

ISSUES OF GLOBALIZATION
Case Studies in Contemporary
Anthropology

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Labor *and* Legality

*An Ethnography of a
Mexican Immigrant Network*



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dollars a week, or more than double what he currently earns. As Rigo finds it difficult to make ends meet for his family, he said that he will probably go back to Chicago, "I want to, I don't know when, but yes, I want to go back." As I get ready to send this book to press, I have recently heard that Rigo has just arrived in Chicago and is already back to work at Uncle Luigi's.

One fact highlights the degree to which these workers' lives have become truly and probably permanently transnational: the workers in Mexico mostly say they want to come back to the United States, and the workers in the United States mostly want to return to Mexico. Close relationships with friends and families in both Mexico and the United States mean that the Lions will forever emotionally reside in both places.

Notes

1. <http://www.e-local.gob.mx/work/templates/enciclo/guanajuato/municipios/11020a.htm>
2. But see the Epilogue.
3. See Cohen 2001, 2004; Smith 2006; Stephen 2007.
4. Chacon and Davis 2006; Jimenez 2009; Massey et al. 2002.
5. Massey et al. 2002; Porter 2006b.
6. <http://www.ssa.gov/legislation/nomatch2.htm>

CHAPTER FOUR



Múy Unidos

Friends, Networks, and Households

HAVING FRIENDS MAKES THINGS EASIER: ALEJANDRO

My name is Alex, and I'm thirty five years old. I came from León, Guanajuato, Mexico when I was sixteen, so in 1989, almost twenty years ago. I started working when I was seven years old. That was my dad's idea, to learn to be responsible. There was not too much I could do when I was seven, but just like bring the tools to the guys and stuff. Later I worked in a tire shop, doing alignments, balance. I became a professional at balancing, I went to school for it. But the pay was like nothing you know, if you're talking about dollars, it'd be thirty dollars a week.

So when I came to Chicago I went from making thirty dollars to a hundred and fifty dollars a week and I was like, "Yeah!" I started working as a dishwasher and then within a month they put me on as a busboy. And as a busboy you had a day off, and it was like ten dollars more per week. And you were like, "Oh my god," you know, "I have a day off!" But there's not too much you could do if you don't know the language and you don't have a car.

My mom's brothers were here, but as soon as I got here I didn't see them much, I was by myself. And my dad was here, so I was saying to myself, "Oh my dad is here, my uncle is here, so I'm set." But the day I got here my dad told me, "Oh you're gonna work here, you're gonna live here, I'm leaving." So he left. He hooked me up with a job but not with secure pay. Just to get me a job he told the managers, "Just try him out, if he works you can pay him, if not then he'll learn." They didn't pay me for the first month. I was working twelve hours a day, not a day off.

At that time the restaurant gave you a place to live. That was the only way that I survived. That's the way they used to do it before, most of the restaurants provided a place to live, six or seven Mexican guys to an apartment. I went to a couple other restaurants and it was pretty much the same, the pay was low, like really, really low. At that time I was working like seven days a week, twelve hours a day for like a hundred and fifty dollars a week. It was low. But when you come from Mexico, even this low you still think it's a lot, because you compare the money there.

We're all friends and it's like a chain. I think I was the creator, I came here first and everybody followed me. But everybody started coming in after Johnny's [a local restaurant]. At Johnny's they decided not to give us a house anymore and the pay was not enough to pay rent, so that's when I moved to Uncle Luigi's. So we all moved to Uncle Luigi's and then we worked there for a year or two and more people started coming from our town. From me being by myself it got to a point where there were like twenty of us. And it's always been the same thing, like we were working at Uncle Luigi's and then everybody moved to Il Vino, everybody came to Il Vino.

Having friends makes things easier. It doesn't cover the hole that you have, if you're missing your family, if you have a girlfriend or a wife, it doesn't cover it but it helps. It helps get your mind off of it. Like if you have a day off and a couple of other people have the same day off, you go and do something together, it takes your mind off. Because I used to have a day off when I first came here but I had no friends. It was hard because I would come home and be by myself in a room, just thinking, and it was difficult. You're constantly thinking, why am I doing this? But what kept me going was what I wanted. So that's what I compare, that time by myself to now that other people are here, and it makes a difference. Just by hanging out, you know, even coming home. We used to come home at eleven or midnight and we would go to sleep at four o'clock in the morning. We would make dinner and watch movies or play video games and nobody would go to sleep.

