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## “We Can’t Go Back”

### *Immigrant Women, Intersections, and Agency*

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Women are migrating and will continue to do so. Their needs are urgent and deserve priority attention. Only then will the benefits of international migration be maximized and the risks minimized.

—United Nations Population Fund, 2006<sup>1</sup>

In 1836, a young Polish woman named Ernestine Susmond Potowski Rose made her way across the Atlantic to her chosen destination, the United States. Her exit from Poland was prompted by her adamant refusal to agree to an arranged marriage. Ernestine had filed a lawsuit against her father, a Jewish rabbi, over control of her inheritance; she arrived, consequently, after sojourning in other European countries, marrying an Englishman, and espousing an avowed rejection of religious beliefs regarding women’s inferiority. An active and controversial leader and eloquent public speaker for the movements to abolish slavery and forward women’s rights, Ernestine Rose went on to earn the nickname of adulation “Queen of the Platform.”<sup>2</sup>

In 1986, a full 150 years later, the young attorney Sheela Murthy left her native India to enter law school at Harvard University, where she earned her LL.M. (master of law) degree the following year. Sheela’s migration—across a different ocean from that traversed by Ernestine—was motivated in large part by an activist desire to improve the lives of women through the law. By doing so, Sheela was echoing Ernestine’s ambition and underscoring the fact that the revolution that the Queen of the Platform and her cohort undertook had remained unfinished. Sheela’s decision to migrate to the United States and study law meant that she broke out of the mold of a traditional adult path for women in her society, as had Ernestine. Today, Sheela runs the successful Murthy Law, an immigration law firm in Baltimore, Maryland, that she founded, which provides legal assistance to both women and

men nationally. Twenty years after Sheela set foot in the United States, her firm was acknowledged as one of the world's leading U.S. immigration law firms by international law-firm rating agency Chambers Global. Across 2007, 2008, and 2009, *Super Lawyers International* named Sheela Murthy a "Maryland Super Lawyer."

The Queen of the Platform and the Maryland Super Lawyer represent two eras in U.S. immigration history and two different world regions. And they illustrate a phenomenon that is not consciously recognized in the American immigration stories that we tell ourselves about ourselves or in the shared social memory of our founding myths: the presence of foreign-born women as leaders and contributors to the cultures and structures of the United States. This relative silence on the active roles of immigrant women carries over into the scholarly arena. Denise Segura and Patricia Zavella recently characterized this absence in the following way: "[Foreign-born] women's economic contributions, creative adaptation strategies, cultural expressions, and everyday contestations remain largely unrecognized in scholarship."<sup>3</sup> The United Nations Population Fund has also charged that "policymakers continue to disregard both [migrating women's] contributions and their vulnerability."<sup>4</sup> We concur with these diagnoses and offer this book in an attempt to help correct the imbalance in scholarship and policymaking.

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, the image of the typical immigrant in the American popular cultural imagination is a monolithic one: it is that of a working-class Mexican or Central American man. This stereotype continues despite statistical evidence that approximately 50 percent of all global migrants are women<sup>5</sup> and that today women and girls constitute the majority of legal immigrants to the United States.<sup>6</sup> The stereotypical public image also misses the wide diversity in national origins that constitutes the current American immigration landscape: foreign-born women, men, girls, and boys represent more than 140 countries.<sup>7</sup> Globally, women are migrating more than ever in history: they comprise 49.6 percent of all migrants worldwide.<sup>8</sup> Until recently, however, women have been ignored or marginalized in immigration and refugee policy. Due to this prolific presence yet perceptual absence, the United Nations Population Fund has begun to label the phenomenon of globally migrating women as "a mighty but silent river."<sup>9</sup>

This book is an overview of the social, cultural, and employment terrains inhabited by adult foreign-born women in the United States in the early twenty-first century, with attention to the stories that these women narrate about their lives. The book's authors came to this project from our own critical awareness of this perceptual absence: immigrant women in American



