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### Beyond immigrant ethnic politics?

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

Gnes, D.

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## 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<sup>56</sup> 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, those 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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<sup>56</sup> 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*<sup>57</sup> 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 (McCammom 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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<sup>57</sup> 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 2014). 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.<sup>58</sup> 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 Duyvendak 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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<sup>58</sup> 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 Sensenbrenner'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 Sensenbrenner 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 Sensenbrenner 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 Sensenbrenner (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 they 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<sup>59</sup> from the above-mentioned organizations and individual memoirs, 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.**

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<sup>59</sup> 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, multi-cultural 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 in 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.<sup>60</sup> 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,<sup>61</sup> 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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<sup>60</sup> 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).

<sup>61</sup> 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.<sup>62</sup> 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.<sup>63</sup> 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).<sup>64</sup> 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.<sup>65</sup>

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.<sup>66</sup> Growing up in the in 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.<sup>67</sup> 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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<sup>62</sup> IDEPSCA grant application to Liberty Hill Foundation, 9 September 1994, box 46/folder 10, LHFR archive.

<sup>63</sup> Various authors, "Todos Unidos. Primer boletín de la Escuela de la Comunidad," January-March 1994, box 43/folder 12, LHFR archive (herein cited as "Todos Unidos").

<sup>64</sup> See also: author unknown, "¿Por qué estamos en la esquina?", *Todos Unidos* (p.3).

<sup>65</sup> Various authors, IDEPSCA Collective Report, "From Forgetfulness to Hope, 1984-1996", November 1996, box 57/folder 10, LHFR archive (herein cited as "From Forgetfulness to Hope").

<sup>66</sup> 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).

<sup>67</sup> 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.<sup>68</sup>

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,<sup>69</sup> 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.<sup>70</sup>

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

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<sup>68</sup> Interview with Añorve.

<sup>69</sup> 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.

<sup>70</sup> 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.<sup>71</sup> 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.<sup>72</sup> 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.<sup>73</sup> 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.<sup>74</sup>

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.<sup>75</sup> 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.<sup>76</sup> In this

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<sup>71</sup> Interview with Pablo Alvarado, 8 April 2015 (herein cited as "interview with Alvarado #1").

<sup>72</sup> Interview with Alvarado #1.

<sup>73</sup> Interview with Alvarado #1.

<sup>74</sup> Interview with Alvarado #1.

<sup>75</sup> Interview with Lolo Cutumay 18 April 2015. For more information about Cutumay Camones, see Almeida and Urbizagastegui (1999).

<sup>76</sup> 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.<sup>77</sup>

### *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.<sup>78,79</sup> 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.<sup>80</sup> 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.<sup>81</sup> While Hong came from a

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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.

<sup>77</sup> 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.

<sup>78</sup> "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.

<sup>79</sup> "Report", KIWA report to Liberty Hill Foundation, 30 November 1994, box 47/folder 2, LHFR archive (herein cited as "KIWA 1994 report").

<sup>80</sup> Interview with Roy Hong, 6 June 2014 (herein cited as "interview with Hong").

<sup>81</sup> 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.<sup>82</sup> 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.<sup>83</sup> 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.<sup>84</sup> 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.<sup>85</sup>

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grant application to Liberty Hill Foundation, 30 November 1995, box 57/folder 15, LHFR archive (herein cited as "KIWA 1995 grant application").

<sup>82</sup> Interview with Hong. See also Louie (2004).

<sup>83</sup> Interview with Hong.

<sup>84</sup> Interview with Hong. See also KIWA 1992 grant application; KIWA 1994 report.

<sup>85</sup> 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 Trotskysts, 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.<sup>86</sup>

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.<sup>87</sup> 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

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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).

<sup>86</sup> Interview with Hong.

<sup>87</sup> 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 II, LHFR archive.

generations.<sup>88</sup> 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.<sup>89</sup> In parallel, ties with South Korean activists were maintained through language and exposure programs for both Korean and US-born activists,<sup>90</sup> 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.<sup>91</sup> 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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<sup>88</sup> 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).

<sup>89</sup> “Report. Asian American Youth Activist Project”, KIWA final report to Liberty Hill Foundation, 15 May, 1996, box 51/folder 8, LHFR archive. Various authors, “KIWA News. The Newsletter of Korean Immigrant Workers Advocates”, KIWA newsletter, vol. 4, summer 1995, box 50/folder 4, LCHR archive. The training, despite its limitations in scope and depth, would influence the genesis of other key groups such as the Pilipino Workers Center (PWC) – see next section.

<sup>90</sup> 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.

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

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.<sup>92</sup>

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.<sup>93</sup>

Ideologically, PWC founders owed a great debt to local and transnational Filipino and Filipino America radical organizations.<sup>94</sup> However, they were initially unsure regarding the kind of organization they wanted to establish.<sup>95</sup> 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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<sup>92</sup> Interview with Aquilina Soriano-Versoza, 16 June 2014 (herein cited as "interview with Soriano-Versoza").

<sup>93</sup> Unknown author, "SAT '96 Provides Hands-On Experience in Community Organizing", in "KIWA News. The Newsletter of Korean Immigrant Workers Advocates", KIWA newsletter, vol. 6 summer 1996, box 6/folder 7, KIWA archive.

<sup>94</sup> 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/>).

<sup>95</sup> 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,<sup>96</sup> 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,<sup>97</sup> 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.<sup>98</sup> 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?”<sup>99</sup> 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.<sup>100</sup> 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

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<sup>96</sup> Interview with Soriano-Versoza.

<sup>97</sup> 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”).

<sup>98</sup> Interview with Lledo.

<sup>99</sup> Interview with Lledo.

<sup>100</sup> Interview with Lledo.

direct organizational work towards the healthcare and caregiving sectors, where Filipino immigrants were disproportionately employed and were also exposed to a wide range of abuses by both domestic employers and contracting agencies (Ghandnoosh 2010).

## 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 vane, 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.<sup>101</sup> 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 Sensebrenner 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

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<sup>101</sup> 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.