In spite of physical separation from place of origin and, often, family and friends, many immigrants are deeply embedded in transnational social networks that provide them with crucial material and emotional support.¹ Immigrant workers with resources can make frequent visits to their home countries, where they reconnect with old friends and family. For undocumented immigrants in the U.S., the dream of returning home is

increasingly just that—a dream. As the U.S. further militarizes its southern border and intensifies criminalization of undocumented immigrants, fewer workers can move physically between the U.S. and Mexico with any frequency. Instead, these workers spend years and even decades in the United States without physical contact with their families and home communities. To compensate for this loss, they seek belonging here in the U.S., comforting themselves with the company of friends, girlfriends, and frequent communications home. The Lions also utilize these social contacts to evaluate jobs and bosses and maximize their working and living conditions. This chapter explores how the Lions are embedded in social networks and households and how they access the emotional and material resources these bonds provide.

Utilizing a Social Network: Finding Work

The social circumscription of undocumented workers results in an increased reliance on fellow undocumented immigrants for aid and assistance. Even workers with family members who are legal U.S. residents or U.S. citizens often find themselves dependent on their undocumented networks, as legal-resident family members may be wary of helping an illegal relative if they believe it could have negative repercussions for them. Lalo explains how intensified anti-immigrant policies have narrowed his social resources, making people like him more and more reliant on immigrant networks:

If you have a relative who has papers and you tell him, "You know what? I'm here at the border, I'm in the U.S., I just don't have a place to go and I want you to help me," they might tell you, "You know what, I can't let you come here." So you look for help from the other side, from someone who is not your relative, and those people help you more than your own family.

Undocumented immigrants will often use their social networks to get a lead on an available job before they even leave Mexico. Since workers are often the first to know that a coworker is leaving and a job will become available, they may have a friend or family member in Mexico lined up as a replacement before the boss even knows a change is coming. All of the Lions have gotten jobs by tapping into the resources of their social network, and they have all recruited coworkers through their network.² Luis explains, "You come here and don't know anybody, you don't know anyone except the guy who brought you, or maybe some people from your town. So what gets you around are the other guys, the other wetbacks who

get you a job, 'Hey, I got this job, come here to work.' Cool. And then another guy comes, 'Hey, this job pays better, come over here.'" At Il Vino, the Mexican workers have almost exclusive access to information about which busboys are leaving or will not work out. As Rene explains, they diffuse this advance knowledge throughout their social network, and when it comes time for the worker to leave, the other busboys have a suitable replacement all lined up: "We would tell [the boss], 'He's going to Mexico, can we bring this guy in [to replace him]?' and he would say, 'Yeah, bring him.' And then the next year another guy would leave for Mexico and we would bring in somebody else." Occasionally, employers will encourage their workers to take an even more direct role in the recruiting and hiring process. Alejandro explains that at Uncle Luigi's,

[The managers] said we're opening a new place over there and you been with us for a long time, so come and work with us and you be in charge of the busboys. So I went over there but there was no busboys, I was the only one. So I started making phone calls and asking my friends from León, "Do you want to come work over here?" ... So I called them and everybody started going over there. We started with two and then they would bring another two you know, like cousins and friends, but everybody from León.

This arrangement has advantages for both the workers and the boss. For undocumented workers, who often count on each other to share living expenses, transportation, and who may have invested in the new immigrants' passage, securing income for a new arrival makes good financial sense. It also helps the group, which is bound by legal status, language, and common origin, monopolize job opportunities and maintain their autonomy. A friend or family member is also more likely to feel invested in the existing group than a stranger and so, from the outset, is considered trustworthy and more likely to conform to group norms. The increased comfort that the Lions feel working with people that they've known for a long time and trust should not be discounted as an additional incentive for bringing in people from "back home."

For the boss, letting your workers take charge of the hiring process cuts down on the investment required to find a suitable new employee. If a boss is pleased with his staff it makes sense to hire more workers who share the same background and social network, and likely the same values and attitudes toward work. Also, when the existing workers feel invested in a new worker, and when they have the same native language, the boss can feel confident that the new worker will be properly trained in both the mechanics of the job and the work culture of the existing employees. As this quote from an Il Vino manager indicates, management is quite aware that it is in

the workers' interest to properly train and socialize new busboys to be hard workers; she says, "With us, [the Mexican immigrants] bring their friends, they bring their family. And I don't think that they're going to bring their friends and their family if they're not going to be fantastic workers, because they know that's who they're going to be pooling [tips] with at the end of the night. They know they're a reflection of them." Of course, the boss is the ultimate authority who can—and does—give and withdraw permission for the workers to hire and train amongst themselves.

