
Introduction

We woke up on September 11, 1973, an early spring day, to the radio broadcasts describing troop movements all over Chile. My parents had been working for several years against the far Right, an elite influence in Chile, and were at that time working with President Allende. My mother cofounded and directed a party based on liberation theology, and my father, who was educated at Harvard, worked in the Department of Agriculture and taught sociology of law. Salvador Allende was the first socialist president elected democratically in Latin America and in the context of the cold war; this was not acceptable to the U.S. government. The United States provided the Right with financial and military power to challenge him. My sisters and I had been living through rather uncertain times as we struggled with the fast pace of life and the confrontations between our family members. While some sided with the privileged classes, others, like my parents, favored the ideals of social justice that were sweeping through Latin America, in different avatars, during those difficult yet hopeful days.

That early spring date came to be known as “El Golpe” (coup). My parents took us to our grandparents’ house and said good-bye. Convinced that we would never see them again, we cried as they rushed to their party’s headquarters to burn all the documents containing names, addresses, and anything else that could be used to track down the party’s members. We sat and waited while our aunts and grandparents drank champagne to celebrate. We knew that they did not realize what was happening, but also that we could count on them. The radio told us that people were being rounded up all over the country. Although my sisters and I were terribly afraid, our family did not notice because they, like the country, were so profoundly divided along political ideology that my sisters and I lived in different realities.

Having suffered in silence for most of the day, we were greatly relieved when my parents showed up to take us home, just in time to avoid the new curfew roundups. From our apartment windows on the thirteenth floor, which overlooked the Mapocho River, a mountain called San Cristobal, and

the edges of downtown Santiago, we watched American fighter jets bomb the presidential palace. We saw bodies floating down the river and heard the blasts of gunfire over several nights while military vehicles patrolled the streets. Several days later, we heard loud knocks on the door. Several police officers ran into the apartment and ransacked it. A few stayed in the living room and pushed us against the wall with their machine guns. “So what is this subversive equipment?” one asked, holding our Batman play tent in his arm. At that moment, one of the police officers ran toward the front door to tell his commanding officer, who was questioning our mother, that he had found a bomb. They all became excited and surfaced with a broken clock with protruding springs that my sister had been playing with.

“So what do you do?” the commanding officer asked our mother. “I am a secretary,” she replied, wisely avoiding the rest of her title of “executive secretary of the Christian Left Party.” Being the *machista* he was, the officer uttered with disdain, “Just a secretary.”

Our father was taken away, but none of us cried until later because we did not want to give the police the benefit of our sorrow. We thought they had killed him, and we went to the national stadium, which had become a concentration camp, and stood in line all day only to be told by the Red Cross to check the morgue. Later, we received a call from a priest who told us that our father was alive and could be found in the stadium. So we returned to stand in line again and wait with our toothbrushes, soap, and change of clothing. Finally, through the influence of our grandfather, who was a retired general, our father was released, and we were given two months to leave the country. Because our father had attended Harvard, he was acquainted with intellectuals from the Ford Foundation who lived in Chile during this time and who helped him obtain a grant to conduct research at Harvard. In the middle of the Chilean summer, on December 26, 1973, we boarded a Braniff International plane with other refugees. When the captain told us that we had crossed the boundary into Peru, everyone uttered a gigantic sigh of relief. Some people started to cry while others laughed.

We landed in snowy and cold Boston on December 27, 1973, armed with ponchos and a total of \$1,000, a sum we had obtained from the sale of our car. After being shown several ugly apartments, we settled into a five-room apartment situated in a two-family home in Arlington, Massachusetts, which cost \$200 per month. My sisters and I went to public school, and because of the difference in academic calendars between Chile and the United States, I repeated the second half of the seventh grade. I did not understand anything that was being taught because there was neither a bilingual teacher nor a course in Eng-

lish as a second language to assist me in making the transition. This “sink-or-swim” approach to learning English was efficient but costly in the end.