Figure 1.1. Sheela Murthy. (Copyright Murthy Law Firm)

society are relatively invisible as a recognizable group and have yet to form a collective political or cultural voice. We emphasize the term *relatively*, because we do recognize, quite insistently, that immigrant women are an increasing, significant presence in the daily lifeworlds of Americans across all regions of the United States; these individual relationships between the native-born and immigrant women are visible to those who participate in them, despite the less visible construction of these women as an aggregate group in our cultural myths. That presence in the authors' own lifeworlds—and the fact that one author *is* an immigrant woman—are the key motivations behind our interest in this subject. In the words of anthropologist Clifford Geertz, this subject arose out of our “local knowledge”<sup>10</sup>—as well as research knowledge—and our curiosity to deepen and expand that knowledge; in social-science lingo, it was inductively as well as deductively inspired.

This book's authors coincidentally represent four of the major waves of American immigration: Susan Pearce primarily traces her ancestry to northern Europeans who arrived prior to and immediately after the American Revolutionary War. Elizabeth Clifford's Irish ancestors were among the nineteenth-century immigrants escaping the renowned potato famine, and the Polish side of her family arrived during the Ellis Island era of the Great Immigration at the turn of the twentieth century. Reena Tandon, from India, is a member of the post-1965 wave of immigration that is predominantly peopled by those from non-European countries. And like so many contemporary immigrants, Reena Tandon's sojourn has been multiply transnational: her first venture from India was as an educational migrant to Australia. She then moved to the United States for her postdoctoral research and has now migrated to Canada. Grounded in these personal and family immigration histories, we set out to try to understand the multiple meanings of immigration for women today.

### *Women, Migration, and Research*

The female face of migration today is not only an American phenomenon but one manifestation of an international phenomenon. The United Nations has recently announced that at the global level, “[t]he demand for women migrants is at an all-time high and growing.”<sup>11</sup> The researcher Rhacel Salazar Parreñas recently observed that “[i]ndeed, men who seek low-wage jobs in construction or heavy manufacturing no longer lead the flow of workers from poorer to richer nations in the new global economy.”<sup>12</sup> It is the

charge of some scholars that migration scholarship has not yet given adequate attention to this “feminization of migration.”<sup>13</sup> Such critics also insist that migration scholarship has yet to examine the manner in which nearly every aspect of the immigration experience is somehow gendered, for both women and men.<sup>14</sup>

It has been more than twenty years since Mirjana Morokvašić announced, in her introduction to a special issue of *International Migration Review*, that “Birds of Passage Are Also Women.”<sup>15</sup> Despite a growing number of titles that address the question of gender, however, scholarly books, articles, and conferences about migration continue to appear each year with little or no mention of women or gender.<sup>16</sup> The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs has critiqued researchers and policymakers for this absence.<sup>17</sup> Yet migration cannot be fully understood apart from a sociological understanding of its gendered qualities. A vivid illustration of the gendered nature of migration processes is found in a study by sociologist Vasilikie Demos. Stimulated by the stories of her Greek immigrant grandmothers, Demos’s research on early-nineteenth-century Greek migration to the United States and Australia demonstrates that the Greek tradition of the dowry to accompany a woman’s marriage was a powerful motivator of both male and female immigration. In addition to young women who might migrate to earn their dowry, Greek men quite often migrated alone to underwrite a daughter’s or sister’s dowry and sent remittances from their earnings back home.<sup>18</sup> Today’s Greek society is less likely to manifest such motivations; nevertheless, this example illustrates that the intersection between gender and migration has a long history.

As Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo and the contributors to her edited volume *Gender in U.S. Immigration* describe it, gender shapes the processes of migration in critical, central ways. In other words, taking a gender lens in research on immigration is not only an attempt to understand immigrant *women*. It is an attempt to understand *immigration*. This involves an interpretive shift in research, moving beyond conceiving of gender as a “variable,” which was certainly an important initial step for pioneering women’s and gender studies literature, toward viewing gender as a basic ground of experience. Scholarly views of gender have progressed in this direction in recent years. As Beth Hess and Myra Marx Ferree have observed, sociological research has moved from early approaches that examined sex differences as characteristics somehow “owned” by an individual to a recognition of the core relational or social meanings of gender and how gender is an organizing principle in all arenas of social life.<sup>19</sup>

It is important to emphasize, as has the growing field of masculinity studies,<sup>20</sup> that women are not the only people who are gendered. Men's behaviors, attitudes, and choices are also profoundly shaped through gender socialization, although it was the feminist and women's studies literature that pioneered research investigations into the gendering processes of relationships and societies. Nevertheless, the continued imbalance of privilege and rights based on gender and the subconscious association of the term *immigrant* with *male* provide the impetus behind our decision to offer a book that concentrates on the experiences of women.

Among scholars who study immigration and gender, it is a familiar truism to state that immigrant women are a multidimensional group, defying any stable definition of the word *woman*. Therefore, the gender "ground" is a shifting one. In a similar vein, another recognized truism is that these women are agents in their destinies, within and against the structural tempests that they navigate. Yet the familiarity of such truisms does not render them unworthy of discussion and demonstration. We bring these multidimensional features into stark relief in this study because they are underemphasized and underrecognized; such an underemphasis risks lending support to a "natural attitude"<sup>21</sup> that the immigrant is male, of a particular ethnicity and class, and the family's lead pioneer. A case in point that illustrates the agency of women as this pioneer—even in families migrating together—is the memory of *Svetlana*,<sup>22</sup> whose story is included in this book. She and her husband escaped the Soviet Union surreptitiously, but after arriving in England en route to the United States, her husband got cold feet and wanted to return home. She flatly told him, "No, you have to stay. We can't go back." And . . . they made the originally intended journey to the United States.

There is a near absence of immigrant women in the public cultural image—the shared social imaginary—as a unified cohort in the United States. This claim can be approached descriptively by recalling 2008 and 2010 election-year debates about immigrants as contributors to criminal and economic instability, accompanied by local-level protests over day laborers gathering in parking lots seeking work.<sup>23</sup> When nativist-oriented discussions mention women, it is often in the context of fertility: either the women are *too* fertile, or they are using childbirth to get a foot in the (U.S.) door. This stereotype of the foreign-born woman bearing an "anchor baby" to gain residency and public benefits may be the most recent incarnation of the "welfare mother" myth. And like the "welfare mother" myth of the nonwhite poor woman with uncontrolled fertility who milks the public

coffers for her enrichment, nativist outrage over immigrant women has racial overtones. The fear is the loss of a perceived national identity rooted in racial whiteness as more nonwhites migrate and populate the country, upsetting the historical racial balance.<sup>24</sup> Patricia Hill Collins has observed that the stereotype of the black welfare-dependent woman is a “controlling image” that emerged as black women began to demand access to political and economic power.<sup>25</sup> We have yet to document whether this process is also the case for immigrant women, but there is certainly a consistency in public culture between the two myths (of black and immigrant women), and public moral panics regarding the overfertile immigrant can be traced back to earlier centuries.

There is more to our statement that the presence of a community of immigrant women is still relatively invisible and silent in the discourses of the public sphere than a social-scientific observation. There are political implications to this claim. Invisibility and silence translate into a relative unavailability of social and political power—a reality that the late writer Tillie Olsen, daughter of immigrants, explored in her book *Silences*. In that book, Olsen articulated the challenges that individuals who are outside of social privilege have when they attempt to contribute to literary fields as writers: time and space are luxuries, their voices are considered politically controversial, and their words may be devalued by their audiences.

In the twenty-first century, international migration has become a critical player in the global economy at a scale far beyond that of the nineteenth-century Greek dowry remittances. Global migration generates twenty trillion U.S. dollars each year, adding ten billion dollars to the U.S. economy alone. Even though migrants send much of the money that they generate to their home countries, helping boost those economies, most of those dollars are spent in the receiving country.<sup>26</sup>

### *Imagining This Community*

Saskia Sassen has recently written, “Through their work in both global cities and survival circuits, women, so often discounted as valueless economic actors, are crucial to building new economies and expanding existing ones.”<sup>27</sup> It is our hope that the research presented here, based in interviews with immigrant women across national origins, will contribute to the acknowledgment of this dynamic, adding to the construction of an “imagined community” of immigrant women. Benedict Anderson proposed in his book *Imagined Communities* that the modern nation is an imagined community since its

members do not all know each other but symbolically create a shared image of themselves as a unified group. In a similar sense, we could ask whether more scholarly attention to the female face of immigration might help sketch the outlines of a silhouette of an imagined community.

