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INDIGENOUS MEXICANS IN NEW YORK CITY: IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION,
LANGUAGE USE, AND IDENTITY FORMATION

by

LESLIE A. MARTINO-VÉLEZ

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,

The City University of New York

2022

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Leslie A. Martino-Vélez

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in satisfaction
of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Date

Robert C. Smith

Chair of Examining Committee

Date

Lynn Chancer

Executive Officer

Supervisory Committee:

Nancy Foner

William Kornblum

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

ABSTRACT

INDIGENOUS MEXICANS IN NEW YORK CITY: IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION, LANGUAGE USE, AND IDENTITY FORMATION

by

Leslie A. Martino-Vélez

Advisor: Robert C. Smith

As indigenous Mexican immigrants migrate, settle, and raise families in the United States, parents, particularly women, and their children increasingly have contact with community institutions. Despite their growing numbers in U.S. schools, indigenous children, youth, and their parents are often invisible due to their ethnolinguistic identities and undocumented status. Understanding what parents do to help their children is essential to understanding the first generation's integration and their children's integration, the second generation.

To better understand this, I conducted an ethnographic research study at a bilingual Head Start program in New York City, in East Harlem, where many undocumented indigenous families have their U.S.-born children enrolled in an English and Spanish preschool program. It was not only a place where undocumented indigenous women immigrants, the primary caretakers of their U.S.-born children, congregated but did so in a centralized space. I observed interactions and interviewed twenty-one Nahuatl and Mixtec women about their migration experiences, settlement processes, ethnic identities, and linguistic ideologies within their families and interviewed twenty school personnel. It was a critical school site since Spanish and English were spoken. It was not a monolingual, English-dominant context but a site where institutional leaders were immigrant and native-born Spanish speakers themselves.

Conducting this study with mothers of U.S.-born preschool children was an opportunity to answer the following questions: How do new immigrants who are language and ethnolinguistic cultural minorities in their own country of origin integrate into a new society? More specifically, how do they integrate into institutions meant to accommodate the new society's language minority? However, what happens when the language and culture of that minority integration program – Spanish and English, with Puerto Rican, Dominican, and South American staff – encounter unfamiliar indigenous culture and language among parents? How do the parents, staff, and children react?

The research allows us to understand a newer immigrant group in New York City and appreciate the experiences of immigrants within the diverse Mexican community, including indigenous Mexicans. This research provides a window into the integration, language use, and identity formation of indigenous Mexican immigrant women into an English-Spanish multilingual context in New York City. It also presents information on how they are faring and developing strategies in their communities, schools, and families. It offers more details on how marginalized, undocumented indigenous women negotiate the contexts of bilingualism, which also has implications for their U.S.-born children.

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deepened, there were times when the sadness was so great; it could have been the demise of the dissertation. However, my husband Rafael Vélez's unwavering support, along with my cousin Judi and Aunt Sue's encouragement, healed the wounds. I also thank my stepsons Javier, Andres, Adrean Vélez, and my mother-in-law, Alicia Mercado, who have embraced me as their own.

While there has been darkness during this time, there has also been lightness. The birth of my son Paolo has been a shining moment. I thank Paolo for keeping me accountable and inspiring me when writing together. I thank Rafael for all he does for our family – especially his humor, his commitment to Paolo's bilingualism, and particularly at the end of this project, the extra dishwashing and dinner duties that gave me the time to write. Both have kept me going and shown me what love is all about. Being a mother made this research better, so I could relate to the women in my work. Being a partner in a committed relationship has shown me the power of family - and so this dissertation is dedicated to my family, both the living and the departed, who I know would be proud that I didn't give up.

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Chapter One

Introduction

As Marta approached her twenty-ninth birthday, she prepared for her journey across the US-Mexico border, to reunite with her partner in New York City. While it was difficult to leave her five, nine, and twelve-year-old children with her mother-in-law, she crossed the border on foot in Arizona and arrived by bus to East Harlem three weeks later on a snowy December day. Marta had never experienced such cold or snow nor seen tall buildings since she had never been far away from her indigenous Mixtec speaking town in Guerrero, Mexico. While she did go to Tlapa de Comonfort, the main economic center in the Mixteca region, two hours away from her small town of Telotepec, she had never been anywhere else in Mexico. She never attended school and when she arrived in New York, she only spoke Mixtec, her native language and basic phrases in Spanish.

At seventeen years-old Mari, left Coachaimalco, Guerrero, her Nahuatl town to reunite with her partner, who had migrated to New York two years prior. She excitedly crossed the border in California, escaping her small town and made her way to East Harlem, to live in a crowded apartment with other families. Upon arrival in the city, she worked as a house cleaner for several months, but stopped working when her son was born to take care of him.

I met both women five years after they came to New York, when they enrolled their U.S.-born children in a bilingual English and Spanish preschool in East Harlem, in Manhattan. Marta, fluent in Mixtec, had no prior schooling in Mexico, and had limited Spanish facility, but was learning. While Mari spoke some Spanish as well as Nahuatl fluently, she preferred speaking in Spanish as she learned it in a bilingual primary school in Mexico. Both mothers,

while having different experiences prior to migration, both were committed to the education of their children as they navigated a new world in New York City.

Marta and Mari's immigration stories are not uncommon for some indigenous Mexicans, as many Mixtec and Nahuatl speaking Mexican immigrants who arrive to New York have low levels of schooling and do not speak Spanish well or may not speak it at all. Many indigenous immigrants learn Spanish in New York, as Marta continues to do, and while most are earnest in their attempts to learn English, many prefer Spanish language learning for themselves as well as for their US-born children, to be able to tap into the networks within the Mexican and Latino community.

Immigrants are a part of the New York City landscape, and undocumented, indigenous Mexican women, like Marta and Mari, are a more recent addition to the cosmopolitan mix. Understanding how immigrants integrate, or incorporate, into a new host society is a key focus in international migration research. The ways immigrants navigate a new community depends on many factors, including the context into which they arrive and the languages they speak.

Many immigrants come to the United States speaking languages other than English and become ethnolinguistic minorities. Ultimately, the processes of language, culture, and ethnic identity are intertwined, not just for the first generation who immigrates but also for their US-born children. What first-generation immigrant parents do, particularly mothers, is central to the integration of their children since their role is vitally important, not just to shape their language learning but also their children's adjustment, aspirations, and schooling (Bean, Brown & Bachmeier, 2015; Yoshikawa, 2011).

A community's social institutions, schools, and families are places to understand how immigrants adapt and integrate into their new society and key places where ethnic identity

formation and language learning occurs. These local contexts matter because that is where integration occurs. The connections and services immigrants utilize impact their everyday lives and the languages families choose to use, value, and pass along within their families are rooted in their agency constructed through social interactions.

Some of the earliest studies on incorporation in the early to mid 1900s focused on the European waves of migration to the United States. Much of this literature concentrated on how Europeans and their descendants were incorporating into a White mainstream society and assimilating into an English-speaking context (Park, Burgess & McKenzie, 1925; Warner and Srole, 1945; Wirth, 1950; Gordon, 1964). However, with the passage of the Hart-Celler Act in 1965, a broader range of individuals, predominantly from Latin America and Asia, came into the United States in greater numbers. The population's makeup changed from one that was predominantly of European and African American descent to one that was multi-ethnic, multi-racial, and multilingual in nature and incorporation research about many different immigrant groups and their children followed through the decades to the present time.

While Mexicans have been living in the United States for centuries, in both the pre- and post- 1965 immigration eras, there were few studies on the incorporation of Mexicans prior to 1965, with the exception, for example, of Gamio, 1931; Taylor, 1932; Taylor, 1934. In the post-1965 era integration studies about Mexicans and their descendants gained traction and more studies filled that gap in the literature (Ochoa, 2004; de Genova, 2005; Zuniga and Hernandez-Leon, 2005; Perlman, J, 2005; Smith, 2006; Telles and Ortiz, 2008; Jimenez, 2010; Marrow, 2011; Vasquez, 2011; Aguis Vallejo, 2012; and Telles and Sue, 2019, among others).

Much of the sociological literature on language and immigrant integration, both pre- and post-1965 has looked at language shift to English with the mastery of English language skills as

a marker of integration into American society by the third generation (Fishman, 1989; Veltman 1983). However, some research shows the development of Spanish-English bilingualism, instead of language loss with Spanish speakers (Linton and Jimenez 2009; Tran, 2010). Other research shows a slower pace of language shift to English, with Spanish's persistence into later generations compared to other ethnic groups (Telles & Ortiz, 2008; Jimenez, 2010; Rumbaut & Massey, 2013; Telles & Sue, 2019). These previous integration studies looked at how later generation Latinos and Mexicans negotiate Spanish language and identity in an Anglo/English speaking context, while my research looks at the integration processes to show how first-generation indigenous women negotiate language use and identity in an English/Spanish bilingual context with Spanish speaking institutional leaders.

Additionally, indigenous Mexicans are often excluded in research on Mexican migration since much of the literature tends to treat national-origin groups as ethnically homogenous and does not pay attention to heterogeneity within populations (Fox, 2006; Alba, Jimenez & Marrow, 2014). The bulk of the research treats Mexicans as monolithic Mestizos, descendants of Europeans and indigenous peoples, who only speak Spanish due to colonization. However, Mexico is a multilingual, multiethnic country where sixty-eight official languages are spoken that are not like Spanish nor like one another. Many of the Mexican immigrants who come to the United States also reflect this diversity, but most research studies exclude diverse Mexicans, who are also ethnolinguistic minorities in their own country.

As indigenous Mexican immigrants migrate, settle, and raise families in the United States, parents, particularly women, and their children increasingly contact community institutions, such as schools. Despite their growing numbers in U.S. schools, indigenous children, youth, and their parents are often invisible due to their ethnolinguistic identities and

undocumented status. Understanding what parents do to help their children is important to understanding not only the first generation's integration in the United States, but also their children, the second generation.

My research looks at the integration processes, language use and ethnic identity of indigenous Mexican immigrants. To better understand this, I conducted an ethnographic research study at a bilingual Head Start program in New York City, in East Harlem, where many undocumented indigenous families have their U.S.-born children enrolled in the English and Spanish preschool program.

This Head Start bilingual preschool that I call Shining Star Bilingual School, with large numbers of Mexican indigenous immigrant mothers, was not only a place where undocumented indigenous women immigrants, the primary caretakers of their U.S.-born children, congregated but did so in a centralized space. I observed interactions and interviewed the women about their migration experiences, settlement processes, ethnic identities, and linguistic ideologies within their families. It was also a critical school site to do this since Spanish and English were spoken. It was not a monolingual, English-dominant context but a site where institutional leaders were immigrant and native-born Spanish speakers themselves. By studying integration of indigenous mothers at this site, we can learn more about their linguistic practices and their own shifting identities in the United States, which impacts what they do to support their US-born children's integration, language usage and ethnic identities.

Head Start, a federal government program for low-income families, can be viewed as an institution of immigrant integration. As demographics have shifted in communities across the United States, Head Start enrolls many high poverty ethnolinguistic minority children and works with their families, particularly mothers. Head Start programs take a two-generational

educational approach by educating preschool children in basic literacy and numeracy skills and working with parents in various ways, to increase parental engagement through literacy development, health and nutrition education, and community support. The social workers work with families to help them better understand how to access community resources, which ultimately can help U.S.-born children integrate into society. Head Start improves educational outcomes, particularly in vocabulary gains and receptive language skills for children with low achievement levels and Spanish speakers (Bitler, M., Hoynes, H and Domina, T., 2018) and it has also shown that participation in the program increased positive parenting practices for ethnic groups and mothers who did not have a high school diploma (Whitmore Schanzenbach, D. & Bauer, L., 2016).

Conducting this study with mothers of U.S.-born preschool children was an opportunity to answer the following questions:

- How do new immigrants who are language and ethnolinguistic cultural minorities in their own country of origin integrate into a new society?
- More specifically, how do they integrate into institutions meant to accommodate the new society's language minority?
- However, what happens when the language and culture of that minority integration program – Spanish and English, with Puerto Rican, Dominican, and South American staff – encounter unfamiliar indigenous culture and language among parents?
- How do the parents, staff, and children react?

This research provides further information about a newer immigrant group's integration into a multilingual context and provides information about indigenous Mexican language use and

ethnic identity formation in New York City. It also offers more information on how marginalized, undocumented indigenous women negotiate these new contexts of bilingualism and what that might mean for the future of their U.S.-born children.

Note on terminology

The terms assimilation and integration are similar in how immigrants adapt or incorporate in a country yet are distinct. Assimilation is generally defined as adopting the ways of another culture and fully becoming part of a different society and shedding their culture, but newer iterations of assimilation theory posit that immigrants can assimilate into American society without losing their ethnicity (Alba & Nee, 2003). Integration is typically defined as a process that increases opportunities for immigrants and their descendants to be able to join in or mix into new situations and contexts, without necessarily shedding their cultural attributes to live successfully in the host country. While I use the terms assimilation, incorporation and integration throughout the study, I rely heavily on the term integration.

I use the terms indigenous and Mestizo in this research. In the broadest sense, indigenous Mexicans are native peoples from Mexico who were original inhabitants of that land before Spanish colonization in the 1500s. Mexico, as I already noted, is a multicultural country with sixty-eight official indigenous cultural groups with distinct languages. Mixtec and Nahuatl peoples, the dominant cultural groups of the interviewees in my study, existed before this colonization and still exist today. As Mexican immigrants who come to the United States, they reflect the diversity of the sending society. They are dual ethnics, both Mexican and indigenous peoples, with cultures that have been native to Mexico for thousands of years. Most of the

interviewees in this study described themselves as Mixtec and Nahuatl, from the Mixteca region in Guerrero.

The term Mestizo means ‘mixed’ in Spanish and is generally used throughout Latin America to describe people of mixed ancestry with white European and indigenous background. However, through generations of mixing and exclusion, indigenous identities and language change and have often been lost.

Mexican Migration and Indigenous Mexican Migration to New York City

The origins of the Mexican American population in the United States are traced to the Treaty of Hidalgo, which ended the Mexican American War in 1848. As Mexico relinquished its Northern territories, the United States expanded its land. The border shifted Southward to include the modern-day states of New Mexico and Nevada and parts of California, Arizona, Utah, and Texas. Over 50,000 Mexicans, by conquest, were incorporated into the United States. The first great wave of Mexican immigration to the Southwest in the United States dates to the late 1800s and continued, as changing economic conditions in Mexico and the United States were intertwined (Massey, Durand and Malone, 2003). Throughout the 20th century, these areas were still the dominant areas where Mexicans settled, but newer settlement areas have emerged throughout the United States (Zuniga and Hernandez-Leon, 2005), including New York (Smith, 2006). The implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994 pushed many Mexican migrants northward due to the upset in agricultural trade, which many indigenous Mexicans depended upon for their livelihood.

Gamio (1931) recorded that about 2,000 Mexicans, from varied regions in Mexico, lived in upper Manhattan in the 1920’s and 1930’s, while many of the first Mexican migrants from the

Mixteca region, primarily from Puebla, came to New York in the 1940s (Smith, 2006). Since then, there has been a steady increase in migration from Puebla, but also an increase in migration from the states of Guerrero and Oaxaca, two other states comprising the Mixteca region, where large indigenous communities reside.

According to the American Community Survey data (2020), 339,425 individuals identify as Mexican in the New York City boroughs, including 8,649 Mexicans in East Harlem.

However, these numbers are undoubtedly much higher since Census figures tend to undercount undocumented populations since immigrants may not trust responding to governmental surveys. Additionally, regarding Mexican indigenous status, the United States Census does not ask this question directly. While there are areas to write in this information in, many indigenous Mexicans do not do so in great numbers or may choose to identify solely as Mexican and not as indigenous, because of their low Spanish literacy levels or confusion on how to fill out the form (Correal, 2010).

Mexicans settle in many areas of the New York region within the five New York City boroughs. There are some Mexicans who reside in Manhattan, primarily in East Harlem and many Mexicans live in Sunset Park Brooklyn, Port Richmond Staten Island, Jackson Heights Queens, and increasingly in the South Bronx, among other areas. In addition, many Mexicans are moving and settling in the outer Metropolitan region, including New Jersey, Long Island and Connecticut (Bergad, 2020a). In the New York Metropolitan region, Mexican immigrants are to a large degree undocumented, but there are increasing numbers of US-born second-generation Mexicans, whose educational attainment levels are increasing, compared to the first-generation immigrant population who have low levels of education. However, many Mexicans have high

poverty levels, compared to other Latino New Yorkers, and also have the highest childhood poverty rates in New York (Bergad, 2020b).

Most of the existing literature about indigenous Mexican immigrants has taken place in California and focuses on the migration of adult males, including their political incorporation, identity formation, and networks (Fox and Rivera-Salgado, 2004; Kearney, 2000; Malpica, 2008), as well as transnational processes (Besserer and Kearney, 2006; Holmes, 2013; Stephen, 2007; Velasco, 2005).

There is burgeoning body of research on the migration experiences, on adaptation and acculturation from a psychological perspective, as well as the language ideologies of indigenous Mexican youth and families in the U.S., particularly those of Maya, Mixtec, and Zapotec descent (Pérez-Rendón, 2011; Casanova, 2012; Velasco, 2010, 2014; Machado-Casas, 2009; Mesinas and Perez, 2016). As indigenous migrants raise families in the United States, their children increasingly have contact with U.S. educational institutions. Despite their growing numbers in U.S. schools, there is little information about their language use and identity formation. Indigenous children, youth, and their parents are often invisible, experience discrimination, and are grouped and racialized into categories such as Mexican or the overarching Latino pan-ethnic category (Machado-Casas, 2009; Barillas-Chón, 2010; Kovats, 2018; Perez, Vasquez & Buriel, 2016). Much of this work has been detailed in studies about undocumented and 1.5 generation indigenous Zapotec and Maya youth in English dominant high schools and universities, who migrated from Oaxaca and the Yucatan, and who have settled on the West coast of the United States. My research extends some of these understandings about discrimination, however, it focuses on the integration, language use and identity formation of indigenous Mexican Mixtec and Nahuatl mothers and their US-born children in New York City, within the context of a

bilingual English and Spanish preschool, where the teachers and staff are Spanish speakers themselves.

