Beyond immigrant ethnic politics?

Organizational innovation, collaboration and competition in the Los Angeles immigrant rights movement (1980-2015)

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Publication date
2018

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BEYOND IMMIGRANT ETHNIC POLITICS?


Davide Gnes

Invitation

To attend the public defense of the doctoral dissertation entitled:

BEYOND IMMIGRANT ETHNIC POLITICS?


Davide Gnes
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Wednesday, June 27
10:00-11:30
Agnetenkapel
Oudezijds Voorburgwal 231
Amsterdam

The defense will be followed by a reception

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BEYOND IMMIGRANT ETHNIC POLITICS?


Davide Gnes
BEYOND IMMIGRANT ETHNIC POLITICS?

ISBN: 978-94-6233-979-8
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Cover design and layout: Nicola Gnes
Print: Gildeprint, Enschede, NL.

This research was funded by the European Union’s Seventh Framework Program (FP7/2007-2013) under grant agreement n° 316796. The research was part of INTEGRIM: Integration and international migration: pathways and integration policies, a larger EU-funded research project involving 8 partner universities: University of Amsterdam, University of Deusto, University of Liège, University of Sussex, University of Lisbon, Koç University, Central European University (CEU), and University of Poitiers.
BEYOND IMMIGRANT ETHNIC POLITICS?


ACADEMISCH PROEFSCHRIFT

ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor
aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam
op gezag van de Rector Magnificus
prof. dr. ir. K.I.J. Maex

ten overstaan van een door het College voor Promoties ingestelde commissie,
in het openbaar te verdedigen in de Agnietenkapel
op woensdag 27 juni 2018, te 10.00 uur

door Davide Gnes
geboren te Pavia, Italië
Promotiecommissie:

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

The Rise and Fall of a Class-Based Immigrant Rights Movement in Los Angeles. How Did It Happen?

In 2000, a few hundred people are marching through Koreatown, an area west of downtown Los Angeles. They are holding banners in various languages and chanting slogans in English, Korean and Spanish. In the crowd there are students, local residents and seasoned activists. The Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles, the Central American Resource Center, the Instituto de Educación Popular del Sur de California, the Pilipino Workers Center have all sent some of their staff and members. The march is led by the Korean Immigrant Workers Advocates, or KIWA, as everybody knows the group, an organization founded by two Korean American activists that represents South Korean, Mexican and Central American immigrants in labor disputes with South Korean restaurant owners in Koreatown. The crowd arrives in front of the Elephant Snack, a small restaurant located on Western avenue owned by Mr. Lee, a South Korean immigrant. KIWA executive director, Roy Hong, picks up the microphone. Unless Mr. Lee agrees to pay back wages to 8 Latino workers employed at the Elephant Snack, he says in English, the people gathered there will start a community-wide boycott of the restaurant. The crowd is pleased, and they respond by chanting in Spanish: “Elefante, elefante! Obreros, adelante!” (Elephant, elephant [Snack]! Workers first!). They continue in English, in Korean and in Spanish: “Boycott Elephant Snack!”; “Ko Gee Lee, Bool Meh!” (Boycott Elephant Snack); “Que Queremos? Justicia! Cuando? Ahora!” (What do we want? Justice! When? Now!). The boycott has been launched. It would go on for a year and a half, until the restaurant owner finally caved in.¹

In 2014, I am in downtown Los Angeles, meeting with a leading organizer from the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA). Before I start asking the actual questions I prepared for the interview, I tell her a bit about myself and my interest in studying immigrant rights groups in Los Angeles. Among other things, I tell her that I am fascinated by how groups such as IDEPSCA or CHIRLA began using popular education back in the 1980s or early 1990s. She looks at me and rolls her eyes. “Oh yeah, of course, popular education...! Back in the day that was innovative, nobody was doing that kind of stuff. But today everyone is doing popular education. And to be honest I don’t think new organizations really know what they are doing with it... but it’s like part of a checklist, you gotta have it in your projects, because our funders love it!” A few months later I am discussing my first findings with a researcher with extensive knowledge of the activist organizational landscape in Los Angeles. Our conversation turns to KIWA, as I begin asking about what kind of ‘radical’ campaigns they may be involved at this moment, after their landmark unionization campaigns in the restaurant and market sectors. “KIWA? Now?” he says, skeptically. “They’re not really what they used to be ten or fifteen years ago, nowadays the organization’s presence is just symbolic.”

The story of the contemporary immigrant rights movement in Los Angeles is a fascinating one. As those two small excerpts show, it is also full of contradictions and turning points. The first text recalls the energy of a grassroots action organized by the Koreatown Immigrant Workers Alliance (KIWA) to support restaurant workers in a legal battle against their employer. Many aspects make this action special: it takes place in an area of

¹ This excerpt was compiled on the basis of different archival sources. Those include: various authors, “Restaurant Campaign”, KIWA 8th Anniversary Dinner booklet (p.17-19), May 5, 2000, box 2/folder 3, KIWA archive; various authors, “Campaign Against Elephant Snack Corner”, KIWA 9th Anniversary Dinner booklet (pp. 16-19), April 27, 2001, box 2/folder 3, KIWA archive; author unknown, “Elephant Snack Chant Sheet”, ca. 2000, and “Boycott Elephant Snack Corner”, ca. 2000-01, box 5/6, KIWA archive. Additional context information provided by Ha (2001).
the city dominated by immigrant businesses, primarily Korean; it has been conceived by two immigrants of Korean origin against a Korean business owner; it has mobilized a constituency of immigrant workers from a variety of ethnic origins, including Korean but also (and primarily) Spanish-speaking immigrants and Mexican Americans, organized around a class identity; it has enlisted the crucial support of organizations representing Mexican and Central American as much as Filipinos and Chinese immigrants. The second text, which recalls informal conversations with two keen observers of local activist dynamics during my fieldwork in Los Angeles, points instead to more recent disenchantment with the ‘movement’. While one respondent decries with a cynical undertone the professionalization of immigrant rights activism, and the organizations’ structural dependence on external funders, the other rather underscores KIWA’s organizational change over the year, which has greatly reduced the organization’s ability to be a pivotal actor in current immigrant rights activism.

KIWA is part of a group of immigrant worker organizations established in Los Angeles between the late 1980s and the 1990s. This includes, among others, the Coalition for Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA), the Instituto de Educación Popular del Sur de California (IDEPSCA), the Pilipino Workers Center (PWC) and the Garment Worker Center (GWC). Mostly led by immigrants and by people with an immigrant background, immigrant worker organizations set to politically mobilize and advocate for the most vulnerable strata of the local immigrant population on the basis of a social and economic justice agenda. In the heyday of the LA immigrant rights movement, between the 1990s and early 2000s, immigrant worker organizations were able to bring to the fore the plight of undocumented, low-wage workers while also supporting the transformation of many of them into empowered political subjects. Through day-to-day action towards both abusive employers and unsympathetic state institutions, those organizations positively affected working conditions and more general well-being of hundreds of immigrant workers across Los Angeles. Moreover, by hiring a number of low-wage immigrant workers as staff, developing internal participatory structures and creating worker-led organizations they provided pathways of political participation for non-citizen (and often non-status) immigrants. In their narratives, immigrant worker organizations highlighted how advanced capitalism, institutional racism, gender discrimination and legal precarity were deeply intertwined and conducive to transforming particular categories of migrants into a disposable, super-exploitable proletariat. In their concrete organizational development, through activities as different as service provision, unionization, political education and legislative lobbying, they emerged as innovative hybrid organizations that filled in the socio-political vacuum left by the retreat of state institutions and the weakening of civil society, particularly labor unions. Immigrant worker organizations forged multi-ethnic coalitions and alliances that partially moved away from ethnic-based political mobilization. They imagined collective action on the basis of immigrant class solidarities and workplace-based constituencies. One of these pivotal coalitions was the Multi-Ethnic Immigrant Worker Organizing Network
(MIWON), whose organizational groundwork was laid by the above-mentioned organizations during the Elephant Snack march of 2000 recounted above.

Those organizations, however, have not remained the same over the years. Between the mid-2000s and the early 2010s KIWA abandoned grassroots unionization strategies in favor of affordable housing and labor law advocacy. It decided to focus its efforts on small actions for visibility purposes, while supporting large-scale institutional advocacy campaigns led by labor unions. In parallel, CHIRLA and, to an extent, PWC moved towards institutional advocacy. CHIRLA, in particular, shifted from organizing low-wage immigrant workers to organizing immigrants of Latin American origin. In so doing, it diluted the socio-economic and class aspects of its work in order to strengthen immigrant political power as an ‘ethnic bloc’, in line with more traditional immigrant political incorporation in local political machines. In contrast, IDEPSCA and GWC continued to focus on undocumented, low-wage immigrant workers and workplace rights, but they ended up significantly downscaling their organizational scope and abandoning most radical actions. Those concurring changes were a significant blow to a cohesive, unified movement of immigrant-led, immigrant rights organization. They marked the end of the most innovative and radical period of the contemporary immigrant rights movement.

This empirical sketch lays out the main theoretical puzzle of this research. First, theory suggests that political opportunities and resources contribute to the growth of mobilizations and cooperation between organizations. Hostile political conditions would lead us to expect low immigrant mobilization. Absence or low levels of resources, such as money or labor, would lead us to expect low organizational capacities and therefore ineffective, short-lived or absent mobilization; and vice versa. However, here we see the opposite. The rise and consolidation of the movement unfolded under adverse conditions, while the decline took place under more propitious conditions. Second, theory suggests that organizational forms, claims and identities align with existing discursive opportunities. In the United States and California, where ethnic and racial politics have historically played a key role in structuring social cleavages, and their prominence has discouraged the formation of class-based and multi-racial political coalitions, we would expect new immigrant organizations to follow such established pattern of political mobilization. Yet, we witnessed the rise of a group of immigrant organizations who adopted a leftist, Marxist-informed intersectional ideology that emphasized class solidarities across ethnic groups.

Immigrant worker organizations were founded in a rapidly changing social, economic and political context. The unprecedented growth of the non-European immigrant population was met with increasing hostility by local politicians and native population and culminated in the passing of anti-immigrant measures such as California Proposition 187 in 1994. Federal legislation such as the Immigration Relief and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986 and the welfare and immigration measures of 1996 contributed to the growth and precarization of an already burgeoning immigrant undocumented
population. Deeply entrenched institutional racism and discrimination affected not only newcomers of non-European origin but also their children, including US natives. Those factors impacted the incorporation of first and second-generation immigrants, affecting their prospects of upward social mobility as much as their ability to participate politically at all levels in Southern California. While shared discrimination provided the common ground for articulating shared grievances, it also contributed to weaken the mobilizing potential of immigrant communities by disempowering them socio-economically and politically. A class-based immigrant movement was also deemed unlikely because, between the 1980s and 1990s, Southern California was hardly a receptive context politically. This applied not only to mainstream public opinion and political institutions, but also to local civil society and immigrant communities themselves.

Paradoxically, the movement began to fragment under more positive circumstances. Political support and resources for general immigrant organizing arguably increased throughout the 2000s and the early 2010s. While migration, particularly irregular immigration, continued to remain a ‘hot button issue’ among politicians and public opinion alike, significant segments of the local civil society became more receptive to immigrant claims and interests. Inclusive discourses of social and economic justice gained significant traction. Labor unions, in particular, dramatically reversed their stance on undocumented migration and on immigrant organizing, and from the late 1990s began to invest significant resources in immigrant organizing and immigrant organizations. In a similar fashion, local and national foundations substantially increased their financial support to immigrant organizations. Even more strikingly, politicians and public officials of non-European immigrant background finally entered the precincts of institutional power. By 2005, Latino officials occupied both the mayoralty of Los Angeles as well as the highest post in the LA County Federation of Labor. It is therefore surprising that immigrant worker organizations abandoned their most creative, resource-intensive and innovative campaigns and coalitions at this point in time.

Explanations of Los Angeles scholars do not always mesh with the facts on the ground. For instance, Milkman and her colleagues (Milkman 2000a; Milkman 2006; Milkman, Bloom and Narro 2010; Franck and Wong 2004) stress the importance of union investments in immigrant rights activism and coalitions. They highlight the role of organized labor in developing a local pro-migrant organizational infrastructure and in channeling organizing across ethnic and racial lines. However, in the late 1980s and 1990s unions were still not very active investors in those relations. In fact, the very existence of immigrant worker organizations indicated that new immigrants faced obstacles in accessing mainstream organizations and in making use of their capacities (Fine 2006). Pastor and his colleagues (Pastor 1995; 2001b; Pastor and Prichard 2012; Regalado 1994) instead see the 1992 Civil Unrest as the spark of a veritable civil society renaissance in Los Angeles. The unrest prompted city officials, foundations and (to a lesser extent) labor unions to support the establishment of workplace-oriented, multi-ethnic and multi-racial coalitions as a way to address inner city poverty and restore social order and social
cohesion. However, as we shall see in the upcoming chapters, the consolidation of the immigrant movement, including its defining characteristics, was already underway before the unrest. In this respect, both union investment and civil society responses to the unrest accelerated what was already well underway.

In light of the puzzles outlined above, the main research question that guided this research is therefore the following:

What factors and conditions allow us to understand the rise, consolidation and ultimate fragmentation of a class-based, multi-ethnic and cross-generational immigrant rights movement in Los Angeles over the last thirty years?

The main research question, to its turn, comprises of three more specific sub-research questions:

1) What are the factors and conditions that led to the emergence of a multi-ethnic, class-based and cross-generational immigrant rights movement in a setting traditionally dominated by ethnic and racialized forms of political mobilization and collective action?

2) What are the factors and conditions that, in spite of low financial resources, limited institutional backing and low support from local civil society actors, allowed immigrant worker organizations to mount effective campaigns and become a visible political actor in the Los Angeles landscape?

3) What are the factors and conditions that, in spite of greater resource availability and more favorable political and discursive opportunities, led to the fragmentation (and eventual weakening) of the immigrant worker movement over time?

In the remaining sections of this introduction I will begin by describing the general theoretical framework of this research more in detail. I will then proceed to linking the empirical puzzle to the relevant literature, a sketch of which has already been provided in this introductory overview. I will continue by outlining the general methodology and assumptions that guided the development of this research project. I will conclude by presenting an overview of the various chapters and their content.

Theoretical Framework of the Research Project

Immigrant Incorporation and Political Participation in Receiving Societies: The Role of Contentious Politics and Social Movements.

Over the last several decades, migration has arguably become one of the most politically salient issues within our societies (Castles and Miller 2009; Nicholls and Uitermark 2016).
In a context characterized by ever-more pervasive economic globalization and global competition, rising social and economic inequalities and a weakening of the social regulatory role of the state, migrants and their children have been increasingly perceived as a threat to the livelihood, security, and cultural identity of the communities where they settle (Castles and Miller 2009; Chebel d’Appollonia and Reich 2010; Zolberg and Woon 1999). International migrants have become a key resource to be mobilized by countries to revitalize their urban economies and boost their global competitiveness (Mayer 2007). At the same time, they have largely incorporated in new societies at the very bottom of their socio-economic structures, and there have overwhelmingly remained due to a combination of low human capital, legal precarity and ethnic and racial discrimination (Scott 2011; Sassen 2005). In light of these developments, observers have argued that the long-term incorporation of migrants in receiving societies, and particularly their upward social mobility, has become more difficult (de Genova 2004; Menjivar 2006; Portes and Zhou 1993).

This research departs from the assumption that participation and incorporation within the political system are key processes through which immigrants can redress their structural subaltern incorporation within host societies (Bloemraad and Vermeulen 2014; Briggs 2013). This is most effective when immigrants, both at the local and the national level, are able to challenge the distribution of resources and positions of authority that underpin societal power arrangements (Dancygier 2010; Gerstle and Mollenkopf 2001; Beetham 2013). Scholars have often focused on how immigrants enter the ‘the precincts of powers’ (Mollenkopf 2014), for instance by building an organizational infrastructure that translates into ethnic voting blocks and clientelistic relations with political party machineries (Dancygier 2010; Vermeulen, Michon, and Tillie 2014). Historically, however, the incorporation of migrants and their children within the formal political system has been rather slow (Bloemraad and Vermeulen 2014). On the one hand, because even when migrants attain a certain degree of social and economic rights in a given country, for example when they are granted a long-term resident permit, they are still denied political rights (including the right to vote and to stand for political office) unless they undergo naturalization (Bauböck et al. 2006; Castles and Davidson 2000). On the other, because even naturalized immigrants or second-generation migrant citizens are often excluded due to more subtle barriers of institutional racism and discrimination (Vermeulen, 2014).

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1 The concepts of migrant incorporation, as well as integration and assimilation have a long and complicated history in the social sciences, and in migration studies more specifically. The concepts of integration and assimilation have been often criticized for their excessive normativity, and for implying that only immigrants need adapt to the economic, cultural, social and political structures of the receiving society. In this research, I use the less-loaded term of incorporation, and broadly define it as the process through which migrants, in the process of settlement, interact with the host society (Garces-Mascareñas and Penninx 2016: 12, 19). However, in more normative terms, the outcome of this process on the migrants’ side may comprise of varying benchmarks, such as securing access to the labor market on equal footing, learning about and interacting with host-society institutions, expressing and gaining recognition for valued cultural and social practices, and so on (Garces-Mascareñas and Penninx 2016).

2 For reviews of the literature on political incorporation and participation in the United States and Europe, please see Bloemraad and Vermeulen 2014; Gerstle and Mollenkopf 2001; Martiniello 2006; Bauböck et al. 2006).
Michon and Tillie 2014; Bloemraad and Vermeulen 2014; Portes and Zhou 1993). That said, it is undocumented or non-status migrants who face the greatest hurdles to formal political participation, as they are excluded from the polity both formally and substantially (de Genova 2004; Menjivar 2006; Park 2013; Benhabib 2004).

For these reasons, migrants’ grievances and claims have often found expression through contentious politics outside institutional channels (Nicholls 2013a; Voss and Bloemraad 2011; Milkman, Bloom and Narro 2010; Adler, Tapia, and Turner 2014; Barron et al. 2011; Però and Solomos 2010). In certain cases, immigrant organizations have coalesced around more or less cohesive social movements, that is “collective challenges, based on common purposes and social solidarities, in sustained interaction with elites, opponents and authorities” (Tarrow 2011: 8). They have engaged in acts of claim-making through sustained campaigning, and participated in public performances such as rallies, pickets, demonstrations, marches and advocacy activities (Tilly and Tarrow 2015: 11; see also McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2004).

State authorities are generally the primary target of political claims by immigrants and on immigration-related matters (Koopmans and Statham 2003). Through migration policies, citizenship policy and integration policy, nation states have traditionally used their sovereign power to dramatically affect the extent and quality of social, economic, cultural and political opportunities afforded to non-nationals within the boundaries of their territory (Castles and Davidson 2000; Bauböck et al. 2006; Benhabib 2004; Menjivar 2006; Dancygier 2010). However, local institutional and private actors, particularly in large cities, have also become the target of immigrant political activism. On the one hand, in the United States, such development has been influenced by the gradual devolution of particular competences over immigrant integration policy to states (as opposed to federal authorities) as well as to municipalities (Varsanyi 2008; Romero 2008; de Graauw 2008; 2016). On the other hand, this shift also reflects the more general consideration that cities, due to the state’s inability (or unwillingness) to protect the collective interest of its citizens and residents vis-à-vis the pressure of transnational corporations, are today the geographical and symbolic space where the effects of neoliberal global capitalism and market penetration are mostly felt (Voss and Williams 2012). As a result, particular grievances and claims – which are not necessarily unique to immigrants, such as enforcement of labor rights, access to emergency healthcare, obtaining a driver’s license, or gaining approval for building a new mosque – may be best accommodated by local public or private actors (Nicholls and Vermeulen 2012; Varsanyi 2008).

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4 I here draw on Tarrow’s and Tilly’s notion of contentious politics as a process involving “interactions in which actors make claims bearing on other actors’ interests, leading to coordinated efforts on behalf of shared interests or programs, [and] in which governments are involved as targets, initiators of claims, or third parties” (Tilly and Tarrow 2015: 7).

5 If migration policy is mainly concerned with regulating entry and conditions of stay of foreigners, and citizenship policy with regulating access to nationality and political rights, integration policies are concerned with a wide range of aspects relating to immigrants’ stay in the host country, including their access to social and economic provisions for non-citizens.
Thus, unsurprisingly, grassroots social movements have increasingly targeted not only national institutions, but also local institutions as well as private corporations, firms and agencies (Voss and Williams 2012; Nicholls and Vermeulen 2012). The immigrant worker organizations analyzed in the following chapters, in this respect, are key examples of this multi-level targeting. This is not to say, of course, that central states cease to be important targets of political action for immigrants. Rather, as shown by Nicholls and his colleagues (Nicholls 2008; Nicholls and Vermeulen 2012; Nicholls, Uitermark and van Haperen 2016), that immigrant (and other types of) mobilizations have become increasingly multi-scalar and multi-sited, and now routinely include even the virtual space of social media. As such, localized struggles, such as a dispute over access to housing or the construction of a mosque, may become “proxy battles for [the securing of] broader rights in the national society” (Nicholls and Vermeulen 2012: 79) by paving the ground for the establishment of larger movements confronting national governments.

Exploring immigrant political participation and engagement through contentious politics and social movements is important for a number of reasons. Practically, political incorporation of migrants is of course neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition to ensure the improvement of immigrants’ material conditions in the receiving society. However, I argue that greater political inclusion is likely to provide the potential means and instruments by which immigrants can approach and influence issues from the perspective of their own communities. Theoretically, by focusing on the political activity of individuals who are partly or fully excluded by the polity, we can shed a light on the opportunities and constraints faced by some of the most vulnerable members of society to gain recognition and equality in a particular context (Nyers 2010; Benhabib 2004). Within a democratic, pluralist society, to investigate the organizing processes which allow or hamper underprivileged groups to not only voice their concerns, but also to leverage actual power, has therefore intrinsic value with a view to promoting a more just and equal democratic society, based on the recognition of people’s common humanity (Jenkins 2002; Louie 2001; Nyers 2010). Moreover, by highlighting political practices that involve non-citizens or second-class citizens, and that extend outside of the perimeter of formal political participation, we can also interrogate the very boundaries of our political communities and complicate the meaning of contemporary notions of citizenship –e.g. formal, substantial, or enacted (Isin and Nielsen 2008; Benhabib 2004; Varsanyi 2005; 2006; McNevin 2013).

*Understanding Immigrant Organizations and their Organizing Process. A Relational Perspective.*

Organizations are key units of our social life. Generally speaking, they are mid-level institutions, linking more primary attachments and social spheres such as family and kinship to higher-level institutions such as the state or the market (Moya 2005; McQuarrie and Marwell 2009). They are the main vehicle through which people engage in collective action, and through which individuals can engage in activities and pursue goals that
would otherwise be too broad or complex (Aldrich and Ruef 2006; Scott 2003). In this sense, organizations are instrumental. However, organizations are also collective actors endowed with particular rights, powers and identities (Scott 2003; Melucci 1995; see also chapter 4 of this dissertation). In a broad sense, regardless of their specific activities, organizations are always, to an extent, political. They routinely engage in the task of defining who they are, what they stand for and who they speak on behalf of (Whittier 2009; Melucci 1995; Taylor and Whittier 1995; Scott 2014). Moreover, depending on their capacities and influence, they may be able to enhance or restrict access to various resources and benefits to members and non-members alike, and to contribute to shaping the political and material interests of the constituency on whose behalf they purport to operate (Scott 2003; Beetham 2013; Stokke and Selboe 2009).

Organizations formed by or catering to immigrants have long been the subject of scholarly attention. They are important because they mediate the relation between immigrant groups and the context of settlement, they are collective entities that can deeply affect immigrants’ social, economic, cultural and political incorporation in a particular locality (Moya 2005; Schrover and Vermeulen 2005). Immigrant organizations naturally engage in all domains of social life. Social scientists have described how organizations help immigrants navigate the host society and its institutions (Portes, Escobar and Arana 2008; de Graauw 2016; Ramakrishnan and Bloemraad 2008a), maintain and foster social and cultural ties with the country of origin (Levitt 2001; Østergaard-Nielsen 2003a; Chaudhary and Guarnizo 2016), or smoothen their inclusion through various forms of social, economic and political support (Fine 2006; Milkman 2000a; Milkman, Bloom and Narro 2010; Gleeson 2009). As Moya (2005) has shown, immigrant organizations have historically taken a myriad of forms, from secret societies to rotating credit associations, from mutual aid societies to religious or hometown associations, including more explicit political organizations across the whole ideological spectrum. Immigrant organizations are often hybrid and include a combination of service provision (for example legal or service), community-building activities and political undertakings (Fine 2006; Ramakrishnan and Bloemraad 2008b; de Graauw 2016).

Like any other organization, immigrant political organizations face the challenges of survival and attaining success (Gamson 1975; Pfeffer and Salancik 1978). In a contentious setting, those dimensions are generally linked to two different aspects: political backing and external resource support. Political opportunity structure theories link movement emergence and success to the degree of support or hostility provided by political elites, such as government, or other powerful elites (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald 1996; McAdam 1982). Hostile elite attitude to immigrants’ claims is therefore likely to negatively affect the outcome of immigrant mobilizations, particularly when closed political opportunities translate in pessimistic and quiescent attitudes on the side of potential challengers (McAdam 1982). Resource mobilization theories instead underscore the importance of organizational strength and various types of resources – namely money and labor – in creating the material conditions for effective mobilization on the ground.
Immigrant communities are generally regarded as unlikely to mobilize politically because of a varying combination of general disempowerment, limited technical resources, cultural and political apathy or lack of context-specific capabilities (Ramakrishnan and Bloemraad 2008b; Chung, Bloemraad and Tejada-Peña 2013; Martinello 2006; Milkman 2006). In both situations, securing government backing is a great source of dilemma for all social movements. Too much dependence on government support and recognition may result in co-optation and pacification of the movement (Piven and Cloward 1977; Nicholls and Uitermark 2016), while too little may end up in dramatically reducing access and chances of success (Tarrow 2011). In a similar fashion, too much resource dependence on powerful actors such as government, business elites or large philanthropies may lead organizations to align their structures, goals and claims with external interests and preferences (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978; McQuarrie 2013; Uitermark, Rossi and van Houtum 2005).

Prior to engaging in action, immigrant organizations also face the question of defining who they are, what their interests are and who they speak on behalf of; that is, of defining their collective identity, organizational goals, and form (Whittier 2009; Melucci 1995; Taylor and Whittier 1995). Collective identities and concrete organizational forms are, to a large extent, the product of conscious ideological work on the part of political activists (Wilson 1973; Simons and Ingram 1997; see chapter 3 and 6). Ideology affects how individuals and organizations understand social reality and guides their action (Wilson 1973). Moreover, in a social world characterized by the availability of a plurality of identities – from class to gender, from ethnicity and ‘race’ to sexual orientation, from religion to age, and so forth – ideological constructs help determine the saliency of particular social cleavages for the political project at hand (Calhoun 1997; Brubaker and Cooper 2004; Brubaker 2004). While possibly a goal in itself (Bernstein 2009: 267), organizational forms and identities are also critically important in securing political backing and external support. The latter do not take place in a cultural vacuum, rather in the context of existing normative expectations of individual and collective agents (Suchman 1995; Powell and DiMaggio 1991; see also chapter 4). Theories of ‘discursive opportunities’ show that established discourses on the nature of social reality, national identity or politics all contribute to define the perimeters of what claims and identities

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*If ideologies are seldom entirely detached from the material conditions of people who embrace them, this relation remains ambiguous at best. Social scientists have long debated the question of what conditions shape the basis of collective action and have wondered the extent to which collective identities are a reflection of people’s material conditions, such as their positioning within relations of production or their embeddedness in socially and culturally bounded residential communities (Katznelson 1981; 1994; Calhoun 1982; Buechler 2000). Those conditions, while they may well be a pre-requisite, they are often not a sufficient condition to trigger collective action along specific cleavages and identities (Buechler 2000). In his historical analysis of nationalism, Calhoun (1997) has shown how working classes in various European countries have often mobilized politically along lines other than class, for example by embracing nationalist political projects or by identifying as members of particular crafts. Similarly, other scholars have noted that what appear to be ethnic-driven social processes are often founded on different types of identities and social relations, such as family ties or geographical proximity (Wimmer 2008; Smith 2006). Scholars in the social constructionist tradition have long recognized that we carry multiple social identities, and all of them may be potentially used as the basis for collective action (Buechler 2000; Calhoun 1997; Jenkins 2008).*
migrants can legitimately put forward in the public sphere of a given context (Koopmans and Statham 1999; Koopmans et al. 2005). Organizations challenging established discourses or established ways of ‘doing things’ therefore risk rapid disbandment or, at best, irrelevance.

The literature presented above provides us with an entry point into the puzzles presented at the beginning of this introduction. First, if LA immigrant organizations received limited institutional and civil society support in their early phases, both in terms of political openings and resource provision, how can we explain their ability to mount successful campaigns in spite of those limitations? Second, how can we explain the emergence of organizations that, at least in part, challenged institutionalized forms of collective identity, organizing and political action? Third, why have immigrant worker organizations changed over time and has the movement fragmented right when institutional backing and civil society support increased?

I thus suggest that we can best answer those questions by adopting a broader relational lens on those processes. This perspective alerts us to the fact that organizations depend for their survival and success on a wide range of social actors, including (but not limited to) government institutions, private actors, and other organizations, and that this dependence affects internal organizational dimensions such as identity- and goal-definition, claim-making and structures (Hannan and Freeman 1989; Powell and DiMaggio 1991; Pfeffer and Salancik 1978; Diani and McAdam 2003; McCarthy and Zald 1977). Those insights allow us to understand organizational development not only in relation to the state, but also as a reflection of organizational relations with other audiences and organizations within a given context. As a matter of fact, scholars of social networks have argued that through the analysis of inter-personal and inter-organizational relations we can better comprehend key social dynamics such as innovation (McAdam and Ruth 1993), collaboration, competition and conflict (Hannan and Freeman 1989; Vermeulen 2006; Diani and McAdam 2003). As we will see in the following chapters, those dynamics are critical for at least two reasons: first, because organizational innovation and inter-organizational collaboration, by supplying both ideological and practical alternatives and material resources, may allow challenging movements to offset the obstacles presented by hostile political and discursive opportunities; second, because inter-organizational competition and conflict may instead hamper movement success and lead to its fragmentation. To better understand the LA case, it thus becomes important to identify factors and conditions that, at varying stages of the immigrant rights movement, spurred organizational innovation and inter-organizational cooperation or conflict.

Urban sociologists have noted that large cities, characterized by high social differentiation and diversity, are particularly conducive to those processes (Sennett 2002; Nicholls 2008). Unlike smaller context, metropoles are more likely to contain dense and diverse organizational environments that can provide different forms of critical support and specialized resources to aggrieved (yet under-resourced) immigrants, including highly technical and logistical expertise (Nicholls and Vermeulen 2012; Nicholls 2003).
Similarly, migration scholars have argued that patterns of ethnic community formation in large cities, especially when buttressed by dynamics of residential concentration, can facilitate collective action and the pooling of resources on the basis of pre-existing networks of trust and solidarity (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993; Portes and Zhou 1993; Fennema and Tillie 1999; Tillie 2004). Those ‘community resources’ can become particularly important in context of ‘micro-mobilization’ (McAdam 1988), when activists operate at a relative informal level and cannot count on high level of financial and technical resources. Such resources can also lead to more complex and articulate ethnic political infrastructures that boost political participation and/or political influence of immigrant communities in particular contexts (Vermeulen, Michon and Tillie 2014; Tillie 2004).

In the following chapters I will therefore focus on the factors and conditions that fostered those processes of organizational innovation and inter-organizational collaboration and/or conflict. In chapter three, I suggest that we can explain the ideological diffusion and innovation that characterized immigrant worker organizations during the 1980s and 1990s by analyzing the local and transnational connections that underpinned this process. In chapter four (together with my co-author) and chapter five I suggest the usefulness of the concept of organizational legitimacy to better understand organizational dynamics. Organizational access to resources is shaped by the normative expectations of the different audiences involved in this process, even within the same context. We can therefore show why and how organizations embedded in similar geographical and socio-cultural contexts can nevertheless end up developing different organizational structures and identities. Finally, in chapter six, together with my co-authors I develop a theoretical model that incorporates insight from ecological organizational theory, resource mobilization theory and theories of collective action to comprehensively understand organizational trajectories over time as well as dynamics of collaboration and competition.

Research Methodology

The empirical chapters that comprise this dissertation are all part of the same research project investigating the immigrant worker rights movement in Los Angeles. They also broadly share the same qualitative research methodology. However, the reader should keep in mind that all the chapters have been conceived independently as stand-alone articles. This means that, while they all share the same broad theoretical concerns and research questions presented in this introduction, they also approach them from somehow different theoretical angles and sub-questions. Moreover, each chapter uses its own research methodology and data sources, which do not always overlap with each other. In this section, in order to avoid unnecessary repetitions, I will therefore only focus on a few methodological aspects that are not covered in subsequent chapters, and that inform the overall research project. Those include: the general perspective on social
reality that informs this research; the justification for selecting a case study approach and Los Angeles as single case study; a brief description of the data sources; a set of considerations evaluating my own positionality in the field and on gaining access to the field; a note on terminology.

**Perspective on Social Reality**

The collection of articles in this research project all share the same ontological perspective on social reality, which can be summarized as ‘pragmatic realism’, or *post-positivism* (Miles, Huberman and Saldaña 2014; Scott 2014). In adopting such view, I do not reject the claim that social phenomena are socially and historically constructed, moreover filtered by the interpretation of research participants and researchers alike (Berger and Luckmann 1967). However, I also argue that, beyond the extreme complexity and messiness of social life, as well as its mediation by systems of meaning, it is still possible to try and identify certain patterns and regularities that characterize social interaction (Scott 2014). While I reject the post-modernist claim that reality exists uniquely as a product of the mind, I also contend that its analytical interpretation by the researcher does not parallel the universal *truth* claimed by pure positivist scholars (Scott 2014; Miles, Huberman and Saldaña 2014). Following Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2014: 7), I argue that, while affirming the “existence and importance of the subjective, the phenomenological, and the meaning making..., [the] goal is to register and transcend those processes by making assertions and building theories to account for a real world that is both bound and perceptually laden.”

**Research Method and Case Selection**

In this research project, I decided to employ a qualitative case study research strategy. Following Snow and Trom (2002: 150), I define case study research as “a research strategy that seeks to generate richly detailed, thick, and holistic elaborations and understandings of instances or variants of bounded social phenomena through the triangulation of multiple methods that include but are not limited to qualitative procedures.” The reason for choosing such approach was three-fold. First, I found it most suitable in guiding the early stages of my research, as it allowed me to start engaging with a relatively bounded social phenomenon – the immigrant rights movement in Los Angeles – while not immediately demanding the formulation of detailed research questions, sets of hypotheses and data sources (Snow and Tron 2002). Second, once the research questions were specified, I continued to find the approach sensitive to explore historical processual dynamics as well as meanings and motivations of the social actors involved in them. Case study research lends itself well to historical research as well as to the use of a wide range of qualitative data sources (Snow and Trom 2002; Clemens and Hughes 2002; Blee and Taylor 2002). Third, pragmatic considerations of limited time and capabilities persuaded
me that I could most effectively answer my research questions by focusing on an in-depth, single case study rather than on comparing two different ones.

The decision to focus on a single case was taken when it became clear that the Los Angeles immigrant rights movement was no ordinary case. As I have argued above, and as I dwell more in detail in chapter 2, the unlikely emergence of this particular movement in the socio-historical context of 1980s-1990s Los Angeles singled out the phenomena as a ‘critical’ case defying conventional explanations (Snow and Trom 2002; Flyvbjerg 2006). The local immigrant rights movement was therefore selected as an ‘unusual’, stand-alone case study to explore alternative explanations for such developments. At the same time, while the movement itself was my case broader study, it did not prevent me from analyzing its constituent parts in separate, and sometimes comparative, sub-case studies.

Being primarily concerned with issues of organizational emergence and change among leftist immigrant organizations, I selected a group of organizations that fulfilled four requirements: a leftist ideology committed to pro-migrant social change, workplace organizing and multi-ethnic activism, at least during the early years of organizational operations; a relatively long operational continuity, spanning at least 15 years; a majority of staff, volunteers, members and constituents comprising of first- and second-generation immigrants; a significant impact on the local political landscape, testified by pre-existing academic literature and further corroborated through informal conversations with local activists and key informants; the availability of sufficiently rich historical records, such as organizational archives and other forms of documentation. Based on those criteria, I selected the following organizations: the Korean Immigrant Workers Advocates (KIWA), the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA), the Pilipino Workers Center (PWC), the Instituto de Educación Popular del Sur de California (IDEPSCA) and the Garment Worker Center (GWC). The Korean Resource Center (KRC), an organization which can arguably be inscribed into a more liberal and integrationist political tradition, was moreover included in the group for comparative purposes (see chapter 5).

To be clear, such a selection limits the scope of my argument to a very specific group of organizations engaged in immigrant political activism in Los Angeles. My analysis did not include, for example, the vast array of more socially conservative groups, as well as organizations that engage in liberal politics or support more traditional forms of ethnic politics. The following research does not intend, therefore, to provide an exhaustive account of the immigrant political organizational landscape in Los Angeles, and not even to account for the richness and heterogeneity of its progressive immigrant rights movements (see chapter 6 for further comments). Instead, it aims to provide the reader with a ‘strategic window’ to observe inter-organizational relations in a more fine-grained and detailed manner than can be achieved in large-scale, quantitative studies. Moreover, it also provides the reader with a comparison that is also historical in nature, since it compares the organizational trajectories of the different groups analyzed over
time. Those two aspects, I believe, constitute the most interesting methodological contributions of this research to the literature.

**Data Sources, Analysis and Limitations**

All chapters analyze, from a qualitative standpoint, the historical interactions occurring among immigrant worker organizations as well as between those organizations and other social actors. In each chapter, I drew on a slightly different combination of data sources. Overall, I relied on a triangulation of four types of sources: 1) archive material from the aforementioned organizations; 2) qualitative interviews from key informants; 3) IRS 990 US Federal Tax Return Forms (1990s-2013); 4) existing case study literature. The first two constituted the main data sources of the following empirical chapters.

The bulk of the archive material consisted of grant applications, correspondence, and other documents that the examined organizations supplied to a local philanthropy, the Liberty Hill Foundation, when applying for founding (1990s-2014). In addition to those documents, I was also able to access the internal organizational archives of KIWA (1993-2006), which included additional material such as minutes of meetings, correspondence, strategy and position papers and other documentation for internal purposes, as well as various material (reports, newsletters, fliers, etc.) produced by other organizations and collected by KIWA staff. All those archives, with the exception of the latest Liberty Hill grant files (2006-2014), which are still hosted by the foundation, are freely available at the Southern California Library in LA (see appendix A for more detailed information). During my visits to the Liberty Hill Foundation and the SoCal Library I was able to create digital copies of the above-mentioned documents, which are all in my possession. I catalogued the scanned documents, whenever the information was available, by year, by type (flier, grant application, newsletter, finance statement, minutes, etc.) and by box and folder numbers. Between 2014 and 2016 I also conducted 30 formal interviews with 28 key informants, all of whom were current or former staff of the organizations in our study, or had an intimate knowledge of organizational dynamics through personal involvement (see appendix B for a list of formal interviews with informants). Interviews centered on individuals’ biographies, organizational work, and perceptions of organizational missions, activities, and objectives. While some were interviewed to specifically talk about their lives as political activists, others were interviewed to gain a deeper understanding of

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7 Since one of KIWA staff was tasked with coordinating the Multiethnic Immigrant Worker Organizing Network (MIWON), KIWA archives include a substantial section on the internal development of the coalition, which is treated quite in detail in chapter 6.

8 It is important to note that this chronological division only refers to how the material was organized by the Liberty Hill in specific yearly folders (possibly depending on what kind of material each immigrant organization decided to include to support each application, or what material Liberty Hill was able to gather independently). This does not mean that all included material was dated within the specific folder time framework, nor that it necessarily made reference to that period either.

9 Box and folder number are given in the case of the archives hosted by the Southern California Library, but not in the case of more recent data acquired directly at the Liberty Hill Foundation (2006-2014).
internal movement and organizational dynamics (Blee and Taylor 2002). Interviewees were largely drawn from the (more or less professionalized) class of organizational leaders and staff and, except in a handful of cases, did not extend to the membership (see paragraph below). I also collected IRS 990 forms for each organization analyzed, which specified its annual finances and main funding sources (see appendix A for further information). Moreover, given the availability of such material, I drew on previous case studies for additional insights into the internal workings of some of the organizations.

I considered organizations as the primary unit of analysis, but I attempted to relate the varying organizational trajectories to the influence of both the individual and the inter-organizational dimensions. The organizational dimension largely focused on its most formal layer – the leadership, the staff, and in certain cases the membership leadership – rather than on its membership and broader constituency. In each chapter, I described the specific data used, the process of analysis as well as the limitations of each research methodology. As I acknowledge further in the various chapters, the use of those data sources held a number of limitations. Archive material, largely produced by immigrant organizations themselves and often designed for specific external purposes – such as funding applications – demanded careful contextualization, particularly when used to assess the state of relations with other organizational actors or organizational performance. Moreover, using archive sources to assess organizational qualities inevitably carries the bias of seeing the collective largely through the eyes of organizational leadership or specific internal factions (Clemens and Hughes 2002). Finally, there were some language limitations that I could not overcome. While I was able to process archive material in English and Spanish, my lack of Korean and Tagalog language skills prevented me from making full use of those archives. If interviews posed no significant language limitations, they posed other challenges. As interviewees were often asked to recall events far in the past, dating back as early as the early 1990s (if not 1980s). This inevitably increased the risk of faulty recollections, or of retrospectively superimposing new meanings, motivations and rationales for actions on earlier events (Blee and Taylor 2002; Weiss 1994).

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10 As it will become clear in the empirical chapters, organizational membership was a relatively large and also constantly changing group of individuals in comparison with the organizational staff. In practical terms, the volatility of the membership made it difficult to locate and interview members, particularly those who had long left the organization. From an organizational point of view, with few exceptions, members generally played a small role in shaping the organizational vision or practices. This does not mean that the membership dimension was not significant – on the contrary, the ability to verify whether the ideology and vision of immigrant worker organizations was broadly embraced by their main constituents would have significantly strengthened the arguments presented in this dissertation – but rather that researching it presented extensive methodological challenges. That said, certain organizational documents (particularly in the case of KIWA) such as minutes of meetings sometimes presented the view of the membership.

11 Those limitations were more evident for Korean in the case of KIWA than for Tagalog in the case of PWC, as the overwhelming majority of PWC material was in English. In the case of KIWA, a sizable share of the material (though inferior to the share in English) was in Korean during the very first years of organizational activity. This share very fast decreased over the years though.

12 Interviews were all conducted in English, with two exceptions (one in Spanish and one in Korean). Interviewees, for the most part, were all perfectly confident in conducting a conversation in American English. While I conducted one interview in Spanish, I conducted another one in English/Korean with the help of another respondent who translated questions and responses for me.
Nevertheless, I believe I was able to counter some of these shortcomings through constant triangulation of sources. For example, access to both the internal archives of KIWA and the Liberty Hill archives containing KIWA’s grant applications allowed me to assess the discrepancies and differences between the two levels. In a number of cases, the Liberty Hill foundations also conducted its own evaluations of the different organizations prior to granting funding, providing the external observer with a more nuanced and ‘technocratic’, if more distant, assessment of the goals, activities and internal workings of these groups. In other cases, organizational archives of different organizations recounting the same events provided complementary and sometimes contradictory takes on similar events. When not referring to information such as dates or names but to more substantial interpretative content, such information was considered as reflective of different sensitivities among organizational members and staff. Moreover, inasmuch as archive information was triangulated with information contained in previous case studies, it was also used to inform interviews with respondents. Conversely, interviewees provided crucial insights to better contextualize and situate organizational documents.

_Researcher’s Positionality, Access to the Field and Ethical Issues._

The topic and questions of this study raise important ethical questions and issues. What are the implications of researching political movements, particularly those led by some of the most vulnerable segments of society? How do we, as researchers, situate themselves in the research field, and how do we negotiate our (often privileged) position vis-à-vis our research participants? How does our position affect our theoretical and empirical concerns, the way we gather and process information in the field, and the way our respondents see us? Obviously, these are all questions that have been long debated in the social sciences, and do not have easy answers. However, they remain today more important than ever.

Unlike other researchers that have chronicled immigrant activism from an insider position, I approached the movement as a sympathetic outsider. My sympathy for the work of immigrant organizations, as well as for their broader struggle to gain social, political and economic inclusion stems from my own background as son of a foreign-born mother, as well as from my volunteer and work in non-profit organizations. In particular, my experiences in Syria, Jordan and the Maghreb opened my eyes to the complex dynamics that fuel migration, but also to the basic unfairness that characterizes the contemporary apparatuses of migration control. Those experiences also made me aware of the various layers of privilege I myself held within this system, as a white, heterosexual man of middle-class, European background with a dual citizenship. Even though I believe they did not impede my capacity for critical analysis, those various factors clearly influenced my research positionality and impacted the way I was perceived by research respondents. In more general terms, I approached my research from a normative standpoint that sees immigrant incorporation on equal footing as natives as desirable,
since it recognizes the unfairness of particular sets of structural inequalities that affect migrants and their children in the pursuit of social, economic, cultural and political opportunities. Moreover, I similarly see the political struggle of migrants as valuable and worthy of support as an ally.

As an outsider to the context of Los Angeles, gaining access to archive information and respondents was not a straightforward process. Initial attempts to formally contact respondents on my own as PhD student from the University of Amsterdam fell on deaf ears, so I had to rely on external help. As a testimony to the rich web of interconnections between academia and political activism in Southern California, my access was greatly facilitated by a number of local researchers (including one of my dissertation supervisors). An Amsterdam-based labor organizer, formerly based in Los Angeles, was key in connecting me to key informants and respondents. While my access to the archival information was basically unrestricted since the beginning, the development of a friendly relation of trust with archival managers both at the Liberty Hill Foundation and at the Southern California Library ensured that I was able to make better use of the material overall. Liberty Hill personnel also facilitated connections with respondents who had initially declined to be interviewed.

Finally, to study a political movement largely composed of people in socially vulnerable positions raises the issue of their potential harm by research (Weiss 1994). This is all the more relevant in the case of respondents in precarious legal position, whose identification for research purposes may expose them to the action of immigration or other law-enforcement authorities. In this research, I exclusively interviewed respondents who were either long-term legal residents or US citizens, who therefore risked no legal consequences. As a research that is mainly concerned with social relations and interconnections, I named my respondents in a number of occasions whenever that was indispensable for structuring the narrative. I believe this decision does not place them in a situation of danger nor breaks our interview agreements. My respondents are well known figures in the local activist context, and sometimes beyond, and they are part of very small organizations. A great deal of information, including biographical one, is already available in a number of previous case study literature dealing with those organizations, as well as online in newspaper articles and other material. Their own digital footprint is quite extensive, as they have often authored different kinds of political material themselves, so connecting the dots is therefore a relatively simple and straightforward operation.

Notes on Dissertation Terminology

In this section I would like to specify the usage of several terms throughout the chapters. When referring to ethnicity, I define it in Weberian terms as the “subjectively felt sense of belonging based on the belief in shared culture and common ancestry” (Wimmer 2008: 973). I view ‘race’ a sub-type of ethnicity, inasmuch as phenotypical characteristics are used
to define and indicate group membership (Wimmer 2008: 973-74). In a similar fashion, I conceptualize *ethnic/racial politics* as the processes through which supposed ethnic and racial similarities are given significance and mobilized by various actors for political purposes, including creating collective identities, encouraging recruitment, or establishing a basis for a collective claim (Buechler 2000; Calhoun 1997; Brubaker 2004; Wimmer 2008). When referring to *class*, I refer to a mechanism of social differentiation based on “the production and distribution of material resources as mediated by labor and capital markets and state intervention” (Buechler 2000: 107). Along the same line, I see *class politics* as the process through which class identity and consciousness becomes the primary basis for political action, typically among working class people (Buechler 2000; Katznelson 1994; Calhoun 1997).

When I use the term *immigrant*, I primarily refer to a foreign-born citizen who has reached another country for the purpose of permanent (or at least long-term) settlement. Moreover, somehow controversially, I apply the term immigrant to US-born citizens of immigrant descent. This decision reflects the general academic consensus on the fact that, for various reasons (explored in chapter 2), *second-generation immigrants* still face significant structural barriers in accessing the same social, economic, political and cultural opportunities afforded to full-fledged natives. In further defining immigrant communities, I followed the conventional terminology adopted by US ethnic and migration scholars (for examples, see Waldinger and Bozorgmehr 1996a; Ngai 2014; Muñoz 2007; Chavez 2002). Such tradition recognizes that, because of the persistent salience of those identities for immigrants and their children, as well as of the way in which US institutions have historically articulated them, the use of ethno-racial categories to define groups and communities remains inescapable. This does not mean, however, to automatically equate the existence of a category with the existence of a group characterized by bounded identity, tight networks and solidarity (Jenkins 2008; Wimmer 2009), but rather to recognize that those labels carry everyday significance in the context of Southern California.

That said, I defined Mexican, Central American, Korean and Filipino Immigrants as those immigrants who were born outside of the United States. Conversely, with the terms Mexican American, Central American, Korean American or Filipino American I designated US-born second generations. Terms such as ethnic Mexican were used to refer to a community of people including both Mexican-born immigrants and Mexican Americans. The category of *Latino* was employed to denote first- and second-generation immigrants of Mexican and Central American origin and/or descent. In a similar fashion, the *Asian* category was used to refer to first- and second-generation immigrants with ties to a number of Asian countries (including the Philippines, South Korea, India, Thailand, and so forth).

Outline of the dissertation
I ordered the chapters in the following manner: chapter 1 is the present introduction; chapter 2 provides a general introduction to the socio-economic and political context of Los Angeles; chapter 3 focuses on the emergence of the immigrant worker organizations examined in this research; chapter 4 introduces the concept of legitimacy, and outlines its usefulness for the study of immigrant organizations; chapter 5 focuses on a comparative empirical study of two immigrant organizations; chapter 6 analyzes the rise and fall of the multi-ethnic, class-based collaboration among various immigrant worker organizations; chapter 7 provides an overview of the general research findings and concludes this dissertation.

In chapter 2, entitled “The Research Puzzle in Context: Theorizing Los Angeles as a Critical Case,” I place the relevance of my case study and research questions in the context of the socio-economic and political history of Los Angeles. The chapter describes the peculiar pattern of urban growth, political nativism and economic development that characterized Los Angeles for most of its existence, and it highlights how those dynamics contributed to trapping non-European immigrants within the lowest rungs of the labor market and prevented them from exerting significant political influence. The chapter also explores immigrants’ involvement in institutional and contentious politics, underscoring the importance of ethnic and racial politics. It further places such involvement in a context of widespread hostility and lack of support from other civil society actors. Finally, the chapter reframes the empirical puzzle presented in this introduction in light of the dynamics presented above.

In Chapter 3, entitled “Immigration, Ideology and the ‘Third World’: Organizational Innovation in the Early Days of the LA Immigrant Rights Movement,” I explore mechanisms of organizational innovation through a migration-centered analysis of the founders of key immigrant rights organizations in Los Angeles. While migration researchers have convincingly argued that practices, values and ideological orientations of migrant political organizations are influenced by the latter’s relation with both the place of origin of its members, they have paid less attention to how migrants themselves may be able to reshape existing practices of organizing in a particular context, creating new organizational forms and practices that allow for alternative ways of political engagement. In this chapter I set out to show how migrant activists drew on their earlier militant experiences, cultural sensitivities and transnational connections to develop new hybrid organizational forms that converged towards a common ideological platform. By combining autochthonous US approaches, such as community unionism and community-based organizing, with alternative experiences including Third-World Marxism and Popular Education, migrant activists of different generations (and different socialization degrees within the US context) contributed to the creation of an organizational model which rejected both ethnic-based organizing and traditional unionism to the advantage of class-based, intersectional and multi-ethnic solidarities.

In Chapter 4, entitled “Legitimacy as the Basis for Organizational Development”, I discuss the concept of organizational legitimacy in the context of organizational
emergence and survival. Legitimacy and legitimation processes are crucial dimensions to understand the relation between voluntary organizations, including immigrant organizations, and the environment in which they operate. Broadly defined as the process through which an organizational entity justifies its right to exist and its actions within a particular societal power arrangement, legitimation can help us understand how organizations establish themselves, strengthen their position and survive over long periods of time in spite of very limited material resources of their own. Moreover, it can help us examine how resource dependence affects the relations between an organization and other relevant social actors, from members and constituents to organizational allies, funders or state institutions. While the concept is not extensively used in all three remaining chapters, it provides an important anchor to understand the mechanisms at work in chapters 5 and 6, namely the ability to access resources and the constraints exerted over organizations by environment constraints.

In chapter 5, entitled “Organizational Legitimacy beyond Ethnicity? Shifting Organizational Logics in the Struggle for Immigrant Rights in Los Angeles”, I look at how ideological orientations interplay with support networks to drive organizations toward alternative legitimating strategies in local urban politics. Building on a neo-institutional theory of legitimacy, I examine the diverging legitimating strategies employed by two long-standing immigrant organizations based in Los Angeles (LA): the Korean Resource Center (KRC) and the Koreatown Immigrant Workers Alliance (KIWA). Through grant applications, organizational archival data and qualitative interviews, I show how KRC and KIWA, two groups embedded in the same sociopolitical context, have built unique yet equally successful legitimating accounts by adopting different organizational logics, one broadly based on ethnicity and one on class and multi-ethnicity. I suggest that KIWA and KRC’s ideological differences, and their reliance on a different core of supporters – ethnic-oriented for KRC, labor-oriented for KIWA – drove the organizations towards distinct, yet partially overlapping subfields. By discursively mobilizing those connections, and by actively shaping the surrounding organizational environment, both KRC and KIWA were able to incorporate in the broader non-profit advocacy sector in LA.

In chapter 6, entitled “Beyond the Los Angeles Model? Understanding the Evolution of Immigrant Worker Organizations through a Hybrid Resource-Based Model,” I provide a tentative explanation for the emergence, consolidation, and fragmentation of the Los Angeles immigrant workers rights movement over the last three decades. While traditional accounts highlight labor unions and private foundations as supporters of immigrant workers’ organizations and multi-ethnic collaboration, the role of such institutions fails to account for the rise and fall of a key coalition, the Multi-Ethnic Immigrant Worker Organizing Network (MIWON). Inspired by ecological theory and Olson’s collective action theory, I contend that organizational collaboration is shaped by 1) forces that spur competition between organizations, 2) complementarity and alignment of organizational goals, and 3) ideologically grounded moral incentives that sustain collective action. With qualitative data from in-depth interviews and organizational and
public archives, I elaborate how these three dimensions’ changing configuration underpins shifting rationales for organizational collaboration within a group of ideologically similar organizations.