Many U.S. employers have become quite adept at tapping into undocumented social networks to recruit new workers. Leonardo explains that not long after his arrival in Chicago, he went to visit a friend at Uncle Luigi's, "And the boss, he's American, and he said, 'Hey, amigo, did you find a job yet?' I told him no. 'Do you want to work?' 'Yes.' He said, 'Tomorrow come to our other location, you can work there.' And so I went the next day and he gave me a job." Tony and Colleen were part-owners of several restaurants before they opened Il Vino, giving them access to lots of potential experienced restaurant employees. When Il Vino opened, Tony and Colleen tapped into these employment networks to recruit the "best staff" that they could find. Rene heard about Il Vino directly from Tony, who was a regular at the restaurant where Rene worked. Tony recruited Rene to come and help with the construction of Il Vino; he did, and when Il Vino opened, Tony offered Rene a cleaning job. Rene accepted and worked briefly as a janitor before being promoted to busboy. He has been working as a busboy at Il Vino for eleven years and, for most of that time, his fellow busboys have mostly been friends and acquaintances from his hometown of León.

Money and Respect: Assessing Jobs and Bosses

Social networks not only provide information about immediate opportunities, but also supply a collective pool of information and experience which network members draw on to make decisions about work and living situations. Like a potluck dinner, every member brings his own connections and resources to the network, which other members of the group can then access; immigrant households and workgroups are thus vital social nuclei for passing information and opportunity through a larger social network. The Lions use this collective information to take advantage of existing opportunities and to improve their situations.

The Lions are quite savvy about constraints on their job opportunities, and they assess jobs as desirable or not relative to their other options. That is, an available job as a busboy or a line cook isn't compared to, say, an engineering job or a nuclear physicist position—these are simply not within the realm of possibility. Rather, a job opportunity in a restaurant

might be evaluated in comparison to landscaping or janitorial jobs, which tend to be more accessible to undocumented immigrants. The Lions harbor few illusions about the type of employment they are likely to get. When Lalo's sixteen-year-old son, Armando, told Lalo he wanted to come to the U.S. to work with him, Lalo advised him to stay in school in Mexico because, "Here [in the U.S.] the only jobs you're going to find are dishwasher, busboy, kitchen, in construction, in landscaping." Armando decided to migrate anyway and, just as his dad predicted, he currently works in a restaurant kitchen as a dishwasher.

Undocumented Mexican workers are aware not only of what kinds of jobs are accessible, they know which companies hire undocumented workers. There are cues that employers give to indicate their willingness to hire undocumented immigrants, and a company can quickly become known as a place that either does or does not hire undocumented workers. The most secure way of knowing that a place is "safe" for undocumented workers is to know undocumented people that are employed there. At restaurants like *Il Vino* and *Uncle Luigi's*, when an existing busboy brings in a friend to work, the owners may not ask the friend for his social security card right away. Instead, they often tell the existing busboy that the friend is hired, but he needs to go get his "papers" and come back the next day. In this way, the owners acknowledge the undocumented status of the new employee and give their tacit approval of it.

The second most important concern when evaluating the desirability of a job is pay. Pay considerations include dollar amount per hour or week, whether pay is hourly or salaried, how many hours a week are available to work (if pay is hourly, the more the better), and whether workers are paid by check or cash. If the ultimate goal of the worker is to "fix" his legal status he might prefer to be paid by check; conversely, if the worker's goal is to make as much money as possible and then return to Mexico, he will probably prefer a cash job. Cash-only jobs are fairly rare: Massey et al. (2002:124) report that, in 1998, 20 percent of undocumented immigrants reported cash income; a more recent report from the Social Security Administration estimates that about 25 percent of undocumented immigrants work for cash only (Porter 2005). In the restaurant industry, most service employees (citizens and immigrants alike) are paid with a combination of payroll checks and cash tips.

