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Labor, Limits, and Liberty:

A Study of Day Laborers at a Grassroots Collective in Southern California

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
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by

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Abstract

Day laborers in the United States have increasingly become a source of labor in the informal economy due to the pressure for businesses to reduce labor costs (Gonzalez 2007; Ordóñez 2016; Valenzuela 2001). Day laborers provide necessary labor yet are exempt from typical workplace regulations, making them an ideal source for inexpensive labor (Theodore, Valenzuela Jr., and Meléndez 2009). Though day laborers are a vulnerable population, they are also united and show strength as a collective. This project is an ethnography of a grassroots organization of day laborers in Southern California that I call the Day Labor Center (DLC). I argue that migrant day laborers, despite vulnerabilities and structural inequalities, demonstrate agency and flexibility in the workplace and in their everyday lives.

Through 22 months of fieldwork, including observations, interviews, and group discussions, I present the experiences of migrant day laborers to reveal the unique contradictions they face as they navigate employment alongside broader structural boundaries that add to their precarious existence. While migrant day laborers are economically marginal, they simultaneously control their own labor in ways that other workers cannot when they set their own schedules, negotiate wages, and choose their employment conditions. Furthermore, because most day laborers are undocumented, they are a marginalized workforce, yet openly visible as available workers and active participants of the community. My fieldwork reveals that migrant workers at the DLC demonstrate "local citizenship" (Villazor 2010, 574) as they have become embedded into the local community and may serve as a potential model for how local community members and policymakers can offer more inclusive spaces for migrants. This research

highlights the central role of day labor centers as sources of empowerment for migrant workers as they provide services, encourage collaboration and resource-sharing, and foster community. Finally, although many migrant day laborers are isolated and far from family, labor centers can foster a sense of community and empower them to create new forms of kinship and belonging. Ultimately, this research contributes to current anthropological scholarship regarding migration and labor and informs our understanding of the varied experiences and responses to vulnerabilities that migrant workers confront.

Dedication

I dedicate this research, with incredible gratitude, to the workers at the Day Labor Center, whose stories could only begin to fill these pages. Thank you, for welcoming me into your world and trusting me to learn about your lives. I hope that I have served you, in some small way, to bring more justice to your futures as you labor for yourselves, your families, and your communities. You are inspiring.

And, to my family, without whom this project could never have been realized; who have sacrificed time, energy, and resources to make this happen. This dissertation is as much mine as it is yours. I dedicate this work especially to my incredible husband, David, whose prayers and support have meant the world to me. And to my children who have been gracious as they watched me work tirelessly into the night and encouraged me with their laughter and love along the way. Do not stop believing. You are possible!

And, to my *abuela*, in her memory, who came to America from El Salvador and lived a selfless life through serving her family and her neighbors. Her love and support over the years inspired this work as I learned from her the kind of resiliency and strength it takes to make a new home in a new world. *Con cariño, abuela.*

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Chapter 1

Labor, *Limites*, y *Libertad*: Labor, Limits, and Liberty

One Saturday morning, a woman drove up to my field site, a semi-formal grassroots collective of day laborers that I call the Day Labor Center (DLC). She explained that she needed a gardener and was willing to pay $10 per hour. It was a warm day in September as Mateo lamented, “They don’t pay very much. Always, they want to pay so little. She should pay $20 per hour in this heat. Sometimes, they try to get us for $8 per hour! What a joke, eh?” No one took the job. About fifteen minutes later another employer came to hire a worker for $15 per hour to help in a warehouse, loading and unloading boxes. He requested a “young man” as he pointed to Omar, a migrant worker from Mexico who fit the description of the “ideal” day laborer: young and strong.

Leonardo, who sometimes volunteered as a coordinator, helped with the negotiations and they came to an agreement. Several others began to joke with Omar in Spanish, hoping the *patron* would not understand, “Careful, man…he wants your young body – he wants you man! Go, Rico Suave!” [in reference to an attractive, Latino celebrity]. Omar brushed them off and then got into the car with the employer and drove to the job site. Another fifteen minutes passed as the joking continued, “Rico!” they yelled in high-pitched voices, imitating screaming fans. They were laughing and spurring one another on to continue the banter.

About ten minutes later, another employer arrived looking for two men for a digging project. The workers wanted the job but insisted on $20 per hour because the day had heated up and digging is hard work in the sun. The employer accepted and off they

went. There was more noise, more activity, and fewer jobs as the day went on. "Every day is something different for us – maybe there's work, maybe there is no work. Maybe I'll go out today, and maybe I won't. *Todo depende.* It's all a chance – we gotta make money, so we're here," Mateo affirmed as he made a motion of resignation with his arms up in the air. It was early in my fieldwork and already I could sense the precariousness that day laborers faced on a regular basis. Every day was unpredictable. At the Day Labor Center, the noise, joking, banter and opportunity were dependent on several factors such as the weather, number of jobs coming in, mood of the workers, and the level of activity. But, every day, they were there, available and waiting for a chance to earn some money.

Introduction: Migration and Labor

As the world has become vastly interconnected in recent decades at a faster pace than ever before (Appadurai 1996), global capitalism and the rise of neoliberalism have motivated labor migrations (Mize 2008), producing "neoliberal governmentality [which] ensures the availability and precarity of cheap, flexible migrant workers for privileged citizens" (Constable 2014, 13). As part of my master's thesis, I conducted fieldwork in the Garment District of Los Angeles where I investigated "sweated labor" or work at a "factory or homework operation that engages in multiple violations of the law" including "the non-payment of minimum or overtime wages and various violations of health and safety regulations" (Bonacich and Appelbaum 2000, 3). I discovered that migrant workers were the primary source of labor in these factories, overwhelmingly from Mexico, El Salvador, Honduras and many other countries throughout Latin America. I learned that labor and migration are cultural processes that are embedded in a system of

global economics where "the dynamics that converge in the global city produce a strong demand for low-wage workers" (Sassen 2002, 256). My research of apparel factories in Los Angeles clearly revealed that migrant labor is just one part of a broader set of global economic processes, one in which migrant workers emerge as immensely valuable because of their vulnerable status.

There seems to be no question that migrant workers are in high demand. David Bacon, a labor organizer and immigrant rights activist, argues that migrant workers have become an "indispensable part of the global system," as immigrants are represented in several sectors around the world, including *maquiladora* (factory) workers from Honduras and Mexico along the U.S.-Mexico border, oil industry workers from Bangladesh and the Philippines in Iraq, and agricultural workers from the Caribbean throughout the East Coast in the United States (Bacon 2008, 70-71). Migrant day laborers in the United States, the primary subject of this dissertation, demonstrate an important part of this growing labor sector as an informal, available, and largely undocumented work force. It is estimated that every day approximately 117,000 workers, who often gather at informal hiring sites near home improvement stores, gas stations, and public spaces, are either looking for day labor jobs or are employed as day laborers (Valenzuela et al. 2006, i). Nationally, the vast majority of day laborers are immigrants from Mexico (59%) and Central America (28%), while U.S.-born workers make up only a small representation of laborers (7%) leaving 6% from other nations (Valenzuela et al. 2006, iii). The strong representation from Mexico reflects a complicated relationship with the United States alongside geographical proximity to the U.S. Southwest.

Mexico is the largest source of immigrants to the United States at 28% of all United States immigrants (Pew Research Center 2014). This reflects the history between the United States and Mexico, which has included guest-worker programs and complicated legislation. The Bracero Program is probably one of the most critical pieces of legislation in the history of Mexico-U.S. labor migration. Designed to employ temporary laborers from Mexico, the Bracero program was in effect from 1942 to 1964, bringing more than two million Mexican workers to the United States (Mize and Swords 2011, 3). Through its implementation, workers were allowed to enter the United States to serve in a number of labor-intensive jobs, particularly in the agricultural sector, by way of a limited, "nonimmigrant visa policy" (Johnson and Trujillo 2011, 35). Under the Bracero program, "the U.S. government admitted temporary entry of nearly 4 million Mexican workers" (Johnson and Trujillo 2011, 35), who accepted contract employment for considerably low wages by U.S. standards. As a result, bracero workers were the norm in the agricultural sector for their low-cost labor.

Additionally, during this time, unauthorized migration into the United States actually increased for several reasons. One of the most significant reasons that historian Kelly Hernandez (2009) asserts was the practice of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) to offer bracero contracts to unauthorized border-crossers who had been apprehended. Thus, crossing without documents into the U.S. could almost guarantee a labor contract. Despite the program's termination in 1964, numerous braceros remained as "clandestine guest-workers" (Johnson and Trujillo 2011, 35) as U.S. employers had grown accustomed to utilizing Mexican workers. Additionally, Mexico's economy suffered and offered little opportunity for employment nor social assistance to support the

near 60% of Mexicans in poverty conditions (Hernandez 2009, 27). Ultimately, as Ruth Gomberg-Muñoz points out, "the duration and scale of the Bracero Program dramatically increased the interconnections between the U.S. economy and Mexican workers, establishing a migration pattern that could endure with or without the benefit of access to visas" (2017, 27).

Another benchmark for current trends in migrant labor was the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) which opened the borders between Mexico, the United States, and Canada in terms of labor regulations (Adkisson and Peach 2009). A trade agreement that would drastically change relations among these countries and the laborers from them, NAFTA was designed to remove federal labor and tax regulations in order to increase profits for businesses, creating a corporate competition for the cheapest labor (Bacon 2004a, 2004b). Almost immediately after NAFTA passed in 1994, factories sprang up all along the U.S.-Mexico border, including garment and textile workshops, electronics and component factories, and meat processing plants as well as canneries, packaging plants, and several other assembly-line industries. One of the goals of NAFTA was to enable foreign companies to move their production to Mexico to utilize a cheaper labor force while increasing the number of jobs for Mexicans. Unfortunately, NAFTA had deleterious effects. The result of "lifting restrictions on the movement of capital, goods, money, and business at the same time that…border operations restricted the movement of Mexican workers" was that it "devastated the working and living conditions of many Mexicans as cheap, mass-produced U.S. grains and goods flooded Mexican markets, pushing farmers off their land and undermining the ability of Mexican craftspeople to sell their wares" (Gomberg-Muñoz 2017, 31). Agricultural workers from

Mexico's rural communities migrated to the northern border to look for jobs in factories in hopes of earning wages.

David Bacon argues that increased neoliberal policies throughout this time period that were "designed to foster foreign investment, have undermined the laws that have historically protected workers, farmers, and the poor" (2004b, 12). As workers were exposed to difficult working conditions and exploitative pay, many decided to cross into the United States, despite the risk of apprehension, in hopes of securing better employment conditions and higher pay on the other side of the border (Hernandez 2009). The results of NAFTA are palpable today and have included driving down wages (Adkisson and Peach 2009), producing numerous inequalities (Bacon 2004a), violations of human rights (Landau 2005), an increase of poverty (Garcia 2006) and exploitation of a migrant labor force (Mize and Swords 2011).

The realities of globalization, or worldwide interconnectedness, manifest in various ways, such as the global exchange of finance, ideas, natural resources, disease, and media, which emerge through the lives of migrant day laborers. Anthropologist Arjun Appadurai (1996) suggests that the role of the sovereign nation-state is dramatically changing and proposes the concept of "scapes" to describe how intersections within the global community converge. These include "ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes, and ideoscapes" (1996, 33). Appadurai reveals that "the complexity of the current global economy has to do with certain fundamental disjunctures between economy, culture, and politics" (1996, 33), where the exchange of labor has become a cornerstone of financescapes, arguably the core location where global processes have become intricately interdependent. Stock market integration, the global flow of goods and

services as they are imported and exported between nations, and the way in which information travels so quickly today clearly signify a shift in global relations.

Labor migration has become an integral part of financial connectedness, where multi-national corporations can now hire workers from around the globe, motivating individuals (and communities) who seek wage labor to migrate to where the work is available. Sociologist Saskia Sassen (2002) argues that economic globalization must be understood locally and nationally such that by focusing on production, "we shift our emphasis to the *practices* that constitute economic globalization: the work of producing and reproducing the organization and management of a global production system and a global marketplace for finance" (2002, 256). Labor and migration are clearly embedded within a global economy (Lamphere, Stepick, and Grenier 1994), and yet it is the people in local contexts who are most affected: "If we recapture the geography behind globalization, we might also recapture its workers, communities, and work cultures" to discover "how global processes become localized" (Sassen 2002, 257). Embedded in the global economy as essential for production, day laborers make up an important subset of migrant workers who reveal much about migrant labor as part of the informal economy. Because much of their work takes place in the homes of employers or among private small business owners, this study augments what social scientists have learned about migrant workers across the globe, particularly how they experience harsh labor conditions, restrictions, and agency differently than workers in other, more visible sectors. Migrant day laborers also exemplify how global labor migration becomes localized as they live and work in local communities throughout the United States.

The Day Labor Center (DLC) where I conducted my research is uniquely situated as it represents the links between local and global economies. The DLC is physically located at a local home-improvement store, in a small suburban community that I will call Portbridge, which has a population of approximately 11,000 people according to the U.S. Census Bureau (2017). More broadly, Portbridge is situated in what I will call Overton, a much larger city with a population of nearly 470,000 and home to the largest port-city access in the United States. Overton is incredibly diverse with one of the largest Latino populations in California at 42% of the total population in 2017, is a core destination site for Thai and Cambodian migrants with nearly 14,700 Mon-Khmer, Cambodian speakers, and is home to African American and White residents, who make up about 12 percent and 26 percent respectively (Data USA 2016; US Census Bureau 2017).

Finally, Portbridge and Overton are part of Los Angeles County, an extensive metropolis with over 4 million residents, nearly 35% of whom are migrants from all over the world (US Census Bureau 2017). Significantly, Portbridge is like many other suburbs of cities within Los Angeles County where “old money,” a colloquial term used outside of the community to describe the wealth of many Portbridge residents, is the source of much of the visible wealth in the county. An oil-rich landscape, Portbridge has many residents of who are affluent as a direct result of working for oil companies or owning wells which produce oil in Portbridge, while others have inherited wealth that came from the booming oil industry in the 1930s. Thus, Portbridge stands out as a location of wealth compared to the poverty that can be found within a few blocks from the center of town.

The most recent data from the Pew Research Center suggests that California is home to nearly 15 million "Hispanic" residents, making up 39% of the total state population (Pew Research Center 2014). Additionally, Portbridge, Overton, and Los Angeles are all characterized by a wide socioeconomic gap between poverty and wealth where one can easily observe high-end, million-dollar homes within blocks of homelessness, project housing, and low-income developments. Recent statistics reveal that the average earning for "Hispanic" residents in California was $22,000 annually (Pew Hispanic Center 2014), just under the poverty line ($24,000) for a family of four. Understanding the dynamics of the local geography as it is embedded in a global cityscape illuminates the environment and cultural milieu in which migrant day laborers at the Day Labor Center experience labor migration in unique and empowering ways despite the incredible challenges they face.

"Illegality," Terminology, and Migrant Day Labor

Throughout this dissertation, I use the terms "migrant," and "immigrant" interchangeably to connote actors who are characterized by movement both within the United States and across borders. For the primary subjects of this research, I utilize the terms "migrant worker" and "migrant laborer" as the vast majority of the workers at the Day Labor Center migrated to the United States primarily in search of work opportunities. Additionally, terms such as "unauthorized" or "undocumented" refer to many of my subjects' immigration status. A core finding of my research is that being undocumented is one of the primary reasons that migrant workers have utilized day labor as their primary

form of employment and has been an important element that has shaped how they have experienced exclusion and belonging in the United States.

Anthropologist Nicholas De Genova (2002) argues that the "production of illegality" stems from a combination of factors including migration history, social parameters under which migrations occur, and immigration policy. Further, De Genova argues that foundationally, "undocumented migrations" are rooted in "labor migrations" within a "global capitalist economy" (2002, 423). De Genova also points to the ways in which "immigration" has become essentialized and widely understood as "generic" while the distinctive history and experiences of individual migrants are neglected. Instead, policies become written that fundamentally view immigrants as a single entity or a "problem" (De Genova 2002, 433). As the state monitors "undocumented" migrants but still relies upon their labor, the state exercises a significant degree of control over migrants who are "disciplined [through their] illegality" (De Genova 2002, 425). De Genova argues that migrants who are "undocumented" are especially controlled through their "deportability" (2002, 438). Because migrants are consistently vulnerable to surveillance and can be asked to produce documentation for any number of reasons, they are constantly aware of the consequences of being labeled "illegal."

Further, the term "illegal" deems immigrants' very presence as outside of the law – as "outlaws" (Peutz 2010, 372). The use of terms like "illegal" or "alien" has significant implications for who "belongs" and who does not and creates exclusion as migrants are constructed as what Mae Ngai (2013, 12) describes as "impossible subjects." In this view, migrants often find themselves as impossibly present, working and moving within a nation-state and yet, not "officially" permitted to exist. This has serious

implications for how migrants are treated unequally in society, an experience that my research addresses.

Bridging the study of migration and the study of how people provide for themselves and others, anthropologists and other social scientists have explored myriad ways in which immigration and labor are connected as global processes (e.g. Constable 2014, Heyman 2012, 2016, Mize and Swords 2011, Rothstein 2007; Sassen and Smith 1992, Seol and Skretny 2004, Valenzuela 2001). As workers traverse national borders, their "bod[ies] have become [a] site of inscription for the politics of immigration, defining what we can call, [in Foucauldian terms], a biopolitics of otherness" (Fassin 2001, 4) where some bodies fare far better than others. Current scholarship affirms that migrant workers remain a significant labor source throughout the globe whether in garment production (Bonacich and Appelbaum 2000), agriculture (Bade 1999; Holmes 2013; Horton 2016; Sanchez 2013), health care, domestic service (Bales 2002; Ehrenreich 2002; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2002) or factories (Ngai 2005; Salzinger 2000, 2003; Striffler 2005). As a "subaltern" (Gramci, 1929, 1) population, their bodies, it seems, have become the most efficient for decreasing labor costs while increasing profits.

In this context, the body is a day laborer's most important asset and causes us to consider from another perspective how the commodification of the body within the context of global capitalism and wage labor has critical effects on workers. Much of the literature about migrant labor focuses on migrant workers' vulnerabilities such as their susceptibility to low wages and little to no benefits (Bank-Muñoz 2008; Lugo 2008, Ngai 2005) and strenuous and even dangerous working conditions (Bade 1999; Holmes 2013; Horton 2016a, 2016b; Ortiz 2002; Striffler 2005; Stuesse 2016). Collectively this

research has represented laborers in factories and in the agricultural sector, common locations of migrants. In these work environments, labor is heavily controlled, uniformity is expected, and productivity is primary.

Migrant workers in the informal economy, such as those employed in domestic work as nannies (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2007; Parrenas 2002), housekeepers (Anderson 2000, 2002; Barber 1997; Constable 2002, 2007; Gamburd 2000) or gardeners (Ramirez and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2009) have become an essential part of the U.S. economy and around the world. Less represented in this scholarship, however, are migrant day laborers whose experiences as workers in the informal economy parallel that of other migrants and yet are unique in many ways (Malpica 2002; Ordóñez 2015; Purser 2009; Turnovsky 2004). Day laborers are an emerging set of workers among the migrant work force, who have increasingly become a source of labor in the informal economy due to the pressure for businesses to reduce labor costs (Gonzalez 2007; Ordóñez 2016; Theodore, Valenzuela Jr., and Meléndez 2009; Valenzuela 2001). Day laborers provide necessary labor yet are exempt from typical workplace regulations, including health benefits, paid time off, and overtime, making them an ideal source for inexpensive labor (Theodore, Valenzuela Jr., and Meléndez 2009).

Because of the intimate nature of the work they do in employers' homes and businesses, labor violations are frequent, including dangerous working conditions (Meléndez et al. 2013; Raythod 2016; Theodore, Valenzuela Jr. and Meléndez 2009; Walter et al. 2002; Walter, Bourgois, and Loinaz 2004), underpayment (Organista et al. 2013), and discrimination, which may lead to maltreatment on the job (Negi 2013; Quesada et al. 2014). Still, day laborers make up a unique category of migrant workers

who express agency in their ability to turn down jobs for a number of reasons including pay, conditions, type of work, or employer preference and enjoy many of the freedoms and flexibility of being a day laborer. My fieldwork reveals that migrant day laborers are characterized by many contradictions. I argue that migrant day laborers, despite vulnerabilities and structural inequalities, demonstrate agency and flexibility in the workplace and in their everyday lives.

The Contradictory Experiences of Migrant Workers

This project is an ethnography of a grassroots organization of day laborers in Southern California. Through 22 months of fieldwork which included participant observation, interviews, group discussions, and informal conversations, I have generally divided the results of my research into these primary themes: labor conditions, citizenship, and transnational kinship and community. Throughout each chapter, I present the experiences of migrant day laborers at one particular day labor center to reveal the unique contradictions they face daily as they navigate employment as day laborers alongside broader structural boundaries that add to their precarious existence. This research aims to contribute to current anthropological inquiries regarding labor migration and immigration processes while also establishing the potentially critical role of day labor centers to mitigate some of the challenges that migrant workers tackle. Throughout the following chapters I pose the question: How do migrant day laborers, despite vulnerabilities and structural inequalities, demonstrate agency and flexibility in the workplace and in their everyday lives? Ultimately, this research informs our understanding of the varied experiences and responses to vulnerabilities that migrant workers confront.

As scholarship reveals, day laborers are indeed a vulnerable population (Quesada et al. 2014; 2013 Negi 2013; Organista et al. 2013; Raythod 2016; Theodore, Valenzuela Jr. and Meléndez 2009; Walter, Bourgois, and Loinaz 2004), but through their ties to labor centers and to fellow day laborers they are also united and show strength as a collective. While migrants are economically marginal due to the temporary and precarious nature of day labor, they simultaneously control their own labor in ways that other migrant workers cannot. Furthermore, because most day laborers are undocumented, they are a marginalized workforce, yet this group of day laborers are openly visible as an available labor force and as active participants of the community. Migrant day laborers are strategic as they occupy public spaces as an available workforce despite the presence of local law enforcement (Cleaveland and Pierson 2009; Ordóñez 2015; Turnovsky 2004). Finally, although many migrant day laborers are isolated and far from their families and communities, labor centers can foster a sense of community and become empowering spaces where migrants can create new forms of kinship and belonging as well as provide a wealth of resources which serve to mitigate many of the challenges and tensions that migrants confront.

My findings reveal that workers at the DLC were vulnerable to harsh working conditions, exposed to discrimination and racism, and were limited in their ability to gain employment protections. Additionally, many workers referred to themselves as "professionals" but were considered "unskilled" by potential employers and thus, wages were subpar compared to the expectation of pay for local professional citizens. Employers also judged workers based on their appearance and language abilities which limited their prospects because of these parameters. Without the chance to prove one's

professional skills to an employer, they were excluded from many job opportunities. And, for those who were undocumented, day laborers at the DLC were also limited by broader, governing structures which affected their everyday lives. However, in spite of the many hardships, I found that migrant day laborers enjoyed the freedoms and flexibility that day labor offered as they exercised autonomy over their schedules, employers, type of jobs they accepted, and the conditions under which they were willing to work. In many ways, I observed how workers were in control over their work lives as they connected with other migrants, invested in their assets, and found creative ways to earn money.

Additionally, though formal citizenship in the legal sense was not available to most migrant day laborers I studied, their incorporation into the community of Portbridge demonstrated flexible forms of belonging through "local citizenship," (Villazor 2010, 575) "urban citizenship," (Castañeda 2018b, 22) or "social citizenship" (Glick-Schiller and Caglar 2008, 205). Their acceptance into the local community revealed how migrant workers can be included and actively engaged in their host communities. Their experiences challenge the notion of belonging and cause us to consider the role of day labor centers to facilitate relationships between migrants and local community members, and to work toward cooperation and collaboration rather than separation and exclusion. Finally, I discovered that the Day Labor Center provided a unique space for migrant workers to connect to one another as they dealt with the many challenges of transnational living. Workers demonstrated their care for one another by supporting one another financially and emotionally, by creating a familiar cultural environment through hosting impromptu barbecues and celebrations, and by meeting financial needs of one another by sharing labor opportunities and participating in the activities of the Day Labor Center.

In the current political milieu, immigrants, are, once again, facing exclusionary politics (Golash-Boza 2009b) including militarization of border zones (Trump 2017), increased dangerous "prevention-by-deterrence" strategies (De León 2012, 479), and daily acts of racism and discrimination (Diddier 2001). This project reveals the lives of migrant workers, who have taken great risks in coming to the United States in hopes of providing for their families and creating a better life for themselves and their home communities (Mahler 1995). Though they have faced great hardship and suffer from living "in pain, poverty, or under conditions of violence or oppression" (Robbins 2013, 448), migrant workers at the DLC also make up a community through which anthropologists might advance what anthropologist Joel Robbins calls "an anthropology of the good" (2013, 448).

Robbins argues that new trends in anthropological scholarship ought to focus on topics such as values, morality, well-being, imagination, and hope. My research is a connects to an "anthropology of the good" by revealing that, although migrant day laborers are marginalized and suffer from many vulnerabilities, they also demonstrate resilience as they are empowered by their intentional collective efforts. Through what I refer to as the "power of collectivity," migrant day laborers, in working together and in collaboration with Portbridge law enforcement, residents, and community members, demonstrate a population who suffer, yet also, demonstrate agency and resiliency in the face of many challenges. This study broadens anthropological inquiry of "the good" to explore how migrants engage imagination, empathy, care and hope despite the many structural limitations they confront as migrant workers in the United States.

This project has revealed that migrant day laborers face a series of contradictions in their work lives and everyday experiences as the days come and go. My goal is to bring the experiences of migrant workers at the Day Labor Center to the forefront and to discuss the role of day labor centers in empowering migrant workers. In the following chapters, I describe the lives of day laborers and their precarious existence as a way to expand understandings of migrant workers in the United States.

Chapter Breakdown

In chapter two, "*Zona Jorneleros* – Inside a Day Labor Center," I describe the Day Labor Center to provide a clear, detailed picture of the field site and outline what the DLC aimed to do for workers and the community. The Day Labor Center began as a distinct, grassroots organization of day laborers who wanted to be *organizados* (organized) as opposed to other *esquinas* (corners) where day laborers gathered, places that research participants described as sometimes "chaotic." I outline how the DLC functioned daily, including how workers spent their time waiting for work, how they interacted with potential employers, and how rules and regulations enforced at the DLC helped to facilitate employment opportunities. Additionally, I present the ethnographic methods I utilized to obtain a holistic perspective of the Center and its participants. Research at the DLC shows how day labor centers often serve as critical connection points for migrant day laborers because of the important services they provide, and because they foster cooperation between local law enforcement, workers and employers, and the local community.

Next, in chapter three, "'*Todo Duro*' – Difficult Labor Conditions," I consider the consistent remark from workers, "*todo duro,"* which in Spanish means "everything is difficult," to reveal the vulnerabilities, difficulties, and challenges that migrant day laborers faced in a variety of ways. Like other migrant workers, day laborers at the DLC experienced wage-theft, maltreatment, and harsh working conditions as they worked in intimate spaces such as employers' homes and offices. Whether hired by company contractors or individual community members, migrant day laborers spoke of difficulties on the job and off as they faced racism and discrimination as immigrants. As day laborers were often employed for risky tasks, they also faced injuries both on and off the job which affected their ability to work and added to their precariousness as laborers. If injured on the job, immigrants' prospects for work were greatly reduced, and thus many workers expressed anxiety over avoiding injuries and illness in order to maintain their roles as the primary providers for their families. Additionally, I draw out the effects of multiple difficulties on migrant workers through Mateo, a day laborer who suffered from a combination of economic hardship, illness, and anxiety, and whose story illustrates how workers' adversities can sometimes lead to serious depression and despair. Migrant day laborers, like other migrant workers, are susceptible to many hardships as I address in this chapter.

In chapter four, "'*Soy Libre*' – Freedoms and Flexibility," I present the reasons why, despite challenges, migrant workers continually used day labor as a primary or secondary form of income. As day laborers, workers employed flexibility as they chose when and for how long they wanted to work, chose with whom they wanted to work, and declined jobs for a number of reasons including employer preference, remuneration, or

the type of job offered. Additionally, because most workers at the DLC were undocumented, day labor offered opportunities for employment without social security numbers, licenses, or certifications that were difficult (if not impossible) to obtain.

Day laborers at the DLC also employed important strategies to improve their earning potential, providing a lens that may expand our perceptions of day laborers in the informal economy. Using the DLC as a source to strengthen their networking ties to one another and potential employers while expressing innovation to get jobs and earn money in creative ways, day laborers paralleled strategies used by successful businessmen in more elite sectors, whose efforts might be more aptly understood as entrepreneurialism (Valenzuela 2001, 339). Drawing on the work of Marcel Mauss (1925) whose ethnology of reciprocity reveals that obligations to exchange gifts are embedded into societies, I highlight the importance of exchange at the DLC. Day laborers grew to depend upon one another, underscoring the importance not only of migration networks (Gomberg-Muñoz 2011; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Striffler 2007; Stephen 2007), but also how reciprocal relationships improved workers' chances of obtaining employment and even solidified success in other areas of their lives, such as health and coping with being far from their families—experiences I explore further in chapter six about the friendships and networks that developed among day laborers.

In chapter five, "'*Aquí Pero No Estoy Aquí*' – The Making of Local Citizenship," I consider the contradictory experiences of migrant day laborers at the DLC who are restricted in many ways due to their documentation status and yet, are included in the community of Portbridge in tangible ways. Though racism has increased in the last decade throughout local communities such that many Latinos have suffered from anxiety

and fear of apprehension and deportation, causing them to move about cautiously (De Genova 2002, 2010) or to isolate themselves (Rodriguez, Menjívar and Saenz 2009; Saenz, Menjívar, and Garcia 2013), migrant workers at the DLC have remained openly visible in the community and at the Center. I employ the utility of "local citizenship" (Villazor 2010, 575) to capture the distinctive ways that migrant workers at the DLC experienced both belonging and exclusion as migrants in the United States. First, I discuss the many structural barriers that migrant day laborers confront as undocumented workers in the United States. Then, I draw attention to how the Day Labor Center has fostered "flexible citizenship," (Ong 1999, 4) pointing to ways that communities might incorporate immigrants into the increasingly multicultural social fabric of American society (Brettell 2003).