In Chapter 7, the conclusive chapter, I summarize the findings and main arguments of the previous chapters, discuss research implications and limitations, and offer a few overarching concluding remarks.
CHAPTER 2. THE RESEARCH PUZZLE IN CONTEXT: THEORIZING LOS ANGELES AS A CRITICAL CASE.

Abstract

In the present chapter I place the case study and research questions of this dissertation in the context of the socio-economic and political history of Los Angeles. The chapter describes the peculiar pattern of urban growth, political nativism and economic development that characterized Los Angeles for most of its existence, and it highlights how those dynamics contributed to trapping non-European immigrants within the lowest rungs of the labor market and prevented them from exerting significant political influence. The chapter also explores immigrants’ involvement in institutional and contentious politics, underscoring the importance of ethnic and racial politics. It further places such involvement in a context of widespread hostility, limited institutional backing and lack of support from other civil society actors. Finally, the chapter reframes the empirical puzzle presented in this introduction in light of the dynamics presented above.

Introduction

In this chapter, I place the relevance of my case study and research questions in the context of the socio-economic and political history of Los Angeles. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the (limited) opportunities and (substantial) constraints for political participation that immigrants and their children have historically faced in Los Angeles, it is first necessary to highlight the main features of the local social, economic, cultural and political context. This is important both to appreciate the relevance of Los Angeles as a critical empirical case – characterized by unusually high levels of international in-migration, high degree of socio-economic transformation, political hostility towards migrants and yet resurgence of progressive political activism with little match in the United States in the late 20th century – as well as to better understand how the local environment shaped potential grievances and political interests of immigrant communities.

This descriptive chapter has the objective of providing a historical contextualization of the peculiar pattern of urban growth, political nativism and economic development that characterized Los Angeles for most of its existence. The chapter is organized as follows. In the first section I describe the scope and consequences of the social and demographic changes that took place in Southern California throughout the 20th century. In particular, the period between the 1960s and 1990s was a veritable break from the past. After decades of social closure and internal migration, Los Angeles underwent a dramatic transformation that would make the city the migrant capital of the United States by the turn of the century.
In the second section I link the phenomenon of internal migration to global and local processes of economic restructuring. I highlight how those dynamics contributed to trapping non-European immigrants within the lowest rungs of the labor market, with little prospects of upward socio-economic mobility. Racialization, legal precarization and residential segregation were key processes underpinning and compounding the subaltern incorporation of immigrants and their children in Los Angeles. The latter is crucial not only to understand the grim reality of a large segment of the immigrant community – a reality which would encourage the emergence of the immigrant worker organizations examined in this research – but also to appreciate the formidable obstacles immigrants had to face to engage in collective action.

In the third and fourth sections I explore immigrants’ involvement in institutional and contentious politics. I underscore their historic exclusion from the polity as well as the importance of ethnic and racial politics for channeling political engagement in both arenas. Moreover, I place political engagement of immigrants in a general context of widespread hostility and lack of support from other civil society actors, namely labor unions and large philanthropic organizations. This part sets the ground for the empirical analysis of the following chapters, as it argues that immigrant worker organizations emerged in a context characterized by hostile political and discursive opportunities. Finally, I conclude the chapter by re-stating the empirical puzzle and the project research questions in light of the information presented.

The Social and Economic Context of Immigrant Los Angeles

*Los Angeles and the Great Demographic Transformation: From ‘Nativist City’ to ‘Capital of the Third World’*

Los Angeles is a city shaped by migration. Its formidable demographic growth, which transformed a Mexican *pueblo* into the second-largest metropolis in the United States over slightly more than a century has been largely fueled by movements of people from all walks of life. A former Mexican *pueblo* incorporated in the newly formed US State of California in 1850, by 1880 Los Angeles was still a 30,000-people rancho town and its region scarcely reached 100,000 inhabitants in 1890 (Sabagh and Bozorgmehr 1996). By 1920, however, the regional total had already reached 1 million, and by 1930 had more than doubled to 2.3 million – a surge that could only be explained by mass movement of people rather than by mere natural increase (Waldinger and Bozorgmehr 1996b). Those arrivals were sustained and made possible by a dramatic economic transformation of the region.

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13 Geographically located in Alta California, present day Los Angeles is situated in an area that, between the late 18th century and early 19th century, was nominally under the Spanish colonial empire and largely administered by Catholic religious missions. Part of the Mexican Republic between 1822 and 1848, Los Angeles joined newly formed California following the US-Mexican Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo of 1848 and the state’s official admission to the US union in 1850 (Starr 2005).
that took place between the late 19th and the early 20th century. Railroad development and seaport expansion transformed Los Angeles into the main rail and trading hub of the Southwest and linked the region to the rest of the country, greatly facilitating mass movement (Starr 2005; Lasslett 1996). Oil discovery in the 1890s gave a significant boost to the local economy, while the construction of the Owens River aqueduct to the San Fernando Valley and the Pacific Electric interurban system encouraged real estate development and agriculture (especially horticulture) (Laslett 1996; Davis 2006). Those developments encouraged the ‘suburbanization’ of Los Angeles as early as the 1930s, transforming the area in a loosely connected agglomeration of ‘residential islands’ separated by agricultural fields (Laslett 1996).

During the 1920s, Los Angeles was a fairly diverse and multicultural city. Chinese immigrants, who had come to the US as indentured laborers to build the railway in the 1870s, had since created a sizable community in downtown’s ‘Chinatown’ (Starr 2005; Laslett 1996). Small groups of Mexican and Japanese immigrants, as well as African Americans (migrated from other areas) were also present in the area (Laslett 1996). Mexican and Japanese, in particular, found employment in the expanding citrus farming in the San Gabriel and San Fernando valleys (Laslett 1996). A small contingent of Italians, Irish and Eastern Europeans, with a cross-country Jewish population of relative significance, also inhabited Los Angeles (Laslett 1996). The largest groups, however, were European migrants from older countries of emigration, such as Great Britain, Germany and France, and internal migrants of similar descent. In stark contrast with other major US cities, which at the time were attracting international, prevalently Catholic and Jewish immigrants from all parts of Europe, Southern California mostly witnessed the mass arrival of Protestant, ‘small-town’ internal migrants of Western and Northern European origins (Laslett 1996; Foner and Waldinger 2013). The newcomers included a fairly homogenous group of middle-class retirees, businessmen, tradesmen and land developers from the Mid-West, as well as impoverished farmers from ‘Dust Bowl’ states (Starr 2005; Laslett 1996). Driven by a desire to outrival San Francisco as the key economic hub of the Pacific Coast, Southern California political and economic elites – the so-called ‘boosters’ – encouraged the arrival of new immigrants by emphasizing the area’s mild climate, its promise of social advancement and mobility, as well as its explicit anti-union business policy (Davis 2006; Milkman 2006; Waldinger and Bozorgmehr 1996b).

The Los Angeles of the early 20th century was not a place devoid of a certain degree of social mixing and tolerance (Laslett 1996). Yet, as in the rest of the United States, its social hierarchy was already largely organized around ethno-racial differences, with a ‘white’ (and male) population in a dominant position to the detriment of ‘colored’ peoples (Almaguer 2009). If ethno-racial hierarchies in other regions of the US came to be primarily defined along the black-white divide, largely due to the presence of a large

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14 Only 17 percent of LA’s inhabitants were foreign-born in 1920, compared to 35 percent in New York (Waldinger and Bozorgmehr 1996b).
African American population, racialization in California (as well as in the broader US South-West) was largely the result of the early encounter between newcomers of European origin and Native Americans and, at a later stage, between Euro-American settlers and Mexican, Japanese and Chinese residents during the 19th century (Almaguer 2009; Omi and Winant 2015). This dynamic was only reinforced in the early 1900s. In fact, as Laslett (1996: 40) argued, it was the “class and cultural gap that opened up in the 1920s between the Protestant midwesterners and newcomers of color, as well as Catholics and Jews, that largely determined the uneasy set of racial and ethnic relations between Anglos and others that persist in Los Angeles to this day.” Anglo settlers, who embraced values such as “temperance and churchgoing, economic individualism and social conformity, the pursuit of rural arcadia in the form of single-family dwellings, and an easy assumption of white social and economic superiority” (Laslett 1996: 71; my emphasis), were key in shaping the urban and economic development of the LA region for the decades to come (Almaguer 2009). This was practically done by preventing immigrants of color (as well as the growing African American population) from accessing equal housing, schools and jobs through the use of racist zoning regulations, legislation and court rulings (Laslett 1996: 51). While white Anglos drove LA’s urban sprawling by retreating into a myriad of gated ‘suburban islands’, other groups were gradually pushed in particular areas of the city, such as East Los Angeles for Mexicans and South Los Angeles (then South Central) for African Americans (Laslett 1996). Jews, despite their ‘whiteness’ and their growing economic success – they would gradually emerge at the top of the entertainment industry coalescing around Hollywood – also suffered considerable degree of exclusion and discrimination during this period (Davis 2006; Laslett 1996).

Between the 1930s and the 1960s, as internal migration continued and US federal policy restricted international migration, Los Angeles continued to grow but its population became more homogenous. By 1960, it had reached 6 million inhabitants – second only to New York in the United States – but eight out of ten residents both in the city of LA and LA county were non-Hispanic whites (Sabagh and Bozorgmehr 1996; Waldinger and Bozorgmehr 1996b). If limited immigration from the Western hemisphere, and particularly from Mexico, continued to be encouraged for agricultural purposes in California on a seasonal basis,15 US administration virtually shut down immigration channels from European and Asian countries between 1924 and 1965 (Ngai 2014; Tichenor 2002). During this period, Los Angeles became, “both culturally and demographically, the most nativist and fundamentalist of [US] big cities” (Davis 2006: 102). Immigrant communities were therefore virtually cut off from their countries of origin, and they developed their distinct ethnic identities through a variety of community-formation trajectories. If migrants of European origin consolidated an ‘Anglo’ white identity that spun different ethnic national origins and became the ‘mainstream’, growing residential

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15 During this period, Mexicans immigrants came to California largely under the Bracero program (1942-1964), a federal program which allowed local farmers to recruit and employ migrant laborers in their fields on a seasonal basis (Tichenor 2002).
and school segregation, as well as racism were important factors in consolidating distinct (and subordinate) Mexican American, Chinese American and Japanese American ethnic identities among the growing second- and third-generation of non-European migrants (Ngai 2014; Laslett 1996; Acuña 1995; Muñoz 2007). The creation of these communities, in spite of their relative limited size, would also prove a source of social tensions once international borders would be open again after the reform of 1965.

In the meantime, between the 1930s and the 1950s, Los Angeles began to develop a substantial industrial base. As the area shifted the core of its economy from agriculture towards manufacturing, its first autochthonous working class emerged. During the 1930s, attracted by the availability of cheap oil, an expanding consumer market and an aggressive ‘open shop’ policy, steel, auto and rubber manufacturers established several plants in the region (Milkman 2006). By 1936, companies of the likes of Ford, General Motors, Chrysler, Goodyear and Firestone already employed more than 40,000 people, and by 1939 Los Angeles ranked second nationwide in both auto assembly (behind Detroit) and tire and rubber production (Laslett 1996). In the following decade, driven by federal funding, LA underwent a spectacular industrial growth that made it the leading aircraft manufacturer in the country (Laslett 1996; Davis 2006). The military compartment, which included production of complex aerospace and related technology, became the major industry in the area in the 1950s, employing 36 percent of the total regional manufacturing workforce as of 1957 (Moore and Vigil 1993: 33). By 1970, the region could offer three million jobs, employing three times as many people as in 1940 (Laslett 1996). Durable manufacturing, by now firmly unionized and offering high wages and stable jobs, emerged as key regional employer (Milkman 2006). Unsurprisingly, given the social make-up of the area, the first industrial working class in the area was predominantly white and native-born. As impoverished white migrants from Oklahoma or Arkansas captured the vast majority of these jobs, it was African Americans who came distant second (Laslett 1996). Initially, Mexicans remained largely concentrated in agricultural jobs, furthermore suffering racial and geographical discrimination in accessing high-level industrial jobs (Laslett 1996; Moore and Vigil 1993; Scott 1996a). However, over time, they

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16 Since at least the 1920s, local elites had promoted Los Angeles as the ‘Citadel of Open Shop’ a way to ensure a competitive advantage over heavily unionized cities, such as San Francisco (Milkman 2006). During this period, organizations such as the Merchants and Manufacturers’ Associations were able to effectively ‘militarize’ industrial relations, ensuring that no unions would be allowed to organize in Los Angeles. Picketing was illegal and labor activists were frequently terrorized by the expanding Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) (Davis 2006).
17 In the context of Cold War arms-racing, this sector would remain strong until the end of the 1980s.
18 Industrial unions, which came together as the newly formed Congress of Industrial Relations (CIO), were able to finally gain a foothold in Los Angeles during the 1930s (Tait 2016).
19 Whites held 82 percent of the region’s jobs in 1940, and they would continue to hold as much as 72 percent in 1970 (Laslett 1996). Yet, as shown by the fact that the local working class was largely composed of poor white Midwesterners, which themselves suffered significant prejudice and discrimination vis-à-vis white entrepreneurs and businessmen, intra-group differences in class and status also clearly mattered (Laslett 1996).
20 Attracted by economic opportunities as well as what was a (comparatively) less hostile environment, a sizable African American population migrated from southern US states between the 1930s and 1950s. The black population grew especially fast in the early 1940s, increasing from 63,774 to 118,888 between 1940 and 1944 (Grant, Oliver, and James 1996: 381).
were able to enter both durable and nondurable manufacturing, establishing key connections with industrial employers that would be crucial to link them up with the massive migrant arrivals of the subsequent decades (Laslett 1996). Likewise, Chinese and Japanese Americans abandoned employment in agriculture, but they were able to find occupations in a variety of economic sectors, including health, education and engineering (Laslett 1996: 65-66). Nevertheless, first and second generation international migrants remained a relatively inconspicuous presence in LA up until 1970. Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans represented only 6 percent of the regional workforce in 1940; by 1970 they had barely increased to 7 percent – 211,500 workers (half of which native-born) over a total population of more than seven million (Laslett 1996). Asian immigrants and Asian Americans – mostly of Japanese and Chinese origin – were an even smaller percentage (2 percent in 1940, 3 percent in 1970) (Laslett 1996).

The state of affairs in Los Angeles dramatically changed between the mid-1960s and the 1990s. Over three decades, the metropolitan region21 almost doubled its population, from 7.75 to 14.5 million (Sabagh and Bozorgmehr 1996). Slightly half of this increase (3.3 million) came from international migrants, with the foreign-born population increasing from 8 percent to 27 percent between 1960 and 1990 (Waldinger and Bozorgmehr 1996b). LA County,22 while it lost a significant share of its resident population – particularly its older white population retreating to neighboring counties – still managed to grow from slightly more than 6 million to 8.86 million (Sabagh and Bozorgmehr 1996). In 1990, while the nationwide rate grew to 8 percent, concentration of foreign-born in metropolitan LA, LA County and LA City respectively climbed up to 27, 33 and 3723 percent (Waldinger and Bozorgmehr 1996b; Sabagh and Bozorgmehr 1996). By 1990, in absolute terms, LA metropolitan region was the nation’s immigrant capital with 3.9 million foreign-born, 400,000 more than New York (second) (Waldinger and Bozorgmehr 1996b). The pace of this growth was also phenomenal. In 1990, 13 percent of the region’s population was composed of immigrants who had arrived during the previous decade (Waldinger and Bozorgmehr 1996b).

The most astonishing difference from the past, apart from the raw numbers, was the origin of the newcomers. Migrants from Mexico, Central America and a variety of Asian countries entirely replaced the older generations of European and native-born internal migrants in the LA metropolitan area. Through immigration and high fertility

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21 This region, used for statistical purposes, is composed of five counties, including LA County (its core and most populous area), Orange, San Bernardino, Riverside and Ventura Counties.

22 The reason for relying on metropolitan and county demographic data has to do with the fragmented administrative geography of the area. Unlike some other major cities such as New York, the City of Los Angeles proper cannot be considered a self-contained political and social unit (Foner and Waldinger 2013). This has to do with the urban history of the area, characterized by suburbanization, processes of administrative secession, complex division of functions between the city and the county, as well the continued existence of residential pockets that remain unincorporated (Davis, 2006; Foner and Waldinger 2013; Laslett 1996). Areas such as East Los Angeles are still not part of the City of Los Angeles proper, but part of Los Angeles county.

23 To put these numbers into perspective, at the peak of the early 20th century migratory wave – the only other moment in history that parallels the phenomena from the 1970-1990 – New York roughly counted 40 percent of its population as foreign-born (Waldinger and Bozorgmehr 1996b).
rates, the population of Mexicans and Mexican Americans combined more than tripled between 1970 and 1990, from 1.12 million to 3.72 million (Sabagh and Bozorgmehr 1996). Almost 800,000 newcomers from Mexico settled during the 1980s, the share of foreign-born Mexicans within the larger community growing from 25 percent to 46 during the 1970-1990 period (Sabagh and Bozorgmehr 1996). Central Americans went from being a marginal presence to half a million by 1990, their numbers largely rising as a result of the growing refugee flows from El Salvador (241,000) and Guatemala (126,000) (Sabagh and Bozorgmehr 1996; Hamilton and Chinchilla 2001). Asian and Asian Americans, around half a million in 1970, rose to 1.3 million in 1990 largely through immigration, with Filipinos, Koreans and Vietnamese joining in large numbers pre-existing Chinese and Japanese communities (Sabagh and Bozorgmehr 1996). During the 1980s, the Asian community further diversified with the arrival of a substantial number of refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos (Hamilton and Chinchilla 2001; Sabagh and Bozorgmehr 1996). Those communities largely surpassed pre-existing ethnic minority groups, such as Native Americans (63,000 in 1990) but also African Americans (1.1 million) (Sabagh and Bozorgmehr 1996). While an observer called Los Angeles the 'Capital of the Third World' in 1991 (Rieff 1991), a decade later Hamilton and Chinchilla (2001: 41) noted that Los Angeles had “the largest Mexican, Central American, Asian, and Middle Eastern populations in the United States, and ... the largest populations of Koreans, Filipinos, and Iranians outside of their respective countries... [furthermore] the largest Mexican metropolis outside of Mexico and the largest Salvadoran metropolis outside of El Salvador.”

This new wave of immigration was due to a combination of political, economic, social and cultural factors that, to an extent, escaped the reach of the local context. The change in federal immigration regime, in conjunction with growing economic globalization and neoliberalization, were key in fostering immigration to the US from new regions (Tichenor 2002; Massey, Durand and Malone 2002). For once, federal legislation reshaped the scope and intensity of international migration flows directed to the United States. The 1965 Immigration and Naturalization Act, which finally allowed immigration quotas from the Eastern Hemisphere while facilitating immigration for family reunification or local economic need, was in fact a “watershed in the development of American immigration policy” (Tichenor 2002: 218). Against government expectations of attracting immigration from Europe, the act ended up encouraging unprecedented levels of migration from Asian countries (Tichenor 2002; Ngai 2014). The long-standing geopolitical relations between the US and the Philippines or South Korea, founded on colonial and neo-colonial arrangements, were key in channeling migrants from those countries towards the United States (Espiritu 1993; Chung 2007; Kramer 2006).

Pre-existing migrant networks and geographical proximity played a key role in sustaining flows from other regions. In fact, while immigration from the Western
Hemisphere was instead for the first time restricted, economic incentives and migrant receiving infrastructures in the US remained in place. This was especially true for those set up under the agricultural Bracero program (1942-1964). New migrants from Mexico continued to enter the US well beyond the annual quotas expected, many of them thus de facto crossing the border irregularly (Massey, Durand and Malone 2002; Ngai 2014; Massey and Pren 2012). In this respect, LA’s proximity to the US-Mexico border was arguably a key factor in facilitating the continuation and further escalation of such dynamics (Waldinger and Bozorgmehr 1996b). In addition to economic migrants, the United States, and Los Angeles in particular, also attracted thousands of people fleeing political conflict from regions such as Central America or South-East Asia (Waldinger and Bozorgmehr 1996b; Hamilton and Chinchilla 2001). In regions of origin, particularly in Central America and in Mexico, international migration was encouraged by fast-paced industrialization, agricultural modernization and forced urbanization; those processes contributed to the uprooting of peasant and framing communities and to the fast deterioration of their livelihoods (Hamilton and Chinchilla 2001; Henderson 2011). The gradual integration of North and Central America within a common economic market, through instruments such as the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement of 1994, accelerated those dynamics and further encouraged international migration (Massey, Durand and Malone 2002).

The overall result of these immigration waves was a complete make-over of greater Los Angeles over less than three decades. No other area in the United States experienced such a massive demographic growth and change within such a short period of time. Moreover, no other area experienced such a substantial migratory flow from the same country. If 70 percent of all Mexican immigrants heading to the United States during the period 1965-85 selected California as their destination, 30 percent of the grand total settled in Los Angeles alone (Massey, Durand and Malone 2002). Migration from Mexico and Central America would begin to stabilize only during the second half of the 1990s, following the escalation of anti-immigrant hostility in the region (such as the passing of State Proposition 187) and increasing militarization of the San Diego-Tijuana border (Massey, Durand and Malone 2002). All in all, by the 1990s, Los Angeles had become the second most populated metropolis in the country, set to overtake New York in the early decades of the 21st century. Moreover, it had become the most diverse city in the country.

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24 In fact, observers have argued that it was precisely such restrictions which disrupted old patterns of circular and temporary migration among Mexican migrants and created a large pool of stranded immigrants in a wide variety of irregular situations (Massey and Pren 2012; Massey, Durand and Malone 2002).

25 The 1965 Act initially established an overall annual quota of 120,000 migrants from the Western Hemisphere – a 40 percent drop from the annual entries during the previous years. In 1976 Congress placed further pressure on Mexico – by far the largest immigrant sending country – by specifying the internal quota allocation among Western Hemisphere countries and granting a mere 20,000 slots to Mexico (Ngai 2014).

26 As a matter of fact, while overall population as well as absolute numbers of international migrants have continued to grow since, the percentage of the foreign-born population and the main national composition of flows has since remained broadly the same (Foner and Waldinger 2013). LA County has grown from 8.8 million in 1990 to 9.5 million in 2000 and 9.8 million in 2010.
by sheer number of foreign-born, second only to Miami metropolitan region in relative terms (Waldinger and Bozorgmehr 1996b). However, as we will see in the second section, the social and economic incorporation of this new population in Los Angeles proved a formidable challenge.

Between Economic Restructuring, Legal Precarity and Differential Racialization: Creating an Immigrant Working Class

The arrival of post-1965 immigrants in Los Angeles needs to be contextualized. International migration largely coincided with and was to an extent fueled by the vast transformations that altered the economic structure of Southern California between the 1970s and the 1990s. Those changes were linked to broader processes of economic restructuring spanning an increasingly interconnected global economy (Jessop 1994; Moore and Pinderhughes 1993; Scott 2011). Driven by the declining productivity of Fordist modes of production, as well as by internationalization of trade and production chains and the growing competition threat posed by Asian economies, urban economies in the United States underwent a large-scale process of restructuring; the latter resulted in widespread de-industrialization and delocalization overseas of heavy manufacturing, expansion of the service economy, and successive re-industrialization oriented towards light manufacturing and high-tech production (Jessop 2002; Soja and Scott 1996; Moore and Pinderhughes 1993; Pastor 2001a). Simultaneously, the fiscal crisis of the welfare state in the early 1970s and the ideological decline of Keynesianism opened the door to the hegemony of neoliberalism as a political and economic project (Peck and Tickell 2007). The ascendance of Ronald Reagan to the US presidency in 1980, and the election of George Deukmejian as governor of California in 1982 coincided with this turn. Concretely, this resulted in the dismantling of national and local social wage policies, the weakening of workplace protections, as well as the privatization, liberalization and deregulation of vast sectors of the economy (Peck and Tickell 2007; Hamilton and Chinchilla 2001; Milkman 2006). Moreover, such political vision also underscored international migrant labor (both low- and highly-skilled) as a key resource to be mobilized for economic growth and competitiveness, particularly by cities (Scott 2011; Sassen 2005). Not incidentally, this period also witnessed a concerted attack by business and political institutions against organized labor, who saw its membership and political influence dramatically decline, particularly in industrial sectors (Milkman 2006).

In Los Angeles, where durable manufacturing was one of the largest in the country, and still remained strong until the late 1970s, economic and political changes were heavily felt shortly thereafter. The economic recession that hit the US economy in the early 1980s, and the growing competitive pressures from expanding manufacturing
production in the Global South resulted in significant downsizing or delocalization overseas of many LA-based plants (Pastor 2001a; Scott 1996). In response to the erosion of part of the region’s industrial base, political and business elites sought to diversify manufacturing production, to attract foreign capital investment and to expand the area’s service economy (Scott and Soja 1996; Sonenshein 1993). They therefore promoted the development of large communication and transportation infrastructures (such as the modernization of the San Pedro and Long Beach port, or the upgrading of the LAX Airport), set up attractive tax incentives to attract transnational corporations and relaxed labor law requirements and regulations for prospective employers (Milkman 2006; Scott and Soja 1996). The LA region refocused the upper tier of its industrial economy towards high-tech manufacturing, particularly in electronics and aerospace industries, and drew on the influx of foreign capital (mainly from Japan) to become the major financial, trading and managerial hub of the Pacific Rim (Moore and Vigil 1993). In parallel, at the lower tier, the region also witnessed the revitalization of low-technology, labor-intensive industries that had been declining since the 1950s (Scott 1996; Ong and Blumenberg 1996). Through an aggressive cost-cutting strategy that relied on low-wage labor to undercut global competition, local manufacturers turned Los Angeles into one of the few remaining urban economies in the Global North still involved in industries such as textile, clothing, furniture and printing (Scott 1996). Thanks to this conversion, and unlike cities such as Chicago or New York, where the overall manufacturing sector shrunk dramatically, Los Angeles still continued to offer large and diversified employment opportunities throughout the 1980s and well into the 1990s (Moore and Pinderhughes 1993; Waldinger and Bozorgmehr 1996b). Moreover, the real estate boom in houses and office buildings, hotels and restaurants, as well as the growth of a very affluent upper class resulted in a proliferation of a variety of low-skilled, low-wage jobs27 (Hamilton and Chinchilla 2001; Scott and Soja 1996). In the case of this expanding light manufacturing and service economy, however, the result was the creation of jobs of lower quality, which boosted comparatively lower wages, longer hours, and less or non-existent social benefits than older durable manufacturing employment (Pastor 2001a; Zentgraf 2001). The loss of mid-level, unionized and protected jobs exacerbated the ‘hourglass’ character of the local economy, leaving people working at the bottom with diminishing chances of upper mobility (Zentgraf 2001; Moore and Pinderhughes 1993). Overall, economic restructuring significantly widened the gap between high- and low-tiers type of job occupations throughout the 1980s and 1990s, and more generally greatly contributed to rising social and economic inequalities in the LA region during the same period (Scott and Soja 1996; Ong and Blumenberg 1996; Ong and Valenzuela 1996).

From 1970 onwards, in conjunction with the growing international migration influx, foreign-born workers became a strong presence both in the changing

27 According to Hamilton and Chinchilla (2001: 72), “by 1990, construction jobs had increased by 50 percent of their 1972 levels in Los Angeles county, while jobs in restaurants were up by nearly 100 percent and hotel jobs by 125 percent”.

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manufacturing and expanding service sectors. If immigrants from Mexico and Central America represented only 2.9 percent of the entire manufacturing workforce in the region in 1950, by 1990 they made up 30.8 percent; Asian immigrants, in a similar fashion, grew from 0.5 to 8.2 percent during the same period (Scott 1996). While this was not the case for all immigrants, the majority of newcomers and the growing native-born population of color entered the labor market at its the lowest rungs (Waldinger and Bozorgmehr 1996b; Chinchilla and Hamilton 2001; Zentgraf 2001). Occupations were stratified also across gender. Whereas Mexican and Central American male immigrants tended to concentrate in industries “characterized by heavy materials-handling labor processes” and hazardous working conditions, such as for example “metallurgy or wood-related, their female counterparts concentrated in “labor-intensive craft industries marked by small establishment size”, such as for example “clothing, textile and leather-products industries” (Scott 1996: 230). If Asian male immigrants were often able to find jobs in the booming high-tech sectors, including computer technology, electronics and advanced machinery production, Asian women were present both in similar industries – particularly as assembly workers – as well as in the same craft industries of Latino women (Scott 1996). A similar segmentation occurred in the service sector. Mexican and Central American men became overrepresented in a wide range of low-paid and precarious occupations, from construction to building maintenance, from gardening to delivery (Chang and Diaz-Veizades 1999). Figures such as the ‘day laborer’ or ‘jornalero’ – people soliciting a day-job at a street corner or in proximity of large shopping malls – as well as street vendors became closely associated to Latino migration (Hamilton and Chinchilla 2001; Valenzuela 2002). Women often took up jobs as domestic workers, waitresses, caretakers or hotel maids (Ortiz 1996; Lopez, Popkin and Telles 1996; Chang and Diaz-Veizades 1999). Similarly, different Asian immigrant groups were channeled towards specific segments of the economy. For example, Korean immigrants (both men and women) concentrated in self-employment, investing in businesses such as grocery stores, restaurants, laundries, auto repairs or liquor stores (Chang and Diaz-Veizades 1999; Chung 2007; Cheng and Yang 1996). Filipinos, instead, were largely present in sectors such as home care, nursing and domestic work (Espiritu 1995).

The question of whether international migration was the cause or rather the consequence of such economic changes in Los Angeles has been hotly debated (Milkman 2006; Scott 1996; Waldinger and Bozorgmehr 1996b). It seems safe to assume that processes of economic restructuring and incorporation of migrants in Los Angeles as both skilled and unskilled labor were deeply intertwined and mutually sustained each other (Scott and Soja 1996; Sassen 2005). In the most general terms, immigrants filled labor market niches where local workforce was either insufficient – or not skilled enough, such as in highly-skilled occupations – or unwilling to take a wide range of low-paid, ‘dirty, dangerous and demeaning’ jobs (Waldinger and Bozorgmehr 1996b; Ong and Valenzuela 1996). However, by the time they entered those sectors, those occupations had already been on a
downward spiral of de-unionization, casualization and worsening working conditions (Milkman 2006). Generally, observers have noted that economic restructuring removed mobility ladders for workers at the bottom of the labor market (Sassen 1988). Portes and Zhou (1993) argued that immigrants and their children were hit particularly hard by economic restructuring, as the disappearance of mid-level jobs greatly reduced chances for inter-generational mobility.

Variations in human capital and education certainly contributed to channeling different migrants towards alternative occupations (Ortiz 1996; Scott 1996). Waldinger and Bozorgmehr (1996b: 16) argued that, while “the newcomers to LA [had] come from all walks of life, ...the very distinctive national origins of LA’s immigrants mean[t] that its foreign-born mix [was] characterized not by diversity but rather by socio-economic polarization.” Latino immigrants generally had quite a low level of human capital and tended to come from rural and (to a lesser extent) working class backgrounds. Among Mexican and Central American immigrants, 10 percent of the adult population in 1990 was virtually illiterate, while an additional 40 percent had only attained 8th grade education (Waldinger and Bozorgmehr 1996b). Migrants from Asian countries were instead generally high-educated and with a middle-class background. Unlike Mexicans and Central Americans, they were able to use the provisions of the 1965 act to find jobs in highly skilled occupations such as engineering, pharmacy, medicine or nursery (Waldinger and Bozorgmehr 1996b). Moreover, they showed considerable entrepreneurial skills as well as capital funds and other resources to be invested in the area (Waldinger and Bozorgmehr 1996b). This is not to say, of course, that all newcomers from Asian countries were from a middle-class background, or even that they immediately entered the middle-class in LA, but rather than compared to newcomers from the Western Hemisphere they had significant comparative advantages, including more familiarity with American culture and values (Lopez 1996; Cheng and Yang 1996).

Two important structural factors also contributed to the social and economic subordination of immigrants: their differential racialization\(^28\) and their legal precarization. A growing number of social historians such as Ngai (2014) and Almaguer (2009), as well as sociologists such as Portes and Zhou (1993) have highlighted how non-European immigrant groups have traditionally found it harder to integrate within the American ‘mainstream’ than their European counter-parts due to pre-existing structures of racial domination. Such structures have ensured and justified asymmetries of status among different groups, as well as unequal treatment and distribution of power and resources (Omi and Winant 2015; Pulido 2002; 2006). Racialization was a key factor in the process of US expansionism and nation-building in the southwest as early as the 19th century, and it was only reinforced by the already mentioned mass migrations from the

\(^{28}\) I define racialization as “the extension of racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified relationship, social practice or group” (Omi and Winant 2015: 111). At the basis, racialization entails the construction of human difference “based on supposedly significant biological features, including skin color, hair texture, and eye structure” (Pulido 2006: 21).
mid-West in the early 20th century (Almaguer 2009; Laslett 1996; Davis 2006). While racial hierarchies were never entirely fixed, they overall resulted in preventing populations of color such as Native Americans, Mexican Americans and Asian Americans from competing on an equal footing in the labor market or in accessing the same level of social goods (such as education or decent housing) as whites, all other conditions being equal (Ngai 2014; Almaguer 2009). Those groups were collectively incorporated at the bottom of the economy of Southern California, first in a range of semi-free labor arrangements in construction and agriculture (such as indentured labor), and later on in low-skilled manufacturing (Pulido 2006; Laslett 1996; Ngai 2014). Racial hierarchies also contributed to processes such as residential segregation and ethnic enclave formation. Those measures, which also targeted the growing African American population, led to a strengthening of inter-ethnic difference and to the development of distinct racialized ethnic communities between the 1920s and the 1960s, particularly at a time when no major immigrant flows reached Los Angeles (Acuña 1995; Laslett 1996). Racial hierarchies, once institutionalized, remained salient even when formal citizenship rights were granted to minorities of color. While race-based housing covenants were abolished in Los Angeles in 1947 and deemed unconstitutional in 1948, informal discrimination still prevented Mexican Americans and Asian Americans (as well as African Americans and, to an extent, Jews) from accessing residential areas inhabited by white, Christian communities in the following decades (Laslett 1996; Davis 2006). Mexican American youth, similarly to African Americans, were effectively prevented from attending mainstream public schools and higher education until the late 1950s and early 1960s (Muñoz, 2007). During World War II, Japanese American citizens, stripped off their civil liberties, were interned in several camps across California and deprived of all their economic assets (Pulido 2006).

By the late 1960s and 1970s, when new immigrants from Asia and Latin America began to reach Los Angeles, their status within the new society came to be a reflection of the interplay between their prevalent socio-economic conditions and the pre-existing racialized structures in Southern California. For example, immigrants from South Korea and China, who generally displayed high levels of entrepreneurship, education, professional skills and strong work ethic, came to be perceived as ‘model minorities’ (Chang and Diaz-Veizades 1999) – in that respect following the trajectory of Japanese Americans after WWII, following the normalization of geopolitical relations with Japan (Pulido 2006). Filipino migrants, because of their English proficiency and high professional qualifications, especially in the health sector, also earned a similar (ambiguous) model minority status (Espiritu, 1995). Given the comparatively limited size

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29 California constitution defined the pre-existing Mexican population as ‘white’ and granted them full-fledged citizenship – in spite of the fact that most of them were dark complexioned mestizos. This owed to their social diversity, the influence of Spanish colonization, their romance language, as well as to the existence of an economically powerful local economic elite (Almaguer 2009).

30 By this period, the growth of the African American community in Southern California had repositioned racial hierarchies along a white-black spectrum (Pulido 2006).

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with respect to Mexican and Central American immigrants, those groups were also often lumped together for both administrative and statistical purposes as simply ‘Asians’ (Espiritu 1993). New Mexican and Central American immigrants, instead, partly because of their generally low human capital and resources,\(^{31}\) partly because they were associated to a pre-existing working class Mexican American community that was already heavily stigmatized, suffered more intense stigmatization and discrimination (Pulido 2006; Chang and Diaz-Veizades 1999). More in general, the salience of racialization was so pervasive that it contributed to mask the existence of other key social cleavages within immigrant and ethnic communities, such as class or gender. Moreover, it obscured the fact that, to an extent, old and new immigrant communities faced similar challenges: they were subject to the same exclusionary process of racialization; they often shared the same geographical spaces; they were essentially competing for the same limited social and economic opportunities (Chang and Diaz-Veizades 1999; Chung 2007).

Between the 1970s and 1990s, the new immigrant inflow led to a reconfiguration of the social composition of Los Angeles' neighborhoods, particularly in its inner city. New immigrants settled across most of the region. However, it was LA County – and particularly the poor urban areas of Central, South and East Los Angeles – which attracted the largest numbers of newcomers in relative terms, particularly those with limited economic resources and low human capital (Chang and Diaz-Veizades 1999). In addition to racial discrimination, the pre-existence of sizable communities of co-ethnics, geographical proximity to some low-wage jobs (particularly light manufacturing) as well as low costs of housing were key in favoring such concentration of low-income populations (Laslett 1996; Ortiz 1996; Chang and Diaz-Veizades 1999). Central Americans, among the poorest of the new immigrants, overwhelmingly settled in areas such as Westlake or Pico-Union, just west of downtown LA (Chang and Diaz-Veizades 1999). Mexicans and Mexican Americans continued to concentrate in areas such as East Los Angeles, but also expanded towards traditional black neighborhoods in South Los Angeles, such as Huntington Park or Bell Gardens (Hamilton and Chinchilla 2001). Despite their relatively higher socio-economic status, many Korean immigrant entrepreneurs similarly established their businesses in the inner city,\(^{32}\) developing an economic ethnic enclave which relied on a multi-ethnic low-wage workforce and similarly catered to the needs of the low-income immigrant and ethnic minority populations of the area (Chung 2007; Chang and Diaz-Veizades 1999).

In areas where long-term residents, predominantly African Americans and older generations of Mexican Americans, had witnessed the disappearance of manufacturing jobs, endured decades of institutional neglect and suffered growing poverty rates and

\(^{31}\) While ethnic Mexicans and Central Americans were an extremely diverse mix of people, both in cultural and physical terms, the arrival of a predominantly rural population with indigenous features and low literacy crystallized a negative (and racialized) understanding of the ‘Latino’ label in popular usage.

\(^{32}\) Due to the high visibility of Korean ‘ethnic’ businesses in this part of the city, the area would earn the formal name of ‘Koreatown’ in 1980 (Chung 2007).
worsening living conditions, the arrival of new immigrants led to growing inter-group tensions (Chang and Diaz-Veizades 1999; Min 1996). Issues such as economic competition or access to social services and benefits were perceived by residents through the prism of race (Chang and Diaz-Veizades 1999). African Americans resented the competition of Latinos in housing, low-wage jobs or educational opportunities, while at the same time accusing them of driving down wages and working conditions in what were previously unionized and better-paid occupations – e.g. building maintenance and janitorial work (Chang and Diaz-Veizades 1999; Milkman 2006). The conflict grew particularly acute between African Americans and Koreans, largely the result of their asymmetric customer-merchant relations – Koreans being accused of capitalizing on the misfortunes of oppressed native minorities of colors (Min 1996; Chang and Diaz-Veizades 1999). The mounting tensions among new and old residents eventually exploded on April 29, 1992, leading to four days of civil disturbances that would leave a trail of 52 casualties, 2,400 wounded, 10,000 arrests and 1 billion $ in property damage across the city of Los Angeles (Chang and Diaz-Veizades 1999; Chung 2007). While the causes of the unrest went much beyond the Black-Korean conflict, involving issues such as police brutality and institutional racism, its unfolding demonstrated how not only racialization had structured social relations in the area, but also how the language of racial and ethnic solidarity provided the most powerful source to develop collective grievances and sustain collective action in Los Angeles (Chang and Diaz-Veizades 1999). Such tensions, in spite of institutional and grassroots efforts to diffuse them, would not dissipate in the following years. Racial and ethnic cleavages remain salient well into the 21st century.

In addition to racialization, another factor contributed to creating a vulnerable immigrant population and to channeling it towards the lowest rungs of the economy: precarious legal status. Several scholars have highlighted how state authorities, by affording discretionary access to legal status to newcomers, can dramatically affect the extent and quality of social and economic opportunities afforded to them in host societies (Ngai 2014; Menjivar 2006; Castles and Davidson 2000). In this respect, legal status has proved to be a key ‘axis of stratification’ among the immigrant population, as situations of ‘deportability’ and ‘liminal legality’ have compounded the vulnerability of already marginalized populations (Menjivar 2006). Mexicans and Central Americans, for different reasons, have comprised the largest share of undocumented migrants in Los Angeles (and nationwide) in the post-1965 era (Waldinger and Bozorgmehr 1996b). In the case of Mexicans, long involved in virtually unimpeded cross-border mobility with Southern California, the gradual restrictions to their freedom of movement from the late 1920s onwards, including the imposition of quotas following the 1965 Act, mirrored the

33 The poverty rate of African Americans in South Los Angeles was slightly above 30 percent in 1990 (Chang and Diaz-Veizades 1999).
34 Ngai (2014: 17) has argued that the federal Johnson-Reed Immigration Act of 1924, in addition to introducing immigration quota restrictions for European and Asian countries, also "generated illegal immigration as the central problem in immigration law." This was done in two ways: on the one side, by institutionalizing a system of visa controls to track the effective distribution of
development of a national immigration enforcement infrastructure (Ngai 2014; Tichenor 2002). In a somehow different fashion, Central American immigrants in Los Angeles also frequently became undocumented. While the majority of them had strong grounds for obtaining asylum as they had to flee conflict situations in El Salvador and Guatemala, they were often granted only temporary humanitarian protection and refused permanent refugee status due to geopolitical reasons (Hamilton and Chinchilla 2001). While Latinos have consistently comprised the greater share among undocumented, a growing number of migrants from Asia living Southern California are in irregular situation, particularly as flows from countries such as China, South Korea, India or Bangladesh have become more diverse socio-economically and channels of highly skilled migration have become more difficult to access (Chang and Diaz-Veizades 1999).

In Los Angeles, and in the United States more generally, precarious legal status has dramatically contributed to channeling large segments of the immigrant population into the lowest rungs of the emerging restructured low-wage economy, and in transforming them into cheap and disposable labor (de Genova 2004; Menjivar and Kanstroom 2014). In theory, even undocumented immigrants are protected by existing labor law regulations and possess the same range of civil liberties and labor rights afforded to citizens and legal permanent residents (Ngai 2014). Moreover, landmark Supreme Court decisions affirmed the right of undocumented children to public education (Plyer v. Doe, 1982) and the right of undocumented migrants to receiving welfare benefits (Graham v. Richardson, 1971) (Ngai 2014). However, undocumented immigrants have rarely been in a position to have those rights enforced. At all times, such rights may be revoked as they are tied to a right to residence on which US authorities retain considerable discretionary powers (Ngai 2014; Tichenor 2002; Park 2013). The passage of 1965 Act was in fact followed by the expansion of border militarization and the increasing criminalization of undocumented migrants. The result was a surge in deportations of irregular migrants, particularly towards Mexico. Further legislation, such as the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986, if on the one hand provided a path to regularization for quotas among the different nationalities; on the other side, by establishing an apparatus of internal and border surveillance that would ensure that only those individuals in possession of proper documentation are allowed in the country. While Mexican seasonal workers were initially spared from the restrictive provisions of the 1924 Act, they were nevertheless obliged to require a visa and comply with a number of administrative requirements, including paying a head tax and the visa fee. Because of their economic value to California growers, the newly established land Border Patrol was generally lenient towards laborers lacking proper documentation, although raids and deportations were routinely conducted (particularly in times of economic recession) (Ngai 2014).

35 In the 1980s, under the presidency of Ronald Reagan, the US was actively supporting, both militarily and politically, the authoritarian regimes in El Salvador and Guatemala largely responsible for the conflict. For more information, see Booth, Wade and Walker (2010).

36 According to estimates, between 2 and 4 million immigrants from Mexico and Central America arrived unauthorized in the US as of 1980, and roughly a third of the total settled in Southern California (Waldinger and Bozorgmehr 1996b).

37 In 1968 151,000 undocumented Mexican immigrants were removed from the US territory by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). In 1976, the same agency deported 781,000 migrants (Ngai 2014).

38 When the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) was passed in 1986, it included a general amnesty for undocumented immigrants who had resided continuously in the US since January 1st, 1982; a special program for agricultural workers; a series
specific categories of undocumented migrants, on the other penalized employers for knowingly hiring undocumented migrant workers (Durand, Massey and Parrado 1999). Such legislation turned out to be particularly detrimental to undocumented immigrants, as employers frequently threatened to alert authorities of their legal status should they start demanding better working conditions, higher wages or unionization (Durand, Massey and Parrado 1999; Milkman 2006). While immigrants gained certain legal battles throughout the 1980s and 1990s, federal immigration and welfare reforms of 1996 launched another attack on immigrants by limiting newcomers’ access to welfare benefits, increasing penalties for undocumented migrants found in the country and expanding border militarization at the US-Mexico border (Tichenor 2002). Since then, the number of undocumented immigrants has continued to grow throughout the 1990s and 2000s, and with no major immigration reform as of 2017, it shows no signs of abating.

The dynamics presented above indicated that a significant portion of the immigrant population was confined in menial, unprotected jobs, denied access to even most basic social provisions and segregated from the rest of the city. Moreover, as new immigrants moved in areas of the city inhabited by pre-existing poor racial and ethnic communities, they also had to face mounting tensions. In the next section I will address the issue of political exclusion that has kept migrants at the margins of the polity in Southern California, and how they responded to it.

The Political Context of Immigrant Los Angeles

Immigrant Political Activism and the Historical Salience of Racial and Ethnic Politics

Ethnic- and race-based dynamics of political mobilization have often been taken for granted in the United States, assumed to be a natural feature of how immigrants enter the game of politics in a new context (Portes, Escobar and Arana 2008; Portes and Rumbaut 2006). Observers have noted how the primacy of race and ethnicity in US society can be traced back to its particular history of nation-building, characterized by the ‘Manifest Destiny’ imperialism of Euro-American settlers and the enslavement of the black
population (Almaguer 2009; Ngai 2014). Some scholars have moreover highlighted how immigrant incorporation in the US political system as ‘ethnics’ has been historically encouraged by major political parties, particularly in the East of the country; these parties have traditionally engaged in clientelistic relations with ‘ethnic brokers’ in order to capture the vote of particular ethno-national communities (Dahl 1961; Katzenelson 1981). Those processes combined have reinforced ethnic and pan-ethnic identification among members of immigrant communities, even across generations and national and sub-national groups, and led to the formation of cohesive ethnicized communities that could be mobilized politically by ‘political entrepreneurs’ (Brubaker 2004; Castles and Davidson 2000).

The salience of racial and ethnic politics is similarly prominent in the social and political history of Los Angeles and California. The LA context, however, differs significantly from other US regions, especially from comparable contexts such as New York City. On the one hand, during the first great migration at the turn of the 20th century, Southern California did not receive a comparable number of immigrants from Eastern Europe and Southern European Catholic countries as East Coast cities did (Lasslett 1996). This reinforced the social and cultural homogeneity of the white dominant block and limited its porosity, preventing the formation of an intermediate stratum of new immigrants that could claim gradual political incorporation by virtue of their higher racialized status (Laslett 1996; Mollenkopf and Sonenshein 2009). On the other hand, the extreme process of ‘otherization’ of immigrants of color in Southern California, who came to be seen as entirely incompatible with the values and norms of the white majority, resulted in their nearly total political disenfranchisement in the 19th century and throughout the first half of the 20th century (Chavez 2002; Laslett 1996). This exclusion, coupled with the historical dominance of business interests and the relatively limited influence of political party machines, prevented the development of similar processes of ethnic political incorporation that took place in the East, such as in the case of Italian Americans or the Irish Americans (Ignatieff 2009 [1995]; Dahl 1961). More concretely, it resulted in the formation of white homogenous city councils, and the election of white, generally socially conservative mayors which relied on the support of organized business (Sonenshein 1993). This pattern was disrupted only in 1973, with the election of African American Tom Bradley. However, for new immigrants from Mexico, Central America and

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41 Chinese immigrants, even before the federal Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 barred them from further entering the United States, were deemed ineligible for naturalization and citizenship in 1854; Japanese immigrants followed in 1893 (Almaguer 2009). Chinese Exclusion Laws would not be repealed until 1943, while it was only in 1952 that Japanese were allowed to naturalize as the Immigration and Naturalization Act (McCarran-Walter) lifted the racial requirement for citizenship.

42 Scholars have argued that Los Angeles, unlike cities like New York, has historically been dominated by business interests (Foner and Waldinger 2013; Davis 2006). Economic elites have been strongly involved in the management of public affairs, and this dynamic has reflected in the relatively limited power of local politicians and political appointees, in the fragmentation of electoral constituencies as well as in the lack of strong political machines run by mainstream parties (Mollenkopf and Sonenshein 2009). As far as immigrant communities were concerned, this state of affairs limited the attractiveness of clientelism and political patronage – widely used in the East Coast (Dahl 1961) – as a strategy to enter institutional politics (Laslett 1996).
different Asian countries, as well as for more long-standing communities of color (with the exception of African Americans), those barriers would largely remain intact well into the 21st century (Sonenshein 1993; Mollenkopf and Sonenshein 2009).

In spite of their limited resources and low socio-economic status, Mexican Americans began to develop an organizational infrastructure in Southern California as early as 1937, with the foundation of the LA Chapter of the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC). It was followed by organizations such as the Mexican American Movement, Inc. (MAM) in 1942, the Community Service Organizations (CSO) in 1947, the Association of Mexican American Educators (AMAE) in the 1950s and the Mexican American Political Association in 1959 (Muñoz 2007; Chavez 2002). Those organizations had fairly different structures and goals. LULAC, an organization that remains to this day, was a federation of civil rights groups committed to improving the legal standing of Mexican Americans, for example by challenging school segregation in court43 (Muñoz 2007). MAM, and later AMAE, were mainly concerned with increasing access to education and other social services for Mexican American youth (Muñoz 2007). CSO was established as a community-based organization with the objective of promoting voter registration and naturalization among the Mexican American community, while also mobilizing on issues such as police brutality and school segregation (Chavez 2002). MAPA was created with the goal of developing an independent political infrastructure that could be used to mobilize Mexican Americans without relying on the support of the local Democratic party (Muñoz 2007). What all these organizations had in common, however, was a reformist approach to politics, a firm commitment to American democratic institutions and traditional values, as well as anti-Communism (Chavez 2002).

Aware of the discrimination encountered by ethnic Mexicans, those groups nevertheless believed assimilation to be the best path forward for the successful inclusion of old and new migrants, and encouraged them to leave behind Mexican traditions, adopt English language and acquire US citizenship (Muñoz 2007). Education, declined in a liberal way, was seen as the main tool for Mexican Americans to gain their acceptance as first-class citizens. While those organizations “acknowledged that Mexican Americans were victims of racism, ...they did not promote a nonwhite racial identity for their people [; i]nstead, they promoted the image of Mexican Americans as a white ethnic group that had little in common with African Americans” (Muñoz 2007: 64). MAPA, together with LULAC, was probably the most influential of these organizations. Disinterested in creating a third political party (like militants of La Raza Unida Party would try to do a decade later), MAPA saw itself as a nonpartisan organization with a clear ethnic focus on Mexican Americans.44

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43 For example, LULAC played a role in the lawsuit that brought to the 1946 decision by the Ninth US Circuit Court of Appeals in the Mendez v. Westminster case, which ended formal legal school segregation in the state of California (Muñoz 2007).

44 In 1960 MAPA became part of a larger national umbrella organization committed to the same objectives, the Political Association of Spanish-Speaking Organizations (PASSO).
and did not seek to alliances or political coalitions with other non-white minorities (Chavez 2002: 33).

This is not to say that there were no leftist Mexican American organizations in Southern California at the time. The Asociacion Nacional Mexico Americana (ANMA), a political membership organization briefly active in the early 1950s, advocated for the political, civil, and economic rights of ethnic Mexicans (Chavez 2002). While not Communist, ANMA’s members were sympathetic to socialist ideas, singled out institutional racism as the main problem of US society and called for the unity of Mexican American and Mexican immigrants, bound together by their common working-class fate (Chavez 2002). The political climate of the 1940s and early 1950s, however, was hardly conducive to more radical political struggles, both within ethnic communities and mainstream societies. Rather, it was shaped by the politics of ‘super-patriotism’ – a reflection of WWII US involvement against the German Nazi regime and the beginning of the Cold War – and the following anti-Communist hysteria led by right-wing politicians such as Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin (Muñoz 2007). Organizations such as ANMA did not last more than a few years. Such climate also affected the participation of immigrants in labor unions, the only mainstream organizations potentially open to them. Despite a patchy early history of racial hostility by organized labor, the 1930s and the 1940s saw unskilled and semi-skilled Mexican American workers enter the ranks of the industrial unions affiliated to the new Congress of Industrial Relations (CIO) federation and, in some cases, even the crafts unions of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) (Milkman 2000a; Milkman 2006). However, McCarthyism played an important role in purging labor unions of their most progressive leadership, thus severing the links between mainstream organized labor and grassroots social movements and limiting labor outreach towards the most disempowered segments of the multi-ethnic working class (Tait, 2016). Despite some laudable attempts of unions to organize ethnic Mexicans, particularly in agriculture, the presence of ethnic Mexicans (and other communities) in labor unions in Southern California remained extremely limited (Chavez 2002).

During the 1950s, gradual settlement and rise in numbers of the immigrant population, as well as growing organizational presence did not translate in greater political power of Mexican Americans. If the Asian community remained relatively small until the 1970s, the larger Mexican American community was finally able to elect Edward Roybal to the LA city council in 1949 (Laslett 1996). Roybal, a conservative politician of distant Mexican ancestry who had grown up in the heavily Mexican neighborhood of

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45 Because of its left leanings, ANMA was identified as a state security threat under the Internal Security (McCarran) Act of 1950. Continuous surveillance and harassment of the organization’s members led to its demise in 1954. However, the organization still remained committed to reform: “though accused of being ‘un-American’, ANMA was the opposite, for it promoted reform of American society, not revolution, and the reform it sought was protection of the constitutional rights of all, including Mexican immigrants as well as Mexican Americans” (Chavez 2002:18).