In restaurants, Mexican immigrant workers often start out in the lowest paid position of dishwasher, then work their way up to line cook, salad preparation, or busboy.³ The possibility of "moving up," or being rewarded for work with better opportunities, is an important consideration when evaluating a job. Before he started at *Il Vino*, Lalo worked at a Chinese

restaurant and says that he appreciated the owners' willingness to reward his hard work: "I started there as a dishwasher, then they put me on food prep cutting vegetables, so I had moved up and they paid me a little bit more." Another important consideration when evaluating a job is respect. Busy restaurants are high-stress environments, and it is not uncommon for managers to be verbally abusive to employees (see also Fine 1996). Undocumented workers make particularly easy targets; as Alejandro makes clear, this is a vulnerability that they are aware of and strive to avoid:

It's just the whole point that you have no papers and they can fire you at any minute. If it's a white guy and they fire him for no reason, he can sue them. You can use race and discrimination, but if you have no papers you're afraid to do anything legal against anybody because you might be the one paying for it. The owners know that, so they can yell at you, scream at you, even call you names and you take it. There's nothing you can do.

Since undocumented workers are especially vulnerable to exploitation and abusive treatment, the Lions value a job in which their work is appreciated and they are treated well by management and coworkers. Luis explains, "What makes a good boss is knowing how to treat people, like giving them opportunities to move up, or treating you well, not yelling all the time and on top of you. It's what I told you, if he sees that you work well, he changes toward you. It's a way to thank you for your work, he gives you opportunities. That's what makes a good boss, more than anything." Lalo agrees and says that one of the things he liked best about his former job as a cook was that, "Every year they would give us a bonus. It wasn't a lot, but it showed that they cared about us, at work, you know. And so you would work harder." The quality of a job, and the dignity of immigrant workers, largely depends on whether those in charge cultivate an atmosphere of friendliness and respect toward the immigrant staff. This can vary greatly from place to place. The Lions agree that the staff and customers at *Il Vino* largely treat them with respect. In fact, Alberto says that the thing he likes most about working at *Il Vino* is the friendliness of the staff. He explains, "Everyone, all of the waiters are good people, they say hi to you, they never give you dirty looks or yell at you, they treat you well. Everyone there is good people and so you feel good working there, you feel comfortable."

Autonomy is another important characteristic of a good job. The Lions explain that autonomy and trust go hand in hand and often must be earned over time. Alberto says that when his brother-in-law Luis first

started at Il Vino, he aroused Tony's suspicion by entering and leaving the liquor storage room for no apparent reason:

And the owner came and said to me, "Hey, what's going on?" I said, "Why?" He said, "Why is this guy hanging around back here?" I said, "No, it's nothing, he's looking for the keys to the gate." And he searched the room to make sure there wasn't a bottle lying around that he was going to steal. He said, "He didn't steal anything?" I said, "No, I'm right here, how is he going to steal? He didn't steal anything." He said okay and he left. It's like he never trusts new people but if he sees me going in and out of the liquor room he never says anything. Like he trusts that I'm not going to do anything wrong, you know? That they trust me, I think, is the first thing that makes you feel good. When they're always checking what you're doing, you don't like it. Always behind you, over your shoulder. But no, here they let you do what you know how to do.

Tony's confidence that Alberto is trustworthy means that Alberto has some degree of autonomy on the job; he does not have to worry about being constantly watched. Autonomy, and the greater freedom, trust, and responsibility it entails, is vital to workers' sense of dignity and is an important characteristic of a desirable job.

The social atmosphere and relatively high pay at Il Vino also make it an attractive place to work. Luis says, "I love working at Il Vino to be honest. I love the job. You have fun while you work, you look at girls all night, I don't know, you are with your friends, the servers are nice. I love working there is the truth." However, as Luis learned himself, there is very little job security in the restaurant business. Saying that they wanted to cut personnel, the owners at Il Vino demoted Luis from a night busboy to a day busboy and he went from making over five hundred dollars a week to just two hundred and fifty. Since then, his motivation to work declined, as did his status at Il Vino. When he recently asked for a raise, he was dismissed by Tony, "There's the door, if you don't like it here." Discouraged, Luis started drinking and partying heavily on the weekends, a habit not conducive to his new 8:00 AM start time. After repeated warnings about arriving to work late, Luis was finally fired from Il Vino when he failed to show up for work two days in a row.

Job insecurity is intensified by the lack of benefits and pensions. This is a drawback that many restaurant workers share, not just the Mexican immigrant employees. Only one undocumented worker that I interviewed, Rene, receives health insurance—which was enough to lure him away from a higher paying construction job. Thus even though the Lions

cite health insurance as a job characteristic that is important to them, it remains out of reach for all but a few.