Although migrants throughout the United States experience conflict with local and state authorities who are increasingly pressured to enforce federal immigration policies (Armenta, 2016; Provine et al. 2016), I show how police and local governing authorities can be potentially important resources for migrants by incorporating spaces that foster inclusion and belonging while facilitating employment opportunities. Further, migrants participate in the community by providing a ready workforce, purchasing from local businesses, and paying taxes. My analysis of how workers have become embedded into Portbridge in ways akin to citizenship, builds upon scholarship that complicates "citizenship" (Boehm 2011; Glick-Schiller 2003; Ngai 2013) and provides another avenue through which we may consider what it means to be a citizen and the role that day labor centers play in fostering belonging and inclusion (Camou 2009).

Finally, in this chapter, I address recent disputes about immigration with regard to "sanctuary" (Perla and Coutin 2009, 8; see also Chinchilla, Hamilton, and Loucky 2009). Although Portbridge has not been declared as an official sanctuary city, the ways in which they have incorporated migrant day laborers into the community through the DLC demonstrate many of the goals of sanctuary, including encouraging migrant solidarity (Perla and Coutin 2009, Però 2008), connecting migrants to helpful resources (Castañeda 2018b), and facilitating collaboration between local community members, authorities, and migrants (Villazor 2010). The DLC provides a potential model for how sanctuary can be effectively embodied by local communities against the wider anti-immigrant sentiment.

In chapter six, "'*Como Familia*' – Cooperation, Conflict and Kinship," I explore the Day Labor Center as a source of kinship and support and expand upon the importance of reciprocity as a way to build mutually beneficial family-like relationships. I show how the DLC provided a core location for relationships much like those among kin to flourish. Relationships among day laborers may ameliorate the many challenges of transnational living such as social isolation, depression, and loneliness (Abrego 2011, 2014; Gonzalez and Chavez 2012; Negi 2013); poverty and illness (Galvan et al. 2015; Organista et al. 2013; Zavella 2011); and being far from home and away from families (Boehm 2012; Constable 2014; Lee 2013; Smith 2006; Stephen 2007). While migrant workers faced the challenges of being far from home, the DLC became a place of support where workers gathered to spend time together, engage in conversations about home, and celebrate cultural events.

Additionally, migrants provided emotional support as they encouraged one another and engaged in regular practices such as the daily *vaquita* (lottery), tool-lending, food sharing, and employment networking. These practices demonstrated the importance of reciprocity, as exchange and interaction with fellow immigrants and participation in the Center were essential to building and maintaining a family-like environment. Day laborers also utilized reciprocity by training one another in various skills, sharing resources such as tools and vehicles, lending each other money and providing aide for older workers for strenuous tasks – actions that resulted in significantly increased earning potential and mimicked defining characteristics of kinship systems (Kronenfeld 2012). Still, workers at the DLC faced conflict, and so I also explore how the DLC dealt with disagreements among workers and employers. As a grassroots organization, the DLC was much like a "family" in that it was characterized by conflict, resolution, and daily struggles, while also promoting inclusion, encouraging participation in the community at the DLC, and sharing in their ultimate goal: to find and secure employment.

Finally, I conclude with chapter seven, "'*Queremos Respeto*' – Imagining Possibilities," where I reflect on how ethnographic research reveals that, despite the many barriers they face, migrant day laborers express agency and control in their lives in ways that migrant workers in other sectors of the economy may not. I posit that day laborers offer a unique—and critical—voice as members of the global economy as migrant workers. Further, migrant day laborers can empower one another through their collectivity and actively engage with their local communities. The challenges that migrant workers face are not uniform. Day laborers experience precarity as their work is unstable and often dangerous, and as they face limitations as undocumented migrants in

the United States looking for employment. Still, day laborers also demonstrate freedom and flexibility which adds an important perspective to current scholarship regarding migration and labor. Day laborers represent a class of migrant workers unlike those in other sectors as they live and openly work in local communities while also subject to increasing immigration enforcement at the federal level (Cleaveland and Pierson 2009). As they carve out a distinctive place for themselves as part of the informal economy, migrant day laborers can inform our understanding of what it means to be agentive and in control of some aspects of their labor and lives.

Workers at the Day Labor Center exemplified the power of collectivity, community engagement, and cooperation. As migrant workers foster new forms of kinship and engage in flexible forms of "citizenship," they provide a model for the inclusion and belonging of all residents of a community, broadening our perspectives about migration and labor in the global economy and providing alternative ways of defining community itself. Through partnering with local community members and local law enforcement, migrant workers at the DLC demonstrate how cooperation and collaboration can improve the experiences of undocumented migrant workers in the United States. Migrant workers at the Day Labor Center provide a perspective that is both unique and critical and challenges us to consider the various ways in which migration and labor are inextricably linked while broadening our understanding of how global processes affect the everyday lives of immigrants.

Chapter 2

Zona Jorneleros: Inside a Day Labor Center

It was early on a Saturday morning in December, just before 7:00 a.m. at the Day Labor Center. Already, there were about 70 workers on benches and standing around while a few were in their trucks in the parking lot. Someone was shouting and there was loud music playing. A few people were playing music, sharing their tunes through Bluetooth speakers and on their cell phones. It did not seem to matter that you could not hear any one song distinctly; rather, each source had its own beat. I heard lots of laughter and noise. Some of the day laborers huddled in a circle, joking with one another as they poked fun at one of the workers. Spirits seemed high. Everyone looked like they were having a good time. Mornings were generally like this, especially on the weekends. The day seemed full of possibility. Greetings were loud, welcoming, and encouraging as a week may have passed since workers visited with each other. There was a lot to report to one another as I overheard in many conversations. There was so much happening and many smiles as they seemed genuinely happy to see each other.

Lil's Taco food truck rolled up to the Center and parked. Immediately, several men lined up, anxious to give their breakfast order. There was a large crowd gathered for Lil, whose regular presence at the DLC made her popular. Tacos, eggs, breakfast burritos, drinks and coffee were served. Lil called some of the workers by name and served up their regular orders, demonstrating that several workers were regulars. She was kind to acknowledge me, giving me some scrambled eggs in a corn tortilla. As I reached into my pocket to give her some money, she said, "*No maestra. Está bien*. Don't worry about it." I

was grateful and said, “thank you,” and then I sat down with some workers to eat. Gael took great interest in my breakfast and said to me, “That’s a great choice! The key is a low carb diet. I used to be so chubby but then I got rid of all the extras . . . especially alcohol—and I lost a lot of weight. You gotta stay away from the *pan* (bread), *pandulces* (sweet breads or pastries). All that sugar is really bad for you.” I had found a kindred spirit! We spent fifteen minutes talking about weight and nutrition and swapping our favorite healthy recipes.

After serving more food and catching up with workers over coffee, Lil packed up the truck and some of the workers helped her to fold up the expanded counter top. She promised to return for lunch and wished everyone good luck: “I hope there’s a lot of work today!” She drove off to visit another hungry bunch and we waved goodbye. Lil provided a regular opportunity for workers to gather together. Usually, upon her arrival, workers would congregate around the food truck to visit with her and the cook, providing a nice break in the day. They also used this opportunity to support an immigrant-owned business, a show of comradery and connection with other immigrants in the community.

Later that morning, the pastor arrived with six parishioners. Like a preacher in a church, he situated himself in front of the benches, standing behind a tall, beat-up podium as a makeshift pulpit. With a captive audience waiting for work opportunities, he opened his Bible and dramatically addressed the crowd. As he began speaking, silence ensued throughout the Center. Nearly everyone sat and listened intently to the pastor as he talked about hardships and securing their identity in Christ. He reminded them that “no state, no nation, no class system can define you.” He hit a nerve with several workers who were nodding their heads and verbalizing quietly to each other, “yes, yes…¡*es cierto*!” (it’s

true!) Though I knew not all of them were followers of this denomination, they were intently listening, respectful of the pastor's time and effort. As he closed with a prayer, several workers bowed their heads and there was a solemn moment as they shared, prayed, and concluded with "Amen."

Then, activity ensued once again as church volunteers served pastries and punch and conversations continued. What was most striking was the regularity of this activity. The pastor came nearly every weekend, and regardless of the individual beliefs of the day laborers, they welcomed his presence. Everyone seemed grateful for the treats and the time the group invested in coming to the DLC. Some workers got into deep conversations with each other or with the pastor and his team. Many seemed encouraged by his message. Others tuned out the pastor's talk by being on their headphones or doing some other activity, but they did so quietly and respectfully, trying not to draw attention to themselves. No one seemed to mind. As long as an activity did not interfere with employers who came for workers, everyone accepted the presence of community visitors and interactions. During his teaching this day, three job offers came by and each time, a coordinator or worker would politely tell the pastor to wait and then would call out "¡*jale*!" indicating that a potential job offer was approaching. And respectfully, the pastor would pause and pick up again when the majority of the workers indicated that they were ready to continue.

Each day, workers at the Day Labor Center experienced a range of activities from sharing meal times to playing games to sitting and chatting for long periods of time while waiting for work. The level of engagement depended on the availability of work and the general

interest of workers. The unpredictability of each day could, at times, feel exciting, but also stressful, a condition that added to the precarity of day labor. In this chapter, I provide a background about day labor and the ethnographic study of it. Next, I turn to the unpredictability and regularity I observed at the Day Labor Center where I conducted my research. My research reveals that day laborers experience contradictions: they are vulnerable to many stressors, and yet workers at the DLC came together as a collective to actively resist the many limitations they face.

Review of Literature about Day Laborers

Day laborers have indeed carved out a space for themselves in many communities around the United States as suggested by a broad survey of day laborers around the country (Valenzuela, et al. 2006). Still, as pointed out by Gretchen Purser (2009), due to the lack of ethnographic inquiry into the subjective experiences of day laborers, we know little about how they "perceive and make sense of, and cope" (Purser 2009, 119) with the precarious labor they undertake. Day laborers' experiences provide a critical perspective of migrant workers, although it can be difficult to capture their experiences (or those of other workers in the informal labor market) as they live precarious lives, are highly mobile, and often, are suspicious of researchers seeking sensitive information.

Even though these factors have made it challenging for anthropologists and social scientists to capture day laborers' experiences using in-depth ethnographic methods over long periods of time, several researchers have studied the important role of day labor in the informal economy and addressed some of the challenges that migrant day laborers encounter (e.g. Cleaveland and Pierson 2009; Esbenshade 2000; Malpica 2002; Ordóñez

2015; Organista and Kubo 2005; Purser 2009; Turnovsky 2006a, 2006b; Valenzuela 2002; Valenzuela et al. 2006). Collectively, this scholarship has demonstrated the importance of community between migrant workers who gather informally on street corners, analyzed how workers engage in competition, considered the particular ways day laborers experience health risks, and documented the strategies they utilize for garnering employment.

Building upon current scholarship about day laborers, I concentrate on how workers—despite vulnerabilities—experienced collectivity, fostered friendships, built alliances, and improved their chances for success through ties to one another by engaging with other workers on a regular basis. This research reveals how day laborers experience many tensions between vulnerability and autonomy or agency, building upon but also challenging current theories of migrant labor.

Previous scholarship and my own research reveal that day laborers are indeed a vulnerable population. Day laborers experience chronic stress as a result of the unpredictability of their work (Galvan, et al. 2015), risks to their health and safety due to the nature of the work that they perform (Heyman 2016; Meléndez et al. 2013; Raythod 2016), and psychological distress because of frequent, overt discrimination and familial separation (Negi 2013; Ordóñez 2015; Organista, Arreola, and Neilands 2017; Organista et al. 2013; Turnovsky 2006b). They are also susceptible to becoming victims of "street-level" crime (Negi, Cepeda, and Valdez 2013, 355) that often goes underreported, as migrant workers are fearful of reporting incidents due to their distrust of the U.S. criminal justice system and fear of deportation if undocumented (Galvan et al. 2015; Horton 2016b). And, due to the precarious nature of day labor, workers are also prone to

financial instability (Ordóñez 2015). Clearly, this scholarship affirms that migrant workers are susceptible to many vulnerabilities.

As undocumented migrants, many day laborers at the DLC are fearful of immigration authorities and local law enforcement and yet, they are openly visible as they wait for labor opportunities. Day laborers who gather on street corners must be strategic in order to find labor opportunities despite pervasive law enforcement and racialization based on appearance or language abilities (Cleaveland and Pierson 2009). For Guatemalan day laborers in Virginia, migrants' indigenous identity furthered their susceptibility to racism and exclusion not only from potential employment but also more broadly as "victims of globalization and neoliberalism," (Ibáñez-Holtermann 2011, 31). Still, as Ibáñez-Holtermann (2011) points out, indigenous Ixil day laborers expressed resistance as they escaped the violence of their homeland and built strong communities among other Ixil migrants and also connected with other Spanish-speaking migrant communities in Virginia (2011, 32).

Migrant workers who gather informally on street corners utilize important strategies to connect with other day laborers in order to forge alliances and create supportive communities. Carolyn Turnovsky's work (2006a) "*A La Parada*" confirms the importance of social relationships, observing how day laborers gathered on the corner not only to find work but to participate in the social lives of other migrants. Daniel Malpica (2002) argues that *los esquineros*, Spanish for corner-workers or loosely, day laborers, appear chaotic to the untrained viewer. However, he observed that workers actually submit to a set of unspoken rules (2002, 7) based on practice and precedent which maintain order, hierarchy, and relationships (2002, 24). Similarly, Juan Tomas Ordóñez

highlights the tension between competition for jobs and understanding another's "*situación*" (situation or circumstance) (2015, 5) causing workers to sometimes defer job offers to another worker who has not received work in a while or who was new to the corner.

These scholars have revealed that day laborers who gather informally on street corners rely upon strong social ties to one another and expectations of social norms, despite the irregularity of workers' presence. Workers at the DLC also demonstrate the importance of forging ties to other migrants and networking with other workers. However, at the DLC social norms are enforced by a central leadership structure as the director helps to facilitate the goals of the Center. By imposing sanctions against workers who would undermine the collective efforts of the Center, workers support the expectation of behaviors and encourage one another to contribute to the collectivity of the group. Rather than relying upon an informal set of norms, the DLC implements formal leadership to direct day laborers toward working together and demonstrating the value of the collectivity (Camou 2009). My research points to the potential of day labor centers with centralized leadership structures to provide a consistent presence that helps to direct workers in ways that foster community.

In contrast, competition is also an important factor to consider as migrant workers do compete daily for labor opportunities. Ordóñez (2015) points to how day laborers balance establishing trust while simultaneously competing for a limited number of jobs where he studied in Northern California. His observations indicate that earning the trust of other men on the corner was difficult (2015, 67) as workers faced many hardships like poverty and harsh living conditions. As their need for work increased, so did the

competitive environment of the corner. Workers at the Day Labor Center also engage in competition for work, however, unlike Ordóñez's findings, I observed how day laborers' collective efforts encouraged cooperation over competition and reduced hostilities between workers. Additionally, the system at the DLC helped to mitigate conflict over opportunities as job offers were mostly distributed through an objective lottery system. If conflict did occur, the director could help workers to avoid severe disagreements. Consistent with previous scholarship (Ibáñez-Holtermann 2011; Malpica 2002; Turnovsky 2006a), my research reveals that investing in building alliances and fostering community based on workers' shared experiences and goals has proven to be a source of empowerment and has contributed to the success of many migrant day laborers.

Scholars have also addressed ways in which immigrant workers are agentive, particularly through the lens of "entrepreneurialism" (e.g. Light and Rosenstein 1995; Ramirez and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2009, Wahbah and Zenou 2012). Migrant workers may return to their home countries with the ability to become entrepreneurs having saved money and gained valuable experience as a result of their labor migration (Ramirez and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2009, Wahbah and Zenou 2012). Sociologists Ivan Light and Carolyn Rosenstein (1995) differentiate between two types of entrepreneurs: disadvantaged "survival" entrepreneurs—workers who are compelled to engage in self-employment in the informal economy because of restrictions pertaining to financial constraints, a lack of skills, or documentation status—and "value" entrepreneurs, who exercise some flexibility and independence that self-employment offers (1995, 213).

I concur with labor scholar Abel Valenzuela (2001) who argues that day laborers can be both survival *and* value entrepreneurs as I have observed at the DLC. Viewing day

laborers as entrepreneurial broadens the degrees to which we consider their sense of autonomy and agency over their labor as Valenzuela argues, "to characterize day labor as a 'no-option' job ignores the many day laborers who toil in this occupation for reasons of autonomy, wages, and choice" (2001, 336). Based on workers' stories and experiences, and my observations of the Day Labor Center's activities, I have found that migrant day laborers can be flexible entrepreneurs despite structural inequalities. Additionally, they are innovative and creative as they employ many strategies to build their employer networks and earn money such as leaving business cards, asking for recommendations, recycling unused materials from job sites, and investing in their assets.

Discovering Day Labor: Methods of Research

In my junior year of college, a group of my hallmates gathered at an event to hear about the unfair labor practices of Gap Apparel Inc., one of many events then tied to social justice issues. Encouraged to attend by a friend, I went along to support my hall's event but had little idea that what I would learn about the global apparel industry that evening would forever affect my perspective of my clothing – among other material goods. I learned that my consumption of "stuff" was part of a global system rooted in capitalism and fueled by cheap labor through what I later learned as "sweated labor" (Bonacich and Appelbaum 2000, 3). Gap Apparel Inc. had violated several labor codes in their overseas factories. Our campaign involved writing local representatives and state senators on behalf of the workers. We demanded that the owners of the company pay better wages and provide time off for workers, and that safe working conditions be implemented in all of their factories. I had little knowledge then of how important our cause was and, at the

same time, how unlikely the campaign was to change such a profitable portion of a global industry.

When it came time to consider a dissertation topic for my doctoral studies, I looked for a field site where I could study immigration and labor as interconnected processes. After much time and consideration, I learned of a grassroots organization of day laborers where two subsequent years of research would broaden my understanding and assumptions about migrant workers and change my ideas about what constituted "the immigrant experience." The same day I introduced myself to Ricardo, the director of the Day Labor Center, I was welcomed as a researcher and given permission to become a regular presence as an anthropologist and as a volunteer ESL teacher. I conducted research for nearly two years, typically spending 20 to 30 hours each week at the DLC between July of 2016 and February of 2018. Since 2018, I have continued to visit the DLC weekly to catch up with workers and offer English lessons.

When I conducted fieldwork, the majority of the available workforce at the Day Labor Center were undocumented migrant workers from Mexico and throughout Latin America. Most workers regularly looked for employment at the Center, some semi-frequently, and others only occasionally. During my fieldwork, I interacted with and observed nearly 100 research participants including workers, volunteers and staff at the Center, and local community members who came by to visit with workers or offer services. I observed a number of employer interactions as well when they came to the Center to hire workers and as they negotiated the terms of employment. However, I did not go out on jobs with day laborers. Doing so could have put employers at risk if I were

injured and I did not want to adversely affect the relationship between the worker and employer.

The day laborers I worked with—primarily men—ranged in age from 17 to 70. Only two women came to the Center regularly in search of work and only one of them was regularly employed. Of those who disclosed their age during formal interviews, most were between the ages of 25 and 55. Most workers were from Mexico City and several states in Mexico, including Jalisco, Sinaloa, and Zacatecas. There were also a number of laborers from Guatemala and a few from El Salvador. Only two workers that I formally interviewed were born in the United States. Finally, one research participant was from Cameroon and another was from Honduras.

Many of the migrant workers at the DLC had been in the United States for over ten years with the longest duration being 33 years. The majority of workers had been in the United States for a decade or more (between ten and twenty-five years); for most, Southern California was their primary destination. Several workers had arrived more recently within the past five years, and, as I learned during informal exchanges with migrant workers, a few had arrived within days of our meeting. Most workers had migrated alone to the United States in order to fulfill their responsibility as wage earners for their families at home.

The majority of day laborers I interviewed lived in Overton, the larger city in which Portbridge was located, or in some neighboring city. Some workers lived alone in an apartment or rented room, while others had a roommate or lived with their partners. One worker lived about 15 miles away, renting a room from a homeowner in a more

affordable city in Orange County. Only three of the workers I knew of lived directly in Portbridge as rental rates are typically quite high and there are few apartments available.

Finally, nearly all of the workers I met used the Day Labor Center as their primary means of finding employment. Though there were nearby street corners where day laborers often gathered, most workers only utilized the DLC. One worker, Martin, spoke of a street corner in Overton that he used from time to time to obtain work only when he was frustrated with the DLC for some reason or if there seemed to be few work opportunities. Most workers were full-time day laborers, though about four workers had part time jobs and used day labor as a supplementary form of income. And, for some men, the DLC was a place where migrants would come primarily to socialize; they were not interested in finding work at all. Though uncommon, this is significant as I learned that the DLC served migrants as a place to socialize and form community; it was not only a source of employment.

I used anthropological methods including participant observation and structured and informal interviews. With the approval of the director, Ricardo, I conducted 45 formal in-depth interviews alongside a number of informal conversations and roundtable discussions. Given the fleeting nature of day labor, interactions with some interlocutors were brief and lasted only a day or two, while I was able to interact extensively with other participants throughout the duration of the project. As a trained English as a Second Language (ESL) instructor, I participated in the goals of the Center directly by offering regular ESL classes. At first, this afforded me a way to get to know the workers, as I spent time as a regular volunteer during my preliminary research period (March 2016-July 2016). After obtaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, I began to

conduct formal interviews with day laborers at the Center utilizing a set of questions designed to elicit how day laborers exhibit agency and flexibility in their work and daily lives, as well as the inequalities and vulnerabilities they face.

I requested verbal consent for interviews, following my approved IRB protocol. Formal interviews took place at the site either in the office area, which was a designated space for the director with a desk and a few chairs, and outside in the parking lot. Sometimes we would pull up chairs but for the most part, interviews were conducted while sitting on the curb or a patch of dirt, within earshot of the main Center so that workers would not miss out on an opportunity to get work, but far enough away to allow for privacy. I always offered the option for a completely private interview at a local off-site coffee shop or a place of their choosing but no one opted to do so. I conducted interviews in both Spanish and English, depending on the subject's preference. I recorded interviews only with their permission so that I could translate difficult or lengthy responses later. I changed any identifying information and all of the names contained in this dissertation are pseudonyms to protect the identities of migrant workers. I informed interviewees that any information about their personal lives, labor experiences, and documentation status were completely voluntary, and that they had no obligation to share any information with which they were uncomfortable.

I spent time regularly at the Day Labor Center for nearly two years. I visited during the week and over weekends, and at various times of the day so that I could cover a wide range of possibilities of what the Center was like at different times of the day, week, and year. I grew to understand more of the daily activities through participant observation and I took detailed field notes during each visit. In addition to participant

observation, interviews, and group discussions, I utilized visual ethnography by taking several photos of the Center in order to provide a clearer picture of what the Center looked like, how it ran, and the workers who used it. I requested formal permission from each worker I interviewed to take their photograph.

Teaching ESL was an excellent way to gather general and specific data because my lessons could be formulated around a particular topic such as "family" or "work." I learned about workers' experiences during these classes when they completed phrases such as, "What do you miss most about your home country?" and "The most difficult thing about living in the United States for me is …" Workers enjoyed these opportunities to share real experiences and to explore their feelings about what they had gone through. Additionally, informal, roundtable conversations emerged naturally as my students began to converse about specific topics. For example, in one lesson I asked about specific labor experiences such as, "This week, my longest job was XXX hours and I made XXX dollars. It was XXX work." The goal was to get at the average length of jobs they worked and the amount of pay that they earned. Then, day laborers would evaluate the job for its ease or difficulty, such as, "It was really hard work," or "It was really strenuous work."

Workers shared responses about the temperature of the day, the mood of the boss(es), the type of activity the labor required, the tools involved, whether or not they received lunch or breaks, and other details that informed my understanding of their work experiences. Similarly, when I asked about family matters, workers responded with great detail. As one worker began to share, another would relate to his experience and share his own story, participating in roundtable discussions that were rich with data about their lives as day laborers and transnational migrants trying to make it in the United States.

During my fieldwork, I went from being a volunteer English teacher, to researcher, to (at times) trusted friend. I recall feeling quite overwhelmed at the prospect of being a white woman making a regular appearance among a group of predominantly Latino men. I wondered if and how my positionality might prevent workers from trusting me enough to share their experiences with me. Indeed, in the first year, I contracted meningitis, possibly from being in the field, as my doctor inquired if I had recently been to South America. I informed him that I worked with migrants, most of whom had been in the States a long time but with others who arrived only days or months prior to my meeting them. Some of the workers were surprised at my return after my illness as one worker told me in jest, "You Americans – you catch everything because you're afraid of getting dirty." After my illness, it became something of a ritual to greet workers with "elbow shakes" instead of handshakes and hand sanitizing after classes or meals together; however, workers saw that I was committed to learning about their lives, despite the potential risks.

Later, I became pregnant with my second daughter and over the course of the pregnancy, many workers doted on me, asked how I was doing, and kept watch over my eating habits. In many ways, I think I served as a surrogate for the women in their own lives whom they had left back home, pregnancies they had missed and births of their own children. I demonstrated my commitment to them and was open to sharing my own life and struggles as I made friends. We ate together, joked and laughed together, and I allowed them to instruct me in ways that emerged naturally. During one interview, an interviewee commented "I'm happy to do this…we need it too. We need to talk about our stories." I discovered over the course of two years that my research participants had much

to add to studies about immigration and labor, the global economy, and cultural exchange, as they shared their perspectives as migrant day laborers.

A History of the Day Labor Center

Migrant workers throughout the nation gather informally on street corners every day, and especially throughout California (Ordóñez 2016; Valenzuela et al. 2006). There are also specific locations around the country, like the Center where I conducted research, that have permission from local businesses or city government to gather unofficially. Day labor sites vary in their locations, appearances, and purposes. They offer a variety of services to day laborers and their communities by helping to regulate the day labor market in several major ways: "wage setting, job allocation, and wage claims, grievance resolution, and worker education" (Theodore, Valenzuela Jr. and Meléndez 2009, 426). Day labor centers are typically located at or around popular home-improvement stores and busy street corners where workers can be visible to potential employers. While not all sites are sanctioned by local communities, many are established as a result of cooperative efforts between local governments, faith-based organizations, and commercial businesses that support the presence of day laborers (Theodore, Valenzuela Jr. and Meléndez 2009). Many sites also provide basic services such as restrooms, benches to sit on, and shelter from the elements. Some offer more formalized job training, ESL courses, and legal assistance as part of their efforts to improve workers' transition to the formal labor sector and higher wage-earning potential (Camou 2009; Toma and Esbenshade 2001).

Like many typical day-laborer zones, my field site was located in the parking lot of a popular home improvement store in Southern California. Lined with simple wood and metal benches and a makeshift roof, there were two portable toilets and an office of sorts where the director, Ricardo, usually sat to coordinate with workers. The Center was a semi-permanent structure that provided a specific location for day laborers to assemble. The DLC acted something like a staffing agency, though lacked some of the comforts of an indoor setting with air conditioning or heat. However, the DLC did offer a place to sit and wait for employment with tables that workers could sit at to eat, converse, or read, along with multiple activities, such as worship services and visits from social service providers.

Most of the workers who made the Day Labor Center their home base for work opportunities had previously gathered at other, less formal sites. Several workers recalled that many of these corners were rowdy, disorganized, and "full of problems." As one worker described, "There was yelling, drinking, drugs and many problems." Another worker commented that prior to organizing, he felt that there were more opportunities to actually get jobs because workers could fight for them by aggressively approaching employers. However, this approach could also be quite chaotic and at times counterproductive, as it actually caused employers to feel overwhelmed and they would leave. Additionally, so much competition made it easy for employers to pay subpar wages as the supply of workers continually exceeded the number of jobs coming in.

In 2006, several workers came together and began a grassroots movement to organize and to form a collective in hopes of solving some of the problems. At first, they tried to collaborate with a national day-labor organization and when that did not work

out, they reached out to another, locally based group for help. Both groups promised to use city-allocated funds to help build an official center, complete with a trailer, bathroom, and resources for workers. Instead, according to Ricardo, that money was used to further political endeavors, such as campaigns or rallies that would support social movements for immigration reform. Although supportive of such efforts, the founders of the Center needed funds specifically for workers—to improve their labor opportunities and make improvements to the labor center itself. They were frustrated and felt cheated out of much-needed funds.

By 2008, Ricardo had been volunteering with the workers for four years and was frustrated with the lack of progress the Center had made. He had worked for nearly thirty years for a local school district as head of their maintenance department. He was not looking for more work but was eager to volunteer as he was an active member of his union and had learned a lot about organizing workers. Labor organizations and unions have brought migrant workers together in other labor sectors (Archer et al. 2010; Bloom 2010; Collins 2006, 2007; Compa 2004) and Ricardo recognized that these workers needed help to improve their situation. Since he had emerged as a leader among the group, he was approached by local city officials who asked if he would be willing to partner with local law enforcement to set up a worker center.

Since 2011, Ricardo has organized workers at the Center as an officially paid coordinator under the umbrella of the local police department. Though he is officially an employee of the city, Ricardo has functioned quite autonomously. Ricardo sets rules but has liberty to bend them; he has followed the direction of the city police department yet allowed exceptions; and he has served as a respectable mentor to some of the workers,

especially the younger ones. Ricardo became a voice for day laborers in many ways and came to care for them personally. As young Gael explained, “Without him [pointing to Ricardo], I don't know what would have happened with me. I didn't know anything without Ricardo.” Gael is a young migrant worker who learned how to manage his money, maintain employer networks, and perform daily functions of American life with Ricardo's guidance. As a facilitator, Ricardo learned much about the lives of many of the workers and because had built rapport with them, he could communicate with workers freely and with confidence. That is not to say that there have not been problems in the leadership structure, as I will address later. As the DLC’s central leader, overall, Ricardo has earned respect among the workers and among city leaders that helped the DLC to become a critical part of the local community and to function as well as it has.

The Day Labor Center has been built and run by grassroots organizers and workers who agree to collectively charge a minimum wage for their labor, who share information about employers, and who depend upon the positive reputation of the Center to increase employment prospects. At the same time, the DLC is officially permitted to exist and has been funded by the local police department whose very presence helps to regulate the behavior of the workers and employers who use the Center—a characteristic that makes this day labor gathering site distinct. Working in cooperation with local law enforcement as an official part of the local community, the Center demonstrates how local government can help facilitate immigrants’ acceptance as members of society, challenging and advancing scholarship that centralizes the collectivity of immigrants alone (Però 2008). Additionally, local authorities are often viewed as primarily antagonistic towards immigrants (Chavez 2008; Provine et al. 2016; Varsanyi 2006,

2008) while ignoring the potential benefits of cooperation between local officials and immigrants. Arguably, the DLC demonstrates a model for how collaboration and cooperation can be beneficial for migrants and local community members.