46 Crafts unions affiliated to the American Federation of Labor (AFL) were generally hostile to including immigrants and people of color within their ranks (Tait 2016).
Boyle Heights, had played a pivotal role in the formation of CSO to support his political ambitions, and would also be involved in the formation of MAPA (Chavez 2002). While holding limited influence within City Hall, Roybal nevertheless became the spokesperson for the local ethnic Mexican community throughout the 1950s. However, once Roybal was elected to Congress in 1962, leaving his seat vacant, he was unable to have another Mexican American elected. He was instead replaced by Gilbert Lindsay, an African American who would keep that seat until 1990 – leaving ethnic Mexicans without representation in the city council until 1985, when Richard Alatorre was elected in another district. While the immigrant naturalization rate began to steadily increase from the 1950s onwards, Mexican Americans (as well as other minority groups) were still heavily penalized by the political fragmentation of the LA region, including districting clearly engineered to favor majorities of white voters in the city and most of the county (Laslett 1996).

Things began to change in the early and mid-1960s. The election of Democrat John F. Kennedy to the US presidency in 1960 marked the beginning of a new liberal era, while the African American civil rights movement broke out of southeastern states to spread across the country. One of the side effects of those development was enhanced educational opportunities for minority youth, including Mexican Americans, who were now able to access higher education in greater numbers thanks to federally-funded programs established and implemented during the Johnson administration (Muñoz 2007). By the late 1960s, frustrated by the lack of social and political progress and the excessively accommodating stance of reformist organizations, and galvanized by the examples of the Black Power movement and the white New Left, a new generation of US-born Mexican American and Asian American youth took the front political stage (Pulido 2006). It is difficult to summarize in little space the diversity and richness of the political activism that developed during this period – a myriad of organizations, political study groups and collectives were founded between 1968 and the early 1970s, not only in Los Angeles but nationwide. In Southern California, movements of second-generation immigrants during

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47 Roybal, despite being firmly anti-Communist and generally socially conservative, gained prominence for speaking out against the abuses of the LAPD towards Mexican Americans, or for opposing measures that he saw as discriminatory towards minorities of color (particularly in housing). However, he could not mitigate the impact of large infrastructural redevelopment plans that deeply affected Mexican American communities in LA’s inner city, such as the construction of the Golden State freeway (which would cut through Boyle Heights) and the building of Dodgers Stadium in the working class neighborhood of Chavez Ravine (Chavez 2002).

48 The decision not to incorporate East Los Angeles as part of the city of Los Angeles was also motivated by the concern of the white population regarding the potential of a growing political weight of Latinos in the city (Foner and Waldinger 2009).

49 Education for Mexican Americans was limited to segregated schools in Los Angeles throughout most of the first half of the 20th century. Educational possibilities in the 1930s and 1940s were limited to those sponsored by YMCA, while other limited opportunities opened up for veterans in 1940s and 1950s (Muñoz 2007).

50 MAPA itself had been established following the clear lack of Democratic party support received by Roybal as well as Henry Lopez (another Mexican American politicians) in their runs for state office during the 1950s (Chavez, 2002). Mexican Americans moreover contested the lack of influence and of upward mobility in the local Democratic party. The loss of Roybal’s LA city council seat was a severe blow to MAPA’s reputation, and marked the virtual exclusion of Mexican Americans from local politics (Chavez 2002)
this time revolved around four large themes: education, opposition to the Vietnam war, community service and electoral political mobilization. Perhaps the most famous political mobilization of the time was that for the establishment of Ethnic Studies programs across the country, spearhead by organizations such as the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF) in San Francisco, or various Mexican American organizations such as the United Mexican American Students (UMAS) or the Mexican American Student Association (MASA) in Southern California. A variety of Mexican American student organizations from the southwest would converge into the Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan (MEChA) in 1969 and begin to engage in political activism over a wide variety of issues, from education to drug abuse and police brutality (Muñoz 2007). The opposition to the war in Vietnam also became an important moment of politicization, both for Mexican Americans (who served in high numbers in the military) and for Asian Americans (which in Los Angeles were predominantly Japanese Americans), who identified with the ‘popular liberation struggles’ of the South-East Asian population (Pulido 2006; Wei 1993). The LA-movement also included paramilitary organizations such as the Brown Berets, a Mexican American group structured on the self-defense model of the Black Panther Party (BPP) (Pulido 2006). In parallel, other activists established LA chapters of La Raza Unida Party, an organization intended to operate as a veritable third independent political party at all levels of institutional politics for the representation and support of Mexican Americans (Muñoz 2007; Chavez 2002).

The most visible Mexican American organizations of the time, such as MEChA, La Raza Unida, or the Brown Berets, were largely nationalist in vision and scope. They advocated an oppositional Chicanismo that based itself on traditional Mexican culture and rejected mainstream (white) US culture. Such organizations therefore largely viewed Mexican Americans, or ‘Chicanos’,51 as a homogenous non-white group oppressed by decades of US imperialism and racist institutions. They viewed their struggle going beyond class differences, and whose “basis for unity would be their pride in Mexican ethnicity and culture” (Muñoz 2007: 92). They also vehemently rejected the assimilationist views of the old political guard embodied by MAPA and other Mexican American organizations, arguing instead for more or less open revolutionary struggles (Chavez 2002).

Nevertheless, a handful of radical organizations of the time, including Japanese American East Wind, Mexican American Centro de Accion Social (CASA) and multi-ethnic August 29th Movement were deeply influenced by Marxism-Leninism. Maoism was particularly appealing, because of Mao’s role as nonwhite philosopher and his theoretical work on China’s national struggle against foreign imperialism (Pulido 2006). As Pulido has argued (2006: 135), “Maoism, or some version of it, enabled [radical] nonwhites to

51 The term ‘Chicano’ was a disparaging label initially used to denote people of Mexican descent of working class background. However, during the 1960s and early 1970s it was claimed by student activists in a positive light and came to refer to someone who supported the Chicano student movement (Chavez 2002).
engage Marxism in a meaningful way, as it allowed them to merge their commitments to class and racial politics under the rubric of the nation.” This meant, however, that even when activists elaborated radical anti-capitalist projects, they did primarily so through the lens of race, by conceptualizing their different racialized communities as ‘oppressed nations’ (Pulido 2002; 2006). Such a vision steered those organizations towards a primary commitment towards their ethnic and racial communities. It did not encourage the formation of inter-ethnic collaborations nor solidarity towards more recent immigrants, whose social and political history (as well as political interests) were seen as different (Chavez 2002; Pulido 2006).

Among Asian American organizations, there were some attempts to forge multi-ethnic collaborations. For example, East Wind regularly supported the political actions of other groups, such as Chinese activists in Chinatown, Chicano groups or African Americans. However, the most notable example of organization trying to bridge the divide between older ethnic communities and new immigrants was CASA, at least in its early phase. CASA was established between 1968 and 1969 by labor organizer Bert Corona as a hybrid organization with the aim to defend the rights of undocumented workers and promote their political organization (Chavez 2002). CASA, affiliated to a national organization named Hernandad Mexicana Nacional, played an important role in the history of Los Angeles because it was the only known organization of the time that attempted to organize undocumented migrants—something that not even Cesar Chavez was prepared to do (Garcia 1994). Corona’s leadership of CASA, however, was short-lived. After the immigrant membership peaked at around 4,000 people in 1973, the organization was taken over by more radical second-generation Mexican American activists the following year. The younger activists tried to steer the organization towards an ideology of sin fronteras, a trans-border revolutionary nationalism that viewed Mexican Americans, Mexican immigrants and Mexicans living south of the border as part of the same community, all united in the same struggle against US oppression and imperialism (Muñoz 2007; Pulido 2006). Their goal of uniting Mexicans across borders was ultimately unsuccessful. Ideological dogmatism and neglect of services alienated the original immigrant membership, and state repression led to organizational disbandment by the late 1970s (Chavez 2002; Pulido 2006).

Immigrant Organizing Under Adverse Conditions

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52 For the people of immigrant descent involved in those organizations, the improvement of their own political condition and immediate interests were reasons strong enough to protest and mobilize for. Their organizational ideologies therefore generally reflected the acknowledgment that differences existed between second-class Mexican American and Asian American citizens on the one side, and the new immigrants on the other. Similarly, the most important multi-ethnic and multi-racial labor movement of the time, the one led by Cesar Chavez in the California Central Valley, was initially uninterested in organizing new immigrants, particularly undocumented immigrants. Yet, Cesar Chavez also explicitly rejected Chicano nationalism, being much more interested in advancing the cause of farmworkers and improving their working conditions on a class basis (Muñoz 2007).
The period between the late 1970s and the early 1990s was characterized by a conservative political backlash, both at the local and national level, which ended the possibility for radical revolutionary politics and stifled grassroots mobilization (Muñoz 2007; Nicholls and Uitermark 2016, chapter 6). Those years, which saw the emergence of some of the immigrant worker organizations analyzed in this dissertation, were hardly conducive to immigrant, class-based contentious politics. First, local and national discursive opportunities discouraged political action across ethnic lines, while anti-immigrant sentiment and legislation negatively impacted the legal, social, and economic status of newly arrived immigrants and asylum seekers from non-Western countries. If such conditions slowed down immigrants’ access to institutional politics, they were likewise expected to prevent immigrants, especially undocumented ones, from engaging in contentious political action. Second, in spite of scattered support from local politicians and a handful of labor and advocacy organizations, immigrant worker organizations received limited backing from both mainstream politics and civil society in their early years of activity.

The election of Ronald Reagan to the US presidency marked the beginning of a conservative trend that resulted in the dismantlement of what remained of the welfare state, the pursuit of an aggressive neoliberal economic policy and interventionist foreign policy, and a mounting attack towards the national civil society progressive infrastructure and the growing immigrant communities (Muñoz 2007; Milkman 2006). In California, the growth of the immigrant community throughout the 1970s and 1980s was met by increasing frustration and concerns by the native population, particularly with respect to undocumented immigrants. The already mentioned IRCA, expansion of the deportation regime between 1980s and 1990s, as well as state and federal legislation of the mid-1990s all signaled increasing hostility towards immigrants (Nicholls and Uitermark 2016). As we have already seen, this period, characterized by the decline of labor union influence and economic restructuring, was also marked by rising socio-economic inequalities which overwhelmingly affected communities of color. Moreover, longer-standing ethnic and racial communities, as shown by the Civil Unrest of 1992, scapegoated newcomers for their own worsening conditions. Such period was not conducive to internal leftist politics. As Muñoz has argued (2007: 207), “compared with the 1960s, the politics of 1980s resembled the super-patriotism and anti-communism of the 1940s and 1950s.”

Most of the radical organizations described in the previous section, plagued by internal ideological conflict, police infiltrators and lack of steady resource inflows, disbanded in the early 1970s. Mexican American and Asian American activists achieved very little of their ambitious plans. Besides failing to mobilize significant grassroots opposition to local political institutions, unlike African Americans they also failed to secure greater access to institutional politics. After a series of white, conservative mayors – including Norris Poulson (1953-1961) and Sam Yorty (1961-1973) – LA city voters selected in 1973 Democrat Tom Bradley, the first black mayor in a major US city (Davis 2006).
Elected in a ‘bi-racial’ coalition that included west-side Jewish liberals and the black communities, Bradley would remain the mayor of Los Angeles for 20 years, until 1993 (Sonenshein 1993). Yet, while Bradley appointed a number of Mexican Americans and Asian Americans in important political positions, the latter were generally unable to gain significant political power (Sonenshein 1993).

Nicholls and Uitermark (2013; 2016, chapter 7), in their history of immigrant activism in Los Angeles, have argued that local civil society went through important transformations as a result of shifting national and local government policies. Throughout the 1970s, using available federal-funded programs, local officials and private philanthropies encouraged community organizations to take up a greater role in service provision. In order to access government funding, organizations had to professionalize and conform to government norms and expectations, while at the same time abandon explicit political action. In its early years, in order to undermine the appeal of politicized civil society organizations, the Bradley coalition developed a progressive political platform that emphasized ethnic and racial justice and advocated for greater social redistribution of resources to minority groups (Nicholls and Uitermark 2013). In the early 1980s, however, as rollback neoliberalism became more influential and federal funding dramatically decreased, the priorities of the Bradley coalition dramatically changed (Nicholls and Uitermark 2013; Davis 2006). In spite of its initial progressive agenda of social spending, and its pledge to address poverty and invest in disadvantaged inner-city ethnic communities such as East LA or Watts, the Bradley coalition soon instead prioritized spending on infrastructure (especially ports and airport) and downtown real estate redevelopment (Davis 2006; Sonenshein 1993). More in general, the early 1980s witnessed declining government funding to the local civil society (Nicholls and Uitermark 2016). This resulted in the disbanding of several small-scale community organizations and in the significant downsizing of larger organizations – i.e. service providers, but also advocacy groups (Nicholls and Uitermark 2016; Muñoz 2007).

Between the 1980s and the early 1990s, emerging immigrant organizations could thus count on limited institutional and mainstream civil society support. At the institutional level, the growth of particular ethnic communities did not significantly alter the local balance of political power. Mexican Americans were finally able to elect two city councilmen between the mid-1980s and early 1990s, while Asian Americans elected their first in 1985, but both communities remained dramatically under-represented in local politics. Moreover, the unfolding of the 1992 Civil Unrest, marked by the LAPD’s refusal to protect Latino- and Korean-owned businesses from looting and destruction, showed that both communities still held very limited influence in local politics (Chung 2007; Chang and Diaz-Veizades 1999). Labor unions, their membership and political influence decimated, were hardly in a position to provide significant resources to labor-oriented
immigrant groups. Moreover, while there were notable exceptions, organized labor remained generally reluctant to welcome non-Western immigrants, particularly undocumented ones, in their rank-n-file (Tait 2016; Fine 2006). Even when union organizers expressed sympathy for the plight of undocumented immigrants, they often judged that the newcomers’ precarious legal conditions, possible temporary presence or supposed political apathy would make them ‘unorganizable’ (Milkman 2006). Those concerns were also motivated by the fact that immigrants were often employed in sectors of the economy – e.g. building maintenance, domestic work, services – which were very volatile and extremely difficult to organize (Fine 2006). Overall, while unions gradually began to invest more and more resources in immigrant organizing, immigrant worker organizations and undocumented immigrants were cut off from the mainstream labor movement until the late 1990s. In fact, some immigrant worker organizations in their early years developed in parallel and in partial competition with unions (Fine 2006; see chapters 5 and 6).

The late 1970s and 1980s was not a period entirely devoid of political activism in Los Angeles. However, given the political climate, much of the political action revolved around foreign policy issues, such as South African apartheid or US intervention in Central America. As Los Angeles received large numbers of El Salvadorans and Guatemalans asylum seekers at the turn of the decade, a number of faith-based organizations and advocacy groups mobilized to raise awareness about the conflict – and particularly about the US government support of brutal authoritarian dictatorships – and to protect the growing number of refugees who were denied legal protection and were being deported by the US government (Chinchilla, Hamilton and Loucky 2009). While the ‘Sanctuary Movement’ was mainly composed of local religious groups, students and teachers, newly formed immigrant organizations played a key role in the mobilization (Nicholls and Uitermark 2016). Those often mirrored the ideological political spectrum in the countries of origin and brought to Los Angeles new repertoires of political organizing (Chinchilla, Hamilton and Loucky 2009; Chinchilla and Hamilton 2001). In parallel, Los Angeles witnessed the emergence of a number of new organizations established by the new immigrant groups, such as Koreans or Filipinos (Park 1999; Chung 2007). While all in all those organizations remained oriented towards homeland politics or focused on their own ethnic communities, they would play an important role in establishing an organizational infrastructure for future immigrant rights organizations of the late 1980s and early 1990s (see chapter 3).

53 A few notable cases of immigrant organizing from the late 1980s and early 1990s are referenced in the collective volume edited by Milkman (2000). Those include the organizing drive of Latino workers in the LA manufacturing sector (Zabin 2000) and in construction (Milkman and Wong 2000), as well as the famous SEIU Justice for Janitors (J4J) campaign (Fisk, Mitchell and Erickson 2000; see also Waldinger et al. 1998). However, with the exception of J4J, as the authors themselves recognize, input for mobilization in those campaigns mostly came from immigrants themselves rather than from unions.

54 This is a major difference from a city like New York, where labor unions had established connections with political parties and began organizing earlier waves of European immigrants at a relatively early stage, therefore facilitating their political incorporation in an ‘ethnic politics’ framework (Foner and Waldinger 2013).
The radical organizations of the late 1960s and early 1970s, in spite of their short lives, left a long-lasting political legacy. One of the most visible accomplishments was the establishment of Ethnic Studies programs and departments across the nation, including Los Angeles. Given access to alternative radical scholarship, generations of students during the 1980s and 1990s would become politicized through their experiences at the Chicano Studies Department or the Asian American Studies Center at the University of California-Los Angeles (see chapter 3, and Brodkin 2007). Activists of the period also continued their political engagement through other organizations during the 1980s and 1990s, joining progressive labor unions such as the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Union (HERE), civil rights advocacy organizations such as National Coalition for Redress and Reparations (NCRR) or progressive philanthropies such as the Liberty Hill Foundation (Pulido 2006). More in general, the long-lasting legacy of those movements – no doubt owing to African Americans as well – was to enshrine ‘racial politics’ and ‘identity politics’ as key axes of political mobilization in Southern California, whether in contentious politics or in institutional politics. As Ngai (2014: 263) has argued, by mirroring their own experience to the one of African Americans rather than older immigrant generations of European descent, many Asian American and Chicano activists “directly challenged the nationalist narrative of assimilation and proposed, instead, to read immigration and ethnic history through the lenses of race, conquest, and colonialism.”

While the organizations examined in this research developed during this period of widespread immigrant hostility and ultra-racialized politics, their influence weakened from the mid-2000s onwards. Somehow paradoxically, such period coincided with the improvement of political prospects of the new immigrants, particularly Mexicans and Mexican Americans, in Southern California. Growing naturalization rates transformed the Latino community – now comprising a heterogeneous population of ethnic Mexicans and Central Americans – into a potentially influential voting bloc (Mollenkopf and Sonenshein 2009). In parallel, labor unions underwent major transformations that dramatically reversed their stance towards ethnic and immigrant communities. Under the new leadership of former SEIU Director John Sweeney, the AFL-CIO, the national confederation of labor organizations, started investing in immigrant organizing in 1995 (Milkman 2000b). In 2000, the AFL-CIO also approved a resolution that committed organized labor to supporting amnesty and regularization for undocumented immigrants (Milkman 2006). Los Angeles was the epicenter of this transformation. Miguel Contreras, a Mexican American and son of farmworkers in California Central Valley, became the head of the LA County Federation of Labor in 1996 (Milkman 2006). Maria Elena Durazo, a Mexican American from a similar background, took over the LA County Fed and maintained the post of Treasurer until 2014.

55 For more information, see also Milkman (2000a; 2006).
In the early 2000s, discursive and political opportunities for leftist immigrant activism in LA thus opened up. Local unions, together with progressive academics and newly formed community-based organizations, joined forces to revitalize the stagnant local civil society and promote a political discourse of cross-ethnic social and economic justice (Nicholls and Uitermark 2016; Milkman, Bloom and Narro 2010). The gradual incorporation of immigrant leaders, particularly from Mexico and Central America, within labor unions also facilitated the growth of their political influence in city-level affairs in Los Angeles. In 2005, after a first failed attempt in 2001, Antonio Villaraigosa became the first Latino mayor in a major US city – an event that would have been unthinkable in LA just a few decades earlier. These latest developments, here only briefly sketched, therefore suggest a more favorable environment for immigrant political mobilization in recent times. Why those dynamics resulted in the fragmentation of the immigrant worker rights movement is the subject of the last section of this dissertation (chapter 6 and the conclusion).

The Research Puzzle(s) Reframed.

In this chapter I have placed my empirical study within the broader social history of Los Angeles and Southern California. This historical overview can help us appreciate both the relatively limited opportunities and the formidable constraints that emerging immigrant worker organizations faced between the 1980s and 1990s. In the first section I showed how Southern California, built around social and cultural homogeneity, received an unexpected flow of international migrants from non-European regions that completely reshaped its social make-up. In the second section I linked international migration to global and local processes of economic restructuring. I described how most newcomers, entering a labor market that was already skewed to the disadvantage of people of color, were incorporated at the lowest rungs of the economy as permanent disposable and cheap labor. Racialization and legal precarization underpinned this dynamic.

In the third and fourth sections I turned my attention to processes of political incorporation and participation of immigrants. I described how, until very recently, local institutions kept migrants of non-European origins at the margins of the political community in Southern California. Political, economic and social elites contributed to creating an unwelcoming political climate that reached high levels of hostility during the 1980s and early 1990s. Unwelcoming institutions included, to an extent, labor unions. Conversely, I have tried to show how immigrant communities tried to address their socio-economic and political exclusion by mobilizing at the grassroots level. They did so mostly by appealing to notions of ethnic and, at a later stage, racial solidarity. Rather than engaging in inter-ethnic mobilization and workplace organizing, they decided to privilege nationalist identities and to focus on their specific communities. Activists struggled to define their immediate constituency and to reconcile the political interests of newly
arrived immigrants and more long-standing ethnic communities. Finally, I briefly sketched how much the social and political context has changed since the late 1990s, significantly opening up political and discursive opportunities for immigrant right activism.

Outlined these factors, we can go back to the initial puzzle(s) of the research. Between the late 1980s and 1990s, a new set of immigrant-led organizations emerged in Los Angeles. Unlike the second-generation immigrant organizations of the late 1960s and early 1970s, who were primarily concerned with improving conditions of their long-standing ethnic communities, those immigrant worker organizations explicitly targeted new immigrants, particularly the most disenfranchised and politically powerless among them. In so doing, unlike previous immigrant organizations (both mainstream and radical), they emphasized class relations and class solidarity in order to create both multi-ethnic constituencies and multi-ethnic and multi-racial coalitions with other organizations. Critically, they were also able to attain substantial success and political visibility in spite of limited institutional backing, and of lack of strong support from mainstream civil society. It is the combination of all these aspects—a resurgence of contentious political action under conditions of political hostility and limited support; the unlikely politicization of a weak and under-resourced membership base; the popularity of a movement ideology promoting an intersectional understanding of immigrants’ subordinate conditions; the development of multi-ethnic constituencies and multi-ethnic coalitions—that makes the emergence of these organizations at this particular time quite puzzling. Conversely, what adds to this puzzle is the fact that, once political conditions improved and external support from civil society grew—the immigrant worker rights movement began to fragment. Organizations abandoned their most innovative campaigns and contentious actions, and some of them resorted to traditional ethnic-based mobilization and ethnic politics. In the chapters that follow I will attempt to provide an explanation of the various factors and conditions that can help us understand those puzzles.
CHAPTER 3. IMMIGRATION, IDEOLOGY AND THE ‘THIRD WORLD’: ORGANIZATIONAL INNOVATION IN THE EARLY DAYS OF THE LA IMMIGRANT RIGHTS MOVEMENT.

Abstract
This paper asks the questions of how, and through which processes and channels, migrants are able to innovate political action in societies of settlement. Drawing on a qualitative analysis of three key immigrant-led advocacy organizations established in Los Angeles between the 1980s and the 1990s, which imported a notion of multi-ethnic, class-based activism in contrast with prevalent local notions of ethnic and racial politics, I argue that this process was possible due to a combination of the following factors: first, the establishment in Los Angeles of settled immigrant communities from a wide range of non-European countries, including from areas under extremely polarized, Cold War-style political conflict; second, the forging of long-lasting transnational connections between immigrant ethnic communities and homeland politics, which resulted in the development of a leftist infrastructure in Los Angeles; third, a process of social construction of solidarity through bounded solidarity between 1.5 and second generation immigrants on one side, and newly arrived immigrants and activist in the homeland regions on the other.

Keywords: Immigrant Organizations; Organizational Innovation; Immigration; Transnationalism; Bounded Solidarity.

Introduction

Over the last few decades, Los Angeles has proved to be a major hub of leftist immigrant activism in the United States. Researchers have observed the resurgence of a multilayered conceptualization of class as a key organizing principle within those organizations, and witnessed how certain groups developed innovative, sophisticated ideological understandings of how immigrants are broadly affected by socio-economic inequalities, institutional racism and sexism in US society (Milkman, Bloom and Narro 2010; Fine 2006; Louie 2001; Chung 2007). The emergence of a multi-ethnic, class-based immigrant rights movement contrasts with mainstream accounts of urban politics in the history of major US cities, and especially Los Angeles (Sonenshein 1993; Chavez 2002; Ngin and Torres 2001). Scholars maintain that, in the US as much as in Southern California, organized political action has historically revolved primarily (if not exclusively) around ethnic and racial identification, with ‘ethnic politics’ (as well as ‘racial politics’) shaping the form and content of political engagement by newcomers, their near and distant offspring as well as racialized minorities (Dahl 1961; Portes and Rumbaut 2006; Ngai 2014; Chavez 2002). If this is indeed the case, where have alternative and potentially conflicting modes of political participation come from, and through what channels? Researchers have tried to explain
the emergence of immigrant class politics and multi-ethnic coalition-building by underscoring the influential role of pre-existing LA organizations and institutions. For instance, they highlighted how US labor unions, both through the efforts of their most innovative locals and through the sponsorship of labor advocacy organizations and multi-ethnic coalitions, chiefly contributed to the development of a local pro-migrant organizational infrastructure, moreover channeling organizing across ethnic and racial groups and developing a broader social and economic justice agenda (Milkman 2000a; 2006; Pastor 2001b; Franck and Wong 2004). Economists and urban planners have instead underscored the legacy of the 1992 Civil Unrest in shifting the local discursive and political context, prompting city officials and foundations to support the establishment of workplace-oriented, multi-ethnic and multi-racial coalitions to address inner city poverty (Regalado 1994; Pastor 1995; 2001b; Pastor and Prichard 2012). Finally, scholars of religious activism have emphasized the role of newly emerged progressive churches in providing a radical vision of social change grounded in Liberation Theology and the ‘preferential option for the poor’ (Hamilton and Chinchilla 2001; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2008).

While contributing to our understanding of the LA case, these explanations neglect two basic aspects of the local immigrant rights movement: the intrinsically transnational context in which its members have been embedded since the beginning; the agentic role of migrants themselves as synthesizers and producers of new ideas and practices. In this paper, drawing on the social movement literature on innovation and on transnational migration studies, I intend to show how migrants played a key role in importing and recombining political organizational knowledge in Los Angeles for the purpose of establishing a class-based immigrant rights movement. The development of sustained migratory flows linking Los Angeles to a number of locations in the non-Western world, including key sites of Cold War-era political struggles such as South Korea, El Salvador and the Philippines, paved the ground for the arrival in Southern California of migrants with various leftist-leaning political orientations. The experience of racial and ethnic discrimination in the US by newly arrived immigrants and second generations alike was instrumental in intensifying the circulation of knowledge across those sites, sustaining the ‘social construction of similarity’ that allowed non-US knowledge to flow and be received by LA-settled migrants as relevant and appropriate for their own particular political and practical purposes in Southern California.

I demonstrate this argument by describing the early history of three key immigrant rights organizations which were founded in Los Angeles between the 1980s and 1990s: the Educación Popular del Sur de California (IDEPSCA) and its predecessor La Escuela de la Comunidad, the Korean Immigrant Workers Advocates (KIWA) and the Pilipino Workers Center (PWC).

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*For an analysis of the significance of the unrest, see chapter 2, chapter 5 and Baldassare (1994) and Min (1996).*
Innovation, Ideology and Immigrant Organizations in a Transnational Context.

Innovation may be broadly defined as an idea or practice that is seen as novel in a given context (Rogers 1982). In the context of organizational and social movement studies, scholars have been especially interested in how innovative ideas and practices translate in new forms of political participation, alternative organizational forms, as well as novel strategies and tactics of contentious politics (Clemens 1993; McAdam 1983; Tilly 1995; Tarrow 1995). Innovation is often noteworthy because on the one hand it may allow pre-existing organizations to overcome and survive the various challenges they are confronted with throughout their trajectory – e.g. political repression, lack of funding, ineffectiveness, lack of appeal to constituents, etc. (Minkoff 2002; Wang and Soule 2016), while on the other it may empower previously marginalized groups to create new organizational structures that allow them to overcome particular barriers to their participation in public affairs (Clemens 1993; McAdam 1983). Social movement scholars’ concern for innovation has often been limited to how ideas translate in protest tactics, through selection from available collective action repertoires (Tilly 1978; McAdam 1983), or in organizational models (Clemens 1993: 758). Yet, repertoires of contention or organizational models are not neutral cultural constructions with mere instrumental value, but also embed specific ideological interpretations of social reality and of social change in the context of existing power relations (Wimmer 2008; Berger and Luckmann 1967; Simons and Ingram 1997). Political activists have historically developed and deployed ideologies to interpret and challenge distribution of resources, group stigmatization, political exclusion and other forms of social inequality (Melucci 1995; Wilson 1973). More concretely, they have drawn on ideologies to envision particular organizational structures and forms, to define organizational missions, goals and activities, as well as to determine the boundaries of their target membership and constituencies (Pulido 2006; Chavez 2002).

Environmental constraints and opportunities – including uneven distribution of resources, changes in modes of governance, demographic and cultural change, availability of new technologies – are all important factors in spurring innovation in a given context (McCammon 2012; McAdam 1983; Tilly 1995). Innovation, or new knowledge, is usually produced through diffusion and of recombination of old and newly acquired knowledge (Rogers 1982; McAdam and Rucht 1993). Social networks are, in this respect, key conduits of innovation, implying transmitters – those who import new knowledge from an external context – and adopters – those who receive it, but also recombine it and

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I define ideologies as a broader set of beliefs about the social world and its functioning, including ideas about the desirability and rightfulness of particular social arrangements as well as the appropriate course of action required to achieve or maintain those arrangements (Wilson 1973: 91; Simons and Ingram 1997: 784). This definition rejects the typical negative connotation of ideology as ‘false consciousness’ in the Marxist tradition, but also an overtly neutral meaning that sees ideology as any set of ideas and beliefs (Scott 2004). Rather, consistent with the definition provided above, I see ideologies as theoretical constructs that reflect and describe existing power relations, and that are therefore concerned with providing justifications and modes of action to either reproduce or challenge the organization of such relations (Berger and Luckmann 1967; Wilson 1973; Beetham 2013).
repurposes it to fit new contexts (McAdam and Rucht 1993). Diffusion, while relying on some sort of pre-existing inter-personal networks, also appears to imply attributes such as trust, shared identity and sense of similarity (Tarrow 2005). Particularly when knowledge circulates between distant localities and groups, the extent to which particular ideas and practices will be shared (by transmitters) and accepted (by adopters) seems to depend on the degree of social similarity both parties attribute to each other and their respective political struggles (Snow and Benford 1999; Chabot and Duyvendak 2002).

Nevertheless, theories of innovation have been rarely applied to the context of international migration. Social movement theorists have tended to focus on innovation produced by professional activists from the Global North, most often white (or in a relative position of privilege) and relatively mobile (McAdam and Ruth 1993; Keck and Sikkink 1998; but see Chabot and Duvenak 2002, and Choudry and Kapoor 2010). Scholars have thus paid less attention to how different (and less privileged) categories of people, such as long-term transnational migrants from the Global South and their children, contribute to innovating social, cultural, economic and political life in Western societies despite exclusion (or partial inclusion) from the polity (Sarabia 2011; Kasinitz 2004). Scholars in the field of epistemology have made a similar point, underscoring that particular bodies of knowledge – i.e. those that do not conform to accepted methodologies of academic scientific inquiry, those who adopt a feminist or racialized experiential standpoint, or those who are not Western-centric or are produced by non-Westerners – are often denied the status of ‘knowledge’ and remain under-researched (Harding 1987; Bernal 2002; Choudry and Kapoor 2010; Casas-Cortés, Osterweil, and Powell 2011). These considerations have therefore invited researchers to focus more on marginalized social actors as knowledge-producers, and to reflect on the implications that such knowledge may have for broader processes of social and political change in particular contexts (Casas-Cortés, Osterweil, and Powell 2011; Choudry and Kapoor 2010; Sarabia 2011).

Over the last few decades, increasing economic globalization, rising socio-economic inequalities within and across countries, persistent geopolitical humanitarian crises and continuous technological improvements in transportation and communication have arguably fostered human mobility across regions (Sassen 1991; Vertovec 2009). Pre-existing relations among countries are key to channel initial migration flows, after which the development of structural networks between sending and receiving areas makes further migration less costly and more likely to continue (Massey 1990). While transnational migrant networks are often studied with respect only to their role in perpetuating migrations, they also serve as infrastructures connecting multiple sites of social, cultural, economic and political activity, comprising of migrants, non-migrants in

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58 A notable exception is the work of migration scholar Peggy Levitt (2001), who developed a ‘social remittances framework’ to understand, among other things, how the organizing process of Dominican immigrants in the US is shaped by the migrants’ embeddedness in a transnational web of relations. While very insightful, this work does not however explicitly engage with theories of innovation and diffusion, nor focuses much on the ideological dimension of organizations.
the country of origin, as well as of children of migrants, regardless of their place of birth (Levitt 2001; Vertovec 2009). Researchers of political transnationalism have argued that we can hardly understand the way migrants engage politically in the host country without considering the transnational and homeland politics dimensions; that is, we need to pay attention not only to how migrants bring their own previous political experience to use in the new society, but also to how established migrant networks facilitate the continuous circulation of information (Chung, Bloemraad and Tejada-Peña 2013; Østergaard-Nielsen 2003a; 2003b; Smith 2006).

In this context, Portes and Sensebrenner’s (1993) concept of bounded solidarity seems to be particularly appropriate to understand how migrants and non-migrants, different immigrant generations, as well as members of different ethnic communities construct social similarity to make diffusion of knowledge and innovation possible. Conceptualized as an “emergent sentiment of ‘we-ness’ among those confronting a similar difficult situation” (Portes and Sensebrenner 1993: 1328), bounded solidarity among individuals arises when the latter perceive to be confronting similar structures of disadvantage, oppression or exploitation. While this concept was developed by Portes and Sensebrenner to better understand processes of economic incorporation and socio-economic mobility among immigrants in the US, I argue that bounded solidarity has important implications for innovation and diffusion mechanisms as well. According to Portes and Sensebrenner (1993), this type of solidarity tends to arise mainly among those who perceive themselves as members of the same ethnic community, and who see themselves as facing the same structural barriers such as institutional racism or labor market discrimination – therefore explaining why US-born citizens of migrant descent may see themselves as still part of an ethnic community. To push this argument further, I would however argue that this kind of solidarity does not necessarily restrict itself to perceived co-ethnics in a given locality, but can also apply across a transnational ethnic space as well as a local multi-ethnic one. By focusing on three migrant organizations emerged in three different ethnic migrant communities in Los Angeles, I will try and stress both these points.

Methodology

For the purpose of this paper I focused on the early history of three key immigrant rights organizations in Los Angeles between the 1980s and 1990s: the Educación Popular del Sur de California (IDEPSCA), the Korean Immigrant Workers Advocates (KIWA) and the Pilipino Workers Center (PWC). For illustrative purposes, and for lack of space, I will focus on the role of a handful of key figures in developing those organizations. Those organizations have been selected for several reasons. Together with a few others, they have formed the bulwark of the nascent immigrant rights movement in Los Angeles between the late 1980s and mid-1990s, and the have been repeatedly hailed as pioneering
in their different efforts to improve legal, social and working conditions of immigrants in the city (Fine 2006; Milkman, Bloom and Narro 2010; Nicholls 2016). Moreover, they have been at the forefront of a number of multi-ethnic and multi-issue political coalitions that have significantly reshaped the political landscape of Southern California (Milkman, Bloom and Narro 2010). Yet, while these organizations developed a fairly compatible set of compatible structures, goals and strategies, they also developed to an extent in isolation from each other, embedded in different migrant communities with little history of previous collaboration and strikingly different socio-cultural and political backgrounds: The Central American and Mexican communities for IDEPSCA, the Korean community for KIWA and the Filipino community for PWC. I argue that by taking into account the transnational relational dimension we can better understand this puzzle.

Building on the literature presented above, in my analysis I will focus on the following aspects: the evolution of migration flows to Los Angeles, which made the city a major migration hub between the 1980s and 1990s; the geopolitical context of the migrant sending countries, particularly those related to the three organizations in question; the process of organization-building and the process of political socialization of key activists involved in it. My analysis is based on three types of data: 12 biographical interviews from key immigrant activists, archive material from the above-mentioned organizations and individual memoires, and the vast case study literature covering different aspects of the LA immigrant rights movement (which are here repurposed to address the research question at hand). Interviews centered on individuals’ biographies, their organizational work, their political experiences in the sending and/or receiving countries. As for the process of organizational selection, informal conversations, exploratory interviews and previous case study literature directed my focus towards specific individuals, who were selected because of their role in shaping those organizations. Interviews supplied me with key information regarding the life of immigrant activists and their ideological trajectories. Moreover, they have also proved problematic sources to reconstruct ways of thinking and experiences of political socialization dating back in certain cases over three decades. For this reason, I tried to verify and triangulate this information with other sources: early organizational documents, which were strongly shaped by founders, and included valuable information about the broader ideological vision, strategies and tactics of the organization; related case-study literature; external observers (not directly cited in the paper) who were involved in the genesis of the movement.

Part One. Community Formation and Early Transmitters in Los Angeles.

The bulk of the archive material consists of grant applications, correspondence and other type of material provided by organizations when applying for funding to the Liberty Hill Foundation, Los Angeles, CA (1990s-2014). To complement this information, I also used the public organizational archives of KIWA (1993-2006), hosted by the Southern California Library, Los Angeles, CA. See introduction and annex A for additional information.
In this section I present the evolution of the social and demographic context of Los Angeles, showing how unprecedented migratory dynamics from 1965 onwards changed the social environment of the city by creating a number of ethnic (and racialized) communities, but also paved the ground for sustained circulation of political knowledge across distant localities. In these contexts, where immigrant communities began to develop their own social needs, normative expectations and political projects, most political attention was initially focused on homeland-oriented politics. Transmitters from countries of origin imported ideas and practices in LA’s ethnic communities for the purpose of homeland-oriented political organizing. However, as the influence of homeland politics waned and communities continued to grow, migrants began to assess their political status within local politics and to experiment with political organizing directed towards the local context. This dual process of community-formation and shift towards local political engagement proved important to sustain the development of the three organizations described in the subsequent section.

The perception of Los Angeles and Southern California as a cosmopolitan, multicultural and extremely diverse metropolis is a commonsensical notion in 2017. However, the city as we now know it began to take form only within a relatively short period of time, between the late 1960s and the early 1990s. Largely as a result of broader geopolitical and socio-economic circumstances that escaped the city’s reach – the increasing globalization processes that connected countries and their economies, the growing political violence in certain areas of the world, the legislative changes in federal immigration policy, which removed barriers to Asian immigration with the 1965 Immigration and Naturalization Act – Los Angeles began to attract an unprecedented number of immigrants from all over the world (Waldinger and Bozorgmehr 1996b; Sabagh and Bozorgmehr 1996). Migration dynamics strongly contributed to complex demographic changes that dramatically affected the social make-up of the city. Structural barriers to the full social and political inclusion of migrants, coupled with a sweeping economic restructuring process that placed the labor exploitation of migrants at its core, contributed to creating a massive migrant working class whose local needs largely went unaddressed by existing organizations and institutions (Waldinger and Bozorgmehr 1996b; Soja and Scott 1996; Scott 1996; Milkman 2006).

After 1965, immigrants from Mexico, Central America, South Korea, the Philippines or China began to reach Los Angeles in high numbers. The overall foreign-born population in Los Angeles County increased from 11 to 30 percent during the 1970-1990 period. Language diversity also rapidly increased – by 1990, 50 percent of LA’s population spoke something other than English at home (Hamilton and Chinchilla 2001: 41). From being a relatively small minority, Latinos made up 40 percent of LA County’s total population by 1990, with their number growing by 70 percent between 1980 and 1990, fueled by immigration from Mexico and Central America, as well as by high birth rates (Moore and Vigil 1993). Immigrants from Asian countries were the fastest growing
population during this time, its total population reaching 1.3 million in 1990; while Japanese were the most prominent community in 1980, they were supplanted, in order, by Chinese, Filipinos and Koreans (Hamilton and Chinchilla 2001: 41). Hamilton and Chinchilla (2001: 41) noted that in 2000 the city had “the largest Mexican, Central American, Asian, and Middle Eastern populations in the United States, and ... the largest populations of Koreans, Filipinos, and Iranians outside of their respective countries... [, furthermore being] the largest Mexican metropolis outside of Mexico and the largest Salvadoran metropolis outside of El Salvador.”

The inflow of migrants between the late 1970s and early 1990s, namely from places like El Salvador, South Korea and the Philippines, had very specific characteristics. At the time, all these countries witnessed the rise of heterogeneous, left-leaning popular liberation movements that engaged to overthrow the respective right-wing, authoritarian regimes backed by the US government. To an extent, this galaxy of insurgent movements, including the Salvadoran Farabundo Marti Liberation Front (FLMN) (Booth, Wade and Walker 2010), the ‘Kwangju’ pro-democracy and labor movement in South Korea (Shin and Hwang 2003), or the New People’s Army in the Philippines (NPA) (Kramer 2006), had a distinct Marxist-Leninist (sometimes Maoist) ideological outlook, applying those principles to the context of a post-colonial liberation struggle against US-backed regimes. The existing colonial or pseudo-colonial ties existing between the US and those countries, as well as the presence of a pre-existing nucleus of migrants from those regions in Southern California, facilitated the migration of large numbers of people to Los Angeles. The political conflict was not necessarily the primary cause prompting the majority of people from these countries to migrate, especially in the case of South Korean and Filipino migrants. However, in light of the high polarization of political conflict and government repression, a significant share of migrants reaching Los Angeles had been politicized in the country of origin. Some of them, at a time (the 1980s) where the stay of immigrant communities (especially Central American ones) was seen as temporary, set up organized groups once in the US with the purpose of influencing homeland politics (Hamilton and Chinchilla 2001; Espiritu 1993). Among other groups reflecting the variety of the countries’ political spectrum, organizations such as the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES), the Korean Resource Center (KRC) and Young Koreans United (YKU), or the Movement for a Free Philippines (MFP) were founded by political exiles and mirrored leftist politics in each of these places (Hamilton and Chinchilla 2001; Espiritu 1993, 1995; Louie 2004).

Between the late 1980s and mid-1990s, locally-oriented political organizations began to emerge within those communities in response to growing and diversifying local demands. On the one hand, as immigrant communities permanently settled in Los Angeles, transnational political concerns became less urgent, partly also due to the fact that the Philippines, South Korea and El Salvador all underwent transitions from authoritarian regimes to liberal democracies during the same period (Booth, Wade and
Walker 2010; Louie 2004; Kramer 2006). On the other hand, and more importantly for this study, the growth of non-European migrant communities did not correspond to a parallel increase in their political power in the local landscape (Chavez 2002; Wei 1993; Mollenkopf and Sonenshein 2009). Rather, migrants continued to be incorporated in the local context in a structural subordinate position compounded by economic exploitation and work precarity, housing segregation, stalled social mobility and lack of influence over institutional decision-making (Pastor 2001a; Chang and Diaz-Veizades 1999). Many Salvadorans, for example, began to compete with newly arrived Mexican immigrants in soliciting jobs in the low-wage, informal and exploitative day labor economy (Lopez, Popkin and Telles 1996; Valenzuela 2002) or worked as street-vendors (Weber 2001; Hamilton and Chinchilla 2001). South Korean immigrants largely concentrated in small-scale service subcontracting and entrepreneurship in LA’s inner city, and particularly in ‘Koreatown’, setting up an ethnic economic enclave which was only sustainable as long as the owners put up with painstakingly long hours, paid their employees poverty wages and afforded no social protection and benefits (Chang and Diaz-Veizades 1999). Many Filipino migrants, often highly educated, were often forced to accept menial, low-wage jobs for which they were overqualified and/or had no relation to their expertise – home care and domestic work being the two most common examples (Espiritu 1993). At the same time, each ethnic community included a growing share of US-born citizens with migrant parents (second generations), as well as foreign-born migrant children who had arrived in Los Angeles at a very young age. Many 1.5 and second generation immigrants attended local schools, took up jobs outside of enclave economies and went on to attain high education in some of the local universities and colleges; they often (but not always) spoke the language of their parents as well as fluent English (Portes and Rumbaut 2001).

Outside immigrant communities, existing mainstream organizations, particularly labor unions, were unwilling or incapable of catering to the needs of their members. LA’s tradition of workplace activism was on the wane during the late 1970s and 1980s, especially if compared to other major cities such as San Francisco, Chicago, Detroit or New York (Milkman 2006). In spite of some laudable, and in certain cases successful attempts to organize immigrants in particular industries, unions were largely uninterested in getting involved in labor market sectors where immigrant presence was growing, partly due to their lack of capacities (including language and multicultural skills), partly due to the persistence of internal racism towards workers of color and non-

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60 While migration flows from those countries continued at high rates throughout the 1990s and 2000s, ethnic communities also began to grow as a result of high birthrates of the immigrant population. By 1997, over a total population of 9.55 million, Los Angeles was home to 3.52 (foreign-born) migrants and 2.39 million US-born citizens with foreign parents (Portes and Rumbaut 2001).

61 A few notable cases of immigrant organizing from the late 1980s and early 1990s are referenced in the collective volume edited by Milkman (2000). Those include the organizing drive of Latino workers in the LA manufacturing sector (Zabin 2000) and in construction (Milkman and Wong 2000), as well as the famous SEIU Justice for Janitors (J4J) campaign (Fisk, Mitchell and Erickson 2000; see also Waldinger et al. 1998). However, with the exception of J4J, as the authors themselves recognize, input for mobilization in those campaigns mostly came from immigrants themselves rather than from unions.
European immigrants (Tait 2016; Fine 2006). While unions began to open up their locals to immigrants and to staff their leadership from migrant rank-n-file from the mid-1990s onwards, they were still mostly hesitant to engage with immigrant organizing in the 1980s and early 1990s. At the same time, other potential sources of political inspiration, such as the African American civil rights movement, the Chicano movement or Asian American activism, which had been important political forces in Los Angeles between the late 1950s and the early 1970s, had exhausted their major impetus by the time the post-1965 waves of immigrants began to arrive in Los Angeles in large numbers during the 1980s (Chavez 2002; Wei 1993). Those movements clearly left a lasting legacy in Los Angeles, particularly as they contributed to crystallizing ethnic and racial identities as a tool for political mobilization and as a source of empowerment for native minorities and new immigrants alike (Chavez 2002; Pulido 2002). Moreover, as some of the activists from that generation moved into non-profit organizations, labor unions, or institutional politics during the late 1970s and 1980s, they contributed to fostering a less hostile climate towards new immigrants within particular sectors of the local civil society (Pulido 2006). However, the peculiar features of the organizations analyzed in this paper still suggest that, at least in part, the impetus for this new form of immigrant organizing came from outside Los Angeles.

Part Two. Innovators and Knowledge Synthesizers.

The three organizations examined – IDEPSCA, KIWA and PWC – were established between the late 1980s and the late 1990s. These groups were different from the majority of pre-existing immigrant organizations within the Central American/Latino, Korean and Filipino communities, which fell into one or more of those categories: targeted homeland politics, had a socio-cultural focus, represented the interests of the business elites, provided basic assistance in navigating US society (Espiritu 1995; Hamilton and Chinchilla 2001; Park 1999; Chung 2007). IDEPSCA, KIWA and PWC differed from other organizations because of the combination of three aspects: first, they focused on serving and catering to the perceived needs of the growing multi-ethnic immigrant population in Los Angeles; second, although each organization focused on different sets of activities, they all shared a radical political vision that incorporated both a strategy to redress socio-economic inequalities from below and a critique of US capitalist society; third, they were established by a varying combination of 1.5 and second generation migrant activists, but incorporated newly arrived migrants both as members and staff.

The Instituto de Educación Popular del Sur de California (IDEPSCA)

The Instituto de Educación del Sur de California (IDEPSCA) was established in 1991 in Pasadena, an area north of downtown Los Angeles. The organization, initially a loose
coalition of activists and smaller neighborhood collectives active during most of the 1980s, embraced a two-fold objective: a minimal one, which aimed at providing literacy services to Spanish-speaking immigrants across Los Angeles; a more ambitious one, which sought to use the same literacy tools to politically empower this constituency, and particularly undocumented immigrants, to confront their exploitative conditions through collective action. The Escuela de la Comunidad, whose establishment had preceded IDEPSCA’s in 1984, was the organizational space where the programs took place. It catered to an audience of second-generation immigrants of Mexican descent, as well as newly arrived immigrants from El Salvador and Guatemala fleeing the civil war in their countries. Many of them were of working class, rural and indigenous background, were sometimes illiterate even in Spanish, and frequently found jobs as day laborers at street corners (Añorve 1989; 2009). While literacy programs for immigrants were nothing new in Southern California, what set aside the programs of the Escuela de la Comunidad (and later IDEPSCA) was their insistence on employing popular education methodologies. Rooted in the experience of Latin American liberation struggles, popular education was used as a means to connect with personal and cultural experience of newly arrived immigrants to build notions of self-esteem, self-worth, and eventually political power as a group.

Raul Añorve, the son of a Mexican seasonal worker recruited to the US through the Bracero program, is generally credited with providing a major contribution to the establishment of the Escuela de la Comunidad and later IDEPSCA. Growing up in the 1960s and 1970s in East Los Angeles, a predominantly Mexican neighborhood, Añorve was socialized in the US context but constantly reminded of and discriminated because of his immigrant background (Añorve 1989). In his youth, he was confronted with the extremely limited upward mobility possibilities that existed for children of Mexican immigrants, who would ‘be penalized for speaking Spanish,’ dissuaded from pursuing higher education and mainly confined in menial and low-skilled jobs. In spite of structural limitations, Añorve nevertheless grew up bilingual and was later able to acquire a graduate education, stopping short of obtaining a doctorate degree. This dual position is generally credited with providing a major contribution to the establishment of the Escuela de la Comunidad and later IDEPSCA. Growing up in the 1960s and 1970s in East Los Angeles, a predominantly Mexican neighborhood, Añorve was socialized in the US context but constantly reminded of and discriminated because of his immigrant background (Añorve 1989). In his youth, he was confronted with the extremely limited upward mobility possibilities that existed for children of Mexican immigrants, who would ‘be penalized for speaking Spanish,’ dissuaded from pursuing higher education and mainly confined in menial and low-skilled jobs. In spite of structural limitations, Añorve nevertheless grew up bilingual and was later able to acquire a graduate education, stopping short of obtaining a doctorate degree. This dual position is generally credited with providing a major contribution to the establishment of the Escuela de la Comunidad and later IDEPSCA. Growing up in the 1960s and 1970s in East Los Angeles, a predominantly Mexican neighborhood, Añorve was socialized in the US context but constantly reminded of and discriminated because of his immigrant background (Añorve 1989). In his youth, he was confronted with the extremely limited upward mobility possibilities that existed for children of Mexican immigrants, who would ‘be penalized for speaking Spanish,’ dissuaded from pursuing higher education and mainly confined in menial and low-skilled jobs. In spite of structural limitations, Añorve nevertheless grew up bilingual and was later able to acquire a graduate education, stopping short of obtaining a doctorate degree. This dual position

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62 IDEPSCA grant application to Liberty Hill Foundation, 9 September 1994, box 46/folder 10, LHFR archive.
64 See also: author unknown, “¿Por qué estamos en la esquina?”, Todos Unidos (p.3).
66 In IDEPSCA material, Añorve is identified as a key leader, he “who has given direction to the Instituto by responding to what the collective wants and desires...and within those processes Raul [Añorve] has been the first among the equals” (From Forgetfulness to Hope, p. 7). The decision to focus on Añorve is not meant to deny or downplay the contribution of the several other activists who were active in the creation of IDEPSCA. However, this move underlies the general recognition in the activist community, as well as within IDEPSCA, that Añorve (as well as Pablo Alvarado, later discussed in this section) played a strong role in shaping the ideology and vision of the organization. Moreover, their individual trajectory is useful to understand the different ways in which migration acted as a vehicle of innovation in the local context. See also Dzimbowska (2010).
67 Interview with Raul Añorve, 6 June 2014 (herein cited as “interview with Añorve”).
as highly educated and between social worlds gave him a privileged insight, especially as he became active as an educator in a local high school in Pasadena, where many children of immigrants attended classes (Añorve 1989: 37). These experiences were important for Añorve, not only because they fueled his commitment to social justice, but also because they shaped his self-identification as an outsider to the US social mainstream and as a Latino. This made him sympathetic and solidary to the plight of Spanish-speaking newcomers, regardless of their nationality, but also open to their influence.68

Añorve became acquainted with popular education, and particularly with the work of seminal authors such as Paulo Freire’s (1996[1970]) “Pedagogy of the Oppressed” while teaching reading and writing in El Salvador in the 1970s (Dziembowska 2010). In fact, while such an approach was fairly unknown in Southern California at the time, it had gained considerable popularity in Latin America between the 1960s and 1970s, as Marxism and Liberation Theology became important streams of political thought (Theodore 2015). To Añorve, popular education was the answer he was looking for to reach out to a politically disempowered and marginalized community. Añorve creatively repurposed the tenets of popular education, which had been first applied to the emancipation of worker, peasant and indigenous communities in a variety of Latin American contexts, to fit the situation of Mexican and Central American immigrants in Los Angeles. Not only was this methodology attentive to the specific cultural and social dimensions of the participants involved,69 but also entailed a strong political component that aimed at making students aware of how their individual experiences were (at least in part) governed by broader structural forces (Theodore 2015). Through his mentoring work with immigrant youth and young adults, Añorve recruited a number of first- and second-generation immigrants that embraced popular education and began to work as volunteers to sustain the project and further politicize other immigrants.70

Pablo Alvarado, a young teacher and educator from El Salvador who came to the United States in 1990, is a key example of how pre-existing migration networks contributed to sustain the circulation of ideas and practices from migrant-sending countries to Los Angeles. His trajectory is also indicative of how imported ideas and practices were used to strengthen immigrant-oriented organizational work in Southern California. Son of a farmer, Alvarado grew up in a rural area of El Salvador which was

68 Interview with Añorve.
69 According to Añorve, mainstream pedagogical methodologies relied on English words, constructions and imaginaries that had little meaning for immigrants, and did not represent their experience. They also neglected the fact that immigrants were part of communities that were (at least) bilingual, and where Spanish played a crucial role in social interaction. Interview with Añorve.
70 These included people like Patricia Guzmán and Matilde Soria. Guzman, a Mexican student that was involved in the 1981-82 student walkout at Blair High School, Pasadena – where Añorve worked as an educator (Añorve 1989), went on to become an educator and director of the Escuela de la Comunidad, further training other volunteers and bringing a feminist focus on the organization’s activities. Soria was a UCLA undergraduate student who instead set up a student volunteer educational program under the sponsorship of UCLA (Añorve 1989). Both women are mentioned as playing a key role as cuadros or ‘organic leaders’ in the early days of the Escuela (see From Forgetfulness to Hope, 1984-1996, p. 9; IDEPSCA grant application to Liberty Hill Foundation, 27 November 27, 1996. Box 57/folder 10, LHFR archive).
controlled by the armed insurgency during the civil war. He became an educator himself after witnessing the killing of his own teacher by the army (Bacon 2008). Alvarado became politically engaged in Salvador in a deeply polarized national context, characterized by an ongoing struggle between a US-backed, right-wing authoritarian regime and a galaxy of insurgent Marxist-Leninist organizations organized under the FLMN. Although not directly part of the guerrilla himself, Alvarado was socialized in the world of the local insurgent political left, and his commitment to supporting the political mobilization of local peasant communities was reinforced by his first-hand experience of the regime’s brutality, particularly in displacing peasants from their lands or in denying them access to basic resources such as water. Following an escalation of violence, Alvarado reached Los Angeles with no money, no social support and no job (Bacon 1998). He found himself going through the dreadful experience of soliciting work at street corners, which included having to wrestle a job from other immigrants and being able to escape the frequent police raids (Gorman 2006; Bacon 2008). There he met Añorve and other volunteers and decided to use his experience as educator to engage with day laborers at street corners.