Getting Paid and Managing Money

About half of the busboys' income is earned as cash tips. The distribution and allocation of tip income has its own set of rules, and being a tipped employee has important implications. On an average weekend night, there are three bartenders and between fifteen and seventeen servers ("server" is the gender-neutral term for waiters and waitresses) "on the floor" at Il Vino. While the busyness of the restaurant and the amount of tips that are earned can vary widely night to night and season to season, a good server can expect to make between one hundred and three hundred dollars in tips in a night. Each of the fifteen to seventeen servers and all three bartenders are expected to allocate at least fifteen percent of their tips to the busboys. This is called "tipping out." Let's say that on a typically busy Saturday night, the average tip income earned by the servers and bartenders is two hundred and fifty dollars. If there are fifteen servers and three bartenders who each make two hundred and fifty dollars, and they each tip out forty dollars (which is just over fifteen percent) to the busboys, the busboys as a group make seven-hundred and twenty dollars. Distributed evenly among five busboys, this amounts to a nightly cash income of one hundred and forty four dollars each.

On Friday and Saturday nights, the busboys generally earn between one hundred and one hundred and seventy dollars each in tips. Sunday through Thursday there is less business, less in tips, but also fewer busboys. On these nights the two to three busboys who are on the floor will usually make between twenty dollars each (on very slow nights, like Mondays) and one hundred and fifty dollars each (on busier nights like Sunday and Thursday). There are, of course, nights that are unusually slow—for example, during a heavy snow storm—in which nobody makes much money. There are also nights in which the money pours in—like a Saturday night in the summer in which the dining room is packed and there are also large parties in the banquet rooms—and busboys can easily make upwards of two hundred dollars each. Il Vino doesn't get much of a lunch crowd, and daytime busboys earn very little in tips, between nothing and forty dollars or so.

It used to be common practice for servers to "side tip" busboys, or give a little extra cash to a particular busboy who did an exceptional job. The side tip was his to keep; he was not expected to share it with the other busboys. Official policy at Il Vino now discourages side tipping, since all of the busboys want to work with the servers who are more prone to side tip,

but it still happens occasionally, particularly for banquet parties. The owners also occasionally give a bonus "side tip" to a favorite busboy, although this is more rare. The most striking example is when Rene returned from his honeymoon, and Tony handed him an envelope that contained enough cash to cover his honeymoon expenses—a bonus that amounted to over two thousand dollars.

All of the busboys work on Friday and Saturday nights and most work at least two other nights per week. Alberto, for example, works Sunday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights. Rene works Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights and Monday through Wednesday days. As I mentioned, it is difficult to estimate an exact annual income for a busboy since tip income varies nightly and seasonally. But in an average week, a busboy can earn upwards of three hundred dollars in tips—or more than fifteen thousand dollars per year in tips alone.

The Lions earn an hourly wage that is at or just over the regular minimum wage and receive a biweekly check from the payroll department for their first forty hours of work; they pay taxes on that income. At Uncle Luigi's, overtime pay is issued separately from another account without taxes and as straight pay—that is, workers do not receive time-and-a-half for overtime hours as required by law. Alejandro explained to me that, although it seems as though the busboys are being taken advantage of, this two-check system actually works in their favor. First, since no taxes are taken out of the overtime check, the net pay is actually very close to the amount it would be if it were issued at time-and-a-half after taxes. Second, since it does not cost Uncle Luigi's more to pay for overtime, the busboys are allowed to work more hours. That is, if Uncle Luigi's paid time-and-a-half for overtime, the managers would limit the busboys to forty hours per week. So with the two-check system, the busboys can all work more than forty hours per week, and this is a very important source of extra income for them.

Being tipped employees has important implications for both the busboys' approach to work and their attitudes about exploitation. In most capitalist industries (take manufacturing for example), there is a clear inverse relationship between how much workers can earn in wages and how much profit the company can make. For tipped employees, nearly the opposite is true: the more money the company makes, the more money the employee is likely to make. A fifteen percent tip on a one-hundred and fifty dollar check is more than fifteen percent of a one-hundred dollar check is more than fifteen percent of a fifty-dollar check. The more money guests spend on dinner, the more money they spend on tips. The goals of the boss and the worker are, if not exactly the same, at least overlapping. Having the

busboys earn tips also diffuses the labor costs of the company, allowing Il Vino and Uncle Luigi's, for example, to retain highly competent busboys without compensating them more directly.