Indigenous Mexican migration to New York is quite recent with significant numbers starting to arrive after 2000. While there is no official Census data, a study conducted by the Mexican Consulate in New York (2013) showed that roughly 21% of Mexicans in the New York Metropolitan region, in the States of New York, New Jersey, and some counties in Connecticut, self-identify as indigenous language speakers. Mixtec is the indigenous language most widely spoken, followed by Nahuatl and Triqui, with Mixtecs from the state of Guerrero being the largest indigenous group migrating in the most significant numbers to the New York Metropolitan region.

These data, while approximate, corresponds to my ethnographic data, as many indigenous Mexicans migrate from the state of Guerrero, in the Montaña region, a highly marginalized area with high levels of political, social, and geographic exclusion. The Mixtec and Nahuatl women respondents in my study were primarily from the Eastern side of Guerrero, within a two-hour radius of the leading commercial town of Tlapa de Comonfort, which borders Oaxaca and Puebla. While there are indigenous Poblanos and Oaxacaños in the area, making it Tri-state to Tri-state migration, most indigenous migrants in the New York region are from Guerrero.

Many indigenous Mexicans have low educational attainment rates, but there is variation. In my interviews with indigenous Mexican mothers in the East Harlem Head Start program, the average educational attainment was 5.2 years of schooling. The majority of the twenty-one women attended some primary school, while three of the mothers had no formal schooling experience, and three had completed high school. The women ranged in age from twenty-two years old to forty-three years old, and they had arrived in New York City between five to eleven

years prior to my study. All of them had young children born in the United States. Two of the mothers had older elementary aged children who had been born in Mexico, and who resided with their families in New York City, and six of the mothers had other children living in Guerrero, the state in Mexico where they had migrated from. Apart from one of the women, all were married or with common-law partners, with whom they lived. Two mothers held informal childcare jobs outside of the home, and the rest were homemakers. See Appendix 1 for more detailed information about the family profiles.

Research Methodology

As Foner (2003) discusses, ethnography is a method to engage and understand hard-to-access populations and a way to capture the realities of individual lives since it allows the researcher to see what people do in everyday settings. The in-depth study of a small number of people, produces deeper insights and reveals subtleties that large scale surveys can miss. Using qualitative ethnographic research methodology consisting of semi-structured, open-ended interviews and participant observation, I was able to get a better understanding of the indigenous mothers' perspectives. I learned about their migration, educational and linguistic experiences, and experiences in the East Harlem community and at the Shining Star Bilingual Head Start, the field site, all of which helped me understand their integration. I entered the school site at the end of one school year to meet the teachers and staff, get an overall understanding of the school, and continued the research throughout the following academic year, as Head Start employs a year-round calendar, with the first week beginning in mid-July. I interviewed forty-one individuals, including twenty-one indigenous Mixtec and Nahuatl mothers.

Additionally, I interviewed twenty Head Start personnel: the Director, the Education Coordinator, six teachers, four assistant teachers, four family workers, the custodial worker, the front desk receptionist, the special needs coordinator as well as the speech and language coordinator. Some of these were extensive hour-long interviews and others were shorter brief conversations. Each of these staff members interacted with the families in different capacities and gave varying perspectives on how they viewed the growing linguistic group within the Head Start school. I also interviewed three staff members at a local East Harlem community-based organization that I call Helping Hands Community Center, that provided food assistance, parent-child classes, and tutoring services, where many of the families had connections. I also interviewed one longstanding Italian community member.

Of the indigenous Mexican Mixtec and Nahuatl speakers, all mothers had a three or a four-year-old child attending the Shining Star Bilingual Head Start in East Harlem. All the interviews with the parents were recorded, and conducted in Spanish, as all of the parents spoke Spanish with various fluency levels. Some of the mothers had limited vocabularies as it was their second language learned in New York City. In addition to the forty-five minute to one-hour open-ended conversations that included questions about their migration and educational histories, I also asked about their language ideologies and practices, individually, within their families, and the community as well as their settlement experiences in New York. I shadowed three of the women more intensely, which allowed me to see portions of their everyday lives in more detail. Once a week, on a rotating basis with the three women, I went with them through the neighborhood into stores, restaurants, and the local community organization, where they attended programs or received services. These visits allowed me to observe their everyday interactions with other people in and outside of the school. It also allowed me to see their

preferred language usage and see their daily routines and interactions to get a glimpse into their everyday lives.

I supplemented those interviews with participant observation at the Head Start site and within the East Harlem community. At the school, I observed morning and afternoon pick-up and drop-off routines. I attended classroom meetings held by the teachers and family workers, and I watched the children in the classrooms and chaperoned field trips. I observed classroom meetings and participated in the multicultural potluck meals and parent Zumba classes held in the gym. I attended school-wide community cultural performances to better understand how the school was working with this burgeoning ethnic group.

Gaining entry and issues of trust

At the start of this research in 2012, I initially utilized a snowball methodology. I interviewed individuals in East Harlem and the South Bronx, another area of the city that has become home for Mexicans, including indigenous Mexicans. However, I encountered many male migrants, many of whom did not have children or only knew of children's experiences through their friends or relatives. It became clear to me that to better understand indigenous integration, language and identity, I needed to interview women, the primary caregivers of children, who are most responsible for the day-to-day responsibilities of child-rearing. However, this was challenging since many women migrants with children are not as readily visible in the community and workforce as the men but lead isolated lives in their homes. I changed my strategy to find a place where women congregated, looking at organizations and schools that served families, where women were more likely to participate.

This change first led me to Helping Hands, a longstanding social service organization in East Harlem specializing in health and educational services, where indigenous Mexican migrants go for assistance. In Fall 2013, the Executive Director welcomed me, introduced me to the individuals leading the Adult and Family programs, and I learned about their programs and the indigenous families they served. However, when it came time to interview the Mixtec and Nahuatl families, they allowed me access, but only with a small group of three women with the highest education levels and the highest Spanish fluency skills, leaving out the women who had no or little formal education. While their gatekeeping was done with good intentions, to safeguard and protect the most vulnerable women who had come to trust the organization, I wanted to be able to interview indigenous women of all educational levels and language fluencies, not just those with the highest levels of education and language fluencies, to have a greater understanding of their circumstances and not just a limited perspective. While this community organization was not the primary field site, it was an essential connection as many of the Shining Star Bilingual School women utilized their social services, such as the infant and child classes, the food pantry or educational services for themselves and for their children. This allowed me to know more about their prior experiences in that organization as well as get a better idea about the types of services and resources available for them within the community, as it was an integral organization helping the woman and their families integrate more fully.

At the Shining Star Head Start School, I observed and interviewed the staff and families. With the assistance of the Parent Coordinator, I met the social workers, who knew the indigenous mothers most directly, as they each were assigned to one classroom. They introduced me individually to each parent at dismissal when they picked up their child in their classroom. This step was critical to knowing who I was and establishing that I was someone they could trust

since they were wary of speaking with someone they did not know. I then devised an interview schedule to use with the indigenous parents.

In some cases, it was easier to meet up with the mothers in the hallway during the morning and conduct an interview then or later in the day before dismissal. As time progressed as they saw me frequently come in and out of the building in the mornings and afternoons, and interact with the teachers and school social workers, they began to trust my presence. Some saw me as someone who worked at the school, sometimes confusing me as a teacher or a social worker. While my eleven years as a K-12 teacher in New York, Los Angeles, and Mexico had given me an understanding of how bilingual schools function, I was not an employee of the Head Start, and this was made clear to the women. We bonded as mothers since I, too, was raising a child bilingually in Spanish and English. From living many years in Mexico, my repeated trips to the Mixteca area of Mexico, in the states of Guerrero and Oaxaca, and my familiarity with indigenous languages, we were able to discuss the region, which surprised many of the women. It helped open dialogues about their own lives and their linguistic and cultural identities. However, due to my positionality as a White woman with U.S. citizenship, I was not living in the same situations as these women, and I was in no danger of deportation. I use pseudonyms for all participants in this research, including the mothers and children, to not compromise their identities, so this research cannot be used against them. While the children have U.S. citizenship, they are directly linked to their mothers, so changing their names was an additional layer of confidentiality and protection for the families.

Plan of the research and chapter formation

Following this introduction, chapter two provides an overview of the relevant literature about Mexican immigrant integration in the pre and post – 1965 eras as well as ethnic identity and discusses the role of language, as language acquisition and choice influences both analytic perspectives.

Chapters three and four discuss the ethnographic findings of my research in the two contexts of the school/community and the family. Chapter three also discusses East Harlem as a place of reception and contextualizes how indigenous immigrants fit into the landscape of where they live and interact with community organizations. It reviews the history of Head Start and the school as a field site in more detail to understand how and what the staff and teachers understood about indigenous Mexicans in the school. It focuses on the mother's experiences at the school and the community organization as well as the ways they understood them and how they hid their indigenous identities at the school. The chapter also discusses how the mothers engaged with the school, utilizing both the resources of the Head Start and other community organizations to help their families and children integrate more effectively. It examines the relationships they had with the teachers as well as looks at their trusted connections with the school social workers. These relationships and connections built social capital contributing to more robust parenting capacities, which improved their own integration as well as their children's integration into their community. Chapter four discusses the indigenous Mexican women in more detail focusing on the mother's educational and language ideologies, and those of their children as well as their experiences with discrimination and marginalization in Mexico and in New York. The mother's prior life histories in Mexico impact their own integration in the United States as well as their US-born children's integration and language learning, as the mothers are the ones responsible for

their children's well-being and influence the languages they speak, ultimately choosing that they learn Spanish and English, which impacts the children's integration. The concluding chapter five reflects on the overall project and addresses the central questions of the study. It also outlines this project's contributions and the limitations of the research, as well as the possibilities for further investigation.

Chapter 2

Theoretical Perspectives

It is helpful to look at the theoretical perspectives of immigrant integration and ethnic identity to better understand indigenous Mexican integration into New York society. Language, as a cultural marker, interacts with both analytic processes and is a crucial variable to understand how immigrants integrate in society as well as construct their ethnic identities. Similarly, boundaries are fundamental to understanding both integration as well as ethnic identity.

Some of the earliest studies on incorporation in the early to mid 1900s focused on the European waves of migration to the United States. Much of this literature concentrated on how Europeans and their descendants were incorporating, or had incorporated, into a White mainstream society and assimilating into an English-speaking context (Park, Burgess & McKenzie, 1925; Warner and Srole, 1945; Wirth, 1950; Gordon, 1964). However, with the passage of the Hart-Celler Act in 1965, a broader range of individuals, predominantly from Latin America and Asia, came into the United States in greater numbers. The population's makeup changed from one that was predominantly of European and African American descent to one that was multi-ethnic, multi-racial, and multilingual in nature and incorporation research about many different immigrant groups and their children followed through the decades to the present time.

While Mexicans have been living in the United States for centuries, in both the pre- and post- 1965 immigration eras, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, there were few studies on the incorporation of Mexicans prior to 1965, apart from Gamio, 1931; Taylor, 1932; Taylor, 1934. In the post-1965 era integration studies about Mexicans and their descendants gained traction and more studies filled that gap in the literature (Ochoa, 2004; de Genova, 2005; Zuniga and Hernandez-Leon, 2005; Perlman, J, 2005; Smith, 2006; Telles and Ortiz, 2008; Jimenez,

2010; Marrow, 2011; Vasquez, 2011; Aguis Vallejo, 2012; and Telles and Sue, 2019, among others). Some of these more recent studies have included legal status (Gonzalez, 2015) and identity in the later generations (Jimenez, 2010; Telles and Sue, 2019); however, none have specifically looked at the integration of indigenous Mexicans.

Classical and Contemporary Assimilation Theories

The assimilation theories first proposed in the early 20th century were almost exclusively focused on European White ethnics. Researchers such as Park, Burgess & McKenzie (1925) and Wirth (1950) at the University of Chicago studied immigrant adaptation from Southern and Eastern Europe. They were most concerned with the idea of Anglo conformity. The assimilation process was unidirectional whereby immigrant newcomers living in ethnically concentrated areas, working in immigrant ethnic niches and identifying as a distinct ethnic group, and even more their U.S.-born children, became middle-class White Americans, speaking English. The Chicago School and Park (1950) were best known for proposing a four-stage cycle of assimilation called "the race relations cycle" which included contact, competition, accommodation, and assimilation, which led to the erosion of ethnic differences.

Similarly, Warner and Srole (1945) analyzed second-generation White ethnics. They found that assimilation progressed with each successive generation born in the United States and documented their upward mobility of moving out of ethnically concentrated neighborhoods, attaining better pay and higher occupational and class standing. Warner and Srole argued that assimilation was happening for all ethnic groups but cautioned that different groups progress at different rates, observing that skin color may determine the pace at which immigrants assimilate.

Those immigrants with darker complexions (i.e., some Jews and Southern Europeans), they argued, may take more generations to become assimilated than those with lighter complexions.

Building on those works, Gordon (1964) developed a more nuanced theory of assimilation and argued that assimilation is more multi-dimensional. While still assimilating in an upward straight-line pattern, he proposed that as immigrants and the second-generation achieve "structural assimilation", that is, when they entered the clubs and institutions, such as schools, they would achieve "cultural assimilation" and adopt the culture of the host group, such as the English of the host society. Gordon expected that other types of assimilation, such as discrimination, would follow.

This model of linear assimilation of European immigrants through successive third and fourth generations was most prevalent through the 1960s. Overall, European immigrants and their descendants have integrated into American society, but not as easily as theorists demonstrated. At the turn of the twentieth century, some thought that Eastern and Southern Europeans, such as the Italians and Jews, were racially inferior, would hold onto their languages, and would not assimilate into the American mainstream (Foner, 2005). But, as time progressed, they and their descendants did achieve parity and became structurally incorporated, becoming part of the White mainstream. However, some researchers noticed that they held onto their ethnic identities, even though the classical theorists had predicted that their ethnic distinctions, such as their native languages, would disappear. In *Beyond the Melting Pot* (1963), Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan noted that native-born Jews, Italians, Irish, and Puerto Ricans in New York City maintained their ethnic affiliations and rejected the idea that immigrants assimilate into a unified Anglo White-Protestant core. Gans (1979) also observed that White ethnics, who were structurally incorporated and acculturated into the core, continued to evoke

these ethnic attachments; however, Gans argued that these attachments were "symbolic". Intermarriage between European groups resulted in symbolic attachment to an ethnic identity that is characterized by leisure activity and "a nostalgic allegiance to the culture of the immigrant generation, or that of the old country; a love for and pride in a tradition that can be felt without having to be incorporated in everyday behavior" (1979: 9).

Waters (1990) demonstrates that, unlike some racialized minorities, White ethnics experience ethnicity symbolically and can choose their ethnicity. Similarly, Alba (1990) finds that ethnicity is no longer salient for White ethnics, such as Italians. Intermarriage and the disappearance of large, ethnically concentrated communities have resulted in a symbolic attachment to their ethnic origins.

All these earlier studies focused on European immigrants and their later generation descendants, but Mexicans (apart from studies conducted by Gamio, 1931; Gamio, 1932; Taylor, 1932; Taylor, 1934), were not included. Additionally, legal status was not a salient issue for many of the European immigrants as it has become for immigrants in the recent decades due to the legal and political context in the United States. While many more integration studies include Mexicans in the post-1965 era, which the next section will highlight, none have included indigenous Mexicans.

Post-1965 Theories of Immigration

Contemporary integration theories consider the ethnic diversity of the post-1965 immigration flows, which are overwhelmingly non-White in origin from Latin America, Asia, and the Caribbean. The passage of the Hart-Celler Act in 1965 ended quotas and allowed different people to immigrate to the United States. It shifted the composition of the population

from one that was primarily European-origin and African American to one that was multi-ethnic, multi-racial, and multilingual, as I have emphasized. Immigrants from the previous waves were also multilingual, but the focus in the scholarly literature was on learning English to integrate into American society and not on the value of preserving their languages.

With the arrival of the Civil Rights Movement, various legislative actions initially provided a means to address injustices of the past faced by African Americans. These changes influenced other ethnic and racial groups and presented new ways to make change. Chicanos, or Mexican Americans, on the West coast challenged educational and employment injustices. Additionally, legislative changes for linguistic justice were introduced in various states in the 1960s. The bilingual education reforms implemented were due to the activist work of the Puerto Rican community in New York City and the Mexican American/Chicano community on the West Coast, two longstanding Spanish speaking ethnic groups, who had suffered high dropout rates in schools (Garcia, 2010). The passage of the federal Bilingual Education Act (BEA) Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1968 signaled that the federal government recognized the need and value of bilingual education in public education across the nation and provided funding to do so. Many more schools created bilingual programming due to this legislation to meet the linguistic needs of their increasing immigrant populations.

During this same time, there was great concern for the post-1965 immigrants and their children, the second generation. Gans (1992a) argued that assimilation would not be a straight line but a bumpy one, with different groups experiencing bumps in their adaptation process. Gans (1992b) also proposed that many children of immigrants might experience "second-generation decline" given limited educational and economic opportunities. This decline,

combined with racial discrimination and an inability to attain better jobs, causes downward mobility relative to their parents.

Portes and Zhou (1993) and others expanded upon Gan's argument. They maintained that today's second-generation diverges into two segmented paths: straight-line assimilation into the middle class or downward assimilation into a minority underclass culture. They argue that the restructuring of the job market, with a reduction of mobility opportunities as well as the non-white status of today's second-generation and their proximity to urban culture make upward mobility for them uncertain. Portes and Rumbaut (2001) further advanced this argument by examining how a welcoming or an exclusionary context of reception can segment second-generation assimilation into different pathways. A positive context of reception and high parental capital can lead to linear assimilation. In contrast, a negative context of reception and low parental capital, and minimal economic resources will most likely result in adopting an oppositional culture, where norms such as doing well in school are devalued, resulting in a pattern of downward mobility. In the case of Mexicans, Portes and Rumbaut (2001:277) argue that "Mexican immigrants represent the textbook example of the theoretically anticipated effects of low immigrant human capital combined with a negative context of reception which cumulatively leads to downward mobility across generations."