While the context in which he found himself was completely different – Los Angeles was not exactly in the middle of an armed struggle, nor regime change was at stake – Alvarado drew on strategies of community-building and politicization that he had learned in El Salvador. In particular, building on one of the crucial tenets of popular education, which argues for the use of culturally resonant practices in order to build community and solidarity, creatively used sports (such as football tournaments) and music activities to reach out to day laborers. Inspired by the broader ‘Nueva Canción’ movement which had developed through Latin America throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Alvarado in particular supervised the creation of a music band composed exclusively of undocumented, day laborer immigrants from different Latin American countries – Los Jornaleros del Norte – which would play for other day laborers at different street corners. Alvarado founded the band with Lolo Cutumay, another Salvadoran day laborer who had a past as musician in Cutumay Camones, the legendary in-house band of the FLMN tasked with producing revolutionary propaganda music on behalf of the Salvadoran leftist resistance. The band’s music style has been quite eclectic, shaped by the influences of its different members. Over the years, it has included relatively mainstream Central American cumbia tunes as much as corridos, a typical Mexican song form with strong political undertones. The lyrics, directly written by the band’s members, draw inspiration from their personal experiences as migrants, workers and foreigners in the US.

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71 Interview with Pablo Alvarado, 8 April 2015 (herein cited as “interview with Alvarado #1”).
72 Interview with Alvarado #1.
73 Interview with Alvarado #1.
74 Interview with Alvarado #1.
75 Interview with Lolo Cutumay 18 April 2015. For more information about Cutumay Camones, see Almeida and Urbizagastegui (1999).
76 For example, the song ‘Ese guey no paga’, an upbeat cumbia tune, recalls the familiar experience of many day laborers of not getting paid by their employers after a day’s work. The band members, when they perform this song, often warn their day labor
way, music (as well as other communal activities) became a means to simultaneously provide a moment of relief and entertainment to marginalized day laborers, foster rights awareness and encourage group solidarity among each other. Such strategies were also skillfully designed to bridge national and political divides – e.g. between Mexicans and Guatemalans, or between immigrants who had been active in the revolutionary movement in Salvador and those who had supported the authoritarian regime.77

The Korean Immigrant Workers Advocates (KIWA)

The Korean Immigrant Workers Advocates (KIWA) was established in 1992 as a migrant labor advocacy organization by Roy Hong and Danny Park, two 1.5 generation South Korean immigrants. They established KIWA’s premises in Koreatown, an area west of downtown dominated by Korean business interests but with a majority of Latino immigrant residents. KIWA founders drew on a strong ‘Third-World’ Marxist ideology to inform their reformist vision for social change, namely by pointing to the subordinate place of all immigrants and people of color within an intrinsically racist US society and by crucially differentiating between immigrant ‘workers’ and the upper-classes within the same Korean community.7879 The organization, almost single-handedly, launched landmark advocacy and unionization campaigns to improve working conditions in the restaurant and market industries in Koreatown, which were largely staffed by workers of different immigrant origins and had no exposure to mainstream US labor unions (see chapter 5). In so doing, it also tried to bridge ethnic and racial divides through a conscious effort to represent laborers of both Korean and Latin American origin.

Son of a warehouseman and a garment worker, Roy Hong left South Korea as a teenager and settled in San Francisco in the mid-1970s with his family.80 Danny Park, son of a Salvation Army minister and a mother who worked several menial jobs at San Francisco’s Fishermen’s Wharf – arrived in the U.S. at the age of fourteen. They met in high school and started volunteering together for the Chul Soo Lee Defense Committee, an organization fighting for the liberation of a Korean immigrant wrongfully convicted of murdering a gang member in San Francisco’s Chinatown.81 While Hong came from a

audiences to not accept checks (they may be impossible to cash) from their employers, and they encourage them to share information with each other about abusive and unreliable employers. Interview with Omar Leon, 5 May 2015.

77 The day laborer immigrant population was in fact very heterogeneous socio-economically, culturally and politically. Successful outreach thus required a sophisticated understanding of those differences and demanded very creative strategies to overcome them. Interview with Pablo Alvarado, 12 May 2015.

78 “Fund for a New LA”, KIWA grant application to Liberty Hill Foundation, ca. late 1992, box 41/folder 1, LHFR archive (herein cited as “KIWA 1992 grant application”). See also chapter 5 for a more detailed description of KIWA’s ideology.


80 Interview with Roy Hong, 6 June 2014 (herein cited as “interview with Hong”).

81 This and other information in the same and following paragraph (where uncited) was obtained from Park’s and Hong’s personal detailed CVs, which were included in KIWA’s application to Liberty Hill Foundation. See “Fund for a New LA”, KIWA
family that was generally supportive of labor unions, Park grew up in a more conservative environment that explicitly antagonized Communism (Louie 2004). As part of the so-called ‘1.5 generation’, both Hong and Park had been (young) immigrants themselves, had been partly socialized in South Korea, and spoke the language. Yet they also had a chance to pursue educational and job opportunities that were not available to their parents, including higher education. By the time they enrolled at San Francisco State university – Hong majoring in political science and Park in social welfare studies – the ‘Kwangju movement’ had brought Korean transnational politics to California. The arrival of overseas student activists had a strong politicizing impact on both of them, as South Korean militants explicitly connected their leftist popular movement struggle for regime change and against US imperialism to the battle for social inclusion of Korean immigrants in the US.\textsuperscript{82} Hong and Park were among the co-founders of the San Francisco-Berkeley branch of the Korean Resource Center and became soon after members of the local Young Koreans United (YKU) as well. In so doing, they also aligned with the more radical, Marxist-Leninist faction of the movement, the People’s Democracy (PD) trend (Louie 2004).

While in college, both Hong and Park also volunteered for local unions engaged in tentative organizing drives with immigrant workers. Their proficiency in both English and Korean made them particularly valuable to US unions. Soon afterwards, Hong took up a job with the Service Employees International Union Local 87, a local labor union who was trying to organize janitors of Korean origin at the San Francisco airport. His almost decade-long union experience – he was employed there between 1983 and 1991 – gave him an incredible amount of insight into the work of one of the most progressive labor groups active at the time, famous for groundbreaking campaigns such as the Justice for Janitors Campaign (J4J). During this time, Hong learned about some of the strategies and tactics that would later be employed at KIWA, such as the industry-wide organizing approach.\textsuperscript{83} This experience also showed Hong how unions were generally failing to organize immigrants successfully, as they did not have the capacity to culturally (and linguistically) connect with the experience of the growing immigrant population, or were plagued by racist views towards non-white workers.\textsuperscript{84} Park, on the other hand, continued to be involved in the transnational Korean movement, and became increasingly interested in rediscovering Korean culture, including music and traditional dance, as a way to express and redefine his political identity as Korean American and a tool for mobilization.\textsuperscript{85}

\textsuperscript{82} Interview with Hong. See also Louie (2004).
\textsuperscript{83} Interview with Hong.
\textsuperscript{84} Interview with Hong. See also KIWA 1992 grant application; KIWA 1994 report.
\textsuperscript{85} Between the mid-1980s and early 1990s Park was involved with several Korean American organizations. Those included: the Oakland Korean Resource Center, where he taught “Korean Traditional Mask Dance Troop”; the Min Jung Cultural Research Center, which he founded and where he contributed to organize study groups and performances; the Korean Youth and Student Union, where he was involved to promote peaceful reunification of the Korean peninsula (KIWA 1995 grant application, p. 16).
This combination of local and transnational experiences is important to understand KIWA’s inception and its innovative potential. By the late 1980s, with South Korean well on its way to democratization, South Korean homeland-oriented activism in the US was on the wane, while US-oriented political engagement was acquiring a new sense of urgency (Louie 2004). While Hong and Park’s experiences in South Korean transnational politics might have driven them in the direction of more traditional ethnic activism — their experiences in both an ‘ethnic’ radical leftist milieu and the US labor movement led them instead towards a more complex understanding of how class and ethnicity entwined in determining the socio-economic positioning of immigrants (see chapter 5). The connections that KIWA founders had established with the South Korean labor movement continued to prove important. Hong acknowledged that their peculiar bottom-up vision for KIWA was further influenced by his 1988 visit of various ‘worker centers’ in South Korea’s industrial zones:

I went to Korea ...and met with a lot of worker centers, in those industrial zones where there were manufacturing industries. Because in the late 80s in Korea there were a lot of worker centers at the front, doing a lot of political strikes and so on! [chuckles] And you know, they were Trotskyists, Marxists, Leninists... so I think there were a lot of different visions in that movement, but there was a lot of hope, and competition... and what they were doing was not only helping workers with immediate grievances, like wages, and injuries and [other things such as] sexual harassment... they were [also] actually educating the workers on their rights to organize [themselves] and form a union! And that part was really fascinating to me. I felt that some of that was an answer to the struggle in the labor movement in the U.S. as well.86

Hong and Park’s ‘entrepreneurial’ vision is highlighted by the fact that they consciously decided to move to Koreatown, Los Angeles from the Bay Area, selecting one of the neighborhoods which had been mostly reshaped by migration over the previous two decades. The relatively isolated and opaque (to external observers) character of the neighborhood provided fertile territory for a new experiment in labor organizing. Hong and Park’s proficiency in Korean language, and their intimate knowledge of Korean local and transnational politics placed them in a unique position to intervene in the area. Crucially, Hong and Park were also able to transmit those ideas to a group of younger, US-born and highly educated Korean American and Asian American activists, which gradually staffed the organization.87 Mostly socialized in the world of local identity-politics student activism of the early 1990s (Brodkin 2007), this new activist generation through their work at KIWA crucially made the link between the situation of newly arrived immigrants and their own political standing in the US as ‘ethnicized’ second

References to Korean culture, for example to traditional drumming, would become a typical feature of KIWA-led public demonstrations and political actions in Koreatown (Chung 2007).

86 Interview with Hong.

87 The initial group included second generation Korean Americans like Paul Lee and Julie Noh, UCLA graduates involved in campus activism. Lee was a member of the Korean American United Students for Education and Services (KAUSES), while Noh was Student Community Project Coordinator at the UCLA Asian American Studies Center. See KIWA 1995 grant application (pp. 22-23). See also Hong, Roy; Park, K.S.; Park Ed; Park, Danny, letter, 8 February 1994, box 43/folder 11, LHFR archive.
generations. It also encouraged them to rediscover their own cultural roots, including Korean language (which many of them did not speak), to more effectively relate to newcomers (Chung 2007). In 1994, KIWA also developed a Summer Activist Training (SAT), which was meant to train a new generation of Korean American and other Asian activists around principle of social justice, class-based analysis and cross-ethnic alliances from a distinct Asian pan-ethnic perspective. In parallel, ties with South Korean activists were maintained through language and exposure programs for both Korean and US-born activists, and new ties with Mexico – place of origin of many Koreatown migrant workers – were developed to send staff on language training programs or establish relations with local labor unions.

The Pilipino Workers Center (PWC)

The Pilipino Workers Center (PWC) was established between 1996 and 1997 by Jay Mendoza, Strela Cervas, John Delloro and Aquilina Soriano-Versoza, a group of second generation Filipino Americans. The organization initially operated in the Koreatown area, and later moved closer to Downtown Los Angeles, in an area that is now known as ‘Pilipinotown’ because of a fairly high concentration of Filipino residents. It was strongly supported in its inception by KIWA, which acted as fiscal sponsor and also hosted the PWC within its premises. Strongly influenced by KIWA, PWC developed as a labor advocacy organization that soon thereafter decided to focus its efforts towards Filipino migrant women and those employed in homecare and domestic work. Like KIWA, the organization filled a niche untapped by both local Filipino organizations, who were either still concerned with leveraging political influence towards the homeland or in promoting the interests of the business class, and were therefore less interested in catering to the needs of the local low-wage immigrant constituency, as well as local labor unions.

Mendoza, Cervas, Delloro and Soriano-Versoza became socialized in the context of US campus leftist identity-politics. However, they also came of age at a time when the local political landscape was already shifting, due to the emergence of organizations such

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88 Over the years, this new generation of adopters has also contributed to changing KIWA itself. The organization gradually included a certain number of highly politicized women, who raised the issue of sexism and gender discrimination both with respect to KIWA’s work and internally, therefore broadening its platform of social and economic justice (Chung, 2007).


90 An example is the Korea Education & Exposure Program (KEEP), which was designed to “introduce Korean American participants to the struggles of South Korean workers, urban poor, farmers, women, students and other marginalized communities working as individuals or in organizations to create a more just society in South Korea.” See “Korea Exposure and Education Program ’95”, in “KIWA News. The Newsletter of Korean Immigrant Workers Advocates”, KIWA newsletter (p. 10), vol. 3 spring 1995, box 6/folder 7, KIWA archive.

91 PWC application to Liberty Hill Foundation, 1 March 1997, box 64/folder 4, LHFR archive.

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as KIWA, the Thai Community Development Center (TCDC), IDEPSCA or the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA). As Soriano-Versoza recalls:

We started organizing at around 1995, and we were mostly students at UCLA, and a couple of others at USC, but mostly UCLA. And a lot of the influences came out of both the growing workers center movement here, so definitely we had folks who were involved with KIWA, and then the whole struggle against Jessica McClintock, [in] the garment industry...one of our founders, John Delloro, was out on the pickets, ... he was actually very involved with them. Well, the other influence for us was from the Philippines, the National Democratic Movement, so it’s these two influences coming together to form PWC.92

The case of PWC is revealing of the ways in which access to existing migrant knowledge in Los Angeles, particularly developed by KIWA, combined with transnational influences to shape the character of an immigrant organization. Delloro, son of Filipino immigrants involved with labor unions, transferred to UCLA in Los Angeles at about the time of LA civil unrest, and there began to develop a strong political consciousness through his involvement in the university’s Asian American Studies Center and local immigrant worker rights campaigns (Brodkin 2007; see chapter 2 on the history and importance of Ethnic Studies programs). Aquilina Soriano-Versoza, who became executive director of PWC in 2000 (and still holds the position as of 2017), similarly became politicized during her years at UCLA. She joined a Filipino student club hoping to reconnect with her heritage, while simultaneously engaging in a number of political activities on- and off-campus – this included participation in an environmental coalition, immigrant rights activism against the passing of anti-immigrant state legislation (Proposition 187) and volunteering with HERE on a hotel workers unionization campaign (Brodkin 2007). Some of PWC’s founders, including her as well as Jay Mendoza, also took part in KIWA’s SAT, which specifically stressed the connection between the social and political fate of second generations and that of the newly arrived migrants.93

Ideologically, PWC founders owed a great debt to local and transnational Filipino and Filipino America radical organizations.94 However, they were initially unsure regarding the kind of organization they wanted to establish.95 On the one hand the organization emerged at a time when the Philippines were transitioning out of the authoritarian regime of President Ferdinand Marcos, making overseas activism seem less pressing. Moreover, for a group of Filipino Americans who had lived their entire life in the US, homeland-oriented political engagement seemed less attractive. On the other hand, they also had little experience in dealing with newcomers, and their ideological

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92 Interview with Aquilina Soriano-Versoza, 16 June 2014 (herein cited as “interview with Soriano-Versoza”).
94 This included Philippines-based or Philippines-oriented organizations, such as Kilusan ng Mayo Uno (a federation of labor unions), Migrante and Bayan (an alliance of militant Marxist-Leninist organizations founded in 1985 to oppose the Marcos dictatorship, which later on established its own anti-imperialist US chapter (see http://bayanusa.org/about/).
95 Interview with Soriano-Versoza.
formation clashed with the reality on the ground. Many Filipino migrants had a middle-class background and no ‘working class consciousness’ whatsoever, embraced fairly conservative politics and related to cultural references that young Filipino Americans could largely not understand – partly as a consequence of their very limited proficiency of Filipino Americans in Tagalog, the most widely spoken idiom in the Philippines (Ghandnoosh 2010). To become more effective, founders therefore resorted to external knowledge from the Philippines. For once, Filipino Americans tried to deepen their understanding of the social reality they were confronted with. Before fully committing to PWC and becoming its executive director, Soriano-Versoza went on a year-long study trip to the Philippines, during which she was involved with local activist groups such as the League of Filipino Students and toured different areas of the country. This experience allowed her to significantly improve her Tagalog skills, but also to gain a more grounded understanding of social and cultural daily life in the Philippines.\(^96\) It led to the realization that radical leftist rhetoric should be toned down when approaching newly arrived immigrants in Los Angeles (Ghandnoosh 2010).

Moreover, PWC second-generation staff benefitted from the insights of two first generation migrants, long-time Filipino activists Lolita Lledo and Dong Lledo. Both came to Los Angeles as economic migrants, long after they had exhausted their militancy overseas,\(^97\) and joined PWC respectively in 1998 and 1999. Lledo, who as of 2017 is still a PWC organizer, has brought to PWC her extensive experience of community-organizing and outreach. While she perceived most of the Filipino immigrants coming to the US as part of the establishment back home, or at least of that middle class that had passively accepted the dictatorship she also recognized their class condition immediately changed once in the US context.\(^98\) This however, posed a problem. To put it in Lledo’s words, “how do you organize and politicize people that are in denial that they are, here, the working class?”\(^99\) Lledo’s long-time experience as an organizer who was confronted with the practical challenges of mass political mobilization proved strategic for PWC. Instead of focusing on abstract ideological training or student anti-imperialist politics, Lledo suggested instead to devise a concrete plan to reach out to undocumented immigrants, who were the most marginalized and in need of help.\(^100\) Such actions included mapping and identifying those apartment blocks where newly arrived Filipino migrants were mostly concentrated, as well as organizing food distribution and personal household visits as a means to build mutual trust and assess the migrants’ needs. This preparatory phase allowed the organization to successfully build an initial constituency, and to gradually

\(^{96}\) Interview with Soriano-Versoza.
\(^{97}\) Accordingly, both Lledos were involved in the underground movement during the 1970s and 1980s that contributed to end the brutal dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos, and particularly in the Maoist faction that sought to develop a mass-based organization in the countryside among illiterate peasants. Interview with Lolita Lledo, 7 June 2014 (herein cited as “interview with Lledo”).
\(^{98}\) Interview with Lledo.
\(^{99}\) Interview with Lledo.
\(^{100}\) Interview with Lledo.
Discussion and Conclusion

In this chapter, I intended to draw attention to how migrant communities contribute to reshaping local politics through their own processes of knowledge production. At a time when radical, Marxist-informed critiques of capitalism in California were on the wane, they were regenerated through the ideological work of a transnational ‘critical community’ (Rochon 1998) of first, 1.5 and second generation migrant organizers. Such community understood immigrants’ subordinate socio-economic positioning in American society as the product of the complex relation between US colonial legacy and imperialism, US deeply entrenched racism and an increasingly interconnected capitalist economy. The three organizations analyzed above came therefore to share a political vision grounded in a Third-World Marxist ideology, shaped by popular liberation struggles in the Global South and, to an extent, by the legacy of the racial struggles of the 1970s in contemporary identity politics on West Coast US campuses. At the same time, activists from these organizations pragmatically understood that, for ideology to be an effective tool for recruitment and broader social change, it needed to resonate (at least to an extent) not only with the everyday social reality of activists but also with the broader constituency they were trying to reach. The conservative socio-political climate in Southern California, as well as the ideological polarization of the new immigrant communities was not conducive to the anti-capitalist radical politics of the 1960s (see chapter 2). For these reasons, activists in the 1980s and early 1990s pragmatically adapted this ideological mix to the concrete advocacy and mobilization tasks at hand, often diluting ideological dogmatism for the sake of reaching out to more socially conservative members and achieve concrete policy change. To that extent, they used less ideologically-charged tactics – for example music, or food distributions – as a way to politicize prospective new members and volunteers.

The three case studies above show how those immigrant rights organizations introduced new knowledge and organizational innovation in Los Angeles landscape in two main ways: by maintaining and developing transnational connections and by forging relations with local migrant communities in LA. In the case of IDEPSCA, founder Raul Añorve and volunteers such as Pablo Alvarado and Lolo Cutumay drew on their own experiences and skills (as educators, political activists, musicians) to organize a marginalized immigrant population that was vastly neglected by local institutions. In the case of KIWA, Hong and Park creatively synthesized their experiences in the South Korean solidarity movement and with the US labor movement to create an organization catering to the specific needs of a multi-ethnic, disempowered low-wage immigrant
workforce. In the process, they also continued to expand KIWA’s transnational ties (not only with Korea, but also with other migrant-sending regions) and began to spread their own organizational model across other migrant communities. In the case of PWC, we can see the influence of both transnational connections (the anti-imperialist movement), as well as of the burgeoning multi-ethnic immigrant rights movement under the impulse of KIWA and other groups. PWC founders, drawing on the insights provided by first generation migrants such as Lolita Lledo, and on their own training experiences in the Philippines, were able to gain a better understanding of the situation of newcomers, while at the same time gaining valuable language and cultural skills to better inform their organizing strategies.

While IDEPSCA, KIWA and PWC emerged at slightly different historical times in different ethnic communities, and were founded by different ‘typologies’ of immigrants, their trajectories also share some striking similarities which further elucidate processes of migrant knowledge production and circulation. In all three cases, circulation of knowledge between receiving contexts and Los Angeles was made possible thanks to the creation of long-standing and sustained social, cultural, political and economic ties between sending countries and Los Angeles. Moreover, in all three cases, migrants had reached Los Angeles fleeing countries experiencing extremely polarized political confrontations. The arrival of an earlier generation of homeland-oriented leftist activists in the 1980s was the first step in setting up a leftist infrastructure in the area, paving the ground for more arrivals of politicized migrants as well as for influencing the successive US-born generations.\textsuperscript{101} At the same time, the particular experiences of 1.5 and second-generation immigrants in Los Angeles as racialized, discriminated people of color – which became politicized mostly in the context of student and campus politics – was important in driving their commitment towards the social inclusion of marginalized, undocumented immigrants. Drawing a parallel between their own situation and the one of newcomers as confronting the same structural conditions of oppression was key for the social construction of similarity among the different groups. It made organizational founders of the different organizations more receptive towards new ideas and practices that newcomers brought to Los Angeles (IDEPSCA), but also encouraged them to develop new ties with different migrant-sending regions (KIWA) or with local migrant communities with a different ethnic background (PWC with KIWA). The development of this ‘bounded solidarity’ (Portes and Sensebrenenner 1993) was key in facilitating this multi-level process of knowledge circulation and production.

This chapter was a first attempt at elucidating how migration processes can deepen our understanding of diffusion and innovation processes. While social movement scholars and political sociologists have begun to take notice of these dynamics, the role of

\textsuperscript{101} Scholars have argued that those dynamics have had an important influence on the revitalization of the local labor movement as well. See Ganz et al. (2004).
transnational migrants in processes of social and political change remains largely unexplored.
CHAPTER 4 LEGITIMACY AS THE BASIS FOR ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATIONS

Abstract
In the analysis of voluntary organizations, legitimacy and legitimation are useful concepts because they bring to light the process through which organizational entities justify their right to exist and their actions within a particular normative context (Meyer and Scott 1983; Maurer 1971; Beetham 2013). Theories of legitimacy underscore the moral basis of organizational power as grounded in the relationship between organizations and different kinds of audiences. In this chapter, we look at how those concepts and theories relate to the study of voluntary organizations, including ethnic and community-based organizations (CBOs), social movement organizations (SMOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), advocacy organizations and non-profit service providers. Those theories not only help us understand how different types of voluntary organizations establish themselves, strengthen their position and survive over time despite very limited material resources of their own, but also how different organizational claims can directly impact communities, either by publicly projecting particular conceptions of community or by articulating specific interests and needs on behalf of its members. In our review of the literature on organizational legitimacy, we focus on three main aspects of legitimacy: conceptualization of the term in organizational sociology, political sociology and studies of non-profit organizations; the constraining role of institutionalized normative contexts and competing audiences in the legitimation processes; the agentic role of organizations within both institutional and strategic contexts.

Keyword: Immigrant Organizations; Organizational Legitimacy; Legitimation; Voluntary Organizations; Organizational Resources.

Voluntary Organizations and Legitimacy

An environmental organization accuses a business corporation of irreprehensible pollution and urges industry-wide reform in order to preserve the environment for future generations. A community-based organization claiming to represent the interests of disgruntled citizens convenes a town hall meeting to discuss an urban redevelopment project in a city neighborhood. A 501(c)(3) non-profit organization advocates that state legislators create a fairer immigration system, thereby encouraging volunteers and activists to donate to the organization and help uphold human rights standards. A social

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102 This chapter is based on an article co-authored with Floris Vermeulen, to appear as: Gnes, Davide, and Floris Vermeulen. Forthcoming. “Legitimacy as the Basis for Organizational Development of Voluntary Organizations.” In The Handbook of Community Movements and Local Organizations, edited by Ram Cnaan and Carl Milofsky. New York, NY: Springer US.
movement group protests police brutality, calling on concerned citizens to join a demonstration urging greater police accountability. An ethnic organization applies for a grant from a philanthropic foundation to conduct a series of legal trainings for exploited domestic workers.

Each has its own unique circumstances, yet all these situations are examples of voluntary organizations formulating specific claims on the basis of normative assumptions. One engages to uphold the rights of minority groups, another to represent the interests of concerned citizens. One engages to serve the needs of underprivileged communities, another to fight for advancing social justice. But why should the business corporation feel accountable to a community-based organization or activists donate money to an immigrant rights campaign? Why should citizens decide to join a protest or a foundation grant money to a group conducting training in social justice? More fundamentally, on what grounds do organizations themselves make their claims and on what grounds do audiences evaluate them?

Much – though not all – of what is described above has to do with legitimation. That is, the process of how social entities morally justify their right to exist and their actions to others within a particular arrangement of societal power (Maurer 1971; Beetham 2013). Organizations must constantly offer ‘an acceptable theory of themselves’ (Meyer and Scott 1983) that rationalizes their existence though still also sanctions the power relations to which they subscribe (Beetham 2013). To themselves and others, organizations continually try to make their goals desirable, their procedures appropriate and their structure comprehensible (Suchman 1995). But who should decide whether a particular organization has the right to exist or engage in particular actions? On which grounds should this right be assessed and by whom? Moreover, why should this justification process matter at all for voluntary organizations and how does this affect communities?

While keeping with the general theme of community that runs through this book, this chapter explicitly adopts an organizational perspective on the issues of legitimacy and legitimation. We focus specifically on voluntary organizations for two reasons. The first is theoretical; organizations play a crucial intermediary role between ‘system-level institutions’ (including the state and the market) and local communities by both contributing to the allocation and distribution of resources across communities and structuring social relations within single communities (McQuarrie and Marwell 2009: 256; Levine 2016a; Marwell 2004; Small 2006). The second reason is empirical; in contemporary urban contexts – where the task of governing has shifted more towards ‘governance’ and includes a wide range of stakeholders in decision-making – we must pay more attention to the growing role of voluntary organizations in producing (or constraining) social change, particularly in poor areas (McQuarrie and Marwell 2009; Smith and Lipsky 1993; Small 2006). Now more than ever, voluntary organizations are tasked with representing a ‘community’. They are supposed to communicate the community’s ‘real’ needs to external audiences and promote its empowerment to an extent sometimes even greater than what
is expected of local elected officials (Levine 2016a; Stone and Stoker 2015). Regardless of whether organizations accurately reflect those interests and needs (Levine 2016a), their claims and their potential acceptance by third parties do have a real impact on the ‘community capacity’ of disadvantaged areas (Chaskin 2001).

In this chapter, we adopt a wide definition of voluntary organizations as being relatively formally organized groups “that receive substantial contributions of time (volunteering), below-cost goods or services, or money” (Steinberg and Powell 2006: 3). We see voluntary organizations as part of a so-called third sector, a domain of organized human action that extends past family but remains distinct from state and market and in which most participants (both individuals and organizations) are not remunerated for their participation (Knoke and Prensky 1984; Knoke 1986; Viterna, Clough, and Clarke 2015). We believe this definition adequately encompasses a range of organizational forms, including community-based organizations (CBOs), ethnic and immigrant associations, social movement organizations (SMOs), advocacy groups, recreational and neighborhood organizations, and more.\(^{103}\) We also find the definition suitably inclusive of organizations pursuing various goals, from explicit social and political change to more traditional service provision.\(^{104}\)

Conceptualized in this way, voluntary organizations may provide a variety of services, such as employment opportunities, trainings (vocational, language), welfare provisions (such as supportive direct services), as well as recreational outlets (Small 2006; Chaskin 2001; Marwell 2004; Fine 2006). However, depending on the limitations posed by their formal legal status, they may also engage in more or less explicit political activities, such as grassroots organizing and advocacy (Fine 2006; Chung 2005). They may do so through the backdoor of institutional politics, influencing electoral politics by virtue of their intermediary role between government institutions and different kinds of communities (Marwell 2004; de Graauw 2016; Levine 2016a), or by explicitly engaging in contentious political activities to spur social change from the outside (Milkman, Bloom, and Narro 2010). Regardless, in all those situations, a voluntary organization must consciously construct and negotiate a relationship with particular communities, for example, by establishing claims of democratic representation (representative-represented), interest group representation (representative-stakeholder), or effective need fulfillment (provider-beneficiary) (Knoke and Prensky 1984; Small 2006; Levine 2016a).

Organizational sociologists have long found that organizations generally rely on a combination of three factors to survive and thrive: power (as the capacity to coerce),

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\(^{103}\) We believe this definition could also encompass national organizational forms, such as non-profit organizations in the US, as well as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as they are conceptualized in European domestic spheres and international development (Beetham 2013; Collingswood 2005).

\(^{104}\) Many definitions of voluntary organization exist in academic literature, with debates ensuing as to whether one should be evaluated according to its goals, structures, legal status, or some combination thereof (Steinberg and Powell 2006). Consistent with our findings in this chapter, scholars have emphasized the radical transformation of these organizations throughout history (Robbins 2006).
resources (wealth especially, but also labor) and legitimacy (moral justifiability) (Stinchcombe 1968; McCarthy and Zald 1977). Here we argue that legitimacy is a key factor accounting for ability to operate, notably for voluntary organizations, which often lack the ability to coerce and sufficient resources to mobilize external audiences. As both resource mobilization theorists and scholars of voluntary organizations have regularly underscored, participation in and support of voluntary organizations has a strong normative component (Jenkins, 1983; McCarthy and Zald 1977; Knoke and Prensky 1984; Knoke 1986). If we put it in the terms of rational choice theorists, individuals may join organizations and movements not only for possible ‘selective incentives’ (Olson 1971) – better wages, services, training, etc. – but also because they may be heeding appeals for solidarity, fairness or social justice (Knoke 1986; Gamson 1992). We can therefore say that much of the power enjoyed by voluntary organizations, in a general sense, has a moral basis. As Beetham (2013: 275) observed:

> whatever powers they exercise – of internal hierarchy, influence at the national and international levels, power over clients and the distribution of resources – are dependent on their level of voluntary and wider public support, and [particularly on] continually proving themselves to be worthy of support.

In the last few decades, the literature on organizational legitimacy has grown (see Suchman 1995; Deephouse and Suchman 2008; Scott 2014 for reviews in the field of organizational sociology; Collingwood, 2005 for a review within international development and NGO studies; Beetham 2013; Netelenbos 2016 for discussions of the concept in political science and political philosophy; Johnson, Dowd, and Ridgeway 2006 for its usage in social psychology). In our review, we rely mainly on literature developed within organizational and political sociology. However, when appropriate, we draw on other disciplines’ insights to help grasp the concept of legitimacy as specifically applied to organizations. We focus on three main aspects of legitimacy, each explicated under its own heading: conceptualization of the term; definition of the legitimation process; and organizational agency within this context. Two sub-sections come under the second and third headings. The second heading’s sub-sections address the institutionalization process of normative expectations about organizational form and action and the identification of relevant audiences for organizations. The third heading’s sub-sections describe two approaches we can use to analyze organizational action: one broadly based on long-term managerial responses towards institutional constraints and one focused on everyday strategic interaction.

On the one hand, we note that organizational legitimacy theory has been appropriated by researchers of management and for-profit organizations, with studies in the non-profit area developing more as a by-product of this theory (Walker and McCarthy 2010; Vermeulen and Brünger 2014; Vermeulen, Minkoff, and van der Meer 2016; Levine 2016b). On the other hand, we see how social movement researchers have often found the concept of legitimacy unsatisfactory because of its tendency to emphasize conformity and
social reproduction rather than disruption and change (Clemens 2005). Nevertheless, we argue that the theory has much to offer scholars of voluntary organizations and communities. Accordingly, we emphasize three pillars of the theory: the existence of institutionalized expectations that are intrinsically heterogeneous, which problematizes the assumption of broad societal consensus; the existence of different and competing audiences, who may be as interested in social reproduction as in social disruption; the possibility of organizations to purposefully manipulate the environment to legitimate new forms and claims. We argue that, so formulated, legitimacy theory provides a powerful analytical framework to understand how voluntary organizations relate to the contexts in which they operate. Not only does this touch upon the issue of organizations’ relationships with their constituencies, but also with vital third parties such as funders, organizational allies, the media, and state institutions. Alongside its theoretical implications, this chapter may provide important insights for community activists and organizers by exposing the complexities and dilemmas organizations face as they come to depend for their survival on a variety of social actors with unique expectations.

Defining Legitimacy

In its broad usage, legitimacy\(^{105}\) entails study of the normative dimension of power relations in society (Beetham 2013; Netelenbos 2016; Stinchcombe 1968). Since at least Weber (1978), social scientists have been sensitized to legitimacy’s role in justifying a particular institutional hierarchy or power arrangement vis-à-vis a higher order of meaning (Berger and Luckmann 1967; Beetham 2013; Scott 2014; Deephouse and Suchman 2008). Weber (1978) famously elaborated a typology of legitimate authority. He argued that both the existence of a system of power as a ‘social fact’ and the belief in power holders’ legitimacy by subordinates was crucial to understanding why they would accept being under a position of domination, especially when it explicitly countered their self-interest (Netelenbos 2016). Legitimacy is a key feature of any system of power because it “concerns those ideas and practices that give those in power their moral authority and credibility” (Beetham 2013: x). It therefore ensures subordinates’ obedience of institutionalized rules without any need for power holders to resort to actual coercion (Stryker 1994).

Parsons was among the first to introduce the concept of organizational legitimacy, conceptualizing it as a force shaping organizations in accordance with the expectations and specific needs of a society (Parsons 1956; Pfeffer and Salancik 1978; Suchman 1995).

\(^{105}\) Unlike moral and political philosophers, social scientists are mainly interested in legitimacy as an empirical and socially constructed process, grounded in specific temporal and geographical contexts as well as embedded in social relations and their associated sets of meanings (Beetham 2013; Netelenbos 2016; Suchman 1995; Berger and Luckmann 1967). Beetham (2013) usefully distinguishes between usages of legitimacy in moral and political philosophy, in one realm, and social science in the other. Unlike social scientists, philosophers are mainly concerned with their own prescriptions of how power relations ought to be arranged and according to which justifications.
Drawing on Weber’s insights, Parsons (1956: 84) defined legitimacy in terms of organizational conformity to “the norms of ‘good conduct’ as recognized and institutionalized in the society.” Following this influential reasoning, theorists defined organizational legitimacy as the degree of conformity or congruence of organizational goals, structures and activities to laws, norms, and values embedded in a specific context (Dowling and Pfeffer 1975; Meyer and Rowan 1977; DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Dowling and Pfeffer (1975: 123) were among the first to distinguish between legitimacy and legitimation in the case of organizations. Legitimacy, they found, should be seen as the potential outcome of a legitimation strategy, which they referred to as the actual dynamic process through which an organization justified its right to exist to a third party within a broader context of changing social norms and values. Coming from a definition of legitimacy that stresses congruence between organizational actions and environment values, Richardson and Dowling (1986: 91) defined legitimation as “those social processes by which this quality of congruence is established or defended.”

Meyer and Scott (1983: 201) proposed an alternative though nevertheless compatible definition, which understood legitimacy in relation to the degree of ‘cultural support’ for an organization – that is, “the extent to which the array of established cultural accounts provide explanations for its existence, functioning, and jurisdiction, and lack or deny alternatives.” This conceptual development has found its ‘closure’ in Suchman’s (1995: 574) highly influential definition, which treats legitimacy as “a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions.” That definition has provided the theoretical anchor for countless studies of organizational legitimacy, including of voluntary organizations, and it is still widely used today (Walker and McCarthy 2010; Deephouse and Suchman 2008; Scott 2014; Vermeulen and Brünger 2014; Levine 2016b).

These definitions and approaches provide a point of departure to understand organizational legitimacy and legitimation as they are commonly treated within the discipline. We can single out a number of properties that characterize those conceptualizations. First, legitimacy is seen as an inherent relational process; it is produced in interaction between an organization and an audience (Suchman 1995; Deephouse and Suchman 2008) – i.e. the legitimation process. Second, organizational legitimation processes are to an extent grounded in established normative expectations that transcend the judgment of single individuals, both inside and outside organizations (Meyer and Scott 1983; Meyer and Rowan 1977). Those expectations are rooted in the historical process of institutionalization of social and political orders within specific contexts, and social actors often take them for granted without realizing it (Jepperson 1991). Third,

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106 Weber (1978) was the first to suggest that respect of norms and procedures, both formal and informal, contributed to legitimating power holders’ authority in the eyes of the rest of society (see also Scott 2014; Beetham 2013; Deephouse and Suchman 2008).
organizations may well reflect the expectations of the surrounding environment in their structures and operations, but they also bear their own strategic capacity to adapt, reformulate, and potentially challenge those external expectations (Dowling and Pfeffer 1975; Ashforth and Gibbs 1990; Oliver 1991). Fourth, through this lens, legitimacy is seen as a strategic *mediated resource* for organizations since it will likely provide access to other resources – i.e. encouraging audiences and stakeholders who accept organizational claims to provide access to their own resources, be they time and labor, funds, or logistical support (Suchman 1995; Pfeffer and Salancik 1978; Hannan and Freeman 1989; McCarthy and Zald 1977).

**The Context of Legitimacy: Institutionalization of Normative Expectations and Grounds for Legitimacy.**

Since at least Parsons (1956; 1960), organizational theorists have grappled with defining where legitimation processes take place and how common normative expectations develop within this very context. We thus ask how actors come to accept certain normative assumptions as valid for some organizations but not for others. How do voluntary organizations come to adopt certain organizational forms, pursue particular goals and activities and formulate some claims but not others? In this section, we take a closer look at the production of those normative expectations as a result of different processes of institutionalization.

Parsons (1956) saw organizations as organic to larger societal systems, wherein organizational goals not only aligned with the values embraced by the broader society, but also fulfill some of its needs. Subsequent scholars have shifted away from this functionalist view of legitimacy, though have expanded on the idea that institutions play a key role in shaping the meanings, values, and norms that influence human behavior and, by extension, organizational action (Jepperson 1991; Meyer and Rowan 1977; Zucker 1991; Sewell 2005; Clemens and Cook 1999; Scott 2014). In their seminal text on the social construction of reality, Berger and Luckmann (1967) argued that at the most basic level, individuals create institutions by defining an ever-expanding sphere of routines and regularities in their lives. This activity creates a basic background knowledge that can be taken for granted by all those who share it and allows social actors to focus on new tasks. As the stock of meanings, rules, and norms accumulates, the institutional sphere expands. Successive social actors who are born and socialized into specific contexts tend to internalize and reproduce this institutionalized knowledge, which over time is no longer seen as the product of subjective, concrete routines, but rather has become the ‘natural’ way in which things are done (Zucker 1991).

Institutions, therefore, may be defined as those social patterns that, after being “chronically reproduced, owe their survival to relatively self-activating social processes” (Jepperson 1991: 145). Institutions are important for organizations because they provide
‘cultural definitions [that] determine how [an] organization is built, how it is run, and, simultaneously, how it is understood and evaluated’ by different audiences (Suchman 1995: 576). These cultural definitions generate requirements and social expectations that individuals incorporate into their organizations and ultimately legitimate the organization within a specific context (Galaskiewicz 1985). Certain requirements may generally apply to a vast array of organizations, such as having an organizational mission, hiring and paying employees, satisfying tax agency, health, and labor regulations. Others may instead apply to specific organizational domains – consider, for example, the membership structure and democratic decision-making of labor unions or the money-making logic embedded in for-profit organizations.

Broadly speaking, neo-institutionalists have traditionally considered state and market as two major forces shaping organizational life (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Jepperson 1991; Scott 2014). In particular, they encourage establishment of separate spheres of social activity and organizational domains (e.g. health care, education, business) – or organizational fields – which are consequently governed by specific understandings and rules of the game. Large or pioneer organizations, regardless of rationale, have a major part in establishing a field and compelling subsequent organizations to comply with their set expectations. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) showed that corporation subsidiaries often adopt the accounting, performance indicator and budgetary practices of their parent company, and these practices easily spread through the actions of just a few established consulting firms. As fields develop, organizations also tend to professionalize while struggling to “define the conditions and methods of their work… and establish a legitimation for their occupational autonomy” (DiMaggio and Powell 1983: 152).

As DiMaggio and Powell (1983) argued in their influential theory of the “institutional cage”, organizations may come to resemble each other not so much out of concern for efficiency, but rather because they develop a shared understanding of how things ‘should be done’. Meyer and Rowan (1977: 351-352), for example, found how American public school districts in the 1970s held near monopolies on education as long as they “conform[ed] to wider rules about proper classifications and credentials of teachers and students, and of topics of study.” While other types of organizations, such as private charter schools, could enter the educational domain, the need to conform to state-enforced standards ultimately deterred the emergence of alternative organizational forms. Organizational ecologists have posited a similar idea in the concept of organizational population, noting that organizations come to resemble each other through similar selection processes of externally legitimated properties, which ultimately enhances their survival (Hannan 1986; Hannan and Freeman 1989).

We may trace similar developments in the field of voluntary organizations in the United States by analyzing the move towards standardizing grant reporting procedures across state institutions and private funders. Along these lines, we should note how figures
such as ‘community organizer’ and ‘advocate’ have come, after decades of institutionalization of the field, to denote specific professional figures regulated by their own technical and normative criteria of evaluation (Chauvin 2007; Walker and McCarthy 2010). Nevertheless, we must recognize that institutionalization of voluntary organizations differs in many respects from other types of organizations, and it is probably much less pronounced than in other sectors. Voluntary organizations tend to have broader, vaguer goals and objectives than, for example, for-profit organizations, and can also assume very different organizational forms (DiMaggio 2006; Alexander 1998). This lack of homogeneity becomes evident when we consider the differences between an advocacy group, a community-based organization, a social movement organization, a worker center, and an informal intermittent group. In these cases, legitimacy of specific organizations may come to rest less on the respect of particular organizational templates than on the charisma of its funders or staff, and their ability to cultivate relations of trust and emotional affinity with different organizational audiences (Weber 1978; Netelenbos 2016; Larsson and Rönnmark 1996).

Unlike for-profit organizations – whose existence is justified by the broad acceptability within capitalist societies of the logic of profit-maximization – voluntary organizations rely on a combination of normative expectations that go beyond simply adopting formal denominations and procedures. For example, a strong civil society (or third sector) as a key condition for a healthy democracy is a generally accepted view in many national contexts, especially in the public sphere (Netelenbos 2016; Viterna, Clough and Clarke 2015). For this reason, when organizations claim to cater to or represent disadvantaged and stigmatized groups, such as undocumented immigrants, the homeless or drug addicts, they also carry ‘moral weight’. This is mainly because “the representation of ignored viewpoints appeals to a democratic conception of a pluralist public arena in a context where there is a strong bias towards the voices and interests of the powerful” (Beetham 2013: 277). In similar fashion, the idea of community has gained a generally positive connotation in US society, particularly in relation to associational life (see Hunter, forthcoming; Milofsky, forthcoming). For this reason, voluntary organizations often mobilize this concept to justify their goals and activities (not without problems, as Danley, forthcoming, notes). At the same time, notably as market logics have gained considerable influence over a number of domains of social life (Friedland and Alford 1991), voluntary organizations – especially those that have become government-contracted service providers – are evaluated according to managerial and efficiency standards, as well as in terms of substantive output (Smith and Lipsky 1993). As Alexander (1998: 273) stated, voluntary organizations “are often located in the intersection of competing institutional spheres, as nonprofits, traditionally steeped in the rhetoric of charity, religion, or democracy, are increasingly governed by the rhetoric of business.”

Even within a normative context that seems to recognize conflict and incorporates particular conceptions of social change, we must acknowledge that for
explicitly political organizations, structural constraints remain. Organizational ecologists, notably those studying contentious organizations and social movements, have directed their attention to how environmental constraints affect voluntary organizations that actively promote radical social change. Analyzing the disbanding of national women’s and minority membership organizations between 1955 and 1985, Minkoff (1993) found that those organizations’ life chances highly depended on the acceptance or rejection of their political “blueprints for action” by external audiences, especially supporters and volunteers. The more organizations were perceived to “follow an accepted course of institutional challenge based on moderate objectives and targeted at nonpolitical arenas,” the more their legitimacy increased in the eyes of their constituencies and the overall public opinion (Minkoff 1993: 903-904). Taking this perspective, other researchers have hinted at the strong role that the state still retains in shaping not only the forms of organizations, but also the appropriateness of organizational goals and discursive claims (Koopmans 2004; Koopmans and Statham 2003). In their study of organizations of Turkish immigrants in the Netherlands, Vermeulen and Berger (2008: 166), for example, found that Dutch national and local policies helped drive immigrants towards ethnic forms of organizations, as they encouraged “immigrants to integrate in Dutch society and yet retain their cultural identity.”

One of the major contributions of neo-institutional theory has been to conceptualize contexts in terms of fields or population environments. This conceptualization stresses the importance of the nation-state, the institutionalization of professions and templates, as well as of cognitive frameworks in structuring norms and values expressed in organizations and their claims (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Meyer and Rowan 1977). However, when it comes to voluntary organizations, we argue that these abstract dimensions also necessitate being grounded in actual communities.107 As McQuarrie and Marwell (2009: 259-260) have convincingly argued, communities, particularly spatial ones, are a crucial place where those values and norms originate. Communities are the context where organizations operate, where they pursue many of their objectives, conduct their activities and mobilize a significant share of their resources. For these reasons, organizations can hardly be evaluated exclusively in terms of externally validated properties; they must also relate to the norms and values of the community in which they are embedded and connect (at least in some way) with the everyday experience of community members (Chaskin 2001; Alinsky 1941).

Marquis, Glynn, and Davis (2007) showed how the basis of legitimacy for organizations may change across cities and bounded communities, and therefore that organizational legitimacy also has a spatial dimension. Local understandings, norms, and rules can serve as touchstones for organizational activity in a community. In their research, they argue that organizational templates vary from community to community, making some types of organizations more legitimate in one community than in another.

107 For an extensive discussion of the different conceptions of community, see Hunter (forthcoming).
Such variation, at least in the US context, stems from a number of historical, demographical, and geographical factors – for instance, the historical migratory and settlement patterns of different ethnic and religious groups, each of whom brings unique frames for what constitutes a legitimate organizational form. Vermeulen, Minkoff, and van der Meer (2016) showed how neighborhood characteristics affect the spatial dimension of organizational legitimacy among voluntary organizations in Amsterdam’s neighborhoods. Their article begins by noting that neighborhoods are concrete spaces wherein urban residents can interact, produce social norms and articulate a distinctive social order (McQuarrie and Marwell 2009). The empirical analysis, however, leads to the suggestion that for certain immigrant organizations, citywide networks may be more salient than those of neighborhoods. The authors thus underscored the importance of noting how specific organizations, such as recreation or service providers, may be tied to specific neighborhoods (and their specific social configuration) more than general ones that engage in broad advocacy and support. In fact, Vermeulen, Laméris, and Minkoff (2016) found that the neighborhood is a vital basis of organizational legitimacy for recreational voluntary associations having a relatively strong connection with the neighborhood in which they are located, for instance, football clubs, billiards associations, drama clubs, children’s circus groups, and gardening associations. For these types of recreational organizations, certain demographics, such as percentages of immigrants or children in the neighborhood, have an effect on organizational survival rates. The authors accounted for this by referring to the neighborhoods’ deeper set of shared frameworks; these concern legitimate organizational forms and behaviors, which accumulate through everyday interactions with other neighborhood residents.

The Context of Legitimacy: Audiences and Power Inequality

Having examined the construction of normative expectations within specific contexts, we now turn to the audiences of voluntary organizations. We question whose beliefs and norms are relevant when assessing such an organization’s legitimacy. Who are the relevant audiences for organizations, and how do organizations decide whom to target? Who has the power to confer legitimacy on an organization by virtue of their position?

As we have so far shown, defining the appropriate normative context of organizational analysis is no easy task. Its complexity lies in the accountability organizations often have to multiple stakeholders; legitimacy, moreover, must be evaluated in relation to the normative expectations of each audience, who may not always be compatible with each other or internally consistent (Elsbach and Sutton 1992; Suchman 1995; Thornton and Ocasio 2008). According to Scott (2014), an organization is less likely to be seen as an overall legitimate actor when it is confronted by competing sovereign authorities, which embed conflicting normative requirements. To assess an organization’s legitimacy, Pfeffer and Salancik as early as 1978, asked not only whose normative
expectations should be taken into account, but also which organizational aspects should count in the evaluation. They found that this question could not be answered in general terms. The suggestion was that an organization need not be legitimate for all segments of society, but rather at least for those third parties that contribute to the organizational resources critical to its survival (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978; Vermeulen and Brünger 2014). In the case of community-based voluntary organizations, those parties may comprise a variety of actors, including members, volunteers, individual donors, community supporters, as well as governmental agencies, private foundations, and federated organizations, such as United Way (a nationwide coalition of community groups chiefly focused on fundraising).

While we broadly agree with those propositions, we raise some additional points. First, we argue that the range of audiences should be expanded and more clearly defined. The interaction between organizations and audiences should be conceptualized more dynamically to include opponents rather than be reduced to strict support. Second, and relatedly, we argue that audience relevance will most likely be based on considerations of both material and symbolic power. Third, we argue that the discussion about an organization’s overall legitimacy is largely misplaced. More often than not, an organization’s legitimacy, or illegitimacy, is a question of the grounds on which an organization is evaluated by itself and others and if those grounds are relevant to people who are invested in the organization.108 We draw on social movement theory to propose a definition of audiences that we deem suitable for voluntary organizations.

As some of those who study institutions have already conveyed, even small-scale settings are usually governed by competing institutional logics. They are produced by the actions of overlapping institutional domains such as market, state, community, and family, and define what is appropriate, desirable and comprehensible within specific contexts (Friedland and Alford 1991; Thornton and Ocasio 2008). As a result, there will necessarily be different audiences, each with its own normative expectations as well as resources and power endowments, which may or may not be relevant for voluntary organizations (Clemens and Cook 1999; Beetham 2013; McCarthy and Zald 1977).

To reiterate, audiences matter because they provide resources and support. However, their role is often more complex than that. For example, government institutions or grant foundations may also provide recognition to voluntary organizations, particularly when engaged in influencing policy or achieving some strategic objective. As we argued in the introduction, this is particularly important if we consider the role of many community-based organizations in contemporary societies. We observe that urban

108 The study by Elsbach and Sutton (1992) showed how certain radical political organizations may be able to gain legitimacy with constituencies through ‘illegitimate’ actions. However, in equating illegitimacy with noncompliance with the formal state law, the authors focus on a particular type of rule conformity; though generally deemed important, this type may not be relevant for some audiences as a ground for establishing legitimacy. As presented by Scott (2014) – who shows how the mafia is an illegitimate institution according to the normative standards of most citizens in Western liberal democracies while still being legitimate for its members – legitimacy is always a function of a specific point of view.
politics (and politics more in general) can hardly be reduced to the analysis of how state institutions establish legitimate domination, rather should be extended to how a plurality of actors (including a variety of voluntary organizations) develop legitimate governance infrastructures, or to how both state and non-state actors manage strategic conflict within a pluralist society (Smith and Lipsky 1993; Netelenbos 2016; McQuarrie 2013; Jasper 2015; Fliegstein and McAdam 2011). This has also led more resource-rich actors, such as state institutions and private funders, to adopt legitimation strategies similar to those of voluntary organizations. For example, Levine (2016a; 2016b), in his ethnography of urban neighborhood redevelopment found that even city officials, as well as funders, felt compelled to legitimize their role vis-à-vis a community-based organization. And they did so by appealing to an established macro-logic of non-divisive ‘partnership’, which has replaced the notion of partisan conflict in the governance of contemporary US cities (Stone and Stoker 2015; McQuarrie 2013).

Neo-institutional theorists have traditionally privileged the value of fields and large institutions, emphasizing peer and government recognition in the legitimation process (Galaskiewicz 1985). They also argued that particular actors, such as state institutions,\(^{109}\) carry greater weight than others in the legitimation process for any type of organization. As Scott (2014: 73) stated, those “whose values define legitimacy is [ultimately] a matter of concerted power.” The importance of the state cannot be discredited, but we must not neglect the role of other audiences, such as private funders and community-related audiences. This dimension is especially important for voluntary organizations, whose interaction with members, militants, volunteers, or constituents constitutes one of the major axes of organizational activity.\(^{110}\) Communities themselves, however, are stratified along a number of cleavages, including class (Chung, Bloemraad and Tejada-Peña 2013). As a result, the endorsement of specific ‘community elites’ tends to have more far-reaching consequences than that of other members (Danley, forthcoming).