Today, the Center operates much like it has over the past ten years. Ricardo, who is generally well-respected among the workers, has continued as the director and utilized several volunteers. These volunteers help to facilitate employment transactions with translation, clarifying job duties to potential employees or assisting with wage negotiations. They have been especially helpful to newcomers who may not know how the system works and who rely upon the aid of other workers to avoid being taken advantage of or falling into potential harm. As I mentioned above, the DLC has operated much like a staffing agency compared to other *esquinas* (corners) (Ordóñez 2016; Turnovsky 2004) as it was organized. More than a place to find day-labor employment opportunities, the DLC has also become a central hub for informal gatherings, cultural activities, community building, networking, and training. These activities have made it a rich field site to study migrant workers within local communities, migrant networks, and several intersections of migration and labor which I discuss in the following chapters.

¡Jale, Jale!: Getting the Work

"*¡Jale, jale!*" yelled several workers as the car approached the group. I had heard this phrase every day since the beginning of my visits, not realizing what it exactly meant for quite some time. With the motion of arms waving, beckoning prospective employers, the phrase was a hopeful chant that a job was on the horizon. *Jale* literally means "pull" in Spanish, but in this context the term invoked a sense of wishful thinking or desire. As

they moved their arms outward toward a potential employer or approaching car there was hopefulness that perhaps this would be their chance for a job. As workers enjoyed flexibility as day laborers, they also depended on chance or pure "luck" that there would be job offers and that their number would be called.

"Look, *maestra*," Zee would joke, "It's my boss!" as he pointed to an approaching car, indicating with a humorous certainty that his number would be called for the incoming job. When it turned out that the car was a customer of the local store or random passerby rather than a potential employer, workers would sigh with disappointment, "*false alarma*!" and then, they would chant "next time, next time." With every approaching car, hopes were high, and the level of excitement and anticipation grew. Workers rose to their feet as they stopped whatever they were doing, "*¡Jale, jale!*" As the employer slowed to a complete stop in front of the Center, a coordinator dashed to meet him to ask, "What do you need?" Each worker held on to their tickets with hope—maybe this job would be theirs.

Workers at the Day Labor Center followed a fairly regimented, agreed-upon set of rules that helped to maintain order and organization. Workers arrived to sign in by 7 a.m. After checking in with Ricardo or another coordinator at the office, they received a number on a ticket which corresponded to a ball. The ball went into a spinner that looked like a "Bingo" game while the worker kept the ticket. If they lost their ticket, there was no proof that their number belonged to them for that day and so protecting one's daily ticket was a priority. Each day, ticket colors changed so workers could not cheat and get a job by having the same number as someone else. When an employer arrived, a few of the

workers would find out the details of the job from the employer and then draw a number. The worker with the ticket number got the job. The person spinning the balls was a volunteer, though sometimes Ricardo would spin it. There was no rule about who necessarily operated the spinner, though there were built-in social norms as a few regular workers would take on the task each day.

On any given day, there were between 15 and 80 workers present who came in hopes of getting a job. Though the Center was available to anyone in the community, the vast majority of workers were Spanish-speaking, undocumented migrant men from Mexico and Guatemala. A few local citizens would sometimes use the Center to find work, but it was rare. The Center remained open until 3 p.m. when Ricardo would shut it down, lock up the office area, and place yellow caution tape around the benches, across the open space, and at the portable toilets to make it clear that the DLC was closed. They began using the caution tape to avoid night-time visitors such as local homeless people or people who would drink on the site and make a mess. There were a few occasions when the office area was robbed. Once, a bicycle was stolen, and another time there was an attempt to get into a secured locker where Ricardo kept a cash box for donations to the city. A few workers would linger waiting for rides home and on occasion an employer happened to come by and pick up a worker after hours.

The mood of a typical day at the DLC varied from one day to the next. The DLC vacillated between being full of activity and painstakingly slow. Like so many dependent factors, the level of activity depended on the day of the week, the time of year, the weather, and even the mood of the workers present. A typical day at the Center for a worker usually involved arriving between 6 and 7 a.m. and no later, as those arriving

after 7 a.m. were not permitted to participate in the labor lottery. Weekends were typically busier and Saturdays were packed with activity. Workers who had regular jobs during the week but needed to make more money utilized the DLC on the weekends. Many also came for the sole purpose of socializing, "*para placticar"* (to chat), as workers described it in several of my interviews.

After arrival, the daily *vaquita* (lottery) would usually be conducted. The *vaquita*, as I describe in more detail in chapter six, was a daily lottery when workers would have an opportunity to win a large, lump sum of money at one time. For one dollar, workers would buy a ticket which was placed into a big bucket along with all of the money. This activity was usually conducted by a select group of volunteers. Mike was one of my favorite leaders as his energy was contagious. He would yell, "Okay *todos, todos*! Today is your *oportunidad*!" (Everyone, today is your chance!). As the total pot of money grew he would update the crowd, "50 *maracas*! 65 *maracas*! 200 *maracas*!" then encourage more workers to participate shouting, "Just one dollar! One dollar!" Saying "*maracas*" was the equivalent of "bucks" or how one might colloquially say "clams" or "smackers" for cash in English. Some days, the pot was very large, other days, fairly small but it was a significant activity to show solidarity and also to get people excited in the morning. One could count on the regularity of this activity each day–a way to wake up and be excited about the potential for the day ahead.

Typically, by about 2 p.m. most workers who had not gotten a job that day would leave, though the Center officially remained open until 3 p.m. At least twice a day, there were chores to be done at the Center. Chores were also assigned by lottery using the spinner and tickets in the same way as for jobs. There was often a lot of banter, chiding

and joking over the "domestic" chores of the day. I frequently heard joking such as "Look at him – all he's missing is an apron!" "He has delicate hands - too delicate for the toilets, *hombre*!" The workers were not without their antics as they performed duties such as sweeping, picking up trash, collecting the recycle or restocking the portable toilets with paper and hand sanitizer. Everyone pitched in and as I will discuss in chapter six, acts that contributed to the wellbeing of the Center as a whole translated into greater respect among peers and, in some cases, increased chances of garnering employment opportunities.

On Wednesdays, a local food bank came to offer donations of food from a local grocery store. Ricardo gathered all of the food on a bench and it was given away by rolling for numbers using the lottery spinner. In the summertime, Alberto regularly visited to sell ice-cold treats out of the back of his van. He was one of several vendors who visited the DLC to sell to potential customers. Other vendors would sell clothes, *tamales*, or other items, or ask for donations for philanthropic causes. On one occasion, a man drove up as several workers rushed toward the truck. Seeing my curiosity, Ian said, "This guy is bad news but he's here. He sometimes sells stolen tools. I don't have any need to get caught doing something like that…buying them is against the law, not just selling." I learned that there were many surprises that could be found at the DLC as vendors of all types would come and workers had to be cautious. As a vulnerable population, there were certainly unscrupulous employers and community members who would poach or try to use migrant day laborers for nefarious purposes, a vulnerability that I address in chapter three.

Once a month a group of local university students came to talk about wage theft, worker rights, and immigration law. They brought *tortas* (sandwiches) for everyone as a way to reach out. Another group of students from San Diego were interested in the health of immigrants and visited the DLC on occasion to bring literature about health care availability, local clinics, and other resources related to health. For about twelve consecutive Saturday and Sunday mornings, Ricardo allowed a friend to open a sort of "restaurant" at the DLC. Two women came early to set up tables and an outdoor stove that ran on propane. Their friends and family came to have meals and to support the burgeoning business. After three months or so, Ricardo had to ask them to shut it down because he was becoming wary of the legalities and lack of regulation. This operation also seemed a bit out of place for a day labor center, but as I learned over many months, much happened at the DLC that was not solely linked to labor or employment.

When there was little activity, time passed very slowly. Workers filled the day by talking to one another, conversing, and joking. They also spent countless hours working on their cars and trucks or organizing their tools. On one occasion, I came to the Center to find several workers putting together the engine of a dated-model Honda Civic. I curiously and light-heartedly asked the director, "What's going on here? It looks like a mechanic's garage!" Several workers approached with greasy hands and blackened pants from the oil. Ricardo replied, "I picked it up at auction for a good price. It's a good car but needs a little work. It gives us something to do." This sort of project was exactly what workers found interesting and exciting and, as I later observed, these activities were also quite important for community-building. As they worked together on projects, cleaned the Center, repaired cars, trucks or tools, or even played games together while waiting for

work, I observed how day laborers forged alliances, learned from one another, and fostered community.

My English language classes also offered a break in the tedium of slow days, particularly when I shifted the class from Saturdays to Wednesday mornings since midweek days were typically slower than weekends. I would announce that my ESL class would begin in a few minutes and then approach small groups of workers who were "hanging out" together talking or a few individuals who were passing the time reading or on their cell phones. When I received disinterested glances or awkward promises of attendance, I would joke saying, "What? You have somewhere else to be?" Indeed, this was a great strategy to garner interest in my class as any activity helped make the days seem to move more quickly.

One of the most important commodities for a day laborer was a cell phone. A cell phone primarily meant access to entertainment by watching videos, television shows, sporting events, and listening to music. A cell phone also meant more job opportunities because it allowed for Internet access, a commodity they may not have been able to afford in their homes, so they could look on Craigslist or Facebook for employment. Though not everyone utilized such technology as many did not know how to navigate the Internet or use email, or had access to the resources that would allow them to do so, those who did spent a significant amount of time on their cell phones throughout the day making calls and building networks in hopes of solidifying more work. Cell phones were also a lifeline to connect with families. Spending time talking with relatives and friends was a great way to pass time if they could afford it and find a quiet space to engage in conversation.

At least twice a day, a "*limpia"* (cleanse) was conducted as one of the volunteers would call out all the numbers on the balls in the lottery spinner. This was used to filter out the numbers of workers who were not present for whatever reason. This way, when an employer arrived, and a number drawn, they would not draw the number of a worker who had left and waste time for the employer. Though this served a clear function, the *limpia* was also a wake-up call for everyone. When it was slow, a volunteer might yell out, "¡*Limpia todos! ¡Limpia*!" It would get everyone's attention and refocus workers on the task of the day which was primarily to get work. Sleeping workers or those visibly lost in their entertainment would stand at attention and make their presence clearly known. "¡*Aqui*! ¡*Aqui*!" (Here) they would shout and show their ticket to verify their number for the day. Sometimes there was loud joking, gestures, or silly dances performed to show one's presence. It would cheer everyone up and made them laugh as they regrouped.

Organizado: Grassroots Organizing at the DLC

When I asked workers why they chose the Day Labor Center over other *esquinas* or day-labor sites, their primary response was "because it is organized." Nearly all workers spoke of the benefits of organizing at the DLC versus using other corners where the people yelled, fought over job opportunities, rushed to employers, and engaged in disrespectful and even dangerous behaviors. Adrian biked fifteen miles every day to come to the DLC because he believed it was far better than several other corners where day laborers met, including at least three locations he passed on his way to the DLC. Nicolas, who helped Ricardo as a volunteer coordinator for a few years but now

participates only to find work, spoke of the need for leadership and organization to help regulate activities at the Center, noting that "at the end of the day it's about finding work, respecting one another, and making money." Others commented that they came to the DLC because people understood that if you "lay low" and do not cause trouble, it is easier to avoid problems like apprehension and even deportation–a fear that intensified in the increasingly anti-immigrant political milieu. The DLC was also protected under the umbrella of the local police department, a characteristic which workers said tended to ensure a safer environment. It was less likely that one would get into fights, drink on site, or cause trouble because the consequences were too risky.

Scholarship reveals that migrant workers in highly controlled environments such as factories may intentionally resist the controls and treatment they face from their employers in passive ways. For example, women in factories might use their femininity to obtain favor from supervisors by exaggerating their make-up, hair styles, and accessories to stand out among the rows of uniform workers (Ngai 2005; Salzinger 2003; Tuttle 2012). Through seemingly insignificant acts like rolling their eyes, mocking male counterparts, and colluding with other workers, women express their disapproval of working conditions (Lugo 2008; Ngai 2005; Ong 1987; Salzinger 2000, 2003). Additionally, Aiwha Ong describes how women in a Malaysian factory would appeal to their foreman's sense of "family" and "empathic feeling" using "humanitarian values as a means of softening his control" (1987, 167). Steven Striffler (2005) observed how factory workers will intentionally slow down the production line until the supervisors notice and respond, utilizing what Carolina Bank-Muñoz has termed the power of "*tortuosidad*" or "working at a turtle's pace" (2008, 70).

Scholars have also considered more overt forms of resistance, particularly in the form of unionization (Archer et al. 2010; Bloom 2010; Collins 2006; Zavella 1987). Ruth Milkman (2006) argues that unions in Los Angeles provide valuable avenues toward demanding better working conditions and equitable pay, particularly among Latino workers, whose collectivist-cultural ideals propel them to organize. She argues that immigrants are prone to organize due to:

> stronger social networks [which are] deeply rooted in occupational and/or workplace settings, class-based collective organization like labor unions [which are] more compatible with the lived experience, worldviews, and identities of many immigrants (especially Central Americans and Mexicans) than with native-born workers, and the shared experience of stigmatization among immigrants which foster a sense of unity – especially in employment settings where immigrants make up the bulk of the workforce (Milkman 2006, 133).

However, Richard Sullivan and Kimi Lee (2008) argue that unionization has yet to benefit millions of low-wage workers around the globe, proposing that worker centers can provide a space for workers to join forces as a way to organize protests, discuss labor laws, and learn more about their rights. The DLC exemplified this kind of collectivism at a grassroots level and demonstrated its potential benefits.

Day laborers recounted how grassroots organizing led to the development of the Day Labor Center, a place that, over time, has served to alleviate challenges workers face through the collective efforts of the workers, the leadership, and the services that the DLC informally provides. Through the collective efforts of migrant workers, they have built a place that has maintained a positive reputation in the community, benefitted from

respected leadership, and organized workers in such a way as to provide protections from so many of the challenges that can arise for immigrant populations.

While injustices do occur, workers at the DLC have employed several strategies to mitigate them in a number of ways, including enforcing a minimum wage requirement, safety training and wage-theft prevention techniques, maintaining a positive reputation in the community, and sharing information about employers. The DLC also demonstrates how strong leadership over the organization can help to facilitate its goals. By participating in the organization of the DLC, day laborers demonstrate their ability to control aspects of their labor as they educate themselves and learn from one another's experiences. Actions like these present a new perspective of migrant workers who, together, are able to resist the many adversities that come with being a marginal population.

Conclusions: **Empowering Workers**

The Day Labor Center is embedded in the local community in such a way that the power of the collective serves the workers as well as the local employers in preventing potential problems between day laborers and their employers. Research at a site such as this expands understandings of migrant workers, showing that it is possible, despite many vulnerabilities, to exert control over one's work and to demonstrate active resistance. My research provides important insights about the role of day labor centers as places where migrant workers receive support and build reputations as considerable businessmen for local communities. Although many of the days spent at the DLC could be fairly predictable, as workers understood, "¡*todo depende!"* (it all depends) on the day. And so

each day can be different from the last as workers face the ebb and flow of unpredictability.

In this chapter, I have situated my research project within scholarship about migrant day laborers to demonstrate their particular circumstances and the benefits of their collectivity. In providing a snapshot of what an average day for workers looked like at the DLC and the sorts of activities they engaged in, I have introduced the Center as a place characterized by order and coordination, but also unpredictability. As a location of migrant labor exchange, this field site revealed the complexities of migration and labor, especially during a time when anti-immigrant sentiment and exclusionary immigration policies have been on the rise. Next, I turn to the many challenges migrant workers regularly confront, including structural barriers and inequalities such as poverty, language barriers, racism, and undocumented immigration status. At the same time, day laborers also demonstrate agency in multiple ways, a theme I will continue to discuss in the following chapters.

Chapter 3

"*Todo Duro*" – Difficult Labor Conditions

It was a bright August morning after one of my English classes, a perfect time to engage with workers. We had warmed up with a lesson that, like many before, led to a meaningful discussion. I found myself that morning interviewing Rodolfo, a tall, somewhat disheveled older worker who had become a recruiter of sorts. He was always finding new research participants for me asking, "Have you talked with *la maestra* yet?" as he kept tabs on how many interviews I needed to reach my goal. Rodolfo was an interesting man who was at times clearly engaged during my classes, while on other days seemed distant and pensive. This morning, as we sat in the warm sun, he was ready to be interviewed and share his stories. As we talked about work conditions and compensation, I asked about the payment of particular jobs, "When a job is easier, you charge less, no?" Rodolfo gave me a puzzling look as he considered such a notion and responded flatly, "*todo duro"* (everything is hard). Many of the day laborers I spoke with used these same words, indicating that all of the work they do is difficult, that there are no "easy" jobs. Rodolfo continued, repeating this refrain, "*Todo duro*. Of course it is. If the work wasn't hard, we wouldn't be the ones hired to do it."

Scholarship about immigrants as marginalized workers tends to focus on those in factories (Bank-Muñoz 2008; Lugo 2008; Striffler 2005; Tuttle 2012) and farmworkers (Bade 1999; Holmes 2013, Horton 2016a; Sanchez 2013), settings where individuals have very little control over their work circumstances. Immigration status, language

barriers, and being labeled, often erroneously, an "unskilled" worker contribute to migrant laborers' vulnerability to dehumanizing treatment, extreme controls in the workplace, and dangerous working conditions. On the farms of Washington, California, North Carolina, and around the country, migrant workers suffer from gastritis, hypertension, headaches, and joint pain, experience injuries from falling off ladders, and are exposed to extreme temperatures and dangerous pesticides (Bade 1999; Holmes 2013; Horton 2016a). *Maquila* (factory) workers are plagued by "exposure to toxins, mutagenic and carcinogenic chemicals, the operation of dangerous and antiquated machinery that lacks safeguards to prevent injury, lack of protective equipment and clothing, stress or disease caused by long hours of repetitive motion, and a denial of information on chemicals in the workplace" (Cravey 1998, 96; see also Denman 1997). And unrealistic expectations of worker productivity stress workers' bodies as employers frequently speed up factory conveyer belts to increase output, regardless of workers' requests to slow down the pace (Striffler 2005).

While much of the current literature focuses on workers in these particular contexts, there are also vulnerabilities unique to day laborers such as potentially risky, precarious jobs that may result in major injuries (Heyman 2016; Meléndez et al. 2013; Raythod 2016; Walter et al. 2002) and increased stress levels that can result in disease, depression, and social isolation (Galvan et al. 2015; Negi 2013; Organista et al. 2016). Consistent with my observations at the Day Labor Center, "most day laborers are male, foreign-born, recently arrived and unauthorized, and have low levels of education and poor command of English. As a result, the participants in this industry are highly vulnerable and exploited" (Valenzuela 2003, 309). In this chapter, I address migrant day

laborers' vulnerabilities to wage theft and unfair wage negotiations, the potential for injury, illness, and depression, and experiences with racism and maltreatment on the job.

Wage Theft, Expectations and Negotiations

During a discussion with a group of men, I asked if any of them had been treated unfairly at a job obtained through the DLC. Andy started, "Well, I went to the job and the lady said she would pay me about $220 for some gardening work. When we arrived, I asked her which of the rows of plants she wanted done; she said, 'only that side.'" Andy finished the job in half the time he expected and was proud of his work. When Andy showed the employer the completed job, she insisted that he finish another, adjacent row of plants, upset that it was not done already. "But you told me only to do one side," explained Andy. The woman argued that she had directed him to complete "both sides" and insisted he return the following day to finish the second row of plants in order to get paid at all. Andy continued, "It isn't fair; I had to return another day to finish the job, but she didn't tell me that she wanted both rows done in the first place!"

After hearing Andy's description of his exchange with an employer, Miguel, a newcomer to my English class, shared a similar experience:

> One time, I went on a moving job with a guy. He was fine to pay $15 per hour. He took us to three places: Los Angeles, Hollywood, and somewhere else in LA. It took all day! When he brought us back here, he paid us only for two hours. When we asked why, he said because he wasn't going to pay for the time we spent traveling.

Miguel was able to negotiate for another hour or pay for a total of three paid hours for six hours of actual time spent on the job. He lamented that had he known he would not be paid for the full day, he would have declined the job altogether. But the employer did not disclose that he intended to pay only for time spent actually moving boxes and furniture, not the driving time.

Multiple migrant day laborers at the DLC have faced wage theft, negotiating a wage but being paid less at the end of the job. One strategy they have employed to prevent this is the minimum wage requirement of $15 per hour which is posted on a sign for potential employers to see clearly: “Unskilled labor pays a minimum wage of $15; skilled labor $20.” Rarely would a day laborer accept a job for less than $15 per hour and because most of the workers considered themselves professionals, even $15 per hour was viewed as low. Employers often tried to low-ball day laborers despite this expectation using several techniques. On one occasion an employer offered $10 per hour for unskilled labor. When he was met with resistance by a few of the workers he became upset and threw out some expletives. “I don't know about *that* [referring to $15 per hour]. I’ll have to call the boss and see if he’s willing to go *that* high.” As he walked toward his car, he got on his cell phone and made a production out of his talk with his “boss” so that everyone could hear him protest. Eventually, he got into his truck and left. Because none of the workers were willing to go that day, the employer left without any workers. When this happened, and it happened frequently enough to make a significant impact, workers felt proud for having stood up for themselves and for holding to their standard wage. If they *all* agreed to work for no less than $15 per hour, that became the expectation of potential employees and employers.

Another strategy that employers would use to drive down the wage was to underestimate the time and difficulty of a job. Moving jobs were notorious for this. Employers would underestimate the number of boxes they had to carry and/or the difficulty of maneuvering throughout the structure such as a multi-level apartment with stairs or a unit that was on the opposite side of the loading zone. Other projects were also underestimated as Vera experienced with an employer. During initial negotiations with the employer, Vera agreed to be paid $50 for a small demolition job that included taking out a small brick wall. Thinking the job would take about three hours, this was an acceptable wage. When she went to the job site, however, she found that not only was the wall larger than expected, but that the employer also wanted her to take out a whole floor and then clean up the discarded building material and take it to the dump. Apparently, the employer also micromanaged how the job was executed, which was frustrating for Vera. In the end, she said she should have charged $100 for that job saying, “I kind of killed myself on that one, but you learn.”

Employers would also overestimate the duration of the job or sometimes a worker would be so efficient that they completed the job sooner than expected. Day laborers have learned to be careful about this and to be very specific about the expectations of a job; thus, they preferred to charge a flat-rate. This way, whether the job took shorter or longer than expected, workers would be paid a fair wage. Otherwise, if they worked hard and fast, the employer might reduce the negotiated amount because it did not take as long to finish as expected. Workers considered the difficulty of the job as well. For example, for a moving job, the rate was increased if there was no elevator or if there was heavy furniture to lift. Being specific about the parameters of a job and clearly understanding

the employer were important to avoid potentially awkward or even violent confrontations or conflict when it came time to render payment.

In other instance, Tomas was hired late in the afternoon by a woman who wanted him to empty a storage unit in a neighboring county. Because he had not gotten work all day and most of the workers were gone, he reluctantly agreed to take the job for $12 per hour with the expectation of seven hours of work. It was a very hot afternoon; the employer offered no water or food and she docked the time that they spent driving to the storage unit and back. After seven long, hot hours, he was paid only $50 total and had a splitting headache due to the heat exposure from moving many heavy boxes from a large storage unit into a very long, hot moving truck. “I needed the money so much. I am so tired today,” he bemoaned the next day.

The expectation of a good wage was one of the reasons that migrant workers chose day-labor as their primary or supplementary source of income. Certain jobs were deemed “unskilled” and others, “skilled,” and wages varied accordingly. Jobs that required specific knowledge such as electricity and plumbing usually paid between $25-$50 per hour which was considered a decent wage but still under market standards for this community where the minimum started at around $50 per hour for specialty professions. Construction requires specific knowledge, time, and precision as does painting, taping, and drywall, which typically earned $20 to $25 per hour. Gardening and cleaning were among the lowest paying jobs as they required less specialization, tools, or extensive experience and so $15 per hour was usually acceptable. Other considerations included the weather and estimated time to completion. If the job was outside and it was either very hot or very cold, day laborers requested a higher rate. Workers may also

negotiate a lower hourly rate with the clear expectation of several days, weeks, or months of work. Jobs varied across the board and wages might be negotiated for any number of reasons. Some examples of job offers that I observed included:

- Dishwashing for seven hours for $100
- Digging for $15 per hour
- Demolition for $20 per hour
- Breaking up concrete for three hours for $80
- Moving for $15, $20, and $25 per hour
- Cleaning a boat for $15 per hour
- Loading and unloading furniture for $10 per hour
- Unloading and dumping a container for $100 for the day

One of the reasons that was repeatedly given for why workers chose the DLC over the *esquinas* was the commitment to the collective. “If one person agrees [to work for less] than another, it’s all for nothing,” said one worker. Many workers considered themselves professionals; they had experience and knew what they were doing. They wanted to be remunerated appropriately. The price of labor for the types of jobs that workers at the DLC did ranged but was especially high for plumbing and electrical work, which were considered high-skill jobs. Even at a discounted rate, several workers said they had been paid far under market for skilled jobs because as Adrian stated, “They don't pay. They don't want to pay.” Nicolas explained that, “Sometimes they [employers] say ‘I could get a guy in LA for $10 per hour’ and I think, okay, go to Los Angeles and find one of those workers, then. Spend your time and your gas. But here, we won’t work

for so little unless we are desperate." Many workers shared this sentiment, expressing their commitment to the collective while also valuing their own abilities.

Desperation can be a motivating factor for some to accept a job at a lower rate, despite their commitment to the collective. In a conversation about education, Nicolas told me of a saying: *"los letras no están cuando tienes hambre"* or, "grades and education do not matter when you're hungry." The sentiment of "he must be hungry" was a phrase I heard frequently as an explanation as to why someone took a low-paying job himself or to explain why another worker would accept a job for such a low wage. Occasionally, when an employer wanted to pay less than $15 per hour, Ricardo allowed the job to be made available to anyone who wanted it. Instead of using the regular lottery system (with the ball roller and their tickets) anyone who was interested randomly pulled a ball out from a bucket. Ricardo might say the lowest or highest number got the job. If someone really needed the money, they may be willing to do it "*por la renta"* (because the rent is due), a common phrase that encapsulated the day-to-day reliance on getting work.

Workers were more prone to accept lower paying jobs toward the end of the day, after waiting for something better to come along but it had not. Rather than lose the whole day, day laborers might take a low-paying job so that the day does not end up a total loss. Employers knew that many migrant workers had multiple financial obligations and were limited in job opportunities because of their undocumented status, making them more apt to accept lower wages than would be acceptable for regular contractors (see also, Ordóñez 2015, 49). As one worker acknowledged, "There have been other times when I worked a lot of hours for a little bit of money, and I know that they're [employer]

abusing me but I still do it. I do it because I need the money [but] nobody wants to be abused." As much as workers enjoyed the freedom of negotiating wages and refusing jobs, they were simultaneously limited or capped by the expectation of local employers who wanted to pay a lower wage than market value. Thus, workers were vulnerable to being underpaid for their labor.

A third strategy that employers utilized to reduce wages was to ask workers to wait until after the job was finished to be paid so that they could evaluate their work and pay them an amount that they believed was fair for the completed job. Usually, these proposals were rejected in negotiations as they posed too much of a risk. However, some workers did experience outright wage theft when they completed a job and were not paid for it. For example, Nicolas recalled a time when he was doing a remodeling job and the employer said that he would pay him $200 the following day but he never followed through with payment. Nicolas returned to the worksite after trying to call the contractor several times but found the apartment empty. Not knowing the owner of the apartment, he was unable to track down the employer. As he said "You have a house and a car. You can get money from the ATM. Why you don't want to pay me for today's work because you don't know what tomorrow might bring?" He said that no compensation was not typical but when it happened, "it's bad" and it was significant because there was little to no recourse.

Rodolfo shared about a similar experience where he was owed $450 but when it came time for payment the employer lied, saying he had already paid him. Rodolfo challenged his employer and called him a liar as he described the events to me, but he did not directly accuse the employer. He walked away from the conflict, without payment. In

frustration Rodolfo remarked that, “We don’t have rights. We can’t call the police in this country; there is no support. We are at the mercy of others.” Another worker, Tony, recalled this type of situation happening twice in nine years of working as a day laborer. The first time, the employer would not pay him the $120 he was owed for a painting job. Tony decided to let it go because he didn’t want to have a major conflict. The second time, he was paid for two of three days of work. On the final day, the employer told him he would pay him the following day but did not. Tony tried to call him but could not get ahold of the employer to demand payment. Rather than dwell on these instances, Tony said, “There was nothing I could do. I looked for the employer, but nothing. God will give me more work.”

Though instances like these were not the norm, they were significant and posed a real threat for day laborers. Losing a day’s or week’s wages and time can be detrimental for day laborers who depend on daily income and may quickly cause them to spiral into financial stress and hardship. Additionally, if immigrants call the police or report the employer to any authority, they run the risk of being apprehended by immigration officials. Even if they do have rights as individuals, many workers do not understand how to report incidents of wage theft or maltreatment and are afraid of potential consequences. Thus, many incidents go unreported.

Injury and Illness

One particularly sunny morning, I arrived at the DLC to find Mateo, a familiar face, sitting on one of the benches with the contents of his backpack strewn about a tabletop. He looked tired and very sick, a stark contrast to his usually positive demeanor, energetic,

and welcoming presence. Just as he was reaching for a tissue, I extended my usual distant-high-five, reserved for workers who insisted their hands were too dirty to shake hello as he warned, “Don’t come any closer, *maestra*.” Usually, Mateo had his speakers on with music pumping as he poured over magazines, enjoyed friendly conversation, or helped me teach an English class with his detailed questions and examples for other students to follow. But on this day, Mateo had caught the flu and was feeling especially drained. He sat alone in the corner among his mess of tissues, hands folded over his chest with his sweatshirt hood up as he placed his head down on the table top. He confessed he had taken a lot of Nyquil and had a bad headache. Mateo was stressed out. He was also facing serious problems including losing his housing situation at his brother’s home and wondering what he would be able to afford. He also desperately wanted to go back to Mexico to be with his son but struggled with feeling like failure. If he returned now, he explained to me, he would not have anything to offer his son financially. He was sick and needed rest, but he could not afford to miss an opportunity to work because he relied on the money. As Mateo reminded me, day laborers do not get paid sick leave.