However, these patterns are not universal as they emphasize that downward assimilation among the second-generation may be delayed by them selectively acculturating as when parents actively work to immerse their children into a tight-knit ethnic community that supports educational attainment. In this sense, avoiding full assimilation into American society can facilitate upward mobility. However, some scholars say that Mexican ethnic communities lack the community resources and institutions that can delay assimilation for the second generation

(Baca Zinn & Wells, 2001; Lopez & Stanton-Salazar, 2001). While many studies theorized about the incorporation of the Mexican population, Mexicans were treated as ethnically homogeneous Spanish speakers incorporating into an English context and indigenous Mexican ethnicity was not considered. And even though undocumented legal status started becoming an issue due to stricter border enforcement, contemporary sociologists were writing about downward assimilation, but these studies did not address its impact.

While the segmented assimilation model refocused the debate on the integration of the children of immigrants, the second-generation, and the importance of race, it has been extensively critiqued. Among other things, the segmented assimilation perspective is based on a black-white model of race relations that places Mexican Americans as a group closer to African Americans than to Whites, which may lead some to overestimate Mexicans' likelihood of downward mobility. However, Mexican ethnicity may not hinder the incorporation of Mexican Americans in the same ways that race impedes the mobility of African Americans (Alba and Nee, 2003; Bean and Stevens, 2003; Kasinitz et al., 2009; Perlmann, 2005).

Alba and Nee's (2003) boundary-oriented perspective on assimilation views ethnicity as a social boundary embedded in differences between groups, where these boundaries may be crossed, blurred, or shifted. They show evidence that over time the children of new immigrants will assimilate. They also argue that ethnic boundaries may not be as rigid for Mexican Americans as the segmented assimilation model proposes and that assimilation may occur through modifications taking place on both the Mexican and white sides of the boundary.

Assimilation has reshaped the American mainstream in the past, and it will do so again, culturally, institutionally, and demographically. The cultural reshaping of the mainstream that we see as resulting from immigration is not accurately conveyed by the metaphor of the melting pot, which implies that change is essentially a process of fusing elements from different cultures into a new, unitary culture,

but much cultural change appears to occur as the mainstream expands to accommodate cultural alternatives, usually after they have been "Americanized" to some extent by shedding their more exotic aspects (2003:282).

Similarly, Perlman (2005) asserts that second-generation immigrants do better overall than their parents and will become upwardly mobile. Additionally, Kasinitz et al. (2009) reveal similar findings in their second-generation study as part of a critique of the segmented assimilation model. While their sample in New York City did not include the Mexican population, they postulate that most children of immigrants who have parents with low levels of education will do better than their parents in schooling and other outcomes. They call this "the second-generation advantage."

Many of these studies portray a more hopeful outlook on the incorporation of Mexican immigrants and their descendants, but again, indigenous Mexican immigrants were not included in these research studies, and they looked at how Spanish-speaking Mexicans integrate into an English-speaking context; whereas this study looks at how indigenous Mexicans are integrating into a Spanish-speaking context.

More Recent Research on Mexican Integration

Due to the increase of Mexican migration to the United States since the 1980s, there was a pattern of geographic dispersion away from the longstanding major gateway cities and researchers filled the gaps to see how Mexicans were integrating in these new places. Mexican immigrants were not only migrating in large numbers to the traditional areas in the Southwestern part of the United States and to gateway cities such as Los Angeles (Telles and Ortiz, 2008) and Chicago (de Genova, 2005), but were settling in different destinations, such as New York

(Smith, 2006); North Carolina (Marrow, 2011) as well as in smaller cities and suburban contexts al around the country (Zuniga and Hernandez-Leon, 2005; Jimenez, 2010).

Additionally, researchers focused on later generations of Mexicans, most notably those of the second, third and fourth generations, focusing on upwardly mobile middle-class Mexicans (Aguis Vallejo, 2012) as well as issues of racial identification (Vasquez, 2010; Dowling, 2014). The works of Jimenez (2010) and Telles and Ortiz (2008) and Telles and Sue (2019) – building upon earlier quantitative analyses of Telles and Ortiz (2008) on the incorporation of Mexican generations over time by adding a qualitative aspect -- also look at how later generation Mexicans are integrating in American society. These studies focus on issues relating to ethnic identity as well as language and conclude that later generation Mexicans are not fully assimilating in ways that the previous later generation European immigrants did. As Jimenez (2010) maintains, persistent ethnic identity in the later generations is due to the constant replenishment of first-generation Mexican immigrants, while Telles and Sue (2019), by focusing on identity and cultural processes, including Spanish language, show that later generation Mexicans have a durable ethnicity across generations, integrating into the non-White “ethnic core”. These studies added to analytical frameworks about Mexican integration in important ways, including ethnic identity and language, but none of the studies included indigenous Mexicans.

Integration and Language

It is commonly thought that language shift to English monolingualism by the third generation occurs, including among those from Latin America and the Caribbean, (Fishman, 1989; Veltman 1983). However, some research shows the development of bilingualism instead

of language loss for Spanish speakers (Linton and Jimenez 2009; Tran, 2010). Other research shows a slower pace of language shift to English, with Spanish persistence into later generations compared to other ethnic groups (Alba and Nee, 2003; Telles & Ortiz, 2008; Jimenez, 2010; Rumbaut & Massey, 2013; Telles & Sue, 2019). A key issue is what happens among indigenous Mexicans since they may not come to the United States with fluent Spanish language skills. This not only impacts their integration into society and their identity development, but also influences their children's language and ethnic identity development.

Spanish language has impacted the American mainstream. With so many immigrants from Latin America and the Caribbean, more Spanish-speaking immigrants and their descendants are speaking and retaining Spanish in many contexts within the United States. Spanish language print and digital media, including the media giants Telemundo and Univision, sustain and maintain Spanish language usage (Davila, 2008) and speaking Spanish can be an advantage in a more global society (Garcia, 2008) giving people more opportunities to communicate with others. Studies show that multilingualism also helps cognitive abilities, as it strengthens executive brain functioning, which is a major predictor of academic success (Best, Miller & Naglieri, 2011) and academic success predicts long term health and well-being for children into adulthood (Duncan, Ziol-Guest & Kalil, 2010).

Additionally, schools are not only teaching immigrant and native-born children of Latin-American descent in Spanish, but also teaching White children and other groups the Spanish language through many English and Spanish bilingual programs since bilingual education has become more mainstream. Furthermore, the teaching staff in this country has become more diverse, with immigrant and native-born Spanish speakers taking on leadership roles in many schools, creating more bilingual contexts for immigrants and their children to enter. This

dissertation helps to fill the gap in integration research about Mexicans, as it looks at how undocumented indigenous Mexican immigrants and their US-born children are integrating into a specific English/Spanish bilingual context and community.

While the structural integration frameworks are useful to understanding Mexican migration, including indigenous Mexican migration, in some ways, they are not complete and do not fully capture how multiethnic Mexicans are integrating into American society. As researchers have found for later generation Mexican Americans (Jimenez, 2010; Telles and Sue, 2019), understanding ethnic identity is important for capturing the nuances found within the diverse Mexican population, which includes indigenous Mexicans. Ethnic identity and how members envision themselves is crucial to the integration of immigrant groups and their descendants.

Ethnic Identity, Boundary Making and Language

Ethnicity, commonly understood to be a sense of group belonging grounded in the idea of common ancestry, history, and culture, is a vital element to understanding immigration. Similarly, identities, along with race, gender, and class, matter in how individuals make sense of who they are (Cornell and Hartmann 1998). Boundaries are fundamental to understanding ethnicity and identity, and particularly social identity, which refers to how one sees the self in terms of his or her group memberships, and as defined against other groups (Tajfel and Turner 1979; Tajfel 1982; Deaux 2009). Individuals' feeling of belonging in the social world is based on their in-group membership, which provides them with a social identity and a sense of belonging in the social world. When an individual elevates the prestige of their group while also discriminating against or harboring unfavorable opinions about the out-group, or out-groups,

their self-image is improved. As a result, are often seen as separated into "them" and "us," or into in-groups and out-groups. Ethnic identity is a social identity that shapes people's self-concepts and is associated with belonging to a particular ethnic group.

The concept of ethnic boundaries was first established by Fredrik Barth (1969), who posited that ethnicity is not an innate quality but rather a social construct that is constructed and designed or re-created in response to different political, economic, and social contexts. All this impacts identity, which is integral to how individuals conceptualize themselves and influence the actions people take in their lives, which is fundamental for understanding how immigrants will integrate in society.

A boundary is both a category and a social dimension. The former refers to classification and representation; the latter to everyday networks of relationships that result from acts of connecting or distancing (Wimmer, 2008a). Lamont and Molnar (2002) distinguish between the social boundaries, the social outcome of the structural arrangements that bring about the unequal distribution of social resources between ethnic groups and symbolic boundaries, which are the social actors' interpretations and conceptualizations of this distribution. Boundaries can classify at the macro level, but also have implications on the micro level. At the macro level, scholars tend to study the creation and reinforcement of categories through collective action and political projects (Omi and Winant 1994). At a micro level, scholars concentrate on individuals' everyday interactions with others (Goffman 1959, Lamont 2000, Waters 1999). The experiential basis of boundaries is most explicitly studied in micro literature as it shows how individuals' life experiences lead them to perceive or observe boundaries and categories. For example, discrimination, or experiencing negative treatment based on membership in a negatively stereotyped group, represents a way of perceiving group boundaries.

Thus, there are "insiders" and "outsiders" and, to a degree, those that belong and those that do not. Although boundaries may divide groups, a "boundary" does not necessarily signify a differentiation between groups. Boundaries may be flexible, and individuals may belong to multiple groups within the same identity dimension and may switch between and across groups. Boundaries may be malleable and changeable, allowing individuals to maintain membership in many different categories or switch identities, depending on the situation. Boundaries may be crossed, shifted, or blurred. As explained by Alba and Nee (2003), boundary crossing means individual movement between groups without real change in the actual dividing line, boundary shifting entails a change in the location of a line itself, and boundary blurring implies the decreasing social clarity of the dividing line. Alba (2005) distinguishes between bright and blurred boundaries that reflect differences in the salience of a boundary. With a bright boundary, there is little ambiguity regarding membership, while a blurry boundary reflects the opposite. Wimmer (2008b) further develops work on boundary change from an agency-based perspective, examining how actors attempt to alter ethnic boundaries. He offers a taxonomy of boundary change strategies; this includes shifting of boundaries, which can take the form of excluding individuals or including new members; altering the meaning of membership, which can include changes in intergroup hierarchies; and efforts to highlight other modes or bases of classification.

The concept of boundary does not imply closure but can vary in degree from one society to another and in one social position over another. Ethnic boundaries are social mediums through which association is revealed rather than closed geographic demarcations. Consequently, ethnic identities are fluid across time and social contexts. These identities can switch over time (Alba, 1990, Nagel, 1994) or give individuals the option to decide which

identity they will choose at a given point in time (Waters, 1990). Thus, indigenous Mexicans decide with whom and where they will disclose their indigenous identities.

Immigrants not only cross physical borders, but also racial, ethnic, and linguistic borders within their home countries and in the United States (Stephen, 2007). Distinct indigenous Mexican language and culture set indigenous Mexican immigrants apart from others in Mexico and in the United States, as they are ethnolinguistic minorities in both locations. Indigenous immigrants must not only navigate differences with other racial and ethnic groups in the United States, including other Latinos, but must also do this within their own larger Spanish-speaking Mexican Mestizo communities.

At the same time, migration allows for the creation of new spaces of ideas and for identities to develop. This melding of perspectives allows for the creation of new identity formation, allowing people to create and recreate their identities based on the situation and social context. A dual frame of reference enables immigrants to compare the present new location with that in their past home countries (Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco, 2001) and give individuals greater flexibility to change their identity to potentially recreate a "possible self" (Markus and Nurius, 1986). That is, they can look at their present self and see their 'ideal selves' to think of their potential or their possible self. Many migrants, including indigenous Mexicans, move to another country to make their lives better, for both themselves and their children and this can involve attempting to change how they identify themselves and are identified by others.

In a new place, immigrants can shift their identity or identities and decide what information to disclose. Tajfel (1982) proposed that to protect one's self-esteem and cope with being members of a devalued social group, as indigenous Mexicans are, individuals may employ identity management strategies that buffer or enhance self-esteem. Similarly, Goffman (1963)

posits that to avoid rejection or disapproval many people with a stigmatized status, such as indigenous Mexicans, attempt to “pass” by hiding the markers of that status. For example, members of marginalized groups may disengage from the lower-status group and attempt to gain acceptance from a higher-status group, or they may challenge discrimination by enhancing their group identification and highlighting their group’s positive attributes. Thus, depending on the circumstance or context, indigenous Mexicans will choose to disclose their indigenous identity to Mestizo Mexicans as well as with other indigenous Mexicans or may not. Alternatively, they make attempts to hide this identity. Hiding their indigenous identity, to the extent it is possible, may potentially help them bypass discrimination from Mexican immigrants as well as from others, including other Latinos, in the United States.

As Fishman (2010) states, language is a prime indicator of one’s ethnicity. Language is integral to how individuals conceptualize themselves and influences the actions people take. Additionally, language is also a marker of ethnicity for both ethnic insiders as well as ethnic outsiders. Furthermore, as García argues, the focus on language as well as ethnic identity “illuminates processes of cultural change and continuity” (2010: 519). Of importance is how people and groups establish group membership through language practices, how group membership changes or remains the same over time, and the significance of language practices in these processes, among other things.

Understanding language practices allows us to investigate how ethnic boundaries may be negotiated, resisted, and contested. As Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004: 4) discuss, “languages may not only be ‘markers of identity’ but also sites of resistance, empowerment, solidarity, and discrimination.” The relationship between language and ethnic identity demonstrates how language use links to societal and individual beliefs about languages (influenced by political and

historical conditions); asymmetrical relations of power, and language users' views of how they see themselves and each other. As Heller (2007: 2) states, language is "a set of resources which circulate in unequal ways in social networks and discursive spaces, and whose meaning and value are socially constructed within the constraints of social organizational processes, under specific historical conditions." For example, Mexican society devalues indigenous languages, and this affects how Mestizo Mexicans view indigenous Mexicans as well as influences how indigenous Mexicans value, use and maintain their own indigenous languages.

Fundamental to this view are language ideologies. Language choices by individuals are shaped by language ideologies or sets of feelings and beliefs about languages, and these do not arise in a vacuum. As Susan Gal writes, language ideologies shape and are shaped by "the way[s] in which meaning, and thus language, [serve] to sustain relations of domination" (1989: 359). Beliefs about language are never neutral. Language ideologies provide a window to investigating how individuals and groups make sense of their language activity, how some languages, language varieties, or linguistic forms are more valued than others, and how ascribed values may be accepted or resisted. In the context of unequal distribution of power in a society, speaking the "wrong" language may very well become an object of inequality, humiliation, and abuse, leading to the population's abandoning of the language altogether. In Mexican society, this can occur in indigenous communities, which leads to a shift to speaking Spanish and the start to abandoning indigenous languages.

Conversely, knowledge of the "right" language may provide access to a range of resources (education, jobs, network, etc.), becoming, in the words of Bourdieu (1991), significant "symbolic capital," or a means of enriching the quality of one's life. With the "right" language (s), such as Spanish or English, speakers can achieve things, gain control, and enlarge

one's arenas of influence. Language management, and the maintenance/loss of particular speech varieties or practices, are not only a question of governmental (top-down) intervention, but also individual choice, as is the case among indigenous women who prefer Spanish, as well as English for their children in the United States.

Acknowledging that language and ethnicity are social and cultural constructions, like identity construction, allows us to explore how individuals and groups mobilize linguistic resources and beliefs about languages to define themselves and others in ethnic terms in social interaction. At the same time, it is equally important to acknowledge that individuals bring their past histories and stereotypes into social encounters, informing their thought and action. Indigenous Mexicans come to the United States with their own language ideologies from Mexico. These ideologies are not formed in isolation, but through governmental policies as well as individual practices that have been shaped over time, in different places. In a place such as New York, indigenous Mexican immigrants have agency over their linguistic choices, not just for themselves, but also for their children, deciding which languages they will use, maintain and learn.

Conclusion

I have provided a brief overview of the literature that is relevant to understanding indigenous Mexican integration and ethnic identity. I discuss an overview of the relevant literature about immigrant integration in the pre and post – 1965 eras, including various studies on Mexican integration as well as ethnic identity construction. I further discuss the role of language use, language ideologies and boundary making, which are both fundamental to understanding ethnic identity as well as integration. These boundaries of ethnic change are

designed and re-created in response to different political, economic, and social contexts and can be blurred, crossed, or shifted. All this impacts identity construction, which is integral to how indigenous Mexicans conceptualize themselves and influences the actions they take in their lives, which is fundamental for understanding how they integrate in American society.

Chapter Three

Community Organizations and Schools as Sites of Integration

This chapter highlights current and historical aspects of the East Harlem neighborhood, where the indigenous mothers lived and from which they rarely ventured away. It discusses the field site, the Shining Star Bilingual Head Start, in more depth and examines how the indigenous mothers navigated the school and community organization. It focuses on their experiences at these organizations and how they understood them, and how they sought to hide their indigenous identities at the school by not speaking their indigenous languages. The chapter further discusses how other school personnel, including the teachers, misunderstood the indigenous mothers and children as a group and as individuals, which distanced them from full inclusion in the school community. It also discusses indigenous mothers' trusted connections with the school social workers, which built social capital contributing to more robust parenting capacities, and in turn improved their integration and their children's integration into their communities.