Social movement scholars and political sociologists have devoted considerable effort to fleshing out the characteristics and roles of audiences (McCarthy and Zald 1977; Jasper 2015; Fliegstein and McAdam 2011). McCarthy and Zald’s analytical schema proved

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\(^{109}\) The state, through its regulatory and certification agencies, and professional orders have become crucial gatekeepers in many domains of organizational life – consider, for example, the accreditation processes required of a hospital and its medical personnel, or how new business ventures may need the local chamber of commerce’s approval before engaging in any transactions. Many community-based organizations would hardly even be considered for funding without first providing the legal incorporation documentation (official name, type of corporate structure, organizational purposes, etc.) mandated by federal legislation.

\(^{110}\) A possible explanation for the deficiency may be that early legitimacy scholars developed their theories in the context of service provision organizations (e.g. hospitals, museums, schools) and for-profit organizations, particularly corporations (Meyer and Rowan 1977; Powell and DiMaggio 1991; Meyer and Scott 1983; Suchman 1995). Up until now, organizational legitimacy theory has been applied primarily to those types of organizations, and examples of such research are mostly found in journals of management and administrative research. Those theories were applied to the field of voluntary organizations as a sub-category of these types of organizations, generating inconsistencies stemming from the dramatically diverging goals and logics among voluntary organizations (notably the most political ones) and other groups.
pertinent for integrating voluntary organizations’ many functions (in terms of goals and objectives) and forms. Drawing on their framework, we distinguish four types of audiences: adherents, who espouse the goals of an organization; constituents, who provide material resources to the organization; bystander publics, who neither support nor actively fight an organization and its goals; opponents, who oppose the organization and its goals. As McCarthy and Zald (1977: 1222) determined, one of the primary tasks of an organization is “converting adherents into constituents and maintaining constituents involvement.” We can further classify those categories according to whether particular actors (adherents, constituents, or bystanders) would directly benefit\footnote{While the notion of benefit is problematic – especially if we argue that benefits may come in the form of preference (i.e. value-based) satisfaction – we still find it useful to distinguish between a direct tangible benefit and a more abstract preference-based one. This is consistent with our view that the interaction between organizations and audiences is always grounded in normative expectations. However, organizations do not only engage in legitimation, but also provide concrete, tangible offerings.} from the achievement of a particular goal (or provision of a particular service) – i.e. the potential beneficiaries – and those who would not – i.e. conscience adherents and conscience constituents. We must keep those analytical distinctions in mind when thinking about legitimacy. In empirical terms, those definitions may apply to a wide range of groups as they are identified by organizations in their everyday operations: members, volunteers, activists, militants, communities, allies, donors, private funders, government agencies, inter alia. The saliency of each category and group depends on the specific organization and its characteristics (structure, goals, etc.), but analytically it becomes more useful to assess whether, in a given context, each of these groups does one of two things: 1) provides important resources; 2) becomes directly affected by organizational action.

Depending on the specific context, organizations may direct their claims towards each one of these specific audiences, including opponents\footnote{The literature on non-profit organizations, rooted in a model of politics as consensual, tends to downplay the role of opponents within a perspective of strategic political conflict (Walker and McCarthy 2010). Rather, studies emphasize more opponents as being potential competitors for funds and resources in the same organizational field (Vermeulen, Minkoff, and van der Meer 2016).}. For example, if a voluntary organization is interested in being recognized by a local company – to be seen as an acceptable bargainer on behalf of its workers – it must consider the normative expectations of company staff and the organization as a whole. Similarly, if an organization is interested in developing a representative relationship with the residents of a specific neighborhood, it will have to devote considerable effort to targeting those communities. At the same time, we must recognize that some organizations may refuse to seek recognition (from opponents) or support (from constituents) because of their specific ideological preferences. For example, many social movement organizations do not wish to be associated in any way with government institutions and refuse to apply for or receive any government funding for their activities. State legitimation may in fact have a delegitimizing effect on the organization for some of its other audiences, such as activists and militants. Many constituents may therefore provide resources to organizations but may not be directly affected by their goals. Consider, for example, the role of foundations.
or government agencies in supporting many voluntary organizations by providing services or organizing under-resourced communities. In certain cases, constituents may be directly affected by organizational goals and goods, and be able to contribute;\textsuperscript{113} for instance, community members and volunteers may give donations, organize fundraising, contribute equipment or knowhow, and help plan and run organizational activities (McCarthy and Zald 1977; Walker and McCarthy 2010). However, in other cases, those affected by organizational activities – such as marginalized and vulnerable groups like poor people, undocumented immigrants, and ethnic and racial minorities – may lack any substantial resources to contribute to the organization (Fine, 2006; Milkman, Bloom, and Narro 2010). In fact, their lack of resources and means of power may justify their organizational involvement in the first place (Beetham 2013).

It is therefore important to distinguish between material resources such as money and time and the symbolic resource of audiences. Apart from instances where human numbers can be successfully mobilized as a resource – for example, during public actions such as pickets, demonstrations, rallies and strikes – potential beneficiaries who cannot contribute to resources tend to have a strong symbolic role rather than any substantial one (Jenkins 2002). If we go back to a normative conception of civil society and communities, as described in the previous section, we see that this symbolic role takes on meaning when organizations try to legitimate themselves to funders or local institutions. Whether an organization’s primary mission is service provision or political representation, its legitimacy for external audiences then comes to rest, at least in part,\textsuperscript{114} on the perceived legitimacy of its relationship with its beneficiaries (Beetham 2013; Walker and McCarthy 2010).

Organizational Agency in Legitimation Strategies: An Institutional Perspective

In this section, we analyze the legitimation process from the organizations’ point of view. We suggest two ways to address the issue of organizational agency in legitimacy. The first draws on an institutional approach examining legitimation and legitimacy crises over long period of times. The second draws on a notion of legitimation as an inherently contested process, negotiated in everyday activity. Both views are consistent with a perspective on organizations as relatively autonomous agents with the capacity to both reproduce and contest existing structures.\textsuperscript{115}

\textsuperscript{113} Certain organizations may also decide to seek no external funding in order to avoid professionalization and potential bureaucratization. See Kelley (forthcoming) for an example of how different organizations debate those issues.

\textsuperscript{114} Researchers have found that voluntary organizations in Western societies broadly base their legitimacy on a mix of democratic and technocratic ideals (Beetham 2013; Walker and McCarthy 2010). The second level relates to the organizational staff’s claim to knowledge and experience concerning a specific domain of action.

\textsuperscript{115} This perspective is grounded in theories that emphasize the ‘duality of structure’ (Giddens 1984; Sewell 2005; Clemens and Cook 1999). Inasmuch as “structure shapes people’s practices... it is also people’s practices that constitute (and reproduce) structures” (Sewell 2005: 127).
The institutional approach generally splits the legitimation process into three phases: 1) the securing of legitimacy; 2) its maintenance; 3) its reparation in case of loss (Suchman 1995; Ashforth and Gibbs 1990; Elsbach 1994). Along these lines, organizational legitimacy is strongly conceptualized in institutional terms, particularly vis-à-vis forms and organizational templates. Through a strict neo-institutional lens, organizations are generally seen as having a relatively limited degree of agency. The only exception is the initial stage of a development of a field, when pioneer organizations led by skilled institutional entrepreneurs (DiMaggio 1988) are first and foremost engaged in developing a sense that a new sector “objectively exists independently of specific organizations” (Suchman 1995: 586). During this period, they also must engage in sustained outreach to publicize their activities, thereby creating a constituency or target audience and persuading legitimate entities to provide support to enhance their overall legitimacy (Suchman 1995). Unlike large political institutions, organizations have to compete for their legitimacy with similar organizations in other domains (e.g. advocacy organizations vs. community-based organizations in the broader non-profit sector), and therefore need to actively promote their organizational type as valuable and worthy of support (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978). New organizations may also fail to gain recognition because they lack reputational indicators, such as organizational or individual track records, which can often effectively back particular claims with the reasonable promise of appropriate performance. Since some organizational forms may be too different from existing ones within specific contexts, these organizations may initially suffer what organizational ecologists have called the ‘liability of newness’ (Freeman, Carroll, and Hannan 1983). However, once an organizational field is established, social actors come to recognize certain organizational forms or templates, along with their associated features, as being natural within a given order of arrangements (Suchman 1995). As long as an institutionalized organizational field already exists and it has produced a recognized organizational template, new organizations may achieve a first level of legitimacy by simply adopting this template (Meyer and Rowan 1977).

As Suchman (1995: 587) stated, all these strategies “involve complex mixtures of concrete organizational change and persuasive organizational communication.” Within a more managerial view of legitimacy, organizations are seen as strategic agents purposefully manipulating the surrounding environment (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978; Dowling and Pfeffer 1975). Organizations retain a certain degree of autonomy within certain dimensions: first, in relation to the level of conformity they may be able to exercise vis-à-vis the environment – be it foundational, superficial, symbolic; second, in relation to their choice of relevant audiences for strategic targeting; third, in relation to potential capacity of organizations to manipulate the very values and beliefs of the environment in which they operate (Ashforth and Gibbs 1990; Richardson 1985). As Meyer and Rowan memorably argued (1977), organizational requirements need not always be substantial and fundamental, as organizations may simply be required to “adopt certain highly visible and
salient practices that are consistent with social expectations, while leaving the essential machinery of the organization intact” (Ashforth and Gibbs, 1990: 181). Meyer and Rowan’s (1977) theory of rational institutional myths, which posited a ‘loose coupling’ between formal structure and actual organizational activities, suggested exactly this type of dynamic. Consider, for example, the widespread diffusion of ethics and corporate social responsibility departments in corporations or the adoption of standards and certifications provided by gatekeepers and labeling institutions in highly formalized and institutionalized environments.

According to this understanding of legitimacy, once legitimation has been successful, it requires relatively less effort to maintain it. Thus, the existence of particular organizations comes to be taken for granted. Legitimation work is therefore mainly directed towards maintaining the appearance that ‘business is running as usual’ (Suchman 1995), as well as monitoring possible changes in the normative expectations of the different audiences targeted by organizations. Loss of legitimacy is therefore viewed with a long-term perspective, being tied to an ‘unforeseen crisis of meaning’ in light of changed values and beliefs of targeted audiences, and not in relation to specific issues of performance or decisions (Suchman 1995; Ashforth and Gibbs 1990). For organizational staff, it is therefore crucial to anticipate challenges and be alert to environmental changes, providing reassurances to audiences while simultaneously preparing the terrain for possible changes in strategy. ‘Risk assessment’ and ‘crisis management’ are hence new buzzwords in the voluntary sector, mirroring the language of for-profit organizations.

We can see those processes at work in various situations. As already stated, legitimacy is dependent on a relationship with one or multiple audiences, whose values and beliefs may also change over time as a result of a number of structural processes that escape the reach of any single organization (Beetham 2013; Sewell 2005; Clemens and Cook 1999). For example, a community-based organization rooted in a specific neighborhood may witness major demographic changes in the area as an effect of economic downturns or gentrification. The arrival of people of different ethnic or racial backgrounds, age cohorts or income brackets can also significantly affect the viability of specific organizations as they influence the area’s prevailing normative expectations.

Responding to these circumstances, organizations thus often employ a mix of substantive changes and strong symbolic management. This may include directly denying the misrepresentation of organizational activities, but also emphasize re-explanations of past organizational activities that retroactively present them in light of the changed system of values (Ahsforth and Gibbs 1990; Pfeffer and Salancik 1978). Typical actions of

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Meyer and Rowan suggested that contemporary organizations develop in societies that are already highly institutionalized. As new types of organization emerge, they tend to incorporate procedures and practices that are already accepted in a specific context. Those procedures and practices are “defined by prevailing rationalized concepts of organizational work and institutionalized in society” (Meyer and Rowan 1977: 340) and adopted by organizations specifically for their legitimating function. Rather than being adopted out of concerns of organizational effectiveness, those organizational features are adopted ceremonially, and function ‘as powerful myths’ (Meyer and Rowan 1977: 340).
symbolic management of legitimation include providing *accounts*, which “are explanations designed to remove one from a situation that may reflect unfavorably on one’s image or claims to legitimacy” (Ashforth and Gibbs 1990: 181). Those accounts often include excuses, such as the attribution of unfavorable outcomes to unexpected or external events, but also justifications that minimize the negative outcome. Other actions include offering *apologies*, an action that acknowledges the organization’s own responsibility while still attempting to maintain some credibility towards target audiences (Ashforth and Gibbs 1990).

As Scott (2014) pointed out, legitimacy is most evident when absent. Open criticism and questioning often signal that an organization has lost – or may be in the process of losing – its legitimacy for some audiences. Lack of legitimacy occurs when an organization has failed to recognize the lost cultural support for its activities (Meyer and Scott 1983). Threatened legitimacy may be hard to overcome, especially if previous legitimation strategies have already been discredited. It may also trigger a cascade reaction, which pushes former organizational allies and supporters to self-distance so as to avoid their own delegitimation. Suchman (1995) finds that organizations may still be able to protect their legitimacy so long as they enjoy even a bit of credibility and support among relevant audiences.

In fact, adaptability to the changing normative contexts is probably the most important quality of resilient organizations. Zald and Denton’s (Zald 1970; Zald and Denton 1963) fascinating study of the Young Men’s Christian Association in the US showed just that. The authors describe the transformation of the YMCA, from its start in the mid-1800s as an evangelical Protestant organization to its state in the mid-1960s, at which point it had become a more secular- and market-oriented organization largely dependent on membership sales.\(^1\) The study revealed how shifting values and beliefs in society – and particularly in the subgroup of members and related audiences who constituted the bulk of the organization’s support – point to patterns of organizational survival through change and adaptation. As Minkoff and Powell (2006) noted, however, organizations may be limited in their substantial and adaptive efforts to the changing environment by their own historical trajectory, particularly by the original articulation of the organizational mission. This may happen, for example, when organizations refuse to seek legitimacy from certain actors. Consider, for example, a social movement organization that refuses to deal with state institutions for ideological reasons and therefore will not comply with any of their normative expectations. Or, in the same scenario, it could be that adaptation would require complete goal displacement, and that goal is still seen as the only justification for the organization’s existence.

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\(^{1}\) The organization is still active and has continued to change over the last few decades. In their latest efforts to distance themselves from their initial faith-based character, they have come to embrace issues such as sustainable development, gender equality or racism. As of 2010, the US branch of YMCA has also adopted a new logo and it is now simply known as “The Y”.

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Organizational Agency in Legitimation Strategies: A Strategic Perspective

Without always explicitly incorporating legitimacy, some researchers have grappled with organizational agency being normatively framed from a strategic perspective (Jasper 2015; Fliegstein and McAdam 2011; Netelenbos 2016; Levine 2016b). Their approach emphasizes ‘arenas’ (Jasper 2015) or ‘strategic fields’ (Fliegstein and McAdam 2011) as sites of contention, where actors employ strategic repertoires to get others to do what they want them to (Jasper 2015: 19). Despite recognizing the existence of specific rules of the game (what might be called the established normative expectations that ground legitimacy), those actors make strategic moves that may reproduce, ignore, or subvert those rules for the sake of accomplishing their goals. Indeed, while form and procedures are important, they are inherently tied to issues of performance – the achievement (or at least its promise) of organizational goals (Netelenbos 2016). Through this lens, actors can be conceptualized collectively, for example, as organizations or fields. However, their own normative consistency should also be seen as the product of internal negotiation and strategic action among smaller units in smaller arenas (the different organizations and the different audiences or the different individuals involved in the same organizations). While the institutionalization of particular organizational dimensions provides insights into what types of organizations will survive or change over time, this view emphasizes the practices of negotiation that take place in everyday political interaction.

Chung (2007), Kwon (2010), and chapter 5 of this manuscript described the complex process through which the Koreatown Immigrant Workers Alliance (KIWA) established its legitimacy for multiple audiences with very different normative expectations. Founded by a South Korean-born activist with a strong Marxist background, the multi-ethnic immigrant advocacy organization in Los Angeles’ Koreatown, had to develop alternative rationales for its existence. Which rationale was elicited depended on whether the organization was trying to obtain the support of local US labor unions, immigrant rights organizations or private funders, to recruit members among newly arrived immigrants from South Korea or Latin America or to gain neighborhood recognition and acceptance from the Korean business community. Each strategy required toning down or emphasizing specific aspects of the organization, from its compliance with non-profit regulations to championing the immigrant working class, from its commitment to the Korean community’s wellbeing to its rejection of ‘Communism’. It also required KIWA to strategically seek different kinds of endorsements to enhance its legitimacy, from the local Korean ‘ethnic’ media to longstanding activists respected in the local activist scene, from LA politicians to Korean religious ministers working in the neighborhood.

It is important to remember that “organizations become infused with the norms and values of the people who make them up, rather than simply being the expressions of actors’ goals” (McQuarrie and Marwell 2009: 260). Organizations are not simply social facts that abstractly conform to external expectations, but rather are sites of everyday
normative negotiation and discussion among individuals. Organizations are constantly concerned about legitimacy and continually engage in legitimation management in relation to specific audiences. They wonder how changes in goals or activities will be perceived, whether they will affect organizational support and their credibility. However, they also weigh those considerations in relation to the organizational values and those who make up the organization. We see this clearly in Del Valle’s (2016) article exploring discussions within the non-governmental organization Doctors Without Borders (MSF) concerning engagement in a search and rescue operation in the Mediterranean Sea. Confronted by a dilemma of whether or not to intervene to help immigrants attempting to enter Europe by boat, some MSF staff argued against launching such action; they felt the operation would make the organization ‘too political’ and that MSF would be overstepping the bounds of its general mission to provide medical assistance. Those who favored the operation stressed the organization’s commitment to humanitarianism, arguing that migrant deaths at sea was a catastrophe demanding a more political intervention. Notably among those who opposed the operation, there was concern about how donors and subscribers, which constitute the bulk of the organization’s support,118 would evaluate its new potential role. The organization eventually decided to launch the operation, despite the prospect of losing members and donors as a result. While MSF lost the support of some members, its new role gave the organization the chance to recruit new supporters who were emboldened by its more politicized commitment.

Lastly, we should not forget that another level in which voluntary organizations become active agents is in the construction of their relationship with a community. In making particular claims, organizations chiefly rely on their relationship with a community – members, volunteers, residents, inter alia – to justify the right to exist (Beetham 2013). However, organizations do not make claims based on their neutral de facto representation of community interests. In doing so, they also contribute to the symbolic construction of this very group and its interests, highlighting some dimensions while downplaying others (Stokke and Selboe 2009). In formulating different claims of community representation – for example by emphasizing class and multi-ethnic solidarities, or rather by encouraging ethnic loyalties – organizations articulate ‘political projects’ (Chung, Bloemraad and Tejada-Peña 2013) that underscore the saliency of certain audiences and their concerns within a particular community (see also chapter 5). This symbolic construction is not unique to organizations. Organizational criteria are rarely formulated from organizational templates or broader institutional categorizations available within specific contexts. They cannot be entirely disconnected from the experiential reality of their constituents. However, organizations have a relative autonomy in selecting and defining their internal audience, emphasizing and over time even changing different criteria among them: ethnicity and race, geographical location, religious affiliation, socioeconomic class, sexual orientation, identity, or a combination of

118 MSF receives no funds from national governments or supranational institutions.
these dimensions, and many more (Vermeulen, Minkoff and van der Meer 2016; Walker and McCarthy 2010).

Considering the LA case study, we observe how Kwon (2010) found that KIWA redefined its constituency as the ‘residents and workers’ of Koreatown, thus grounding its legitimacy in the neighborhood rather than a specific ethnic community. While this process was not disconnected from wider socioeconomic dynamics of the neighborhood – the increasing heterogeneity of the residents, the rising saliency of issues such as gentrification or affordable housing – it was largely directed by the organization’s conscious decision to abandon more confrontational unionization campaigns and focus on urban redevelopment advocacy. Within this process, it also strategically reframed its message to attract support from new audiences, such as leaders of the local Korean business community (Chung 2007).

**Conclusion**

In this final section, we recapitulate the relevance and usefulness of the concept of organizational legitimacy for the study of voluntary organizations.

In our introduction, we stated that voluntary organizations play an important mediating role between larger institutions such as state and market, on one side, and communities, on the other. Voluntary organizations are vital for communities because they provide services, engage in political activities and produce social change. In many cases, they are the only means to amplify the political voice of marginalized communities. For all these reasons, how organizations legitimate their claims towards their different audiences, community members included, matters.

Throughout this chapter, we underscored critical points to consider when analyzing organizational legitimacy. We began by reviewing its basic definition, which organizational scholars have broadly defined as the level of cultural congruence of organizations with the environment in which they operate. Organizational legitimacy fulfills its most vital function for organizations as a *mediated resource*, providing access to other resources such as funds or labor. We suggested, however, that the link between legitimacy and access to resources is not always straightforward. Legitimacy may succeed in backing particular claims, but scale of preferences and level of resources – i.e. of audiences – will also matter for determining the level of support that organizations can successfully claim. Moreover, particular organizational claims, for example a claim of representation, are not only directed at securing support, but also at building organizational ‘moral’ power (such as the power to influence political decisions).

We then examined the importance of the context in which the legitimation process takes place. Borrowing heavily from neo-institutional theory, we argued that organizational claims are largely evaluated according to institutionalized normative expectations. Those expectations dictate appropriate organizational structures and
procedures in a given environment and suggest desirable organizational forms to achieve specific purposes. For what specifically concerns voluntary organizations in Western societies, we also suggested that democratic and market logics may both play a role in determining acceptable organizational forms, goals, and activities. We continued our analysis by analyzing the role of audiences and addressed the question of which audiences matter the most for legitimation and why. We drew on the conceptualization of McCarthy and Zald (1977) to identify critical differences among audiences of voluntary organizations. The direction of organizational goals, ideological considerations and resource inequalities all have a major part in directing organizations towards specific audiences.

In the final two sections, we analyzed the process of legitimation from the agentic perspective of the organization. The first section emphasized organizational agency within an institutional perspective. We argued that organizations' managerial autonomy, from a strict institutional view, is limited to the point at which pioneer organizations construct a new organizational field. However, drawing on a more nuanced vision of organizational agency, we argued that organizations have relative leverage in manipulating the environment and reconfiguring the network of audiences with whom they interact. Moreover, through strategic communication – involving appeals to emotions and rational argumentation – organizations are able to construct alternative accounts that are accepted as legitimate. The second section drew on theories of organizations that emphasize strategic action and coordination in everyday political interaction. While those theories are not insensitive to the importance of long-standing rules and norms, they also suggest that legitimacy is constantly appraised in micro-processes of negotiation and conflict. Organizations are constantly doing ‘legitimation work’ for strategic purposes, not only to legitimate their existence but to achieve concrete political objectives and counter power and resource inequalities.

These dynamics are highly complex, but we can begin to better understand them when we pay more attention to how voluntary organizations are affected by their environment, as well as to how they contribute to shaping it. That is, how the quest for resources and legitimacy affects their organizational trajectory and their relationship with their primary constituents, but also how organizations themselves contribute to producing audiences and communities and articulating their interests and needs. As we approach the issue of legitimacy, we must remind ourselves that analyzing legitimacy is not about the evaluation of particular normative expectations that we, as researchers or individuals, may hold or privilege. Instead, it is about how the normative assumptions of specific organizations are justified – or not – within a particular normative context and in relation to the expectations of particular audiences. Much work must be done to better understand how considerations of legitimacy at different levels affect the behavior of voluntary organizations, and we hope this chapter will stimulate more empirical research in this direction.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: an early version of this chapter was presented at the meeting of handbook authors in Seattle, WA (August, 18, 2016). We would like to thank Tracy Soska for his extensive comments and feedback, as well as the handbook editors and the meeting participants for their support. We are also thankful to Ruud Koopmans, Eric Schliesser, Enzo Rossi and Benno Netelenbos for providing additional feedback and suggestions on how to strengthen the chapter. The research leading to these results has received funding from the European Union’s Seventh Framework Program (FP7/2007-2013) under grant agreement n° 316796.
CHAPTER 5. ORGANIZATIONAL LEGITIMACY BEYOND ETHNICITY? SHIFTING ORGANIZATIONAL LOGICS IN THE STRUGGLE FOR IMMIGRANT RIGHTS IN LOS ANGELES

Abstract

Immigrant political organizations in the US have traditionally built political power by claiming to legitimately represent an ethnically defined group. However, the emergence of a number of multi-ethnic, class-based organizations over the last two decades has challenged this assumption, while raising questions about the ability of the institutional context to accommodate organizational change. Building on a neo-institutional theory of legitimacy, I examine the diverging legitimating strategies employed by two long-standing immigrant organizations based in Los Angeles, the Korean Resource Center (KRC) and the Koreatown Immigrant Workers Alliance (KIWA). Through grant applications, organizational archival data and qualitative interviews, I show how KRC and KIWA, two groups embedded in the same socio-political context, have built unique yet equally successful legitimating accounts by adopting different organizational logics, one broadly based on ethnicity and one on class and multi-ethnicity. I suggest that KIWA and KRC’s ideological differences, and their reliance on a different core of supporters – ethnic-oriented for KRC, labor-oriented for KIWA – drove the organizations towards distinct, yet partially overlapping sub-fields. By discursively mobilizing those connections, and by actively shaping the surrounding organizational environment, both KRC and KIWA were able to incorporate in the broader non-profit advocacy sector in Los Angeles.

Keywords: Immigrant Organizations; Social Movements; Worker Centers; Ethnic Organizations; Korean Americans

Introduction

Ethnicity and race have long defined the perimeters of urban politics in the United States (Wimmer 2008; Katzenelson 1981; Mollenkopf 2013; Ngin and Torres 2001). Immigrant organizations have followed in this pattern, traditionally building political power in their American host societies by claiming to legitimately represent an ethnically defined group (Portes, Escobar, and Arana 2008; Dahl 1961). This strategy has been even more salient in the local politics of cities, such as Los Angeles, and notably in the context of the city’s 1992 civil unrest and the narrative of ethnic reconciliation that ensued (Chang and Diaz- Veizades 1999; Chung 2007; Pastor 2001b). Recent organizational developments, however,
have challenged this assumption. The change has come, in part, as a result of the stronger alliance between immigrant organizations, labor unions, and a new generation of African American associations (Nicholls and Uitermark 2013; Milkman, Bloom, and Narro 2010; Pastor 2001b). Over the last two decades, a number of immigrant organizations – recently grouped as worker centers (Fine 2006) – have forwarded the political interests of multi-ethnic immigrant constituencies through the discourses of socioeconomic inequalities and class. In doing so, they have built hybrid organizational forms that cannot be easily reconciled with established models of immigrant ethnic organizations (Milkman, Bloom, and Narro 2010).

Examining this change in narratives and structures among immigrant organizations is crucial for understanding how they establish themselves and survive. That is, how they become legitimate collective actors, recognized not only by the constituency they represent but also by the broader field in which they operate. However, not all immigrant-based organizations gain legitimacy in the same way, use the same rhetoric, or draw support from the same audiences. Analyzing how new organizational models emerge and survive can help us better understand how broader institutional change takes place, as well as better appreciate the degree of flexibility of the local context in accommodating different types of immigrant organizations.

The Korean Resource Center (KRC) and the Koreatown Immigrant Workers Alliance (KIWA), two long-standing Los Angeles-based immigrant organizations, were selected for comparison with this purpose in mind. KRC was first established as an international solidarity group and later became an organization along the lines of ethnic representation. KIWA emerged from the same political milieu but embraced an intersectional, class-based framework of action, claiming to represent ‘immigrant workers’ across ethnic lines. Both groups have broadly combined identity-based service provision with political advocacy, supporting an agenda that calls for protecting and enhancing the rights of their immigrant constituency in the US. However, despite being located in the same geographical area and initially working with a similar population, the two organizations have employed different strategies to gain and assert legitimacy to their surrounding environment, building distinct organizational models.

This article aims to understand these two diverging paths and, in so doing, answer the following questions: why have these two organizations pursued different strategies to assert their legitimacy in almost identical contexts? How have they succeeded? Building on a neo-institutional theory of legitimacy that emphasizes the desirability and appropriateness of organizational actions within a normative context, I compare the historical trajectories of KRC and KIWA. I then turn to how the organizations discursively constructed their legitimating accounts over time, especially vis-à-vis donors and funders.
Organizational legitimacy is inherently linked to organizational survival (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Suchman 1995). Immigrant political organizations are no exception in this respect. Their struggle to be seen by other social actors as legitimate is largely driven by their need to access material and symbolic resources (Suchman 1995; Vermeulen and Brünger 2014). Beyond the commitment of their constituency, such organizations also need backing from a wide range of external audiences – other organizations, churches, unions, media, funding agencies, and select institutions – who are not directly concerned by the issue at stake. External supporters become crucial in situations where the targeted constituencies come from underprivileged groups and lack economic resources, and organizations require technical expertise or critical mass to achieve a particular political goal (Walker and McCarthy 2010).

The pursuit of legitimacy poses significant constraints to the scope of collective action. Neo-institutional scholars have argued that newly formed organizations, if they seek higher chances of surviving, are generally expected to conform to the social values and norms of institutionalized organizational fields (Meyer and Rowan 1977; Walker and McCarthy 2010). Suchman’s (1995: 574) influential definition, incorporated in my study, stresses this precisely, stating that legitimacy is the “generalized belief that an organization’s actions are desirable, suitable and appropriate within a socially constructed system of norms, values and beliefs.” Organizational fields generally form from increasing interdependencies and mutual awareness processes among collective actors, with organizations gradually resembling each other’s structures, discourses, and practices (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Once this process completes, social actors come to recognize certain organizational forms (or templates) along with their practices and discourses, as being natural within a given order of arrangements (Suchman 1995). New organizations therefore have to deal with existing “models, schemas, or scripts” (Clemens and Cook 1999: 446) that dictate the accepted range of possibilities within a given field. Each field will be guided by its own institutional logics: “organizing principles that shape ways of viewing and interpreting the world... [which] encode the criteria of legitimacy by which role identities, strategic behaviors, organizational forms, and relationships between organizations are constructed and sustained” (Suddaby and Greenwood 2005: 38).

Emerging organizations are not only constrained by the limitation of organizational possibilities. They also have to cope with an existing discursive context where there are already “established notions of who and what are considered reasonable, sensible, and legitimate” (Koopmans 2004: 451) concerning a certain field or issue. Within this context, only specific strategies of categorization and classification of the social world (Lamont and Molnár 2002; Brubaker 2004) are considered acceptable by most, if not all, the actors. They may revolve around notions of class, sexuality, ethnicity, gender, religion, or some combination thereof. Such strategies are socially context-dependent, historically
contingent and inherently contested, being the product of on-going political struggle where the most powerful social group imposes its own categories and meanings on the others (Wimmer 2008).

Organizations that challenge established organizational models and discourses may therefore face dire prospects of survival. As a matter of fact, it is still unclear how those new organizations empirically construct their legitimating accounts and successfully recombine elements from different organizational logics. Moreover, why similar organizations operating in similar environments may pursue unique strategies remains largely unexplained. Skilled institutional entrepreneurs can, to varying degrees, exploit external shocks or tensions between different institutions to create new logics, mainly by transposing or extending schemas from one context to another (Clemens and Cook 1999; Rao, Morrill, and Zald 2000). For instance, they may align an innovative organizational narrative with the “broadly accepted norms, values, and belief systems that constitute the master principles of society, such as truth, equality, and justice” (Haveman and Rao 1997: 1613-1614). In other words, they may create organizations that, at the surface level, adopt established structural features (organizational denominations, mechanisms of accountability, predetermined financial requirements) but, at the deeper level, challenge normative expectations within the very same field (Clemens and Cook 1999; Vermeulen and Brünger 2014).

Some scholars have suggested that the analysis of organizational linkages is useful for studying legitimacy, as it places a single organization within the wider field in which it is embedded (Vermeulen, Minkoff, and Van der Meer 2016; Baum and Oliver 1991; Wollabaek 2009). Others have stressed that networks are crucial for understanding why organizations adopt specific organizational logics (Clemens and Cook 1999), or why certain groups are more powerful than others in public discursive struggles (Wimmer 2008). These different streams of literature, however, have not paid enough attention to how different networks can impact legitimating strategies of similar organizations, particularly within the same context. Often, the assumption is that organizations with similar characteristics and embedded in the same context will attempt to gain legitimacy from the same institution in the same way, but this is not always the case.

In order to explain for this process, I propose to combine different conceptualizations of networks in my study. In one way, I consider networks as a structural vehicle on which models, practices, interpretative frameworks, and discourses travel between organizational settings, thus setting the conditions for bridging different institutional logics or creating new narratives (Clemens and Cook 1999; Wimmer 2008). When incorporated into organizational narratives, networks also become a discursive device (Mische and White 1998), “cultural constructions, [that] do not pre-exist, or exist apart from their enactment in conversation and discursive communication processes” (Knox, Savage, and Harvey 2006: 129). Therefore, organizational entrepreneurs may be driven towards a given legitimating strategy and organizational logics because of previous
or on-going interaction with specific actors. Organizations and individuals become part of a foundational “organizational infrastructure” (Nicholls 2003: 882), conceived as a system of relations which comes to characterize a specific organizational sector. This infrastructure, to its turn, allows the organization to develop, but also influences and limits the horizon of organizational possibilities over time. At the same time, organizational entrepreneurs may also discursively employ different types of linkages to gain legitimacy among third-party actors. Advertising those connections may suggest reliability and adherence to certain organizational values and principles (Baum and Oliver 1991; Wollabaek 2009), or rather convey support from the community it wishes to represent (Walker and McCarthy 2010; Vermeulen, Minkoff, and van der Meer 2016).

**Methodology**

My research focuses on the long-term legitimating strategies of KRC and KIWA, two immigrant organizations active in Los Angeles (LA) over the last three decades. Given the larger amount of material available and the peculiarity of its trajectory, KIWA is my main case study. The reason for comparing KIWA with KRC lies in the similarities that the two organizations share with respect to a number of characteristics: their ideological orientation, which can be broadly traced to the same wider political milieu within the Korean and Korean American Left; their intrinsic ‘political’ mission, supported by a variable combination of service provision, membership organizing and advocacy activities; the ethnic characteristics of the founders and of the early staff, largely composed of 1.5 and second-generation Korean immigrants; their co-existence within the same territorial, social, and cultural boundaries of the multi-ethnic neighborhood of Koreatown in Los Angeles. I therefore selected the two organizations for comparison in order to understand how they adopt diverging, yet equally successful legitimating strategies despite those striking similarities, eventually becoming part of two separate organizational fields structured around unique organizational logics.

To conduct this study, I relied on a number of data sources, which are cited throughout the paper to demonstrate the evolution of organizational trajectories at specific moments in time. Those included: archive (grant applications to funding organization and related material); interviews with KRC and KIWA former and current staff; public organizational material available online (internal reports, press releases, newsletters, and other digital information). Most of the archive material was assembled by Liberty Hill, a private philanthropy foundation, which has funded a number of LA-based immigrant advocacy organizations over the last 40 years, including KRC and KIWA, and kept detailed record of the whole funding process. Each application folder, ranged per year and per organization, generally included: a grant application (9-10 to 23-25 pages), prepared by the organization to apply for a specific grant; evaluations conducted by the Liberty Hill foundation during the selection process; correspondence between the
application and the foundation, such as grant agreements (few pages); an interim report (6-8 pages), describing the progress of the use of funds by the organization awarded the grant; a final report (7-10 pages), describing organizational achievements at the end of a funding cycle; miscellaneous material provided by organizations to back their application, including newsletters, newspaper articles, fundraising dinner booklets and organizational reports. The significance of the miscellaneous material varied greatly, both by organization and by year, being overall significantly richer for KIWA during the period 1992-2006. For KRC, information was available only for the periods 1983-1984 (on behalf of YKU), 1998-2000, and 2005-2015 (total of 11 application folders). As for KIWA, the data spanned the period 1992-2015 with some minor gaps – records were available so long as the organization submitted an application and was awarded funding (total of 20 application folders. KIWA folders also included selected folders of affiliated organizations MIWON and RWAK in 2000 and 2002, respectively. For the scope of this article, I mostly focused on the early years and up until the mid-2000s for both organizations, when each public legitimating strategy solidified.

I treated archival material and interviews as discursive products, assuming that grant applications and related material reflected KRC’s and KIWA’s official narratives as intended for an external US audience, i.e. a Los Angeles-based philanthropic organization. This assumption carries two caveats with it. First, that organizations are aware that funding applications are expected to comply with certain context-dependent technical and normative expectations in order to be considered by donors. Second, that the official narratives necessarily obfuscate the internal debates and disagreements within organizations, to the advantage of a seemingly homogeneous and coherent organizational story that is essentially the product of the organizational leadership. I adopted a methodological strategy that analyzed archive material to formulate legitimating accounts by focusing on the following dimensions: organizational historical accounts; objectives; structure, decision-making, and collaborations; projects, campaigns, and activities; financial metrics and sources of funding; identified memberships, audiences, and opponents. The literature reviewed and the research questions informed my coding strategy. I coded the material mostly through structural and descriptive coding, in my attempt to extrapolate underlying organizational logics as embedded in those descriptions – i.e. the organizational worldview, its view on social change, the criteria defining its membership, etc. I interpreted organizational linkages mentioned in the narrative in two different ways: as representing a flow of information, ideas, practices, and discourses between the main organization and the connected groups; and as part of the discursive legitimating strategy of the organization vis-à-vis the third-party donor agency.

I also conducted 11 interviews with current and former staff and volunteers: four were involved with KRC and eight with KIWA.120 The interviews broadly focused on the same organizational dimensions explored in the archives, with a specific look on selected

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120 One respondent was involved in both organizations.
periods of the organizational life between the early 1990s and the early 2010s. Respondents provided their own perspective on the development of certain webs of relationships that proved crucial, in their understanding, for the development of campaigns and the organization. They also clarified interpretation of some of the archive material.

The Politics of the Korean Immigrant Community in Los Angeles

The Korean Resource Center (KRC) and the Korean Immigrant Workers Advocates (KIWA) are considered part of a small group of highly politicized organizations that emerged in LA’s Korean immigrant community between the 1980s and the early 1990s (Chung 2007). Ideologically, each organization was inspired by a different thread of South Korea’s pro-labor and pro-democracy movement during the 1980s, though both were firmly anchored on the left of the political spectrum (Louie 2004). Researchers have explained their emergence by singling out three intertwined factors that affected the immigrant community: the pro-labor and pro-democracy movement in South Korea; the 1992 civil unrest in LA; the generational change within the immigrant community (Chung 2007; Chung, Bloemraad, and Tejada-Peña 2013; Louie 2004; Kwon 2010).

Since 1965, LA has been one of the major cities across the US in which waves of Korean migrants settle (Chang and Diaz-Veizades 1999). As Korean immigration boomed in the following three decades, a significant percentage of Korean-owned businesses concentrated west of Downtown LA, which gradually became known across the city as ‘Koreatown.’ As the immigrant population grew and their activities and socio-economic status diversified, immigrant-led organizations of all types and political inclination established premises in the area, providing different financial, social, and cultural services that, due to cultural and linguistic barriers, local institutions could not (Chung 2007). This combination of residential, economic, and service concentrations, all catering to a specific immigrant group, soon earned Koreatown the definition of ethnic enclave. This happened despite the fact that the area was (and still is) inhabited by an extremely heterogeneous and ethnically diverse population, including a majority of Latinos (mostly composed of Mexican and Central American immigrants), as well as South Asian immigrants (mostly from Bangladesh) (Kwon 2010).

As LA’s Korean community became the largest outside South Korea, the South Korean government also took strong interest in maintaining tight control over the political activities of its nationals in the US, specifically when those were directed at influencing affairs in the Korean peninsula (Chung, Bloemraad, and Tejada-Peña 2013). Immigrant organizations sponsored by Korean institutions had little to no legitimacy outside the immigrant community, mainly because they did not need external backing to perform their functions (Chung 2007). At the time, the Korean community in LA was particularly sensitive to political developments in the homeland. The growth of South Korea’s labor and democracy movements inspired a new generation of Korean Americans to formulate
alternative political projects to those of the government-sponsored traditional elites (Chung Bloemraad, and Tejada-Peña 2013; Louie 2004). As news of the South Korean government’s brutal repression of the movement travelled to the US, an emerging group of young Korean Americans, often born in the US from Korean parents or socialized in the American context at a very early age, connected with the home country of their parents in unexpected ways. The connections they forged with pro-democracy and pro-labor activists during this period considerably shaped their political consciousness (Chung, Bloemraad, and Tejada-Peña 2013).

Taking place from 29 April to 1 May 1992, a second major event was short-lived but hard-hitting. Following the acquittal of four white LA Police Department officers who had been charged with the beating of an African American motorist, LA’s inner city experienced one of the most violent rioting outbreaks in its entire history (Pastor 1995; Chang and Diaz-Veizades 1999). What began as an expression of anger over the acquittal, soon devolved into widespread disturbances that included killings, arson and looting. Korean storeowners, most of which had shops located in South Central and Koreatown, were hit the hardest. By all sides, including social commentators and researchers, the event was seen through the lenses of ethnicity and race, with identities such as Black, Latino, and Korean heavily defining cleavages that were much more complex and woven in the broader social, political, and economic disempowerment of inner-city residents (Pastor 1995; Baldassare 1994; Chung 2007). For the Korean immigrant community, the event was financially devastating, but also dramatically exposed the community’s powerlessness in local politics, as shown by local law-enforcement agencies’ reluctance to intervene to protect the businesses under attack (Chung 2007). At the same time, the unrest put Koreatown and its surrounds in the spotlight, attracting the attention of mainstream non-profit groups, media, and private foundations, which began channeling their resources to the inner city to promote inter-ethnic collaboration.

For 1,5 and second generation Korean American political activists, often highly educated and perfectly comfortable in dealing with mainstream US institutions, this combination of events opened up an unprecedented political space to make their concerns be heard outside of the immigrant community (Chung, Bloemraad, and Tejada-Peña 2013). It also allowed organizations such as KRC and KIWA, which were part of this milieu, to envision other sources of legitimization beyond the immigrant leadership.

**The Korean Resource Center: Building Immigrant Ethnic Politics**

*From Ethnic International Solidarity to Ethnic Engagement in the US*

KRC was established in 1983 by Yoon Han Bong, a South Korean activist who played a major role in the pro-democracy demonstrations in Seoul and Kwangju in 1980 (Louie 2004). Throughout the 1980s and up until the early 1990s, KRC mostly functioned as a
progressive community space for the local immigrant population, providing a safe haven where Koreans could share their common experience as immigrants, speak their native language and engage in cultural and political activities. Young Koreans United (YKU), the center’s more politicized arm, was heavily engaged in raising awareness about the oppressive nature of the South Korean state and exposing US complicity with the regime. Although firmly planted on the left of the political spectrum, members of both KRC and YKU had diverging opinions on the future of South Korea (Louie 2004). Some promoted versions of liberal democracy, underscoring the fight against US imperialism in South-East Asia and emphasizing the quest for national independence and reunification. Others supported degrees of socialism, arguing that democratization in South Korea should come as the product of class struggle within the country. The center’s political mission, as well as its popular charismatic founder, were key for attracting a small niche of committed volunteers, most of them 1.5 and second-generation immigrants. More or less at the same time that KRC was funded, South Korean activists encouraged the establishment of similar centers elsewhere in the US, respectively the Young Korean American Service and Education Center (YKASEC) in New York in 1984, and the Korean American Resource & Cultural Center (KRCC) in Chicago in 1986 (Louie 2004).

In this phase, the organization received little to no active support from audiences beyond a small core of committed activists with an immigrant background (Louie 2004). KRC, however, was not a foreign object in the Los Angeles organizational landscape. First, the organization officially registered as a 501(c)(3) non-profit, complying with local regulations governing voluntary political organizations. Second, KRC’s ethno-national political dimension was quite common in LA among different international solidarity organizations comprising immigrants and political refugees from diverse countries (Hamilton and Chinchilla 2001). LA-based organizations such as the Guatemalan Information Center, or the Committee in Solidarity with the People of Salvador (CISPES) pursued a similar combination of public awareness-raising, ethnic identity-building, and service provision to the onsite immigrant community. While there is no direct evidence linking KRC’s organizational trajectory to that of those organizations,112 I suggest that KRC established itself within a growing organizational field where certain practices and discourses were already considered legitimate, this de facto recognition likely smoothening up the organization’s transition to US advocacy and its later professionalization.

KRC’s political mission started to change in the early 1990s, when the organization shifted focus from international solidarity to the concerns of the Korean

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112 Former ED Joo Hoon compared the formation of KRC with the establishment of CISPES or the activity of Filipino exiles in LA. Interview with Dae Joo Hoon, former KRC executive director and current NAKASEC director, 21 January 2015 (herein cited as ‘interview with Joo Hoon’). Moreover, a KRC grant application referred to the early 1980s as a “vibrant and provocative time when young Korean Americans were politically awakened by the anti-imperialist and democracy movements from Nicaragua, El Salvador, South Africa, the Philippines and South Korea.” See “Fund for a New Los Angeles”, KRC grant application to Liberty Hill Foundation, (p.2) 15 March 2007 (herein cited as “KRC 2007 grant application”).
immigrant population living in the US. On the one hand, the political situation in South Korea had become less pressing, as the country was well on its way to democratization. On the other hand, in making a connection between the 1992 Civil Unrest and anti-immigrant legislation (such as California Proposition 187 and the federal welfare reform of 1996), KRC stressed the vulnerability of Korean immigrants both as an ethnic minority and an immigrant group:

The April 29, 1992 L.A. Unrest (Sa-I-Gu) and the anti-immigrant wave with Proposition 187 and welfare reform were two recent events which led many Korean Americans to reassess their understanding of the American dream. Korean Americans directly experienced the harsh effects of social and economic inequality, unfair immigration laws and immigrant scapegoating. As well, these events signified the need to educate young second generation Korean Americans to become socially conscious about their community and to defend their civil rights.

In KRC’s narrative, those events were seen as inherently related, and presented as an attack directed at Korean Americans as a whole. KRC emphasized the ethnic and racial component of both the disturbances and the legislative action, noting the unfair ‘scapegoating’ of Korean immigrant community by the rest of society, but also using this argument to urge Korean Americans to get politically involved. This particular reading of the events provides a rationale for the organization’s shift to legislative advocacy, as well as for its decision to treat legislative and socio-economic discrimination as a matter of civil rights.

KRC’s transition was facilitated by the organization’s pre-existing informal structure of members and supporters, but also by its decision to continue address the same type of public institutions. Another element that guided and facilitated KRC transition was the organization’s embeddedness in a national network of ‘Korean’ organizations, which included YKASEC in New York and KRCC in Chicago (Louie 2004). Not only did the two organizations share similar principles and undergo a similar transformation to that of KRC, but also joined the LA-based group to establish the National Korean American Service Education Consortium (NAKASEC) in 1994. The network developed as a national infrastructure where participating organizations would regularly meet to share ideas, information, as well as human and financial resources. It also tied the interests and logics of KRC to those of the other centers and of their national counterpart, as it formalized their common political struggle as Korean ethnic-based advocacy organizations.

124 KRC newsletter 1999/3 and interview with Joo Hoon.
125 In his interview Joo Hoon, also stressed a similar point.
Those logics were retained and further developed in the late 1990s, when the organization decisively moved towards professionalization and budget expansion. KRC’s then director, Dae Joo Hoon, began seeking external finances to cover major expenses such as headquarters maintenance and mortgage fees, expansion of organizational activities, and building a core of paid salary staff.\(^{127}\) This last move signaled the beginning of the organization’s dependence on a new type of supporter, philanthropic foundations, and considerably changed the organization’s size and scope. Within the broader context of post-1992 Los Angeles, KRC recognized the lack of a ‘Korean voice’ in the local politics and went on to structure its political claim along these lines.

**Placing Korean Americans at the Center of the Mainstream Immigrant Rights Debate**

Throughout the late 1990s and the early 2000s, KRC elaborated an organizational platform that placed at its core the *political empowerment* of Korean Americans, stressing both the ethnic and immigrant dimension of this community. KRC planned to achieve this through a combination of “education, advocacy and grassroots organizing... [in order to] promote political and civic participation of Korean Americans... preserve and promote the cultural heritage of Korean Americans as part of multicultural America.”\(^{128}\) The identification of such organizational objectives implies an underlying logic where ethnicity is discursively used as a primary source of identification for members and staff as well as a principle for guiding the organization’s political action within American society. Korean identity – loosely presented as self-awareness of Korean and immigrant history, culture, and language – thus becomes a way to unite different immigrant generations, children of immigrants raised and born in the US included, around a common political cause blending immigrant and ethnic rights.\(^{129}\)

KRC structured its legitimating strategy in Los Angeles around two axes. One was the assertion of its role as a progressive political advocate of the specific interests of Korean Americans, an ethnic constituency which lacked a voice in 1990s local politics. The second was the recognition of its constituency’s struggle as being similar to that of other underprivileged groups, mostly defined across ethnic and racial lines, coupled with an implicit acceptance of the broader US institutional system and its logics.

As for the first axis, the organization emphasized its ethnic commitment in the description of its cultural and educational activities, which were open to the *Korean immigrant community* at large and, unlike KIWA, were not explicitly antagonizing or excluding particular segments. KRC stressed that its staff mostly comprised 1.5- and second-generation Korean youth, and that its “core leadership represents different

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\(^{127}\) Interview with Joo Hoon.

\(^{128}\) “Liberty Hill Foundation – Seed Fund Application”, KRC grant application to Liberty Hill Foundation (p. 4), 14 February 1999, box 76/folder 10, LHFR archive (herein cited as “KRC 1999 grant application”).

\(^{129}\) KRC newsletter 3/1999.
components of the Korean American community (women, seniors, recent immigrants, students, low-income families, etc.)."\textsuperscript{130} The description of board members also conveyed connections with an ethnic community at large, the immigrant experience, and progressive politics. It highlighted the member’s “sincere involvement in and commitment to social justice issues,”\textsuperscript{131} their civic engagement in a variety of local and transnational Korean associations, and their varied socio-economic status.\textsuperscript{132} Through its association to NAKASEC, KRC built a double-layered narrative meant to challenge established advocacy groups and reinforce the legitimacy of both groups. KRC would represent the most immediate connection to the Korean immigrant constituency, mobilizing an “ethnic immigrant grassroots” base to support advocacy activities. Those included, for instance, the Californian campaigns to restore welfare for elderly immigrants or to gain access to higher education for undocumented youth,\textsuperscript{133} or the creation of grassroots groups such as the elderly-led Community Health Promoters, and the undocumented student-led Alliance for Korean American Students in Action (AKASIA).\textsuperscript{134} For its part, NAKASEC would - through its aggressive advocacy stunts – translate those concerns at the national level, with the aim of establishing “Korean Americans as a player in the welfare reform and immigration debate.”\textsuperscript{135}

As for the second axis, KRC connected the struggle of Korean immigrants to larger issues within mainstream American society. Building on a tradition that emphasized institutional political engagement within a democratic system, rather than polarization around class inequalities, KRC and NAKASEC elaborated a framework that envisioned the political empowerment of the immigrant community as part of a process to make US society more just and equitable, all the more while fostering \textit{multi-ethnic co-existence}. In suggesting the development of “a truly multi-racial and multi-ethnic civil rights agenda,” and in urging “more immigrant communities and ethnic communities [...] to become active players in the civil rights arena”\textsuperscript{136} together with more traditional groups, the organization implicitly connected the struggle of Korean immigrants to that of other racial minorities present in the US, moreover inscribing its actions in the footsteps of the widely legitimated civil rights movement of the 1960s. KRC went about political organizing as a way to educate the immigrant community of its rights as American citizens, but also to encourage immigrants to embrace mainstream political engagement. Throughout the 1990s and the 2000s, KRC’s main activities – legislative advocacy, voter education, and civic engagement – precisely supported the organization’s acceptance of

\textsuperscript{130} KRC 1999 grant application (p.5).
\textsuperscript{131} KRC 2007 grant application (p.3).
\textsuperscript{132} KRC 1999 grant application.
\textsuperscript{133} KRC 2007 grant application 2007.
\textsuperscript{135} The 1995 NAKASEC “Justice for Immigrants” Washington Post Ad Campaign involved raising over $50,000 for a pro-immigration reform ad to appear in \textit{The Washington Post} (see KRC 2007 grant application, p. 7).
\textsuperscript{136} See KRC 1999 grant application (p. 5).
the institutionalized US political mid system. KRC’s network of collaborations also illustrates this pattern. The organization has since the late-1990s associated itself with a variety of established civil society organizations and institutions, mainly by formally engaging in joint projects, by joining a number of coalitions and alliances, and by endorsing campaigns organized by other organizations. Partners include renowned national and local advocacy organizations, such as the National Immigration Law Center (NILC); established immigrant rights groups, such as the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA); ‘Asian’ advocacy organizations, such as the Asian Pacific American Legal Center; institutional actors, such as the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. Those linkages, as described in the proposals, provided funding agencies a framework to interpret the organizational coherence of KRC and its reputation in the non-profit scene. They also showed that KRC had actively embraced the logics of ‘alliance-building’ and ‘networking’ – that is the idea that organizations should devote part of their time and budget to engage in collaborative work – which were particularly praised by progressive philanthropies.\textsuperscript{137}

**The Korean Immigrant Workers Advocates: Building Immigrant Class Politics**

**Building an Immigrant Working Class Organization in a Hostile Environment**

KIWA,\textsuperscript{138} formerly known as Korean Immigrant Workers Advocates – the ‘k’ in ‘Korean’ now standing for ‘Koreatown’ and the ‘a’ in ‘advocates’ for ‘alliance’ – is a LA-based non-profit organization founded in 1992 by South Korean-born activists Roy Hong and Danny Park. Throughout its over two decades of existence, the organization has mostly focused on workplace-based advocacy, addressing labor conditions and labor law violations in the Korean-dominated service economy of Koreatown and beyond. It has done so by highlighting socioeconomic inequalities within and across immigrant communities, representing a multi-ethnic constituency of low-wage immigrant workers.

Members of the same political milieu that established the KRC, Hong and Park grew up in the Bay Area, where the movement leaned more in the direction of Marxist, class-based international solidarity. During college, both volunteered for local labor unions, with Hong soon taking up a job with the Service Employees International Union (SEIU). He worked there from 1983 until 1992, learning the ins-and-outs of the US labor union system and gaining insights into the work of one of the most progressive unions of the time, famous for ground-breaking campaigns such as the Justice for Janitors Campaign (J4J). Such experience acquainted him with the idea of industry-wide and cross-

\textsuperscript{137} Liberty Hill funding applications always included a section about the applicant organization’s collaborations and coalitions, the organizational network being one of the metrics employed to assess the viability and credibility of a proposal.