Arlington was an Irish and Italian neighborhood of second- and third-generation immigrants, and my family soon realized that the residents harbored a strong dislike of foreigners. The other children at school made it known in multiple ways that I was not “one of them,” spreading insults about me in a variety of different ways. Once as I sat in a chair taking a test, I glanced at the wall where someone had written offensive remarks about me, misspelling my name. This discriminatory harassment is now being labeled “bullying” and it recently caused the suicide of Phoebe Prince, an Irish immigrant young girl in South Hadly, a community outside of Boston. I wondered why the kids treated me this way, but in doing so, I asked myself what was wrong with them as opposed to what was wrong with me. This is what marks the difference between me and Phoebe. Luckily, I felt that they were very immature and did not know anything about life and struggle. They had no idea about what we had gone through, a fact that was extremely awkward for me because our experience seemed so immense to us. I was struck by the apathy and superficiality I witnessed. My life had changed so drastically; I had no grandparents or cousins and no idealism. Life as a socialized, minority-status person in the United States had begun.

Feeling alienated, I joined an Amateur Athletic Union swim team to help me bridge the two worlds. I had been a member of a high-ranking Chilean national swim team before leaving. Although joining the swim team helped me adjust, within six months, I understood that kids were complaining to the teacher that I was not being made to work as hard as they were. There was a Colombian boy in the class, but instead of identifying with me as a fellow immigrant from Latin America, he wanted so badly to be accepted by the white kids that he spent his time telling the others how to swear at me in Spanish. I thought of him as identifying with the aggressor, joining those who considered two outsiders splendid subjects to reject and ridicule.

The next year, in the eighth grade, I told a sympathetic social studies teacher that it was hard for me to understand how the other students could treat a biracial girl and a girl who had physical disabilities so badly. I felt good when the teacher talked to the students about tolerance and compassion. Most of the students in the class looked ashamed, but I was gratified that I could effect change.

Meanwhile, our father went on to pursue a doctoral degree at MIT, and our mother became one of the first family day care providers in Massachusetts. We were also able to stabilize our immigration status. The Refugee Act

of 1980, sponsored by Senator Ted Kennedy, extended the possibility of refugee consideration to people like us who had escaped persecution from a country other than a communist state. This law passed just in time for our father's graduation and the expiration of our student visas. We qualified as political refugees and became legal residents two years later.

As we were Latino pioneers in suburbia, among the early post-1965 immigrants, our neighbors continued to express their animosity well into the nineties. The neighbors had little understanding and knowledge of Latin Americans and thus did not know how to classify us. Despite their beliefs, we were neither Puerto Rican nor uneducated, yet this did not keep them from trying for more than five years to close down our mother's family day care program because they thought it increased crime in the neighborhood.

The problems with our neighbors began the day after we moved into our own home. The neighbor from next door came over to introduce himself and to tell us that we either had to sell the house or stop providing day care. Ironically, all the children who attended the day care had educated white parents who were affiliated with MIT. These parents formed a legal group, raised funds, and ran for town council membership until they could introduce changes in the bylaws that would allow family day care providers to care for six children, the number allowed by state regulations. With the support of the organized parent group, my family persevered, but our neighbor continued to harass us for several years by playing loud music whenever my mother took the children outside.

Fortunately, we developed friendships that counterbalanced much of this discriminatory and offensive treatment. Initially, our family became a center for the Chilean exiled community, and many who came to or through the United States stopped at our house. We also had many friends who were foreign students with children, as well as other immigrants. Our circle also included many European Americans and African Americans. Most of our friends became *fictive family*, like the Brathwaites, a West Indian family in Cambridge, and the McGuinns and the Brookses of Arlington. We also encountered many people who provided us with information about colleges and opportunities. It was a philosophy professor, Oliva Blanchette, who knew my parents through their common understanding of the theology of liberation and Jesuit education, who convinced me to apply to Boston College. I also received a recommendation from the director of flexible programs at Arlington High School, Mr. McCarthy, who told me about a scholarship that I applied for and received. There is no question that social relations were instrumental to our family's adaptation to this country, particularly given our exclusion as Latino pioneers in suburbia.