East Harlem neighborhood

As you walk down 116th St., the main artery of East Harlem, you are bombarded with the sights, sounds, and smells of Mexico, as many Mexican restaurants, delis, and stores have sprung up. Continuing East towards Second Avenue and the East River, there are many renovated buildings catering to the gentrifying crowds of the neighborhood. However, you will also find entrepreneurial Mexican vendors selling the morning tamales in full force on street corners, where vendors compete for customers. After the corn-husked wrapped delicacies are gone by afternoon, the food scene changes to tacos and tortas for the day crowd. As part of the informal economy, some Mexican women work these jobs to help support their families.

In contrast, their male partners work in the various restaurants in East Harlem and all around the city. The area has become home to many Mexicans over the last twenty years, who, along with Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, African Americans, and increasingly, non-Hispanic White populations, now call East Harlem home. According to Census and American Community Survey data via IPUMS, in 2019, 43% of East Harlem residents identified as Hispanic/Latino. Table 1 shows the breakdown of the Hispanic/Latino population in East Harlem compared to New York City. The Mexican population numbers 8,649, accounting for 19.2% of East Harlem's population, while the city-wide reported Mexican population is 339,425, or 13.8% of the Hispanic/Latino population. However, these numbers are low due to undercounting given that Mexicans are marginalized - as undocumented, indigenous, and poor.

Table 1

Latino/Hispanic population and percentages, comparing East Harlem and New York City

	East Harlem		New York City	
Hispanic/Latino	45,037	100%	2,457,137	100%
Mexican	8,649	19.2%	339,425	13.8%
Puerto Rican	20,009	44.4%	696,879	28.4%
Dominican	8,496	18.9%	701,188	28.5%
Central American	2,262	5.0%	179,031	7.3%
South American	3,113	6.9%	392,206	16.0%

Source: American Community Survey Data, 2014-2018 via NYC Planning Department

The area has high poverty levels, with 33.9% having a household income of less than \$20,000. The median household income in 2019 was \$32,960, about 53% less than the city-wide median household income (\$70,590). The severe crime rate was 18.3 crimes per 1,000 residents in 2020, compared to 11.6 serious crimes per 1,000 residents city-wide. (2020, NYU, Furman Institute)

East Harlem encompasses an area on the East side of Manhattan from 96th St. to 125th St, between Fifth Avenue and the East River. It is an area with tenement buildings as well as

twenty-four public housing projects. However, E.116th St. is its heart, where the principal commercial artery has businesses and restaurants. Further East, towards First Avenue, is the Shining Star Bilingual Head Start, the primary field site of this research project, and some mainstay Italian businesses.

While many Italians of the neighborhood are long gone, some businesses, families, and landmarks linger on. Patsy's Pizzeria on First Avenue and Rao's on Pleasant Avenue are two longstanding Italian businesses still in existence in the area. The Marrone & Sons Bakery storefront and awning still stands on 116th St., but it closed in 2007 after more than a half-century in business (New York Times, 2007). The Banco Italia, where many early immigrants once did their banking, closed many decades ago. However, the relief lettering in Italian and the ornate statues are still intact, even though it is now a modern Seven-Eleven franchise convenience store.

While the Mexican Independence Day celebration, held each September on 116th St., dwarfs the annual dancing of the Giglio each August, the festival remains a vibrant Italian immigrant tradition on Pleasant Avenue. The Giglio Society of East Harlem, an organization devoted to East Harlem and the Catholic Saint Anthony, first started hoisting St. Anthony's five-story wooden statue of St. Anthony and parading it through the streets in 1908. Early immigrants created the tradition to honor their town's patron saint - and today, nearly one thousand Italian Americans from the tri-state region still come back to East Harlem to partake in the yearly feast of Italian food, music, and games (Meyer, 1989).

There is still a solid Puerto Rican and Caribbean presence in the neighborhood, but many moved out to other parts of the city, and Mexicans, mainly from the states of Puebla and Guerrero, moved in. Indigenous Mexicans, specifically Mixtec and Nahuatl-speaking Mexicans from the state of Guerrero, have migrated to the neighborhood in large numbers since the 2000s

and live in the apartment buildings within the radius of Second Avenue and Pleasant Avenue between 110th and 120th Streets, near the Shining Star Bilingual School. Many indigenous Mexicans have followed their families and friends to the United States, finding housing and work opportunities in similar places. Local community organizations, such as the Shining Star Bilingual Head Start and Helping Hands, provide educational support and information to families to help ease the transition in a new country.

The Shining Star Bilingual Head Start has a long history in the neighborhood as it was one of the initial Head Start sites at the inception of the program in 1965. While it changed to different locations within East Harlem several times, the school found a permanent home in a former Catholic parochial school building and has been in this current location since 1980 (from communication with school personnel). As Pat, a local Italian coffee shop owner who still lives in the neighborhood, told me, "It was the Italian parishioners who built that building. My father and uncles put up the walls, and all the Italian kids went to school here. Nevertheless, the neighborhood started changing in the 1970s. People were not sending their kids to Catholic school anymore, and the Church needed to make money." In 1980, Shining Star Bilingual Head Start leased the building, and it has held classes in the space ever since.

It was the Italians who built the brick-and-mortar physical buildings of the neighborhood and the foundational philosophies of intercultural and multilingual education. In the 1930s and 1940s, Leonard Covello, an Italian educator, promoted Italian immigrant students learning the Italian language and culture. Covello began to implement strategies for improving Italian American high school students' achievement by alleviating the conflict between the ethos of American educational institutions and the adapted Southern Italian culture by promoting the study of Italian; organizing Circoli Italiani (Italian student clubs); and founding the Casa del

Popolo, a settlement house in East Harlem. Covello devoted much of his professional life, first at Clinton High School and then at Benjamin Franklin High School, on the corner of 116th and Pleasant Ave., in East Harlem, to constructing bridges between the immigrants and their children (Krawkowsky, 2010). Just as Covello promoted immigrant Italian language and culture learning, the Shining Star Bilingual Head Start promotes learning Spanish and English in the same neighborhood.

History of Head Start

Head Start is a national initiative of the United States Federal government with its roots in the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964. President Lyndon B. Johnson took up the cause of building a "Great Society" and declared the "War on Poverty" in his first state of the Union address. The Head Start program's goal is to teach low-income preschool children their basic foundational academic readiness skills and also work with parents by offering literacy, health education, and nutrition classes, among others, to combat the effects of poverty. It began in several urban and rural areas across the United States, including New York City, in May 1965 and continued into full-year programs that same September (Zigler and Styfco, 2010).

In that same year, in October 1965, the Hart-Celler Act, also known as the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, was signed into law, following the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The Hart-Celler Act abolished an earlier quota system based on national origin, as laid down in the Immigration Act of 1924 that favored Northern and Western European immigrants and left out other immigrants. This 1965 law established a new immigration policy based on reuniting immigrant families. It changed the immigrant population's demographic composition,

fundamentally shifting immigration patterns to the United States from European migrants to Latin American and Asian migrants.

These shifts impacted the Head Start program across the United States, as many communities saw population changes that affected who was utilizing their services. While Head Start is not specifically a program for immigrant families, it has responded to these demographic shifts over time, as many of the students and families it serves are immigrants and children of immigrants. Nationally, it serves more than one million children, of whom twenty-nine percent speak a language other than English. In 2018, in New York State, 498,000 children, ages 0-4, lived in homes where individuals did not speak English, and half of those children lived in poverty (Migration Policy Institute, 2019).

Between 1976 and 1979, Head Start created a bilingual and bicultural curriculum for Spanish-speaking students during the Carter Presidential administration. As the Shining Star Bilingual Head Start Preschool director stated, their school was one of the first programs to implement Spanish bilingual services, even before the 1970s, responding to the demographic shifts in the East Harlem neighborhood, primarily from the influx of the Puerto Rican community. The Federal monies then, as now, provide an adding funding stream for the school to operate. As a longstanding institution, it has served many generations of diverse families from the surrounding neighborhood community.

Head Start's primary goal is to teach preschool children their basic foundational academic readiness skills and increase parental engagement by holding parent education and literacy classes, health education, and nutrition classes to combat the effects of poverty. It is an effective program with long-term positive outcomes for those who are part of it. Head Start improves educational outcomes, particularly in vocabulary gains and receptive language skills for children

with low achievement levels and Spanish speakers (Bitler, M., Hoynes, H and Domina, T., 2018). It has also shown that Head Start increases the chances that student participants will complete high school and higher education. It has also shown that mothers who participated in the Head Start program who did not have a high school diploma increased their positive parenting practices relating to their children's learning and development (Whitmore Schanzenbach, D. & Bauer, L., 2016).

The current Shining Star Bilingual Head Start

At the multicultural potluck, the smell of rice, beans, empanadas, and enchiladas wafted through the auditorium, where the families, primarily mothers, gathered to celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month. I heard sounds of bachata from the loudspeaker and saw the small flags from Mexico, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, and the United States that stuck out of the food and adorned the table. The one hundred and forty-two three and four-year-old students who attend the school have varying racial and ethnic backgrounds reflecting the neighborhood's demographic makeup. In many cases, parents were of the same ethnic background, but many were of mixed ethnic heritage. Almost half of the families at the Head Start school are from Mexico, while others are from various Latin American countries representing the multiple flags on the table. Families from other countries, such as Morocco and Thailand, attend the school, but most are from Latin American and Caribbean countries, such as the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico. Of the school's sixty-five Mexican families, twenty-one identified as indigenous, speaking Nahuatl and Mixtec, two of the sixty-eight official languages spoken in Mexico. See Appendix 2 for more information about the demographics of the school.

All the print on the walls and bulletin board announcements in the school are in English and Spanish, as is the academic instruction. The teachers speak to the children in both languages in the classroom, playground, and school. The unofficial language policy of the school is a bilingual dual language model, where the goal is to have both speakers of English and Spanish in the classrooms, with the goal of having the children fluent in both languages. While this was the articulated policy, some teachers were not clear about the language policy. As the teachers said, they did the best they could with the provided resources, understanding that they were teaching both languages to the children. The focus of this study was not on the interactions between the teachers and the children. However, I periodically observed the children involved in many reading, math, and science activities, in English and Spanish, in their colorful classrooms, named after the atmosphere and the solar system on the 2nd floor. Each of the twenty-one indigenous children were dispersed throughout the seven classrooms. Some classrooms had one or two indigenous children while others had three, and one classroom had a cluster of four, two Mixtec, and two Nahuatl indigenous children.

It was deemed a quality school. Local and national leaders such as New York City Mayor Bill DeBlasio and former New York State Senator and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton visited the school to promote early childhood education. DeBlasio promoted the city-wide pre-K for All program. At the same time, Clinton, through her foundation and the Spanish-speaking media giant Univision, announced the Too Small to Fail initiative, encouraging Latino parents to help their preschool children better develop their language skills.

The school espoused a multicultural philosophy that recognized ethnic diversity, but it celebrated holidays and heroes over understanding the ethnic backgrounds of the families at the school. As Alma, the Education Director, stated, September was Hispanic Heritage Month,

highlighting Puerto Rican culture, January was African American Heritage Month, and May was for Cinco de Mayo, highlighting the Mexican culture. The families attended these school-wide events, watching the children perform songs, skits, and dances. However, many Mexican representations were stereotypical, with sombreros and serapes, and none represented indigenous cultural dances or languages of the mothers and their families.

At that particular multicultural potluck referenced above, and at all of these whole school gatherings, I observed the mother's interactions with others, where they sat, and what they did at these events. The indigenous mothers almost always sat in the back or side at these whole school events and rarely engaged in conversations with anyone, in any language. They sometimes brought their younger children with them or attended the events with their partners. Many did not interact in Spanish due to their acknowledged insecurity in speaking the language, nor did they speak to one another in their indigenous languages since Mixtec and Nahuatl are different from one another, with little similarity in vocabulary and pronunciation. The following section highlights the mothers' interactions with the school staff and teachers and shows how they sought to hide their indigenous identities at school.

The Visibly Hidden

As a whole, the mothers were very isolated within the school and the East Harlem neighborhood. Many told me they rarely ventured outside of the neighborhood boundaries, and some had never been outside of Manhattan, while others went to some of the outer boroughs. Even among themselves, they did not interact with one another frequently. As many told me, the indigenous mothers were unaware that other indigenous speakers had children at the school unless they knew each other from the same town in Mexico, but this was not common. It was

rare to hear the mothers speak their indigenous languages with anyone else. I heard one of the mothers speak Mixtec at the school when she answered her phone to speak with her husband during one of our interviews. I also heard one of the mothers speaking Mixtec to another woman at the fruit vendor stand on 116th and 2nd Ave., as I left the school one day. Two mothers told me they knew other indigenous families at the school, but they had difficulty communicating with one another. As Ita stated, "I do know another Mixtec mother here, but her Mixtec is different from mine. Others speak Nahuatl, but we cannot understand one another. It is completely different."

Mixtec and Nahuatl are separate languages and completely different from Spanish as well as dissimilar to one another. Additionally, Mixtec has forty-eight different variations throughout the Mixteca region in Mexico (Stark, 1995). Due to the mountainous terrain, there is isolation between indigenous groups and within the indigenous languages themselves in Mexico. While advancing communication and transportation options have allowed more contact, language variations persist, causing substantial differences and difficulties in comprehension among indigenous communities. Apart from this geographic isolation, many indigenous cultures and their languages are stigmatized. Negative ideologies throughout Latin America and in Mexico continue to stigmatize indigenous people and indigenous languages. In Mexico, indigenous languages, including Mixtec and Nahuatl are considered lower status than Spanish languages, which marks them negatively. This stigmatization occurs in Mexico and follows them to New York. Goffman's (1963) work on the management of stigma is a helpful concept to understand why the mothers would not disclose they were indigenous to the other mothers or the staff and teachers at the school. Stigma research shows that to avoid rejection or disapproval, many people with a stigmatized status attempt to "pass" by hiding the markers of that status. To hide

this stigma of indigeneity, many indigenous people do not disclose that they speak indigenous languages. The mothers rarely disclosed their language and culture at the school, with the social workers, the teachers, or with one another.

An example of the mothers not telling the school staff about their indigeneity was when families enrolled their children at the intake interview. When the parents register their child to be a part of the Head Start program, they speak with the school social workers, who fill out a home language survey to identify which language or languages are spoken in the home. It is an important document used to understand the families and serve the students and families better, as it was used by the social workers and given to the teachers. The majority of the indigenous families did not disclose that they spoke an indigenous language in their homes at those interviews. Kevin, a Puerto Rican social worker who was also a parent at the school twelve years prior, told me, "When families come into the school, we fill out the entry forms and the home language survey where we assess how much Spanish and English the child knows. Many times, the families do not say they speak their indigenous languages. They tell us they speak Spanish, and we do not ask them if there are any other languages spoken at home. Sometimes we may know by the way they speak Spanish or if they bring in someone else to help fill out the forms, but we put on the form what they tell us." The school representatives are not well versed in understanding the diversity within the Mexican community. The school forms are not created to address and facilitate the correct documentation of these families' complex languages and identities.

While the top leadership of the school and the social workers understood there was a growing indigenous Mexican population, that same information did not always filter down to the teachers who received these home language surveys. Rosario, one of the assistant teachers, told

me that they received the forms a week before classes began. In her five years at the school, she had never seen any mention of indigenous languages being spoken in the home, as the form only referred to English and Spanish, the two languages taught at the school.

At the beginning of the school year, many teachers and some staff were unaware of the differences between Mestizo and indigenous Mexicans and assumed that the mothers spoke Spanish. While the indigenous woman did have some oral fluency in Spanish, many of the mothers did not read nor write in Spanish or any language since many indigenous languages are mainly oral languages with few written texts. The headteachers, of Puerto Rican and Dominican descent, some native-born New Yorkers, and some immigrants themselves, were unfamiliar with Mexico's ethnolinguistic diversity. Their own countries of origin have little current indigenous culture, as indigenous Taino culture and language are no longer living. Indigeneity is more of a symbolic identity in the Caribbean, while other Latin American countries, such as Mexico and other Central and South American countries, still have large numbers of present-day indigenous cultures. Some mothers understood that many Americans and Latinos have little understanding that indigenous cultures and languages exist in Mexico. As Gloria stated, "Dominicans and Puerto Ricans don't know there are other languages in Mexico, so they think we only speak Spanish."

Most of the mothers did not disclose their indigenous identities to the teachers. In addition, they did not think the school knew about their identities in any specific way, and the mothers did not want the school to know. However, as Mari said, "I do not need to say I am Nahuatl. My town identifies me." For her, geography and place were an explanation of her identity. While she may have had this understanding, most of the school personnel did not since

most were not aware of the specific places that the mothers had migrated from nor were they aware of the segregation of indigenous communities in Mexico.

Some mothers did not disclose their indigenous identity due to their low Spanish language fluency. There were language barriers, and some did not speak Spanish well. While all the mothers had gained basic verbal conversational skills at the time of this study, many did not yet master reading and writing in Spanish, the literacy skills necessary for fluency. Not having the ability to read or write well in Spanish, many mothers were insecure about using Spanish in front of the teachers. Their quiet ways were not an indicator of their unwillingness to engage but about a language barrier. As Ida stated, "I could not speak Spanish well in Mexico. I learned it here, but I still do not know many words. I try and help my son, but I don't feel comfortable talking with others."

"They do not talk. They are silent.", were comments some teachers made about the indigenous mothers and some of the children who looked at their differences as deficits. A conversation with one of the headteachers who was of Columbian descent exemplified this.

Teacher: In my opinion, those who speak indigenous languages are...affected. Most of them (the children) are in special education, taking speech. I am not sure if it is something genetic. The parents and the children have difficulty pronouncing the "s."

Leslie: (raising my head in disbelief) And the "p," yes?

Teacher: Yes, the "p" too.

Leslie: Well, it is not genetic, but the sounds in the (Mixtec) language are entirely different from Spanish, with little similarity. Mixtec is a tonal, oral language and the kids may not hear the sounds like "s" and "p" at home as frequently because they do not exist in Mixtec.

Teacher: Well, I suppose that is true.