Our second task after proposing a gender perspective, or lens, for studies of migration is to propose a “nativity” lens for studies of gender and women. This task dovetails with the recent direction in gender and women’s studies termed “intersectionality,” a theoretical handle that legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw pioneered and Patricia Hill Collins and many others have elaborated.<sup>28</sup> According to intersectionality theory, one’s gender will inevitably constrain or enable one’s life options—but this process does not occur in a vacuum, separate from other statuses such as race or ethnicity and their social constructions. If you are a white woman, for example, you might encounter a particular form of sexism that is distinct from that experienced by a woman of color. In this book, we propose that nativity—whether a woman was born in the United States or elsewhere—is a key social location that intersects with and influences the experiences that one has as a woman or a man. This is a point that is often missing or underemphasized in analyses of intersections between gender, race and ethnicity, and social class. Edna Erez, Madelaine Adelman, and Carol Gregory have recently charged that many scholars tend to write about the social location of immigration as if it were another racial category. They suggest that “[r]ather than consider immigration as a variable or static category within race, we consider immigration as part of the multiple grounds of identity.”<sup>29</sup>

In the past decade, theorists have worked to advance the critical theoretical approach of intersectionality, while proposing alternative metaphors, such as “interlocking systems” and “matrix of domination,” both proposed by Patricia Hill Collins.<sup>30</sup> The advantage of these alternative metaphors, according to Collins, is that they do not locate the social dynamics of gender and cultural diversity in the individual personal identity of the (working-class, Latino, or African American) woman, for example; rather, this interaction happens between the *systems* of social class, gender divisions, and racial and ethnic status hierarchies. In other words, it is not a person’s essence or inherited group membership(s) that combines to dictate one’s life choices but the ways in which societies define the meanings of those group memberships and allot them varying, unequal amounts of power. And, as Wendy Hulko has illustrated, the dynamics of interlocking systems vary, depending on the time and location of each individual’s experience.<sup>31</sup>

## *Gender, Nativity, and Agency*

In this book, we give central attention to the theme of human agency among immigrant women: how these women act independently within, despite, and against the structures of society. Scholars such as French sociologist Alaine Tourraine have called for a “return of the actor” within social sciences, in order to integrate the important role that human action takes in societies, as individuals negotiate, change, and reproduce larger social structures.<sup>32</sup> Theories of intersectionality and interlocking systems recognize that individuals often resist structural constraints, exercising their agency. Yet there continues to be a tendency in such theory and research to emphasize the structural partner over the agency partner in the structure-agency dance. This is understandable, given the power of such structures as economic globalization and bureaucracies, with their self-perpetuating qualities, as emphasized by Max Weber.<sup>33</sup> The 2009 global financial crisis, for example, took the form of an interinstitutional meltdown, appearing at times to be impervious to intervention or even accurate analysis. Among key tenets across the authors’ fields of sociology and social work, in fact, is the insistence that social processes are *extraindividual*: they precede and follow each person’s lifespan and are largely outside the control of any individual.

Historically, however, social scientists have developed our analysis of structures more fully than our analysis of individual agency; we also have not adequately explored the dynamics of the structure-agency dance. This is in the process of changing. In fact, the International Sociological Association has recently announced that “[d]eterminism is dead in the social sciences.”<sup>34</sup> In this book, we listen to the stories of immigrant women and attempt to understand the nuances of how human agency operates in interaction with these overwhelming structures. If anything characterizes immigrants, in fact, it is *movement*—an act of agency that requires complex decision-making, organization, and reflection in the face of uncertainties. Segura and Zavella refer to such movement as “subjective transnationalism.”<sup>35</sup> The stories presented here demonstrate how action extends beyond geographical movement to more personal, political, and cultural movements. Thus, we should keep in mind that agency is both individual and collective.