Many undocumented workers bolster their regular incomes with informal economic practices such as side jobs and bulk recycling. For example, Chuy, who works in construction during the day, collects scrap copper wire from job sites. Every month or so he sells the wire to a scrap metal place and can earn one hundred dollars or more for a box of the copper. He uses that money to buy himself shoes, clothes, and tools, which he often finds for discount prices at the local flea market. One undocumented Mexican family separates the garbage in Il Vino's dumpster, packing all of the recyclables into their van and taking them across the state line to Michigan where the recyclable materials can be sold for more money (up to 10 cents per bottle). Marta and Carlos are a married couple who work at Uncle Luigi's, she as a bathroom attendant and he as a cook. Once a month they clean the apartment building that one of the owners of Uncle Luigi's also owns. They are paid one hundred dollars in cash to spend an afternoon vacuuming and dusting the common areas of the building and maintaining the landscaping in the summer.

Almost all of the Lions regularly accept side jobs, or one-time jobs for which they are paid cash. Side jobs can range from moving, painting, and cleaning, to more skilled or dangerous jobs, such as construction projects, cleaning windows, and clearing trees. The going rate seems to be about one hundred dollars per worker for a day's work. Manuel, Luis, and Chuy, the Lions who are qualified to work in construction, often team up to accept side jobs. Between them, they can do framing, drywall, electricity, and trim work. They agree to do small-scale construction projects for far less than a homeowner would pay if they contracted union workers. Although they realize that they are underselling their labor, they defend this choice by pointing out that working cheaply is better than not working at all. Manuel says, "[A fellow construction worker] says I'm an idiot for doing the job so cheap, but I'd be a bigger idiot if I were sitting at home not doing anything." Most side jobs are found through word-of-mouth, and not just owners and coworkers, but even regular customers at Il Vino solicit busboys to do side jobs for them.

Undocumented Mexican immigrants also find ways to stretch their dollars. As I discuss in more detail later, all of the busboys live in households with three or more income earners, allowing them to disperse household expenses and absorb the risk of individual unemployment. Members of a household not only share bills and meals, but often cars as well. Both Alberto, who was a skilled mechanic in Mexico, and Chuy, who

has some knowledge of cars, help fellow busboys keep their older cars running. When shopping, the workers choose discount stores like Marshalls and TJ Maxx, rather than the mall, for brand-name clothes.

Although the Lions are well paid relative to many other undocumented workers, even an annual income near the U.S. national average does not go very far. Not only do the Lions have to pay their own living expenses, but their incomes are diffused throughout their families. The single men, Leonardo, Roberto, Chuy, and Luis, send remittance money home to their parents, while Rene, Alberto, Lalo, and Manuel are the primary financial providers for multiple children. After the children are clothed and fed, the rent is paid, and unexpected costs are taken care of, there is often very little money left over. Among the Lions, financial security appears to diverge according to whether or not the worker has family in Mexico. The two men who support wives and children in Mexico—Alberto and Lalo—are the least financially secure. This is probably partly due to their higher household expenses and partly due to their tendency to work for temporary periods in the United States that are interspersed with trips home in which they do not work at all (in Alberto's case) or work for very low wages (in Lalo's case). The five men who have worked in the U.S. the longest—Alejandro, Chuy, Leonardo, Rene, and Roberto—are the most financially stable and are, in fact, very near the cusp of attaining middle class status.⁴ It is notable that all five men are seriously involved with women who earn annual incomes that near or surpass their own—an important contribution to the men's security. In addition, Chuy, Leonardo, and Roberto do not support children and, although they do send remittances home to parents, they are able to save more money over the long term. Alejandro and Manuel have both experienced significant job changes over the past several years which have undermined their tenuous financial security. Although his wife works, Manuel reports that supporting three children in Chicago drains much of their household income; his family suffers recurring periods of instability. Alejandro supports one son but says that his inability to save enough money to buy his own home is mainly due to his spending habits—in particular, he enjoys taking his girlfriend out for nice dinners.

Utilizing a Social Network: Households

Mexican immigrant households often consist of multiple adult income-earners who are not all members of the same immediate family. The Institute for Latino Studies at Notre Dame recently reported that nearly one-third of Chicago-area Latino immigrants live in households with three

or more income-earners, compared with only 8 percent of non-Latino households.⁵ In addition, even though Latino immigrants have the lowest median incomes as individuals, Latino families are less likely to be poor and more likely to own their own home than other groups.⁶ This suggests that the strategies that immigrant workers employ to combat financial insecurity extend beyond the job site and into the household. This section examines the intra-household strategies that make these extended household arrangements work, including how chores and living expenses are distributed, and how workers deal with conflict in households composed of multiple adult males.