More than half of the indigenous children, twelve out of the twenty-one children, were receiving speech therapy or were in the process of being tested to receive this service. The school's speech pathologist, who worked with the children deemed to need speech services and

did the testing, acknowledged a higher percentage of indigenous students utilizing these services than other students in the school. However, she confirmed that it was a listening issue in most cases, not a cognitive issue. The speech therapy was a way for students to work on using sounds through games and listening exercises and practicing facial exercises to strengthen the mouth and tongue muscles to be able to announce certain words. She reiterated that many young children need these services, not just indigenous children, and when started early, with time they phase-out of the services when they become more proficient.

The speech pathologist provided a rationale for the services, but it was alarming to hear a teacher state that educational difficulties were due to genetics, as indicated in the quote above. Not only was it incorrect, but racist and dismissive. Genetic arguments, such as the teacher's, hold that academic talent is primarily inherited, and society rewards these genetically inherited capabilities (Herrnstein and Murray, 1994). These claims that certain groups (i.e., Whites) are inherently genetically smarter than others are racist and have been debunked. Similarly, cultural arguments that argue children are stuck in a "culture of poverty" (Lewis, 1966) and locked into a cycle of failure have been dismissed. Indigenous children are not any less capable nor at any disadvantage for being ethnically indigenous, but their social positioning can lead people to discriminate against them, which can impede opportunities in society and in places such as schools if teachers have these biases against the families and children.

That discussion with the teacher prompted me to give a workshop on indigenous language and culture the next month at the teacher professional development training day, held the last Friday afternoon of each month. At that one-hour workshop, attended by all of the teachers and assistant teachers, I gave an overview of indigenous languages and cultures in Mexico, including the varieties of languages and their variants, a bit about their structure,

comparing the differences to Spanish. I also provided some information about schooling practices, such as bilingual education in Mexico, educational attainment levels in Mexico, and some information about the migration of indigenous Mexicans to the United States, including New York. This workshop took place in the late Spring of 2015, toward the end of my research cycle, so many of the teachers were then aware of the indigenous presence in the school. I was excited to present the information and have a discussion with them. However, it was a Friday afternoon, and the group was more interested in finishing their day than discussing indigenous issues. Some teachers asked questions about bilingual education in Mexico and were completely surprised that bilingual education existed outside of the United States. Most said they had not been aware that Mexico was a multilingual country. Some asked questions about Mexican migration in general and wanted to know more about the Mexican community in New York. While all the teachers were cordial and attentive, our discussion did not last long before they left to go to a mandated CPR workshop.

The two Mexican teachers at the school were the most enthusiastic about the workshop presentation. Malena, a headteacher who had migrated to New York City from Puebla when she was five years old, was fascinated by pre-Hispanic dances, but had never learned about indigenous cultures in her East Harlem school or at home. Equally enthusiastic was Rosanna, an assistant teacher who migrated to New York from a Mestizo town in Puebla when she was eighteen years old. Rosanna had seen indigenous representations on television and in school textbooks. However, she had never met indigenous peoples in her Mestizo town, and she had never heard an indigenous language spoken. It was only through her work at the school that she encountered indigenous families.

In a follow-up discussion with Malena and Rosanna about a month later, they told me they felt very proud at that meeting but also a bit uncomfortable since both of them had never learned about indigenous languages and cultures and realized they knew very little. Rosanna said that it took someone like me, an American researcher, to inform her about indigenous Mexican culture and to hear an example of an indigenous language. She felt self-conscious that she did not learn more than the archaeological histories in school. It made her realize that indigenous cultures and communities are not given much importance in Mexican education since they are not explicitly taught and there is even less information provided about them to teachers in schools in the United States.

At the meeting, Rosanna and Malena told me that none of the other teachers had talked about the workshop with them afterward and not one of those teachers had spoken with me either. Rosanna thought the other teachers were probably not interested. Elena, the Puerto Rican head teacher she worked with in the classroom, did not talk about it with her, and she was surprised about that. However, she did not necessarily think that Elena's silence about the workshop meant indifference towards her as a Mexican or the indigenous families. She stated that there were so many children and families from so many different ethnic backgrounds that it was difficult to focus on one group of families. Rosanna rationalized the lack of attention to Mexican indigenous culture and language by saying the teachers had so much work to do, with many children, with many different needs since they were not only teaching the children Spanish and English, but how to socialize and get along with one another since it was their first school experience. However, she also said that she had never paid much attention to the differences between the indigenous and Mestizo Mexican children nor the distinctions of the families of

other ethnic backgrounds and the workshop made her more aware of the complexities of the population at the school.

At a year-end meeting with the teacher who had made the genetic comment, I noticed a shift in how she spoke about the indigenous families in her classroom. While she did not bring up the workshop directly, her demeanor when talking about the families was more supportive and understanding since she now knew more about their culture, language and the circumstances that led them to migrate to New York.

Utilizing School and Community Resources

Some indigenous mothers participated in the nutrition and cooking workshops at the school, while others exercised each Monday morning in the gym. One mother joined in the weekly English class held in the auditorium. Activities such as these are considered parent engagement, a central aspect that Head Start promotes to help families participate and connect with the school. Such activities create more social capital and more robust parenting capacities, leading to better integration for themselves and their children. These programs were coordinated and promoted by the social workers. The teachers had no part in organizing them nor any awareness that the mothers were attending these classes since they occurred when the children were in the classrooms, usually in the morning and early afternoon.

Additionally, many of the mothers attended programs at the neighborhood social service organization, Helping Hands, before the enrollment of their children at Head Start. Many mothers continued their connection to Helping Hands, utilizing the food pantry, receiving nonperishable food items such as rice, beans, and pasta, purchasing low-cost clothing at their thrift shop, and enrolling their older children in afterschool homework programs. They

registered their children at the Shining Star Bilingual Head Start as a result of Helping Hands' caseworkers' suggestions and recommendations from other female family members whose children had attended the school previously.

The mothers trusted the social workers at Helping Hands, which extended to trusting the social workers at the Shining Star Head Start School. The social workers were necessary information connectors for the indigenous mothers. The social workers encouraged the mothers to attend the previously mentioned school workshops and provide health and housing public assistance resources. They were the people the mothers went to ask questions or solve a problem.

These engagements would seem unlikely given that the women wanted to hide their indigenous identities and languages from the teachers and other parents at school-wide events. Why did the mothers participate in programs, and why was trust developed with the social workers and not with the teachers?

As Mario Small (2009) documented in his research about childcare centers, organizational settings are places where networks are formed, and social ties are created, both with individuals and between organizations. Based on social capital theory, he shows that how an organization is structured will shape the types and number of connections and social capital people can garner. For example, how a childcare center or school is organized, and its links with other organizations can impact the types of connections and the amount of social capital a parent can receive.

At the Shining Star Bilingual School, the social workers created social ties with the mothers, creating trust with the mothers and facilitating their inclusion in engagement activities that helped integrate them into the school community. These ties occur between people and

happen between institutions, as schools' network with other organizations to give information to parents. Childcare centers connect institutionally with other social service organizations, which benefits the participants to receive more information. In the case of the indigenous mothers, the repeated connections with the social workers at Helping Hands broadened their social capital. The connections of the Shining Star Head Start Bilingual School with Helping Hands widened the circle of information the mothers were able to receive and the amount of social capital they accrued, which enabled them to integrate more easily into the broader neighborhood community. It was Helping Hands who initially informed the mothers about the Shining Star Bilingual Head Start School.

When repeated interactions occur, more trust is created with individuals as the social ties are strengthened between them. At the school, the mothers had the most contact with the social workers, as they enrolled the families at the school, created and promoted engagement programming, were the ones who kept the mothers informed about school events, and were also present when there were teacher meetings.

At the morning drop-off and afternoon pickups at the classroom door, the mothers did not go into the classrooms but only signed their children's names into a black book on a table at the classroom entrance outside the hallway. The teachers had minimal substantial contact with the mothers. If they did speak with the teacher at the classroom entrance, it was brief and not in-depth, as there was a flurry of noisy, loud activity, with many adults and children passing in the hallways at the beginning and end of each school day. The mothers only entered their children's classrooms at the monthly meetings held by the social workers with the teachers on the first Friday mornings of each month. These meetings communicated school news and information about the upcoming month and literacy activities for the families. It was one of the main ways

the teachers engaged with the mothers, but it was not on a group level, not an individual basis, where there was little time to have in-depth conversations. As Rosanna said, "The social workers are responsible for the mothers and for all the activities they attend and we, as teachers, are mainly responsible for the work with the children in the classroom. Apart from the monthly meetings and a twice a year conference we do not have much contact with the mothers. But the social workers are with us whenever we do have these exchanges."

Accessing Resources

The following example shows how Marta leveraged these personal connections with the social workers at the school. She visited the social workers to ask questions and receive translation assistance or information about social service programs. She was the only mother in the study who was not living with a partner or husband. Due to circumstances that were not clear to me but may have been due to domestic violence, Marta and her children lived together in a rented room in another family's apartment. At one of the meetings with Marianna, the social worker, Marta discussed her situation. She asked for help in applying for TANF, or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, which enabled her to receive monetary support for herself and her children since she no longer had assistance from her husband, who had brought home money from his employment. As the primary caretaker to her four-year-old daughter and her one-year-old son, she did not work, as childcare was too expensive, and she had no other means to support herself.

As Marianna attentively listened to Marta, she looked up the address of the building on 125th Street where Marta needed to go and apply for TANF assistance. She wrote the address on a piece of paper and wrote down the required documents she needed to bring with her, including

a copy of her children's social security cards and identification cards. Marianna went through the specific steps Marta needed to follow. She needed to tell the office workers that she was applying for benefits for her children and make sure she told them their doctor's name and their social worker's name. This script, in Spanish, gave Marta support to follow through with the application process, as she was nervous and unfamiliar with such bureaucracies. It allowed her to more confidently apply for these benefits which help her and her children, since they bring about lower household food insecurity as well as monies to pay for the rent. All of these resources support the children's health, their early childhood language learning and cognitive development, which helps to ensure a stronger foundation for their future health and academic development.

In a follow-up conversation with Marianna the following week, she told me Marta completed the application the day after their meeting and she was confirmed to receive the funding. It was not the first time Marianna had gone through such a detailed process of helping families apply for these types of services. The social workers conduct bi-annual wellness visits at each family's home in December and in May. They see the families' environment and check for safety at these visits as related to the child's development. As Marianna told me, away from the school, the mothers are more willing to discuss questions they may have about their children's education or inquire about issues related to health and housing, so they can connect them with services and provide them with the specific assistance they may need. She sees it as an integral part of her job to help families who may feel embarrassed to accept help. As she stated, "when we assist the mothers to apply for these services, we are helping the whole family and helping the children in particular, " acknowledging the importance these services have on the whole families' well-being and integration in society.

Many mothers previously participated in the mother and infant socialization classes at Helping Hands before their Head Start enrollment. While there, they became aware of the importance of those public assistance programs, such as Women, Infant, and Children's programming (WIC), that provided food subsidies. They also understood that the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) was available to their US-born children. While all the mothers were undocumented and did not qualify for public assistance programs on their own, their U.S.-born children did qualify for these resources as citizens. As Yoshikawa (2011) notes, many of these resources are proven to help young children's early development, but children are dependent upon their parents to enroll in the programs. Many undocumented parents are reluctant to do so out of fear of deportation or may not know they even exist. However, through their connections at these community organizations, these women did apply for these programs. Despite any hesitancy due to their legal status, they understood the importance of food subsidies, health insurance and housing resources as well as funding streams, like TANF, for their family's well-being, particularly for their children's development, which all improve their health and prospects for integration into American society.

Community organizations, such as the Shining Star Bilingual School and Helping Hands, provide sustained opportunities for families to build networks and build social capital, which is crucial for immigrant incorporation. Exchanging information, and accessing resources, like TANF and SCHIP, are associated with more positive parenting practices. This parental engagement helps with early childhood development, particularly among low-income populations, so the children of immigrants can integrate more successfully during their early years and into the future.

Conclusions

East Harlem has been an immigrant enclave for many generations, starting with Italians, followed by Puerto Ricans and then Mexicans. The Mexican community has more recently formed an ethnic enclave in the neighborhood, and indigenous Mexicans are more recent arrivals in the East Harlem community. The neighborhood has a longstanding tradition of meeting the needs of immigrants through community organizations and schools, including multilingual programming. The Shining Star Bilingual Head Start and Helping Hands are two organizations with sustained connections with immigrant groups, particularly indigenous Mexicans, as they have gained the trust of the mothers.

The Shining Star Bilingual Head Start was one of the first bilingual Spanish and English Head Start programs created in New York City as well as in the United States. It has a reputation as a quality program, teaching children in both languages. It is an important site to understand how indigenous Mexican immigrants in the neighborhood integrate into the school and the community through their work with the families in individual programming and social service enrollments.

The social workers knew the existence of this group in the school; however, indigenous Mexicans are invisible within the larger community. The information via the school intake survey does not adequately record the languages and cultures of the indigenous population and this knowledge is not provided to the teachers, who have little substantial contact with the indigenous mothers. The mothers are racialized as Mestizo Spanish speakers since the teachers did not know about indigenous cultures and languages in Mexico or in the case of the Mexican teachers, had not been exposed to indigenous peoples in Mexico. Some teachers looked at the indigenous language issues as deficiencies, which impacts how they understand and treat the

mothers as well as the children. But, with more information about the language and culture, there came more understanding about their specific needs.

While many mothers participated in the various health, nutrition, and literacy workshops, not all did so consistently due to their low levels of Spanish. However, due to strong social ties from repeated interactions, the mothers trusted the social workers. The undocumented mothers enrolled in public assistance programs, with help from the social workers, who also referred them to other health and housing social service organizations through their connections in the community. This parental engagement helps build crucial social capital that ultimately helps children, and their families integrate into their community more easily.

Chapter Four

Shifting Identities: Being Indigenous in Mexico and in New York

The commonalities that bound the twenty-one indigenous women I met at the Shining Star Bilingual Head Start School were their identities as indigenous mothers, and speakers of their indigenous languages, their undocumented legal status, as well as their dedication to the education of their children. All the women had grown up poor in Mexico, who understood that their success involved assisting their families and helping their children grow and thrive in their community. Their happiness revolved around their families and the daily tasks of food shopping, cooking, cleaning, and taking care of the children. From some perspectives, these responsibilities may seem limited. Still, to these women, the traditional gender roles of having partners, having children, and keeping the home in order were what they knew. While their roles revolved around domestic issues, they were not passive women. Some were quiet in demeanor, but all were optimistic and determined to do the best they could in their newfound city, for their entire family and their children's futures. They are indigenous women who enjoy their roles as mothers and raising families and they are also the ones responsible for engaging with American institutions that promote integration for themselves and their children. They are the main decision makers in the family, most responsible for getting the children to school. The mothers are the ones applying for benefits on their children's behalf and interfacing with other agencies such as Helping Hands, increasing their integration prospects. They are also most responsible for school decisions as well as language choices within the family, all of which influence their children's development and integration prospects in the United States.

However, just as the overall larger ethnic Mexican group is not homogenous, neither are ethnic indigenous Mexicans who come to the United States. The mothers at the Shining Star

Bilingual Head Start School had varying levels of identity associations in the United States as some identified as Mixtec or Nahuatl as well as Mexican, while others identified only as Mexican. They also had differing linguistic and educational backgrounds as some of them had attended school in Mexico through sixth grade, while a few had graduated from high school, while others had no formal schooling experiences at all. Some of the mothers had attended bilingual indigenous language/Spanish schools and others monolingual Spanish schools. The mother's prior life histories impact their own integration in the United States as well as their US-born children's integration and language learning, as the mothers are the ones responsible for their children's well-being.

This chapter focuses on the mothers' experiences in Guerrero, Mexico and New York City, their expressed identities in each location, experiences with discrimination and stigma in both places, and their educational and linguistic ideologies, including those about their children, which impacted their decisions about which language or languages they should learn. All the mothers valued multilingualism for themselves as well as for their children. The mothers all had basic Spanish skills at the time of the study. Some of the mothers were taking Spanish classes to improve their literacy skills and some were also learning English, in formal classes, or informally with their older children. They all wanted their children to learn Spanish as well as English. Their indigenous languages were affirming for themselves, and they all wanted their children to understand their histories. However, most were not actively teaching their children Mixtec or Nahuatl. Some were teaching their children basic phrases and words in their indigenous languages, while others wanted the children to have cultural understandings, to understand their family histories and identity. However, all the mothers wanted their children to learn Spanish to avoid discrimination they faced in Mexico. They also preferred they learn Spanish to

communicate with them as well be able to communicate with the larger Mexican community in this country. English language learning for their children was also important, so they could excel in school and be able to integrate into American society more easily.

Indigenous Guerrero

Eastern Guerrero, in the mountainous region, “La Montaña”, where all twenty-one of the women were born, is hot and dry, has few resources, and lacks economic opportunities. There is low access to quality health care and educational services, and it is marked by high poverty. It is a rural area that revolves around low-paying seasonal agricultural activities. To survive, some families migrate seasonally around the region for work picking vegetables. As a young girl, Joselin, one of the Mixtec mothers who had no formal schooling, left the area eleven years prior to migrating to the United States. Her family harvested the cucumber and tomato crops all over the state of Guerrero, leaving Xilotopec in November and returned in April, leaving little time for her to go to school. This left gaps in her education as she attended school intermittently, which caused her to drop out of school in fifth grade.