As I struggled to adjust to life in the United States, it was a group of African Americans from Cambridge and Boston who accepted and befriended me. They were my peer network throughout adolescence. Through those extremely pivotal years, all these individuals stopped their education, and most settled into lives of low-wage employment. I was the only one in that group who went on to college and defied what immigration scholars like Portes and Zhou (1993) call downward assimilation. Although they shared my identification as a minority in this country, it was the Italian and Irish Americans who repeatedly told me that I was not one of them. In effect, immigrants, who had only decades earlier become “white” after generations of exclusion as nonwhites, were now determining who was or was not “white” and worthy of respect for new immigrants. It was only fitting that I would return to explore how neighborhoods with Italian Americans and Irish Americans influenced the trajectories of Latin American immigrant women years later for the purpose of the discussion in this book.

After graduation from Boston College, I was approached by a friend of a friend who recruited me for a master’s program in social work. I had majored in sociology and psychology and taken courses in social work, so it made sense for me to pursue graduate education in this field. The program would provide a scholarship to cover tuition and offer me a stipend for living expenses. All I had to do was apply. I wondered: Could this be true? At this point, the recruiter told me that there was a caveat; I would be working with “crazy criminals.” I thought about it for a minute and accepted.

I went on to receive a degree in forensic psychiatric social work and worked at the intersection of mental health and the law for the next decade. Given my personal bout with state-sponsored violence, it was only reasonable that I would attempt mastery over violent situations. I became the director of psychiatric services in the then largest prison in Massachusetts. Over the years, I became an expert in preventing homicides and suicides, developing an acute understanding of trauma and its wide behavioral and cognitive frame dynamics. I also learned about and was privy to the power behind interventions to treat trauma and improve social functioning. As a doctoral student and through my participation in national social policy studies, *Welfare, Children, and Families: A Three City Study*, and the *Three City Study of Moving to Opportunity*, I reencountered violence-based trauma and its effect on women’s ability to get ahead.

All of my life experiences, personal and professional, inspired me to study the social worlds of immigrants, especially women, and to explore the dynamics of low-income neighborhoods, the effects of violence, and the fac-

tors that impact social mobility. As an involuntary immigrant and refugee, my story is not like that of many voluntary immigrants who have come to the United States. I was endowed with a family background with high cultural and human capital. But immigration laws and legal status, language difficulties, prior traumatic history, loss of family and other supports, cultural differences, and social and racial discrimination in receptive neighborhoods affected me in similar ways as they affect voluntary immigrants.

Access to the Setting and Data Collection

I conducted the initial research for this project as part of a larger study on the consequences of welfare reform among African American, European American, and Latin American women. *Welfare, Children, and Families: A Three City Study* focused on women who were receiving or were eligible to receive Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). The women had children between the ages of two and four in the cities of Boston, Chicago, and San Antonio. The Three-City Study is an intensive investigation that assessed the well-being of low-income children and families in the post-welfare reform era.¹ The study began in 1999 and comprises three interrelated components: longitudinal surveys, embedded developmental studies, and contextual, comparative ethnographic studies. Surveys were conducted in 1999, 2001, and 2005, and developmental studies were conducted in 1999 and 2001. The Three City Study examined issues such as work, welfare, family, money, health, intimate relationships, social networks, and neighborhood resources in the lives of low-income families. As a Boston-based ethnographer, I conducted participant observation and longitudinal ethnographic interviews from 1999 to 2003 with five Latin American women in East and South Boston. Another ethnographer gave me access to data from four other women who lived in the same neighborhoods. In addition, I interviewed ten women on three occasions over several months. I chose these later interviewees to approximate a balance between first- and second-generation immigration statuses in each neighborhood and to explore more specifically themes that I had already encountered in the field. The experiences of these nineteen women serve as the basis for the current analysis.

All but two of the participants were low-income mothers of young children, and all lived in concentrated areas of poverty in the Boston area. I recruited some of the women through service providers who were familiar with public housing residents, and I randomly identified others as mothers with children in parks and outdoor places. I conducted interviews monthly, usually at the home of the respondent or at a location of her preference.