The Lions' households are at once economic units in which the costs and duties of daily living are shared among household members, and social spaces in which housemates rely on each other for friendly interaction and emotional support. The migration chain that Alejandro established eventually brought over Rene's best friend from Mexico, then Rene himself and his brother Chuy, as well as Alejandro's two brothers, Alberto and Carlos, and Alberto's wife's brother, Luis. All of these men, and all of the Lions, have not only been working together but living together in various arrangements as well. These extended living arrangements have both advantages and disadvantages. They provide advantages in that they allow the Lions to disperse financial insecurity and household responsibilities, and, because they gather together friends from "back home," they provide emotional security and comfort for men who are separated from their families. But living as an adult man with other adult men in crowded conditions comes with challenges as well, including lack of privacy, messiness, noise, and conflict. The Lions have multiple, well-developed mechanisms for dealing with these challenges and maximizing the potential benefits of their rather large households.

Nearly twenty years after Alejandro arrived in Chicago alone, he once again lives with family. Alejandro, Alberto, Carlos, and Luis rent a small, white frame house in a Chicago suburb. Their house is a mid-century ranch that sits at the end of a neat, working-class block dominated by single-family homes. Their block dead-ends at freight-train tracks that crisscross Chicago's southwestern suburbs and also pass by Rene and Chuy's house just a few blocks away. The house is not beautiful, but it is in good condition. As the senior members of the house, Alejandro and Alberto each have their own bedroom, while Luis and Carlos share the third room. At any given time there might be a cousin or friend who is also spending the night on the couch until a good living situation of his own becomes available.

The décor is very "bachelor"—the living room is dominated by an enormous blue sectional sofa and a television. The younger men's bedroom has

two twin mattresses on the floor, a TV, and an Xbox video game console, which the guys spend countless hours playing. Alberto and Alejandro's bedrooms are also rather bare. Alberto has a mattress on the floor, and a small TV with a built-in VCR player which sits atop one of two narrow dressers. Alejandro's bedroom is the most furnished of the three, as his bed actually sits on a bed frame and is pushed against a dark laminate head board. Alejandro has even hung a picture on the wall—a team photo of the Chivas, Guadalajara's soccer team.

Like all of the other Lions' households, this house is neat. Not just neat compared with dorm rooms or other apartments that I have seen in which single males live together, but really neat. It is clean; there are no dirty dishes in the sink or dust on the furniture. There are lots of dirty clothes, especially in Luis and Carlos' room, but even those are mostly confined to the one small closet. The men tell me that they share the household chores, which are completed on a daily basis, and conform to the chore schedule that is posted on the refrigerator door. They also share the household expenses. The monthly rent for their house is eight hundred dollars, which is split evenly among the four of them. As a household, they spend another sixty or so dollars a month on electricity, and between one hundred and two hundred for gas. Each household member thus spends around three hundred dollars a month for his total living expenses (not including food).

The brothers and Luis have lived together (on and off) for several years, and they get along well. Luis says that having a schedule of chores helps suppress conflict because every roommate knows what is expected of him. They respect each other's bedrooms and give each other as much privacy as possible. Luis also says that it's important to have a laid back attitude regarding noise and company. When fights do occur, they can often be attributed to someone having had too much to drink. The conflicting parties then avoid each other for a day or two until the hard feelings wear away.

Leonardo and Roberto share a two-bedroom apartment with two other men—Leonardo's older brother Juan, who also worked at Il Vino, and Gus, a busboy at another nearby restaurant; all four of the roommates are from León. The apartment building that they live in is owned by the owners of Uncle Luigi's, and about half of the apartments are rented to Uncle Luigi's employees. Mexican immigrants rent only two of the sixteen apartments in the building; the other tenants are mostly young white workers. Leonardo and Roberto's apartment is on the second floor and features a small balcony facing a courtyard. We sit out there to do interviews, talking above the rush of traffic coming from the nearby expressway.

This apartment is rather spare on furnishings, with only a small sofa, coffee table, and television in the common living area. Leonardo and his brother Juan sleep on mattresses in the bedroom that they share, while Roberto has somehow finagled the other bedroom to himself. Gus sleeps on the living room sofa but stores his clothes in the bedroom closet in Roberto's room.

