relative...she told us that the schools here did not require papers to get kids into schools. So we stayed here so we could put the kids in school.”

Josefina Hernandez-Morales, 29, unemployed restaurant worker

For some, the prospect of keeping their children in school was sufficient motivation to keep them in the community.

“My daughters are comfortable. What else could I ask for? Now one thing that is important to me is to not interrupt the studies of my daughters. One right now is in the eleventh grade. I know that I have to last (in El Tree) at least until she graduates.”

Cuauhtemoc Blanco, 45, factory worker

For others, the educational system made them want to relocate their families to the United States, in general, and El Tree specifically. When asked what he liked about living in the community, Tavo Valdez, a 30-year-old seasonal roofer responded, “More than anything the schools...I would like to have my daughters use the schools here.”

While El Tree offers many amenities to community residents it seems likely that those centered on the quality of life of children and the family are among the most important and influential in selecting a place of residence. This is particularly the case regarding issues of safety and education.

Summary

Ultimately, relocation to the suburbs remains an attractive prospect for many Americans, particularly those with families and young children. Despite its allure, suburban America lies beyond the grasp of many Mexican immigrants. Given these facts, it seems likely that the move to rural America for many constitutes a search for a higher quality of life than is possible in urban settings. In effect, the move to locations like El Tree signifies a form of “Brown flight” for those unable to reach suburban America. It indicates a move to more peaceful areas with abundant work, better employment prospects, inexpensive housing, light Immigration and Naturalization Services presence, lower crime, and an environment conducive to raising a family. While for some the move to suburban America may lie beyond their grasp, the benefits of suburbia are also available in small town America. This is particularly the case for a community like El Tree that has many employment options.

Chapter 7

¿Y Que?®:

The Implications of Immigrant

Social Networks for

Life in America

Waldinger (1989) suggests many ways in which immigration and immigrants have helped cities like Los Angeles and New York remain viable despite drastic changes in their local economies. Not only has the influx of new workers helped to spur on stumbling economies, they have also provided replacements for workers who have left the inner cities. In fact, the presence of immigrants has prevented the stagnation of these urban centers. Immigrants have not only helped keep large cities viable, they have also served a similar function in rural America where the growth of these new populations have slowed, and in some cases reversed, the decline of local native populations.

Review of Findings

The aim of this project was to uncover how immigrant networks form and the roles they play in the lives of actors. Social networks are important for several

different reasons. The study of social networks provides insight as to why and how people make the decision to immigrate. In addition, it provides understanding of how networks influence the lives of community members and the extent to which they do so. Finally, social networks are important because they play a crucial role in institutionalizing movement from one area to another. In sum, the objective of this research has been to provide a glimpse of the development of social networks and the extent to which they influence the actions of immigrants.

Given the exploratory nature of this project and the transient nature of the population being studied, I elected to use qualitative methods to complete this project. Immigrant residents of a small rural community in Oklahoma were interviewed using a semi-structured interview design. There are several reasons why El Tree was an ideal research location. First, because I was able to draw upon my own network connections in the area, I was allowed access to the immigrant community. Furthermore, it is a location that, because of its abundant employment opportunities and affordable housing, is an attractive destination for immigrants. Academically, it is also an interesting community because its Latino and Mexican populations had both experienced an increase of over 100 percent over the last ten years. In addition, since El Tree is located in an area not typically associated with immigration, it does not have any of the resources aimed at easing the adaptation of immigrants to live in the United States. All of these

factors were conducive to being able to record the development and influence of the El Tree immigrant social network.

Like many other communities in the United States, El Tree has experienced a significant increase in its Latino population. Both the Latino and Mexican populations grew by approximately 125 percent between 1990 and 2000, a significant fact given the two percent decline in the general population of El Tree. Of those interviewed, the vast majority indicated they had lived in other locations in the United States in addition to El Tree. Furthermore, 38 of the 51 respondents interviewed reported their state of origin as being in Northern Mexico. This is a particularly striking finding given previous research suggesting that the Mexican immigrants generally come from Western Mexico (Massey et al. 1987).

A Mexican immigrant community in El Tree developed as the result of two serendipitous events. The first event was the construction of a power plant to the south of El Tree. This construction project was responsible for the first permanent immigrant settlement in the community. The second event was the opening of a meat packing plant. Not only did the meat packing plant provide employment for the displaced power plant construction workers, it also brought a new type of immigrant into the community. These immigrants were predominantly from the Texas-Mexico border area and were contracted to

relocate to the community to work. The hiring practices of the meat packing plant help to explain the high incidence of community members from Northern Mexico.