Day labor is by its very nature physically precarious and risky. Much of the current literature gives voice to the many potential health concerns to which day laborers are most prone. Galvan and his colleagues (2015) highlight the psychological consequences of living in poverty, experiencing unpredictability, and living as a marginalized population as it becomes apparent through chronic stress. Similarly, Negi (2013) finds that day laborers who face discrimination become prone to depression and as a result may tend toward social isolation. Further, psychological distress can also lead to physical illness as the body internalizes the many external factors contributing to their

psychological suffering. Organista and his colleagues (2005, 2013) have studied migrant day laborers' vulnerability to HIV and other sexually transmitted illnesses as men are far away from their partners for long periods of time and engage in extra-marital relationships, may drink prior to sexual activity decreasing their rate of condom use, and report drug use with unclean needles (Organista and Kubo 2005; Worby and Organista 2013).

Migrant day laborers run the risk of injury and illness, as well as being taken advantage of as a vulnerable population. Legal scholar Jayesh Rathod (2016, 4) argues that "Immigration law norms arguably shape occupational risk, independent of their direct impact on labor standards…Most undocumented workers are funneled into the informal economy where precarity is the norm". Further, most undocumented workers are characterized by economic insecurity, which leads to desperation and thus, they will encounter greater occupational risks as "workers' extreme financial need may lead [them] to remain in an unsafe work environment" (Raythod 2016, 4). Migrant workers who do not receive safety training are at much higher risk for injury and illness resulting from harsh working conditions because they have not received knowledge of proper care and procedures to protect themselves, and because their employers did not protect them (Rathod 2016).

Further, Abel Valenzuela et al. report that 54% of day laborers who had been injured on the job in the past year of their survey did not receive necessary medical care because they either could not afford to pay for it themselves or the employer refused to cover the expense (2006, 13). Additionally, because most migrant workers are undocumented, they may fear entering government buildings where health departments

are usually housed and avoid places like hospitals and medical clinics where they could receive critical access to education, preventative care, and immediate assistance. As a result, migrant day laborers may never get the consistent care they need, and thus continue to suffer from the illnesses and injuries that ail them.

Most jobs also require physical strength to lift weighty tools, maneuver awkwardly shaped and heavy objects (like moving furniture or handling lumber), or perform demolition of concrete, brick, or tile. Additionally, agility is required to move quickly and accurately. Working on roofs, climbing up ladders, and using heavy equipment may lead to injuries that could potentially reduce day laborers' ability to work for long periods at a time or altogether (Heyman 2016; Meléndez et al. 2013; Raythod 2016; Walter et al. 2002). The most frequent injuries day laborers described were musculoskeletal, with acute and chronic back pain among the most common complaints. Additionally, joint pain caused by laying carpet and tile, long-term ailments like carpel tunnel syndrome from repetitive jackhammer use, and rare but serious burns and falls are all potential ailments that day laborers risk. Exposure to "toxins, dermatitis, or allergic reactions to dust on a work site" are also common (Walter et al. 2002, 226). Day laborers do not have health insurance, are not covered by workers' compensation, and are at the mercy of their employers' homeowner's insurance (if they are working in a house) or their generosity to take them to a clinic or doctor should injury occur. Several workers I observed experienced injuries on and off the job and it affected them personally and professionally.

Diego experienced an injury to his ankle, leaving him temporarily unable to climb ladders and hold his body in certain positions for long periods of time, positions required

for specific jobs like lifting or doing repetitive motions for spray-painting. Though he thought the pain would be temporary, and it had been a while since his surgery, Diego said that sometimes the pain returned when he worked for too long or applied too much weight or pressure on the injury. Though he was not severely overweight, he was actively trying to lose weight in order to reduce the pressure on his leg and ankle. Diego frequently spoke to me about being healthy, eating well, and having faith in God. I observed that those who maintained a positive outlook tended to have faster recoveries from injuries and illness and greater motivation to stay well. Diego also had great contacts and worked frequently though he was still bothered by this injury. Though day labor afforded him the opportunity to turn down jobs that were too physically taxing, his financial needs frequently propelled him to work through the pain.

Two years ago, Hipolito was hit by a car at a nearby intersection and broke his leg very badly. Unfortunately, the ache still bothered him, even after surgery. He could not lift heavy boxes when doing moving jobs anymore and he had to be very careful not to cause further damage by stressing the injury. Hipolito worked incredibly hard and though he was over sixty years old, he had many repeat clients and frequently posted photos on Facebook of the difficult jobs that he had done. He reported that when he bent his leg a certain way, it hurt, and he had to be careful about the jobs he accepted. Thankfully, the person who hit him had good insurance, so the cost of his hospital care was covered along with a $20,000 compensation for the ordeal. He sent this money to his son in Mexico, who was able to purchase a much-needed truck and even a house. Worried about the cost of care, Hipolito was relieved that his medical bills were covered, but still suffered from the injury and it impeded his ability to take certain jobs.

Adrian had been hit by a car as he was riding his bike to the DLC. He was taken to the hospital and treated by physicians, but it left his ribs badly bruised and he was in a lot of pain. Thankfully, the injury was mostly superficial in that he did not puncture a lung or experience internal injuries; however, his muscles and bones still ached and he had not fully healed. He was not as fortunate as Hipolito in that he received no additional payment from insurance, though his medical expenses were expected to be covered. Adrian was concerned that there could be long term effects from the damage, such as persistent muscle and joint pain as a result of the jolt to his whole body, that could potentially impact his ability to work. When we last spoke he was debating whether or not to employ legal counsel in hopes of winning a settlement to make sure he could pay for additional care should his condition worsen. In his late fifties, he feared that his body would not recover easily, and he was concerned about his future earning potential. Despite his pain and hardship, Adrian continued to come to the DLC to get jobs as he pushed himself to earn a living.

Nicolas told me that once while he was working a job there was an incident when he nearly chopped off his little finger. It was a moving job and he slammed his finger between the garage door and a concrete block. The employer took him to the hospital and dropped him off without offering to cover his expenses or to stay to find out the diagnosis. Aside from the employer's disregard for the outcome, it bothered Nicolas more that his employer that day was Mexican, like him, as he "expected my own to be better to me." Most employers, he said, "will give you something right then like $2000 or $1500 and they feel bad" but not this employer. Fortunately, the injury was on his non-dominant hand and left no long-term damage that prevented him from working but it was an

unexpected expense and, at the time, prevented him from being able to work for a few days while he recovered.

Injuries on and off the job can leave day laborers without any recourse to gain compensation to pay for future health care needs or potential loss of income. Health insurance is rarely ever an option; neither is access to good, consistent medical care. Day laborers do not have access to protections such as worker's compensation, or benefits like paid sick leave, that employees in other labor sectors do. Thus, the risk of a job must be weighed heavily during wage negotiations. Additionally, as workers age, they tend to consider the risk of a job more carefully, recognizing that they have much to lose if they cannot do physical labor because of injury or by neglecting their health. As Nicolas stated, "Sometimes you are asked to do risky work, but we need to do it to make money." As many of the workers at the DLC were the primary income earners for their families, avoiding injury and illness was a priority, although like so many other aspects of their lives, this too was unpredictable.

Illness also includes psychological distress as many workers consistently experience hardships and, as a result, may fall into despair about their situations (Negi 2013; Organista et al. 2013). One example is Mateo, a worker I introduced in the opening of this chapter whom I met early on in my fieldwork and was consistently concerned about throughout my time at the DLC. Mateo spoke excellent English and was always interested in coming to my classes to learn more and to help me with translation or to assist others with their questions. We had several conversations about his life as a day laborer. Originally from Mexico, Mateo came to the United States for the first time around fifteen years ago. He had a nine-year-old son whom he missed terribly and he

tried to talk to him regularly via phone. Mateo had been away from his son for about six years and felt very disconnected from him and his needs. Mateo and his son's mother had parted ways long ago and communication with her was, according to Mateo, very difficult. In his absence, she met another man who has filled the role of "father" in many ways to Mateo's son. Still, when they spoke, his son repeatedly pleaded with Mateo to come home. Mateo's primary goal was to return Mexico to take care of his son, and so he had been trying to save money by continuing to work in the United States.

Unfortunately for Mateo, life in the United States had been difficult. He had been living locally with his brother and his brother's wife for several months but had some conflict with his sister-in-law. Eventually, his brother asked Mateo to leave. It was difficult to find an affordable apartment in Southern California. After staying with friends here and there, Mateo eventually landed at the Mission, a local community shelter which allowed him to stay for 90 days. They had strict rules regarding guests' entry and exit times and so leaving with just enough time to get to the DLC to sign in for the morning was often difficult. He also relied on public transportation to get to the DLC since he did not have a car. Finally, with life being as expensive as it was, he had a hard time paying for daily expenses in the United States while also sending money home to his son, furthering the conflict between him and his son's mother who relied upon his financial support.

At one of his lowest points since I had met him, Mateo did not even have enough money to buy lunch for the day. A very upbeat, gregarious type towards the beginning of our friendship, Mateo became progressively distant and more depressed. At times, he was hopeful, speaking only of his desire to see his son. But his goal to return to Mexico was

delayed a month at least three times during the course of our interactions. After not seeing Mateo for several weeks, I grew concerned and asked Ricardo about him. He told me that Mateo had been asking to borrow money from some of the other workers too frequently and more often than not, was unable to pay them back. This caused some friction between Mateo and some of the workers to the point where Ricardo had to ask him to leave. I later learned that Mateo had a direct conflict with Ricardo about drinking alcohol on site. Apparently, Mateo called the police to report Ricardo drunk while at the Center but upon their arrival, the police found Ricardo to be without any alcohol. Since there was no evidence to follow through the report, it was quickly dismissed as a situation involving a disgruntled worker that simply went too far or as one worker called it, "a lot of drama." After this incident, Mateo did not return to the Center.

It is hard to say what Mateo's reasons were for not returning to the DLC. Mateo fell victim to harsh working conditions which led to logistical difficulties, and eventually to depression. The depression also prevented him from being able to engage in consistent work opportunities and may have contributed to his frequent illness. In his case, emerging from such difficulty proved impossible given the circumstances that seemed to continually stack up against him.

Stefan was a young worker who also experienced a season of depression that affected his ability to work. When I first met him, Stefan was living his mother and sister locally while his son lived with his mother in a town about two hours away. Stefan, like Mateo, worked hard to help provide for his son but found himself in a similar cycle of circumstances that eventually led him towards depression. Stefan was born with a heart defect, and his parents brought him to the United States when he was around eleven years

old in hopes of getting him medical care from a specialist in Los Angeles. He also suffered from a physical disability whereby he had one short arm and two disjointed fingers on the other. He had experienced discrimination because of this disability before because employers did not think he could work with one semi-functioning arm. At age 29, when I first met him, Stefan explained that he had received few long-term work opportunities. He would get some short-term temporary work but no continuing offers. Without regular work he eventually became homeless which caused him to lose track of many of the documents required to complete his Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) application. Given the current political climate, Stefan was racing against the clock to get his paperwork underway before he turned 31, when he would no longer qualify for DACA consideration.

Then, because of what he called "bad choices," Stefan had some legal trouble, needed money to pay for his legal aid, and needed assistance submitting the paperwork for DACA. Eventually, he felt overwhelmed as one small infraction turned into a much bigger, more expensive situation from which he felt he could never recover. One night, he became very angry and blew up, hit someone at a local bar, and found himself in jail for inciting violence. He was released on bail and was clearly shaken up by the experience. During one of our talks, Stefan was moved to tears, fearing that he would never get out from under the pile of circumstances that had grown out of control. He was motivated by his desire to take care of his son and wanted to keep moving forward but he just did not know where to start. Over the course of a year, one of Stefan's family's members remained a regular at the DLC, and so I would frequently ask about his situation. I was so pleased to hear that after the most recent jail experience, he was

working regularly in a warehouse and seemingly doing well at it. He was slowly coming out of his depression and trying to make amends with his family, maintain a steady job, and complete his DACA application.

Many day laborers experienced depression for a number of reasons similar to Mateo and Stefan; circumstances can quickly spiral out of control. Without the financial means and cultural know-how to navigate complex legal and medical systems, it can be easy to feel despair that one will never be able to overcome such hurdles. And because many migrant day laborers are far from the family and friends who know them best and are in a position to provide support, day laborers often remain isolated and without such support, and thus, the services and the help they often need are not available to them.

The inequalities and injustices that migrant workers face are the result of intersecting and interconnected socioeconomic structures including ethnicity (Baker-Cristales 2004, Obeler 1995), globalization (Landau 2005; Ortiz 2002; Rothstein 2007), neoliberalism (Loewe and Taylor 2008), and the spread of capitalism (Collins 2007; Heyman 2012). Mateo and Stefan exemplify how a theory of intersectionality (Crenshaw 1989) may be useful to understand migrant day laborers' series of difficulties in terms of their health and overall wellbeing (or lack thereof). Intersectionality captures how marginalization emerges from multiple aspects of identity as race, class, and gender intersect to become sites of stratification that are built into cultural systems and directly affect the life chances of individuals (Crenshaw 1989). For Mateo, his lack of employment opportunities led to feeling like a failure since he could not provide for his family, an important, culturally defined characteristic of manhood. Additionally, his lack of documentation prevented him from seeking medical help, thereby increasing his

chances for chronic illness which would directly affect his ability to work and further prevent him from providing for his family.

Migrant day laborers have individual ailments like injuries and chronic illness while at the same time, face structural barriers rooted in immigration policy, poverty, gender expectations, and access to resources. Immigrants are often subject to poor health outcomes as racialized, marginalized individuals (Viruell-Fuentes, Miranda, and Abdulrahim 2012). Thus, migrant day laborers are more prone to experiencing multiple forms of hardships–physical and psychological distress that often propel them toward greater difficulties–mainly, a lack of finances, resources, and personal connections to others.

Legal scholar Kimberle Crenshaw argues (1989, 3) that focusing on "the most privileged group members marginalizes those who are multiply-burdened and obscures claims that cannot be understood as resulting from discrete sources of discrimination." By analyzing where day laborers experience locations of marginalization on a daily basis and in their everyday lives, my fieldwork reveals that poverty, injury, discrimination, and documentation status may all be locations of marginalization. This research adds to our knowledge of how migrant workers confront powerful structural barriers and informs an understanding of the many integrated factors that contribute to their marginalization (Mahler 1995). I now turn to a discussion of how race, discrimination, and employers' mistreatment of day laborers affect migrant workers in tangible ways.

Racism, Discrimination, and Mistreatment on the Job

Migrant day laborers repeatedly experienced racism at the DLC and in their everyday lives. Regardless of the fact that the DLC was in a community that accepted their presence for the most part, several workers attested to their experience with racism and discrimination as migrants in the United States. Gio remarked that racism "[is] something [that is] felt–us not speaking English or whatever. They make assumptions about us." Further, Rodolfo described how people in the United States describe Latin American migrants as "dirty" "wetbacks" or "illegals" based on assumptions about their place of origin. Terms like "*moreno*" indicated racism regarding dark-skinned migrants who were frequently assumed to be indigenous and thus, to have less intelligence than their lighter-skinned colleagues (see Barenboim 2016). I heard that there were a few occasions when people would yell at workers, "Go home!" or shout derogatory names such as "*mojados*" (wetbacks), though I never witnessed it myself.

I frequently observed community members approach the DLC with friendly intentions as I describe later in chapter five. My presence, however, may have affected the frequency of racist comments as employers and workers did not, perhaps, want me to witness that behavior. For example, on one occasion of coarse joking between a few of the men, I asked one of the workers to explain the verbal exchange. He said, "*Maestra*, your ears would burn if I told you," hoping to protect me from the offensive language of the banter. Similarly, employers and other community members may have refrained from discriminatory comments, not knowing the purpose of my presence as I clearly stood out among the workers. Still, although I did not observe overt racist acts, interviews revealed

that workers were subject to racism as workers and as a marginalized population in the community.

Additionally, workers described increased racism and discrimination on other *esquinas,* which is one of the reasons they preferred the DLC. Though the DLC was not immune to racist commentary and discriminatory treatment, transgressions were less frequent. In one of my first interviews, Andy described his first experience with racism:

> I was working in a car wash, and friend came to pick me up early...it was really cold and so I waited at a coffee shop. I was sitting on the sofa and a white guy said in English, but at the time, I didn't understand English, "Hey, go back to your people. This is not a place for you. This is for Americans." Maybe it was because I was dressed really badly to work at the car wash. But he was the only one who ever told me that.

Even worse, was his experience on a job. He recalled being so bothered by the incident but had no idea at the time of how to react. Andy had requested a drink of water after working outside in the heat for a long time. As he described, "There was a gallon of milk on the porch and the boss picked it up from the floor, went to the water hose, rinsed it, filled it up with water from the hose and gave me the water." He continued to work but thought about how wrong the employer was to respond to him in such away. As he described this situation to me, he used a metaphor "like a dog" who was expected to drink water from a hose or from a dirty container that was just lying around the yard as trash. He said, "I was really mad, really upset. I was insulted." As I listened to his account, I could see the anger sort of well up in him as the emotional memory of the injustice of the situation resurfaced. Andy then described how the employer agreed to

provide lunch. Around noon, he arrived with a small, cheap, fast-food hamburger and the receipt saying he would deduct the cost of lunch from his wages. Andy told him “no, thank you” that he would not need to bother since he was going to leave. In fact, Andy recalled working only four and a half hours though he was hired for two days. Andy referred to these instances as the “two humiliations” he experienced, an accurate description for how dehumanizing racism, discrimination, and such maltreatment can feel.

Workers are also discriminated against based on employers’ tendencies to hire laborers based on appearance, age, or gender, among other superficial qualities. Though the lottery system is usually accepted as the way for employees to be chosen, employers ultimately decide whether or not to take the worker whose number is called. Employers hired or not based on one’s clothes, perceived cleanliness, or skin color. For example, according to Santiago, darker-skinned workers were assumed to be from indigenous populations and assumptions about their lack of skill and inability to understand English or “proper” Spanish were frequently made (Holmes 2007). According to day laborers, the lighter one’s skin color, the greater their chance was of getting work.

Employers also expressed preferences based on their ideas and stereotypes about gender and labor. Males were most desirable for the majority of jobs which required heavy lifting, endurance, and were physically taxing; however, for cleaning, women were preferred, despite the physically rigorous work involved in cleaning houses. This was the one area where Elena had an advantage as one of the few women who occasionally employed the DLC to obtain work. Regardless of the lottery or the employee’s skill or experience, employers who wanted to hire someone for a cleaning job would usually ask

for Elena instead. Employers also tended to prefer youthful, particularly strong-looking men. Leonardo, a worker who ideally fit this description, spoke excellent English and had a friendly, outgoing demeanor that employers tended to like. As he assisted in the raffling of a job and sometimes negotiations, employers often asked him, "Can I just take you?" He would thank them but remind them that they have a system in place for exactly this reason. Some employers responded graciously, others objected. And, recognizing that workers competed for jobs, sometimes the system did not work as fairly as was intended. On occasion, a "helper" might cheat the system and go with an employer.

Andy commented on a common practice of employer preference based on age and appearance:

> Here, employers discriminate because of the age; they want someone young; [I was rejected when my number was called] only on one occasion. They said they wanted someone young. I told him that I can do it. I told him that I can do the job, so the employer kept looking at me and then said, alright, let's go. Then, they realized that I could do the job. But the majority of the people that hire here comment that they want somebody young. They look at my companions here and discriminate because of their age and appearance.

Andy was in his mid-fifties and always came to the Center ready to work. He took pride in his appearance and was very friendly to workers, employers, and community members. Andy spoke a little English and as one of the first workers I befriended, he had always come across to me as respectable and knowledgeable. In fact, Andy was hired for long-term jobs because he was a trained professional. He was an apprentice plumber for many years and felt he had the skills necessary to be deemed a professional. However,

employers still assessed his age when his number was called until he convinced them of his skills and capabilities.

Andy's experience, like that of many others, spoke to an assumption employers had that youth was a major indicator of one's ability to do hard labor. Alex Jr. confirmed this saying, "I've seen [old men], old Mexicans in Mexico carrying cement up ladders! If they can do it there… [why not here]." To be denied opportunity based on one's age, especially when they have the knowledge and skills to do a job well, is insulting, but day laborers are not protected by equal opportunity employment laws. And, for older men who have been rejected because of their age, they feel especially inadequate as they come from cultures that value the elderly for their dedication to a strong work ethic. Hipolito, who had begun working in Mexico with his father at age fifteen, was told by his mother and grandmother that working to take care of his family was central to his role as a provider and that he should demonstrate the highest integrity in his work. "If you don't work on the job when a boss has hired you, you are stealing," his mother taught. Sebi and Rodolfo, both males in their sixties, said "it feels bad" to be discriminated against because "[employers] want strength." In the United States, youth is more greatly valued as an asset in the workplace and thus, older workers feel doubly denied because they have lost a potential job opportunity and feel devalued because of their age.

Additionally, if one's clothes were not clean or they themselves appeared unkempt, they were less likely to be accepted by an employer if their number was called. One day, Stan, a young local citizen, came to the Day Labor Center having recently lost his job. He had a casual demeanor, was friendly to the others, and expressed a youthful naiveté. Intending to supplement his income, he came to the Center to look for work. On

his third day he showed up in pajamas. When I asked him about this he said, “Oh yea, I didn’t have time to change because I had to be here by seven. It’s not like it’s a real job anyways.” For some of the workers observing this, they felt insulted; they did not take Stan seriously and commented on his lack of work ethic. Stan’s own words reveal that he did not value the significance of day labor either as he did not bother to wear “real clothes” or work attire. What was especially bothersome to the other workers was that employers would see his lack of professionalism and assume that the others were similar in mindset; they worried that he would negatively impact the reputation of the DLC.

Carolyn Turnovsky describes how day laborers in New York City categorized workers into two basic camps. The “Temps,” typically U.S. citizens who would come to the corner for part-time work, were considered to be “irresponsible, dishonest, young, [do] drugs, lazy, have no skills, [are] proud and [are] trouble makers” (2004, 13). The “Regulars” or those who were full-time employment seekers and primarily immigrants, were insulted by the “Temps’” lack of work ethic and sought to distinguish themselves from them because they did not want to be negatively impacted by the “young Americans” working on the corner (Turnovsky 2004, 13). Workers at the DLC expressed similar sentiments and sought to bring up the level of expectations for everyone and distanced themselves from those who did not take day labor seriously as it could directly impact the perception of potential employers.

Workers at the Day Labor Center also commented that they had been denied work based on their appearance as employers called them “dirty” or commented on their perceived lack of cleanliness. Day laborers usually wore work clothes for painting, construction, and other jobs that would leave their clothes tattered. Additionally, some

workers did not have regular access to showers or laundry facilities, and many could not afford to buy work-specific clothes. This could be a disadvantage for workers who were rejected because of their appearance. Workers were at the Center in hopes of getting a job to pay for everyday expenses, including new clothes and better living conditions. Thus, for some, the cycle continued: without a job, they could not pay for assets, yet without the asset (appearing professional, clean), they were rejected for jobs.

Employers also chose workers based on a specific asset or resource, such as English language fluency or possessing a set of tools, a car, or a truck. While this may not necessarily be explicitly discriminatory, it does speak to the precarity of day labor as dependent upon employers' preferences. Speaking fluent English was a major draw for employers. If a worker said that they spoke English but then could not fully understand the details of the job, it could lead to conflict or losing a job altogether. Geraldo was fired from a job because he could not clearly understand the other employees. They asked him to "pass the hammer" and he did not know exactly what they were referring to. A friend told him about the DLC and so he came in search of jobs that would require little English fluency while at the same time, hoping to learn work-specific terminology on the job to secure more work in the future.

Workers with vehicles, and especially work trucks, possessed an important commodity and were far more likely to get work more frequently than those without. First, an employer did not need to pick up or drop off a worker; instead day laborers could follow behind or be given an address for the worksite. Second, work trucks were useful for hauling, clearing yards and trees, or dumping jobs, which were frequently available. Having a large work truck with a lift on the back could almost guarantee work

at the beginning and end of the month, when moving jobs were extremely common. A work truck was one of a day laborer's most valued assets and investing in maintenance as well as continually making improvements remained a top priority. Owning one's own tools or acquiring access to a set of reliable tools was another important asset. For Sebi, investing in a heavy-duty upholstery steam cleaner was a way to bolster for his business. With the machine, he could detail cars and clean carpets, increasing his chances of getting hired. Employers were given the freedom to choose someone who has such assets over an employee whose number was called in the lottery system. Thus, investing in skills, vehicles, and tools was important, alongside presenting oneself in a professional manner so that one had a greater chance of being selected.

Conclusions: Controlled Bodies

Anthropologists have uncovered the many vulnerabilities that migrant workers face in different sectors, vulnerabilities to which day laborers are not exempt. In addition to experiencing a variety of work violations such as wage theft, underpayment (or even no compensation at all), and unsafe working conditions, day laborers are frequently viewed as unskilled and hired for difficult, risky jobs. Day laborers' experiences with such hardships more broadly problematize the body as a location of power and as a commodity.

Several anthropologists draw out the ways that migrant workers' bodies are controlled by structural power through policies (Chavez 2008; De Genova 2002; Orser 2007; Rodriguez, Menjívar and Saenz 2009) within a range of settings, including on factory floors (Bank- Muñoz 2008; Landau 2005), in agriculture (Holmes 2013; Horton

2016a), and in domestic realms (Anderson 2000, Lemus 2017). In this scholarship, anthropologists point to the ways migrant factory and agricultural workers are objectified and surveilled, processes that capture workers' experiences as they are consistently monitored by the panoptic eyes of supervisors (Foucault 1979, 138). Managers frequently hover over factory workers on raised platforms, place cameras throughout property premises, frequently remind workers of posted regulations, and rely upon internal controls such as gossip as ways of casting their vision over workers' bodies (Striffler 2005).

Domestic workers, especially those who live with their employers, are also subject to the panoptic eye (Foucault 1979, 138) as workers are given strict parameters for behavior. They may be told where to bathe or eat, what to wear, when to sleep, where they're allowed to go (or not go), how to behave in front of their employers and their company, among a litany of other minutia (Constable 2002; Zarembka 2002). The experience of day laborers advances inquiry about such surveillance and control to further our understanding of migrant laborers who work in similarly intimate spaces.

Though day laborers do not experience consistent monitoring in the same ways as workers in factories and fields, they do confront the same challenges of working within a global economy that has reduced their bodies to commodities. Day laborers, whose work is frequently dangerous and who are at risk for multiple illnesses (Organista et al. 2013; Quesada et al. 2014), risk losing their best asset, which is their body. Should they be injured or become ill, there is little that can consistently be done to restore their ability as a wage earner. Such work conditions have detrimental effects not only physically but psychologically. As day laborers are highly susceptible to work injuries and illness,

exploring the relationship between their labor and their bodies contributes to an anthropology of the body through which we may examine more closely the inscriptions of power and agency as tied to the body (Lemus 2017, 105; see also De Genova and Peutz 2010; Fassin 2001, 3; Ordóñez 2015).

More broadly, these findings also underscore the many tensions that migrants experience in addition to their work stressors, including immigration status, discrimination, poverty, and familial separation. All of these are locations of marginalization that can present serious hardships for migrant workers. Mateo's situation exemplifies how difficult it is for migrant day laborers who feel deeply disadvantaged as they deal with the precarity of day labor, the challenges of poverty, and face discrimination. Through the study of precarity, however, we also learn how day laborers are resilient and continue to thrive as wage earners despite the many factors working against them. Stefan's experience affirms the realities of broader, structural limitations that migrant day laborers face regularly as they navigate finding work while also avoiding deportation. Workers are forced to confront these injustices in a global economy that requires cheap labor and enforces policies that relegate migrant workers to the margins. Still, my research problematizes analyses that focus solely on the susceptibilities of migrant workers. As I discuss in the following chapter, day laborers also exercise autonomy and flexibility through their employment in the informal sector.

Chapter 4

"¡Soy Libre!"- Freedom and Flexibility

When I first met Alejandro, I was drawn to his relaxed nature. He was friendly and easy to talk to. Particularly interested in my project, he would often tell me about a situation that was going on or the latest "drama" at the DLC. Alejandro was likeable and had a good rapport with other workers. He made friends and came to the Center "*para placticar*" (to chat and hang out) as well as to work. When I asked Alejandro why he was a day laborer he responded emphatically, "One word: freedom!" a sentiment repeatedly echoed by his peers. As I began to explore the ways in which migrant day laborers demonstrated agency, I came to know Alejandro as a worker who exemplified many freedoms and benefits that day labor offers. Alejandro was entrepreneurial and his pottery business in Mexico had done quite well. He designed and made planters for various nurseries throughout Mexico. He had made excellent contacts over the years in the United States and had sold a lot of his pottery to nurseries in southern California. Alejandro had also earned a reputation as a good, skilled worker. He was frequently hired for short term projects for two or three weeks at a time doing landscaping, design, or construction. He, like many others, used the DLC to supplement his income when there was no regular work available or if he was in between jobs. Additionally, Alejandro's contacts were due in large part to the DLC, signifying the importance of day labor centers where initial contacts between employers and employees may lead to more short or long-term offers.

For nearly twenty years, Alejandro had lived transnationally, traveling between Mexico and the United States. After he and his wife divorced, he returned to Mexico with his son, Alejandro Jr. (Alex) and lived there with him for twelve years. Occasionally, he would return to America to work, sell pottery, or visit with his son's mother. When I met Alejandro, he had an expired Green Card. U.S. permanent residency—a status that includes an issued Green Card—allows immigrants to remain in the United States indefinitely but limits their ability to return to their home countries because "trips abroad lasting longer than one year require a reentry permit" (UCSIS.gov). Alejandro was in the process of renewing his Green Card and eventually wanted to naturalize as a U.S. citizen. His goal, however, was not to stay in the United States as he much preferred life in Mexico. Without documentation, day labor was an ideal choice for making money while he was in the United States. Over the course of a few months when we were in frequent contact, Alejandro successfully renewed his Green Card and began the process for naturalization. As he commented "I have to get my papers to stay here so I can leave!"