Our research expands the conception of agency in various ways. Often, researchers emphasize one dimension of agency: the act of resistance to counter the constraints of the structures. And we have numerous examples

of this dimension in this book. Agency has many other dimensions, however, including creativity, relocation, reinvention of the self, leadership, and responsibility for relationships. The theme of multidimensionality can be heard in the following observation by Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russell Hochschild, introducing their anthology *Global Woman*: “[T]he world’s most invisible women . . . are strivers as well as victims, wives and mothers as well as workers.”<sup>36</sup>

Mustafa Emirbayer and Anne Mische demonstrate in their theoretical treatise on agency<sup>37</sup> that acts of agency are multidimensional, particularly in a temporal sense; individual actions, for example, can be variously oriented toward the present, past, or future. Immigration is an act of agency that encompasses such temporal dimensions, and in quite different ways than for the native-born, since the relationship to the past involves a specific rupture in time, and that rupture carries a host of meanings for the immigrant. In our study, by listening to and helping to amplify the voices of women whom we interviewed, we explore these temporal and other dimensions, such as the spatial dimension. That rupture in time, for example, is also a spatial rupture; the past is geographically distant at the same time that it is temporally distant.

Along with theorists Anthony Giddens<sup>38</sup> and Jürgen Habermas,<sup>39</sup> we view the work of individual agents as part and parcel to the process of both reproducing and changing societal and global structures. In this book, we are creating a conversation between theories of intersections and theories of agency, without losing sight of the social structures that place boundaries around agency, shape its contours, and even propel agency. As Karl Marx wrote, “Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.”<sup>40</sup> More recently, French theorist Pierre Bourdieu has offered a theoretical handle for the dynamic, fluid relationship between the actions of individuals and the social relationships (“fields”) in which they act. Bourdieu proposes the concept of “*habitus*,” or a “socialized subjectivity,” which is made up of behavior, values, and orientations that are inherited from socialized patterns in a culture, but which are always subject to change as individuals innovate through their everyday practices.<sup>41</sup> In the research contained in this book, we listened to stories of how immigrant women expressed such subjectivity by remaining open to this fluidity of the individual’s relationship to her social fields.

## *Process of Our Research*

Please refer to me as “Victoria” in your study, because I have been victorious.

—interview respondent’s choice of her own pseudonym

We carried out this research using a mixture of methods: in-depth interviews and an analysis of existing data from the U.S. Census. Most of the book consists of our reports of the qualitative interviews, since our research goal was to amplify the women’s voices. We conducted eighty-nine interviews with women who reside in the following locations: Atlanta, Georgia; Baltimore, Maryland; Chicago, Illinois; Los Angeles and Orange County, California; Houston, Texas; Miami, Florida; Morgantown, West Virginia; New York, New York; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and Washington, DC.<sup>42</sup> We use a mix of pseudonyms and actual names in the book, depending on each individual’s expressed preference. We have indicated pseudonyms by the use of *italics*.

We analyzed the interviews using an interpretive, grounded-theory approach. What is meant by grounded theory? It is a method of interpreting research findings, proposed by sociologists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in the 1960s, which allows theoretical categories to emerge out of the empirical research.<sup>43</sup> This is in contrast to more deductively inspired studies in which researchers mine the findings for evidence to support or refute a specific, perhaps narrowly defined, theory. Our approach is close to the one that Kathy Charmaz has proposed, which she dubs “constructivist grounded theory,”<sup>44</sup> a more fluid, open, less mechanistic grounded-theory analytic process than the original Glaser and Strauss method. In this approach, the full human story behind the voices can be heard and used in the analysis, in a style that John Van Maanen terms “impressionist tales” and Patricia Clough, following Howard Becker, calls “emotional realism.”<sup>45</sup>