\textsuperscript{138} See previous work on KIWA and on some of its major campaigns. For example: Chung (2005; 2007), Chung, Bloemraad, and Tejada-Peña (2013), Narro (2005-2006), Ha (2001), and Kwon (2010). Chung and Kwon, in particular, provide fascinating and complementary perspectives on this organization.
It also exposed him to the inefficiencies and flaws of the union machine, plagued by internal racism, lack of cultural sensitivity for the immigrant population, and sometimes blatant incompetence.\textsuperscript{139} Partly disenchanted with SEIU and US unions, but also deeply moved by the most radical and ‘workerist’ wing of the pro-democracy movement as it was developing in industrial zones in South Korea, Hong and Park moved to LA in the mid-1980s. It was then that they established their organization in Koreatown.

LA’s Korean immigrant community was predominantly conservative and anti-labor (Chung 2007). Even if KIWA did not necessarily emphasize a class-struggle rhetoric in Koreatown, merely mentioning the word ‘worker’ in Korean (nadoja) was enough for most immigrants to associate KIWA with the militant labor movement in South Korea (Kwon 2010). Despite an early attempt to reach out to large segments of the Korean community – by assisting business owners affected by the civil unrest – the organization could never really get beyond de facto recognition, let alone receive active support (Chung 2007; Kwon 2010). In fact, once KIWA began to target local businesses with gradual force – by filing wage claims on behalf of workers, organizing ‘workers’ rights seminars’, staging pickets and protests, and later on launching public campaigns – the attitude of the immigrant elites and most of the middle-class turned to widespread hostility (Kwon 2010; Chung, Bloemraad, and Tejada-Peña 2013). At the same time, KIWA’s main constituency was extremely low-income, thus constantly thwarting the organization’s effort to collect dues.\textsuperscript{140} The long-term survival, if not success, of the organization therefore greatly depended on its ability to secure a basis of support beyond the immigrant population.

In its first years, publicly presenting itself as an organization committed to ‘Korean immigrant workers’, KIWA stressed both its class and ethnic dimensions. The organization did not immediately draw sharp class boundaries within the immigrant community, rather maintaining quite a loosely defined worker constituency. KIWA’s narrative initially tried to ‘proletarianize’ most of the immigrant population – including small business owners, service sub-contractors, and their employees – as all part of a vulnerable, under-protected immigrant working class trapped in racially segregated, low-income work sectors. However, in so doing KIWA also flipped the mainstream reading of the civil unrest as a culturally motivated ethnic conflict:

\begin{quote}
While the successful employers and business owners in the Korean community are highly visible, vocal, well organized, and well-funded, the struggling workers who make up the majority of the community have had to suffer silently because of lack of representation and basic legal/administrative resources for them. KIWA’s rapid development since the inception
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{139} Interview with Roy Hong, 10 June 2014.

\textsuperscript{140} In one of its applications to the Liberty Hill Foundation, KIWA foresaw no financial contribution whatsoever coming from members in form of membership dues. Moreover, the organization acknowledged that, since its establishment, the grants provided by foundations and philanthropies comprised 90 percent of its budget. See KIWA grant application to Liberty Hill Foundation, 7 January, 1994, box 47/folder 2, LHFR archive.
testifies to the overdueness of such services. The so-called ‘Black-Korean conflict’ must also be seen in the context of this disproportionate attention given to the business sector.\footnote{KIWA grant application to Liberty Hill Foundation (p. 3), 31 August, 1993, Box 43/folder 11, LHFR archive (herein cited as “KIWA 1993 grant application”).}

Describing situations like Korean storeowners dealing with inner-city African American customers or a Korean factory owner employing ‘Latino’ and ‘Korean’ blue-collar workers, the organization stressed that ethnic and racial tensions were mostly due to economic disparities.\footnote{KIWA 1993 grant application.} Moreover, those tensions were fueled by the lack of general understanding that economic disparities not only existed between ethnic and racial groups, but also within a given group. This perspective diverged from KRC’s reading of the civil unrest, which mentioned no socioeconomic inequalities and instead emphasized shared victimhood among Korean co-ethnics.

KIWA did not radically challenge ethnic categorizations as a broader interpretative framework of social relations in LA. For once, the organization believed categorizations such as Korean, Latino or White were still salient in light of the institutionalized racism of American society. However, KIWA did question the suitability of an ethnic analytical framework alone for promoting serious social change. Not only because it masked asymmetries of power within the immigrant community, but also because it downplayed commonalities among the low-income strata of different immigrant groups, to the advantage of supposed cultural commonalities.\footnote{This point was made repeatedly throughout the grant applications and was also expressed to me by Hong in our interview.} KIWA also believed that its analysis should not exclude gender, as immigrant women and LGBTQ people faced the additional burden of sexism and sexual discrimination.

**Articulating Legitimating Strategies Outside of the Korean Immigrant Community**

Close observers of KIWA’s early history have emphasized that, while its leadership had clearly envisioned a working-class organization since its inception, it was only after the 1992 unrest that it strategically seized the opportunity to reach out to non-Korean immigrant workers, while at the same time highlighting its willingness to reach out to other communities of color.\footnote{Interview with Glenn Omatsu, 13 September 2016. Omatsu, a local researcher and activist who has supported and followed KIWA’s activities since its early days, argued that Hong displayed on that occasion remarkable political intuition and calculation. Accordingly, Hong understood that the political climate was shifting and would become more conducive to multi-ethnic forms of organizing, as it indeed happened (Regalado 1994; Pastor 2001b). Moreover, Hong’s and Park’s experience with labor unions and industry-wide organizing approaches further convinced them that their efforts in Koreatown would necessarily need to include non-Korean workers. On another note, KIWA bolstered its public commitment to improving ‘race relations’, particularly between Koreans and African Americans, by engaging in a wider range of activities. Those included, among other things: the production of “A Bridge Towards Unity”, a booklet meant to ‘educate’ the Korean, African American and Latino communities about the structural causes of the unrest and increase mutual understanding; the organization of a joint press conference with African American leaders on the 1st anniversary of the unrest; as well as the participation in the Liquor Store Conversion Project, a taskforce comprising of Korean, African American and other Asian organizations working on reducing the presence of liquor} KIWA’s political vision, if completely subversive to the eyes
of the immigrant elites, provided the basis for grounding the organization’s legitimacy in other milieus. Two circles of supporters were key for this first period, and strongly influenced its organizational logics: young Korean American activists who supplied the manpower to run organizational operations and, as the organization developed, the intellectual tools to build and sustain its vision; progressive labor unions, which consolidated KIWA’s status as a hybrid quasi-union organization. To its turn, KIWA strongly relied on these groups to legitimize itself vis-à-vis the larger LA progressive community of non-profit organizations and philanthropic foundations.

KIWA’s analysis of the civil unrest, magnified by mainstream media and a creative outreach strategy that included summer trainings, internships and exposure programs, found a receptive audience in young, highly educated, second-generation Korean Americans (Chung 2007). Mostly educated in progressive academic venues, many students began to volunteer for KIWA over the years. Taking on daily tasks like administration, media relations, copyediting and researching, some were gradually incorporated as paid staff. Thanks to the ties that KIWA developed over time with different research centers, faculty members, and student collectives across LA campuses, the organization strongly benefitted from these resources in two other major ways. First, it enabled KIWA to quickly mobilize rank-and-file support for most of its public activities, such as pickets, and demonstrations. Second, it allowed KIWA to back organizational objectives and strategies with solid activist research145 – scientific research being an important tool to legitimize organizations and their vision vis-à-vis institutions (Suchman 1995).

Despite Hong’s and Park’s reservations, labor unions were the first major institutions KIWA reached out to for external recognition. Between 1991 and 1993, KIWA staff assisted unions in a number of campaigns involving abuses and labor law violations by Korean businesses in LA. Critical was the Koreana Hotel campaign coordinated by the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Union (HERE), during which Hong helped facilitate dealings between the union and the Korean consulate with the Korea-based corporate owners (Kwon 2010). KIWA’s association to progressive unions in its early years proved crucial. That solidified its public reputation as an organization that, despite lacking the formal properties of an official labor group, was integral to the labor movement rather than to the advocacy non-profit scene.146 Strengthening those relations, therefore, did not

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146 In a letter to a HERE union official dated 12 February, 1992 – just a few weeks before the official founding and inauguration of KIWA – Hong writes: “HERE is one of the most important unions with which we need to work in the future... your suggestions and endorsements are very critical to us in terms our overall plans and our ability to demonstrate to the rest of the labor community that we are already well on our way in intimately working with labor.” Hong, Roy, endorsement request letter, 12 February 1992, box 3, KIWA archives (unsorted).
translate in concrete material resources for KIWA, but rather in symbolic capital that could hopefully be spent towards foundations, or in the recruitment of volunteers. Unlike KRC, KIWA went through this meticulous work of endorsement- and alliance-building since its earliest phase. Its founders presented KIWA as a unique organization, “arguably the first and only organization of its kind, not only in L.A. but in the country, working to build a grassroots community base among Korean immigrant workers and to build bridges with other ethnic community.” Hong and Park tempered KIWA’s radical political message by formally adopting the organizational features that characterized more conventional non-profits, and established a 501(c)(3) organization. Fundraising dinners and galas were conceived as formal acts of public legitimation before LA’s progressive community, not so much aimed at directly securing material resources – funds collected during these events were relatively modest – but rather at displaying the organization’s ability to bring certain people and organizations to its side. Throughout the 1990s, KIWA also joined a number of coalitions with established progressive organizations, promoting its image as a hyper-connected organization. In a similar fashion to KRC, cross-referencing, mutual endorsements, and joint press statements with recognized civil society organizations became increasingly common practice for KIWA, as the same time revealing its ideological pragmatism for the sake of recognition. While this strategy did not really impact KIWA’s organizational logics, it was crucial in highlighting the organization’s visibility for funders, especially before it had any substantial track record.

From Korean Immigrant Workers to a Multi-Ethnic Immigrant Workers Constituency

Between the late 1990s and the early 2000s, KIWA began presenting itself as a predominantly working-class organization, loosening its ethnic connotation. KIWA’s Koreatown Restaurant Workers Justice Campaign (1997-2000) and the Assi Market campaign (2001-2003) were innovative efforts to together organize Korean and other immigrant workers from Mexico and Central America. The organization always stressed multi-ethnic collaboration, but this was the first time it worked directly with a multi-ethnic immigrant constituency in major projects. Within the LA context, a non-union dealing with workplace complaints across ethnic lines was ground-breaking. For this reason, KIWA introduced its decision in pragmatic terms. For one, workers in Koreatown businesses were ethnically heterogeneous, including many non-Korean employees in

147 Sue Cho, KIWA’s financial officer from 1999 to 2003, confirmed what was already evident from KIWA’s financial statements and internal notes, that is unions played a very marginal role in KIWA’s financial and organizational development for most its existence, and did not provide significant manpower to support KIWA’s campaigns (at least until the early 2000s). KIWA largely relied on a handful of private philanthropies, small donations and outside volunteers. Interview with Sue Cho, 16 September 2016.

148 “Fund for a New LA”, KIWA grant application to Liberty Hill Foundation (p.2), ca. 1992, box 41/folder 1, LHFR archive.

149 The Koreatown Restaurant Workers Justice Campaign focused on improving working conditions for restaurant workers. The Assi Market campaign demanded living wages and unionization for the employees of a major Korean-owned supermarket. See Ha (2001) and Kwon (2010).
backdoor and delivery jobs in Korean restaurants and supermarkets. Also, Korean workers, unlike other groups, seemed more vulnerable to social pressure from co-ethnics to not challenge the status quo.\(^{150}\)

KIWA’s narrative emphasized the uniqueness of its multi-ethnic work, testified by an ability to overcome linguistic barriers – using interpretation during meetings and workshops and publishing material in English, Korean, and Spanish – and by hiring multi-ethnic staff, specifically with Asian and Latino background. It legitimated its aggressive tactics vis-à-vis Korean restaurants and markets by associating with the union principle of *industry-wide organizing*. The narrative highlighted the direness of its work and its efficacy, describing horror stories of workers’ exploitation and harassment and KIWA’s role in winning compensation and pressuring employers to improve conditions. It underscored KIWA’s strong grassroots nature, epitomized by the ubiquity of ‘the workers’ in all public documents.\(^{151}\) KIWA’s political commitment was also reflected in its organizational structure and decision-making process. It encouraged the formation of self-defined *multi-ethnic constituent-led groups*, which depended on KIWA for organizational support but were formally independent. The Koreatown Restaurant Workers Association (RWAK)\(^ {152}\) and the Immigrant Workers Union (IWU)\(^ {153}\) are two such examples. The strategy aimed to incorporate immigrant workers within the life of the organization and serve as a final step in their political empowerment as self-helping autonomous subjects.

The more KIWA’s narrative became radical and innovative, the more KIWA took an active role in changing the surrounding organizational environment. Projects such as the Summer Activist Training (SAT),\(^ {154}\) which exposed participants of immigrant Asian background to the principles of class-based, multi-ethnic organizing, or the Asian Pacific Garment Workers Collaborative,\(^ {155}\) which paved the way for the creation of the multi-ethnic Garment Worker Center (GWC) in the late 1990s (Milkman, Bloom and Narro 2010), were instrumental in extending the intersectional, class framework to the experience of other Asian immigrant groups.\(^ {156}\) KIWA also reinforced this process by

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150 Interviews with former KIWA organizer Elizabeth Sunwoo, 3 June 2014 (herein cited as “interview with Sunwoo”).


152 “Fund for a New Los Angeles” RWAK grant application to Liberty Hill Foundation, 4 September, 2001, box 88/folder 6, LHFR archive. RWAK was formed as a member-led organization representing restaurant workers in the Koreatown area. Some of its coordinating staff, like Jung Hee Lee, were hired following KIWA’s worker rights training in the Koreatown restaurant industry. Interview with Jung Hee Lee, 26 November 2014.

153 “Fund for a New Los Angeles”, KIWA grant application to Liberty Hill Foundation, 2 April, 2001, box 83/folder 1, LHFR archive (herein cited as “KIWA 2001 grant application”). IWU, with KIWA’s support, was created to spearhead the immigrant worker-led unionization campaign at Assi market in Koreatown. Max Mariscal, one of the market employees, was elected as IWU president and was later hired by KIWA as organizer. Interview with Max Mariscal, 11 June, 2014.

154 “Fund for a New LA”, KIWA grant application to Liberty Hill Foundation, 30 November, 1994, box 51/folder 8, LHFR archive (herein cited as “KIWA 1994 grant application”)

155 KIWA, Thai CDC and APALC grant application to Liberty Hill Foundation, 1 September, 1995, box 50/folder 4, LHFR archive (herein cited as “KIWA/TCDC/APALC 1995 grant application”).

156 KIWA grant application 1994; KIWA/TCDC/APALC grant application.
encouraging the development of new organizations that shared a similar political vision, such as the Thai Community Development Center (TCDC), or the Pilipino Workers Center (PWC), which were both first sponsored and hosted on its premises.

KIWA also skillfully established itself within the larger immigrant rights movement in LA. The product of a political convergence built over years of close collaboration, KIWA, CHIRLA, PWC, GWC, and the Instituto de Educación Popular del Sur de California (IDEPSCA) formally joined, becoming a network that would amplify the multi-ethnic worker center narrative for the larger public. The result was the Multi-ethnic Immigrant Organizing Network (MIWON), established in 2000, with the goal of addressing “unjust immigration laws and other major issues affecting immigrant communities and particularly undocumented workers.”\(^\text{157}\) In recognition of KIWA’s important role, one of its staff was later assigned to coordinate the network, which was officially hosted on KIWA premises under the fiscal sponsorship of CHIRLA. On the one hand, MIWON further consolidated the relationship among this core of organizations, whose closeness had made one’s reputation reliant on that of the others. On the other, MIWON linked workers’ rights to the bigger battle on state and federal immigration legislation, particularly through the highly visible May Day Marches which the founding organizations first launched in 2000.\(^\text{158}\) In proposing a class-based, multi-ethnic counter-narrative to the mainstream ethnic and civil rights frame, the MIWON organizations not only challenged the legitimacy of Washington, DC-based advocacy and policy groups that were accused of being disconnected from the daily reality of most immigrants,\(^\text{159}\) but also distanced themselves from the more traditional narrative of organizations such as KRC. Despite MIWON’s fading role after the historical 2006 immigrant rallies in Los Angeles, in the early 2000s the network was able to successfully present itself as a collective of immigrant-led, membership-based political organizations, and consolidated its organizations’ legitimacy in the local progressive scene (Milkman, Bloom and Narro 2010).

These developments are important to keep in mind when looking at KIWA in more recent history. After a bitter struggle, the failure of the Assi Market unionization campaign between 2002 and 2003 tarnished the organization’s track record and drained its human and financial resources (Kwon 2010). Throughout the late 2000s, the organization responded by abandoning more confrontational tactics such as direct action and unionization, reframing its commitment to the immigrant working class by explicitly incorporating a socioeconomic spatial dimension in its narrative (Kwon 2010). By identifying low-wage immigrant workers both in their capacity as workers and residents of Koreatown, the organization could justify greater involvement in issues such as housing, healthcare, and gentrification,\(^\text{160}\) but was also able to retain (if not expand) its sources of

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157 CHIRLA, KIWA, PWC MIWON grant application, ca 2000-01 (p.1), box 15, KIWA archive (herein cited as “MIWON 2000-01 grant application”).
158 MIWON 2000-01 grant application; KIWA 2001 grant application.
159 Interview with Sunwoo.
160 Interview with Alexandra Suh, 5 November 2014.
financial support. By the end of 2005, KIWA officialized its cross-ethnic commitment to workers and Koreatown residents by changing its name to the Koreatown Immigrant Workers Alliance.

Conclusion

Organizational legitimacy is essential for immigrant organizations but may be achieved in different ways and through different strategies. This study highlighted how two immigrant organizations embedded in the same socio-political context employed different strategies to gain legitimacy among mainstream institutions. KRC mostly reproduced the typical pattern of politically incorporating immigrants as ‘ethnics’, largely responding to normative expectations of the surrounding institutional environment, to get recognition. KIWA challenged this pattern, producing a counter-narrative that, beyond ethnicity, mobilized notions of class and economic justice to advance the political inclusion of immigrants as ‘workers.’ Organizational leadership skillfully seized on political openings in the aftermath of the 1992 unrest to align KIWA’s class focus with the narrative of ethnic reconciliation and multi-racial collaboration that emerged in LA’s progressive milieus.

In highlighting the similarities of the organizations and their diverging legitimating strategies, I point out to the ability of KRC and KIWA to actively shape their organizational logics, as well as the broad organizational field through their action. My chronological perspective underscored the importance of decision-making in the early phases of an organization, as informed by its founders’ backgrounds and early connections. The trajectories of KRC and KIWA also suggest that organizational logics, once consolidated and legitimated, do not easily change and become strongly path-dependent.

This analysis builds on previous literature on organizational legitimacy, further suggesting that, within a broadly limited perimeter, alternate (but equally successful) public legitimating strategies are possible within the same context. KIWA and KRC’s ideological differences, and their reliance on a different core of supporters – ethnic-oriented for KRC, labor-oriented for KIWA – drove the organizations towards distinct, yet partially overlapping sub-fields. However, in discursively mobilizing those connections vis-à-vis the same public institutions, the two organizations also provided local funders with a legitimate framework to interpret their distinct organizational logics. As a result, both KRC and KIWA managed to become part of the broader non-profit sector of immigrant advocacy organizations in Los Angeles.

This article analyzed organizational legitimating strategies as a cohesive collective product, assuming that public archives represent the official views of their organization. To fully appreciate all the levels of the legitimating process, it may be fruitful to investigate other interrelated dimensions through other sources. A stream of research
incorporating ecological perspectives could further investigate how organizational templates, frames, and discourses diffuse across organizational fields and populations, and how popular they become as measures of legitimacy. A second stream, more concerned with micro-dynamics, could address the construction of legitimating accounts by organizational staff, examining the internal discursive struggles that occur when producing a cohesive narrative of self-presentation. Such analyses may provide a more nuanced understanding of how legitimating strategies are shaped and how ideas and schemas are concretely mobilized to form a coherent account for outsiders.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the annual INTEGRIM conference in Budapest, Hungary (December 10, 2014), and at the UCLA Department of Sociology’s Contentious Politics and Organizations Working Group, Los Angeles, CA (March 4, 2015). I am greatly indebted to Floris Vermeulen and Walter Nicholls for their invaluable help with the preparation of this article. I would also like thank Ruth Milkman, Irene Bloemraad, Marco Martiniello, Lina Stepick, Juan Delgado, Matias Fernandez, Francesco Colona, Thijs van Dooremalen and Stefano Piemontese for their insightful comments and feedback. Special thanks to Margarita Ramirez (the Liberty Hill Foundation), and Michele Welsing (Southern California Library) for granting me access to their archive and guiding me through the material, as well as to current and former KRC and KIWA staff for their help in carrying out the research. The research leading to these results has received funding from the European Union’s Seventh Framework Program (FP7/2007-2013) under grant agreement n° 316796.
CHAPTER 6. BEYOND THE LOS ANGELES MODEL? UNDERSTANDING THE EVOLUTION OF IMMIGRANT WORKER ORGANIZATIONS THROUGH A HYBRID RESOURCE-BASED MODEL

Abstract
This paper offers a starting point to explain the emergence, consolidation, and fragmentation of the Los Angeles immigrant workers rights movement over the last three decades. While traditional accounts highlight labor unions and private foundations as supporters of immigrant workers’ organizations and multi-ethnic collaboration, the role of such institutions fails to account for the rise and fall of a key coalition, the Multi-Ethnic Immigrant Worker Organizing Network (MIWON). Inspired by ecological theory and Olson’s collective action theory, we contend that organizational collaboration is shaped by 1) forces that spur competition between organizations, 2) complementarity and alignment of organizational goals, and 3) ideologically grounded moral incentives that sustain collective action. With qualitative data from in-depth interviews and organizational and public archives, we elaborate how these three dimensions’ changing configuration underpins shifting rationales for organizational collaboration within a group of ideologically similar organizations.

Keyword: Immigrant Organizations; Coalition-Building; Organizational Competition; Social Movements; Organizational Ecology.

From Ethnic to Immigrant Working-Class Mobilization? An Assessment of Los Angeles ‘Exceptionalism’

Over the last few decades, Los Angeles has proven to be a major hub of leftist immigrant activism in the United States. Local immigrant organizations, often organized in multiethnic coalitions, have conducted a remarkable number of successful campaigns addressing diverse issues including unionization and labor conditions, access to healthcare, voting rights, legalization and federal immigration reform, and many more (Milkman, Bloom, and Narro 2010; Voss and Bloemraad 2011; Nicholls 2013; Fine 2006). Researchers have observed the resurgence of class as a key organizing principle within those organizations. Several groups have centered their action on workplace issues, and formulated rights’ claims in the public sphere, mostly in terms of social and economic rights (Milkman, Bloom and Narro 2010; Chung 2007; Fine 2006; Nicholls and Uitermark 2016). While certainly not renouncing other identities – race, ethnicity, gender – organizations have mainly defined their memberships and constituencies in terms of

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16 This chapter has been co-authored by the following: the author of the present dissertation, Walter J. Nicholls and Floris Vermeulen (in this order). The chapter is currently under preparation for submission and publication as an independent article.
class, publicly claiming to represent the “low-wage immigrant workers” across the city (Fine 2006; Milkman, Bloom and Narro 2010; Chung 2007).

This situation presents an intriguing empirical puzzle, with broad implications for understanding urban politics in the US. Observers have long recognized that immigrants tend to mobilize politically through ethnic channels and identities, rather than along class lines (Portes and Rumbaut 2006; Katzenelson 1981; Mollenkopf 2014). Collective action, particularly through non-profit community organizations, advocacy groups, or hometown associations, generally remains within the precinct of ethnic and racial boundaries (Portes, Escobar, and Arana 2008; Chung, Bloemraad, and Tejada-Peña 2013). Trends in LA seem to confound these conventional assumptions because of the prevalence of long-term inter-ethnic and class-based alliances, solidarities, and identities. Working-class immigrants continue to identify as ethnics from different regions and countries, but in parallel, many also belong to bigger struggles organized on class-based affiliations and ideologies. This paper addresses this puzzle by explaining the trend and assessing its potential to fundamentally change traditional patterns of ethnic politics in the city.

So, how have scholars explained the case of LA? Observers have generally accounted for the “Los Angeles model” by pointing to three main factors (Milkman, Bloom and Narro 2010; Milkman, 2006; Franck and Wong 2004; Pastor 2001b; Pastor and Prichard 2012). First, a thick concentration of undocumented working-class immigrants became employed in mostly unprotected low-wage sectors of the highly segmented LA economy, which steered immigrant political mobilization towards workplace issues. Second, labor unions gave firm support to multicultural organizing, which manifested in the leadership of immigrant-friendly progressive labor unions such as the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and the Hotel Employees International Union (HERE), as well as the revamped LA County Federation of Labor (LA Fed) under the guidance of Miguel Contreras.162 Third, networks formed between labor, immigrant, community, and faith organizations, which ensured mutual support and minimized competition over scarce resources while facilitating the attainment of common goals.

These different explanations point to important factors but they do not identify the mechanisms responsible for solidarities across groups. When they do point to explanatory mechanisms, they often highlight the important roles played by labor unions. Immigrant-friendly union leaders opened some unions to accommodate the concerns of immigrants, encouraged important investments in immigrant rights campaigns, and supported building cross-sectoral (alliances around a broad range of issues. Just as important, unions were hearty and forceful advocates of a “social and economic justice” frame, which has assumed great prominence in LA’s progressive politics. However, early on in immigrant organizing, during the late 1980s and 1990s, labor unions and the

162 In 1996, as a former United Farm Workers (UFW) and HERE organizer, Contreras was the first Latino elected as secretary-treasurer of LA Fed and became a driving force in local politics (Milkman 2006; Franck and Wong 2004).
powerful Los Angeles County Federation of Labor had at best an indirect role in stimulating cooperative relations between key leftist immigrant organizations. These immigrant organizations included the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA), the Koreatown Immigrant Workers Alliance (KIWA), the Instituto de Educación Popular del Sur de California (IDEPSCA), and later the Pilipino Workers Center (PWC). Unions certainly reshaped the general political environment of LA and they participated in several large campaigns. Yet, there is scant evidence that unions played a direct role during these groups’ startups or in shaping their relational dynamics or class-based organizing rationale. Others have argued that a handful of private philanthropies played a key role by supporting those groups in their infancy, particularly when leftist immigrant organizations lacked widespread public legitimacy (Pastor and Prichard 2012). Foundations, especially Liberty Hill, were instrumental in seed-funding all the organizations in this case study. This kind of support also encouraged multiethnic collaboration among the organizations. Still, there is no reason to expect that a single funder’s encouragement to collaborate will necessarily produce profound change in actual organizational strategy (Kohl-Arenas 2016).

These explanations cannot account for how different immigrant organizations began to invest important resources in interethnic and working-class collaborations early on. A persuasive explanation of inter-organizational collaboration requires identifying the underlying factors that spurred collaboration at the outset of immigrant workers mobilizations, as well as worked to sustain or weaken it over the years. The central questions we therefore pose are: what conditions have been responsible for encouraging interethnic and class-based cooperation between immigrant organizations in LA? And how have their dynamics of collaboration changed over time?

To answer these questions, we find it worthwhile to integrate existing literature that emphasizes an organizational perspective. Drawing on ecological theories of organization (Hannan and Freeman 1989; Minkoff 1997; Soule and King 2008; Vermeulen 2013; Ingram and Simons 2000) and parts of Olson’s (1971) theory of collective action, we can better understand dynamics of collaboration across these organizations. In doing so, we pay particular attention to 1) the forces that spur competition between organizations, 2) the complementarity and alignment of organizational goals, and 3) the ideologically grounded moral incentives that sustain collective action.

We use LA’s Multi-Ethnic Immigrant Worker Organizing Network (MIWON) as a window into the general relational dynamics between immigrant organizations in the city. MIWON was a coalition of five prominent LA immigrant organizations: CHIRLA, KIWA, PWC, IDEPSCA, and the Garment Worker Center (GWC). It was established in 2000 with the two-pronged aim of strengthening immigrant worker organizing and engaging in broader immigrant rights advocacy at local, state, and national levels. The organizations under research have worked together in many different ways, and MIWON
reflects the culmination of this partnership. Our case study of the coalition serves as a
gauge of the overall health of organizational relations in LA.

While the focus is LA, our intention is to develop an explanation for local
relational dynamics potentially applicable elsewhere. We find similar immigrant workers
organizations in Chicago, Washington, D.C., New York, Boston, and San Francisco. Some
relations between these cities’ organizations have moved in the direction of LA, while
others have not. By developing a more refined theory to understand relational dynamics
in LA, we are in a better position to examine whether the mechanisms we identify here
explain those in others cities as well. This move towards generalization will allow us to
better assess if and how the “working class” turn in immigrant and ethnic politics is
durable or a historical accident that stems from a unique confluence of factors in one
unique place and time: LA in the 1990s and 2000s.

As for the structure of the paper, first we introduce our theoretical framework.
Second, we present our data sources and methodology. We then introduce our case st
udy, describing the evolution of inter-organizational collaboration across immigrant worker
organizations over three distinct historical phases. Last comes the conclusion, discussing
the broader empirical and theoretical implications of our study.

Collaboration between Ideologically Similar Organizations: A Hybrid Organizational
Approach

The density-dependent model provides a theoretical springboard to understand
collaboration among social movement organizations (Minkoff 1997; Soule and King 2008;
Vermeulen 2013). The model's basic assumption is that organizations in any given
organizational population – that is, sharing key organizational structures, ideological
orientation, goals, and missions – rely on the same key resources to exist (Hannan and
Freeman 1989). As such, organizations tend to respond similarly to environmental forces,
causing those in a given population to be in a constant state of interdependence. This
interdependence takes one of two forms: competition or collaboration. The key to
understanding levels and forms of collaboration and competition between similar
organizations, following the density-dependent model, is to evaluate the amount of
interdependence between them. Recent ecological studies on ideology (Barnett and
Woywode 2004; Simons and Ingram 2004; Vermeulen 2013) have found that
organizational interdependence is highly contingent on similarities and dissimilarities
among organizations. Interdependence and resource overlap are particularly acute across
organizations that are ideologically similar because they tap the same resources. Among
social movement organizations, the overlap in potential funders, activists, and volunteers
has proven to be especially significant (McPherson, Popielarz, and Drobnic 1992;
Vermeulen 2013). If these organizations draw from the same member pool, resource
overlap will increase, spurring intense rivalries among them and making collaboration
more difficult. Social movement organizations also recruit new members primarily through the social networks of their existing members (Popielarz and McPherson 1995; McPherson and Rotolo 1995). Membership of voluntary associations may differ according to traditional demographic variables such as age, sex, and ethnicity. However, other characteristics may also be at stake, such as a person’s ideological orientation (whether left-wing or right-wing, for example) and degree of religiosity (Vermeulen 2013). Ideology also influences other forms of resource overlap, such as external funding sources, political allies, institutional access, and public support (Minkoff 1995).

Competition is therefore likely to be higher among organizations that are ideologically similar because their similarity increases forms of resource overlap. At the same time, like-minded organizations are also expected to cooperate with each other to achieve shared goals. The more similar these organizations are, the more we expect to see esprit de corps, which leads to higher levels of collaboration (Barnett and Woywode 2004; Soule and King 2008). Ideologically similar organizations often strive for similar goals, and they may need each other to achieve them. Collaboration is conducive to strategies such as coalition politics, resource sharing, and the formation of umbrella organizations. Collaborations of this kind permit organizational forces to achieve common goals (Minkoff 1997; Simons and Ingram 2004). To distinguish between competition and collaboration among similar organizations is to recognize that although both produce predictions of interdependence, each form relies on distinct mechanisms. Collaboration looks to goals; competition looks to resources (Simons and Ingram 2004). With so many kinds of resources for voluntary organizations to tap—from the institutional to the political (Singh, Tucker, and Meinhard 1991)—overlap among organizations will have varying outcomes. Most studies find that when there is substantial overlap in membership base—one of the most crucial resources for voluntary organizations—competition will dominate and ideological commonality will only increase this. At such a point, ideological esprit de corps swiftly erodes, as even subtle differences in ideology threaten shared resource bases. Thus, in reality, ideologically similar organizations are primarily competing with each other for limited overlapping resources instead of collaborating with each other for common goals (Minkoff 1995; Soule and King 2008), and competition is indeed most intense among organizations that are most ideologically alike (Vermeulen 2013).

For social movements to collaborate, for instance, in forming coalition networks, there must be some level of similarity, similar ideological orientation, and common interest but no major resource overlap. Collaboration can then take either direct or diffuse form. Direct collaboration occurs when, for example, organizations with complementary capacities cooperate for the benefit of both. Diffuse collaboration occurs when collaboration among organizations with similar characteristics leads to the institutionalization and legitimation of a particular organizational field, either through codification of shared organizational templates, practices, and procedures or the
incubation and support of new like-minded organizations (Hannan and Freeman 1989; Minkoff 1995; Powell and DiMaggio 1991; Suchman 1995). If successful, pioneering organizations may therefore widen their own pool of available resources, while at the same time paving the path for additional actors to enter the very sector they helped create (Suchman 1995). In turn, this process may simultaneously increase organizational density and overall competition (Hannan and Freeman 1989).

Common interests and low levels of resources are themselves rarely sufficient for explaining collaboration, due to free-riding and subsequent self-interest among activists and social movement organizations. Olson (1971) argues that we need to look through a cost-benefit lens to understand collaboration in small groups. He (pp. 34-35) notes how especially in small groups that provide collective goods, such as those among a coalition of immigrant workers right organizations, collaboration can be successful without coercion. This happens when at least one group member perceives the gain from having the network and the collaboration as exceeding the total cost of the collective good. Olson also explains how in smaller groups marked by memberships of unequal size (e.g. – membership size, but also resources, support networks, etc.) there is the greatest likelihood that a collective good will be provided. In those instances, since the most powerful member is likely to benefit most from the group effort, it will also be willing to pay all or most of the cost. Moreover, successful coalitions must overcome the calculated self-interest of members by developing group solidarity and a moral commitment to the group. This entails the fusion of personal and collective interests (Jenkins 1983). Collaboration among ideologically similar social movement organizations can be explained by this combination of, on the one hand, a small group network with a larger, more powerful organization having largely overlapping personal and network goals and, on the other, development of a collective solidarity and moral commitment to the overall collectivities in whose name the network acts.

Accordingly, we would expect collaboration between organizations when there is 1) ideological similarity, 2) goal compatibility and complementarity, 3) little overlap in resources (money, labor, legitimacy), and 4) overlap between the particular interest of one of the more powerful organizations in the group and the collective good. In this situation, benefits of joining the network will, for most members, exceed costs. Should this not be the case, collaboration could still take place for as long as disadvantaged members have developed a strong moral commitment to the collective, be it based on trust and solidarity, multiple obligations, or the ideological desirability of coalition goals. By contrast, the literature predicts rivalries and competition when ideological commonalities exist, significant resource overlaps are present, and gains for network members do not exceed costs of starting or maintaining the network. Under such circumstances, esprit de corps, trust, and solidarity swiftly erode. Commonalities in such a context can compel these organizations to cooperate on short-term and time-sensitive projects (e.g. circulating a
petition) though they have little or no interest in investing in larger-scale campaigns or long-term partnerships.

This paper adds to the literature in at least three ways. To begin with, we provide a framework to systematically understand the relational dynamics of cooperation among ideologically similar organizations within a single metropolitan area. By doing this, we can better explain the factors driving interethnic cooperation, or lack thereof, on the basis of class solidarities. Second, we expose processes of cooperation and competition that take place both inside and outside an organizational population. Most ecological studies on ideology have centered on cooperation and competition between distinct yet ideologically similar organizational populations as aggregates (Barnett and Woywode 2004; Simons and Ingram 2004; Vermeulen 2013). Such studies assume that these dynamics exist by identifying correlations between density – the number of existing organizations in a population – and founding and disbanding rates. However, researchers have less examined how organizations within the same population collaborate and compete with each other as a result of ideological tensions, or how those inter-organizational dynamics may trigger a process of organizational change (in activities, vision, goals, structure) that eventually drives the organization towards another organizational population. As such, we focus on actual mechanisms of collaboration by taking into account the emergence, development, and slow disappearance of a coalition in which ideologically similar organizations have collaborated to achieve common goals. We bring in ecological theories on the political behavior of immigrants and ethnic groups and combine them with one of the key features of Olson’s model of collective action. This theoretical approach provides the analytical toolbox to explain the shifting relations between diverse immigrant organizations. It allows us, furthermore, to understand how organizations representing different ethnic groups collaborated at one period of time but later drifted.

Methodology

To conduct this study, we endeavored to map five MIWON organizations’ trajectories, specifically examining their ideologies, goals, and resource pools. We understood these organizations – CHIRLA, IDEPSCA, KIWA, PWC, and GWC – to represent an emerging population of immigrant worker organizations characterized by similar practices, structures, and goals. Our selection of these organizations came after exploratory fieldwork, including formal interviews with key informants involved in the LA labor and immigrant activist scenes as well as informal conversations with local researchers and observers of the organizational landscape. Supported by findings in our review of the

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163 Positive correlations for founding rates indicate stronger collaborative dynamics, whereas negative correlations indicate stronger competitive dynamics. For disbanding rates these directions are in the opposite direction – negative correlations indicate stronger collaborative dynamics and positive correlations indicate stronger competitive dynamics.
existing academic literature on the topic.\footnote{The literature covering LA’s leftist immigrant organizations is quite vast, and it continues to grow (see e.g. Milkman, Bloom and Narro 2010; Chung 2007; Fine 2006; Nicholls 2013; Nicholls and Uitermark 2016).} Our conversations revealed how relevant these organizations were for local urban politics in terms of leadership, taking original and innovative approaches, and relative success vis-à-vis achievement of organizational goals. We therefore decided to analyze those organizations and the coalition they formed as a starting point from which to understand the broader immigrant urban politics of LA.

Inspired by different streams of organizational literature, we conducted our analysis along three key dimensions: ideology, goals and resources. We followed Simons and Ingram (1997: 784) in conceptualizing ideology as a “set of beliefs about how the social world operates, including ideas about what outcomes are desirable and how they can best be achieved.” We contend that ideology affects how individuals and organizations understand social reality, but also guides action (Simons and Ingram, 1997; Wilson 1973). Political ideologies therefore play a crucial role in shaping the identity of an organization, as well as defining its rationale for existence, organizational mission, and structure. At the same time, because ideological principles must be applied to everyday reality, organizations and their staff must translate them into concrete, potentially attainable organizational activities and objectives. Organizations with very similar ideologies may therefore sharply differ in their daily operations.

Resources give organizations the means to carry out their operations and survive. Here we draw on the analytical scheme developed by McCarthy and Zald (1977), which identified types of resources and audiences. The scholars distinguished between two general types of resources: money (grants, donations, funds) and labor (mainly time and commitment of individuals). To this we add legitimacy: the ability of an organization to justify its right to exist and operate within a given normative framework (Meyer and Scott 1983; Gnes and Vermeulen, see chapter 4 of this manuscript). So conceptualized, legitimacy is a symbolic resource. As for audiences, we draw on McCarthy and Zald’s (1977) categories of constituents (providers of money and labor to the organization) and beneficiaries (those who directly benefit from the achievement of a particular organizational goal). While those two categories may overlap, this is not always the case. We suggest that even when they do not overlap, both beneficiaries and constituents are crucial for organizations. If constituents are vital to organizations largely because they provide material resources, beneficiaries are an important source of legitimacy vis-à-vis third parties, as they often provide the most powerful justification for an organization’s existence and backing its appeals for support (Beetham 2013).

To collect this type of data, we relied on four source types: archive material from the aforementioned organizations, qualitative interviews from key informants, IRS 990 US Federal Tax Return Forms (1990s-2013), and other case studies. The bulk of the archive material consists of grant applications, correspondence, and other documents that MIWON organizations supplied to the Liberty Hill when applying for funding (1990s-
To complement this information, we consulted the public archives of KIWA (1993-2006) as well as the MIWON coalition itself (2000-10) and the Sweatshop Coalition (1995-2004). All those archives, with the exception of the latest Liberty Hill grant files (2006-2014), which are still hosted by the foundation, are freely available at the Southern California Library in LA. We conducted 16 exploratory interviews with a number of key informants, all of whom were current or former staff of the organizations in our study. Interviews centered on individuals’ biographies, organizational work, and perceptions of organizational missions, activities, and objectives. We collected IRS 990 forms for each MIWON organization, which specified its annual finances and main funding sources. Given the availability of such material, we drew on previous case studies for additional insights into the internal workings of some of the organizations.

To analyze organizational ideologies, we focused on mission and general goals (rationale for existence, problems constructed and addressed, types of claims put forward); structure (volunteer-based, membership-based, staff-based, participatory, hierarchical); scope of action (service-oriented, advocacy-oriented, organizing-oriented, hybrid); and the criteria in defining and self-identifying membership (class-based, ethnic-based, gender-based, etc.). We considered ideology as both an individual and organizational feature. When necessary, we indicated the role of specific individuals in shaping the overall ideology of the organization. We applied a similar methodology to analyze concrete organizational goals, though zoomed in on specific activities, projects and programs within given periods.

To analyze resources, we attempted to map the extent of key groups’ contribution to organizational operations. Those groups included the organization’s staff (paid or unpaid) and affiliated activists and volunteers; membership and affiliated groups; organizational networks and coalitions; individual donors and public and private funders. We also endeavored to map whether each audience contributed key material resources (constituents) or mainly assumed a legitimating function (beneficiaries). Financial resources included fiscal information (reflected in revenue and expenses streams; sources of income, particularly from government institutions, foundations, or donations); organizational structure (non-profit status, staff size, salaries); board members (names, including who among them voted, and affiliations) and staff (names and positions). The analysis of material resources included mapping the resources mobilized through a number of organizational interactions, such as joint projects and campaigns; joint events and activities; participation in coalitions and alliances; incubation and fiscal sponsorship; technical or logistical assistance to or from other organizations, associations and institutions; different types of endorsements.

Combining those analytical approaches and data sources proved fruitful, but we recognize two potential limitations of our approach. First, in opting for a qualitative study of a single coalition rather than of the entire organizational population of immigrant groups (or of organizations catering to immigrants or engaged in cross-cutting advocacy
work over the given period), we consciously chose to favor depth over breadth. Although this approach limits the applicability of our claims to the trajectory of these specific organizations, we argue that much is to be gained from a thorough, in-depth understanding of the relationship between ideology, goals, and resource configurations in a small-scale case study. We see two main advantages to our approach. They will be discussed in the conclusion, but for now we highlight 1) an opportunity to better understand the relation between collaboration and competition, which is largely assumed in macro-studies of organizational populations, and 2) the ability to grasp how dynamics of collaboration, internal organizational change, and changes in the external resource environment are all inextricably linked and impact each other in a circular fashion. Moreover, despite examining just five organizations, we did consider their interaction with others belonging to alternative organizational populations, such as labor unions, advocacy organizations, and community organizations. Second, in relying on documents that were mostly produced by the very same organizations, and often for very specific purposes (foundation grants, for example), we acknowledge that those products also emerge from an exercise in ‘framing’ for particular audiences. And yet, the parallel analysis of five organizations within the same field allowed us to triangulate information in many instances. When available, we used public information (newspaper articles, reports, interviews) and previous literature to complement our analysis.

Phase 1 (1990s – late 1990s): The Dawn of an Innovative Immigrant Worker Movement

Organizations and Ideologies

Between the 1980s and the early 1990s, a handful of leftist organizations began to take up immigrant rights advocacy in LA. Mainly comprising first- and second-generation immigrants from different countries, those organizations made workers’ rights, legalization, and social and economic justice the guiding principles of their activity. CHIRLA, IDEPSCA, and KIWA, the oldest MIWON members, were among such pioneering organizations. Their founders and early staff were influenced by different streams of socialist political ideologies, including theology of liberation and popular education (IDEPSCA), “Third World” Marxism (KIWA), and a combination of more moderate American laborism (CHIRLA’s initial core including a mix of labor unions and community and religious groups leaders). To their turn, the emergence of these organizations paved the way for the development of like-minded groups, such as PWC and GWC, which joined the MIWON coalition.

Although established in different years within different social and geographical contexts, the organizations all adapted a form of Marxist class analysis as a basic principle to orient organizational action. They focused on the most disadvantaged segment of the immigrant population – day laborers, garment workers in sweatshops, domestic workers,
undocumented immigrants, restaurant workers, inter alia – and on redressing their economic exploitation with the workplace as key site of intervention. This class-centered analysis, applied to the US context and its history of racial and ethnic discrimination, exposed institutional racism as a key factor underpinning the economic exploitation of most of the immigrant population. Moreover, it underscored the role of gender and sexism in confining immigrant women to the bottom of the US labor market and to particular work niches (e.g. domestic work, care, garment sector).

All these organizations – though CHIRLA, IDEPSCA, and KIWA as most notable among them – imposed themselves onto the progressive political landscape of late 20th-century LA. This came as the result of two important factors. They had the ability to revitalize “community organizing” through a mix of innovative tactics such as direct action, political education, and community-wide protests (Chung 2007; Patler 2010). And they made a fateful decision to intervene in economic sectors (e.g. day labor, restaurant work) and geographic areas (e.g. immigrant neighborhoods) where few progressive political organizations, including labor unions, were active (Kwon 2010; Patler 2010; Fine 2006). Regarding the first point, it is worth mentioning that organizations drew on a mix of experiences ranging from Alinsky-based “community-organizing” (Alinsky 1971) to transnational activism (Louie 2004) as well as immigrant unionization tactics as shaped by SEIU’s Justice for Janitors campaign during the 1980s (Fisk, Mitchell, and Erickson 2000). However, in applying the lessons of these experiences to the mobilization of particular immigrant communities, they also drew on their own cultural sensitivities and understandings (language included) as well as their knowledge of immigrants’ countries of origin. For this reason, as concerns the second point, those organizations were uniquely positioned to intervene in geographical areas, work sectors, and communities, whereas unions and mainstream civil society organizations were initially uninterested and then unequipped to do so.165 While researchers have analyzed this dynamic mostly from the point of view of unions and their sustainability, we stress that unions’ historical

165 Fine (2006) and Tait (2016) find that most unions have a murky history when it comes to including immigrants and ethnic and racial minorities in both their rank and file and leadership. Unions traditionally adopted an anti-immigrant stance – particularly against undocumented immigrants – out of concern for their alleged role in eroding salaries and working conditions. According to Tait (2016), the conscious decision to bar immigrants from joining unions had two major consequences. First, it preserved unions as primarily white, male, conservative organizations, generally more concerned with the protection of existing privileges and rights than the development of inclusive organizing campaigns. Second, it left them completely unprepared and unequipped to deal with immigrant populations, both in sociocultural and linguistic terms (a point reiterated by Fine). Milkman and her colleagues (2000a; 2006), who specifically focus on immigrants and unions in California and Los Angeles, emphasize that certain unions – particularly those connected to the AFL branch – engaged in several high-profile immigrant workers campaigns. Those included the organizing drive of Latino workers in the LA manufacturing sector (Zabin 2000) and in construction (Milkman and Wong 2000), as well as the famous SEIU Justice for Janitors (J4J) campaign (Fisk, Mitchell and Erickson 2000; see also Waldinger et al. 1998). However, with the exception of J4J, as the authors themselves recognize, input for mobilization in those campaigns mostly came from immigrants themselves rather than from unions. Moreover, putting the question of union’s interest in organizing immigrants aside, it is worth noting that union officials in Southern California expressed little interest in materially supporting immigrant worker organizations. For this reason, immigrant worker organizations developed more in parallel to the mainstream labor movement rather than as a direct emanation. See chapters 2, 3 and 5 for more discussion of this topic.
disengagement left a significant representational void that immigrant worker organizations began to fill.

Established in 1984 as an informal coalition of modest local community groups, IDEPSCA is the oldest organization we analyzed (see chapter 3 for additional information). Located in the Greater LA Area city of Pasadena, by and large run by Central American and second-generation Mexican immigrants, it became a formal organization in 1991. Its stated core mission was (and still is) education, in the widest sense possible, of the growing pool of exploited immigrant workers living in the region. Projects, such as La Escuela de la Comunidad, were the vehicle to achieve educational and political goals. La Escuela offered a broad range of courses including English-as-a-second-language, Spanish literacy, and computer literacy. Educators drew heavily from the work of Brazilian pedagogue Paulo Freire (1996[1970]) and his “pedagogy of the oppressed.” This method stressed that educators needed to draw upon the experiences of their “oppressed” students, thereby raising their political consciousness (Añorve, 2009). IDEPSCA members were also inspired by liberation theology, grassroots Catholic Marxism, and the Chicano movement. The educational curriculum dealt with themes such as discrimination, racism, and sexism, but also more practical topics such as wage theft, minimum wage, overtime, and work solicitation on street corners. The more abstract themes would “provide the text to analyze... issues,” and through this methodology “make people think critically on the issues and collectively... make decisions toward the solution of problems, [all]... in the context of the social, economic, political and cultural reality”. Raul Añorve, a Mexican educator who founded the organization, and Pablo Alvarado, an El Salvadoran teacher, were key figures in infusing IDEPSCA with those ideas and orienting its action specifically around day laborers, the most vulnerable immigrant population living in LA. The nature of the day labor sector – its volatility and lack of regulations – meant that no unions or other organizations were interested in or capable of filling the shoes of IDEPSCA, and more than once the organization found itself in open conflict with union locals (Fine 2006).

Initially, CHIRLA followed a somewhat different path. It was established in 1986 as a coalition of advocacy organizations, religious groups, and a handful of progressive labor unions. Although the coalition board included prominent figures, such as Father Luis Olivares, a local activist minister linked to Liberation theology, its ideological orientation was more moderate than IDEPSCA’s due to the coalition’s far-reaching institutional links with local mainstream labor unions and advocacy groups. Unlike IDEPSCA or KIWA, CHIRLA was established by an ad hoc grant from the Ford Foundation. Its stated purpose was to ensure fair implementation of the Federal

166 Interview with Raul Añorve, 9 June 2014 (herein cited as ‘interview with Añorve’).
168 Escuela de la Comunidad grant application to Liberty Hill Foundation (p. 4), 31 August, 1993, box 43/folder 12, LHFR archive.
169 Interview with Pablo Alvarado, 8 April 2015 (herein cited as “interview with Alvarado”).
Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) by facilitating the legalization process of undocumented immigrants and providing information to immigrant workers about workplace rights in the US (Patler 2010). While CHIRLA’s work as a staffed coalition mainly centered on service coordination and legal referrals, a turning point was the decision to become its own organization around 1993 (Patler 2010). In detaching the coordinating structure from its members, CHIRLA staff decided to push for self-sustainable, autonomous organizational development. The organization’s core work, already channeled in the direction of workers’ rights and legalization for undocumented immigrants, focused more decisively on organizing economic sectors such as day labor and domestic work. CHIRLA’s work in this area was, similar to IDEPSCA’s, filling a void in economic sub-sectors where unions were not actively involved, at a time when the LA County Fed was seen, at best, as an ‘enigma’ due to its ambiguous attitude towards immigrant organizing. CHIRLA played an important role, notably in its domestic work emphasis, in shedding light on the plight of immigrant women on the American labor market. The mid-1990s also marked the organization’s decision to hire a significant portion of staff from immigrant communities (including undocumented immigrants) and from the very work sectors it was trying to organize. This was a way to strengthen the organization’s connection with day-to-day issues of the local immigrant community’s most vulnerable members (Patler 2010). People like organizer Antonio Bernabe were crucial in sustaining CHIRLA’s day labor project, bringing their own experience and knowledge of the sector (and the people working in it) to the service of the organization.

KIWA was founded in 1992 as the Korean Immigrant Workers Advocates and renamed the Koreatown Immigrant Workers Alliance in 2005 by Roy Hong and Danny Park, two South Korean-born activists. The organization had strong ties to the labor and pro-democracy movement of 1980s South Korea, particularly the one branch of the movement leaning more in the direction of Marxist ideology, and to the more progressive wing of the labor union scene in the US (Louie 2004). Hong and Park viewed class and race as inherently intertwined in a capitalist structure that not only kept immigrants and, more broadly, people of color trapped in low-wage sectors, but also pitted them against each other (see chapters 3 and 5 of this manuscript). Rather than emphasizing commonalities based on origin or ethnicity, they highlighted shared class interests among the lowest segments of the immigrant constituencies KIWA established itself in Koreatown, an area west of downtown LA that constituted an ethnic economic enclave of predominantly Korean businesses though with Latino immigrants as the majority of residents. KIWA argued, with reason, that an inability to understand the local socioeconomic dynamics prevented unions and other mainstream organizations,

170 Interview with Victor Narro, 11 June 2014 (herein cited as “interview with Narro”).
171 Interview with Narro.
172 CHIRLA grant application to Liberty Hill Foundation, 1 December, 1994, box 50/folder 2, LHFR archive.
173 Interview with Antonio Bernabe, 4 June 2014 (herein cited as “interview with Bernabe”).
including mainstream advocacy groups, from getting involved in the area. KIWA’s staff was initially composed of 1.5- and second-generation immigrants of Asian background (Chung 2007). Yet, as the organization planned a campaign in the restaurant sector (1996-99), it also began hiring organizers who were employed in that very industry.

With the partial exception of CHIRLA, at least during its period as a coalition, the three organizations had modest organizational and financial capacities. They were mainly staffed by volunteers and had limited equipment and facilities. Their budget was restricted, relying on individual donations as well as funding from a handful of local private philanthropies. There were two main reasons for the constrained financial capacity. First, the strategy of combining service provision with relatively radical political advocacy and grassroots organizing flagged the organizations as highly political. That cut them from institutional sources of funding such as government grants and certain private funding streams, but also from the financial support of local immigrant elites or politically moderate individual donors. Second, in building their memberships, the organizations targeted a constituency mainly composed of undocumented immigrants employed in low-wage sectors of the economy. This population had few means to afford substantial membership dues. In this respect, particularly in their early phase, the organizations embodied a typical activist-driven social movement organization whose power ultimately rested on the ability to mobilize different constituents for particular public actions (pickets, rallies, demonstrations, boycotts, petitioning). Supportive social groups were rarely directly affected by the organizations’ goals, as their members were often middle-class, well-educated students of immigrant background (Louie 2004; Chung, Bloemraad, and Tejada-Peña 2013; Patler 2010). Moreover, some organizations also had difficulty providing working-class immigrants with significant resources (in terms of time and finances), and the immigrants were unwilling to support their broad ideological orientation. KIWA, for one, struggled to effectively reach out to Korean low-wage workers in Koreatown since its portrayal in the immigrant community as a “communist” organization evoked comparisons with the North Korean regime (Kwon 2010).