One of the main reasons Alejandro had come to the United States most recently was because of his son, Alex, who had been experiencing some difficulties. As a father, Alejandro was concerned about his son's frequent drinking and marijuana use. He brought Alex, who has dual citizenship, to the United States in hopes of teaching him some marketable skills such as construction and landscaping. Alejandro wanted to model a positive work ethic and help his son to save money. He wanted Alex to be independent and successful so that Alejandro could eventually return to Mexico and not worry about his son's wellbeing. About one year into my fieldwork, this plan was still in motion. Alejandro chose to live in his vehicle with his son to save money on rent, anticipating his

impending return to Mexico. He had a friend who had access to regular showers and clean bathroom facilities at a nearby marina that Alejandro and his son utilized. Knowing his situation was temporary, living in his vehicle was a strategy that enabled Alejandro to minimize housing costs and maximize his ability to invest money into his business. Alejandro was "no stranger to sacrifice" as he explained saying, "it is worth it to suffer in a small way to reach a bigger goal."

During my fieldwork, Alejandro returned to Mexico with his son, a change from the original plan to have Alex stay in the United States. Alex's girlfriend and their son were still living in Mexico and Alex decided that he should return to be with them. Within days of Alejandro's return, however, a friend called to tell him that a letter arrived for him indicating that he had been granted an appointment with the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services. Trusting Alex to care for his home and business for a short while, Alejandro immediately returned to the United States. Alejandro was hopeful that once he was a United States citizen, his pottery business would thrive as he would pursue customers both in Mexico and throughout the United States.

Because of his business success and ongoing contact with buyers in the United States, Alejandro went out on jobs from the DLC only a few times each week. Sometimes, he would be away for weeks or months at a time to maintain his thriving business in Mexico. Between his business and the short-term contracts he was frequently offered, Alejandro made enough money to cover his own expenses and help take care of his son. Day labor offered Alejandro immense flexibility, allowing him to tend to his business while supplementing his income regularly in the United States. For Alejandro, day labor, in combination with his status as a U.S. permanent resident, has provided the

freedom he needs to live transnationally between the United States and Mexico and has enabled him to earn money as an undocumented migrant in the United States. Though there are challenges and limitations to the freedom that day labor offers, as I discuss, situations like Alejandro's demonstrate how day labor can provide flexibility and autonomy.

In chapter three, I described some of the vulnerabilities that migrant day laborers encountered including racism and discrimination, wage-theft, and maltreatment on the job. While there are great risks involved in this line of work, there are also strategic reasons for why migrant workers utilize day labor as a primary or supplementary form of income. Despite many challenges, workers at the DLC found that day labor offered them control over their labor and in their everyday lives—or at least the possibility for viable employment—especially if they were undocumented.

In this chapter, I first outline how day labor affords workers a significant level of agency in their work lives as they negotiate wages, accept and reject labor opportunities, make their own schedules, and experience variety in the work that they do. Next, I discuss ways in which these freedoms contribute to the prospect of building one's own business as many day laborers become entrepreneurs as they employ creative strategies for earning money and mimic many of the strategies often attributed to "entrepreneurialism" (Williams and Nadin 2010; see also Valenzuela 2001, 339). Entrepreneurship, as a term that connotes innovation, strategy, and creativity, widens the spectrum through which we may understand varying degrees of autonomy that migrant workers exercise throughout their migration process (Jones 1988; Theodore 2016). As my

research shows, migrant workers use day labor both as a way to survive, as it may their only option to earn money, *and* because it is flexible and allows for many freedoms.

Why Day Labor?

Despite the many challenges and vulnerabilities migrant day laborers face, why do they choose day labor over other employment opportunities? While Daniel Malpica (2002) found that day laborers typically saw their work as temporary or "for the time being" (2002, 16), I observed that workers at the DLC viewed their positions as long-term and embraced the freedoms that day labor offered. The majority of workers utilized day labor as their primary form of income while others used day labor to supplement their salaries from part-time or low-paying jobs. Workers emphasized that day labor offered freedom on many fronts. First, day laborers had direct control over their wages and could negotiate with employers. Second, they had the ability to choose their own hours, which enabled them to hold regular or part-time employment, take care of family obligations, or to accommodate transnational living situations. A third, critical reason why migrant workers chose day labor was that most, unlike Alejandro, were without documents that would authorize them to work in the United States. Without documentation, migrant workers generally have limited options. However, even within those limited options, day labor is attractive because the earning potential tends to be higher than in other labor sectors. Finally, workers enjoyed the variety of day labor as they learned different skills, worked for various employers, and traveled to multiple locations.

Earning Potential

According to Ricardo, the director of the DLC, many workers held a strong belief that, "You can earn as much as you want! If you want the money, the jobs are there. But you have to want it. We are always sending out a lot of guys." According to Ricardo, day laborers can earn as little or as much as they choose when the jobs are available. Migrant day laborers can also earn significantly higher wages than workers in other sectors for various reasons, particularly because the work is risky, can be difficult, and often, though not always, requires some level of skill and experience. Additionally, since day laborers are part of the informal economy and usually paid in cash, their wages are not subject to standard deductions for social security, unemployment, healthcare, state or federal taxes, or worker's compensation insurance. Thus, wages from day labor typically go directly to workers, since employers are not paying required taxes. Several workers commented repeatedly that one of the primary reasons they worked as a day laborer was because they made more money in a few days than they could at a regular, steady job in weeks or even months. Currently in California, the minimum wage is $11 per hour. For workers who arrived ten years ago, around 2008, the minimum wage was $6.75 per hour, though many workers explained that they earned a lot less than that in factories, meat-packing plants, and agricultural jobs. For example, Adrian described that he worked in factories for nearly twenty years but "was always broke. As a day laborer I can charge as much as I want. Maybe I don't make a whole lot but at least there is always money in my pocket." Additionally, factories and farms offer little to no upward mobility, so wages remain stagnant for long periods of time, despite the growing cost of living in California.

When I asked workers what they considered to be a fair wage for a day of work, their responses varied but they generally agreed that $200 a day was considered very good, $150 was desirable, and $120 was acceptable. Though this response reflected the average of workers' responses, nearly every interviewee commented "*todo depende*" (it all depends). Wages are subject to a variety of factors that employers consider including the difficulty or ease of a job, their budget for the project, the duration of a job, and the assets required such as tools or a truck. Workers understood that multiple factors determined the amount of money they could earn, and still, the belief was pervasive that one could make as much as he wanted so long as he was willing to work hard and accept jobs.

Martin was a worker I met early on in my fieldwork. He was likable, spoke English fairly well, and lived in a nearby community. We connected over a shared experience with our family; he had a niece who was the same age as my daughter and we quickly began exchanging pictures and stories of our lives with toddlers. Martin had been working as a day laborer for several years and utilized the DLC regularly. However, over the course of a year and a half, I noticed that his visits became less frequent because he was often hired for weeks at a time. Martin had spent a lot of time investing in building employer networks with the goal in mind to get hired regularly as a contract employee. Over time, the skills and resources Martin had generated led to the building of a successful business. At one point he had secured a job that paid $10,000 for a month of work. He was excited to show me pictures of each phase of the job. The first part included demolition of an existing concrete wall to expand the yard area. Then, he built a fence around the perimeter of the house and replaced the old wall with new

specifications. Finally, he designed an entirely new yard which involved removing and hauling away all of the old material, replacing the sprinkler system, and finally, replanting all of the landscaping.

Such a job required access to tools, materials, skills, and manpower, all of which Martin possessed. He also had a work truck which made the hauling of heavy, bulky construction materials possible. Work trucks are highly valued assets for day laborers. Because of this job, Martin was able to reach one of his major financial goals, which was to invest in a newer, bigger truck that would enable him to accept even more labor-intensive jobs. In early 2017, he purchased a larger work truck and then modified it with an electronic lift, an investment of about $4,000. Additionally, Martin was approved for a permit from the city to use the city dumpster regularly. This meant that Martin had the means to collect materials that construction jobs often required and was able to offer clients the convenience of disposing trash from the work site. Martin continually reinvested in his business by buying newer tools, making modifications on his truck, and broadening his network.

Martin also exemplified how individual success can extend to others. When Martin was offered large jobs like the one described above, he would hire one or two men, usually from the DLC, to work with him. Forming relationships with other workers at the DLC served as an important strategy to improve one's chances for obtaining work. Though relationships were valued because of the mutual support they often provided, they could also be advantageous as workers hired one another for big jobs.

Workers at the DLC were also able to decide how frequently they wanted to work based on their financial goals, provided that the jobs were available. One time as I talked

with Ricardo, we began discussing a worker who stopped coming to the Center. While this worker suffered several difficulties as a migrant day laborer, including financial hardships, housing problems, and depression, Ricardo commented that "his problem was that he would work for a day and take a week off. You can't be like that and do alright." According to the men I interviewed, working toward a financial goal is somewhat easy to do if one works frequently, negotiates well for higher wages, and is able to save money to reinvest in their assets. They conveyed that it takes drive, motivation, and consistency. Sal, a worker who came regularly to the DLC, affirmed the importance of pushing oneself to reach one's income potential:

> You gotta be ambitious to get the jobs. You gotta push yourself. But these guys get scared and they don't put themselves out there. They don't push themselves. But many do. I know a lot of these guys. They make all kinds of money in less than five months of being here. The goal is to be no boundaries.

To be "no boundaries" is to have endless possibilities to work and earn money. Sal's description of "putting oneself out there" meant leaving names and phone numbers with employers in hopes of securing future work opportunities, making business cards, and consistently learning new skills for employers. Sal's comments not only spoke to the importance of one's own ambition but also to the expectation of available work in the United States.

Similarly, anthropologist Gretchen Purser (2009) observed that day laborers in Northern California said that they were looking for steady work that paid well, but at the same time, perceived their street corner to be "paved with economic opportunity. The street corner labor market offers to those with ambition, creativity and undoubtedly

patience, the prospect – however illusory and improbable – of steady employment" (Purser 2009, 126). The belief that workers could make as much money as they wanted ran deep throughout the Day Labor Center. In reality, immigration status, lack of job skills, language competency, and cultural know-how were all factors that limited their earning potential. And yet, workers shared the sentiment that they could make as much as they wanted, signifying that workers had more of a perception of agency than in fact, there was.

This experience of day laborers expands our understanding of how migrant workers negotiate the tensions between their sense of agency and control over their lives and the barriers which prevent them from realizing their expectations. As a collective, workers could empower one another to keep going despite the difficult hurdles they faced as they encouraged one another to push themselves like Sal and Diego did, taught each other skills that would strengthen their marketability, and utilized services at the DLC, such as taking ESL classes. In so doing, workers might increase their actual agency as they invest in their marketability and move toward greater realization of their ideals. Still, no matter how much migrant workers invest in themselves, the structural inequalities that they contend with are powerful and might never allow for the type of opportunities to which migrant day laborers aspire.

Many workers at the DLC left their home countries because of major economic hardship due to the lack of job prospects. Andy, a worker from Guatemala, told me that his weekly salary for driving a bus amounted to about $50 per month, barely enough to cover his living expenses. Leonardo, a worker from Guatemala came to the United States for the same reason: he was living in poverty and had no work opportunities. Leonardo

also said that the level of corruption was very high, and that jobs and promotions were awarded primarily by bribes or given to friends and family members of hiring managers. Additionally, he said that gang violence had become so terrible that law enforcement had long lost the ability to control the problem. Such violence and poverty were pervasive in everyday life, according to several migrant workers at the DLC. Coming to the United States and having the ability to earn money offered relief for migrant workers who had no prospects for employment in their countries. Even if their earning potential was limited because of different barriers, they were still able to earn more money than they could in their home countries which was empowering for some, as they were able to provide for themselves and their families better than they could have before migrating to the United States.

Evaluating Employers, Jobs, and Negotiations

In addition to higher earning potential, workers also spoke of the freedom they felt to decline jobs for a variety of reasons including the wage, their impression of an employer, the difficulty of a job, or the particular type of work. Manny described one incident where he declined a job because the employer had what he called "a bad attitude." When the employer arrived for a moving job, Manny's number was called in the lottery "but I didn't like her attitude, so I said, 'no thank you.' Turns out, she only paid [the day laborer who took the job] $50 with no food or water and I was like, 'lucky I didn't go!'" Vera, a hard-working female employee at the DLC, described how an employer mistreated her by "screaming in my face. I simply walked away. I don't need that!" For day laborers, there

were no serious consequences for declining a job or walking off a work site if they were unsatisfied or felt mistreated by an employer.

Leonardo recalled a time when an employer came to the Center looking for a gardener. None of the workers wanted to go with him because the offer was for only two hours of work and many workers did not want to risk losing an opportunity to a full day's work at another job. Because he was helping to translate the details of the job, the employer asked Leonardo to work for him since none of the others wanted it. Leonardo responded, "No problem, I'll help you out." They agreed to two hours of work though the project ended up taking longer. The employer asked Leonardo what he typically expected to be paid for a full day of hard labor. Leonardo responded that $200 was ideal but was satisfied with their hourly arrangement. The employer surprised Leonardo with his response saying that not only would he pay him $200 for the work he had completed but that he would go and get a nice lunch with him. Leonardo happily reported, "See, none of the guys wanted to do it, but I said I would go help him out and look how it turned out. It was meant for me." Leonardo described his ability to accept or decline jobs simply based on his willingness to take a chance. A native Guatemalan, Leonardo recalled the violence and hardships he faced in his home country. Since coming to the United States, he experienced so many opportunities and enjoyed being able to help workers and employers at the DLC, as he stated, "simply for the joy of serving."

Andy recalled a similar situation when he accepted a job for an employer working on a home-improvement project. Though he knew it would be hard work with mediocre pay, he accepted the job. By the end of the day, not only had the employer provided "an extravagant lunch of salmon and potatoes with all the fixings," she gave Andy a generous

tip because “she liked me. She liked my good work.” Sometimes, taking a chance on an undesirable job or compromising one’s usual terms turns out to exceed workers’ expectations who risk accepting a job that initially seems less than ideal.

Another way that day laborers exerted control over their labor was by asking employers to see the job so that they could make an informed decision about whether or not to accept the offer. For example, one day during an English lesson, an employer came with a job offer. Andy’s number was called so he went to talk with the employer who explained the details of a plumbing job. Uncertain if he should accept the job at the wage offered, Andy requested that he first go to see the job and give the customer a price quote. The employer happily agreed. About twenty minutes later, Andy returned to the DLC. When I asked him what happened he explained: “It’s a difficult job. It would take too long and I’m not sure I have all the right tools. Also, he didn’t want to pay enough for the job.” In this case, the employer was agreeable to Andy’s request to assess the job; not all employers were willing. If employers do not allow workers to investigate a project prior to accepting a job, it could indicate that the employer is being dishonest and deter workers from taking the job. Negotiations like these are important as they serve to protect workers and their employers from potential conflict.

Migrant day laborers do not have to accept every job opportunity that arises and do not have to labor under subpar conditions if they are willing to negotiate, decline a job, or walk away. After carefully considering their circumstances, day laborers employ the freedom to decide for themselves if a job is worth accepting or not, a freedom that is not often available to migrant workers in other sectors (Brennan 2014; Constable 2002; Ngai 2005). Throughout my fieldwork, I observed that many jobs were declined for a

number of reasons, though low pay and undesirable work were the most common. For example, on one occasion an employer came to offer three hours of work for three men to load and unload furniture for a total of $30 each. No one accepted the job because the pay was far too little, and the duration was only three hours. One of the rules at the DLC was that if someone got a job for two or more hours, they were not permitted to accept another job from the DLC that same day. Thus, taking a three-hour job like this guaranteed only $30 without the chance to come back to the DLC for another job opportunity. Accepting such a low offer meant risking the possibility of a better opportunity, but it was always a gamble.

On another occasion, an employer offered a job to clean a boat for $15 per hour for four to six hours. No one took the job because, as several workers exclaimed, “that’s too cheap!” as workers waved their hands dismissively toward the employer. That same day, an employer offered a job to break up concrete for approximately three hours for $80 total. Samuel insisted that was too little pay because it was so labor intensive. Hipolito, however, was willing to do it, so he went instead. Later, another employer needed two workers for a digging job. After showing the workers pictures of the job on his cell phone and proposing his wage offer, none of the men accepted. They explained that it was too hot outside to do such difficult work for little pay.

One September day, an employer offered a general labor job to do some cleaning outside and general landscaping for $13 per hour. It was fairly hot outside so no one really wanted the job given the description and the pay. Though someone did eventually accept the job, it was highly undesirable as many of the workers made clear saying, “Nope! Not for me” and “it’s too hot outside to work for so little.” Workers would accept

the lowest paying jobs only when they could not afford to decline jobs. They tried not to make a habit of accepting subpar pay as it could harm the collective effort to maintain a minimum wage and thereby bring down the expectation of pay rates for potential employers. Overall, migrant day laborers at the DLC would decline jobs as they took the whole scope of their circumstances into consideration and weighed the risks. Sometimes, as Andy and Leonardo demonstrated, even taking a less-than-desirable job can prove to be beneficial in the end, but it was always a risk.

Variety of Work, Employers, and Locations

Day labor is unpredictable in terms of the kind of employment that a worker may do as it varies from day to day. Many workers expressed that they enjoyed the variety for many reasons, including being able to learn new skills, meeting different employers, and seeing various places. For example, Paulo remarked that

> Here, I like doing different things [jobs]. There is variety. Like demolition or moving jobs. I work in many different places too, like Los Angeles, Santa Monica, Pasadena, and Long Beach. I travel to many places for work, so there is variety. It keeps things interesting. I have also learned many different skills, have met all sorts of people and seen many places.

Paulo, a migrant worker from Mexico who had been in the United States for five years, really enjoyed the variety of jobs that he had the opportunity to do as a day laborer. In Mexico he studied chemical engineering, formulating pesticides for plants, but was not able to serve in his profession as an undocumented worker. Paulo faced a common limitation that migrant workers experience. Though many migrant workers are trained

professionals in their home countries, they are unable to practice their trades in the formal sector in the United States without certification from American agencies. Job training, education, and certifications do not always comply with American standards. Thus, workers would have to engage in recertification programs or enroll in educational courses in formal institutions which can be a difficult, if not impossible feat for undocumented migrants. Even with documents, these are demanding endeavors for recent migrants and are also quite cost prohibitive. Thus, many have turned to day labor, learning to enjoy the variety of work that day labor provides while learning new skills.

Similarly, Pierre, a recent migrant from Cameroon, was an architectural engineer. He enjoyed his trade very much but had to leave Cameroon and came to the United States as a refugee. Pierre often spoke of his home country and he missed his wife and children terribly. He had a university education and spoke English quite well, yet could not obtain employment in his trade because he was undocumented. He had been awaiting sponsorship so that he would have work authorization and eventually, bring his family to the United States. Over time, Pierre accepted that day labor was his best option, even if temporarily. Pierre was pensive, but at times, talkative, and he considered himself a lifelong learner. He would join in on many conversations with other workers and with me so that he could learn Spanish. He asked several questions about the English language and wanted to know why there were so many exceptions to English grammatical rules. Pierre's love for learning contributed to his enjoyment of day labor as he described how the variety of jobs, people, and places gave him something to look forward to every day.

Another worker, Vera, preferred having several different jobs rather than being confined to one repetitive form of work. She explained, "I could have a regular job. My

brother called and said they have openings [at a warehouse] but I go crazy indoors all day. I need different things to keep my mind busy." Vera also enjoyed doing demolition jobs because, as she described, "it is therapeutic," a sentiment shared by several workers. Vera regularly emphasized how she "took out a wall with all of my frustrations" or "got my anger out on that job!" Vera supported her two children while living with her mother and spoke of the stresses of everyday life, particularly in terms of providing financially for her family. Always optimistic, she pointed to the benefits that such laborious work offered to help her deal with her many stresses. Vera's personality was well suited for day labor as she was friendly, talkative, and helpful to workers and employers. With a strong work ethic and motivation to garner employment, Vera seemed up to almost any task. She explained that she liked "a good challenge" and felt proud of herself when she successfully conquered a difficult situation or job. Vera was continuously hired and she had earned a reputation as a hard worker among local employers in the community.

Santiago told me that he enjoyed tile work because he felt "like an artist" where detail and precision mattered while allowing space for artistic creativity. Similarly, Andy was a seasoned plumber who enjoyed problem solving and putting pieces together to build a functioning plumbing system. He saw it as a challenge to find and implement several possible solutions. He, too, described his work as "artistic" as no two problems had the same solution. Several workers described this idea as they explained the pride they took in their work, much like artists. For workers at the DLC, boredom could be avoided when there were different jobs to do and learn as well as different places to see.

Another worker, Emiliano, came to the DLC when his work permit expired. He was working in a warehouse where the ease of the job and the positive friendships he had

made contributed to his enjoyment of his position. He took pride in his work and was disappointed when he had to leave. Though he missed his former place of employment, he learned to enjoy day labor because of the variety. He not only learned new skills such as construction and painting, which he had become quite good at, but also he met people "from all walks of life." Living and working in Southern California offered a very multicultural setting where workers were accustomed to the diversity of people and work experiences. Emiliano also missed his family terribly, but he said that it helped him to have something new to look forward to each day.

For Bruno, a migrant worker from Guatemala, the variety of day labor helped him to teach his children new skills as a result of learning from others' expertise. Bruno came to the United States about ten years ago in search of work. He was a father to three sons, all of whom worked at the Day Labor Center, including a seventeen-year-old. Teaching his sons to have a strong work ethic was especially important to Bruno. Exposing his sons to a variety of job experiences and training would help them learn marketable skills so that they would be able to provide for themselves and their families in the future. From construction to plumbing, piping, or painting, Bruno learned different skills from other workers by going out on jobs with them and bringing his sons along. Over the years, Bruno and his sons have become a successful team and are frequently hired for different types of jobs. By joining others on jobs, workers secured for themselves potential job opportunities in the future as they learned new skills, built relationships with fellow workers, and met new clientele.

One worker, Miguel, had been coming to the Day Labor Center for about fifteen years after having worked a regular job for many years as a delivery driver. After losing

his driver's license he was unable to work and used day labor to "temporarily" supplement his income. When I asked him how long his driver's license had been expired he replied somewhat comically, "fifteen years." He continued to use day labor as his primary form of income as he enjoyed the variety of jobs as well as the pay. Miguel said that "I can learn many things. There is so much variety that I can learn to do many types of work. I can earn much more money in a day than other jobs where they only pay minimum wage." As I have illustrated, Miguel echoed the sentiments of many other migrant workers. I asked Miguel why he had not renewed his driver's license after all this time to which he replied, "I don't know. I just haven't." I asked if the process was complicated and he said, "Yes, very complicated and now it's more expensive. It's not a whole lot, but it is a lot for me."

Undocumented and Uncomplicated

Miguel's experience also spoke to another common reason for choosing day labor: undocumented immigration status. For many migrant workers, immigration status was the primary reason they utilized day labor as it was one of few, if not the only, options they had to earn money. Additionally, day laborers were usually paid in cash so there was no need to worry about the documents required to open a checking account to deposit or cash paychecks. Workers also avoided utilizing check-cashing facilities that not only require identification documentation but take a significant percentage off the top of a check as a fee for cashing it (Williams 2008, 72). The expectation of being paid daily in cash also provided some security that workers would be compensated for their labor.

Multiple stories emerged from workers who had previous jobs in factories or in fields who went for two or three weeks without pay, an experience common among migrant workers in these sectors (Holmes 2012; Lugo 2008; Salzinger 2000; Striffler 2005). Employers who hire workers at the DLC are expected to pay workers at the end of each day unless the employee specifically negotiates otherwise. Finally, day laborers do not have to produce a social security number as required by employers in the formal labor sector. Although some workers used a fake or borrowed social security number, a popular strategy among migrant workers (Ordóñez 2016, 27), others found the practice of "identity loan" too risky (Horton 2016a, 72; see also Horton 2016b). Day labor is logistically less complicated where migrants do not need to produce documents in order to work or get paid, demonstrating a labor sector unlike many others.

Motivation and "Staying Positive"

For many migrant workers at the DLC, attitude was everything. How day laborers approached the nature of their situation, the possibilities of the day, and how they felt about themselves overall, contributed to their success or failure. As I finished a formal interview with Benjamin, a migrant worker from El Salvador, he relaxed, as we sat in the sun, enjoying the morning. The DLC was calm as there was little activity in contrast to its usual energy, noise, and excitement. As we were wrapping up I asked my final question, "Is there anything else you would like to add, anything else you'd like to tell me about your experience as an immigrant, day laborer, or anything at all?" He lifted his head as his eyes brightened. "For me," he began, "I have to stay positive. I see all of this beauty around me and I am grateful. It's beautiful. I share what I have. I'm thankful for it. I work

hard, but it's more than that. In this life we have to stay positive." Benjamin described that he had been doing a lot of philosophical reading and finding spiritual contentment. The materials he had been learning from led him to believe that everything in life happened for a reason and that he was only in control of "what I can control and the rest" he said, "I can only respond to in a positive way." Otherwise, he explained, "the negativity wells up and opportunities that could have been are lost."

Several migrant workers shared this outlook of accepting life for what it was as they reflected on how their current situations differed from their pasts, when they were more limited in opportunities. Staying positive was an important strategy for motivation. Believing that they could and, in fact, had been successful, provided the necessary, daily motivation to keep going. For example, as I mentioned earlier, Sal described to me that day laborers "gotta want it" in order to make the money that is out there to be made. He described how workers need to "put themselves out there." For some workers, the language barrier kept them from clearly communicating with their employers, but for others, like Sal, he pushed past his fear of being misunderstood and increasingly talked to more employers. Eventually, he had a few repeat clients who would hire him regularly. Sal attributed his relative success to his positive outlook, continual motivation to earn a living, and comfort in approaching his employers.

Leonardo faced serious hardships in his home country. The most frightening was witnessing the murder of his father when he was a young boy. Leonardo described the opportunities in the United States as "endless." He was motivated by his desire to provide for his wife and children while also laying to rest the bad experiences he lived through in Guatemala. He described this as "shaking off the bad things" so that he could move

forward. Leonardo was always positive when I saw him at the Center. He was outgoing and friendly, despite all that had happened to him in his life. For many workers at the DLC, embracing new opportunities was a way to ameliorate the hardships of the past and many expressed that they were working toward a better, more stable future for themselves and their children.

For many migrant day laborers, imagining their lives as full of possibility was tempered by the reality of their "*situación*" or individual circumstances. They recognized the constraints they faced in a way that I would describe as a kind of hopeful resignation. For Benjamin, for example, though he expressed contentment and said that dreaming of a better life was important, he also admitted that for him and for others at the DLC, being a day laborer in the United States was likely as close to "the good life" and "living the dream" that he would probably get. For others, like Leonardo, just being away from danger and being able to provide for his family was significant. Day laborers described how economic upward mobility and the chance for financial security might always be out of reach—in large part as the result of the precarious, marginal position of migrant workers in the United States. Perspectives like these exemplify "cultural constructions of the good" (Robbins 2013, 457), through which migrant workers' aspirations are shaped by their lived experiences. Their imaginings for the future can inform understandings of the various ways that human beings pursue possibility and "the good," even as such pursuits are limited by structural constraints.

Workers at the DLC had to stay motivated to keep working and making money to provide for themselves, despite the challenges. I observed that workers who shared a positive outlook were not as susceptible to many of the pitfalls that migrants frequently

encounter including depression and financial troubles. Workers' positive attitudes were apparent when they were eager to learn during English classes, talked about their labor as interesting and fulfilling, and as they invested in relationships with other workers. The ways in which migrant workers "foster[ed] the good in their real social relations" by counting on one another, sharing together, and building community at the DLC "throw[s] light on other ways of relating" to one another (Robbins 2013, 458). Here, we see human beings who can effectively work together, in contrast to the many ways that humans "do violence to one another" (Robbins 2013, 458). For workers at the DLC, fostering goodness in their social relations led to significantly positive outcomes, such as greater work opportunities and finding a place to belong. Workers who had a positive outlook and found ways to stay motivated to expand their businesses, demonstrated that day laborers have the ability to some degree, to act as free agents.

Increasing Opportunities: Networking, Exchange, and Creative Strategies

Day laborers employ a number of strategies to increase their chances of finding steady employment. One of the primary strategies that workers use is giving business cards to employers. One worker encouraged the practice, saying "I tell these guys to make cards. You have to leave your number and something the employer can see and give to someone else." Business cards are an important way to communicate vital information such as the type of work one does (construction, handyman, plumber, or gardener), a phone number, and a website or Facebook address. Similarly, workers at the DLC frequently used their work trucks as a means of advertising their services as they clearly displayed their names and phone numbers in hopes of catching potential customers' attention. Some workers

used bold, bright colors to attract attention while others left their trucks plainly colored with no décor and only a phone number in bold print so that it stood out. Getting noticed and being remembered are key strategies that day laborers at the DLC learned would help increase their earning potential.

Networking is another strategy aimed at improving one's chances of getting future employment. Workers reported that they asked their employers to call them again and to recommend their services to friends. Since the DLC was embedded in the local community and had built a reputation for good, honest workers, many employers sent their friends to the DLC to hire workers. Numerous conversations with day laborers also confirmed that it was because of the contacts they made first at the DLC that they built a network of potential employers. For many workers, these networks led to regular job offers and many repeat clients. For example, Santiago first came to the DLC only when he did not have work on a long-term project. Through his networking with employers at the DLC, he secured a regular position with an owner of several apartment buildings. Whenever they had upgrades or remodels to do, they called Santiago, providing weeks of regular employment at a time. Juan had a similar set up because he developed a relationship with a local realtor. Whenever he was preparing to show a house to potential buyers, he hired Juan to do basic maintenance, clean up, and some remodeling. Once workers have impressed an employer with their skills, they may be called back for more jobs.

Although migrant day laborers understood the precarity and temporal nature of day labor, they also hoped for this kind of security. Frequent call backs did not take away their sense of freedom; in fact, it actually seemed to have the opposite effect. Long term

jobs offered temporary financial security, which enabled workers to plan for slow periods when they may not get sufficient work. Motivated individuals networked the best they could to achieve this, "putting themselves out there" whenever they were given a chance.