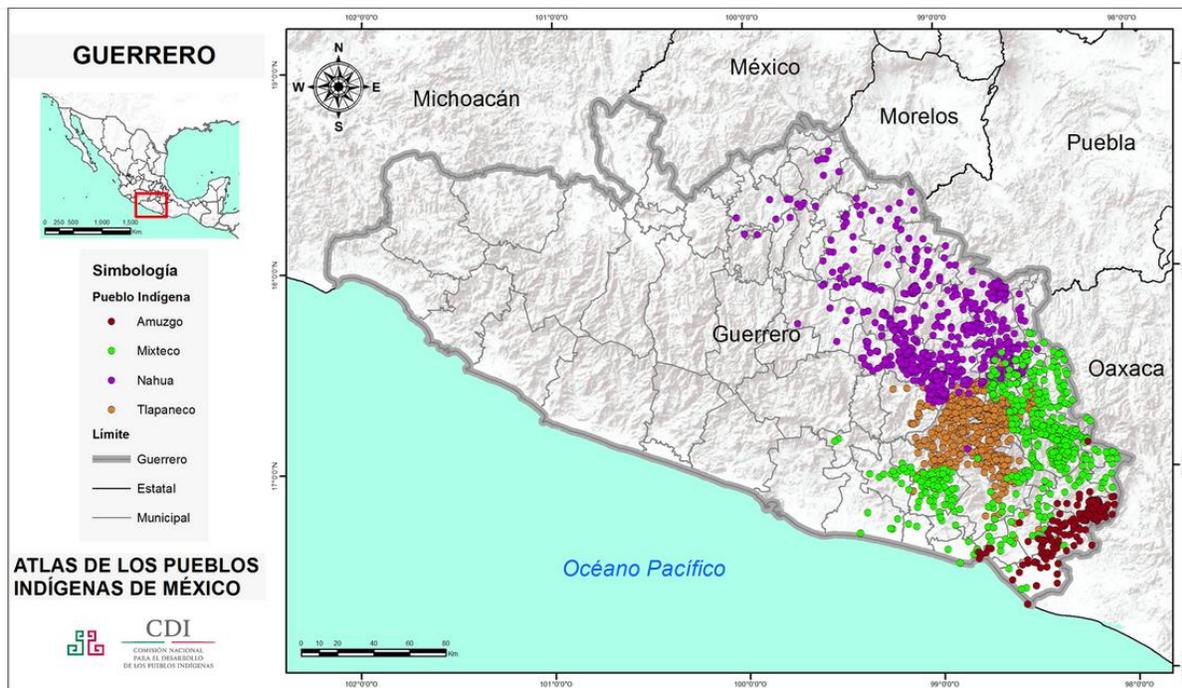
Many towns are filled with elderly individuals and young children, with a small middle-aged population, since many adults leave for the United States. All the women knew family, friends, and, in some cases, spouses who migrated to New York before them. Before the late 1990s, primarily only the men migrated to the United States, but the late 1990s into the 2000s saw an increase in the feminization of migration, with more women leaving their towns. The implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994 exacerbated the financial crisis in rural places like the Mixteca region, as agricultural prices plummeted, spurring more out-migration, primarily to the United States and the New York region (Massey, D,

Durand, J. & Malone, N., 2003; Binford & D’Aubeterre, 1999). Many families rely on financial remittances, that is the monetary support of those who send money from the United States, to sustain themselves since there are few available jobs and economic opportunities in the region.

According to the Mexican Census, the state of Guerrero has the highest out-migration rate to the United States, and Cochoapa el Grande and Metlontonac are two towns in Guerrero deemed to have the highest poverty rates in the nation (INEGI, 2020). Thirty-nine percent of the population in the state of Guerrero identifies as indigenous (INEGI, 2020). Indigenous people live in the Eastern part of the state of Guerrero, speak Mixtec and Nahuatl with the most frequency, as well as Amuzgo and Tlapaneco, two other spoken indigenous languages, as shown in Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1

Indigenous Groups of Guerrero



Map Source: Instituto Nacional de los Pueblos Indígenas (INALI), “Atlas de Los Pueblos Indígenas de México. Guerrero: Población indígena en el año 2015 (2018)”.

Through targeted governmental revitalization programs aimed at improving equity issues for indigenous populations, the Commission for the Development of Indigenous Pueblos (La Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas), has worked to decrease the existing inequalities in health and education. Nevertheless, educational attainment rates are still grim. According to the Mexican Census, Guerrero's school attendance and graduation rates have improved over two decades, but they are still remarkably low. Fifty-one percent of the state population has a primary school education, and only 15.5% have completed high school. Additionally, 11.9% of the state population has had no formal schooling (INEGI, 2020). Seventy-nine percent of the indigenous people in Guerrero reported speaking Spanish, but the census data do not elaborate about reading or written literacy skills. The average state illiteracy rate is 16%, but the illiteracy rates are more than 50% in some indigenous towns in the Alcozauca region, where some women resided before migration. Because of patriarchal structures which limit women's access to formal education, indigenous women are more likely than men to be monolingual speakers of their heritage languages when they migrate to the United States (Blackwell, 2017). Additionally, in Mexico, women continue to demonstrate lower overall literacy levels than men, and this gender disparity is more significant among indigenous women (Trevino, 2013).

Research has consistently shown that these low educational attainment rates can be attributed to low teaching quality, a lack of funding and resources, and inconsistent language policies in indigenous schools (Schmelkes, 2008; Garcia & Velasco, 2012; Santibanez, 2016). With increased teacher training, qualified indigenous teachers have also increased in number, but there are still not enough individuals to fill the demand. In some cases, monolingual Spanish teachers fill the gap, but they do not provide effective Spanish and indigenous language

bilingual/bicultural instruction, which Ida affirmed. "I went to a bilingual Mixtec/Spanish school through sixth grade. I learned Spanish in school so that I could speak some, but I could not speak it well, and I cannot write in Spanish."

For the mothers in this study, the number of years of schooling and literacy levels varied depending upon the type of schooling available in their town and region. Like Ida, ten women graduated from sixth grade, five attained some primary schooling, while three women had no formal education. Three women internally migrated with their families to Tlapa de Comonfort, the main commercial center of the state, when they were younger than ten years old and graduated from high school. They were proficient in Spanish, benefitting from the higher-quality schooling found in larger towns. The eight women who had no education and only some primary level classes had lower levels of Spanish speaking fluency, as evidenced in the interviews conducted. Those who graduated from primary school, in general, had higher levels of Spanish-speaking fluency. While I did not formally assess their literacy skills in reading and writing, I observed their abilities and many told me they had difficulties reading and writing in Spanish, as in the case of Ida.

Elie was the only woman who attended Secundaria (middle school); however, she only attended the middle school for three months. It was difficult to travel over rundown roads to a neighboring village since Cuba Libre, her home community, did not have any schools beyond primary school. The daily commute was arduous, and she ultimately left school. Several of the other mothers told me they faced similar access issues if they did not go beyond primary school. Others stated that the expenses related to schooling stopped their education since books, uniforms and transportation costs can be prohibitively expensive for rural families.

The mothers' own educational backgrounds affected their language use and language choices in Mexico, which also shaped their linguistic decisions once they migrated to New York. These factors, in turn, influenced their identities as well as the educational and linguistic choices for their children, topics which will be discussed in the following sections.

Being Indigenous in Mexico

Since ethnic identification is situational, how members of a group identify depends on whom they interact with and how their ethnic identification is relevant in particular situations. The ethnic label a person identifies with is shaped by structural factors that can limit choices; however, an individual has agency over some decisions (Nagel 1994). Language and culture were central to how the women identified themselves in both Mexico and New York.

In Mexico there were opportunities to speak their indigenous languages with elders who were often monolingual indigenous language speakers, who had not learned Spanish in school. Many women also spoke their indigenous languages with family members and trusted friends. As Ida stated, "In Mexico, I feel more Mixtec. All of the village of Xautlatache speaks Mixtec, and there are many opportunities to speak it with the elders, at home, and in the street."

Women who had no formal education were most likely to affirm their indigenous identities in Mexico. As Marta said, "We did as our grandparents did. We spoke their language, Mixtec, and we cooked the same foods." They had vivid memories of and strong ties to their language, shaped by a culture filled with pride in indigenous traditions transmitted by their elders and ancestors, even as they let go of some practices such as typical dress.

Those who had graduated from primary school and high school were most likely to abandon some of those indigenous traditions and take on more "modern" ways of doing things,

including speaking Spanish. Gloria, a Nahuatl woman who had finished primary school, exemplified this pattern. She identified more strongly as Mexican than as Nahuatl due to her Spanish language learning in school and at home with her mother.

I identify more as Mexican. I went to a Spanish-speaking school, and my mother only spoke to us in Spanish. My father spoke to us in Nahuatl, which is how I learned it – and my parents spoke in Nahuatl together. But I feel most comfortable speaking in Spanish because I can communicate best that way.

While Gloria identified both as Nahuatl and Mexican, and spoke both languages fluently, she identified more as Mexican since she went to a Spanish-speaking school (not a bilingual one), where she did not learn Nahuatl.

Similarly, Jazmin and Olga, who had graduated from high school and had grown up in Tlapa, surrounded by Mestizos, both identified as Mexican. Neither had attended bilingual schools, but learned indigenous languages in the home, with their parents. Jazmin went on to say,

I went to a school where we only spoke Spanish and learned everything in Spanish. I learned Nahuatl from my parents and only speak some Nahuatl with them and with my husband, but I speak in Spanish with almost everyone else. Many people do not think I speak Nahuatl because I speak and pronounce Spanish well.

Having attended Spanish-speaking schools, Gloria, Olga, and Jazmin were not just conversant in Spanish, but also had become fluent readers and writers in Spanish. However, they did not abandon their indigenous languages as they continued speaking the languages with their parents as well as with their partners in their homes.

For many people in Mexico and the United States, Gloria, Olga, and Jazmin, who are fluent Spanish speakers, present the face of *mestizaje* (race mixing), that is neither European (Spanish) nor indigenous but Mexican, that has strongly marked Mexican identity since the

Mexican Revolution in 1917. Manuel Gamio, an influential anthropologist in post-revolutionary Mexico, published *Forging a Fatherland* one year before the creation of the 1917 Mexican Constitution. In his book, which embodied the ideology of mestizaje, Gamio refers to creating a new mixed nationality. With the publication of Gamio's book and other texts, mestizaje gained widespread attention. *La raza cosmica* (The Cosmic Race) by Jose Vasconcelos (1925) and *Mexico integro* (Integral Mexico) by Moises Saenz (1939) both proposed that mestizaje would allow Mexico to become a modern nation. To achieve a just society, Gamio believed linguistic homogenization was required. On his part, Vasconcelos asserted that the Latin American subcontinent had given birth to a 'fifth race,' consisting of a mixture of Europeans and Africans, indigenous peoples, and Asians. Saenz focused on cultivating mestizaje through a solid and unified school system that taught Spanish to everyone, including indigenous people.

It was in this period in the 1920s and 1930s that Gamio founded the intellectual, ideological, and political movement known as indigenismo (indigenism), which attempted to modify indigenous cultural practices to lead indigenous groups toward cultural integration into mestizaje. He founded the Department of Anthropology within the Ministry of Federal Education and encouraged studies that provided the scientific foundations for development projects. Mestizaje ideology was institutionalized and disseminated in the centralized Mexican school system. Moises Saenz, who had studied at Teachers College, Columbia University with John Dewey, designed and developed a new curriculum about Mexican history and civics to create national citizens. For indigenous populations, Saenz devised a plan to teach Spanish through literacy instruction in various indigenous languages to serve as a transition between indigenous languages and monolingualism in Spanish. It was a philosophy of learning Spanish through indigenous languages, but ultimately abandoning indigenous languages.

These programs were in place through the 1970s until indigenismo received criticism as a project to construct a unified national identity (Stavenhagen, 2001). Integration policies had not solved Mexico's social inequalities, which led to the questioning of cultural and linguistic homogeneity for all Mexicans. The Mexican government created indigenous radio stations, as well as bilingual/bicultural Intercultural Education curricula in the 1970s (Martinez-Casas, et al, 2014). During the economic crisis in the 1980s, when the peso devalued, the Mexican government sought to regain legitimacy by endorsing pluralism, acknowledging Mexico as a multicultural and multilingual nation, recognizing sixty-eight official languages in the country.

After the Zapatista rebellion in the state of Chiapas in 1994, indigenous people's legal recognition became central to forming the present multicultural model. Still, the demands of the protestors demonstrated that recognition of multiculturalism was insufficient. The uprising challenged perceptions about ethnic diversity and equality and the myth of the submissive indigenous Mexican, instead showing indigenous people as political actors, making demands for equality and indigenous rights.

In 2001, Mexico passed a comprehensive Constitutional reform proclaiming indigenous peoples' right to their languages and cultures and political autonomy. While some of the reforms have actually been instituted, they have generally been limited to cultural recognition and educational policies, including bilingual education reforms and making available indigenous language interpretation in courts. The Mexican government has been unresponsive to many of the demands of indigenous leaders, such as land reform, leading these leaders to discount how meaningful the reforms have been (Martinez-Casa, et al, 2014).

Education still plays a central role in the advancement of mestizaje, which simultaneously praises indigenous cultures but relegates indigenous peoples to the past. In

primary school textbooks distributed throughout the country, indigenous people are portrayed as "folkloric", implying they are a part of Mexico's past rather than the present (Galvan, 2010).

These nostalgic representations of indigenous people perpetuate the idea that they are from the distant past and unimportant in contemporary Mexico, leading some indigenous youth to dissociate from their indigenous ethnic identities.

However, ethnic and racial identification trends in Mexico appear to be shifting in the aftermath of the 1994 Chiapas uprising. According to Census data, the number of Mexicans who identify as indigenous has increased over three decades, rising from 6.2 percent in 2000 to 14.8 percent in 2010 and 19.2 percent in 2020. Since 2000, the Mexican Census has given residents the right to self-identify based on their own culture, traditions, and history, rather than just their language proficiency. This policy has increased the number and percentage of people who identify as indigenous and, according to some accounts has also resulted in ethnic revitalization (Coronel-Molina and McCarty, 2019). Many more people are proud of their indigenous backgrounds and have responded accordingly.

Many of the mothers were proud to be indigenous and to speak their languages. As Olga, a Mixtec, declared, "I am fortunate to speak another language, and I am proud about that." Alternatively, as Lucila, another Mixtec, articulated, "I am proud of where I come from and proud of my roots." Guadalupe, a Nahuatl, reiterated the same sentiments, "I am not embarrassed to speak Nahuatl because it is where I am from." However, even as indigenous people take pride in their heritage, there is still widespread disdain and discrimination for indigenous people in Mexico, and this carries over to places where they migrate.

Experiences with Discrimination and Stigma in Mexico and New York City

While mestizaje proliferated in the 20th century in Mexico, the racial hierarchies that place indigenous people on the bottom tier of this hierarchy originated even earlier, in the colonial era, when indigenous people ranked below Mestizos, and White Spaniards at the top (Wade, 1997). Colorism, where lighter-skinned individuals have more advantages than darker-skinned, continues to play a role in maintaining inequality and discrimination practices in Mexico (Telles, 2014), and these dynamics persist across generations (Campos-Vasquez, R & Medina-Cortina, E., 2017).

These racial hierarchies manifest themselves in everyday life, not just in schooling and educational attainment, but are widespread in employment hiring practices and the media. Individuals with the lightest skin tones are hired for better jobs with the most frequency and fall into the highest income brackets as compared to those with darker skin tones (Zizumbo-Colunga, D. & Flores, I., 2017). In television, in ads and in films, lighter-skinned individuals are still cast with the most frequency, and even now, calls for actors with light skin still occur. For example, in 2013, a casting call for an Aeroméxico airline commercial sparked outrage for specifying that they were looking for actors with "light complexions" and added that "no one dark-skinned" should apply. Aside from identifying what skin color applicants should have, the call for actors stated that it was going for a "Polanco look", referring to Mexico City's wealthiest, whitest, and most exclusive neighborhood.

Apart from commercial programming, television and movie productions cast light-skinned actors in prominent roles and portray indigenous people in stereotypical, backward ways. La India María, performed by the mestizo actress María Elena Velasco, was a popular character in television shows and films. The character was a comedic depiction of a

stereotypical poor, rural woman who was the butt of jokes and easily tricked. The 1939 film "El indio," starring Pedro Armendáriz and Consuelo Frank as indigenous farmworkers, introduced an early form of comedic "indios" that inspired Velasco's character. More recently, in 2019, Yalitza Aparicio, an indigenous Mexican actress who won an Academy Award for her performance in Alfonso Cuarón's "Roma," was mocked by television personalities for her Mixtec and Triqui ancestry. Sergio Goyri, a Mexican actor, was caught on camera making vicious, racist remarks about Aparicio, referring to her as a "damn Indio" who was unworthy of her role (Los Angeles Times, 2019). The word "indio" in Mexico (and most of Latin America) is not just a neutral word for "Indian" or "indígena" but used as a derogatory racist and classist insult to signify someone backward, lazy, and primitive. To refer to a Mexican as an "indio" is the ultimate insult, as it is a demeaning and condescending racial slur.

Most of the mothers experienced these slurs and other types of discrimination in Mexico and New York City from other mestizo Mexicans. Reina, a twenty-two-year-old Mixtec, lamented, "I felt sad to speak Mixtec in Mexico because they made fun of me and would say things like, 'There goes la india'." Lucila, a thirty-year-old Mixtec who had lived in New York for eleven years said, "there are people who think and speak differently about Mixtecs. They say things like we come from the ranch, or we are 'indios', and yes, this happens with Mexicans in NYC too." The discrimination and marginalization that indigenous people face in Mexico is frequently reproduced in communities of Mexican immigrants in the United States. Elie, a twenty-seven-year-old Mixtec, who had also lived in New York for eleven years, similarly felt ridiculed in Guerrero as well as in New York for speaking Mixtec and for having darker skin.

In Mexico, people look at you funny when you speak Mixtec because they do not understand. Sometimes people do not respect you. They look at you like you are a

nobody. They should not do that. It's usually very subtle, but it's how they look at you. But sometimes it is direct. In Tlapa, they used to tease me for having darker skin. Sometimes they say, 'no you stay here' and they let someone who is not Mixtec go first. In Mexico if you have darker skin – if you are not White - you are treated differently. This also happens in New York City, by some Mexicans.

Apart from feeling stigmatized for speaking her language, Elie also described instances of being teased and being treated unfairly in Mexico for having darker skin. She related that in Tlapa, Guerrero, the main town closest to her small village, she was not allowed to go into some stores and that she and her friends would be barred from entering some restaurants and dance clubs. She said that some of that same treatment also occurs in New York City, in how some mestizo Mexicans look at and talk poorly about indigenous people on the street.