Growing Collaboration

These three organizations began to collaborate with each other and plan ever-expanding ambitious campaigns. The dynamic was enabled by four key sets of circumstances. First, LA’s simultaneous richness and fragmentation allowed the organizations to cater to non-overlapping beneficiaries and rely on support networks of activists and volunteers.

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174 KIWA grant application to Liberty Hill Foundation (p. 3), 31 August, 1993, Box 43/folder 11, LHFR archive.
175 Interview with Margarita Ramirez, 20 May 2014 (herein cited as “interview with Ramirez”). See also Pastor and Prichard (2012).
176 In their correspondence with foundations, organizations repeatedly expressed their intention to establish membership dues. Those attempts were largely unsuccessful, according to correspondence between Liberty Hill’s grant manager, who was generally concerned with the organizations’ unsustainable relationship with the foundation, and the entries of the organizations’ annual budgets.
Second, the different organizations realized not only that their concrete objectives and strategies were complementary, but also that their actual attainment would depend greatly on pooling knowhow and resources from all organizations. Third, a great sense of trust developed among the different groups, their relationships buttressed by inter-organizational circulation of staff. Fourth, the collaborations were fairly loose and unstructured, being based on concrete, grounded objectives that responded to individual organizational priorities and minimized wasting of resources on non-relevant activities while ensuring a mutual benefit among participating organizations.

IDEPSCA was firmly anchored in Pasadena and linked to its community. It relied on a support network of ‘Chicano’ and Latino militants who were active in the area and targeted beneficiaries who were both ethnically defined (immigrants of Central American and Mexican origin) and sector-defined (day laborers in construction, gardening, and related activities). CHIRLA had a similar ethnic orientation but its scope was wider in terms of geography (LA metropolitan region) and work sector (day laborers, but also domestic and garment workers). This also allowed CHIRLA to draw on a pool of activists and volunteers that was different from IDEPSCA’s. KIWA, instead, was firmly rooted in the neighborhood of Koreatown, and mostly attracted Asian-American staff, activists, and volunteers. Of the three groups, and largely because of its founders’ previous experience with American labor unions (namely SEIU), it had the strongest ties with unions, occasionally collaborating in campaigns spearheaded by organized labor. Unlike CHIRLA and IDEPSCA, KIWA held activities that mostly targeted workers in ethnically mixed, Koreatown-based industries, such as subcontracted painting, dry cleaning, restaurants, and supermarkets.

CHIRLA and IDEPSCA enjoyed effective synergy when it came to the issue of day labor. The organizations combined IDEPSCA’s popular education approach with CHIRLA’s more comprehensive advocacy strategy to fight anti-solicitation ordinances in LA County. CHIRLA’s strategy towards day laborers was also shaped by IDEPSCA as Alvarado, mentioned earlier, was hired as CHIRLA’s lead day labor organizer in 1995 and made popular education a cornerstone of the day labor project. The two organizations intensified their partnership when the City of Los Angeles gave CHIRLA the right to manage two job centers in North Hollywood and Harbor City (Dziembowska 2010). While CHIRLA was in charge of the administration of the centers, IDEPSCA took up the tasks of leadership development and popular education among the workers. The two organizations replicated this division of labor in 1997 when they co-established an independent Association of Day Laborers. If IDEPSCA acted as fiscal sponsor to the association and its staff provided the educational resources to help members develop analytical thinking and leadership skills, CHIRLA provided most of the administrative support through its projects (Dziembowska 2010). This allowed the two organizations to

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177 Interview with Bernabe.
maintain their own unique traits, but also to develop a mutually beneficial relationship. Moreover, the CHIRLA-IDE PSCA partnership proved financially fruitful for both organizations, as they gradually took over management of more day labor centers across the city in the late 1990s. This allowed them to receive large government grants for the management of centers, and then to hire additional staff (Fine 2006).

At a time when no other local similar organizations existed in the LA context, CHIRLA approached KIWA to discuss forming a strategic partnership. CHIRLA’s leadership envisioned that collaboration would allow both organizations to grow, to ensure effective resource sharing for campaign support, and to eventually gain greater leverage over both opponents (private employers and local institutions) and competitors (namely unions). KIWA and CHIRLA forged close relationships from the mid-1990s onwards, specifically around the issue of garment work. In 1995, KIWA intervened with other Asian advocacy organizations to assist Thai workers who had been enslaved at, and later freed from, an El Monte sweatshop. Ever since, KIWA stayed involved in the garment workers industry (Kwon 2010). When it became clear that El Monte was not an isolated case, KIWA and other organizations encouraged the workers to mobilize to expose complicity between the sweatshops and the retailers. KIWA and CHIRLA, among others, went on to establish Sweatshop Watch, an LA-based statewide coalition that assumed a leading role in the anti-sweatshop campaign. CHIRLA was also an early supporter of KIWA’s restaurant campaign in the Koreatown restaurant industry (1996-99). CHIRLA employee Victor Narro, then director of its Workers’ Rights Project, served as a key liaison between advocacy and community groups (Narro 2010).

The creation of other like-minded organizations, such as the Association of Day Laborers, was one of the most visible effects of the cooperation between IDE PSCA, CHIRLA, and KIWA. GWC and PWC, organizations to join MIWON later on, also emerged from this activist milieu and the same ideological orientations. KIWA and CHIRLA were among the main driving organizations supporting the establishment of GWC in 2000, as the two organizations (together with the Asian Pacific American Legal Center, APALC) staffed the GWC formation committee under the coordination of Sweatshop Watch. Narro, at the time director of Sweatshop Watch, and KIWA organizer Paul Lee were among the handful of individuals who led the work of the committee. Familiar with different ethnic communities, KIWA and CHIRLA could bring in different yet complementary organizational approaches. Whereas CHIRLA was more experienced in advocacy strategies that targeted local public institutions, KIWA was much more experienced in confrontational direct-action campaigns, particularly when it came to

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178 CHIRLA’s staff attended training sessions and claimed to have been deeply influenced by this approach (interview with Narro; interview with Bernabe). IDEPSCA, instead, relied on CHIRLA for legal referrals and for administrative support (interview with Añorve).
179 Interview with Narro.
180 KIWA, Thai CDC and APALC grant application to Liberty Hill Foundation, 1 September, 1995, box 50/folder 4, LHFR archive.
private businesses. GWC therefore benefitted from both perspectives. It adopted a combination of organizational principles that included legislative advocacy and case management as much as direct-action campaigns to pressure sweatshops and retailers to comply with labor regulations.\textsuperscript{182} GWC kept crucial differences from its incubators. It specifically targeted a multiethnic (mostly Latino and Chinese) constituency of low-wage workers in the garment industry, addressing a work-based and ethnicity-specific immigrant constituency that neither KIWA nor CHIRLA could properly serve with their staff and resources (Archer et al. 2010).

In a similar fashion, KIWA and (to a lesser extent) CHIRLA also strongly supported establishment of PWC in 1997. Two of its founders, Jay Mendoza and Aquilina Soriano-Versoza, came directly out of the Summer Activist Training that KIWA started holding in 1992, first alone and then from 1994, with the National Coalition for Redress and Reparations (NCRR) and the Thai Community Development Center (TCDC). Those trainings, while relatively superficial in terms of content and commitment, were successful in laying the foundation of an Asian American “workerist” activist milieu that extended beyond KIWA and the older generation of militants. Practically, KIWA briefly acted as fiscal sponsor of PWC and hosted the organization on its premises, while CHIRLA contributed to paying initial staff costs. Ideologically speaking, PWC was fairly similar to KIWA, CHIRLA, and the future GWC. It was established by a combination of young Filipino-American college graduates and an older generation of Filipino leftist activists with firsthand experience in the mid-1980s pro-democracy movement in the Philippines.\textsuperscript{183} PWC embraced a pragmatic version of “Third-World” Marxism that resonated with the experience of KIWA founders.\textsuperscript{184} As with KIWA, the focus would not be so much on armed struggle or proletarian revolution, but rather on an incremental struggle for workers' rights and political reform. PWC staff learnt the basics of wage theft litigation and workplace advocacy from KIWA organizers.\textsuperscript{185} At the same time, PWC maintained crucial differences with the other organizations. Its constituency of low-wage immigrant workers were largely Filipinos employed in the domestic and homecare sector (Ghandnoosh 2010).

This first phase was therefore characterized by high levels of collaboration and synergy between the organizations. Besides having broadly similar ideologies and missions – social and economic empowerment of the poorest segments of the immigrant community – organizations also articulated compatible concrete objectives that would be better attained by working together. Limited financial resources restricted their ability to achieve some goals, yet their competition was checked by an activist-driven, contentious

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\item \textsuperscript{182} “Garment Worker Center. Five Years of Workers Organizing in the Fight for Social & Economic Justice”, GWC annual fundraising booklet, December 2, 2006 (herein cited as “GWC 2006 fundraising booklet”).
\item \textsuperscript{183} Interview with Aquilina Soriano-Versoza, 13 June 2014 (herein cited as “interview with Soriano-Versoza”); interview with Lolita Lledo, PWC organizer, 6 June 2014 (herein cited as “interview with Lledo”).
\item \textsuperscript{184} PWC application to Liberty Hill Foundation, 1 March 1997, box 64/folder 4, LHFR archive.
\item \textsuperscript{185} Interview with Lledo.
\end{itemize}
orientation and ability to target different beneficiaries and tap into non-overlapping sources of support. Such conditions encouraged the organizations to engage in highly productive interactions that gave rise to some of the most important campaigns of this period.

**Phase 2 (early 2000s to mid-2000s): The Heyday of MIWON**

**Collaboration and Organizational Convergence**

Between 2000 and 2001, MIWON became officially established as a formal coalition. It brought together, from 2001 to 2007, CHIRLA, KIWA, PWC, and GWC, from 2005 onwards, IDEPSCA. MIWON embodied a first attempt to formalize alliances between five membership-based, class-oriented immigrant advocacy organizations. It was also marked the first attempt to create a common space where the membership of each organization, largely composed of undocumented immigrants employed in low-wage sectors of the local economy, could interact with the other participating groups and also partially direct political campaigns and projects according to their needs and interests (Osuji 2010).

MIWON’s formation initially consolidated relations across the organizations, strengthening the compatibility of their goals and the added value of horizontal, collaborative campaigning. In fact, MIWON first took shape on May 1, 2000, as CHIRLA, KIWA, and PWC united to support a KIWA campaigns in Koreatown’s restaurant industry. Participating members envisioned MIWON as a way to provide mutual support for each other’s campaign, but also to expand and develop their membership groups. Throughout the early 2000s, MIWON collectively supported an impressive number of campaigns launched by its individual members, providing each organization with a core base of supporters and access to the external support networks of the other groups – namely, organizational allies, volunteers, and staff. As a new generation of activists took leadership positions in the organizations, relations of trust and camaraderie were forged during intense campaigning and continued to underpin inter-organizational ties.

Consequently, not only did organizational ideologies remain similar, but their concrete objectives stayed overall compatible and continued to foster inter-organizational collaboration. In fact, organizations also became more and more alike. MIWON members shared a lot of organizational features by the early 2000s. One in particular was

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186 In spite of that, IDEPSCA had been closely involved in all major MIWON activities ever since the constitution of the coalition.

187 For example, during the early and mid-2000s, Xiomara Corpeño (CHIRLA organizer), Elizabeth Sunwoo (KIWA organizer in the early 2000s and MIWON coordinator, 2004-2007), Max Mariscal (KIWA organizer during mid-2000s) and Strela Cervas (former PWC policy officer and PWC representative to the MIWON coalition during mid-2000s) developed a strong friendship that remains strong to the dates of the interviews. Interview with Strela Cervas, 1 June 2014 (herein cited as ‘interview with Cervas’); Interview with Elizabeth Sunwoo, June 1, 2014 (herein cited as ‘interview with Sunwoo’); Interview with Xiomara Corpeño, 10 June 2014 (herein cited as ‘interview with Corpeño’).
participatory, quasi-autonomous immigrant-based membership organizations. After IDEPSCA’s Asociación de Trabajadores del Día de Pasadena was established in 1994-95 and CHIRLA’s Domestic Workers Association was established in 1996-97, KIWA and PWC followed with their respective Restaurant Workers Association of Koreatown (RWAK) and Association of Filipino Workers (AFW). Despite not having its formal association, GWC also had a membership structure that included garment workers. In MIWON’s narrative, those organizations were crucial because they provided the rank-and-file resources for the coalition’s mass-based campaigns, but also symbolically legitimized the coalition’s claim to truly represent the plight of low-wage immigrant workers for different bundles of rights (labor rights, civil rights, cultural rights, etc.).

In the first half of the 2000s, all MIWON organizations were primarily engaged in immigrant workers organizing. Their campaigns tended to rely on a combination of direct action, grassroots mobilization, and support from a variety of local activist and community groups, which the coalition itself helped mobilize.

CHIRLA addressed immigrant rights advocacy, launching a comprehensive legalization campaign that would draw on the resources of its immigration and citizenship project, welfare reform project, and workers’ rights project. They were carried out at the local level in a comprehensive fashion, with topics addressing access to healthcare programs and education, the elimination of employers’ sanctions, and greater labor protection for immigrant workers. MIWON members offered strong support of its landmark campaigns, such as the driver’s license campaign (2001-03) endeavoring to secure California licenses for undocumented immigrants and the California household worker campaign (2004-06) to achieve statewide legislation protecting domestic workers.

IDEPSCA continued its work on popular education and literacy with a renewed emphasis on the capacity-building of day labor groups. The organization heavily supported development of the Association of Day Laborers in Pasadena at the end of the 1990s. Together with CHIRLA, it was instrumental in the creation of National Day Laborer Organizing Network (NDLON), which developed out of the association and remained under CHIRLA’s fiscal sponsorship until 2008. IDEPSCA also got directly involved in the management of additional day labor centers across the city, including the newly formed Pasadena Job Center, as well as similar ones in Cypress Park, Hollywood, and Harbor City. Although not an official MIWON member then, IDEPSCA continued to maintain strong ties with CHIRLA on day labor and undocumented immigrant issues, particularly through its major involvement in the driver’s license campaign.

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188 CHIRLA, KIWA, PWC MIWON draft grant application, ca 2000-01 (p.1), box 15, KIWA archive (herein cited as “MIWON 2000-01 draft grant application”).
190 Interview with Alvarado.
Following its successful restaurant campaign, which had significantly improved the working standards in Koreatown’s restaurant industry, KIWA moved on to more ambitious goals. The organization sought to reform the Koreatown supermarket industry and establish the first independent immigrant union in the area. Though the famous Assi Market campaign (2001-03) failed, it mobilized the organization, market workers, and allied groups – particularly other MIWON members – in an effort to pressure markets to improve their practices in other ways (Kwon 2010).

Like KIWA, PWC maintained a workplace focus throughout most of this period. In the early 2000s, PWC relied heavily on the support of MIWON organizations to carry out campaigning. Its work in the healthcare and caregiving sector largely mirrored that of KIWA, particularly with respect to how the organization combined case management, local advocacy, and direct-action organizing that often targeted businesses owned by members of the same immigrant community – for example, Filipino immigrants who owned homecare agencies (Ghandnoosh 2010). However, PWC’s strongest partner was CHIRLA, since both organizations had similar (though ethnically different) workplace-based memberships in the caregiving sector.

GWC, most recently founded, first acted with very little capacity, veritably operating with a “2.5”-staff membership and very limited financial resources. However, particularly thanks to the support of an expanded MIWON network (which included APALC as well as Sweatshop Watch), the organization was able to engage in its famous Forever 21 campaign between 2001 and 2004.

Member organizations took MIWON as an opportunity to develop a common platform on immigration issues – namely, support for the legalization of undocumented immigrants. This objective was shared by all groups since it was perceived to be tied to the concrete needs of the beneficiaries of each organization: day laborers or domestic workers; Latino, Korean, or Filipino immigrants. Groups such as KIWA and, to a lesser extent, PWC saw MIWON as a coalition that should primarily act at the local level, including a major component of workers’ rights advocacy and grassroots organizing. While the coalition was supposed to act as a “hub” for the organizations “to have a unified platform and stand around immigration issues and workers issues,” it was also expected to “fuel more membership” to each organization through public campaigning. For this reason, MIWON and its members also began to get heavily involved in immigrant rights campaigns at the local level, particularly by supporting legalization for undocumented immigrants.

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192 Interview with Cervas.
193 GWC 2006 fundraising booklet.
194 The three-year campaign began with sit-ins and picketing outside Forever 21 shops in LA – the retailer was found guilty of having stock made in abusive sweatshops – and later turned into a nationwide boycott. For more information, see Archer et al. (2010).
195 Interview with Sunwoo. Interview with Soriano-Versoza.
196 Interview with Sunwoo.
immigrants (who represented a large part of their membership). In 2001, the coalition pressured the LA City Council to endorse and adopt its immigrant rights platform (Osuji 2010). Building on the experiment in Koreatown in 2000, MIWON also consolidated its flagship campaign, an annual May Day immigrant march, on the occasion of International Workers’ Day. The May Day march grew over the years, managing to attract hundreds of thousands of people during the historical 2006 rallies (Voss and Bloemraad 2011). By assuming a leading role over the demonstrations, MIWON secured its position as the backbone – and leading coalition – of the LA immigrant rights movement.

The downside of this process was that MIWON demanded a relatively high level of commitment from participating organizations, their staff, and their membership groups. Unlike the previous phase, when collaborations were relatively loose and unstructured, the incipient formalization of collaborative relations coincided with MIWON’s development. Moreover, the coalition’s attempts to develop an organizational structure of its own led to tighter internal integration, seen at different levels. This was done at the structure and organizational level, by creating a number of bodies comprising organizational staff and members as well as a consensus-based model for coalition decision-making; at the membership level, by designing trainings open to all the members of each organization; at the campaign level, by creating a system where organizations were to commit to heavy support of each other’s work as well as common campaigns. Organizations were therefore expected not only to endorse a campaign of another MIWON member, but also to devote staff time to strategy discussion and mobilizing their own networks of support; to mobilize their own members to attend rallies and demonstrations; and to allocate organizational resources to support campaign logistics.

While this dynamic explained the very success and visibility of the campaigns launched by MIWON members during those years, it also gradually came to place a burden on them. Organizations needed to devote a considerable part of their time and resources to “network-building” instead of concentrating on their direct beneficiaries.

**Sticking Together despite Diverging Goals and Resource Overlap**

As MIWON’s importance and visibility grew, the goals of the coalition began to shift as well, coming to embrace a more prominent advocacy role at state and federal levels. CHIRLA played an important role in this turn, becoming increasingly imbricated in national immigrant rights coalitions such as the Center for Community Change (CCC)’s National Campaign for Jobs and Income Support (NCJIS) and the Fair Immigration Reform Movement (FIRM) (Patler 2010). As the coalition developed, to ensure that no


198 Interview with Sunwoo; interview with Corpeño.
organization would dominate the coalition, MIWON had adopted a “modified consensus-building” decision-making strategy. That is, approval of all major programmatic and political decisions would be on the condition of full consensus, while less important decisions (such as on media messaging) would require only a majority vote.\(^{199}\) The most resourceful organization of the coalition was, by far, CHIRLA, as exemplified by its staff capacity, external connections, financial resources, and its role as the most visible and vocal group in the public debate and in the media.\(^{200}\) CHIRLA was able to sway MIWON’s direction to reflect the new national focus because the coalition largely relied on CHIRLA’s organizational structure, knowhow, and connections. In 2004, a former KIWA staff member was assigned to coordinate the network, which was also officially hosted on KIWA premises, though CHIRLA retained MIWON’s fiscal sponsorship and managed its funding.\(^{201}\) Thus, despite MIWON’s elaborate system of democratic decision-making, CHIRLA gained considerable dominance in shaping the coalition’s position and goals.\(^{202}\)

Given the gradual disconnect between the coalition’s national aspirations and the local rootedness of the member organizations (CHIRLA was an exception), we would expect incentives for collaboration to quickly wane. As mentioned, not only had organizational activities become more similar, but their tightening integration also led to increasing resource overlap in both financial and labor terms, as activists themselves began to recognize. From a financial point of view, CHIRLA realized that incubating like-minded organizations, such as GWC, helped undermine their own chances of accessing local funds for workplace and workers’ rights projects.\(^{203}\) If MIWON itself was supposed to coordinate fundraising efforts among participating organizations, groups such as CHIRLA and KIWA had staff on the GWC steering committee and were expected to support the organization’s fundraising strategy towards the same foundations they were tapping.\(^{204}\) NDLOM, officially established in 2001 under the auspices of both CHIRLA and

\(^{199}\) Executive Summary, MIWON 2007-10 Strategic Plan.

\(^{200}\) All respondents acknowledged that CHIRLA was by far the most resourceful organization of the coalition at any time of MIWON’s progress. Moreover, the archive documentation we collected contains dozens of clippings about immigrant rights issues as covered in a variety of local, state, and national newspapers. They include several quotes from Angelica Salas, Victor Narro, and other CHIRLA personnel, often side by side with quotes from other national organizations, such as MALDEF, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), SEIU, or the National Council of La Raza (NCLR).

\(^{201}\) In minutes of a KIWA meeting, dated February 8, 2004, its staff noted an internal discussion regarding the management of MIWON funding, which at the time was mainly handled by CHIRLA, being the coalition’s organizational fiscal sponsor. KIWA staff argued that it would make more sense to divide the money among member organizations as soon as it was received from the foundations, and also suggested they contact PWC and GWC staff to make sure they supported their stance before approaching CHIRLA about the matter. See author unknown, “Quarterly SP Retreat Feb. 2004”, minutes, 8 February, 2004, box 1/folder 8, KIWA archive.

\(^{202}\) Interview with Soriano-Versoza. The PWC director argued that a major flaw of MIWON was its inability to develop “its own kind of machinery” to move forward as a truly collective stance. This weakness left a void that was filled by CHIRLA’s own structure.

\(^{203}\) Interview with Narro (in Patler 2010: 81).

\(^{204}\) KIWA and CHIRLA staff were involved in GWC’s fundraising strategy through Sweatshop Watch and as members of GWC’s governing board. Victor Narro was also appointed as GWC’s treasurer and was one of the main liaisons with local funders. See author unknown, “Minutes of the Board of Directors of Sweatshop Watch” meeting minutes, 8 December, 2000, box 13/folder 9, KIWA archive.
IDEPSCA, also gradually became a funding competitor as it followed CHIRLA’s trajectory in developing its own staff and organizational structure. These organizations were applying for financial resources from a limited and overlapping funding pool.\textsuperscript{205} From a labor point of view, as organizations constantly pooled their own resources (including staff, volunteers, and membership associations) and provided access to their external networks of support (including local politicians, community leaders, and other organizational allies) for large scale-campaigns, they also found themselves competing for the time and commitment of similar groups. Moreover, an all-encompassing emphasis on undocumented immigrants at large – which was primarily seen as a “Latino” issue in the public sphere – also risked diminishing the visibility of groups. These included KIWA and PWC, which had emerged within an Asian-American activist milieu and whose raison d’être mainly rested in their specific role as progressive spokespersons of specific smaller ethnic communities (Koreans, Filipinos), work sectors (restaurants, markets, healthcare, nursing), or geographical areas (Koreatown).

The coalition’s goals diverged from those of member organizations despite the increased resource overlap. Given these conditions, it is surprising that MIWON continued to be fully operative up until at least 2006-07, and even expanded its coalition-based activities around the mid-2000s. Beyond campaign-related actions, the most notable of these activities was the School of Education, Empowerment and Determination (SEED), which promoted yearlong trainings in leadership development, campaign work, and advocacy (2006-07). SEED was designed for the most politically active members, with the aim of developing “leaders” who would ideally be major players in successive campaigns and mobilizations. MIWON’s membership-based bodies aside, this school signified an important moment in encouraging a class frame of its ethnically very heterogeneous membership. So, how can we understand the emergence of this dynamic?

While it may be impossible to provide a definitive answer, we argue that three combined factors were crucial in keeping the coalition together. First, CHIRLA’s strategic internal organization changed, causing shifts in its internal priorities and influencing MIWON’s direction. Second, for its legitimacy in the eyes of funders in state and national policy circles, CHIRLA thus depended on the continued existence of MIWON. Third, other organizations were relatively weak vis-à-vis the political climate surrounding immigration of the mid-2000s.

To elaborate on these factors, around the mid-2000s, CHIRLA began moving away from workplace-based projects and its most intense coalition commitments at the local level. While CHIRLA had always included legislative advocacy within its organizational activities, it was only between 2004 and 2005 that the organization officially renounced local workplace organizing in favor of two other core activities: state and

\textsuperscript{205} During the early 2000s, Liberty Hill simultaneously funded all five organizations with annual grants ranging between $15,000 and $35,000. Other key foundations included the Needmor Foundation, New World Foundation, and Abelard/Common Counsel Foundation.
federal legislative advocacy on issues affecting immigrant communities (particularly immigration reform and labor rights, but also access to education for youth); and electoral mobilization targeting the Latino immigrant population.206 Political considerations may have played an important role in steering the organization to a full embrace of immigrant rights advocacy, particularly at a time – the mid-2000s – during which alternative immigration reform bills were fiercely debated in Congress. Draconian restrictive measures, such as the infamous Border Protection, Anti-terrorism and Illegal Immigration Control Act,207 were also being discussed (Voss and Bloemraad 2011). Moreover, a change of leadership and the departure of older staff linked to worker organizing also contributed to the revised strategy.208

However, broader resource considerations also weighed in on the decision of CHIRLA’s management. This move was highly influenced by the City of Los Angeles’s decision to not renew CHIRLA’s contract to operate day labor centers across the city in 2004. This was a traumatic blow to the organization because city subsidies constituted a significant portion of the overall organizational budget (Patler 2010). Furthermore, unlike other MIWON organizations, CHIRLA ever since its inception developed a vast network of allies at both state and federal levels. As powerful national organizations such as the Mexican American Legal Defense Fund (MALDEF), the National Council of La Raza (NCLR), the Center for Community Change (CCC), and the SEIU began to coordinate national efforts to lobby for federal immigration reform, CHIRLA was positioned to become their main LA representative. During those years, CHIRLA co-founded and contributed staff to the Coalition for Comprehensive Immigration Reform (CCIR) (2005-07), the California Table for Immigration Reform (2009-11), and the new FIRM (2007-15). CHIRLA’s advocacy role became even more pronounced, having spearheaded the California Domestic Workers Bill of Rights campaign (2005-13). The organization also began to focus on civic engagement, naturalization, and voter registration, particularly through coalitions such as the statewide Mobilize the Immigrant Vote (MIV) and the national We Are America Alliance (WAAA). In doing so, CHIRLA therefore gradually transitioned from being a social movement organization, whose operations broadly depended on militant mobilization, to an institutional advocacy organization, whose activities relied more on access to substantial financial resources and connections to key organizational allies. It was a decision that created internal tensions among the staff and sparked controversy with other organizations; however, organizational leadership judged it consistent with CHIRLA’s original focus on immigrant rights (particularly in terms of

206 “Liberty Vote!” CHIRLA grant application to Liberty Hill Foundation, 31 August 2006.
207 H.R. 4437 – also known as the Sensenbrenner Bill, for its sponsor in the House of Representatives, Wisconsin Republican Jim Sensenbrenner – proposed to increase fortification of the US-Mexico border and further criminalize undocumented immigrants as well as anyone assisting them.
208 Angelica Salas became CHIRLA’s executive director in 1999 and, as of 2016, still holds the role. Both Victor Narro and Pablo Alvarado left the organization sometime between the late 1990s and early 2000s. While Narro went on to support other organizations and then join the UCLA Labor Center, Alvarado founded NDLON between 2000 and 2002, shortly after serving as its director and still in that position as of 2016.
legalization and access to citizenship) and underscored the organization’s aspiration to influence the institutional political process from within, even if that meant ‘getting their hands dirty.’

As for the second factor, although CHIRLA scaled up involvement in state and federal policy circles, its involvement in coalitions, such as MIWON, remained crucial. MIWON was highly successful in presenting itself as a collective of immigrant-led, membership-based political organizations, which had actual legitimacy in local immigrant communities. Unlike most Washington, D.C.-based advocacy and policy groups, CHIRLA could therefore claim strong moral legitimacy by virtue of its connection to the daily reality of most immigrants. Local grassroots legitimacy could be used as symbolic capital to enhance CHIRLA’s positioning within Washington, D.C.’s elite advocacy circles and the emerging national immigrant rights coalitions. As the organization reshaped its local operations, particularly by abandoning support for its workplace-based membership groups, CHIRLA deemed it important to maintain, at least for the short term, a tight connection to LA and the local struggles for immigrant rights. MIWON provided such a platform, especially after the tremendous success of the immigrant rights marches, which gave CHIRLA nationwide visibility. According to its staff, CHIRLA’s influence in both LA and DC greatly depended on its ability to be seen as a ‘convener’ of local grassroots immigrant organizations in Los Angeles – and be perceived as a trusted coalition leader – as well as its capacity to effectively bridge the gap between the local and national scales. For this reason, CHIRLA considered MIWON important because it allowed the coalition to present immigration reform as an issue that not only concerned Latin American immigrants, but also the growing Asian immigrant communities. In practical terms, CHIRLA also relied on the support of organizations such as KIWA and PWC because they had legitimacy in their respective ethnic and geographic communities. Although the other groups remained significantly smaller, CHIRLA needed

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209 Interview with Narro; interview with Corpeño (both expressed a similar concept). See also Ochoa (2005).
211 CHIRLA staff argued that the loss of the centers was furthermore important in driving organizational change because it practically removed the most effective space to organize immigrants around work niches. Although organizers such as Bernabe were initially re-assigned to organize day laborers at street corners, CHIRLA’s organizing strategy soon focused on the mobilization of legal residents and households, particularly for legislative or electoral purposes. Interview with Bernabe; interview with Alvaro Huerta, 4 June 2014 (herein cited as “interview with Huerta”).
212 Interview with Narro. Corpeño argued that CHIRLA’s convening and leadership role was also important at the local level, because it allowed local immigrant organizations to partner with LA County Fed from a stronger bargaining position.
them to periodically tap their beneficiaries, constituents, and organizational allies to ensure large turnouts at immigration rallies and demonstrations.

Finally, despite MIWON increasingly failing to address the goals of the other organizations, several reasons prevented them from leaving the coalition. The particular political climate – including the fact that most beneficiaries of each group would be deeply affected by changes in federal immigration policies – was a moral imperative for every organization to continue supporting the network and provide resources for immigrant rights mobilizations, even when organizations did not fully agree with CHIRLA’s political line.\textsuperscript{213} The stakes for IDEPSCA’s day labor and undocumented beneficiaries were very high. Organizations such as KIWA and PWC proved particularly loyal. For KIWA, we suggest this was, at least to an extent, because the organization had at that point been greatly weakened by its dragging, ultimately failed, unionization campaign, and was exploring alternative options of organizational change. In this sense, the ability to coordinate MIWON through one of its own staff likely provided KIWA the visibility and public legitimacy it urgently needed to restructure the organization. For PWC, we note that its main beneficiaries were healthcare and domestic workers, and that pertinent state legislation was being discussed at the time. CHIRLA had become a crucial partner by incorporating PWC in its campaign to pass the Domestic Workers Bill of Rights in California. We suggest that those overlapping participations were also important for generating multiple commitments. GWC was instead in a particular position. On the one hand, it remained morally indebted to both CHIRLA and KIWA, which supported GWC during both inception and landmark garment workers campaign. On the other hand, the organization began to rethink its organizational model after the Forever 21 campaign, moving in the direction of a membership-led structure and rejecting professionalization.

This second phase was therefore characterized by very intimate, productive collaboration. In the early years of the coalition, such high-quality collaboration was made possible by completing a process started the decade before, as MIWON’s formalization brought together organizations sharing very similar and compatible, yet sufficiently diverse, organizational structures, ideologies, and goals. However, partly due to dynamics triggered by this very process of collaboration, MIWON gradually began to shift its goals and nationalize its scope under the influence of CHIRLA, its most prominent organization. As MIWON organizations and close affiliates started competing for a limited pool of financial and labor resources, and the coalition goals grew more detached from the other organizations’ day-to-day priorities, the coalition became a political tool for legitimizing CHIRLA’s new national advocacy role. Still, MIWON’s position remained pivotal. The moral imperative to support immigration reform, overlapping commitments, and the relative weakness of the other organizations can help us understand why.

\textsuperscript{213} Interview with Danny Park, November 5, 2014. Interview with Sunwoo. Interview with Cervas.
Phase 3 (Mid-2000s to Early 2010s): Organizational Drift

Changing Political Context, Changing Organizational Priorities

The 2006 immigrant rights marches marked the high point of the MIWON coalition. The following year, after police violence ensued on the annual May Day march, MIWON and its flagship activities started losing momentum. GWC abandoned MIWON for capacity reasons, as the organization could not devote staff time to the coalition any longer. While the remaining organizations strategized a plan that reaffirmed their commitment to MIWON’s internal infrastructural development and immigration reform campaigns, MIWON effectively downplayed the inter-organizational cooperation that supported each organization’s areas of work. In 2009, the coalition ceased having its single paid staff position and soon after stopped applying for funding, organizing training, and designing common campaigns. In the years that followed, organizations continued gathering as MIWON exclusively came to plan the May Day march. As of 2016, the coalition still exists, and its fiscal sponsorship has transitioned from CHIRLA to Community Partners, an external organization, and PWC. Coordination of the march is now in the hands of other groups, such as the May Day Coalition, which includes CHIRLA and KIWA as well as LA Fed and SEIU.

Considering the developments recounted thus far, how do we explain the demise of MIWON in this third phase, particularly after the coalition so effectively mobilized people and organizations around the plight of undocumented immigrants in the previous years?

In this last section, we offer a tentative explanation for this outcome. We see two major factors at play. First, CHIRLA’s national advocacy role consolidated and the organization came to depend less and less on MIWON, notably after the resounding success of the 2006 marches and the failure to achieve federal immigration reform between 2006 and 2007. Second, the remaining organizations experienced more and more resource and beneficiary overlap, which came in light of the growing popularity of the worker center model and the involvement of several labor unions in immigrant organizing. While CHIRLA’s success as a national player dampened its interest in keeping the coalition alive and lessened the remaining organizations’ imperative to remain committed, competitive pressures urged them to concentrate on their internal restructuring. To improve their competitive positioning for resources, MIWON members accelerated the strategic adaptation of their goals and moved to differentiate their organizational structures.

The year 2006 witnessed unprecedented waves of immigrant rights mobilizations across the US, with LA as the epicenter of the demonstrations (Voss and Bloemraad 2011). Activists demanded a halt to mass deportations of undocumented immigrants, contested the restrictive provisions of draconian anti-immigrant bill H.R. 4437 (which had already
been passed in the House of Representatives in December 2005), and pressured Congress to instead provide amnesty and a clear path to citizenship for the over 11 million undocumented immigrants residing in the country. Ever since late 2004, a wide coalition of community-based, religious, labor, business, and advocacy organizations at the national level, including CHIRLA, had partnered with Congress senators to propose a bipartisan bill that would include these provisions. The resulting Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act (CIRA, S. 2611) was passed in the Senate in the midst of the demonstrations in May 2006, though did not reach the House of Representatives floor and was therefore never enacted. If demonstrations were successful in making the plight of undocumented immigrants highly visible in the US political debate, as well as in preventing H.R. 4437 from becoming law, they were unable to secure the passing of CIRA or its subsequent 2007 revision, the Secure Borders, Economic Opportunity and Immigration Reform Act (S. 1348).

Those external events certainly played a role in threatening the long-term viability of MIWON as a grassroots coalition designed to sustain mass mobilizations. The unique circumstances of 2006 – on March 25, LA experienced the largest demonstration taking place that day in the whole country, with over half a million-people marching through its downtown for immigrant rights – could hardly be replicated in the immediate years (Watanabe and Becerra 2006). In 2007, the shelving of H.R. 4437 and dim prospects for a progressive immigration reform produced a dramatically lower turnout for the May Day march. Moreover, as violence erupted during the demonstration, police authorities and organizers – including MIWON groups, notably CHIRLA – blamed each other for how the protests were handled. For MIWON organizations, these developments suggested the coalition had already reached its high point, having simultaneously fulfilled and failed its goals as reframed by CHIRLA. Inability to sustain 2006’s epic demonstrations throughout 2007 and 2008, as well as the conviction that immigrant advocacy groups needed to get more involved in federal policymaking, convinced CHIRLA that a local grassroots coalition – MIWON – had fundamentally lost its raison d’être, for both practical and legitimating purposes. KIWA’s internal organizational turmoil, discussed below, and the related departure of MIWON’s coordinator contributed to eroding mutual trust between groups.

CHIRLA continued its transformation to become a national advocacy organization, accentuating mainstream political engagement through electoral mobilization, naturalization campaigns, and legislative lobbying by participating in

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214 The first attempt was the Secure America and Orderly Immigration Act (S.B. 1033), also known as the Kennedy-McCain bill, which was never voted on.
215 Interview with Sunwoo. Interview with Cervas.
216 Interview with Corpeño.
217 Although she officially became MIWON’s coordinator only in 2004, Elizabeth Sunwoo had been involved with MIWON groups as part of KIWA ever since the creation of MIWON. Respondents have pointed to her ability to facilitate relationships among the different groups, but also to the importance of her role as coalition organizer and coordinator to reduce the workload of the staff of each group.
grand-scale national coalitions. Though still relatively small compared to national advocacy groups and labor unions, CHIRLA’s shift allowed it to expand and further differentiate from the other MIWON members. By concentrating primarily on immigration legislation, CHIRLA could tap into large state and nationwide foundations that begun to prioritize comprehensive immigration reform.

CHIRLA increased the range and quality of its financial supporters, which included the California Wellness Foundation ($200,000 in 2006; $300,000 in 2007; $225,000 in 2010), the Marguerite Casey Foundation ($300,000 in 2006; $200,000 in 2009), and the New York-based NEO foundation (between $17,000 and $187,000 annually during 2009-13). These same foundations had been much less interested in funding immigrant workers’ organizing (Kohl-Arenas 2016), but had a strong interest in making resources available for moderate immigration reform, electoral education and civic engagement efforts (Morari, Athanasiades, and Pankaj 2015; Nicholls, Uitermark, and van Haperen 2016). CHIRLA therefore was able to recover from its severe financial setback in 2004 and double its budget from $1.2 million in 2005 to $2.5 million in 2012. In the early 2010s CHIRLA also established CHIRLA Action Fund, its own 501(c)(4) branch.218 This move allowed the organization to further diversify its pool of funders and expand its operational scope, as it was able to directly access foundation money available for legislative lobbying on immigration reform.219 Moreover, CHIRLA’s strengthening relations with national advocacy organizations, such as the Center for Community Change, allowed it to tap into new information and enhance its organizational and mobilization capacities. These connections also ushered the organization into high-level political negotiations and meetings with leading figures in Congress and the White House (Nicholls, Uitermark, and van Haperen 2016). A presence in elite national politics enhanced its reputation among state and regional political elites, further reducing its dependence on MIWON to generate large numbers at its demonstrations. Thus, CHIRLA’s growing emphasis on immigration reform legislation yielded access to flourishing financial, organizational, and political resources. This inflow allowed the organization to expand in numbers and political influence in local, state, and national political arenas. The CHIRLA-led MIWON, during the mid-2000s, reflected this transition: the organization was not robust enough to implement its new national agenda on its own, still needing the infrastructural and symbolic backing of local allies in MIWON. Once the organization was able to consolidate itself, MIWON became a redundant structure, having outlived its value.

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218 Interview with Huerta. Unlike 501(c)(3), 501(c)(4) organizations are not subject to regulations regarding limitations in political lobbying, and is allowed to endorse or oppose political candidates, or donate money or time to political campaigns.

219 For example, CHIRLA Action Fund received 100,000 $ from the Atlantic Philanthropies between 2013 and 2014 as member of the Alliance for Citizenship (A4C), a national immigration reform coalition (Morari, Athanasiades, and Pankaj 2015). Nevertheless, compared to major national advocacy groups, CHIRLA still received a very small fraction of the funding provided by large philanthropies (Nicholls, Uitermark, and van Haperen 2016).
Growing Competition and Organizational Differentiation

The simultaneous success and failure of immigrant rights mobilizations lifted a sense of urgency in the MIWON coalition. At the same time, while CHIRLA was clearly moving in a new organizational direction, the remaining organizations had to confront the fast-changing organizational landscape of LA.

Besides internal tensions, already having risen from resource-sharing within the coalition, organizations were facing potential competition from similar organizations and external ones, namely labor unions. Encouraged by the success of the immigrant worker organizing model, more non-union organizations had, ever since the early 2000s, begun to organize immigrant workers and draw on the repertoire of MIWON organizations. As of early 2006 in California, Fine (2006) identified 29 active immigrant worker centers, 11 of which were in the LA area. This list did not include hybrid organizations, such as the South Asian Network (SAN), which was established in 1990 and explicitly included workers’ rights campaigns starting in the early 2000s (see Leavitt and Blasi 2010). Nor did Fine’s list account for sectoral workers’ organizations that emerged from organizing efforts, such as CHIRLA’s Domestic Workers Association, KIWA’s Restaurant Workers Association of Koreatown (RWAK) and Immigrant Workers Union (IWU), or the SAN-sponsored Los Angeles Taxi Workers Alliance (LATWA), a worker-led organization of immigrant taxi drivers. More organizations continued to emerge throughout the mid- to late 2000s and early 2010s, such as the CLEAN Carwash Campaign (under the initial fiscal sponsorship of KIWA), the Filipino Migrant Center (in Long Beach), and the Restaurant Opportunities Center of Los Angeles (ROC-LA). We believe that the worker center model was fostered by pioneering MIWON organizations and their relative success in achieving concrete organizational goals and building a multiethnic activist milieu. Frequent staff circulation between organizations also encouraged fast diffusion and adoption of the worker center model.

Paradoxically, the success of MIWON’s members also challenged them because it spawned similar organizations competing for overlapping resources. The new organizations and projects competed for staff, volunteers, and the still scarce private funding sources available for immigrant labor organizing. At the same time, bigger changes in the orientation of the national leadership and general union policy had a hand in labor unions becoming more committed to supporting immigrant rights (including those of undocumented immigrants) and organizing immigrant workers (Milkman 2006). In terms of advancing workers’ rights, it was certainly positive that local unions were more open to including immigrants within their leadership and rank and file as well as organizing immigrant-based workplace campaigns. For single immigrant organizations came the challenge of restructuring relations with competitors in their particular sectors and geographical areas – as exemplified by the tensions between KIWA and the United

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220 Interview with Ramirez; interview with Narro.
Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) over who should acquire the Koreatown market workers as members. Unions’ broader involvement in immigrant rights also spurred labor unions to invest in campaigns transcending workers’ rights and addressed themes such as legalization, naturalization, and voting engagement. This greater role of unions among immigrants has now become the norm in immigrant rights mobilization, at local and national levels. Since the early 2010s, MIWON’s flagship event has been taken over by labor, being chiefly organized and coordinated by LA Fed. The federation’s investment in immigration presented a direct challenge to MIWON’s organizations, which found themselves competing not only for members and trained staff, but also for positioning as the legitimate representative of immigrant workers in LA.

If waning moral obligations prompted KIWA, PWC, GWC, and IDEPSCA to gradually divest from MIWON, growing resource competition compelled them to strategically adapt to this environment or risk organizational demise. This sparked organizational differentiation. Single organizational trajectories were, however, quite different from each other, being noticeably shaped by the internal life and unique traits of each group.

IDEPSCA, in striking contrast with CHIRLA, remained solidly anchored at the local level. Although the organization continued working on education and literacy across the city, IDEPSCA transformed into a service-provider organization that was almost entirely dependent on government grants. The organization’s time and energy were spent more on managing worker centers for day laborers and less on political organization. As the number of centers grew in the 2000s, IDEPSCA more often hired outside center managers with little political experience or connection to its popular education tradition. Day-to-day management of the day labor centers did not diminish the organization’s commitment to local coalition building, workers’ rights, and organizing. However, reliance on government subsidies and concentration on management issues contributed to organizational inertia, which inhibited the ability to change and adapt. To worsen matters, the rising prominence of NDLON and CHIRLA bred resentment within IDEPSCA. Unlike CHIRLA, which had been cultivating alternative ties to state and national organizations ever since its inception, IDEPSCA had not developed such networks, nor could it secure new ones at local or state levels. IDEPSCA’s difficulty in obtaining foundation grants, as well as its generally limited private funding base (mostly

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222 “Liberty Hill Foundation Fund for Change 2013 proposal assessment tool,” 27 June, 2013. In their evaluation of IDEPSCA’s grant proposal, Liberty Hill staff noted that the organization struggled to increase its membership base, produce visible social change (organizing and winning significant campaigns) and fundraise effectively.

223 IDEPSCA’s revenues continued to grow until 2009, though it relied heavily on local government grants for the management of day labor centers, which drained most of the organization’s resources.
composed of local Californian funders), has since threatened the organization’s viability altogether.

While IDEPSCA stalled, KIWA undertook important changes. It decided to abandon its more ambitious, aggressive strategies in the mid-2000s. The organization realized that it lacked sufficient power to leverage large employers to improve working conditions. Between 2005 and 2007 – partly to recover from the previous failure of the unionization campaign, which had also threatened its financial viability – KIWA strategically reframed its market campaign as part of a larger citywide living wage and “fair share” campaign (Kwon, 2010). Through this, it successfully pressured a handful of Korean supermarkets to improve labor conditions and wages. This period marked KIWA’s turn to softer, less costly advocacy tactics, as the organization negotiated wage deals with markets in the spirit of neighborhood development being supervised by the Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA). It also signaled KIWA’s intention to explicitly adopt a spatial approach in defining its membership, as the organization’s beneficiaries became the residents of Koreatown rather than the low-wage workers employed in the area. As KIWA’s worker membership organizations, IWU and RWAK were left with no organizational support, and had disbanded by 2006. KIWA moderately grew its structure and diversified its sources of income. It also diversified its activities and support networks all the while remaining anchored at the local level and strengthening its unique connection to the geographical area of Koreatown. After a stint of focusing on gentrification and public development in the late 2000s, KIWA has since embraced a more holistic advocacy approach that includes issues such as affordable housing, labor legislation, and executive actions around immigration. Like CHIRLA’s transition, this move was rather controversial, and led to an internal split where half of the staff – the one more connected to worker organizing – distanced itself from the organization. In a reinvention of its prior role as a workplace organizer, KIWA has since joined a number of large, union-led citywide and statewide coalitions, where the organization plays more of a supportive role.

In a similar fashion, PWC has transitioned to follow a more advocacy-based model. Still, it has maintained a strong workers’ membership structure. The organization also went through moderate growth, but its budget remained half the size of KIWA’s and less than one-fifth of CHIRLA’s as of 2012. If PWC stayed anchored at the local level, its expertise and “ethnic monopoly” over a specific sector – that of domestic and care work,

224 KIWA’s revenues, despite some ups and downs, continued to increase until 2013, occasionally hitting the $1 million mark but generally stabilizing around an average of $800,000 over the last few years.
225 Interview with Max Mariscal, former KIWA organizer, 1 June 2014; interview with Sunwoo; interview with Park. After the resignation of part of the staff, the remaining leadership argued that this transition would allow KIWA “to reassess [its] organization’s needs and increase salaries to attract candidates with more experience that will reinvigorate KIWA and the new affordable housing campaign.” See “Final Report to Liberty Hill Foundation”, report (p. 63), 3 April 2008.
226 Those include, for example, the Los Angeles Coalition Against Wage Theft and the California Fair Paycheck Coalition.
227 Unlike the other organizations, especially CHIRLA and KIWA, PWC’s private funding base remains anchored in California and tied to small grants.
largely done by Latino and Filipino immigrants – gave the organization the opportunity to tap into a growing network at state and federal levels from 2005 onwards. PWC’s partnership with CHIRLA, which first bloomed from a common goal in organizing domestic workers, evolved to address policy issues. PWC had joined a coalition to pass a bill that would improve the working conditions of homecare and domestic workers.\textsuperscript{228} Around this time, PWC also began building its own national network by joining the Direct Care Alliance, a countrywide network of “caregiver associations, consumers and concerned providers and other advocates.”\textsuperscript{229} As more intense campaigning resumed around 2009 – with statewide legislative efforts intertwining with attempts to pass a federal act to lift a minimum wage exemption in domestic work – PWC completely adjusted its local organizing campaigns to fit more general state and federal campaigns on improving domestic work legislation. The organization joined statewide and national coalitions, such as the California Household Workers Coalition/Domestic Workers Coalition, the Southern California CARE Council, and the National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA). PWC helped found and coordinate all three coalitions at the local level, under the leadership of CHIRLA and SEIU. The National Domestic Workers Alliance now has over 60 affiliate organizations. PWC thus adapted by using its local niche as leverage within growing state and federal level advocacy campaigns.

GWC has followed a less linear trajectory. Its inability to improve organizational capacities or develop strong membership groups during its first years led the group to downscale activities after 2004 (Archer et al. 2010). It proved incapable of effectively supporting MIWON’s organizational activities and unable, and probably also unwilling, to engage in larger-scale advocacy. GWC favored bottom-up strategies of worker organizing and political education (Archer et al. 2010). Its organizational development began to stall in the late 2000s. Unlike CHIRLA, KIWA, and PWC – groups whose ideological orientation similarly changed from radical socialism and unionism to more mainstream political liberalism and pluralism – GWC maintained a more activist stance, which was also seen as being in contrast with MIWON’s overall position on immigration reform.\textsuperscript{230} The organization continued underscoring the need to enable workers to advocate for their own rights before both employers and local labor enforcement agencies. Internally, GWC stressed the importance of building an effective workers’ leadership while simultaneously developing a participatory model of consensus-building among the staff and the membership (Archer et al. 2010). GWC decided to abandon the MIWON coalition in 2007, although it was probably the organization that suffered the most from losing the support network. Its organizational trajectory between 2010 and 2012 was difficult to reconstruct, though GWC has since attempted to change strategies and

\textsuperscript{228} PWC first got involved in legislative advocacy during the campaign for the passing of the Household Worker Equity Bill, A.B. 2536 (vetoed by then California governor Arnold Schwarzenegger in 2006).


\textsuperscript{230} Interview with Sunwoo; interview with Corpeño.
hire experienced organizers to restructure its operations and move towards professionalization. Similarly to KIWA, it has embraced cross-sector issues such as wage theft and minimum wage, joined alliances, such as the LA Coalition Against Wage Theft, and formed partnerships with external researchers to support future advocacy campaigns. Nevertheless, its operational scale and political impact has remained very limited. Unlike CHIRLA, KIWA, and PWC, but similar to IDEPSCA, GWC’s over-reliance on a single organizational resource (in this case, MIWON organizations and other close allies) and its initial unwillingness to adapt have caused dramatic downsizing and stalling.

In sum, the third phase was characterized by rising non-interest in collaboration by MIWON organizations and the coalition’s eventual demise. We singled out two major factors that set the condition for this dynamic and triggered MIWON members’ further organizational change. The events of 2006 and 2007 lessened the importance of the coalition for CHIRLA’s bid to become a national immigrant rights organization while removing the strong moral incentives for the other organizations to heavily commit their resources. Relational drift was accelerated by lack of support from the coalition’s most powerful organization, coupled with growing resource overlap not only within MIWON organizations, but also newly emerged groups and labor unions. Each organization, however, responded to these dynamics in different ways.

CHIRLA was the organization that reinvented itself most dramatically. In the process, it embraced a more mainstream “integrationist” approach to immigrant rights advocacy. On the other end of the continuum, IDEPSCA was unable and uninterested in innovating the organization, and GWC’s maintenance of a strong class-based, worker organizing model, seemed rooted in the desire to maintain its original organizational mission and ideological principles. KIWA and PWC fell somewhere in between, struggling to adapt their organizational machinery in the face of greater competition while maintaining a connection to their original base. For KIWA, the change resulted in abandoning more radical and innovative organizing, while for PWC it meant stretching organizational capacities to maintain both local organizing and legislative campaigns. The differentiation between organizations has not necessarily devolved into open conflict. Instead, the organizations came to drift slowly away from collaboration and disinvest in MIWON as a vehicle for collective action.

**Conclusion and Discussion: A Way Forward to Understand Dynamics of Collaboration and Competition**

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231 “Interim Grant Report”, GWC grant report to Liberty Hill Foundation, 4 March 2013. In order to develop a new organizational strategy, GWC formed a transition team that included former director and co-founder Kimi Lee and other experienced organizers. Marissa Nuncio, former Sweatshop Watch program coordinator, became executive director in 2013 and remains in that position as of February 2017.

We opened this paper with a discussion on traditional organized forms of immigrant political engagement in the US, which observers have long seen as primarily ethnicity-based. We argued that LA’s recent history of immigrant mobilization, characterized by intersectional, multiethnic, and workplace-oriented alliances, provides a fascinating counter-case to those commonly held views. However, we also suggested that previous assessments of LA’s “exceptionalism” (Milkman 2006; Milkman, Bloom and Narro 2010) cannot completely account for how interethnic collaborations are developed, sustained, and negotiated over time.

Using the MIWON coalition as a case study, we argued that strong collaboration among coalition members was motivated not only by local foundations or unions. Such external organizations certainly played a role, but not in spurring and deepening collaborations. Rather, collaborations developed under conditions of ideological similarity, the alignment of organizational goals, and the non-overlap of scarce resources. More generally, we showed how we can better understand dynamics of inter-organizational collaboration in relation to 1) the forces that spur competition between organizations, 2) the complementarity and alignment of organizational goals, and 3) the ideologically grounded moral incentives that sustain collective action. Common ideology may be a double-edged sword: it makes organizations likelier to support each other’s goals and to compete for the same resources. However, goal compatibility and organizations’ strategic ability to maintain alternative pools of support and target different beneficiaries not only enable long-term collaboration, but also make it desirable because it is effective.

In our qualitative study of the MIWON coalition and its member organizations, we outlined three different chronological phases. The first saw the emergence of a new group of leftist organizations sharing an ideology of immigrant workers’ empowerment. During this period, class-based interethnic coalitions among immigrant organizations developed. Cooperation prevailed over competition thanks to goal complementarity and non-overlapping resources, which at this time were mostly time and labor by staff, activists, and volunteers. This period cemented solidarity and trust among activists, paving the path for the formalization of the coalition and its more ambitious campaigns.