Our response to the invisibility and silences that we have mentioned is to emphasize voices in the presentation of the research. Our goal of amplifying women’s voices resonates with methodological questions that feminist theory has raised, regarding the risk of scholarship to objectify women, removing their agency as subjects. We also seek to excavate the “situational knowledge” that women possess—an insistence of Dorothy E. Smith that research pay attention to the “everyday/everynight world”<sup>46</sup> that grounds women’s experiences differently from men’s. At the same time, our research method runs up against challenges posed by feminist theory as well, particularly regarding epistemology,

or the science of knowledge. The philosopher Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, for example, asked the question, “Can the subaltern speak?” in her essay with that same title. Spivak suggested that populations that have been subordinated by colonialism or social class hierarchies cannot be given full voice by the well-intended intellectual. By creating a platform where marginalized individuals can express their points of view, the risk is that the scholar will homogenize the group as if it shares a single culture, resulting in both a misrepresentation and a contribution to continuing the silence. We want to hold Spivak’s question before us as a reminder to refrain from attempting to speak “for,” or to assume community and commonality where none exists. We do not intend to speak “for” but to help amplify voices and to illustrate their heterogeneity. In doing so, this book can be a modest platform for immigrant women’s agency.

In this sense, we are incorporating Spivak’s critical, skeptical position—a characteristic of postmodern theorists more generally—about the researcher’s ability to see, hear, and represent the meanings that the marginalized experience. Ironically, this skepticism potentially serves the goal of offering a fuller and more comprehensive portrait of immigrant women. Adrian Holliday has explained how this works: “[B]ecause she reflectively seeks to acknowledge in which way she is the arch designer of the data collection, and how she disturbs the surface of the culture she is investigating, the postmodern researcher is in a position to dig deeper and reveal the hidden and the counter.”<sup>47</sup> We approached our listening tasks in this spirit, and we hope that we have touched at least some of the “hidden and the counter.”

### *The Women*

The women who were interviewed for this book immigrated as adults—ages eighteen and above.<sup>48</sup> Women who came to the United States as children have distinct experiences from those who came as adults, particularly since they have been partially socialized through the American educational system. We learned, however, that although there are both sociological and demographic differences between the first generation and the 1.5 generation—as the foreign-born who arrived in the United States as children are categorized—we met a number of women of this 1.5 generation who proudly self-identify as immigrant women. Among those is Sonia Pressman Fuentes, who immigrated with her family as a child and grew up to become a successful lawyer and activist, cofounding the National Organization for Women with several other activists in the 1960s, and who continues to write and speak on behalf of women’s and immigrant rights.<sup>49</sup>

Definitions of *immigrant* may vary depending on whether one follows legal definitions, categories used by the U.S. government and demographers, or group-membership descriptions of social scientists. For example, after a foreign-born person naturalizes and becomes a citizen, he or she is no longer subject to the laws of the Immigration and Nationality Act. He or she, therefore, is no longer bureaucratically considered to be an immigrant. And the U.S. Census Bureau counts all foreign-born individuals who are residing in the country, regardless of whether they are in a temporary or more permanent immigration status, using the term “foreign-born.” In this book, we use the term *immigrant* to include those on immigrant and “nonimmigrant” visas as well as those who have naturalized. Thus, our sample is broader than one that an immigration attorney might select and narrower than some demographers might select, since we are focusing on the first generation.

We concur with theorists who propose that research needs to be more attentive to the interpretive work of the individuals who are the subjects in our studies. Max Weber wrote that sociologists need to approach the study of society from the point of view of the actor—or the subjective, intended meanings as articulated by the individual whose behavior we are attempting to understand.<sup>50</sup> As Isaac Reed<sup>51</sup> and others have argued, individuals have the same cognitive abilities as social scientists to reflect intelligently on the meanings and motivations of their activities and the social structures in which they act. In other words, people know why they are in the United States and why they have encountered success, exploitation, discrimination, or acceptance. They have observed the twin towers collapsing on 9/11 or the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) policies in action; or they have learned the secrets of success in business. We have a wealth of interpretive information that the women interviewed here offered as they reflected on the experience; we hope that the interview process provided a platform for them to do further reflection.