Like 'indio', 'dialecto' is another slur used to delegitimize indigenous languages and diminish their importance. Elie continued, "Most people do not know I am Mixtec, and sometimes when people find out, they say to me, "Do you speak 'dialecto'? (referring to the Mixtec language) Then they say 'really'? when I tell them I do. But they say it like they do not believe it. I tell them yes, yes. I speak Mixtec and I am proud.". The word 'dialecto' has become widely used throughout Mexico as well as in the Mexican community in the United States, but it's a pejorative reference. While Elie did not use the word to describe her language as she was relating the incident, a few of the mothers did use it, as did the Mestizo Mexican janitor at the school, showing how ingrained these terms have become in Mexican culture.

Francisco, a Mestizo Mexican janitor who worked at the school, used the term 'dialecto' to describe the language indigenous Mexicans speak. He told me he had never seen any instances of overt discrimination against anyone at the school, but he also did not know any of the indigenous mothers since he did not interact with any of the parents directly and had only been working at the school for three months. However, he related his experiences in his town in

Mexico as well as working in restaurants, in his prior jobs in New York City, where many indigenous Mexicans also work.

I have known people who speak ‘dialecto’ in the restaurants where I have worked. They were the only indigenous people I have ever known since we have no indigenous Mexicans in my town in Cholula, Puebla. Here (in New York City) the indigenous Mexicans don’t really interact with those of us who speak Spanish. They get along better with those who speak their same language.

Francisco acknowledged the divisions in the workplace between Mestizos and indigenous Mexicans, but he also kept reiterating that in his family they did not treat anyone badly or discriminate against anyone. However, he stated that discrimination does exist in Mexico, by people overtly saying words like ‘indio’ or that media perpetuates these ideas.

There are people who discriminate against indigenous people, like in Mexico City, where they may do it in a mocking tone. They may do that - but in my family we do not do that. We all use different words to express ourselves. Some might say ‘indio’, but it depends. Sometimes it is in an angry tone and sometimes it is more playful. I also see this a lot in movies and television.

Francisco went on to say that he did not think that discrimination existed between indigenous Mexicans and Mestizos in New York City. “There is no racism or discrimination here in New York between us. We are all the same. We are all immigrants.” He was insistent that because all of them were immigrants, they all were in lower positions in the United States and were all subjected to discrimination from other Americans as well as other Latinos. However, the indigenous women’s experiences contradicted that statement, as most of the indigenous women had experienced discrimination from other Mestizo Mexicans. The women also acknowledged they had experienced discrimination outside of the Mexican community, with other Latinos, as well.

Sandra, like Elie, was proud of her indigenous heritage and was not afraid to speak Nahuatl outside of her home, on the streets, with her friends. She related that she too had

experienced prejudice and been treated unfairly by Mexicans and had negative interactions with some Dominicans and Puerto Ricans as well. She recalled an instance on the street group of Dominican women, who were strangers to her and her friends, but made derogatory comments. She reenacted the conversation.

Dominican woman, in a group: “Que estan hablando pinche viejas? Estan hablando de mi’ (What are you f*ing women talking about? Are you talking about me?)

Sandra: Disculpe senora, no estamos hablando de ti, estamos hablando en nuestro dialecto.” (Excuse me lady, we are not talking about you, but we are talking in our language.)

Sandra was very upset about the incident, but proud that she was able to defend herself and say something back to them in Spanish. However, she remembered another instance when a group of Puerto Rican women were speaking in English and laughing at her and her friend, who were speaking in Nahuatl. Since she did not understand what they were saying in English she was not able to shield herself from this kind of treatment. Sandra said that these types of instances with both mestizos and other Latinos deter people from speaking indigenous languages publicly. She said she has cousins who do not want to speak Nahuatl on the street and when she sees them, they respond to her in Spanish. However, if they are in their homes, they will speak with her in Nahuatl.

Similarly, Elsa tries to speak Mixtec with those she knows who speak the language but said, "I have had bad experiences on the street in NYC. I know people who are Mixtec, and they will not speak it with me. People will just ignore me. I am not sure why they do that. I don't think they want others to know they are Mixtec."

Kata provided additional comments, “There is discrimination in Mexico and within the Mexican community here too. They make fun of us. That’s why many do not like to speak

Mixtec here (in New York City). It's of a different status for some people." These experiences decrease the likelihood that they will speak their indigenous languages in public. This continual stigmatization and discrimination cause some indigenous Mexicans to try to hide or mask their indigeneity, not just in Mexico but in the United States, which impacts identity expression.

Just as the women sometimes sought to hide their identities from the school social workers and teachers, many indigenous people did not want to disclose their indigenous identities outside in the community and do not want to disclose their indigeneity in other settings, including with other Mexicans. The stigma indigenous people faced in Mexico stays with them and to protect themselves they do not want to engage with other indigenous Mexicans on the street or with other Latinos in New York City. Many try not to speak with other Mexicans in public places using their indigenous languages to avoid presenting any markers such as language which could lead to discrimination toward them. And they are eager to have their children learn Spanish as well as English.

Language and Identity in New York

Many factors influence the use of indigenous languages, Spanish as well as English in New York in everyday interactions. These are variable and dependent on context, particularly regarding who is talking and when and where the conversation occurs. On the whole, there is a greater likelihood that one will hear Mixtec and Nahuatl in private contexts, such as at home, where the speakers feel a greater degree of trust, rather than in public places, such as the school and on the street, as I just explained in section above. As Ida stated,

Outside of the school, I speak a little bit of Mixtec with a few friends and with my father who is here, but I also speak a little Spanish with him. I do not know if the other mothers know I am Mixtec. I do not think so. I am not going to ask another person if they are

Mixtec. It might really bother them. Here at the school, I only say I am Mexican and not Mixtec.

Like Ida, most of the women did not know other indigenous mothers at the school. Some did not interact with them, especially if their children were in different classrooms. However, even if they did have some contact at the school, they did not ask or exchange information about their indigenous identities, mainly out of respect. Gloria said, “No one knows I speak Nahuatl here, at the school or out in the city.” Many of the women noted that there was not as much of a distinction between indigenous and Mestizo in the United States as in Mexico, where geographic segregation creates ethnic divisions and an unspoken understanding of where people are from, so that many could identify more freely in New York. As Mari stated,

I identify as Mexican. In my town, I spoke Nahuatl, but here in New York, not much. I prefer speaking in Spanish. Sometimes I am embarrassed to speak Nahuatl in front of others...oh, I do not know. All the rest of the people speak Spanish here, so I do not want them to think I am speaking badly of them if I speak in Nahuatl since they may not know what I am saying. No one here thinks I speak Nahuatl. I only speak Nahuatl with my husband.

Mari, like all the indigenous women I spoke with, knew that speaking Spanish was essential to communicate within the Mexican community and with other Latinos. This oral fluency in Spanish may seem to others that they are fluent Spanish speakers. This helps mask their indigenous ethnicities and enables them to choose when to be indigenous or mestizo, depending on where they are and with whom they are with.

All the mothers were orally fluent in Spanish in varying degrees at the time of the study, but some were not fully literate and able to read and write in Spanish. Elsa, Marta, and Amelia, who had no schooling, and Ana, Luisa, and Rina, who had very few years of schooling, all had lower levels of Spanish fluency and more limited vocabularies to express themselves. They had the most difficulty reading the school announcements or mail and asked for translation

assistance. Learning Spanish or improving their Spanish language skills was very important for all the women who did not arrive speaking Spanish fluently. As Lucila said, “I identify as both Mixtec and Mexican. I speak both Mixtec and Spanish...now, but I learned Spanish mostly here.” As Ida said, “I went to a bilingual Mixtec/Spanish school through sixth grade, so I learned a little Spanish in school, but I could not speak it well. I actually learned how to speak Spanish here in New York City.” Lucila and Ida both improved their Spanish language skills in New York by speaking Spanish within the community. Some of the indigenous women learned Spanish independently on their own, some learned Spanish with their Spanish-speaking spouses and children, while others took Spanish language classes within the community. The school, through the monthly classroom meeting, also provided a way for the mothers to learn or reinforce their Spanish language skills. In short, for many indigenous women, moving to New York brought pressures to improve their Spanish, so that immigration was not just a way to learn English, but to hone their Spanish-speaking language skills.

The monthly family literacy classes in the classrooms on the first Friday mornings of each month, provided time for community meetings with the social workers and the teachers, communicating news and information about the upcoming monthly events, but also served as a literacy activity for the mothers and children to listen to a story together. The teachers modeled questions and pointed to the pictures in a Spanish language storybook. While it was a fun family activity that was educationally beneficial for the children, it was also useful for the mothers, showing different ways to read stories with their children. For the indigenous mothers, it was also beneficial for their own Spanish language development.

In one of these community morning meetings in the Planet classroom, the mothers all sat on the classroom rug, with their three-year-old children in their laps, attentively listening to a

story about ocean animals. The children had recently returned from a field trip to the Brooklyn aquarium that I also had attended. This literacy activity provided background information and vocabulary to help the children and mothers talk about the experience. As the teacher opened the book, the children squealed in delight, seeing dolphins and jellyfish, like those they saw on their trip. Some shouted out the names in Spanish while others spoke in English.

Sitting near Luisa, I overheard her speaking to her son Gabriel in Spanish, asking him to tell her his favorite ocean animal. When speaking with her later in the day, she remarked how she enjoyed the reading activity. Luisa commented that she did not read books when she was young. Leaving school after second grade, she did not learn how to read very well. “Here, I started reading Spanish books with my son. With my older son, (who was still in Mexico), I never read to him since we did not have any books and I did not how to do it. Here, I have learned, and I read in Spanish all the time.” The classroom activity not only facilitated a parent engagement strategy with the children, but also helped the mothers develop their own Spanish reading skills.

English was also important to the women. Those who lived in the United States for longer periods of time were more likely to enroll in English classes or have more experiences speaking in English with older children. For Elie, English was difficult but necessary to navigate her community.

English, ah English...I know some words, but it's taking a long time. I am learning a bit of English though, with my older son. He will tell me words. I identify as a Mixtec and a Mexican, but here it really is challenging to say what my identity is...It's hard, right? She laughed and said, “If I had my papers, I would definitely say Mexican-American. But, papers or no papers, a part of me is here. I have spent a lot of my life here. My three children were born here, and they are American - and Mexican. I came eleven years ago when I was sixteen years old, and I have grown up *a lot* here. Eleven years is a long time.

Elie acknowledged the challenges of articulating her identity, as she felt that she was not only an indigenous Mixtec, but also a Mexican, and increasingly, more American, but not solely an American, but a Mexican American. She felt Mexican, but she felt more American the longer she lived in the United States, whether legally recognized or not. The longer Elie stayed in the United States, the more she felt a part of the country, particularly because she has children who have United States citizenship. Elie, like all the indigenous mothers, was undocumented in the United States, with US-born children who had citizenship.

While citizenship was part of being American for Elie, so was speaking English, but it was not necessarily the only aspect to being an American for her. Speaking Spanish did not preclude her from partaking in American culture, especially since she had many opportunities to speak Spanish within the East Harlem community and around New York, with other people, as well as with her children. Citizenship status, or lack thereof, did not dissuade her or any of the mothers from learning Spanish or English or speaking their indigenous languages. Additionally, when discussing her children's identities, she firmly asserted they were American, due to their US citizenship. However, she also affirmed their Mexican identities, proclaiming them to be both, Mexican and American - to be Mexican American - speaking both English as well as Spanish.

Multilingual Mothering: Language and schooling for the children

While sitting on the bench in a local park, Sandra looked up to the sky, paused, and said, "We have thought of leaving, but we stay for the children and especially for their education." As a teenager, Sandra had left Cuachimalco, Guerrero, eight years before, arriving in East Harlem with other family members and friends. After finishing sixth grade, she lived with her

Nahuatl-speaking mother and father, but the pull of New York, like most others from her town, called her when she was eighteen years old. When Sandra arrived in New York, she worked as a live-in housekeeper in Brooklyn for six months and then did various jobs at a Korean dry-cleaning business for a year. After two years, she met her husband, who had arrived in New York fifteen years earlier. They were from the same town, but they had not known one another in Mexico because he was older than she was. When her two children were born in East Harlem, she stopped working to take of them. Even though they could use the money as a family, it was worth not paying the cost of childcare, and most importantly, not having to leave the children with someone else. However, she recently started earning a bit of money by picking up another child at her older son's elementary school and dropping him off at home, which did not interfere with her mothering responsibilities.

The challenges of living in the city were difficult for Sandra and her family. Living in a costly, \$2100 cramped walkup apartment, a few blocks from the school, they took in a new housemate to stay in the living room to help pay the rent, which was why we spoke outside. With seven adults, including her brother-in-law's family of two adults and two children, and her husband and two children, there was not much personal space in the two-bedroom apartment. These types of living arrangements were very common for most of the families.

Like all the indigenous mothers, Sandra was attentive to her children's educational needs, ensuring that her three-year-old son Nicholas arrived at school on time, was well dressed, and neatly groomed. She also made sure he and his older five-year-old brother had toys to play with, and she provided reading material, ordering bilingual Spanish and English children's magazines, which I saw her pull out of her mailbox.

The preschool was the first formal educational institution the mothers and their children experienced in the United States. Some mothers had questions about how schools worked since they were different from the schools they attended in Mexico. Some mothers had questions about college, even if it seemed far away for their children, but asked perhaps due to my university affiliation. All the mothers had high educational aspirations for their children. As Reina, a Mixtec mother of two-year-old and four-year-old boys, stated, "I want my children to become *something*. I hope they go to the university, and they get a good job." Whatever those future aspirations entailed, the women understood that education was part of getting to those goals.

By making sure they learn not just Spanish, but also English, the mothers were keeping the immigrant family bargain, which can be defined as an intergenerational expectation in which all the efforts of the parents will be converted into future educational success for their children (Louie, 2012; Smith, 2006).

All the mothers expressed gratitude for the preschool since their children could participate in activities, they did have the opportunity to enjoy in their own schools in Mexico. As Ida, a twenty-three-year-old Mixtec, said, "Here (in the bilingual school), they learn more than over there (in Mexico). Over there they do not have classes sometimes because the teachers go on strike.", referring to frequent school closures that occur in rural areas in Mexico (Zabludowsky, 2013). Many appreciated that their children painted, sang, and danced with regularity and all the mothers were happy their children were learning Spanish. All the mothers wanted their American-born children to speak Spanish and English, which was the main reason they enrolled their children in a bilingual school. Being multilingual themselves, they understood the importance of speaking more than one language. "When someone only speaks

one language, they are limited.”, asserted Lucila, “We speak only in Spanish with the children. The children speak Spanish and English and sometimes between themselves they speak English. I want them to speak both languages.”

Spanish became the primary household language for all the families once they had children. Some of the mothers made a choice to speak Spanish with their children because they did not want them to face the discrimination they received in Mexico or when they spoke their indigenous languages in New York. Some thought the children might get confused speaking three languages. For others, marrying a Mestizo, a Spanish speaker, there were fewer opportunities to speak indigenous languages, and Spanish became the dominant language spoken within the family.

While supporting multilingualism, the mothers wanted their children to have a cultural understanding of their indigenous languages and heritages; they taught them some words in Mixtec or Nahuatl but focused on supporting their children’s Spanish and English language development. As Kata affirmed,

Life can be very difficult if you do not speak Spanish. I speak to my children in Spanish. My son says not to speak to him in Mixtec but only speak to him in Spanish to understand me. The children speak in Spanish and English. I sometimes teach them words in Mixtec. Their grandparents are also here, and they speak Mixtec as well as a little Spanish.

Many of the mothers want their children to understand their history and speak some indigenous words so they can speak with their grandparents in Mexico but recognized the challenges of having few indigenous speakers around them in New York City to reinforce the language. As Elie articulated,

When my children talk with my mother, who is in Mexico, by telephone, I translate. I tell the children different words in Mixtec to say to her when they speak with her. I tell them it is important to learn some Mixtec to speak with their grandmother on the

telephone and for when they will go visit her in the future. I speak some words to them, but no one else can speak it (Mixtec) with them.

Elie discussed the importance of her children learning some Mixtec, to be able to speak the language with their grandmother, her mother, but she also acknowledged the challenges of translating Mixtec by telephone and not being able to be in person with her. She hopes that her own children as US citizens will go to Mexico to visit her family, even if she will not be able to leave the country visit her mother.

Similarly, Reina acknowledged the challenges of children not speaking the indigenous languages and the language loss that happens within families,

When people come here, to New York, they stay, and the children only speak Spanish and English. But Mixtec is important, which is why I teach my children some words. It's essential for the children to understand the past, to be able to know their history – to be able to speak with their grandparents. I hope we will be able to go back someday to see my mother. I really want to see her, and I want them to know their grandmother.

She hopes that not just her children will go to Mexico to meet her family, but that she too, will be able to accompany them, as she misses her family since she has not been able to return to Mexico since she left five years before. However, like Elie and the rest of the mothers, Reina understood that due to the rigid US immigration policies, leaving the United States without authorization was risking their ability to return to there. They also understood that changing their legal status was not only a difficult and a complicated process but would take a long time.

Apart from the usefulness of speaking the language with family members and to better understand their family histories, some mothers thought that speaking indigenous languages could be helpful in the future for their children if they could get translation jobs, helping the community. Gloria recognized those possible opportunities but was not teaching Nahuatl to her children, stating that indigenous languages are difficult to learn outside the family context.

Sometimes the children ask me why I speak Nahuatl with my mother, and I tell them that is her language. It's the language of over there, just like English is the language here. However, Nahuatl is important because they could get a job translating. They can learn whatever language they want. They can learn Nahuatl, but it will be difficult.

While Gloria was hopeful her children could learn Nahuatl, she also understood the reality that if they did not learn it as children, it would be very challenging to learn in the future since they would have few opportunities to do so outside of her home.

Other mothers put a different emphasis on language learning for their children. Mari thought Spanish and English were important languages to teach the children in New York and was more important over the preservation of Nahuatl.