The second phase was characterized by strong collaboration under conditions of largely overlapping resource pools and high ideological similarity. If MIWON initially developed to fulfill the mutual needs and objectives of each organization, it gradually aligned to fit the organizational priorities of CHIRLA, the most powerful and resourceful organization in the coalition. In altering its focus from workplace organizing to immigrant rights advocacy, CHIRLA continued to invest heavily in MIWON. This was a way to maintain a foothold in LA immigrant politics, while at the same time legitimizing its new national role as the representative of Southern California’s immigrant communities. The political climate surrounding immigration in the mid-2000s – which placed a moral duty on all groups to act – as well as multiple binding commitments between the same
organizations across different coalitions, were instrumental in keeping the other organizations on board, particularly KIWA and PWC.

The third phase was characterized by the waning of the coalition, relational drift, and organizational change. We singled out two major factors that set up this dynamic and triggered MIWON members’ further organizational change. The political events of the mid-2000s concerning immigration reform lessened the coalition’s importance for CHIRLA, which was in the midst of transforming into a national immigrant rights organization. Mitigated urgency for immigrant rights mobilizations also lifted the strong moral incentives for the other organizations to heavily commit resources to sustain the coalition. CHIRLA’s weakening coalition leadership, coupled with growing resource overlap within the broader resources environment, accelerated relational drift and organizational differentiation. Each organization, however, responded to these dynamics in its own way.

We believe our qualitative case study significantly contributes to organizational theory and social movement literatures. As for the former, we suggested a combination of ecological approaches with an adaptation of Olson’s theory of collective action. Our focus on a handful of organizations and the micro-dynamics of their interaction allowed us to finely trace the processes and mechanisms that underpin collaboration or weaken it. This approach, while unable to systematically account for the competitive forces and resource dependencies that shape entire organizational populations, which characterize ecological studies, helped us investigate how competition is inextricably linked to dynamics of collaboration and internal organizational change. Largely because of methodological constraints, collaboration and competition have been largely assumed in ecological theory rather than empirically researched. However, as we showed in this paper, strategic organizational decisions and collaborative relations are both affected by the resource environment, but it is the decisions that spur dynamics shaping types and levels of available resources in a given context. In the spirit of this proposition, we therefore strived to integrate field and population approaches within an analysis that retains organizational agency and recognizes the ability of organizations to challenge, alter, or reproduce external conditions (Sewell 2005; Clemens and Cook 1999). We argue that our findings require a more sophisticated reading of traditional resource-dependency theories, particularly since they suggest that changes in the configuration of available resources are neither per se nor alone sufficient to modify inter-organizational dynamics or initiate organizational change.

As for social movement theory, we are well aware that resource mobilization theorists have long emphasized the importance of different types of resources and infrastructures to explain movements’ emergence and success (McCarthy and Zald 1977; Jenkins 1983). Moreover, Zald and Ash (1966) famously alerted us to the complex transformative process of social movement organizations as they navigate and weigh the trade-offs that come with institutionalization. However, we argue that social movement
Theorists, along with labor and non-profit researchers, must pay more attention to how rationales for collaboration are inextricably linked to those of competition, and how those rationales change over time. As we have seen, ideological similarities can lead to collaboration only under specific conditions, which are to a large extent shaped by the surrounding environment. At the same time, the changing configuration of available resources over time does impact both internal organizational responses and collaborative dynamics in myriad ways.

Our study is a small-scale analysis of how organizations, particularly those representing disempowered groups, such as immigrants and racial and ethnic minorities, confront constraints and opportunities in their operational environments. We began the paper by suggesting that the types of interethnic and working-class coalitions emerging in LA depart from normal ethnic and racial politics in US cities. Forces in LA joined to produce conditions that favored interethnic collaboration centered on a strong class identity. The robust collaborations lasted for over a decade. This certainly departed from traditional ethnic politics. However, as the ecological terrain evolved, the strong ties that made the city into an organizing model weakened. CHIRLA, MIWON’s most prominent organization, concentrated more and more on immigration reform and Latino voter mobilization. This organization’s value for the bigger political landscape became its capacity to politically mobilize a specific ethnic group, Latinos, in one of the most important gateway cities of the US.

While we examined one particular coalition of immigrant organizations in LA, we contend that our study provides useful tools to analyze the trajectory of similar immigrant organizations in other US urban contexts, particularly Chicago, Washington, D.C., New York, Boston, and San Francisco. Furthermore, this study has important implications for immigrant organizations themselves. In assessing the best course of action for any given time, organizations should consider the costs of maintaining their founding ideologies and organizational goals. They should determine in how far they can remain loyal to their early constituents and beneficiaries in view of organizational survival needs and hopes for successes in other activity areas.

We need more research for a deeper understanding of how organizations establish and sustain collaboration while eschewing competition. At the macro-level, a study comparing the broad organizational populations of immigrant organizations and labor unions may be able to assess the comprehensive constraints and opportunities structuring the two organizational fields. At the micro-level, a study of the internal organizational processes may shed more light on how organizations specifically construct their role in relation to other groups. Ideally, it would also reveal how tensions and alternative views among participants shape trajectories of organizational change in response to external factors.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: Earlier versions of this paper were presented at: the Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association (ASA), during the regular session of the Labor and Labor Movements section in Seattle, WA, on 20 August 2016; a workshop hosted by the ‘Migration, Integration, Transnationalization’ Research Unit of the WZB Center in Berlin, Germany, on 19 October, 2016. We are greatly indebted to a number of people for their insightful comments and suggestions, which have significantly improved the quality of this paper. We are particularly thankful to Ruud Koopmans, Irene Bloemraad, Richard Alba, Els de Graauw, Ines Michalowski. Special thanks to Margarita Ramirez (the Liberty Hill Foundation), and Michele Welsing (Southern California Library) for granting us access to their archive and guiding us through the material, as well as to current and former staff of MIWON organizations for their help in carrying out the research.
<table>
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<th>WCW</th>
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CHAPTER 7. CONCLUSION

An Overview of the Research Project.

In this research I have explored immigrant political incorporation from the perspective of contentious politics. I have begun my inquiry by highlighting three empirical puzzles that arose from a preliminary analysis of recent immigrant rights mobilizations in Los Angeles: unexpected organizational forms, identities and ideologies; unexpected organizational and movement success; unexpected trajectory of organizational and movement change over time. The first puzzle relates to the emergence of a multi-ethnic, class-based and cross-generational immigrant rights movement in a setting traditionally dominated by ethnic and racialized forms of political mobilization and collective action. The second puzzle refers to the emergence of a challenging movement that reached a relative degree of success under conditions of low resources (particularly financial ones), limited institutional backing and low support from surrounding civil society actors and institutions. Finally, the third puzzle relates to the fragmentation (and eventual weakening) of this movement over time, particularly as availability of resources and support from actors such as unions and foundations increased.

The literature has suggested that pre-existing discourses and frames are likely to shape the kind of claims, organizational forms and repertoires immigrant organizations adopt in a given context. It has also highlighted the importance of both favorable political opportunities and high levels of resources in making mobilization by a particular group likely to happen. In Los Angeles, the immigrant rights movement appears to have run counter those expectations in three different ways: 1) in its early stages, by developing a movement ideology that emphasized class-based and cross-generational solidarities as well as multi-ethnic and multi-racial collaborations while downplaying ethnic/racialized loyalties – the latter historically providing much more common channels of mobilization, particularly in the United States and California; 2) in its early stages, by proving capable of mounting relatively successful and visible contentious campaigns for the rights of immigrant workers in spite of widespread political hostility, low financial resources and low support from local civil society; 3) in its later stages, as the political climate became less hostile, and the surrounding civil society lent increasing support to the burgeoning immigrant worker rights movement, by moving away from their most innovative immigrant worker campaigns, by abandoning intense coalition-building work on the ground and eventually by losing lost much of their autonomy and influence with respect to other local civil society actors.

In the previous chapters I have provided an analysis of some of the factors and conditions that, in my opinion, can help us understand the rise, consolidation and ultimate fragmentation of a class-based, multi-ethnic and cross-generational immigrant rights movement in Los Angeles over the last thirty years. I divided this inquiry in three
sub-questions that overlap with the three empirical puzzles described above. The first question asks what factors and conditions can help us account for why and how those particular types of organizations emerged in a setting traditionally dominated by ethnic and racialized forms of political mobilization and collective action. The second one interrogates the factors and conditions that, in spite of low financial resources, limited institutional backing and low support from local civil society actors, allowed immigrant worker organizations to mount successful campaigns and gain visibility in local LA politics. The third question asks what factors and conditions led organizations to differentiate, and ultimately the movement to fragment under conditions of more open political opportunities and growing external support. The previous chapters deal with these intertwined questions throughout. More specifically, chapters 3 and 5 (in part) mainly touch upon the first question, chapters 4, 5 and 6 (in part) deal with the second question, and chapter 6 focuses extensively on the third question.

In the remaining sections of this conclusion I will begin by recapitulating the main findings of the study. Rather than presenting again the arguments of each paper individually, I will discuss them in relation to the three different research sub-questions. I will then consider the significance of the study and its findings for the broader debate on organizational success immigrant political incorporation and urban ethnic politics. I will conclude by discussing research generalizability, limitations and potential avenues for further research and inquiry.

Connecting the Threads: Understanding the Emergence, Success and Fragmentation of the LA Immigrant Worker Rights Movement in a Relational Perspective.


The first puzzle of this research begs the question of where organizational ideologies, forms and practices came from. How can we explain the emergence of a multi-ethnic, class-based and cross-generational immigrant rights movement in a setting traditionally dominated by ethnic and racialized forms of political mobilization and collective action? In chapter 3, in my analysis of the genesis of IDEPSCA, KIWA and PWC, I drew on theories of organizational innovation and diffusion to show how migrant communities contributed to reshaping local politics through their own processes of knowledge production and synthesis. Those practices were both local and transnational and were influenced by broadly similar geopolitical contexts in each immigrant community. In chapter 5, I compared KIWA’s early organizational trajectory with that of the Korean Resource Center (KRC), an LA-based Korean American advocacy organization characterized by a more mainstream, liberal-progressive political orientation. I suggested that the respective founders’ early political socialization and their reliance on two
ideologically distinct cores of supporters, both in South Korea and in Los Angeles, critically influenced the organizations’ trajectories, and eventually drove them towards two different organizational fields in spite of being located in the same socio-political environment. With this study I also attempted to show how, within the same immigrant community (and the same socio-political context), different paths of political engagement remain open to immigrant activists.

In both chapters I tried to show how migration-induced social networks functioned as conduits for the transmission of ideas, practices and values between people and places, both locally and transnationally. The development of long-standing migration flows between several countries of origin and Los Angeles was key in establishing a social infrastructure for the circulation of ideas and practices across those contexts. The spread of leftist ideologies in Los Angeles was favored by the arrival of immigrants from countries experiencing an extremely polarized, Cold War-style political conflict, where radical leftist ideologies held considerable currency and radical activists had gained tremendous experience in political organizing. While those immigrants initially committed to homeland politics, some of them also influenced or directly moved into US-oriented immigrant worker organizations. Nevertheless, it was 1.5 and second-generation immigrants that played a pivotal role in establishing the organizations object of this research. Both groups were open to engage on the side of newly arrived immigrants, including those of a different national background, and to embrace new ideas and practices from abroad because they drew parallels between the experience of newcomers and their own as racialized, discriminated and oppressed people of color. Clearly, immigrant worker organizations of the 1980s and 1990s drew much inspiration from the experience of previous US-based organizations and movements. However, they also filtered those lessons through their own cultural sensitivities and understandings (language included), recombining them with the insights coming from abroad.

The dynamics outlined above suggest that migration can be an important driver of innovation and change. The type or scope of innovation was tied to two factors: the specific ideas and practices being circulated, function of migration patterns and socio-economic and geopolitical circumstances affecting given sending countries; the extent to which other social actors – namely mediating actors – proved willing to embrace and capable of adapting such ideas and practices to the local context. The immigrant worker organizations analyzed here were a product of these dynamics and came to share both their ideological framework and organizational objectives. As we will see in the following sections, such commonalities proved crucial to sustain the intense inter-organizational cooperation required to mount ambitious immigrant rights campaigns.

Mobilizing under Hostile Political Conditions and with Low External Support. The Key Role of Fringe Actors and Inter-Organizational Collaboration.
The second puzzle of this research relates to organizational and movement success. What are the factors and conditions that, in spite of low financial resources, limited institutional backing and low support from local civil society actors, allowed immigrant worker organizations to mount successful campaigns and gain visibility in local LA politics? Previous literature has suggested that organizational mobilization capacities and performance, particularly in adverse conditions, largely depend on the organizations’ ability to attract different kinds of resources, namely money and labor. Money is necessary to cover organizational expenses and to hire and retain core staff. Free labor, both specialized and unspecialized, is crucial to fulfill different organizational and campaign functions and tasks. Traditionally, volunteers, activists and different kinds of movement supporters have fulfilled the role of free labor, particularly in cases where monetary resources have been scarce.

In chapter 5 and 6 I described how immigrant worker organizations, particularly in their early phases, relied on very limited financial resources and received little logistical support from the surrounding LA civil society. Organizations such as KIWA, IDEPSCA or CHIRLA were regularly understaffed, could not afford attractive salaries to their staff and did not have the financial and organizational capacities to mount large-scale campaigns or advocacy efforts. KIWA, more than any other group, also had to confront the open hostility of the immigrant community itself. The leadership of the South Korean community in Los Angeles, who was by and large socially conservative, firmly anti-Socialist and suspicious of other communities of color, not only denied support but also antagonized KIWA. Given these constraints, how were they then able to mount aggressive grassroots campaign, let alone survive during the early stages of their organizational trajectories?

In the previous chapters, I explained overall movement effectiveness and success in two ways. In chapter 3, 5 and 6, I argued that immigrant worker organizations were able to survive and engage in various contentious activities thanks to the support of a number of fringe actors at the margins of LA’s institutionalized civil society. Those included college students, often of immigrant background but by and large socialized in the United States, small-scale radical philanthropies such as the Liberty Hill Foundation, individual activists and donors, as well as themselves. In chapter 4 and 5, I argued that we can better understand this process through the lens of organizational legitimacy and legitimation. I suggested that immigrant organizations gained external support by developing alternative organizational narratives that, particularly at times of great turmoil such as in the aftermath of the LA Civil Unrest, strongly resonated with these particular actors. Financial support, at this stage, was hardly sufficient for mounting any serious advocacy campaigns or outreach efforts; however, it was compounded by the strong ideological commitment of both staff and volunteers, who also put whatever technical expertise they had (legal, communication, advocacy, research, etc.) at the service of the organization. As I argue in chapter 6, the capacities and effectiveness of single immigrant worker organizations were dramatically strengthened by inter-organizational collaboration.
Shared ideological and emotional commitments among the staff of different immigrant organizations created the conditions for highly effective – though extremely labor-intensive – cooperation on particular issues such as day labor organizing, garment workers campaigning, or unionization in the supermarket sector. By pooling their resources, organizations were able to make the most out of a scattered set of skills and competences (on advocacy, communication, labor law, litigation, various languages, organizing, etc.).

Immigrant worker organizations were thus able to survive their early phases and launch innovative immigrant rights campaigns by relying on the support of fringe actors. Those included second-generation immigrant students and small-scale foundations, as well as like-minded individual activists and immigrant worker organizations. A focus on legitimacy and legitimation strategies provides us with an additional entry point to understand how organizations secured those resources. In the following section, I will turn to the question of how the changes in the surrounding context affected the trajectory of immigrant worker organizations in their later phase.

**Organizational Change and Movement Fragmentation. A Resource-Dependency Perspective on Organizations.**

The third puzzle of this research relates to the unexpected trajectory of organizational and movement change in a more recent phase. What are the factors and conditions that led to the fragmentation (and eventual weakening) of the immigrant worker movement over time, particularly as availability of resources and support from actors such as unions and foundations increased? As I described in chapter 6, after a series of smaller victories, the immigrant worker rights movement reached its high point in the early to mid-2000s with the birth of the Multi-Ethnic Immigrant Worker Organizing Network (MIWON) and the massive pro-migrant mobilizations of 2006. MIWON, in this respect, represented the first effort of the kind to establish a broad, immigrant-led immigrant rights political platform in Los Angeles. By the mid-2000s, however, despite persisting organizational rhetoric on representing immigrant low-wage workers, the movement had already begun to fragment. In the following years, organizations such as CHIRLA, PWC and KIWA moved away from an exclusive focus on the workplace and on low-wage, undocumented immigrant workers. Other organizations, such as IDEPSCA and GWC, nearly disbanded and had to considerably reduce their organizational scope and activities. By the late 2000s MIWON had ceased to exist but on paper. Interestingly, all this happened as mainstream political opportunities opened up – particularly for Latinos – immigrant worker organizations mushroomed everywhere, and civil society support for immigrant organizing and immigrant leftist organizations increased. How can we explain this contradiction?
In chapter 6, inspired by ecological theory and Olson’s collective action theory, I suggested that we can begin to understand this paradox by paying more attention to how the fate of single organizations is linked to the changing characteristics of the broader context in which they operate. I thus argued that the prevalence of collaborative or rather conflictive relations depended on three factors: 1) structural forces that spur competition between organizations, 2) complementarity and alignment of organizational goals, and 3) ideologically grounded moral incentives that sustain collective action. Changing levels and quality of surrounding available resources, as well as the degree of external resource overlap with other organizations are key variables in determining whether inter-organizational cooperation or rather conflict will prevail.

In my analysis I showed how immigrant worker organizations went through three distinct chronological phases. During the first period, characterized by resource scarcity and low external support, organizations were pushed to collaborate out of ideological similarity, goal alignment and pragmatic considerations. Their reliance on a different set of core supporters made this collaboration productive and non-threatening for all groups involved. During the second phase, characterized by a moderate resource increase and growing civil society support, but also by an incipient expansion of the immigrant worker organizational field, organizations engaged in more formalized and even intense collaboration, which ushered in higher profile immigrant rights campaigns. However, deeper integration of organizational activities and campaigns, as well as of organizational structures increased resource overlap and began to threaten the maintenance and survival of individual groups. During the third phase, characterized by an unevenly distributed resource increase, but also by growing external competition from other immigrant groups and local labor unions, organizations were compelled to specialize and differentiate their goals and activities from others as a way to survive and (possibly) expand. While single organizational responses to this external threat varied significantly, function of differing organizational capacities, ideologies and managerial capacities, the overall consequence was that intense common campaigning ceased and organizations drifted apart.

In this section I tried to provide an explanation for the paradoxical fragmentation of the immigrant worker movement under conditions of growing external support. I argued that we can understand this contradiction if we approach it from the perspective of organizational maintenance and survival, and we analyze the behavior of immigrant worker organizations in relation to both resource providers and potential organizational competitors. Seen through this lens, movement fragmentation was a reflection of the different ways in which immigrant worker organizations, under conditions of growing dependence on the same set of resources, and under the pressure of new actors entering their sphere of organizational activity (i.e. labor unions and new immigrant ‘worker centers’), tackled the challenges of surviving and maintaining or expanding their influence in the local activist and non-profit scene.
Research Implications, Generalizability and Limitations

Organizational Success, the Meaning of Immigrant Political Incorporation and the Return of Ethnic Politics.

In this section I would like to discuss the implications of the research findings described above. I will especially focus on three interrelated dimensions: organizational success and influence; political participation, incorporation and representation of undocumented, low-wage immigrant workers in immigrant worker organizations; the changing role of immigrants in local civil society and politics, and the changing basis of local urban politics.

The first dimension relates to organizational success and influence. A key question we may ask is how organizational change has affected the capacity of each group to improve the social, economic and legal standing of immigrants (particularly the most vulnerable ones). The voluminous literature on immigrant rights activism in Los Angeles has already convincingly shown that, in their early phases, immigrant worker organizations were able to attain remarkable achievements and significant victories – though necessarily limited in scope. The turn to institutional advocacy of organizations such as CHIRLA and, to a lesser extent PWC and KIWA has driven those organizations away from both contentious, grassroots-based politics and an exclusive commitment to undocumented, low-wage immigrant workers. Organizations justified this turn by the need to influence the very structural conditions – i.e. local, state and federal legislation and enforcement policies on immigration, labor and other socio-economic issues – that created the exploitative dynamics they were confronting on the ground in their earlier years of grassroots activism. Yet, the evidence presented in chapter 6 and elsewhere in the literature seems to indicate that those organizations have remained too small, understaffed and under-resourced to become visible and influential actors in those kinds of political struggles. Those limitations concern even CHIRLA, who has been able to capture national funding resources and to considerably expand the scope and breadth of its activities but remained relatively weak compared to national mainstream and ethnic advocacy organizations, or organized labor (Nicholls, Uitermark and van Haperen 2016; Nicholls and Uitermark 2016).

As we have seen, increased support on the side of labor unions and civil society actors has encouraged – if not forced – immigrant worker organizations to abandon the type of labor-intensive and intimate collaborations that proved so effective and productive at the local level. To be sure, rather than weakening the appeal of coalition-building, the stronger involvement of local civil society over immigration issues has strengthened it. Immigrant organizations are now part of numerous collaborative efforts that span issues as diverse as housing, gentrification, environmental issues, civic engagement, minimum wage, access to healthcare or education, labor standards, immigrant detention and
deportations, and, finally, immigration reform. Within those coalitions, however, restructured immigrant worker organizations seem to have a relatively marginal role, while labor unions appear to have taken a strong leading and steering role. If an organization like CHIRLA may still retain the capacity to partially influence the direction of these coalitions, smaller groups such as KIWA and PWC are condemned to playing more of a symbolic role. We should consider, however, that local civil society has also changed. Unions and mainstream advocacy groups have made considerable efforts to include immigrants both in their rank-n-file and in their leadership, as well as to incorporate the interests of immigrant constituencies in their political platforms.

The second dimension of this discussion refers to the implication of these findings for the political incorporation, participation and organizational representation of low-wage immigrants, particularly those in the most precarious socio-economic and legal conditions. One of the major consequences of CHIRLA’s, KIWA’s and PWC’s changing organizational priorities was the downplay of activities that required direct outreach and the active involvement of their most disempowered immigrant constituents. New organizational activities, in fact, demanded particular technical expertise (lobbying, policy analysis, legal skills, etc.) that their direct constituents did not have. We may therefore wonder whether certain organizations have ‘betrayed’ their initial commitment to be both the direct voice of the most marginalized immigrants and the vehicle for improving their conditions. This is a very complicated question to answer. In their early phases, immigrant worker organizations tried to craft creative and effective campaigns that relied both on technical expertise and grassroots mobilization. In doing so, they attempted to include immigrant workers at all levels of the organizing process. Those two objectives, however, are not always compatible with each other, particularly when the skills and competences supplied by the membership do not match those needed for ensuring the success of a particular campaign (Jenkins 2002).

Internal organizational divides and power asymmetries also existed, particularly between the staff on the one side and organizational memberships and constituencies on the other. To what extent was the membership of those organizations able to influence the trajectory of immigrant worker organizations? This is something I could not clearly assess with the available data. Organizations, broadly speaking, were composed of immigrants or people of immigrant background. Given the intrinsic socio-economic and legal vulnerability of the people targeted, significant differences in terms of class and status nonetheless existed between staff and volunteers on one side, and members on the other. If some immigrant workers were able to gain relative visibility within the organizations, most of them were primarily service beneficiaries and only occasionally participated in more political activities. Those considerations lead us to conclude that organizational change was largely staff-driven and, regardless of the objectives, reflected staff priorities rather than those of the membership (provided it would be even possible for members to articulate common interests and grievances). This is not to say that the
staff was driven to goal displacement uniquely out of concerns of organizational maintenance and survival, rather, that they were likely more sensitive to those issues than the membership.

The third and final dimension refers to an assessment of immigrant organizations in the context of LA politics. The role of immigrant worker organizations in re-shaping local politics can hardly be overestimated. At the level of discourse, they contributed to popularizing a narrative of economic and social justice that now underpins much of the advocacy and campaign work of LA mainstream civil society. Indirectly, they contributed to driving unions towards immigrant organizing. Moreover, they played a key role in supporting and incubating several other immigrant-led organizations and collectives that seek to improve the conditions of different immigrant communities. While those organizations have become competitors for resources, they have also contributed to strengthening the local civil society infrastructure that fights for immigrant rights on a daily basis. CHIRLA and IDEPSCA, for example, helped create the National Day Laborer Organizing Network (NDLON), one of the most prominent organizations fighting for the rights of day laborers and undocumented immigrants nationwide, and have invested considerable resources in mobilizing undocumented immigrant youth. The DREAMers movement could have hardly become a major grassroots force in the late 2000s and early 2010s without the support of the organizational infrastructure provided by the old immigrant guard (Nicholls 2013).

It remains to be seen, however, whether the latest developments signal a return to more traditional forms of immigrant ethnic politics, and whether that will harm or strengthen the fight for immigrant rights. CHIRLA, in particular, has since concentrated more and more on immigration reform and Latino voter mobilization. This organization’s value for the bigger political landscape has therefore become its capacity to politically mobilize a specific ethnic group, Latinos, in one of the most important gateway cities of the US. We can speculate that CHIRLA, upon entering the much more institutionalized field of mainstream politics, has found it very difficult to challenge its fundamental logics. Growing dependency of immigrant organizations on labor unions, which have long been part of the urban political machines of the Democratic Party, has also encouraged this trend across groups. While recruitment on the basis of ethnic identities may not necessarily hamper issue-based and multi-ethnic mobilizations, there are certain

233 For example, CHIRLA realized there were particular openings both at the state and federal level to influence legislation affecting immigrants – e.g. on domestic work, on state-federal collaboration on immigration enforcement, on California state drivers’ license, on immigration reform – and would have to rely on experienced lobbyists and policy analysts to directly influence those processes. KIWA, in light of the failure of its market worker campaign, had instead to acknowledge the limitations of grassroots unionization efforts involving undocumented immigrant workers in the current legislative context. KIWA staff also recognized that, even when successful, grassroots campaigns against employers were not necessarily effective in the long run without proper labor law enforcement and sanction mechanisms in place. PWC leadership, influenced by both CHIRLA and KIWA, also genuinely viewed institutional advocacy as a way to concretely improve the situation of domestic and care workers beyond the rear-guard battles targeting individual employers.
implications in this strategy. For once, the wedge between different immigrant ethnic communities of color may grow deeper, at a time when those groups still share a subordinate position in US society and need to rely on each other to push forward an ambitious agenda of social and economic justice (Pulido 2006; Ngin and Torres 2001). Organizations rooted in the ‘Latino’ community, because of the growing strength of their numbers, may be particularly tempted to continue on their own. Particularly as immigrant organizations come to rely on institutionalized ethnic resources, and they decouple institutional immigrant engagement from the question of work, they may also move away from the concerns of the lowest strata of the immigrant working class to embrace more moderate, when not conservative, middle-class political projects. The recent election of Donald J. Trump as U.S. President may well change this. In light of the increasing hostility of both the President and Congress towards immigrants, immigrant organizations may become more inclined to step up grassroots mobilizations, return to more contentious action and to more robust grassroots coalitions.

Research Limitations, Generalizability, and Avenues for Further Research: Beyond the LA Model?

As I argued in the introduction, I selected Los Angeles and a handful of immigrant worker organizations as a case study because of the unusual set of dynamics that characterized this context. However, it is important to recognize the limitations of such an approach. I have already discussed data collection and analysis limitations in the introduction and throughout the various chapter. Here I would like to reiterate the point that this research focused on a very specific group of organizations, to the detriment of the vast and varied organizational landscape that characterized, and still characterizes Los Angeles (as well as many other major US and world cities). Furthermore, I believe that the particular set-up of this research may also limit its generalizability to other contexts. To an extent, the history of the immigrant worker rights movement in Los Angeles is unique. In comparison with other major cities in the US, Los Angeles received unprecedented and very specific immigration flows. The process of economic restructuring, and its impact on immigration, were also dramatic. Finally, and partly as a result of those dynamics, Los Angeles emerged as an experiment of immigrant (and other forms of) activism that had few parallels in the United States between the 1990s and 2000s. For all these reasons, it is difficult to make a direct comparison with the situations in other urban contexts.

Some of the processes I highlighted throughout this research, however, may prove insightful to understand dynamics at work elsewhere, both in the United States and in Europe. Questions of organizational innovation, resource competition and legitimacy concern not only immigrant worker organizations in Los Angeles, but organizations in general. In assessing the best course of action for any given time, organizations routinely consider the costs of maintaining their founding ideologies and organizational goals. Keeping in mind the (not always reconcilable) imperatives of organizational survival and
success, organizations also have to determine how far they can or should remain loyal to their early constituents and beneficiaries. Those issues relate to the more fundamental questions of what criteria should underpin the legitimacy of immigrant-oriented organizations, and to what extent their legitimacy should be based on technical or professional expertise, on a particular ideological commitment, on shared positionality and ascribed characteristics with their constituents and membership, or on a varying combination of these dimensions.

Those questions are particular important for contentious organizations with an explicit political dimension. The varying answers may dramatically affect the extent to which immigrants not only see their material conditions improve, but also have a say in the process. In the United States, those questions have been primarily framed with respect to the growing influence of large philanthropic foundations over immigrant organizational activity. In Europe, researchers have made a similar argument with respect to the role of national, local and supra-national government institutions. A related aspect that has both concrete implications for society and research potential is the role of immigrants within immigrant rights advocacy. While immigrant rights advocacy organizations in the United States have been traditionally staffed by immigrants and their children (de Graauw 2016; Louie 2001), this has not been the case in Europe, where immigrant associations have largely refrained from open contentious action against the state or private actors (Nicholls and Vermeulen 2012; Nicholls 2008). Immigrant organizations have often been co-opted or neutralized by the different levels of the state, and immigrant rights advocacy is generally conducted by more specialized organizations staffed by trained professionals with no migrant background or direct connection to the immigrant community (Pero’ 2007; Martiniello 1993; Nicholls and Uitermark 2016). More cross-national comparative research is needed to understand those diverging trajectories, as well as to more broadly appreciate how the latter have impacted the overall incorporation of immigrants in societies of settlement.
APPENDIX A. ARCHIVES AND OTHER DATA SOURCES

List of archives


Other data sources

Grant Applications (2006-2014). Liberty Hill Foundation, Los Angeles, CA.

IRS data has been obtained through the following sources:
Foundation Directory Online, https://fconline.foundationcenter.org/
Nonprofit Explorer/ProPublica. https://projects.propublica.org/nonprofits/
APPENDIX B. LIST OF INFORMANTS (FORMAL INTERVIEWS)

Alvarado, Pablo. NDLON Executive Director and former IDPESCA and CHIRLA organizer. Various interviews, April-May 2015.


Bernabe, Antonio. CHIRLA organizer and former Day Laborers Organizing Project Coordinator. 4 June, 2014.

Cervas, Strela. PWC board member and former Policy Officer. June 1 and June 9, 2014.

Cho, Sue. KIWA Development Coordinator. September 16, 2016.


Hong, Roy. KIWA founder and former Executive Director. June 10, 2014.


Husain, Saima. South Asian Network (SAN), Deputy Director. June 12, 2014.


Joong, Yoon Dae. NAKASEC Executive Director and former KRC Executive Director. January 21, 2015.


Mariscal, Max. KIWA former organizer, former IWU President. June 1 and June 11, 2014.

Narro, Victor. UCLA Labor Center Project Director and former CHIRLA Workers’ Rights Project Director. June 11, 2014.


Omatsu, Glenn. California State University Lecturer. September 13, 2016.


Suh, Alexandra. KIWA Executive Director and former Development Associate and volunteer. November 5, 2014.

Sunwoo Elizabeth. KIWA organizer and MIWON coordinator. June 1 and June 3, 2014.

Wong Kent. UCLA Labor Center Director. June 4, 2014.
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Davis, Mike. 2006. *City of Quartz. Excavating the Future in Los Angeles*.


LIST OF IMAGES


SUMMARY

In this dissertation I explored the factors and conditions that shaped the character, success and fragmentation of the immigrant rights movement in Los Angeles, California, during the period 1980-2015.

As I showed in introductory chapters 1 and 2, the recent history of Los Angeles offers a paradigmatic case of the challenges and opportunities of immigrant political incorporation under conflicting conditions of economic globalization and political nativism. Between the 1970s and 1990s, in the midst of economic restructuring, no other city in the United States underwent such an encompassing social and demographic transformation as a result of international migration. At the same time, few other cities experienced similar levels of socio-economic inequality, whereas newly arrived immigrants, often undocumented or in legally precarious situations, found themselves trapped at lowest rungs of the labor market. During this period, legal, ethno-racial and economic barriers at both the local and national level converged to frustrate immigrants’ prospects of long-term inclusion, access to citizenship rights and upward social mobility.

Yet, in an unlikely turn of events, Los Angeles also emerged as an experiment in immigrant political activism that had no parallels in the country at the turn of the 21st century. Against the constraints that blocked their participation in institutional politics, immigrants resorted to expressing grievances and claims through contentious politics and grassroots mobilization. Immigrant organizations, in particular, played a key role in advancing the legal, social, economic and political standing of immigrant communities in Los Angeles and elsewhere.

This research and its guiding questions were thus inspired by those events. In particular, by three empirical puzzles which challenge important aspects of the literatures covering immigrant politics. First, in their early phases, the immigrant organizations under study appeared to defy conventional patterns of immigrant ethnic politics by promoting class-based solidarities, developing multi-ethnic alliances and articulating an intersectional understanding of immigrants’ subaltern position in US society. Second, in spite of limited external support, those organizations proved capable of attaining considerable political victories and prominence. Third, when the movement matured and external support increased, such groups surprisingly drifted apart and abandoned their most innovative grassroots campaigns.

In order to conduct this research, I divided this inquiry in three sub-questions that overlap with the three empirical puzzles described above. The first question asked what factors and conditions accounted for the emergence of those particular types of organizations in a setting traditionally dominated by ethnic and racialized forms of political mobilization and collective action. The second one interrogated the factors and conditions that, in spite of low financial resources, limited institutional backing and low support from local civil society actors, allowed immigrant organizations to mount
successful campaigns and gain visibility in local LA politics. The third question asked what factors and conditions led organizations to differentiate, and ultimately the movement to fragment under conditions of more open political and discursive opportunity structures and growing external support.

To answer those questions, I conducted a historical study of six prominent LA immigrant political organizations that were active during the period 1980s-2015. Those organizations are the following: the Instituto de Educación Popular del Sur de California (IDEPSCA), the Korean Immigrant Workers Advocates (KIWA), the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA), the Pilipino Workers Center (PWC), the Garment Worker Center (GWC), and the Korean Resource Center (KRC). I based my empirical claims on evidence sourced from various organizational archives as well as from qualitative interviews with key informants.

The empirical chapters of this dissertation identified common organizational innovation, organizational strategic action and inter-organizational resource competition as key factors affecting organizational characteristics as well as dynamics of collaboration and conflict under changing external conditions. I argued that we can better understand immigrant organizations if we view them as both agents and products of 1) the environment in which they operate and 2) the relations to which they are part. Organizations depend for their survival and success on a wide range of social actors, and this dependence affects internal dimensions such as organizational identity- and goal-definition, structures and claim-making activities. Yet, unlike other groups, immigrant organizations are not only embedded in the local context, but also in a transnational space that contributes to influencing all these internal aspects. This dual relational lens helps us understand how organizations may be able to offset the obstacles presented by local hostile political and discursive opportunity structures.

In chapter 3, I showed how the transnational migration process was an important driver of organizational innovation, influencing both the ideology and practice of three different immigrant worker organizations (IDEPSCA, KIWA and PWC). My analysis singled out the importance of transnational processes of diffusion, as well as of mechanisms of ‘bounded solidarity’ in fostering the circulation and adaptation of external ideas to the context of immigrant Los Angeles.

In Chapter 4, together with Floris Vermeulen I introduced and discussed the concept of organizational legitimacy in the context of organizational emergence and survival. We showed its relevance for immigrant political organizations, as legitimacy and legitimation can help us understand how organizations establish themselves, strengthen their position and survive over long periods of time in spite of very limited material resources of their own.

In chapter 5, I examined how ideological orientations interplayed with support networks to drive two different immigrant organizations – KRC and KIWA – toward alternative ways of legitimating their existence and action (ethnic- vs. class-based).
Moreover, I showed how organizational leaders strategically tweaked their legitimation strategies in light of the changing discursive environment in order to attract further external support. Relying on the support of fringe actors – including second-generation immigrant students, small-scale foundations, individual activists and like-minded immigrant groups – immigrant organizations were able to survive their early phases and launch innovative advocacy campaigns.

In chapter 6, together with Walter Nicholls and Floris Vermeulen I provided a tentative explanation for the emergence, consolidation, and fragmentation of the Los Angeles immigrant workers rights movement over the last three decades. Drawing on a case study of the Multi-ethnic Immigrant Worker Organizing Network (MIWON) and of its member organizations, we contended that organizational collaboration is shaped by 1) forces that spur competition between organizations, 2) complementarity and alignment of organizational goals, and 3) ideologically grounded moral incentives that sustain collective action. Moreover, we argued that ultimate movement fragmentation was a reflection of the different ways in which those organizations, under conditions of growing dependence on the same set of resources, and under the pressure of new actors entering their sphere of organizational activity, tackled the challenges of surviving and maintaining or expanding their influence in the local activist and non-profit scene.

In chapter 7, I concluded by offering a summary of the key research findings and of how they contribute to answering the questions formulated in the introduction. I discussed the implications of the findings for future research and for our understanding of contemporary immigrant politics in California (and in the US more broadly). In particular, I suggested that the return to ‘ethnic politics’, the institutionalization of key LA immigrant organizations and the fragmentation of the local immigrant political landscape might prove formidable obstacles to the maintenance of an effective, cohesive and immigrant-led grassroots movement for social and economic justice.
SAMENVATTING

In dit proefschrift onderzoek ik de factoren en omstandigheden die het karakter, het succes en de versnippering van de migrantenrechtenbeweging in Los Angeles, Californië, hebben bepaald in de periode 1980-2015.

Zoals ik in de inleidende hoofdstukken 1 en 2 laat zien, illustreert de recente geschiedenis van Los Angeles de uitdagingen en kansen voor de integratie van immigranten in een situatie van economische globalisering en politiek nativisme. Tussen de jaren zeventig en negentig, midden in de economische herstructurering, onderging geen enkele andere stad in de Verenigde Staten zo'n omvattende sociale en demografische transformatie als gevolg van internationale migratie. Tegelijkertijd ondervonden weinig andere steden vergelijkbare niveaus van sociaaleconomische ongelijkheid, terwijl nieuw aangekomen immigranten, vaak zonder papieren of in juridisch precaire situaties, niet in staat waren hun zwakke positie op de arbeidsmarkt te verbeteren. Tijdens deze periode blokkeerden zowel juridische, etnische, raciale en economische barrières op lokaal en nationaal niveau de vooruitzichten van immigranten op integratie, toegang tot burgerschapsrechten en opwaartse sociale mobiliteit.

Verrassend genoeg is Los Angeles tegelijkertijd ook naar voren gekomen als een experiment van activisme, zowel door immigranten als op andere vlakken, die geen parallellen heeft in de Verenigde Staten aan het begin van de 21e eeuw. Tegenover de beperkingen die hun deelname aan de institutionele politiek blokkeerden, namen immigranten hun toevlucht tot het uiten van hun onvrede door de mobilisatie van de achterban. Immigrantenorganisaties speelden met name een sleutelrol bij het verbeteren van de juridische, sociale, economische en politieke status van immigrantengemeenschappen in Los Angeles en elders.

Dit onderzoek en de leidende vragen werden geïnspireerd door bovenstaande gebeurtenissen, en in het bijzonder door drie empirische puzzels die belangrijke aspecten van de literatuur over immigrantenpolitiek in twijfel trekken. Ten eerste lijken de onderzochte immigrantenorganisaties conventionele patronen van etnische immigratiepolitiek tegen te spreken door op klasse gebaseerde solidariteit te bevorderen, multi-etnische allianties te ontwikkelen en een intersectioneel begrip van de inferieure positie van immigranten in de Amerikaanse samenleving te verwoorden. Ten tweede blijken deze organisaties, ondanks beperkte externe steun, in staat om aanzienlijke politieke overwinningen en bekendheid te behalen. Ten derde raakten dergelijke groepen in toenemende mate van elkaar verwijderd en lieten zij hun meest innovatieve grassroots-campagnes en activiteiten achter zich op het moment dat de beweging volwassen werd en de externe steun toenam.

Om dit onderzoek uit te voeren heb ik het opgedeeld in drie deelvragen die overlappen met de drie empirische puzzels die hierboven zijn beschreven. De eerste vraag behandelt welke factoren en omstandigheden ons kunnen helpen verklaren waarom en
hoe dit soort organisaties zijn ontstaan in een omgeving die traditioneel wordt
gedomineerd door etnische en raciale vormen van politieke mobilisatie en collectieve
actie. De tweede vraag betreft de factoren en omstandigheden die, ondanks de beperkte
financiële middelen, beperkte institutionele steun en lage steun van lokale actoren uit het
maatschappelijk middenveld, migrantenorganisaties in staat stelden om succesvolle
campagnes op te zetten en zichtbaarheid te krijgen in de lokale politiek van Los Angeles.
De derde vraag onderzoekt welke factoren en omstandigheden deze organisaties ertoe
hebben gebracht zich van elkaar te differentiëren, en uiteindelijk de neiging tot
fragmentatie tussen de organisaties, tijdens de toename van politieke kansen en externe
steun.

Om deze vragen te beantwoorden heb ik een historische studie uitgevoerd naar
de organisatorische ontwikkelingen in de periode 1980-2015 van zes prominente
organisaties actief in de migrantenpolitiek van Los Angeles. Deze organisaties zijn het
Instituto de Educación Popular del Sur de California (IDEPSCA), de Korean Immigrant
Workers Advocates (KIWA), het Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles
(CHIRLA), the Pilipino Workers Center (PWC), het Garment Worker Center (GWC), en
het Korean Resource Center (KRC). Ik baseer mijn empirische beweringen op
archiefmateriaal - zowel afkomstig van de organisaties zelf als uit openbare bronnen -
alsmede op kwalitatieve interviews met belangrijke informanten.

De empirische hoofdstukken van dit proefschrift identificeren
gemeenschappelijke organisatorische innovatie, strategisch organisatorisch handelen en
onderlinge concurrentie om middelen als sleutelfactoren die zowel de organisatorische
kenmerken als de dynamiek van samenwerking en conflicten onder veranderende
externe omstandigheden beïnvloeden. Ik beargumenteer dat we
migrantenorganisaties beter kunnen begrijpen als we ze zien als zowel de aanjagers als
het product van 1) de omgeving waarin zij opereren en 2) de relaties waartoe zij behoren.
Voor hun voortbestaan en succes zijn organisaties afhankelijk van een breed scala aan
sociale actoren, en deze afhankelijkheid beïnvloedt interne dimensies zoals het definiëren
van identiteit en doelen, de formulering en motivering van de claims die door de
organisatie worden gemaakt, evenals interne besluitvormingsstructuren. Toch zijn
migrantenorganisaties, in tegenstelling tot veel andere groepen, niet alleen ingebed in
de lokale context, maar ook in een transnationale ruimte die bijdraagt aan het vormgeven
van hun sociale, politieke en culturele karakter. Dit dubbele relationele aspect helpt ons
tebegrijpen hoe organisaties de lokale vijandige politieke en discursieve omstandigheden
can neutraliseren.

In hoofdstuk 3, laat ik zien hoe het transnationale migratieproces organisatorische
innovatie stimuleerde, en zowel de ideologie als de praktijk van drie verschillende
organisaties voor migrantenarbeid (IDEPSCA, KIWA en PWC) beïnvloedde. Mijn
analyse is met name gericht op het belang van transnationale diffusieprocessen, evenals
mechanismen van ‘gebonden solidariteit’ bij het bevorderen van de circulatie en aanpassing van externe ideeën aan de context van immigratie in Los Angeles.

In hoofdstuk 4, behandel ik samen met Floris Vermeulen het belang van organisatorische legitimiteit in het ontstaan en voortbestaan van organisaties. Dit hoofdstuk laat zien dat legitimiteit zeer relevant is voor politieke immigrantenorganisaties, omdat dit ons kan helpen begrijpen hoe organisaties zich vestigen, hun positie versterken en kunnen blijven voortbestaan, ondanks zeer beperkte eigen materiële middelen.

In hoofdstuk 5, onderzoek ik hoe de interactie tussen ideologische oriëntaties en ondersteunende netwerken twee verschillende immigrantenorganisaties – KRC en KIWA – heeft bewogen tot verschillende manieren van legitimatie (etniciteit en klasse). Bovendien liet ik zien hoe organisatieleiders hun legitimatietstrategieën aanpasten in het licht van de veranderende discursieve omgeving om verdere externe steun aan te trekken. Met de steun van marginale actoren - waaronder tweede generatie studenten, kleinschalige stichtingen, individuele activisten en gelijkgestemde immigrantengroepen - konden immigrantenorganisaties in hun beginperiode overleven en innovatieve campagnes lanceren.

In hoofdstuk 6, geef ik samen met Walter Nicholls en Floris Vermeulen een voorzichtige verklaring voor de opkomst, consolidatie en fragmentatie van de migrantenarbeidersbeweging van Los Angeles in de afgelopen drie decennia. Op basis van een casestudy van het Multi-ethnic Immigrant Worker Organizing Network (MIWON) en de organisaties die lid zijn van dit netwerk, betogen we dat de organisatorische samenwerking gevormd wordt door 1) krachten die de concurrentie tussen organisaties stimuleren, 2) complementariteit en afstemming van organisatiedoelstellingen, en 3) ideologisch gefundeerde morele prikkel die collectieve actie ondersteunen. Bovendien betogen we dat de uiteindelijke fragmentatie van de beweging is van de verschillende manieren waarop de organisaties, in tijden van toenemende afhankelijkheid van dezelfde middelen en onder druk van nieuwe actoren op hun gebied van activiteit, trachten te overleven en hun invloed in de lokale activiste en non-profit scene te consolideren of uit te breiden.

In hoofdstuk 7, concludeer ik met een samenvatting de belangrijkste onderzoeksresultaten en leg uit hoe deze bijdragen aan het beantwoorden van de vragen geformuleerd in de inleiding. Ik bespreek de implicaties van de bevindingen voor toekomstig onderzoek en voor ons begrip van de hedendaagse immigrantenpolitiek in Californië (en in de VS meer in het algemeen). Ik stel in het bijzonder voor dat de terugkeer naar ‘etnische politiek’, de institutionalisering van belangrijke LA-immigrantenorganisaties en de versnippering van het politieke landschap van de lokale immigranten enorme obstakels zouden kunnen vormen voor het behoud van een effectieve, samenhangende en door immigranten geleide basisbeweging voor sociale en economische rechtvaardigheid.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am indebted to many people who shared with me parts of this long and bumpy journey.

I would like to start by thanking all those in Los Angeles who took an interest in my project and let me into their worlds. Without them, this research would have never seen the light of day. First and foremost, Margarita Ramirez (Liberty Hill Foundation) and Michele Welsing (Southern California Library), as well as the institutions they represent. I can never repay Margarita for her support during my fieldwork, for connecting me to the world of LA immigrant politics, and for her kindness and generosity. Her energy and commitment to the immigrant cause were greatly inspiring. Michele welcomed me to one of the veritable grassroots institutions of this city. Her help was invaluable to navigate the hundreds of archive boxes documenting the rich history of local immigrant activism, and so was her patience every time I contacted her last-minute to visit the library. I would also like to express my gratitude to all the respondents for their time, their insights and their openness to discuss their personal and professional life with a stranger. I am particularly indebted to Victor Narro, Pablo Alvarado, the Jornaleros del Norte crew, Elizabeth Sunwoo and Max Mariscal for dedicating so much of their time to me and my research. While much of the resulting material could not find a home in writing (yet), the memory of those encounters will stay with me over the years.

It is often said that doing a PhD is like an apprenticeship, the ultimate goal being to learn the academic craft and its ‘tricks of the trade’. If that’s indeed the case, I can only be grateful to have encountered such generous mentors who challenged me intellectually and invested so much time in my training. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my PhD supervisors Jean Tillie, Floris Vermeulen and Walter Nicholls. I am thankful to Jean for taking up my project in spite of so many other commitments, for encouraging me to look for the bigger picture, and for the light and humorous atmosphere of our collegial meetings. I am greatly indebted to Floris, who tirelessly and always patiently supported me at every stage of the project. As mentor, Floris not only balanced presence and absence in a way that allowed me to become a more confident researcher, but also offered the right words of encouragement every time self-doubt and worries got the better of me. Without Floris, it is fair to say this PhD would have taken a few more years to write. I am grateful to Walter for his intellectual energy and for often pushing me to go the extra mile. His sharp comments and feedback were always extremely valuable, if somehow feared. By introducing me to Southern California’s fascinating local politics and history, Walter also ‘infected’ me with the LA virus. As it turns out, I am not the only one at the UvA – not many universities outside the US (or even California) can boast a similar number of researchers working on LA politics.

I am indebted to many who made my stay in Los Angeles not only a learning experience, but also a lot of fun. Caitlin Patler, for providing me with a foothold in the city and helping me in countless ways. On top of that, sharing a Snoop Lion concert and
enjoying together the best taco truck in town will be among my best LA memories. Jeff Sacha, for teaching me how to drive on a 10-lane freeway and pass the US driver's license examination, and for making me sweat in his Pico-Union boxing gym. Nelson Motto, Margarita Reyes, Citlalli Chavez, Alvaro Huerta, Lina Stepick, Deisy del Real and the PhD students from the UCLA Contentious Politics and Organizations Working Group for their help and interest in my project. Manuel Pastor, Rhonda Ortiz and the rest of the staff at the Center for the Study of Immigrant Integration (CSII) at the University of Southern California for making my stay there a fruitful and pleasant experience. My research assistants Maritza Olivera, Vanessa Lopez and Marieke de Wilde for their help at different stages of the data collection. Valery Alzaga and Tara Fiorito for connecting me to various people in Los Angeles.

I would like to acknowledge the European Union, which generously funded most of my PhD trajectory and INTEGRIM, the Marie Curie Initial Training Network of which I was part. Eduardo Ruiz Vieytez and Maria López Belloso from the University of Deusto for the impeccable management of the project, as well as the senior staff from other participating institutions for making INTEGRIM such as an enriching, stimulating and globe-trotting experience. Paul Statham and Michael Collyer for hosting me at the Sussex Center for Migration Research, where I spent my project secondment. Lilla Jacobs, Andreea Leru, Vlad Naumescu and Klara Trencsenyi for setting up the film school in Budapest that inspired me to go in the field with a video camera. Last, but certainly not least, all my INTEGRIM PhD colleagues, some of whom over the years have become almost like family. In particular, Amandine Desille, Tina Magazzini, Stefano Piemontese, Reinhard Schweitzer, Franz Buhr, Kingsley Madueke and Mike Nicholson. I really hope our paths will cross again in the near future.

I would like to thank the program group Challenges to Democratic Representation of the Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research (AISSR) at the University of Amsterdam (UvA), which sponsored my research project and also funded it in its last phases. Many UvA colleagues have given me helpful feedback on various chapter drafts of my dissertation, providing me with thoughtful comments and challenging questions – Benno Netelenbos, Justus Uitermark, Enzo Rossi, Liza Mugge, Natalie Welfens, Janna Besamusca, Maria Kranendonk, Robby Davidson, Joep Schaper, the participants of the CPPC seminar and the PhD Political Sociology club, just to name a few. I am also indebted to several scholars outside of Amsterdam for their mentoring and support at different stages of my PhD: Peggy Levitt, Irene Bloemraad, Ruth Milkman, Richard Alba, Els de Graauw, Ruud Koopmans, Paul Statham, Marco Martiniello. Finally, I am thankful to Carl Milofsky and Ram Cnaan for inviting me to present a chapter of my research in Seattle and contribute to an edited volume.

At the UvA I found an inspiring community of colleagues I am happy to also call friends. Martijn Brünger, JuanFran Alvarado, Thijs van Dooremalen, Retna Hanani, Francisco Céron, Else Vogel, Tara Fiorito, Sander van Haperen, Filippo Bertoni, Natalya
Komarova, Asya Pisarevskaya, Mutsumi Karasaki, Stine Grinna, Annastiina Kallius, Sebastian Ibarra, Ayşen Üstübici, and many others. I very much enjoyed podcasting and spending time with Darshan Vigneswaran, Beste Isleyen, Helena Uzelac, Vanessa Cantinho and Francois Bonnet on our Monday Morning Meetings on Migration show. I am grateful to Sébastien Chauvin for inspiring me intellectually and for his generosity as mentor. I am thankful to Solange Fontana and Farid Boussaid for sharing meals and laughs together over the years, and for giving me shelter in Amsterdam during the teaching months.

Without Delphine Gorce, my unofficial ‘life coach’ and one of the people who know me best, I would have never taken the fateful decision to return to Amsterdam and apply for a PhD. Without the inspiring classes of Valerio Contini, my high school history and philosophy teacher, I would have probably never studied political science and sociology. Without Michel, I would have not embraced ‘being critical’ as a way of life. Many friends have been there for me over the years and reminded me of ‘real’ life outside the PhD. In particular Mert Peksen, Konstantina Alexopoulou, Ali Zaidi, Gideon Hamburger, Massimiliano Sfregola, Giulia Cortesi, Matteo Corradini, Valentina Pavarotti, Nicholas Jacob, Cesco, Peppo, Laura, Bergo, Mandingher and Sergio. I am also thankful to Kiek and Rien, Rosa and Arnoud, Jeroen and Isabella for welcoming into their families.

When the time came, it was the most natural thing to ask Edda Bild and Francesco Colona to be my paranymphs. Whether in a pisco bar in Lima, where I was delivered the worst (best) lines from Argentinian telenovelas, or on the top of the Dolomites at dawn, with very few other people I have enjoyed the same level of closeness, familiarity and idiosyncratic fun. Thank you both for being by my side.

Finally, I would like to thank my family. My parents Francesco and Nancy, for always supporting me in what I do and for helping me get all the way here. My mom, in particular, for making it possible for me to imagine a life and career outside of Italy. My sister Annalisa and her family, and my brothers Stefano and Peter, for being there for me in their own different ways. My brother Nicola, for having been such a laid-back and helpful sparring partner in Los Angeles, accompanying me to May Day demonstrations or to primera comunión parties in repurposed Herbalife stores with equal curiosity and excitement. I like to think that the ‘mood’ of those shared experiences is reflected in the cover of this dissertation, which he masterfully designed.

Basje, the last lines are for you. For having shared with me so much of the last four years, and for always cheering me up by finding the hidden comic side of our lives. I would not have made it without your patience, care and love.