Although we have limited this study to women, inevitably, we also met a number of men, including husbands, fathers, sons, and others, whose stories also helped flesh out the research. We remember the image of the male college student standing proudly with his arm around his mother as they both waved goodbye from their front porch following the interview with his mother, an entrepreneur from Mexico. We learned of this student’s passionate activism on behalf of the DREAM Act to allow children of undocumented immigrants equal access to higher education and his commitment to its passage to benefit his financially struggling female friends. The Vietnamese dentist who is married to radio producer Susie Thang enthusiastically

offered information about the couple's joint contributions to the musical arts in Houston. There was also the brother of *Khursheda*, who taught her to ride the subway and helped her find work, and the husband of *Sarla*, who took care of their children once she took a live-in domestic job. And a host of men in their roles as immigration rights activists, scholars, or business consultants assisted us in locating women to interview, many glowing with admiration for the individuals whom they recommended. The public image of the immigrant man, in fact, is also in dire need of revision. In contrast to public perceptions of day laborers as unattached transients, a national study found that immigrant men are strongly connected to their families and are active in religious and other avenues of civic life.<sup>52</sup>

### *Plan of the Book*

We have arranged the chapters of this book thematically. Most chapters, with the exception of chapter 2, consist primarily of presentations and interpretations of the interviews, using a storytelling style to help the reader get to know the women's personalities and hear their voices.

In part 1, consisting of chapter 2, we explore the question of who immigrant women are and were, combining historical and present-day overviews of the phenomenon of immigrating women. We offer a historical portrait of immigrating women and the gendered history of immigration policy, followed by a demographic portrait of immigrating women to the United States in the early twenty-first century.

In part 2, we delve into the means through which today's immigrant women arrive. First, in chapter 3, we take up regular means, such as through family-reunification visas, employment visas, and the refugee and asylum program. We analyze women's experiences as both agents and recipients of these programs, as well as barriers that visa policies often pose. In chapter 4, we review the irregular, or extralegal, means through which women also enter. A growing proportion of the country's undocumented population is female, for example. And the United States is a destination country for the criminal trade in human beings through sex and other labor trafficking.

Our task in part 3, consisting of chapters 5 through 8, is to explore what the immigrating women do. In chapter 5, we become acquainted with the many women who are largely invisible as a group, because their labor as domestic workers is behind closed doors of private households. We hear women's descriptions of their employment, expectations, and treatment and learn about this sector's potential for abuse and exploitation. Chapter 6

offers a look at the “other” side of immigrant entrepreneurship that is rarely noticed: the female side. Leaving behind their grandmothers’ patterns of sharing work in their husbands’ shops, these women are striking out on their own and sometimes hiring their husbands as employees. Chapter 7 describes the women whom Donna Gabaccia calls “gender pioneers”:<sup>53</sup> the women who have immigrated and gone on to forge new paths in gender-atypical occupations. These engineers, construction workers, and others came to their professions through varying pathways. They detail their professional paths, how their peers regard them, and what motivates their continued progress. Chapter 8 presents the cultural contributions of immigrant women, particularly in the realm of the arts. We analyze interviews with visual artists, writers, dancers, actors, filmmakers, and musicians and interrogate many of their artworks as venues of reflection on and vision of the gendered immigrant experience.

Our last two chapters make up part 4, in which we look at what immigrating women are doing to shape their, and our, future as a community and a country. Chapter 9 singles out the work of several immigrant women activists in the realms of politics, society, and culture. Through thick descriptions of their activities to bring about structural change, we learn more about the resistant side of agency. This chapter also provides a depiction, in these women’s own words, of the broader challenges that women and immigrants face, as well as proposed solutions.

In chapter 10, we bring the full portrait together and offer further interpretations of the gender-nativity intersection (and others), as well as the meanings of human agency for those intersections. We reflect on these interpretations in their historically contingent settings. And, in the spirit of public sociology, we summarize proposed policy recommendations.