My son has asked what my husband and I speak when he hears Nahuatl. We use it when we are together in private or when we do not want him to hear something...but we speak Spanish with him. Nahuatl is worth saving in Mexico, but here in New York, we should not work so hard to save it. It's not so important to learn it here (in New York). We should not forget it, of course, but English is very important and so is Spanish, so we should concentrate on speaking those languages.

While she did not want her son to forget Nahuatl, she felt that the children should focus on learning Spanish and English, which would help them for their own futures in the United States.

Similarly, Ida asserted, "My son has no interest in speaking Mixtec because he does not understand me. He does not pay attention. They need to listen to me speaking in Spanish, not Mixtec. We speak in Spanish in the house."

Whatever the parents' preferences the fact is that Spanish and English are the languages that their children are learning. Although Olga said the community should preserve indigenous languages to maintain its identity. She acknowledged that most children are not learning the language since there are few occasions to assemble in groups to speak and hear the language or to celebrate indigenous dance or musical traditions.

I think Mixtec is important for our community and our identity, so it is not lost. We should work hard to teach Mixtec, especially for the children, but that is really difficult because there are so few connections and strong ties in the Mixtec community. There are no opportunities to get together to celebrate Mixtec traditions. Most of the children do not know Mixtec. They may know a few words like water or fruit or phrases.”

Similarly, Kata and Lucila acknowledged that children are not learning Mixtec. Kata was optimistic that the language will continue since Mixtec was still actively spoken in homes, but she agreed that children are not speaking the language. “I do not think Mixtec is dying yet because we speak it in the house”, said Mari, “but if the children do not speak it, it will disappear.” Lucila had some regrets about not teaching her children Mixtec and understood that children were the key to the continuity of the language and culture.

The children do not understand Mixtec. My second son said to me, "Why didn't you teach me to speak it?", but the other two have not asked, said Lucila. I regret that I have not taught them Mixtec because, in the future, they could get a better job, or they could help other Mexicans and Mixtecs. But I do not think most children are learning Mixtec. There are Mixtec dances, but no one is preserving them. The language and the dances will die out if we do not teach the children.

Most of the women admitted that the children were not learning Nahuatl or Mixtec nor were they learning the cultural traditions. Some of the woman felt strongly that the children should keep these traditions, including the language; however, some prefer to have the children focus on learning Spanish and English. Some of the women, like Lucila, regret that they have not taught their older children their histories and languages since it could be useful in their futures and fear that if the children are not carrying them forward, they will become lost in New York and will no longer be spoken in the future.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the role of language in the social construction of identity of first-generation indigenous Mexican parents in both Mexico and in New York. It has also explored their own language ideologies and their identities as well as their perspectives on their children's engagement with these languages.

Identity shifts and changes depend, to a large degree, on location and social context. In Mexico, the boundaries are bright between indigenous Mexicans and Mestizos. While physical geography maintains some of these boundaries, the national ideologies and policies surrounding indigenismo have led to stark divisions within Mexico well as in the United States. While a current turn to multiculturalism in Mexico has created some acceptance and a slight blurring of boundaries, there is still widespread discrimination towards indigenous peoples in Mexico, which also carries over to places where they migrate such as New York. To bridge boundaries, many indigenous language speakers shift to learning Spanish. This process starts in Mexico and continues in East Harlem, in organizations such as the Head Start bilingual school and the Helping Hands organization. As a community space where there are many Spanish speakers, the mothers can communicate more easily with native Spanish speakers, even if they are not fully fluent in the language.

As much as identity shifts in different places, it also shifts over time. The longer a person stays in a place, the more they identify with their new surroundings, although this does not necessarily mean an abandonment of their old identity. Thus, while the women I met and interviewed still identify as indigenous, they also identify as Mexican – and the longer they stay in the United States, they feel a bit more American, or Mexican American, whether they have

legal status or not. Speaking Spanish and learning Spanish or English does not prevent them from partaking in American culture or even identifying as more American.

Thus, language - Spanish as well as English - can be both a barrier as well as a bridge, depending on the context. While the mothers are earnest in their attempts to learn English, many prefer Spanish language learning for themselves and their children to tap into the networks within the Mestizo, Spanish-speaking Mexican community, as well as the greater Latino community. Many indigenous mothers value their indigenous identities and language and maintain the language through speaking it with other indigenous immigrants in the context of their homes, not in public. However, the desire to teach their indigenous languages and pass along their culture varies. Some say that they want their children to speak their indigenous languages, to be able to communicate with their grandparents, but others do not value it, instead focusing on Spanish and English. Those who want the children to speak indigenous languages acknowledge there are few available written resources available and few opportunities for community engagement, so the indigenous languages and cultures are diminishing since most of the children are not learning it. For the mothers, indigenous Mixtec and Nahuatl languages become less significant in New York, and speaking in Spanish becomes their priority, especially with their children, who are also, and increasingly learning English.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

This chapter concludes by coming back to this project's central research questions and by discussing the overarching project conclusions. It also considers some implications of the study for policy and practice, limitations of the research, and the possibilities for further investigation.

Mexican-origin individuals, both immigrants and the second-generation and beyond, constitute a large part of the population in the United States (Krogstad & Noe-Bustamonte, 2021). As recounted in sociological studies, their complex histories as both an immigrant group and a colonized group have impacted their integration into American society. Some studies portray their integration more positively (Perlmann, 2005; Alba and Nee, 2003), others more negatively (Lopez and Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Portes and Rumbaut, 2001; Portes and Rumbaut, 2006). More recent studies have shown that the Mexican experience is unlike the more linear European integration experience (Jimenez, 2010; Vasquez, 2011; Agius Vallejo, 2012, Telles and Ortiz, 2008; Telles and Sue, 2019). Much of this is due to the heterogeneity of the Mexican population. There are recent Mexican immigrant arrivals and second, third, and fourth generation+ descendants, including those who have intermarried, primarily with White individuals (Jimenez, 2010). Indigeneity, another aspect of heterogeneity within the Mexican population, is much less understood as there is little research and understanding of how indigenous Mexicans are faring in American society. The analysis in the previous chapters points to several conclusions about the experiences of indigenous Mexicans in New York City.

As Ruben Rumbaut (2009) states, the United States is a "graveyard" for languages. Immigrants who arrive as adults, understandably, generally feel more comfortable in their home-country language, but its use declines in the second generation, and inevitably the third

generation is, overwhelmingly, monolingual in English. In one sense, this is a story of language decline, but the case of indigenous Mexicans indicates that it can also be a story of language learning. While indigenous language use is rapidly declining in New York, with the dramatic drop in indigenous language usage in the second generation, the fact is that indigenous Mexicans are becoming more adept at and comfortable with Spanish in the immigrant context. Although, some first-generation indigenous Mexicans come to the United States speaking Spanish, others learn it when they arrive. They come to the United States understanding and valuing multilingualism and have a multilingual mindset from their own bilingual schooling experiences and multilingual interactions and seek to pass on this value to their children, albeit in Spanish and English.

While there is concern that the Spanish language will divide the United States, impacting American national identity and social cohesion (Huntington, 2004), learning Spanish does not preclude or impede learning English. Most immigrants will learn some English, eventually. And there is evidence of the development of bilingualism instead of language loss for Spanish speakers (Linton and Jimenez 2009; Tran, 2010), which facilitates a bilingual context of reception.

The contexts in which immigrants enter are essential for integration (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001; Marrow, 2011). East Harlem has been a Spanish-speaking enclave for many decades, primarily due to the settlement of the Puerto Rican and Dominican communities and other Latin American groups. Spanish-speaking immigrants and their immigrant descendants have risen into leadership positions in community organizations and schools. Spanish can be a bridge for immigrants from Mexico and other parts of Latin America, facilitating connections with those in the large Spanish-speaking population. In East Harlem, Spanish-speaking leaders

within community organizations and schools can assist indigenous immigrants, generating social capital for the families and helping them and their children to successfully make their way in New York.

Implications for the second-generation

While this study focused on first-generation indigenous Mexicans, it has implications for our understanding of the second-generation too. It is too soon to say precisely how indigenous children will integrate in the future, but we can gain some insights through the study of indigenous mothers and their influence on the second-generation (Bean, Brown & Bachmeier, 2015; Yoshikawa, 2011).

While indigenous languages still operate within the family context, their decline is inevitable for the second-generation and beyond since they are not taught to the children. It is clear that the Spanish language is valued within the family context, and the indigenous children speak Spanish within the family and learn English in school. Bilingual education is important for future educational attainment. Learning Spanish and English in early childhood may provide a strong foundation for future educational endeavors. Studies show that multilingualism helps cognitive abilities, strengthening executive brain functioning, a significant predictor of academic success (Best, Miller & Naglieri, 2011). In turn, academic success predicts long-term health and well-being for children into adulthood (Duncan, Ziol-Guest & Kalil, 2010).

It is not yet known what may happen if or when the children surpass their parents' Spanish language abilities. It could be a factor in what Portes and Rumbaut (2006) call 'dissonant acculturation' if the children and the parents cannot communicate effectively in the same language with one another. Still, given the parents' increasing use of Spanish, this does not seem to be a worrying prospect in the case of indigenous mothers – and their children – whom I

studied. In fact, the mothers' intense desires for, and efforts toward, their children's educational success bodes well for their future. Especially in an immigrant-friendly place such as New York, the children are likely to experience what Kasinitz, et al. (2009), call the 'second-generation advantage', which sets them up to do better than their parents.

Implications for policy and practice

This research has implications for policy and practice at local and national levels. Many teachers, including those who are Spanish speakers themselves, do not understand the diversity of the Mexican population and do not know that Mexico is a multilingual and multicultural country. Widespread teacher training would facilitate this. Additionally, there is a need for adult Spanish language classes, at schools or within community organizations, for literacy development for indigenous populations and those with low schooling levels. Having a firmer grasp of literacy skills in Spanish can help with the transition to learning English so that what is learned in one language does not have to be re-learned in another (Garcia, 2008). Similarly, there is a need for the creation of indigenous language materials, to facilitate literacy skills as well as foster cultural understanding.

At this writing, the United States may be embarking on the most significant expansion of early childhood education since the formation of Head Start if President Biden's Build Back Better Plan passes the Senate. As part of a more comprehensive plan, free universal preschool will be provided for all children. As the research shows, investing in early childhood education helps children (Meloy, B., Gardner, M., & Darling-Hammond, L., 2019; Bitler, M., Hoynes, H and Domina, T., 2018; Whitmore Schanzenbach, D. & Bauer, L., 2016). However, enrollment in preschool programs depends upon the parents knowing about these types of programs – and, at

least so far, their ability to pay for them (Yoshikawa, 2011). The availability of universal early childhood programs may enable more widespread access and usage of these programs, benefitting indigenous immigrants and their families in other places, outside of East Harlem, who may not know about them or do not enroll their children out of fears of legal status.

Lastly, integration prospects for immigrants are hampered by legal status.

Just as indigenous families have mixed-language statuses among them, speaking all three languages, indigenous families also have mixed-legal statuses. While the children have United States citizenship, their parents do not, which can inhibit the parents' integration and their U.S.-born children's (Yoshikawa, 2011). It may be a time to revisit DAPA – Deferred Action for Parent of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents, an initiative first proposed under the Obama administration that would have provided deportation protections for parents of U.S.-born children. It was an initiative that did not go into effect and was then rescinded under the Trump administration. President Biden vowed to reinstate the program if elected. While his administration has not yet created widespread immigrant-friendly policies, DACA – Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals – has been reinstated, providing relief for a significant number of undocumented individuals. Implementing DAPA would offer more protections for other undocumented individuals and significantly help give U.S.-born children the security of knowing their parents could not be deported from the United States. Each of the indigenous women in this study would benefit and qualify for DAPA.

Limitations and possibilities for further investigation

With any study, there are certain limitations. I captured the experiences of indigenous Mexican women in one context, in one neighborhood in New York City. While this can be limited, it was an opportunity to delve more deeply into this context through qualitative

ethnographic research methodology consisting of semi-structured, open-ended interviews and participant observation. This methodology allowed me to better understand this population, which can be difficult to access through large survey methods. I was able to see what the mothers did in their everyday settings and speak with them directly to understand their perspectives from their point of view and in their voices.

I believe this study provides an exploration into understanding the indigenous Mexican population in New York and opens further opportunities for research. First, a longitudinal analysis would be beneficial to understanding both the mother's and children's integration and their language and identity development over time to see how the indigenous, Spanish, and English languages and corresponding identities evolve. Second, comparative research with other bilingual schools and English-only schools can provide further understandings in different educational contexts. Another comparative study would be to compare the New York context with other areas of the United States, such as California, where large indigenous communities also reside. Third, further research can be conducted in different contexts where language is salient, such as in hospitals and the court system, to see how indigenous Mexicans navigate these systems. Lastly, to better understand internal heterogeneity, more in-depth research among indigenous and Mestizo Mexicans can be conducted to better understand how racialization processes work within the Mexican community.

Conclusion

The research presented allows us to understand a newer immigrant group in New York City and appreciate the experiences of immigrants within the diverse Mexican community, including indigenous Mexicans. This research provided a window into the integration, language

use, and identity formation of indigenous Mexican immigrant women into an English-Spanish multilingual context in New York City. It also presents information on how they are faring and developing strategies in their communities, schools, and families. It offers more details on how marginalized, undocumented indigenous women negotiate the contexts of bilingualism, which also has implications for their U.S.-born children. This dissertation, I hope, will lead to additional studies to understand their experiences and the experiences of their second-generation children.

Appendix 1

Family Profiles – Three-year-old classrooms

<i>Class</i>	<i>Mother's Name</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Indigenous Language Spoken</i>	<i>Years in the US</i>	<i>Highest Level of Schooling</i>	<i>Children (born in NYC, unless noted) *bolded child enrolled in Head Start</i>
Clouds	Ana	28 years old	Mixtec	8 years	2 nd grade	Boy – 7 years old Girl – 5 years old Jenny – 3 years
	Mari	22 years old	Nahuatl	5 years	6 th grade	Ian – 3 years old
	Joselin	31 years old	Mixtec	11 years	5 th grade	Boy – 11 years old Boy – 9 years old Janeth – 3 years
Planet	Luisa	28 years old	Mixtec	6 years	2 nd grade	Gabriel – 3 years old Boy – 10 years old (living in Guerrero)
	Olga	28 years old	Mixtec	7 years	12 th grade	Diego – 3 years old Girl – 8 years (born in Mexico)
	Rina	29 years old	Nahuatl	7 years	3 rd grade	Boy – 5 years old Girl – 3 years old Boy – 9 months
	Elie	27 years old	Mixtec	11 years	6 th grade	Boy – 8 years old Alex – 3 years old
Moon	Sandra	26 years old	Nahuatl	8 years	6 th grade	Boy – 5 years Nicholas – 3 years old
	Jazmin	28 years old	Nahuatl	7 years	12 th grade	Jose – 3 years old Boy – 1 year old
	Ida	24 years old	Mixtec	6 years	6 th grade	Mateo – 4 years old Girl – 10 years old (living in Guerrero)
	Madeline	26 years old	Mixtec	5 years	6 th grade	Javier – 3 years old

Appendix 1 (continued)

Family Profiles – Four-year-old classrooms

<i>Class</i>	<i>Mother's Name</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Indigenous Language Spoken</i>	<i>Years in the US</i>	<i>Highest Level of Schooling</i>	<i>Children (born in NYC, unless noted) *bolded child enrolled in Head Start</i>
Mother Earth	Elsa	43 years old	Mixtec	6 years	No schooling	Girl – 5 years old David – 4 years old Boy – 4 months 18- and 10-year-olds in Guerrero 24-year-old in NYC
	Ita	26 years old	Mixtec	5 years	12 th grade	Victor – 4 years old Girl – 2 years
	Marta	34 years old	Mixtec	5 years	No schooling	Renata – 4 years old Boy – 1 year (17, 14, 10-year-old boys in Guerrero)
	Amelia	24 years old	Mixtec	5 years	No schooling	Ximena – 4 years old
Atmosphere	Gloria	38 years old	Nahuatl	7 years	6 th grade	Boy – 7 years Girl – 6 years Natalia – 4 years old (25-, 16-, and 14-year-olds in Guerrero)
Supernova	Paloma	26 years old	Nahuatl	7 years	6 th grade	Jesenia – 4 years old
Meteor	Reina	22 years old	Mixtec	6 years	6 th grade	Julian – 4 years old Boy – 2 years old
	Alicia	24 years old	Nahuatl	5 years	6 th grade	Jorge – 4 years old Girl – 2 years old (8 yr. old girl in Guerrero)
	Kata	24 years old	Mixtec	7 years	6 th grade	Daniela – 4 years old Boy – 2 years old
	Lucila	30 years old	Mixtec	11 years	4 th grade	Boy – 11 years old Boy – 9 years old Vicente – 4 years old

Appendix 2

Head Start Family Demographics

Mexican – 65 (both parents)

Mixed Ethnicities – 6

- Mexican-Dominican – 2
- Mexican-Puerto Rican – 1
- Mexican-Ecuadoran – 1
- Mexican-Salvadoran – 1
- Mexican-Guatemalan – 1

Indigenous Mexican families breakdown – 21 out of 65 Mexican families

- Mixtec - 14
- Nahuatl - 7

Puerto Rican – 21 (both parents)

Mixed Ethnicities - 8

- Puerto Rican-African American – 4
- Puerto Rican-Ecuadoran – 1
- Puerto Rican-Honduran – 1
- Puerto Rican-Moroccan - 1
- Puerto Rican-Salvadoran -1

Dominican – 16 (both parents)

Mixed Ethnicity - 1

- Dominican-Columbian – 1

African American – 11 (both parents)

Ecuadoran – 6 (both parents)

Mixed Ethnicity - 1

- Ecuadoran-Thai – 1

Guatemalan – 2 (both parents)

Honduran – 1 (both parents)

Senegalese – 1 (both parents)

Mixed Ethnicity - 1

- Senegalese-Canadian – 1

Caribbean (French speakers) – 2 (both)

TOTAL = 142 families

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