As part of the neighborhood ethnography, I attended community gatherings, social service organizational encounters, and neighborhood association board meetings. I also interviewed service providers, clergy, health workers, retail merchants, and other “local notables,” described by Wayne Cornelius (1982, 385) as the host contacts in the community. The “local notables” in Boston included Irish Americans, Italian Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans, and Latin Americans who worked in the neighborhoods as merchants, teachers, social service providers, police officers, attorneys, probation officers, employment advocates, and city officials. Because I researched public housing developments, I also interviewed Boston Housing Authority personnel and attended events at the public housing developments.

Methods

Qualitative research is an inductive approach that seeks to understand social phenomena in context-specific settings. Using a naturalistic approach, it builds theory and knowledge through clarification, understanding, and extrapolation to similar situations. Strauss and Corbin (1990) conclude that qualitative methods can be used to increase the understanding of issues about which little is known and of populations that are not well understood. A qualitative approach is therefore very appropriate to explore in depth the ways in which structural factors promote and/or impede the social and economic mobility of Latin American women who immigrate to the United States.

To understand how Latin American immigrant women negotiate their social relationships within a high-poverty context, I combined longitudinal ethnographic interviews with extensive ethnographic observations and participant observation. This method allowed me to meet family, friends, neighbors, and acquaintances, as well as service providers and neighborhood informants. It also allowed me to go beyond the individual viewpoints of the respondents and to integrate responses from others who were close friends as well as acquaintances. The various levels of data collection allowed for corroboration of social processes and events.

During the interviews, I followed semistructured guides, adhering to essentially the same format and adapting to special circumstances and the flow of information. Each tape-recorded interview lasted approximately two hours. I conducted them in the language the respondent reported as being the most comfortable for her—English, Spanish, or Spanglish—and then translated them into English as part of data collection. Although the quotes are direct, I translated many of them from Spanish to English. At times, I use

Spanish words followed by their English meaning because I want to preserve certain nuances that may be lost in translation.

In addition to conducting interviews, I accompanied the women as they engaged in their daily activities, which included interactions with service agencies and other bureaucracies and family celebrations. While I do not mean for these women's lives to be statistically representative of Latin American immigrants in Boston or of immigrants in the United States, my study is well embedded in the tradition of ethnographies with small sample numbers that have helped us understand dynamics and outcomes, particularly in urban poverty and immigration literature.² It also provides a window into agency responses to structural constraints and opportunities and, in turn, into how the response of the agents influences such structural constraints and opportunities. After some time in the field doing participant observation and monthly semistructured interviews, I began to see patterns, which I followed up on with more observations. After six months in the field, I realized that women in South Boston had access to more services and were involved in education at higher rates than the women in East Boston.

My study soon focused on finding the reason for greater access to services and higher education in South Boston. To this end, I used interviews as the “structured discovery” methodology developed by William J. Wilson and Linda Burton. This methodology offers some structure while allowing information to flow. I also conducted archival research related to the historical dynamics of the neighborhoods.

The setting and timing of the study created the potential for some biases. Because the study occurred in the context of welfare reform, South Boston and East Boston were seeing a service array that may not have been present at another time. In addition, this study was conducted during a time of economic expansion, which broadened employment opportunities. On the other hand, because of welfare reform, the competition for these jobs was tougher. In any event, these structural dynamics may have created different results in similar types of studies at a different time.

The Study Participants

The women who participated in my study were members of the largest minority population in the United States and shared many of the economic and social characteristics of the poorest segments of this group. In Boston, at the time of the study, more than 32 percent of African American and 48 percent of Latin American female-headed families with children under the age of eighteen lived in poverty, compared with 21 percent of European American fami-