Like Alejandro and Alberto's house, this apartment is remarkably clean considering that four single men share it. Tacked to one of the walls in the living room is a sheet of notebook paper titled "*Quehaceres*," or "Chores." It is a schedule showing which roommate is responsible for doing the chores on each day of the week. These chores normally consist of picking up, sweeping, and wiping down the kitchen. Each roommate is responsible for washing his own dishes and the roommates take turns cleaning the bathroom once a week.

Household expenses are divided equally among the four roommates. The rent for this apartment is eight-hundred dollars a month, and the guys spend another hundred and fifty on utilities. This adds up to monthly living expenses of under two hundred and fifty dollars for each roommate.

Roberto and Leonardo have lived together for nearly four years, while Gus and Juan are more recent arrivals. The composition of roommates in this apartment has changed over the years. Alejandro, Rene, Chuy, and Manuel have all lived there, as have former Il Vino busboys who have returned to Mexico or otherwise moved on. Some of these former roommates were particularly fond of late-night drinking and loud music, and Rene explains that eventually his friends who like to "party" all night ended up in one apartment, while their more quiet and serious friends ended up in a neighboring apartment. Composing households in this way helps keep the peace and maintain the stability of living arrangements. When serious conflicts do occur, the household is likely to split up, with members of the feuding parties going their separate ways. Even those households that are consistently made up of Mexican immigrants change composition over the years, as workers leave for and arrive from Mexico, get married, or go off in search of better opportunity.

Rene is the only Lion who owns his own house. He lives with his wife, Molly, and their two children in a duplex that they bought together. Rene and Molly live on the first floor and rent out the two small apartments upstairs, one to Chuy and the other to another undocumented immigrant family. There is also a basement that at any given time is likely to be a temporary shelter for a newly arrived friend. The house is over one hundred years old and, though it is not elaborate, it has the original wood floors in some rooms and very high ceilings on the first floor. Rene and

Molly also have a beautiful yard that makes a lovely gathering spot for summer get-togethers. This house is the social center for the Lions. Except for Leonardo and Alberto (who work on Sundays) and Lalo (who they say is just too old to party), all of the friends gather here many Sundays when the weather is nice. Rene grills steak and chile peppers while Molly makes margaritas. A small boom box plays *rock-en-español* [Spanish-language rock] CDs, competing with the rumble of passing trains, the shrieks of playing children, and spirited conversations about everything from U.S. presidential politics to tire rims. There is a family atmosphere here that provides comfort to the workers. Molly says that Alberto often comes over during the day just to sit in the yard and pet Chuy's dog.

Chuy lives in a modest apartment on the second floor of the house. He is the only Lion who lives by himself, a privilege for which he pays \$250 a month in rent. Although it is small, the apartment is quite nice, with original wood floors and tiles. Chuy values the privacy and tranquility that living alone affords him, but he also makes frequent visits downstairs to play with his niece and nephew and to enjoy his sister-in-law's cooking. While Chuy has no roommates, he has constant company in his dog, Laica, a midnight-black mutt.

Lalo, Omar, and Manuel live with in-law relatives. Lalo lives with his sister-in-law, her husband, their son, and his own son in a house on the south side of Chicago. Manuel lives with his wife, Liliana, their two sons, her parents, and her three sisters in a two-story house in suburban Chicago. This living situation is very difficult for Manuel and Liliana. She feels caught between her parents and her husband, who often have very different ideas about how to raise the children. He feels like he's lost his privacy and independence. Manuel's goal is to move his family into their own apartment, but recently his employment has been erratic. He left *Il Vino* in 2005 for a better paying job in construction, but when the construction industry was hit hard by the contracting economy in 2008, Manuel lost his job. He has been earning some money doing informal side jobs, but, until he can find steady work, Manuel and his family will remain with his in-laws.

For all of the Lions, transnational work-life is made bearable by the love and support of their family and friends. For most of these men, there will be a permanent emotional connection to both Mexico and the U.S., as they will always have family in both places. Without a major overhaul of immigration policy, few of the Lions will be able to travel between the U.S. and Mexico with any frequency. Instead, they will continue to cultivate co-immigrant communities and households in the U.S. to provide them with vital material and non-material resources.

Notes

1. See also Valenzuela, Jr., et al. 2006; Ready and Brown-Gort 2005.
2. See also Garcia 2005.
3. See also Adler 2005; Pribilsky 2007.
4. See Epilogue.
5. Ready and Brown-Gort 2005.
6. Ready and Brown-Gort 2005.