Exchange with Fellow Day Laborers

While networking with employers increased workers' chances of securing employment, so did networking with fellow workers at the Day Labor Center. In *The Gift* (1925), Marcel Mauss argues that exchange in any culture is symbolic, designed to promote obligatory giving not only in gifts, but also in services and relationships. He writes that "in many civilizations contracts are fulfilled and exchanges of goods are made by means of gifts. In theory, such gifts are voluntary but in fact, they are given and repaid under obligation" (1925, 1). He concludes that gift exchange is tied to rights and obligations as a demonstration of altruistic generosity and friendship while at the same time, obligatory. Mauss posits that when an object has been gifted by a giver, "he has a hold over the recipient, just as he had, while its owner, a hold over anyone who stole it" (1925, 9). More concretely, Mauss discovered the "mechanisms of obligation" (1925, 21), concluding that "the gift received is in fact, owned, but the ownership is of a particular kind. It is at the same time property and a possession, a pledge and a loan, an object sold, and an object bought, a deposit, a mandate, a trust" (1925, 22). A gift symbolizes more than a mere object but serves to propel the "social life [as a] constant give-and-take; gifts are rendered, received and repaid both obligatorily and in one's own interest" (1925, 27).

The role of exchange for migrant workers at the DLC showed a clear expectation of the kind of reciprocity Mauss outlines: to return a favor with another. On the one hand,

being generous and showing one's willingness to give to the collective efforts of the DLC was highly valued, while on the other hand, it was a way to build alliances and contractual relationships where expectations of returned favors translate into work opportunities. Thus, following Mauss, exchange and reciprocity at the DLC functioned to demonstrate commitment to the collective through gift-giving and serving others. On several occasions I witnessed workers helping each other improve their assets by repairing and modifying work vehicles, lending each other tools, hiring or recommending one another for jobs, or assisting with other needs.

While my observations of workers' relationships with one another primarily reflected comradery and support, relationships also served, ultimately, as a way to improve one's earning potential. For example, one of the rules at the DLC was to arrive by 7 a.m. in order to be allowed to participate in the lottery for jobs. If a worker was going to be late, he could call a friend to sign in for him so that he would not miss out on an opportunity to work that day. I observed how favors like this were expected to be returned whether for signing another worker in for the day, lending tools to a fellow day laborer, or hiring a worker from the DLC for large projects. The expectation of reciprocity helped to ensure equitable, constructive relationships where workers would not take advantage of one another but instead, help propel each other toward more opportunities.

Nicolas was the very first day laborer that I met at the DLC. He was very friendly, always helpful, and served Ricardo as a volunteer coordinator for a short while. Nicolas spoke English very well and regularly helped with transactions between clients and workers. He was well respected by the other workers and he enjoyed volunteering for the

Center. A few months had passed when I did not see him at the Center and I wondered where he had gone. Ricardo told me that he got a job in northern Washington for a few months. When his employer needed more help, Nicolas called Ricardo and asked him to send a few workers. Since Ricardo knew most of the workers and their abilities, he was a great connection for Nicolas to draw upon. For those with whom Nicolas and Ricardo had built relationships, this presented an opportunity to earn money that they may not have had otherwise.

Similarly, Omar and Cesar were offered a job in northern California for several months. During one of their stints in northern California, they needed to hire two more laborers. Because they had built relationships with other workers from the DLC, two workers earned jobs that lasted several months. Omar and Cesar were particularly likeable and frequently initiated impromptu barbeques and lunches at the DLC. They made many friends this way and workers easily connected with them. Ricardo explained that Omar and Cesar were frequently hired for jobs in northern California and when their employer needed to hire more workers, they would usually recommend their friends from the DLC. By going out on jobs with other workers, like Bruno and his sons did, workers capitalized on the opportunity to prove to other day laborers that they had skills, were easy to work with, and eager to learn. Likewise, befriending other workers with reliable clientele could translate into greater opportunities for work. Building relationships is advantageous: if a worker was ever in a position to recommend a fellow day laborer, it was more likely that they would recommend one of their friends, someone who would reflect positively on their own work.

Though migrant day laborers who gather informally on street corners do employ a valuable social structure, ties to one another are loosely based, and frequently unreliable. For example, one of Ordóñez's (2015) main findings was a high level of competition and distrust among migrant day laborers in Northern California. In one instance, Ordóñez described a worker who expressed his frustration that "there are no friends on the street." This research participant, however, was frequently criticized for his over exaggerations about his employment successes and his lack of "spread[ing] the work" (Ordóñez 2015, 67). I found that understanding the rules of reciprocity and engaging with other workers in a give-and-take relationship strengthened the bonds between workers at the DLC and increased their opportunities. Rarely was bragging evident among workers, but rather, collaboration by helping others and recommending them for jobs. Though it was rare, violating the collective spirit by undermining its goals could lead to mistrust and sanctions, which I address in chapter six.

I observed how workers engaged in competition at the Day Labor Center but found that cooperation was far more effective to increase their work opportunities as they developed friendships and invested in each other. For example, during a conversation with Samuel and Martin, I learned that Samuel suffered from lupus, a condition that has troubled him throughout his time in the United States and was, at times, debilitating for his work. However, Martin insisted, "this guy [pointing to Samuel], he's a good guy. I call him whenever I need a good worker to help me finish a job. Some days, he has a hard time I know, so I like to call him, and he helps me. This guy is a hard worker. I like to work with him." Martin expressed his appreciation for Samuel's work ethic, despite his disability. On the one hand, Martin was compassionate, knowing that Samuel had a hard

time with his illness; on the other, Samuel had proven that he had skills and worked hard and so Martin frequently hired Samuel. At the DLC, there were, in fact, “friends on the street.”

Diego, whom I introduced in chapter three, demonstrated the importance workers placed on empowering others rather than engaging in competition. Diego was a migrant worker who usually came to the DLC to socialize but also for work. I discussed Diego’s ankle injury, an ailment which had, at times, caused him difficulty. He recently purchased a brand new, shiny black work truck. He was so excited about his purchase that he could not wait to show off the truck, which he described as “made just for me. I knew it was mine as soon as I saw it!” Diego had been saving money for a long time to be able to make this purchase. Eventually, he was able to buy the new truck in cash for approximately $17,000. He said that with faith in God, saving responsibly, and acting on the right opportunity, he was able to get the truck that was meant for him. Because he had built contacts over the years, Diego, like Martin, was often hired for long-term jobs for weeks at a time. When he was not working a regular job, Diego came to the DLC to find work. He made a significant amount of money as a skilled laborer, allowing him to invest in a better truck that would likely provide more opportunities down the road. Having assets helps to compensate for other potential short-comings, such as his injury. Diego continued to do well, remained positive, and further invested in his assets.

When Diego took me for a ride in his new vehicle he expressed how proud he was of his discipline to save the money and that he was grateful he had received enough job opportunities to purchase the truck. During our conversation he asked me not to tell anyone that he paid cash for the truck because “some of these guys, they really struggle. I

wouldn't ever want to make them feel bad that they couldn't do that." Diego's concern for others demonstrated that although workers competed for jobs, they also recognized that they empowered one another. Diego was conscious that he was part of a collective and was concerned about coming across as boastful. He did not want to cause jealousy or make others feel badly, but spoke about how he wanted to encourage others to work hard, save money, and be successful.

Scholars emphasize how migration networks initiate and guide migration (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Stephen 2007; Wilson 2009a), help migrants connect to labor opportunities (Gomberg-Muñoz 2010, 2011; Matthei 1996), and foster support (Wilson 2009b). I observed how networks benefited migrants, especially by establishing alliances among immigrants that could increase their financial potential and success. Relationships that were established at the DLC were not only conducive to building community and providing emotional support, they were economically strategic. Being part of the collective–especially for those who were long-term regulars–offered the chance to get to know other workers, learn from their strengths, share in their resources, and partner with them on projects. Because workers compete for a limited number of jobs, building alliances is an important strategy for day laborers to improve their earning potential.

Creative Strategies to Make Money

Other strategies that workers used for obtaining employment included using social media. A few workers utilized Facebook, Craigslist and LinkedIn. However, the use of these technology-based media venues was very limited and only a few day laborers used them. Most workers had little access to the Internet and what little access they did have was

usually on their phones. Several migrant day laborers had trouble navigating Facebook and some of the older workers asked for my help to set up email addresses or to use different applications on their phones. Adrian suggested that I teach computer classes so that workers could learn how to navigate the Internet and set up social media services as a way to obtain more work. Ricardo often used Facebook to promote the DLC and frequently posted live video feeds of the activities of the Center in hopes of getting the word out about the available workforce. He would video various activities such as the visits from the food charity each week, or from local university students. Using social media in this way, Ricardo hoped to attract employers. As a liaison between the DLC, workers, and the community, Ricardo's access to social media was beneficial for the workers as his efforts were geared toward creating more work opportunities.

Finally, I observed how migrant day laborers were innovative in finding ways to make money. One morning, I conversed over a cup of coffee with two workers, Paco and Alejandro. They sometimes worked together and on this particular morning, they were discussing business. Paco was rearranging all kinds of metals and oddly-shaped poles in the back of his work truck. Paco explained that he could earn money by recycling different metals like bronze and steel. With his employer's permission, Paco would take whatever materials were left over from a job, load it in his truck, sort it, and take it to a recycling center. The pieces of metal were banged up, rusted, and warped. From the perspective of an untrained eye, I thought he was going to take the "trash" to the city dump. Instead, he spent time sorting through the potential cash-earning material and evaluated the value of each piece.

Other workers would also take discarded materials from work sites. Moving jobs were particularly fruitful as employers frequently gave things away that they did not want to pack and move. Sometimes, materials were brought into the Center where workers could sell them to each other as a way to earn extra cash. I saw all kinds of building materials, from tiles, to glass pieces, furniture, tables, broken chairs, half-filled cans of paint, and numerous other miscellaneous items. If there was any chance that an object might have value, workers would try to sell it, use it, or donate it to the Center. Ricardo's office area was always filled with items workers brought to the DLC. Workers expanded their economic base as they found many creative ways to earn money and frequently, they shared in these efforts together.

Conclusions: Tempered Freedoms

In chapter three, I demonstrated migrant day laborers' difficulties in order to highlight their shared experiences with other migrant workers and to point to the unique challenges presented by the very precarious, unpredictable nature of day labor. In this chapter I have presented the freedoms that many day laborers experienced in their work which translated to a significant sense control in their everyday lives.

As my research has shown, day laborers feel stretched amid the many tensions between freedom and constraint. On the one hand, they are able to negotiate wages and earn more money than other labor sectors, while on the other, workers were repeatedly paid under market value by local community standards. Additionally, while workers were able to choose the type of jobs they would accept, much of the work offered was by nature difficult, risky, and hard on the body. Further, workers enjoyed the flexibility to

make their own hours and work when they wanted to while at the same time, they felt constricted and powerless during slow days and seasons at the DLC. During my fieldwork, I would frequently hear "*¡que lento!*" (how slow)–a phrase that captured the tedium and frus11tration of slow periods at the DLC. Passing the time while waiting for work can feel like wasted energy, especially as many workers were under a lot of pressure to succeed. Finally, while motivation and attitude are critical to workers' success, capitalizing on "opportunity" is fundamentally linked to the availability of jobs and the chance that one's number will be called. And so, while Ricardo's assessment that workers can earn as much as they want is true in one sense, migrant day laborers remain economically marginal as they are constrained by the availability of employment regardless of their willingness to work.

Still, in light of these limitations, day laborers frequently expressed that they were satisfied with the income they earned through day labor and were able to reinvest in their assets and increase their autonomy. Many workers explained that they enjoyed the ability to "be my own boss" and express creativity in their work. In these ways, workers' perceptions of their autonomy, which did not always reflect reality, seemed to empower workers to stay motivated to work as day laborers. From my observations, migrant day laborers often acted like entrepreneurs (Light and Rosenstein 1995, 2; see also Valenzuela 2001, 339) especially through their motivation to succeed, and as they demonstrated innovative strategies to earn money. Making a living in the informal economy, including working in day labor, is not especially lucrative; but in coming together as a collective, workers have formed networks, shared resources (including tools, vehicles, and apartments), and drawn upon one another's strengths–strategies

ultimately aimed at greater economic security. Finally, the fact that workers continually returned to the DLC and were able to earn a living to pay for their own expenses while sending home remittances demonstrated some level of success.

Migrant day laborers' experiences provide insight into how they demonstrate resiliency and find work opportunities, despite vulnerabilities. Migrant day laborers are both constrained *and* agentive. As they live and work within the confines of structural barriers such as immigration policy and restrictive legal parameters, many workers have built viable businesses and have found some satisfaction in the flexibility and freedoms that characterize day labor. These freedoms are unique to day labor and make it an attractive choice for migrant workers who may not exercise agency in other areas of their lives, thus empowering them to continue to seek employment, and to maintain their motivation to succeed.

C**hapter 5**

"*Aquí Pero No Estoy Aquí*" – The Making of Local Citizenship

Nicolas approached me one morning as he regularly did in my early visits to the Center. He was always curious about my political leanings and anxious for a conversation. Flipping through pictures and news stories on his phone, he looked up and greeted me– "*Maestra*! How are you?" It was just after President Trump had been elected and he quipped, "I can't believe it – you voted for him, didn't you? Not me…if I could, I would have voted for Hillary." We sat down on a long, metal bench, cold to the touch but warm in the sunlight as we talked about the current political climate in America. I was worried that he might be afraid given all the talk about deportation and building a wall, a concern that many migrant workers shared with me. He was unmoved as he calmly explained:

> No, everyone knows we are here. They need us. There are people that say that we are abusing the system, but you know, they have social workers who could go house-to-house and find people that abuse the system because lots of people do it. That's their argument to get rid of all of us? It's not all one race that does it [abuses the system]. They should send out workers to find out who it is and put a stop to it. It's not a good system.

Nicolas was continually critical of "*el sistema*" (the system). He recognized that the challenges he and other day laborers faced did not exist in a vacuum, but that their hardships were rooted in broader structural frameworks. Angel chimed in, "We're all here to work. They should respect our rights with or without papers. If I was deported

tomorrow, I don't have much to lose. I would be okay. But for others, that's not the case. They can lose everything."

Nicolas and Angel pointed to the reality that several migrant day laborers share: everyone, it seems, knows they are here to work and yet they are restricted from full inclusion in American society because they are considered *"*illegal.*"* This contradiction affects migrant workers' lives in critical ways, as they feel torn between belonging and exclusion; citizen, yet, other. Workers at the DLC live with a constant awareness of their precarious existence, both in their labor and also as a result of their documentation status. Nicolas and Angel's reflections exemplified what Ordóñez (2015) found among *jorneleros* in Northern California where day laborers experience a type of citizenship that is "understood as a socially sanctioned form of belonging articulated through state and nonstate institutions–that is tied to the urban settings within which these men live and work and that both enables their incorporation and maintenance as able laborers and ensures their marginalization as undocumented migrants" (Ordóñez 2015, 180). And yet, while most workers could not secure formal U.S. citizenship, workers at the Day Labor Center, like the day laborers Ordóñez describes, experienced an informal kind of membership as their presence was sanctioned in several ways by local authorities and community members in Portbridge.

Susan Bibler Coutin critiques nation-state policies that permeate transnational family life on several fronts and produce citizenship that she argues exists only in a "hidden dimension of social reality" (Coutin 2007:9). Similarly, Nathalie Peutz argues

that national policies often cause undocumented migrants to be seen as "criminal aliens" (Peutz 2010, 372), and to be treated primarily as "outlaws" who act outside of the parameters of legality simply by being present (see also Gomberg-Muñoz 2016). Without considering their participation in local communities, migrants, then, are continually relegated to the margins of national life where their contributions to society, civic engagement, and participation in the economy can be easily minimized (if not outright ignored). Workers at the DLC, however, inhabit a space where belonging is in many ways sanctioned by the city, accepted by the community, and integrated into the local economy. Migrant workers' participation in Portbridge as an available labor force, as well as their everyday interactions with community members, organizations, and businesses demonstrates how migrant day laborers have become embedded into society and problematizes the notion of citizenship as restricted to "official" realms.

In this chapter, I argue that migrant day laborers face many limitations and challenges as undocumented migrants in the United States. Migrant workers are constrained in many ways including limited employment options, restricted mobility, and in obtaining critical services. Yet, at the DLC, migrant workers exercised a form of "local citizenship" (Villazor 2010, 574) through which migrants participated in the local community despite not having formal U.S. citizenship. I use the terms "local citizenship" (Villazor 2010, 574), "urban belonging" (Castañeda 2018b, 22), and "social citizenship" (Glick-Schiller and Caglar 2008, 205) to connote belonging and inclusion within migrants' communities without official recognition by federal authorities and to point to new forms of citizenship that communities like Portbridge encourage.

Although the majority of day laborers at the DLC were unauthorized immigrants who were excluded in many ways as noncitizens, the community, city, and state offered several ways to include day laborers into the local community. For example, the Portbridge City Council approved the space for the Day Labor Center to allow workers to be visibly available for employers and provided funding for a central leader to help organize workers and maintain the facility. Additionally, local community organizations also engaged with the DLC through food donations like FoodStuffs, and by providing both emotional and logistical support through the volunteer efforts local pastors, church groups, and university students. This experience is distinctive among migrant workers in other labor sectors who might not have direct contact with local community members as they labor in factories or fields–spaces that remain removed from every-day contact between immigrants and community members. Day laborers at the DLC are openly visible in the community. Through their interactions with local government officials and community members, they at times experience belonging. My findings provide an alternative perspective on citizenship while also demonstrating how day labor centers can facilitate a sense of belonging for migrants in their host communities.

The Challenges of Undocumented Immigration Status

When the Trump administration was elected to office, an event that occurred during my fieldwork, there were serious concerns about what would happen regarding immigration policy. With all of the anti-immigrant rhetoric alongside the very notion of building a wall between Mexico and the United States, workers spoke about their fears and lack of knowledge on what they would do if immigration policies became more stringent. The

potential for federal authorities to apprehend undocumented workers remained a fear, despite the protections that local authorities offered migrant workers at the DLC. Simply being in the United States in such an open arena posed risks. Therefore, while they were able to work as undocumented migrants, they were simultaneously restricted in their daily activities for the same reason.

Though many migrant day laborers talked to me about their desire to return home for visits, using technology such as cell phones and FaceTime had all but replaced face-to-face visits. Primarily, the cost involved in returning home proved far more expensive than what workers could afford. Additionally, crossing the border was dangerous as the borderland between Mexico and the United States has also become increasingly monitored and militarized (De Genova and Peutz 2010; Heyman 2012). In the name of national security after 9/11, technologies such as infrared detection (De León 2012, 485), aerial drones, and video surveillance have become critical tools for border security alongside a drastic increase in the number of border patrol agents (Cornelius 2001; see also Diddier 2011). Deportations have also increased under recent United States leadership as part of a global "deportation regime" (De Genova and Peutz 2010, 229) and even more so under the current Administration. Because of this, north-bound migrants understand that the border is far more dangerous and the risks of getting caught are far greater than in the past.

As a result of increased militarization at the border, immigrants are staying in the United States for longer periods of time (Cornelius 2007; Portes 2007). One worker described his experiences crossing the U.S.-Mexico border ten different times over the course of about twenty years. Each time, he said, was more dangerous than the last. He

shared with me that on two of his journeys he nearly died. On the first occasion, he was abandoned in the desert by his hired *coyote* (border smuggler) and became overheated and dehydrated as he was without food and water for five days. One of the men traveling with his group died a painful death in the desert – an experience that was seared into this worker's memory. The second time, he was robbed, beaten, and left for dead by attackers. Although he overcame the injuries and made it through, it was another terrifying experience. This worker remarked that despite the potential dangers, crossing into the United States was far easier twenty years ago than in the last decade. He concluded, "Today, I would not attempt it. Today, it's much too hard and not worth the risk."

"Illegality" and Liminality

The limitations of being undocumented in the United States reflect how migrant day laborers at the DLC were subject to what Nicolas De Genova terms the "production of illegality" (2005, 214), a concept which I introduced in chapter one. "Illegality" refers to the paradoxical relationship between U.S. immigration law and migrant workers that has "foreclosed the viable prospects for the great majority who would migrate from Mexico to do so in accordance with the law and thus played an instrumental role in the production of a legally vulnerable undocumented workforce of 'illegal aliens'" (De Genova 2005, 214; see also De Genova 2002, 2010). De Genova points to the "profoundly useful and profitable" use of the term "illegal" as it maintains the "deportability" of undocumented workers and "provides an apparatus for sustaining Mexican migrants' vulnerability and tractability–as workers–whose labor-power, because it is deportable, becomes an

eminently disposable commodity" (2005, 215). Discourses about illegality devalue human life and produce anti-immigrant sentiment and the "othering" (Chavez 2001, 4; De Genova 2010) of Latino migrants. The result is often immigration and labor policies that reflect the role of "illegality" in maintaining a vulnerable migrant workforce while denying migrant workers inclusion into society.

Several scholars have discussed the impact on migrant workers of policies that require documentation in formal work settings (Goldstein and Alonso-Bejarano 2017; Gomberg-Muñoz 2018; Horton 2016a; 2016b; Ordóñez 2016; 2013). For example, Goldstein and Alonso-Bejarano (2017) argue that the use of E-Verify, a federal government program that enables online verification of employees' social security numbers, has caused undeniable anxiety and fear for migrant workers, many of whom left their jobs as soon as the program was adopted for fear of being found out as ineligible to work. Many of these workers joined the informal labor sector, including day labor. Additionally, anthropologist Sarah Horton (2016a; 2016b) found that agricultural workers wrestled with the decision to borrow social security numbers from friends or family members in order secure employment. In hopes of avoiding deportation, workers weighed the risks of getting caught by borrowing a social security number against their earning potential and the benefits of using a social security number (see also Gomberg-Muñoz 2018). For many labor sectors where undocumented immigrants are frequently employed, workers' vulnerability hovers over them, making them increasingly prey to deleterious work conditions and subpar pay as they fear employers' enforcement of immigration mandates. In contrast, day labor offers an opportunity to work without having to produce documentation.

The U.S.-Mexico border is not the only place where undocumented migrants are fearful of immigration authorities. Earlier, I introduced Miguel, a worker whose driver's license had been expired for nearly fifteen years. When I asked him why he had not renewed it, he explained that it was a complicated and expensive process and that he did not want to go to the Department of Motor Vehicles, which was, in his view, a "risky government entity." Navigating bureaucratic processes to renew licenses, work permits, or certifications can be difficult for anyone, but the process is even harder for migrants who may not only have no experience with how such transactions are conducted in the United States but who are not authorized and therefore fear interacting with any government official. Like many migrants, it was common for workers to ignore problems that required government dealings, such as expired driver's licenses, due to their fear of apprehension or deportation. Several workers described their anxiety about government facilities. For Miguel, he no longer worked as a delivery driver as a direct result of his expired license and chose day labor as an alternative. Though he enjoyed the variety of work that he did, his primary reason for working as a day laborer was directly linked to being undocumented and his apprehension to interact with government agencies.

Day labor is a fitting option for undocumented migrants; however, it may also be, in fact, their *only* option to earn money. The very fact that undocumented migrants cannot work in many employment sectors limits their work prospects. Most of the workers I interviewed stated that immigration status was their primary barrier to obtaining regular employment or starting their own business within the legal parameters of the state. Finally, while it is possible to work as a day laborer without formal work authorization, the very fact that many migrant workers are without documents in the United States poses

numerous limitations in their everyday lives. Several workers at the DLC did not go out with friends after hours because they did not want to take any risks being out in the community in case something should happen, such as a routine traffic stop or crossing a random DUI checkpoint. Many workers utilized the DLC because it was protected by local authorities and did not allow unruly behaviors such as drinking or smoking marijuana that were apparent on other *esquinas*. Such activities, they told me, drew unwanted attention and they preferred to "fly under the radar." As undocumented migrants in the United States, workers at the DLC were subject to many constraints and limitations. However, their participation in the DLC provided a way for them to find community and a sense of belonging in multiple ways, as I turn to in the following sections.

Local and Social Citizenship

Although Horton argues (2016, 122) that "the shifting of immigration functions to local authorities has heightened the anxiety of all noncitizens," the migrant workers I observed at the DLC were in an open, even vulnerable space, and yet, they were welcomed and accepted by the community members and had a clear understanding of their relationship with local authorities. My observations of workers at the DLC demonstrate how day labor sites can serve to mediate relations between migrant workers and local citizens, government, and law enforcement (Quesada et al. 2014), and may even facilitate "local citizenship" for workers. Despite the many challenges they faced as undocumented migrant workers, day laborers connected with each other and fostered community

membership that ultimately expanded their ability to exert agency over their labor and lives.

I also observed how having some (albeit limited) control over their lives led to greater confidence in moving about the community, and mitigated some of the anxieties and fear of apprehension that previous scholarship has addressed (see Chavez 2008; Galvan et al. 2015; Negi 2013; Ordóñez 2015). Migrant workers at the DLC accessed local citizenship through their cooperation with local authorities and by receiving services. Day laborers also experienced acceptance from local community members as workers and, importantly, as residents of the community. Additionally, workers participated in the community through their purchasing power as consumers and through their interaction with locals.

Anthropological and other social scientific scholarship on citizenship and belonging includes discussions about how citizenship may be embodied in multiple alternative ways—several of which apply to immigrants at the DLC. In its strictest sense, citizenship is defined by a nation-state and dependent upon formal documentation required by federal authorities. However, migrants across the globe demonstrate varying degrees of inclusion into their host communities, allowing for flexible perspectives of belonging. As I considered various ways that migrant workers experienced belonging in Portbridge, Susan Bibler Coutin's discussion of "legal personhood" (2003, 51) was illuminating. She argues that it is problematic to reduce personhood to a "legal" or "illegal" status within a nation state at all and that "legal status is (theoretically at least) like marital status: everyone is presumed to have one" (2003, 51). I observed how migrant workers' experiences at the Day Labor Center were aptly described by the terms

"local citizenship" (Villazor 2010, 574) and "social citizenship" (Glick-Schiller and Caglar 2008, 205). These flexible forms of citizenship reflect migrant workers' active inclusion in Portbridge as they occupy a significant space of belonging despite the fact that legal status would provide government authorization to be in the country.

Rose Villazor, a legal scholar, argues that "the concept of citizenship as one only bounded by national borders has long given way to the recognition that there are other places–both outside and within the nation-state–where citizenship is also located" (Villazor 2010, 574). Thus, "local citizenship" (Villazor 2010, 574) refers to the degree to which immigrants are able to participate in their local communities, regardless of their official membership in the national polity. Just because migrants do not possess documentation, which signifies citizenship to federal authorities, it does not mean that migrants cannot experience some level of belonging that could be likened to citizenship. For example, Villazor points out that citizenship provides "emotional ties to a community" (Villazor 2010, 580), which can be fostered regardless of one's immigration status, through participation within the community and feeling like one belongs.

Similarly, sociologist Ernesto Castañeda (2018b, xii) argues that "subjective feelings of belonging are as important as objective measures of integration to understand the political and social behavior of immigrants and their descendants." Thus, workers' reflections are an important indicator of how they experienced an emotional sense of inclusion as they worked and served in the community and exercised some level of civic engagement. Many Portbridge community members did recognize and accept migrant workers' presence, and conversely, day laborers described their "feelings of belonging." Several migrant workers expressed that they had never been the subject of direct

discrimination from community members, had good experiences with local employers, and enjoyed being a part of the activities of the DLC, particularly when local community members would engage with them in positive ways by offering services or volunteering their time.

Through their collective efforts, migrant day laborers at the DLC have mobilized to effect social change as migrants living in America. Their impact on the political-social sphere of American life is significant and has resulted in improving their lives and, potentially, that of other immigrants in the local community. Their participation in Portbridge, in this way, demonstrates what Nina Glick-Schiller and Ayse Caglar point to as "social citizenship" to describe when "people without official membership make claims to belong to a state through collectively organizing to protect themselves against discrimination, or when they receive rights and benefits from a state or make contributions to the development of the state and the life of the people in it" (2008, 205).

Finally, "social citizenship" refers not to formal rights that are conferred by one's official documentation status, but a "mode of incorporation" into a host society (2008, 206). "Social citizenship" is similar to what sociologist Ernesto Castañeda calls "urban belonging" (2018b, 22) to connote active participation in the host community, a genuine awareness of and care for political or civic engagement and feeling a part of the community in tangible ways. For example, Ricardo explained how over the past ten years, workers have participated in rallies and peaceful protests, and have attended local city council meetings to discuss the needs of the DLC and promote cooperation between immigrants and community members. Additionally, a few workers at the DLC shared with me that they had joined forces with other immigrants throughout Los Angeles by

participating in the "Families Belong Together – Freedom for Immigrants March LA" in June of 2018.

Day laborers also encouraged solidarity in their expectations for how they should be treated by employers in the community. For example, together, workers upheld a minimum wage requirement of $15 per hour and they frequently shared information about employers, both good and bad, with each other–actions aimed at avoiding abusive situations. Workers also shared in the goal to perform quality work as they respected local employers and appreciated the opportunities they offered. In these actions, workers exemplified what Renato Rosaldo (1994) calls "cultural citizenship," which "refers to the right to be different (in terms of race, ethnicity, or native language) with respect to the norms of the dominant national community, without compromising one's right to belong" (1994, 57). Rosaldo argues that Latinos express and claim inclusion in the community in terms of dignity, well-being, and wages and by asserting their right to housing, health care, and education (Rosaldo 1994, 58). As day laborers engaged with community employers in Portbridge, they shared an expectation of mutual respect and inclusion.

Many workers at the DLC related to one another as they shared in the frustrations that prevented them from obtaining citizenship or work authorization; still, they arguably found a form of belonging through "social" and "local" citizenship. Day laborers at the DLC received important services, developed relationships to support one another, and were de facto members of the community who worked and lived there. Furthermore, and most significantly, the DLC was officially sanctioned by local governing authorities and was financially supported by the local police department, a characteristic that was unique

to this grassroots collective of workers who, together, have become actively engaged local citizens of Portbridge.

Local Law Enforcement: Cooperative Efforts

One of the most important, distinctive characteristics of the Day Labor Center was that migrant workers cooperated with local law enforcement, city government, and local authorities to construct the Day Labor Center. According to a report summarizing the Portbridge City Council decision to approve a contract agreement for the management of the DLC, the city of Portbridge established a committee in May of 2005 to "address complaints received from local residents, adjacent businesses and customers of the [Home Improvement Store] on the Avenue regarding the day laborers" (Love 2011, 1). The committee included representatives from the neighborhood, the home improvement store's management, and another local business whose services were directly on the property of the proposed site for the Day Labor Center. Also involved were owners of local offices and commercial properties, the City Attorney, and the Police Department and City staff.