There are many theoretical explanations for why individuals choose to migrate, including neoclassical economics theory, new household economics of migration theory, segmented labor market theory, and world systems theory. Many of the ideas suggested by these theoretical orientations were observed in the community. Consistent with the micro component of neoclassical economics theory, many respondents indicated their migration decisions were based on perceptions of economic opportunities available in the United States. Some respondents also indicated their intentions to use money earned in the United States to enhance their financial situations in Mexico, an implication raised in the new household economics of migration theory. The research discussed here presents the strongest support for the dual labor market theory and its suggestion that immigrant workers are attracted to the United States because of the abundance of secondary labor market employment opportunities. As shown previously, not only are immigrants attracted to those jobs initially, they continue to be overwhelmingly employed in the secondary labor market sector. For many, personal decisions also influenced their desire to move to El Tree. The overwhelming majority of respondents indicated they came to the United States based on financial decisions although some indicated they came to this country as a result of marital problems or to reunite with family members. Future theoretical

exploration of the cause and persistence of migration would do well to consider the hiring practices of organizations in the secondary labor market in addition to personal push factors in making migration decisions.

At the root of migration decisions are issues of social capital and social networks. As previously indicated, the roots of the El Tree immigrant network can be traced to the construction of the power plant south of the community and the opening of the meat packing plant in the community. These events resulted in at least three types of social subnetworks emerging within the greater immigrant network in El Tree. The first is a traditional subnetwork that is based on primary relationships such as friends and family. The second subnetwork found in El Tree is a church subnetwork that is based on the secondary relationships formed as a result of church membership. The final subnetwork observed in the community is a contract subnetwork. This part of the immigrant network is based on the hiring practices of the meat packing plant. These three secondary networks are based on different forms of group membership; but they all provide members with similar resources including employment information, references, food, and shelter.

The El Tree immigrant network is maintained thanks in large part to the high level of contact between community members and their family and friends both in the United States and in Mexico. Network members freely exchanged information in a reciprocal manner about employment opportunities and access to documents. The network community continues to benefit from the existence of

both strong and weak ties. Weak ties among community members have helped in the early stages of the immigrant network while strong ties have served to make the network denser. This more multiplex and diverse network has served to make immigration from Mexico to El Tree a more attractive option.

Despite its isolated location, El Tree remains an attractive destination for immigrants. Much like suburban America is an attractive alternative for well-to-do city dwellers, a rural location like El Tree is an appealing solution for those who are financially disadvantaged. The benefits associated with living in the small community like El Tree include a general sense of peace and tranquility, abundant employment opportunities, affordable housing options, a virtually nonexistent INS presence, and low levels of crime and violence. All these factors combine to make the community an ideal setting for raising a family.

Ultimately, I have made several findings regarding immigrant social networks. First, in order for an immigrant network to get started, it is necessary that viable and dependable employment opportunities be available to prospective immigrants. Furthermore, it has become apparent that an immigrant network is not a monolithic institution. In fact, networks can be quite diverse and are composed of different subgroups. And while each subnetwork provides similar advantages to community members, they are based on different social arrangements. Finally, I have observed that networks affect immigrant community members in meaningful ways. Not only do social networks facilitate

movement to a new area, they also are fundamental to immigrant adaptation. It is apparent that immigrant networks are extremely important in understanding immigrants and the process of immigration.

Research Implications

While there might be a tendency to see the social processes observed in El Tree as only indicative of the one community in which the research took place, research of this nature will continue to be viable. In fact, as the Latino population continues to grow in the United States, it seems likely that many more immigrant communities, such as that in El Tree, Oklahoma, will begin to surface in other nontraditional locations. The extent to which this occurs will further contribute to the Latinoization of America (Davis 2000). As the Latino population continues to grow in this country, so too does the potential for significant cultural, social, and political change. Furthermore, if as a society we are committed to writing legislation that is truly responsive to the needs of society, we would be well advised to become acquainted with the variables that affect and influence immigration decisions and processes. Choosing not to incorporate this knowledge into public policy decisions will only result in the creation of legislation that is at best ineffective and at worst further contributes to immigration problems (Massey et al. 2002).

In the future, it would be beneficial to continue to do research that emphasizes how immigrant communities grow in rural and nontraditional locations. But also, it would be beneficial to study how the native populations respond to these shifts in demographic compositions of the community. Changes in racial and ethnic relations such as these are inevitable; continuing to conduct research in this vein will help us as a society to better face what is certainly our destiny.

Endnotes

1. *Buscando Trabajo* – looking for work
2. *¿Porque?* – why
3. *Paisanos* – countrymen
4. *Compadre* – godfather or close friend
5. *Papeles Chuecs* -- fraudulent immigration documents
6. *¿Y Que?* – so what

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