TABLE P. *Sample Characteristics*

	<i>First Generation</i>	<i>Arrived</i>	<i>Second Generation^{††}</i>	<i>Arrived</i>
<i>South Boston</i>	Marcela,* 28, Puerto Rico	1997	Camila,* 24, Dominican Republic	1986
	Josefa,* 38, Honduras	1990	Paula,* 27, Puerto Rico	Infant
	Rita,† 36, Puerto Rico	1991	Eliana,†† 22, Dominican Republic	
	María,†† 38, Puerto Rico	1988	Nina,†† 26, Dominican Republic	
	Lisa,†† 41, Nicaragua	1981		
	Martina,†† 36, Dominican Republic	1983		
<i>East Boston</i>	Yolanda,† 28, Puerto Rico	1986	Marta,* 24, Puerto Rico	1982
	Lorena,† 36, Puerto Rico	1997	Jenny,† 26, Dominican Republic	
	Gloria,†† 24, Dominican Republic	1995	Julia,† 20, El Salvador	
	Eva,†† 24, El Salvador	1995	Solana,†† 25, El Salvador	1979
			Mireya,†† 26, Puerto Rico.	

* Designates the women I followed personally for two years or more.

† Designates the women who were followed for two years or more by other ethnographers.

†† Women I followed personally for one year.

††† The category of second generation includes women who were born outside the United States and immigrated as children.

lies (U.S. Census Bureau 2000). Among the Latin American women I followed for this project, ten were first-generation immigrants, and nine were second-generation immigrants. As described in table P, six of the ten women in South Boston were first-generation, and four were second-generation immigrants. Among the nine women I followed in East Boston, four were first-generation immigrants, and five were second-generation immigrants. In terms of country of origin, there were nine Puerto Ricans, six Dominicans, three women from El Salvador, one from Nicaragua, and one from Honduras. The women's ages ranged from 20 to 41 years, with a mean age of 28 years.³ The mean age for the group from South Boston (31.4 years) was slightly higher than that for the East Boston group (25.8 years), and the first-generation women in the sample were older (32.9 years) than the overall sample of second-generation immigrant women (24.2 years). Among the nineteen women in the sample, two did not have children: Solana and Eliana. On the other end, Yolanda and Lorena had the most children, five and six, respectively. The rest of the women had between one and three children, with an average of two. Both Marcela and Martina were pregnant at the end of the study. While all the women in the study were living

in public housing when I first met them, several moved out of public housing during the study, and others bought homes in their country of origin.

Although I mention by name the neighborhoods and public housing developments I researched, I use pseudonyms to protect the identity of the women, their families, and others I interviewed. I identify the neighborhoods by name because opportunity structure is strongly linked to historically determined race relations, and because I argue that the context of reception is extremely significant for the settlement of immigrants. As I engaged in the fieldwork, I realized that the different racial relations in each neighborhood presented the immigrant women and their families with different contexts in terms of resources and population dynamics. It was through the fieldwork that I realized these immigrants were endowed with particular characteristics that allowed them to be socially mobile and that their social mobility developed internationally. These immigrants came from poor areas to a country they perceived as having greater access to opportunity. Indeed, I will never forget the man who was working two jobs to buy a car that would be parked in front of his mother's home in the Dominican Republic. He wanted everyone to know that he had made it, with the car providing evidence that his immigration struggle had paid off. It is this evidence that keeps immigrants coming to the United States and taking the social mobility trajectory globally.

At this juncture, I want to explain the title of the framework and its accompanying language. Social Flow implies being inside and integrated in a flow that is in motion. Are individuals integrated in the society and using their networks and access to resources in order to be socially mobile? Are individuals supporting these trajectories by being social models? Are individuals providing opportunities by bridging to diversify populations? If an adequate number of highly efficacious immigrants exist in a population, then that population is an efficient population for the production of socially mobile people. Such populations are in the social flow. On the other hand, if there are not enough highly efficacious individuals supporting each other, then that population is inefficient when it comes to producing socially mobile people. Some individuals are stuck in a spinning vortex without a clear path out and into the flow. This vortex can be caused by a number of factors requiring intervention. Migrants leave their contexts without opportunities and move to where they think they have a greater likelihood of being part of the Social Flow. Although Social Flow is a network-based model, it does not negate culture, structure, or individual agency. In fact, Social Flow incorporates all these seldom seen factors into one framework, which I developed inductively through my research with the women and their families.