Frustrated with the lack of immigration reform on the part of Congress, the committee stated that they were "left to deal with the very real quality of life issues posed by unregulated or unsupervised day laborer solicitation" (2011, 2). These concerns included the spread of day laborers across several streets in Portbridge which posed safety risks, littering, urination and defecation in bushes and trees at gathering spots, increased traffic, negative impacts on property values, high school students harassing day laborers, damage to landscaping and plant materials on private property, occasional

aggressive soliciting in the parking lot of the home improvement store and, finally, occasional consumption of alcoholic beverages in public and fighting.

The report indicates that "an unusual number of Police Department resources as well as the Police Community Volunteers were required to address the day laborers" (2011, 3). Thus, the committee recommended the establishment of the Day Labor Center in hopes of addressing these concerns. The recommendation was to furnish it with benches, trash cans, shade structures, and a public toilet, to be paid for by a collection of private donations of over $10,000. In 2011, after the DLC had been established, the City staff evaluated the Day Labor Center's efforts to be exceedingly effective noting that "Resident, local business, property owners and customer complaints about aggressive soliciting are now rare instances, instead of a common occurrence" (2011, 3). Additionally, fewer resources from the Portbridge Police Department were necessary to take care of issues regarding day laborers, the zones where workers had gathered were much cleaner, and the safety of workers had been significantly improved.

Finally, the committee requested the renewal of an annual contract for the DLC's manager, Ricardo, whose role they said, "had greatly reduced the number of the calls for service and increased public safety," and whose management was "one of the critical components of the Center's success" (2011, 4). Support for the location and maintenance of the Day Labor Center demonstrated the city of Portbridge's commitment to work toward connecting migrant workers with local community members, business owners, and law enforcement. In so doing, Portbridge included migrant workers in the local community to some degree, especially by providing a sense of safety and security.

Cities around the country have implemented programs meant to reach out to migrant communities and to include them as residents. For example, the cities of New Haven and San Francisco instituted municipal identification cards for migrants as a way for them to access local services such as library facilities and local banks (de Graauw 2014). Political scientist Els de Graauw points to the utility of "local bureaucratic membership" to highlight how "city programs that help undocumented immigrants to access city services for which they are already eligible are substantively different from federal initiatives to expand citizenship rights or regulate undocumented immigration" (de Graauw 2014, 313). She argues that the role of the city is not to expand or limit immigrant rights as defined by the federal government, but to create ways to include immigrants in the local polity and to facilitate their inclusion and integration into American society. In so doing, cities express their autonomy to "protect the health, safety, and welfare of *all* city residents" (de Graauw 2014, 314).

The Day Labor Center exemplifies precisely this type of incorporation as local authorities established the DLC as a hub for migrant workers who were already part of the cityscape. Though Portbridge is one of several cities to employ strategies for migrants' integration into local communities, the experience is still uncommon in a nation whose exclusion of immigrants, and most notably, Latinos, is on the rise (Chavez 2008). Day labor centers may, like municipal identification cards, help migrant workers to "step out of the shadows" (de Graauw 2014, 318; see also Chavez 1998) and find a space where belonging and cooperation are fostered.

Sanctuary Spaces

Given that workers at the DLC experienced some level of protection through their cooperation with local authorities, the concept of "sanctuary" is important to consider in light of recent national discourse surrounding immigration. Hector Perla and Susan Bibler-Coutin (2009) provide a historical context out of which the current sanctuary movement has emerged. Rooted in a desire to protect Salvadoran and Central American migrants to the United States as refugees fleeing violence and corrupt governments throughout the 1980s, sanctuary movements have evolved to:

> [provide] much needed social services and advocacy work in their communities… Most recently, in Los Angeles, networks of attorney and civil society organizations have been mobilized in response to the workplace raids conducted by Immigration and Customs Enforcement… Likewise, in El Salvador, groups that focused on refugee rights during the 1980s have given rise to coalitions that now advocate for migrants' rights more generally (2009, 15).

Similar organizations launched during the sanctuary movement of the 1980s have been established to address current issues related to Mexican immigration; primarily centralizing immigration concerns from a human rights standpoint (see also Coutin 2003).

In October of 2017, the California legislature officially declared California a "sanctuary state," passing Senate Bill 54 into law. Sanctuary status refers to a city or state's intention to essentially provide protections for immigrants at the state and local levels that they deem discriminatory or exclusionary (Ulloa, 2017, see also Adler 2017). Senate Bill 54 (SB54) builds upon the Trust Act, an existing California law which limits

the amount of time law enforcement agencies may detain immigrants for minor crimes. The bill:

> prohibits state and local law enforcement agencies, including school police and security departments, from using money or personnel to investigate, interrogate, detain, detect, or arrest persons for immigration enforcement purposes, as specified, and would, proscribe other activities or conduct in connection with immigration enforcement by law enforcement agencies (California Legislature, 2017).

Additionally, SB54 establishes safe zones such as hospitals and public schools for immigrants, allows law enforcement officers to work with task forces *not* dedicated to immigration enforcement, and reports felonies or "violent and serious convictions" to federal authorities (Ulloa 2017). When the law was passed, workers at the DLC felt a momentary sigh of relief. However, in the wake of President Trump's "zero-tolerance" policy, rumors circulated for a few months about what might happen to workers at the DLC, although, to date, no federal agents have apprehended workers from the DLC in Portbridge.

In some ways, the DLC acted as a sanctuary space, offering some protections against migrant workers' many vulnerabilities. However, "inclusion" for immigrants is still limited because of federal immigration enforcement and exploitative practices among migrant worker sectors (De Genova 2002, 2005; Mize 2008; Seol and Skretny 2004; Stuesse 2010, 2016). For example, anthropologist Angela Steusse argues that poultry factories in the deep south of Mississippi exemplify the damaging relationship between

workers and the state, noting that workers' vulnerabilities in terms of their social, legal, and economic precarity renders them "hyperexploitable," so that

> the state's selective enactment and enforcement of immigration laws and labor protections facilitates this exploitation. This all enables corporations and their shareholders to maximize profits, which, under neoliberalism's economic and cultural logic, is the ultimate objective (Steusse 2016, 9).

Recognizing that migrant workers are constrained by legal and social contexts, the DLC became a source of empowerment where workers could seek out assistance and resist exploitation.

Sociologist Tanya Golash-Boza (2009a, 290) argues that several interests, including media outlets, politicians, and industry, form an "immigration industrial complex," that promotes exclusionary policies, anti-immigrant rhetoric, and xenophobia. She explains, "While the media profits from sensationalizing illegal immigration and politicians use undocumented immigrants as scapegoats, a wide range of government contractors directly benefit from immigration enforcement tactics through the profit potential" (Golash-Boza 2009a, 290). As a result, efficient immigration reform, or "official" approval of sanctuary status, may never be realized as there are too many actors whose aim is not resolution, but profit.

Vacillating between the protections of local law enforcement and the unpredictability of federal authorities left some migrant day laborers at the DLC apprehensive and careful. However, most workers were not fearful because they had come to trust the structure of the Center and how it was situated so safely in the community. Migrant day laborers at the DLC worked in cooperation with local

government, including receiving funding, and successfully demonstrated de facto "sanctuary" at the local level. Though the DLC was also vulnerable to immigration authorities who could potentially raid the location at any time, Ricardo was clear that he would not allow anyone to be unlawfully singled out unless immigration authorities had a specific warrant for a specific person. Additionally, he would call upon the assistance of the local police if there were ever any conflicts between immigration officials and workers at the DLC. Fostering trust between the police and migrants characterizes one way in which the DLC acted as a sanctuary space. Workers stated that they were far more likely to report incidents where immigration authorities wrongfully suspected workers and to seek help if they needed it.

For example, one worker shared his experience with a law enforcement officer who demanded that he show his "documents" when he was pulled over while driving on a street in a nearby city. The officer also insisted on searching his vehicle even though he had not given a reason as to why the worker had been pulled over. Because he had learned from Ricardo and other workers at the DLC that law enforcement officers were not allowed to ask for one's documents without cause, he was able to stand up to the officer. The worker also told the officer that he would go to the Portbridge Police Department if there was an issue. Apparently frustrated, the officer backed down and let the worker go. He never did tell the day laborer why he had been pulled over in the first place.

As the director of the Day Labor Center, Ricardo also acted as a vital resource for workers. Though I consider the role of central leadership at the DLC throughout this dissertation (particularly in chapter seven), there were some specific ways that Ricardo

served migrant workers that are consistent with encouraging belonging and the ideals of sanctuary. Though he was appointed as the director of the Center by the city, Ricardo was not a law enforcement agent or city official and thus, migrant workers found him to be approachable and relatable; non-threatening, and helpful. Ricardo assisted migrant day laborers by offering support, getting to know them, and directing them toward job opportunities. When new migrants came to the Day Labor Center, Ricardo often helped them get acclimated by pairing them up with other workers or volunteer coordinators. Sometimes, newcomers needed help with official processes, finding places to live, or garnering resources such as food, clothing, and cell phones. Ricardo collected items such as clothing and even set up a food closet in the office area for hungry workers to access canned goods and non-perishable items. Additionally, he would connect immigrants with local resources such as the Mission, a homeless shelter that accepted men, which was a difficult thing to find as most shelters in Portbridge provided housing primarily for women and children.

Ricardo also served workers by offering basic safety training about how to lift properly, protect their eyes and respiratory systems from dangerous chemicals, how to negotiate wages, and how to talk with employers in ways that would improve their opportunities to garner more work. This is a service that is rarely offered to migrant workers in the informal labor sector. Nik Theodore and his colleagues argue, "migrant workers increasingly are drawn into substandard employment arrangements, with little recourse against unscrupulous employers. Day labor worker centers provide a mechanism for re-establishing labor market norms, organizing hiring queues, and redressing grievances in the informal economy" (Theodore, Valenzuela, and Meléndez 2009, 433).

Ricardo's actions demonstrated that central leadership at day labor centers can help facilitate worker organization, provide critical support to migrant workers, and offer training to reduce the chances of injury and unscrupulous situations. Through these actions, the DLC—and perhaps day labor centers more generally—provided important spaces where migrants could connect to resources and, arguably, find belonging and sanctuary.

The DLC was part of Portbridge in unique, positive ways that could characterize some of the ideals of "sanctuary" especially because it encouraged cooperation and inclusion between the city, community members, and migrant workers. Arguably, the DLC serves as a model for policymakers. As an alternative to harmful, exclusionary policies that threaten the livelihood of immigrants who live and work in local communities, I observed how creating sanctuary spaces not only improves the lives of migrants themselves, but could serve to foster cooperative relationships among local community members, officials, and the state.

Community Engagement at the Day Labor Center

Almost every Wednesday there was an organization called FoodStuffs that brought donated food from a local grocery chain which was close to expiration, though never bad. We always paused ESL class, as it usually overlapped with their arrival. A few volunteers would rush to the little gray Prius where the organizer of the donation offered boxes of food to the workers. Many workers depended upon this weekly donation, which usually included loaves of bread, baguettes, bagels, muffins, cakes, cookies, fruit, meat, and even frozen treats from time to time. Some of the workers would come on Wednesdays

because they knew they could have a meal that day and possibly an opportunity to bring home some much-needed grocery items. When there was meat, workers were grateful, and pre-made salads and sandwiches were favorites for lunch. When the donations arrived, workers unloaded the boxes of food, and Ricardo would invite everyone to take something like a piece of fruit. If there was a large box of bananas or apples, he would announce: "*¡es libre!*" (feel free to take) and everyone would help themselves. The excitement over the dozens of eggs was most interesting to me. When Ricardo first offered me a traditional "egg float" which consisted of Coca-Cola with a raw egg or two dropped in, I always refused. I was reluctant to try it, but enjoyed the shared laughter and smiles as one worker would be appointed to go buy the soda and the eggs were passed around. As I discuss in chapter six, food sharing was a particularly important community-building activity. Everyone was encouraged to partake. As undocumented immigrants, day laborers were not eligible to receive social welfare benefits such as food stamps or government financial assistance. FoodStuffs was a regular presence at the Labor Center and provided an important service for hungry workers and their families. Although there were many underserved populations in and near Portbridge, FoodStuffs was committed to the Day Labor Center and workers had come to rely on their assistance.

Less regular, but still significant, were the university students who would come to visit. These students would come approximately once a month, or during spring, winter or summer break. One group was from a prominent state university whose medical students came to talk to migrant workers about their health. They came with sandwiches, water, and pamphlets to share with workers about available health care services. Another group of students from a different university also came semi-regularly to share with

workers as part of a Latino-American club. Their goal was to help educate migrant workers about their rights as laborers. They offered a lunch of *tortas* (sandwiches) and juice, and spent time talking with them, hearing their stories and grievances while directing them toward community support resources.

Students from these two universities were clear about their involvement in social justice work, their desire to improve life in the United States for migrant workers, and the community service requirements for their programs. Day laborers at the DLC were very open to their visits and welcomed their support for however long they would offer. On a few occasions, students would provide a presentation about worker safety on the job or what to do if they experienced wage theft or maltreatment. These were usually brief and highly generalized but marked the important role that students in the community played working with day laborers at the DLC. migrants and offer them services and support.

In addition, there were the individuals who regularly provided services for workers out of their own desire to serve. For example, Lety was a regular presence at the Center and was one of the first people I met who helped me understand the needs of the workers and more about how the DLC developed. Lety referred to herself as a "community worker" though she had no official role in any entity. However, because of her many years in the city's educational system and her service as a formal translator for public events, Lety developed a desire to serve the migrant community. She had translated for important visitors to Portbridge, including former President Clinton and several city and state officials. An immigrant herself, Lety reached out to workers around 2011, first to simply meet immigrants and ask them if they needed any help. Over time she built trust, and eventually earned a reputation as a critical resource.

Lety helped workers navigate legal and bureaucratic processes, including immigration services. She recommended lawyers and medical personnel who would reduce prices for migrant workers, and even took workers to appointments and offered to help as a translator. Lety sometimes helped to clean up the Center by picking up trash and materials behind the fence. She said that she did this to encourage workers to take care of their own space. When she began to clean, workers would usually stop her, saying she "looks too nice to be doing that kind of work," or her "shoes are not right for picking up trash in the trees." In other words, upon seeing Lety do the "dirty" work, day laborers felt they should do it themselves. Lety was a welcomed presence who had become a friend to many of the workers. One day when Lety was leaving, she went to start her car but it would not start. Several workers immediately came to her assistance and helped her to fix the problem. Many workers told me that they enjoyed helping her and others in the community as an expression of gratitude for the assistance they had received.

Though less prominent but significant, Ricardo facilitated workers' connections to the community using social media via a Facebook page for the Day Labor Center. He used this venue to post all sorts of information and to build comradery. Ricardo shared job opportunities that he came across by posting a picture or link to the contact. He would also post encouraging notes, Bible verses, and silly pictures just for fun. As a way to advertise what the Day Labor Center was about, Ricardo also used Facebook Live to present video footage of activities at the Center. On several mornings when FoodStuffs arrived with the weekly donation, Ricardo would record the food distribution event using Facebook Live, feature the food that was donated, and publicly thank the organization. He would film workers getting food as it was raffled off and record them sitting together

enjoying lunch. If I was still teaching a class during these times, Ricardo would feature me saying, "and here is *la maestra* (the teacher), Julie, teaching English for you guys. Come and learn with her." Using Facebook Live was risky since so many workers were undocumented, and their identities could have been revealed. However, Ricardo's primary intentions were to show the community that the DLC enjoyed being a part of Portbridge and that workers were available for hire.

Interactions with Local Community Members

Portbridge is a location that draws people from all throughout the city and surrounding areas for exercise because of the steep hills and walking trails. The parking lot of the home-improvement store where the DLC was located was the perfect starting point where many regular exercisers would park their cars and start walking. I regularly observed how residents would come and say hello to workers at the Center. One woman came weekly with her dog that she would bring by for workers to pet and play with for a few minutes, which always brightened the morning. As one worker described, petting the dog reminded him of his own dog as a child and caused him to recall a "simpler time." Another resident frequently brought fruit to share with workers from his trees. He would bring buckets of guavas, lemons, or oranges, and offer them to everyone. He was very friendly and would usually visit for a short while. Several workers would chat with him and thank him for the fruit. And on several occasions, I observed spontaneous "drop-offs" where people would come by to bring boxes of donuts or left-over bakery treats such as cakes or cookies for workers, either from local businesses or an individual

community member. The local community welcomed migrant workers at the Day Labor Center and provided them with all kinds of goods and friendly engagement.

One bright morning as I was finishing an English class, a woman came out of the home improvement store and was walking toward her car when she noticed the DLC. She directed her steps toward us and said with an exclamation, "Well, this IS wonderful! Are you all workers?" Ricardo explained that the DLC had plenty of workers for hire should she ever have need. "I don't need help today," she said, "but how wonderful that you're all so organized here! I've picked up workers a few times at the corner of [street and street] and it's nothing like this. It's chaos!" Then she looked at me curiously, "Do you work here?" I shared with her that I was a volunteer English teacher and researcher to which she responded with delight, "Just wonderful! I think that is amazing and so needed! I will definitely be back here the next time I need help."

An older woman in her late sixties or early seventies, this member of the community demonstrated how welcomed migrant workers were in this city. Not only was she kind and encouraging, she acknowledged that day laborers were a desirable workforce in Portbridge. As migrant day laborers filled this need, they became what anthropologist Deborah A. Boehm has called "contingent citizens" (2012, 130) which she defines as "undocumented residents of the United States who are de facto members by virtue of their employment, education, residence, political participation, and civic engagement" (Boehm 2012, 130; see also Boehm 2011). Workers at the DLC were part of the economic structure of Portbridge as they provided labor for businesses and private employers in the community.

Finally, other community organizations, including churches, would regularly visit the Center and bring encouraging messages to the workers. One church group, which I introduced earlier, came nearly every Saturday morning to share a Bible message and to invite workers to their church. They also brought juice, muffins, or coffee to share. After the pastor gave his presentation, he would ask if anyone wanted prayer or to talk about his lesson. Many workers took him up on this as they came forward to ask for prayer. Usually the pastor or one of his associates would pray over them and engage in extended conversations. The pastor asked me on several occasions to visit the church and, if I would be willing, to offer English classes there. They were always friendly and encouraging to workers and helped them cope with adversity.

On one occasion, a pastor shared his testimony about how he used to be angry, would drink to the point of drunkenness, and would upset his wife intentionally. An immigrant from Mexico, he felt frustrated with his situation, tired of struggling financially, and exhausted with being mistreated as a migrant in the United States. He had troubles controlling his anger until one day he realized that he was not only angry about his situation, but also angry with himself for his inability to cope with life's many stressors. He said that instead of loving his wife, he took his anger out on her and instead of finding solace in his faith, he looked to alcohol. As he shared his story, I noticed that many workers were listening intensely and nodding their heads as they seemed to relate to his experience and empathize with his struggles. Afterward, the pastor's wife shared with the group about how she had grown bitter inside and resented her husband's behavior. Through the encouragement of a friend, she began to pray for her husband. Over time, her own patience with his outbursts grew until, eventually, he began to soften.

They decided together to recommit to their faith, forgive past transgressions, and move forward in their marriage together.

I observed the demeanor of many workers change as they listened to this story, and many seemed pensive. They were clearly struck by the story and encouraged by the transformation of the pastor and his wife. One worker next to me said, "Wow. That's powerful. ¡*Que historia*!" (What a story!) Workers thanked the pastor and his congregants for donating their time to share with them. Additionally, the pastor and his team were also resourceful and could plug workers into programs, facilitate housing solutions, and connect them to community services that partnered with the church. For some workers, just having someone to talk to was a considerable kindness, while for others, more tangible services were appreciated. Regardless, workers responded to and welcomed the community pastor each week. Like FoodStuffs, this church group could have visited any number of needy populations but was committed to building relationships and helping to provide for the needs of migrant day laborers at the DLC.

Debating Public Space

The documentary film *Farmingville*, produced by Carlos Sandoval and Catherine Tambini (2004), recounts the struggles in a small community outside of Long Island New York, where townspeople debated angrily over whether or not to authorize a hiring hall for migrant day laborers. As part of their protest, those who did not want a hiring center railed against immigrants who gathered on corners, yelling derogatory remarks at them, and telling them to "go home" and "stay off our streets." Several citizens of Farmingville protested migrant workers by taking pictures of the license plates and faces of employers

who came to hire them. Many community members of Farmingville expressed their disapproval of day laborers in their community in very tangible and even dangerous ways. They also remarked that having several immigrants living in one house devalued the property of their neighborhoods and that the best advice they received from government officials was to move if they could afford it. Frustrated by what they perceived as a lack of federal government intervention, citizens of Farmingville took matters into their own hands and created a hostile environment for migrant workers as they fought against building a hiring hall for migrant laborers.

Debates about hiring halls and inclusion of migrant day laborers in local communities has similarly been contested in other cities (Varsanyi 2008), including within California. Jill Esbenshade (2000, 28) examines the discourse surrounding immigrants who are viewed as "taking over our jobs, our children's curriculum, and in the case of day laborers – our streets." She argues that:

> Day laborers are the victims of a continuing campaign against immigrants that entails a certain politics of visibility. These conspicuous Latino immigrants present a challenge to the already faltering Anglo hegemony. Local governments have responded by attempting to close off all public spaces under their jurisdiction to day laborers, who are, after all, members of the public. This trend toward the de-democratization of supposedly communal spaces is a phenomenon that urban theorists have referred to in other contexts as the "end of public space" (Esbenshade 2000, 29).

Migrants' visibility alone made local citizens weary; they were far more comfortable with the invisibility of housekeepers and nannies who labor indoors but were bothered by the "weight of the laborers' otherness" (Esbenshade 2000, 34).

More overtly, several cities have passed ordinances that ban gathering on street corners or other locations to reduce worker visibility in "public spaces." For example, in 2003, Pasadena, a large city within Los Angeles County, placed a flashing sign off of a major highway that read: "No Hiring Day Laborers Here" in hopes of curbing day labor zones (Dimassa and Ramos 2003). In a 2001 report for the Los Angeles County Human Relations Commission, Robin Toma and Jill Esbenshade consider day labor sites as effective ways to increase collaboration between migrant workers and local community members. However, they report that anti-immigrant activists in San Rafael, California, rallied against day-labor gathering sites and strongly opposed migrant workers, which resulted in the "abandonment of a proposed project to establish a day labor hiring center" (Toma and Esbenshade 2001, 34).

Sociologist Ernesto Castañeda (2018a, 2018b) examines how immigrants experienced a sense of belonging in New York City, Paris, and Barcelona, noting the importance of the "context of reception" (2018b, 127), which determines the degree to which immigrants are included in the local community. He argues that immigrant integration is dependent upon a city's employment opportunities, formal and informal markets, immigration laws, attitudes about race, residential demographics, and opportunities for political organization. Additionally, Castañeda asserts that integration is also affected by "the role of the state in regulating immigration and labor markets, the historical relationship between their sending and receiving countries, the possibility for

immigrants to speak as a group, and the degree for tolerance for other cultures" (2018b, 127). Portbridge expressed a high degree of tolerance for cultural differences since Overton and Portbridge are both largely diverse in cultural representation. Significantly, community employers frequently hire workers from the DLC, demonstrating that there is a demand for their labor. And workers were not discouraged from organizing in Portbridge; their collective efforts led to the establishment of the Day Labor Center.

Contrary to Farmingville and other cities that have sought to "end public space," migrant workers in Portbridge have, for the most part, been accepted by the community. There were no protests to the establishment of the Day Labor Center by community members or anti-immigrant activists. The experience of workers at the DLC has been quite different from that of migrant workers in other communities who experience discrimination on a regular basis and are made to feel like outsiders (Esbenshade 2000; Negi 2013) or violently rejected (Gonzalez and Chavez 2012; Ordóñez 2015, 2016). I am not suggesting that migrant workers at the DLC do not experience discrimination and racism based on perceived ethnic identity (Oboler 1995) as they have revealed that they certainly do (see chapter three). However, their presence and general acceptance as part of the community in Portbridge points to the ways they are also included as members of the community.

Migrant Workers' Participation in the Community

Workers at the Day Labor Center interacted with people who volunteered their time, money, food, and efforts to improve the lives of migrant day laborers and to offer their support. Migrant workers expressed their appreciation and found ways to serve the

community in return. For example, Adrian went through a period where he had greater financial freedom than usual to accept or reject employment. He was very pleased to be able to serve an older woman in the community who came to the Center looking for a worker. She explained that she could not afford much since she was living on a fixed income but needed some help with her garden. She said that she did not live far from the Center and had come to hire workers in the past. Adrian responded to her request because: “We have the freedom to help other people. I was available and said I would help her but she would not have to pay me. I could give her a day of my work. This place is good to me so I can be too.” Many workers described how helping others gave them a sense of gratification and they looked for opportunities to give back to the community whenever they could afford to do so.

Other workers offered to volunteer for local community events. “Local Life” was an organization that was focused on building community in Overton by hosting events and spaces for people to come together. They organized marathons such as the Thanksgiving Trot, a 10- kilometer run held every year on Thanksgiving morning. “Local Life” also maintained a community garden with vegetables and herbs that residents could help cultivate. “Local Life” leaders have often looked to workers at the DLC to help with their events, usually for clean-up, set up, and logistics. Additionally, every fall, the local “Pumpkin Patch Playground” reached out to the DLC to hire workers for temporary positions. Workers helped to transform a large vacant lot on a local street corner into a pumpkin patch complete with activities for children, such as a bounce house, slides, crafts, and a petting zoo. In the winter, they used workers from the DLC to help

transform the same location into a "Winter Wonderland" with holiday-themed activities and Christmas trees for sale.

Ricardo encouraged workers' participation in local activities because he believed that since workers had been financially supported and protected by the local government, volunteering in the community was a critical way to demonstrate their gratitude. Though Ricardo did not require workers to participate in any community events or volunteer their time, there were social expectations that workers would contribute to the wellbeing of the community when they were able. Workers appreciated how the city of Portbridge supported them in the ways that I described above. Mutual respect for one another and for volunteers and visitors to the DLC was essential, and when those efforts were undermined by putting the reputation of the DLC at risk, there were consequences.

During one of my visits to the Center, Ricardo quietly pulled me aside as I was leaving. With a heaviness about him he said, "Well, you may as well know because you're going to find out eventually." He explained to me that something happened during a recent visit from an organization called "*Santos de la Linea*" (Border Saints) who visited on occasion to bring *tortas*, juice or water, and pamphlets to describe the services they offered to migrants. During their visit, one of the workers, Julio, reached into a volunteer's backpack and stole a laptop and a few other items. Ricardo was disappointed, as was the volunteer, who said, "you know, we come here to help; we don't want to stop coming because we're afraid the workers might steal from us." Thankfully, Julio surrendered the goods and felt regret; but unfortunately, Ricardo had to call the police, something he really did not want to do since Julio was a regular, positive presence at the DLC.

Julio was detained for a few hours and his backpack was searched. It turned out he also had drugs with him. This incident serves as an example of cases when Ricardo felt compelled to involve the police to deal with a conflict or a worker, and the importance of trust within the community. Workers expressed their disappointment at the lack of punishment Julio received from the authorities as well as from Ricardo. Ricardo said that since Julio was released from police custody without consequence (though he was given a good scare by the situation), that he too would let it go. However, many workers wanted a harsher punishment because Julio had broken their trust. Stealing from one another and especially from community volunteers who came to help was a significant violation of the expectations of the collective.

Undoubtedly, Julio who had stolen the laptop experienced social consequences as some of the workers avoided him after this happened and were disappointed in him. Prior to the event, Julio was usually positive, helpful, and kind to other workers. However, when workers were in dire need, it was not unheard of to steal from others at the Center, and though it was rare it was always disappointing. Ricardo was also concerned about the relationship between the Center and the organization, *Santos de la Linea*. He did not want them to stop coming to the DLC as a result of one negative experience because he knew that workers appreciated their services.

Building trust with various organizations was an expression of community inclusion–the Center welcomed and appreciated the services offered by several associations. Els de Graauw (2015b) argues that non-profit organizations that collaborate with immigrant agencies can help to improve the work lives of immigrants and other low-wage workers, particularly in terms of labor organization and unionization. Day laborers

at the DLC greatly benefitted from the non-profit organizations, community volunteers, and local groups that came to visit and to support workers. As workers relied upon their support and services, the DLC demonstrated how collaboration with these organizations advanced collectivity and inclusion into the city of Portbridge.

Economic Contributions: Purchasing Power and Paying Taxes

Finally, one of the ways that migrant day laborers expressed their membership in Portbridge was through their economic contributions to the city and the nation, particularly through their actions as consumers by paying taxes. Anthropologist Ruth Gomberg-Muñoz argues that despite popular discourse to the contrary, "undocumented immigrants contribute to the U.S. economy in many ways…And while many undocumented immigrants send large portions of their earnings to family members in their countries of origin, they also spend money in the U.S." (2011, 127). Though I am not suggesting that purchasing power or paying sales tax, for example, is akin to citizenship, these actions affected how Portbridge residents viewed migrants—including perceiving them as contributors to the local economy—and also shaped migrant workers' sense of belonging to some extent.

In her ethnography of a Mexican immigrant network in Chicago, Gomberg-Muñoz cites a 2006 *Time* magazine article which stated that about 80 percent of undocumented immigrants' income is reinvested in the U.S. economy (Fonda and Takeuchi-Cullen 2006). I observed migrant workers spending money on various necessities including cell phones, tablets, and other technologies that were essential for workers. Workers also bought accessories such as head phones and Bluetooth speakers

for listening to music, movies, or playing games while they passed time waiting for work. Additionally, workers frequently replaced cracked screens, protectors, and cell phone cases. Migrant workers provided a consistent customer base for cellphone companies as they prioritized cell phone service contracts in order to maintain reliable contact with potential employers and their families. In an economy where communication technologies have become such an important commodity, cellphone companies must compete for customers. Many billboards throughout Portbridge and Overton advertised cellphone provider services in Spanish and highlighted unlimited talk and text to Mexico, a feature aimed primarily at this migrant population.

Clothing and food were also necessities that workers purchased regularly. Workers would go to local restaurants, grocery stores, and gas stations to purchase meals. Specialty items like work books and paint coveralls would need to be replaced frequently as a result of wear and tear from construction and painting jobs. Workers also needed tools. When employers needed a worker who had his own tools, the pool of workers was smaller and so one's chances of obtaining a job were greater. Occasionally, Ricardo would purchase a few tools from the local home improvement store and raffle them off to workers as a fun, motivating activity. He would also do this to support the local home improvement store that hosted the DLC in their parking lot. Additionally, work trucks were also major commodities and expensive investments. Earlier, I introduced Diego, who purchased a large work truck from a local dealer for $17,000 in cash, a significant sale for the dealership. Workers also utilized local mechanics and body shops to modify their vehicles like Martin did for his new work truck, which totaled about $4,000.

Most workers also paid rent for a local apartment or a room in a house. Purchasing items for their homes as well as paying rent regularly contributed to the local housing economy. Because rental rates in Portbridge and Overton were high, with an average of approximately $1050/month for a small apartment between 2012 and 2016 (U.S. Census), migrant workers would often find a roommate to help cover the expense. Landlords were happy to have their rooms rented rather than vacant, while workers were able to afford housing.

Gael, a young migrant worker I introduced earlier, expressed that because he had never experienced having money before, purchasing goods became a regular habit for him when he began to earn money in the United States. He recalled that he would buy new clothes and shoes almost weekly and he would change the décor of his apartment regularly simply because he could. While most workers at the Day Labor Center did not have much room for superfluous spending, some were able to enjoy a level of economic freedom to purchase desired goods and services. Every time workers purchased anything in this community, they also paid sales taxes, monies which went to important local services, industry, and infrastructure.

Finally, in terms of their economic contributions, several workers also paid taxes. “Undocumented people annually contribute billions of dollars in sales, excise, property, and income taxes to federal, state, and local coffers” (Gomberg- Muñoz 2011, 127). Undocumented workers were able to get a tax identification number whereby they would pay taxes regularly to the Internal Revenue Services. For migrant workers who wanted to become naturalized citizens or apply for work-permits, they wanted to be able to show that even though they were in the country working without authorization, they had

consistently been paying taxes. Castañeda (2018b, 30) describes that "in the United States, migrants, including undocumented ones, act as de facto citizens in the sense that they contribute to the host country through their labor, social security contributions, sales and income taxes, consumption, food, music, and culture, as well as political actors." The very idea that proving one's participation in the national and local economies by formally paying taxes would improve their chances of obtaining citizenship speaks to the value that is placed on economic participation as a major aspect of belonging in the United States. Since purchasing power can be an indicator of belonging, the reception of immigrants in California could potentially transform as the financial impact that migrant workers make on the state and local economy become even more significant.

Conclusions: Making Room for Local Citizenship

Anthropologists have identified the complexities of undocumented status and transnational life. The experience of being from "neither here nor there" (Boehm 2011, 161; Striffler 2007, 674; Zavella 2011) describes how migrants move through "layers of belonging and exclusion" (Boehm 2011,162). Patricia Zavella uses the term "peripheral vision" (2011, 8) to describe the constant conscientiousness of migrants' marginal existence, while Leisy Abrego's uses the term "legal consciousness" (Abrego 2011:337) to indicate immigrants' constant awareness of how vulnerable they are due to their undocumented status. Day laborers embody several notions of exclusion and belonging in terms of "citizenship." Workers at the DLC have carved out a space for themselves where they are accepted, receive and provide supportive services, and participate in the community by providing an available workforce.

While most day laborers do not have, or have access to, legal citizenship, they have been accepted and received in Portbridge in ways that permit them to act, for the most part, much like other members of the local community. The Day Labor Center in Portbridge offers a model for what local citizenship could look like, especially for other locations where anti-immigrant sentiment prevents inclusion of migrant workers in public spaces, such as Pasadena and San Rafael, California. Certainly, immigrants at the DLC faced racism, discrimination, and fear of apprehension or deportation, though these risks were arguably mitigated by the Center and its unique relationship with local officials, law enforcement, and community members.

The Center also fostered sanctuary spaces in some ways. Legal scholar Corrie Bilke (2009, 192) argues that the sanctuary movement in the United States calls for cooperation between local, state, and national law enforcement and should "include all stakeholders, including policymakers, government representatives, and immigrants themselves." I have observed how allowing migrant workers a voice in the conversation with local officials and community members while making room for their own collective efforts has empowered migrants in Portbridge. The result is the Day Labor Center, characterized by collaboration, built on mutual trust between workers and the community, and a space which offers a high degree of safety and belonging for migrant workers.

Finally, this southern California location is part of a "global circuit" (Sassen 2002, 254); as Saskia Sassen argues, "by focusing on the global city, we can study how global processes become localized in specific arrangements" (Sassen 2002, 256). Research at the DLC suggests how cities might foster forms of local citizenship that recognize

migrants as active, accepted members of local communities against the backdrop of global labor migration. More broadly, this work informs our understanding of citizenship, not as a uniform category but rather as a "flexible" (Ong 1999, 4) range of ways to signal membership. Indeed, the multiple forms of belonging experienced by migrant day laborers may challenge policymakers to consider new, expanded forms of citizenship and inclusion.

Chapter 6

"*Como Familia*" – Cooperation, Conflict, and Kinship

"How do you stay connected to your family?" I asked Emiliano during a formal interview. His eyes watered and his expression shifted as he replied, "My mother is in her eighties and she has diabetes." As he slowly finished his sentence he paused to regain his composure and apologized for crying. Emiliano was clearly moved as he thought about being far from home and away from his family. He continued, "I cannot visit her, but I send her money and clothes regularly. I talk to her often on our cell phones." Being away from home was difficult for Emiliano as he tried to navigate life in the United States among unfamiliar people, a new environment, and the harsh reality that he could not visit home. Emiliano struggled as he tried to communicate to me through tears about his mother's illness and his longing to see her. Though he was grateful that he could communicate with her over the phone, Emiliano expressed that it could never be the same as being there.

During our conversation, he pulled out pictures of his mother. "Isn't she beautiful?" he asked as he caressed the photo on his cell phone screen. As he flipped from one shot to the next, his face softened and his eyes watered up again as he explained the setting of each photo. "Here," he explained, "she is in her home. You see this? She is able to have a home." Because Emiliano regularly sent money home to his family, his mother was able to afford a nice house, good food, and her medications. Emiliano took solace in knowing that he could contribute to his mother's security and help to pay for her medical care. Even so, while many migrant workers at the DLC were grateful that

providing for their families while away from them was a tangible way to maintain links across borders, they still felt disconnected and missed being present in their families' everyday lives. I frequently asked Emiliano about his mother and he updated me regularly. The sense of loss he expressed during our interview remained in my mind as a defining moment during my fieldwork when I realized the many losses that workers' suffer to provide financially for their families.

Throughout my fieldwork, I was consistently surprised at the ways migrant workers at the DLC demonstrated resiliency despite so many challenges. Still, as I learned over time, migrant workers suffered from being far from their families and they shared with me about feeling anxiety and depression. For many migrant workers at the DLC, going back to their home nation was too risky and expensive, and it could jeopardize their ability to return to the United States in the future. Thus, for many workers, the Day Labor Center became a place where new forms of kinship flourished, where workers connected with one another as friends and fictive family. Several of the men I interviewed were responsible for their family's financial wellbeing and stayed focused on their financial goals. At the same time, their parents had missed much of their sons' adult lives since they lived far away in the United States. And for those who had their spouses and children living in another country, they too missed major milestones and felt excluded from family life.

A few workers, like Samuel, expressed no sense of sadness or loss being separated from family. One day, during English class we were learning terms for family

members. We practiced completing phrases such as, “I miss my family because…” To my surprise Samuel responded:

> I don’t miss my family. Why? My leaving was nothing to them. One day, my mother called me ten times in the same day asking for money. More money, she said. I send money, but they want more. They don’t ask about my health. Nothing. Just money. Yes, we are poor [there] but it’s not like they have nothing. I send money to help my mother. She cuts hair, but I don’t know where the money goes. I sent money for the school, they never built the school. I don’t know where the money goes. This happens a lot. We send the money, but where does it go? And they always want more.

Samuel’s frustration and lack of connection to his family revealed that migrant workers can experience relationships “divided by borders” (Dreby 2010, 201). Feeling used and forgotten, Samuel expressed his disconnectedness and shared that he felt much more at home and taken care of by fellow immigrants at the DLC than by his own family.

Propelled to migrate for economic and social reasons, families have been separated, reunited, and imposed upon by nation-state policies as they have moved geographically across borders and between cultures. Throughout my fieldwork with migrant day laborers, I heard their stories of family separation. Many migrants came to the United States in search of labor opportunities and suffered because they missed their partners, and children, mothers and fathers, and extended family members. They frequently told me stories about their families and were anxious to share about major accomplishments, celebrations, and milestones. A few workers, like Samuel, shared that they preferred being far away from family, as the stress of their family dynamics was

burdensome. On the whole, however, migrant workers suffered from being isolated from their communities and feeling disconnected from their families while trying to remain optimistic about finding work in the United States that would allow them to send support home.

For many migrant day laborers, the Day Labor Center provided a place to find support that paralleled kinship ties and helped to build supportive networks and lasting friendships. Though workers daily competed for jobs, they also participated in a system of reciprocity that served to mutually benefit workers. In this chapter, I show how migrant workers' collectivity through grassroots organizing at the Day Labor Center fostered interpersonal ties to one another in familial ways and encouraged a sense of community. Though the DLC was not without conflict, which I also address in this chapter, I maintain that day labor centers are places where kinship-like relationships can be developed–spaces where migrants provide mutual support and connect with one another in important ways.

Transnational Life: Challenges and Responses

Anthropologists have studied transnational movement and ties across borders in the wake of rapid globalization (Appadurai 1996; Ong and Collier 2005; Levitt 2001). Nina Glick-Schiller (2003, 104) defines transnationalism as the "political, economic, social, and cultural processes that extend beyond the borders of a particular state and include actors [who] are shaped by the policies and institutional practices of particular states." Several interviews with migrant day laborers revealed that they experienced feelings of ambiguity about belonging as they sought to maintain their links to their home communities while

finding ways to integrate into the United States as "transmigrants" (Glick-Schiller 2003,105; see also Blanc, Basch, and Glick-Schiller 1995). Migrant workers addressed their struggles with feeling "neither here nor there" (Boehm 2012, 162; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997; Striffler 2007; Zavella 2011; see also Dreby 2010); using terms such as "disconnected" and "cut off" to describe their feelings of displacement, which were especially salient for workers who migrated alone and had no family to connect with in the United States.

Scholarship considers the far-reaching effects of immigration policies that divided families across borders. As anthropologist Deborah A. Boehm (2012, 31) describes, "Ultimately, for Mexican (im)migrants, constructing home, marriage, and family is a transnational endeavor, one that bridges–yet is always ruptured by–the U.S.-Mexico border." Several workers I interviewed had been in the United States for many years, while others were recent arrivals. All of my interviewees revealed that they would stay in the United States for as long as possible as a direct result of current border enforcement policies. This meant that families were separated for longer periods of time than intended for which the consequences were numerous, especially for children (Boehm 2009; Cornelius 2007). Thus, many migrants "sacrifice families" Abrego (2014, 5) to engage in transnational labor migration as a result of immigration laws that prevent family unification. Additionally, many migrant day laborers also face the challenges associated with "mixed status families" (Ruth Gomberg-Muñoz 2017, 49) when parents are deemed "illegal" but their children who were born in the United States are considered "legal."

Anthropologists have examined how migrant families resist the challenges of transnational life and respond to policies that keep families apart. Joanna Dreby (2010,

201) suggests that "the very migration processes that strain and can potentially erode family relationships become the means by which family ties are reinforced and even intensified during periods of separation." Dreby's work illuminates how migrant families express resilience despite the difficulties of family separation when expectations of family members shift during periods of long separation and reunion. The most deeply affected, Dreby asserts, are children whose adaptation to the dynamic processes of transnational life alongside their families demonstrate a surprising resilience (2010, 138) learning to manage as "beneficiaries of parental sacrifices" (Dreby 2010, 142). Sharing in these experiences together, day laborers are like other migrants who employ unique strategies as a collective to support one another at different stages of their transnational lives (Gomberg- Muñoz 2011; Stephen 2007; see also Boehm 2008a).

Anthropologists and other social scientists have also considered how families adapt to transnational life, particularly by redefining migrants' roles within the family. For example, anthropologist Nicole Constable (2014) considers how migrant working mothers have redefined motherhood as they struggle to maintain contact and preserve bonds with their children and raise them according to their cultural and personal ideals while living transnationally. Similarly, sociologist Rhacel Parrenas (2002) argues that transnational working mothers engage in flexible meanings of motherhood when they leave their children with their fathers, extended family members, or friends to engage in labor opportunities overseas. Parrenas's fieldwork in the Philippines revealed what she calls a "care crisis" (2002, 39) and it speaks to how global labor migration has dramatically transformed the roles of mothers who are far from their children as well as for fathers, who have had to negotiate their role in the family unit as well. Several

migrant day laborers I interviewed were fathers who frequently articulated the hardships of fulfilling their ideal roles as fathers, a discussion I turn to in the following section.

Negotiating Fatherhood

Lorenzo, a migrant day laborer from El Salvador, met and married his wife in the United States where they raised their four children. His oldest, Anita, who was 20 years-old, had recently left home. Committed to their strong Christian faith, Lorenzo was devastated to learn through a letter that Anita had run off with a young man she had met and communicated with online and via text messages. The messages revealed that she had gone to San Diego, Fresno, and then, San Francisco. Lorenzo's wife was distressed for several weeks until Anita returned. The very idea that their young daughter would dare to leave home, especially with a man to whom she was unmarried, ran contrary to their strong faith and cultural ideals.

After a three-week hiatus, Anita was reunited with her family. She told her parents that her friends had encouraged her to pursue the online relationship, despite familial expectations of courtship. Lorenzo explained that he and his wife had difficulties raising a family in a culture where the value placed on independence can embolden youth to venture on their own. This was contrary to the ideals of Lorenzo and his wife, which emphasized the central authority of the father in the home and prioritized the family unit over individuality. Other workers shared their stories with me about how different values and cultural norms often led to conflict between family members. Workers shared that children learned about the United States from their peers, while their parents struggled to maintain their own values in the home and worked to “manage these contradictory pulls

by creating new cultural forms and making values from two worlds fit" (Levitt 2001, 97). When values were at odds, conflicts ensued and, as Lorenzo experienced, could lead to dangerous circumstances. Thankfully, Anita returned home safely but her parents were afraid that something terrible could have happened to her while she was away.

Lorenzo described that the challenges of raising a family in the United States stemmed primarily from financial constraints. He worked nearly 40 hours a week for the logistics branch of an entertainment company, making $12 per hour. For this reason, he utilized the Center for supplemental income on the weekends. He had worked in several jobs over the years, primarily in local refinery companies mixing concrete. Lorenzo explained that for him, learning English had been a critical reason that he was continuously employed. However, due to discrimination and racism, he felt there was little upward mobility available to him and migrants like him. And, due to the need to provide for his family, Lorenzo was not present in the home nearly as much as he would have liked; this was one reason, he said, he faced challenges raising his children.

Lorenzo's experience exemplifies what scholars Carola and Marcelo Suárez-Orozco (2001, 75) call the "destabilizing effect" of migration. They explain that "immigrant parents often tell us that working hard is the best way they can help their children, yet these long work hours leave many children unattended," which, they argue, "compounds the psychological unavailability that often accompanies parental anxiety and depression" (2001, 75). Working as a migrant in the United States can present challenges to children and parents because immigrants work hard both to provide for their families *and* try to make time to be available for their children.

Lorenzo fled El Salvador for political asylum in 1996 and had been working in the United States ever since. Over time, he acclimated to living in America in many ways including learning English, which he considered a great advantage, and compromising his value system, which he struggled to articulate. After many years, Lorenzo and his wife became naturalized citizens in 2014. Lorenzo's mother, two sisters, and niece were still in El Salvador and though he talked to them by phone regularly, he felt the sense of loss of a close relationship with them over the years. He wanted to visit them but unfortunately, the expense to return was too high. Lorenzo commented that the DLC was a source of support for him since he had friends with whom to joke, build alliances, and spend time with during the day, especially when times were tough. Other workers, he said, "get it" because they understood the difficulty and hardships of transnational living. Though absent from his extended family, other workers at the DLC served as a fictive family, empathizing with him and his family while sharing similar cultural ideals.

Another day laborer, Pierre, a migrant from Cameroon, fled his country for asylum, leaving his family behind because he could not arrange the logistics to bring them to the United States. He was waiting for sponsorship and it pained him knowing that his family was in danger on a daily basis. Leonardo and Santiago shared the same fear, as increasing violence in Guatemala caused them great anxiety and they were constantly worried about their families' wellbeing. And, stories like that of Mateo, who experienced a set of spiraling circumstances including a lack of housing and employment, reveal that being far from one's children, having little control over their everyday lives, and missing out on watching them grow can lead to depression or spiral into despair.

Several male migrant day laborers I observed struggled to redefine fatherhood, though it was not viewed as a particularly malleable identity. Sociologist Rhacel Parrenas asserts that motherhood is more flexible than fatherhood according to kinship expectations in the Philippines. She explains that "mothers can both mother and father, but fathers cannot take on mothering roles, such as nurturing and caring for children" (2005, 45). Thus, "gender distinguishes the construction of boundaries for mothers and fathers. Society limits fatherhood to a very narrow definition that excludes the care of children" (Parrenas 2005, 47). Migrant workers at the DLC carefully negotiated these boundaries as they struggled to fulfill their roles as fathers while away from their children.

Furthermore, I observed how day laborers "are in a double bind of conflicting visions of fatherhood" because "economic necessity and their role as providers force them to migrate north for work, but their self-concept as guide and protector of the family demands that they be in their home" (Walter et al. 2002, 226). Fathers told me that they not only wanted to provide for their families, but that they also desired to instill important values to their children from a distance. Though they valued the importance of being present in their children's lives, having so few opportunities to provide financially in their home countries propelled them to migrate to the United States. They had to shift their priorities, as many migrant workers do, to provide food, education, and housing for their families at home. Their experiences advance our understanding of how migrants negotiate constructions of gender in the context of transnational life (Abrego 2014; Boehm 2008b; 2012; Castellanos 2008; Constable 2014; Dreby 2010; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997; Mahler and Pessar 2006; Parrenas 2005).

Indeed, for many Mexican men, the majority of day laborers at the DLC, providing for the family defined masculinity. Migration has become an expectation for many Mexican men as part of fulfilling their role as providers. When they can no longer financially support their families in their home countries, Boehm argues that "increasingly, to be a man, one must migrate" (2008b, 21). One of Boehm's subjects remarked that "If you don't go to the United States, you are not a man," echoing several of the workers I interviewed at the DLC. Regardless of one's desire to stay home with their partners and children, financial circumstances and the "social pressures to be a man by going to the other side" (Boehm 2008b, 21) prevailed as men increasingly migrated north.

Walter, Bourgois, and Loinaz (2004) studied the experiences of injured day laborers at a clinic in San Francisco. Their subjects indicated that they felt like they had failed as fathers and as men, particularly when injuries prevented them from getting more work in order to send money home (Walter, Bourgois, and Loinaz 2004). Migrant workers struggled to balance the

> patriarchal accomplishment at generating income for the family versus their shame at 'abandoning' their wife and children…Injured workers suddenly fail both as providers and engaged fathers. When their worthwhile masculine identity collapses, day laborers fall into a personal crisis that often manifests in depression and anxiety–sometimes as *nervios*, (2004, 1164).

This was consistent with my observations of several migrant day laborers at the DLC who, as fathers and as providers, felt stretched between economically supporting their families and being present in their lives. One of the most poignant cases of this was

Mateo, who experienced depression and despair when circumstances stacked up beyond his control including poverty, documentation status, and his limited interaction with his son in Mexico. As he recounted his conversations with this son who longed for a stronger relationship with his father, Mateo shared one of the many deleterious effects of transnational living on children who "give up intimacy and familiarity with their parents" (Parrenas 2002, 51). His primary goal was to return to be with his son, who was growing into a young adult without the help of his father. Because Mateo had not earned sufficient money to send home remittances regularly, he felt he had doubly failed as a father and as a man since he was neither able to fulfill his duty to provide for nor to guide his son through important phases of his young life.

Anton was a gentleman in his late fifties to early sixties. During one of my visits to the DLC, we engaged in a conversation about pregnancy. During the course of my pregnancy, which occurred during my fieldwork, Anton asked about how far along I was, if I experienced any pains or if I could feel my baby moving yet. His curiosity piqued with each week as I grew larger and his questions became more frequent. Anton shared with me that over a holiday he had returned home to Mexico for a short visit. There, he had been with a woman and he had recently learned that she was pregnant with his child. He was curious about my own pregnancy so that he could share in the experience with his girlfriend. He told me that he wanted to be able to talk with her about it and let her know that he was interested in how the pregnancy was progressing. Interestingly, he admitted his fear that the woman could be lying and perhaps that the child was not his, but he trusted her enough to move forward and take on the responsibilities of a father. He said that this was not something that he would have expected to do–to have a baby and be so

far away–but the financial reality of his life necessitated his return to the United States to work as a day laborer, and even more so to support the little one on the way.

For many migrant fathers, renegotiating their ideals for fatherhood proved to be challenging, and yet, I observed how they found support when they shared in their experiences together. Migrant workers face many challenges living transnationally and away from family and friends in an unfamiliar place. For many workers at the DLC, the United States had been their home for many years and they had acclimated over time. However, for others, the adjustment to life in the United States proved difficult. With the support of others at the DLC, many workers found solace in knowing they were not alone. Their experiences were shared by other migrant workers who were available to offer a listening ear and help support one another through difficult transitions. Additionally, I observed how migrant workers joined together through their collective efforts, the value they placed on relationships, and in exchanging favors and services with one another.

Collectivity: Relationships and Reciprocity

Workers at the DLC expressed a range of emotions from feeling sadness, depression, and disappointment at being far from home to embracing the opportunity to make a new home, identity, and family life. The Day Labor Center provided a place where kinship-like relationships formed, and over time were strengthened to create a new place of belonging. Carolyn Turnovsky's work (2005, 2006) reveals that day laborers continually gathered at an informal street corner to look for work, despite other options, because of the relationships they had built and the meaningful purpose that their presence meant to

other workers. She writes that migrant workers' "everyday interactions at *la parada* (the corner) revealed that the corner offered the men a space to enjoy the company of others, share their concerns, offer advice, provide information, and lend support to one another" (2005, 35). I have found this to be the case at the DLC where I observed migrant day laborers supporting one another in various, often indispensable ways that included providing work opportunities for each other and emotional as well as social support.

Connecting with other migrants is a strategy of empowerment that labor migrants employ; collectivity can be a source of strength and support. Ruth Gomberg-Muñoz (2011) points to the importance of migrant networks and collectivity noting that "in spite of physical separation from place of origin and, often, family and friends, many immigrants are deeply embedded in transnational social networks that provide them with crucial material and emotional support" (2011, 65). As a collective, the group of migrant workers she studied cultivated emotional resiliency in the face of many hardships and, importantly, improved their sense of dignity and self-esteem. Similarly, workers' relationships at the DLC revealed the importance of building connections to one another to improve their daily lives as well as increase their chances for work opportunities. Migrant workers' collectivity through grassroots organizing at the Day Labor Center fostered interpersonal ties to one another in familial ways and encouraged a sense of community. They supported one another through various activities such as food sharing, a daily "*vaquita*", and providing helpful assistance with difficult tasks.

Food Sharing

Every morning that I came to the Center there was a flurry of activity, especially on the weekends when most workers would come looking for opportunities to earn money. For others, socializing was a primary reason for coming to the DLC. One morning as Juan approached the Center and walked toward the office area he told the coordinator, "Don't sign me in. I just came for the coffee." Because so many migrant day laborers shared a culture, history, and common experiences, they enjoyed spending time with one another. Over lunch one afternoon I met Nolan, who expressed how much he enjoyed his visits to the Center: "These guys are comedians! They make me laugh. They're funny. We play around. So, I come to have lunch or whatever with them." Nolan had regular work but, like others, still came to the DLC when he was available, simply to enjoy the company of other migrants.

Some of the greatest times of fellowship took place over food. As I mentioned previously, every morning "Lil's Tacos" arrived by around 7 a.m. and workers gathered around the truck to purchase breakfast. They would sit and eat together, socializing and sharing their hopes for work that day. These times served as convenient opportunities to engage with others and build relationships. I witnessed several conversations over meal sharing where migrants would catch up with each other about their families or talk about the news. Much like the "water cooler gossip" that characterizes typical office spaces, morning meet-ups were ideal settings for casual conversations. Additionally, workers would discuss big jobs that they were anticipating and their hopes for sharing the workload with other migrant workers.

Participating in social exchanges was an important tool for networking and getting to know other workers. Demonstrating one's desire to be accepted by the community and to give back to it solidified their commitment to the collective. For example, on one hot summer afternoon, Omar and Cesar suggested a community lunch. Omar went around and asked everyone to chip in a dollar or two to contribute to the pot, pooling their resources that he and Cesar would use to purchase tortillas, salsas, and guacamole so that they could all share a meal together. Regardless of whether someone contributed to the cost or not, everyone was welcomed to partake in the meal. This kind of communal support provided not only what could be much-needed sustenance for workers, but an opportunity to give back to the group.

One of the services that was provided at the Day Labor Center was the weekly food donation by the local community organization "FoodStuffs," which I discussed in chapter five. Each week, when the volunteers arrived on Wednesday morning, workers anticipated sharing in a meal together. One day, after the food donation arrived, a few workers gathered all of the meat from the donation boxes and decided to use it for a community barbeque. Hipolito, a seasoned chef, was designated as the head cook. With the help of Lourdes, the wife of one of the workers, they barbequed chicken, beef, and pork for everyone while another worker collected money to purchase tortillas and drinks. All were welcome to enjoy a plate, including myself. On occasions like these, which were fairly frequent, I found myself among friends as I took part in a deeply social experience where sharing food was considered an important way to welcome friends and show generosity.

I also participated in food sharing, especially during the holidays. One Thanksgiving, I brought pumpkin pies to share as we learned about holidays and traditions together. On Christmas, I baked cookies and explained some traditions associated with Christmastime. For newcomers, these lessons were especially interesting and thought provoking. They began to share with me their traditions and stories and about their families' celebrations for holidays. It was during visits like these where I felt like I was a guest in their "home," a picture of what the DLC became for many migrant workers. Through activities like hosting a family barbeque, migrant workers created a relaxed and celebratory atmosphere in stark contrast to the tedium of waiting for work on a long, hot day. Central to the DLC community, generosity, and sharing were foundational as workers invested in relationships with one another.

The Vaquita

Another example of an activity that fostered support was the daily *vaquita,* loosely translated as "the cash cow" which was an opportunity to win a lump sum of cash. Much like any lottery, workers would purchase a ticket for a dollar and put all of the tickets into a bucket. Once all the tickets had been purchased a worker would draw out three numbers; the first and the second were disqualified and served only to increase excitement, but the third number drawn was the winner. The excitement that this daily activity rendered was palpable, especially on the weekends when the total amount would often exceed $300. The opportunity to win a lump sum of money like this was rare and it could allow a worker to make a large purchase or pay off a hefty bill. Participating was

never required, but workers often felt socially obligated to participate as a way to show their willingness to give back to the collective.

Further, this activity demonstrated that day labor centers can offer spaces where activities foster mutual support and also can provide much-needed financial assistance. For Mitchell, this proved most helpful when the winner of the large sum donated the proceeds to him and his family after his brother had passed away in Mexico. Mitchell and his family needed funds to pay for the costs of burial and a funeral. They were also burdened with the unexpected loss of income by his brother's untimely death. Mitchell was very grateful for the generosity demonstrated by the worker who donated the prize money that morning. In addition to the winnings, other workers contributed to Mitchell and his family financially, another gesture of generosity. Day labor centers can be critical locations to foster caring relationships where workers may also find emotional and monetary support in times of great need.

The *vaquita* was also a way to engage in mutual reciprocity as they would exchange tickets with each other. Buying a ticket as a gift for someone else for the *vaquita* was a way to show appreciation or to garner favor with another worker. On multiple occasions, I witnessed workers combining their monies to purchase ten, twenty, or even fifty tickets with promises to split the proceeds, especially when the lump sum was quite high. More than just an opportunity to increase the likelihood of winning the pot of money, this was an opportunity to build alliances. Cooperation like this is also characteristic of traditional kinship systems where members provide for one another. Reciprocity and exchange, then, as embedded in regular activities at the Day Labor

Center, demonstrated how migrant workers employed a system to provide tangible support while they also solidified kin-like relationships.

Finally, I observed how workers helped one another with important tasks like repairing trucks, helping to arrange tools, and generally offering tangible assistance. For example, Martin, whom I introduced earlier, saved enough money to invest in a large work truck and wanted to install a motorized lift. One day, as I walked up to the Center, I noticed several workers painting and cleaning out the back of Martin's truck. As he showed me the inside of the front cabin, several workers were hammering on the bed of the truck to reinforce the wooden slats on the inside. They were committed to helping Martin complete the desired improvements and took their time to do it well. On another occasion, I observed several men painting the name and phone number of one of the workers on the sides of his truck. They took their time to line up the numbers, write them out clearly, and make it look appealing. On yet another occasion, Mitchell, a younger worker, was helping Adolfo, an older migrant day laborer, to arrange his tools in the back of his truck. Adolfo was having trouble lifting the long, heavy beams of shovels and hoes and Mitchell stepped in to assist him. After helping Adolfo to organize the tools, Mitchell improved the security ties for safety and made them easier for Adolfo to access. I observed many instances like these when workers helped one another to improve and repair their assets as well as offer a general hand.

Showing Up and Being Known

Another significant way that workers supported one another was simply by showing up, getting to know other workers, and building friendships. Most of the workers at the DLC

were regulars, meaning that they had been using the DLC as their primary source for work for a long period of time with daily or weekly frequency. I asked workers if they utilized other strategies to find jobs, but they confirmed that they primarily used the DLC rather than other *esquinas*. Thus, workers saw each other on a regular basis over many years; many of the original founders of the DLC had been actively engaged at the Center for nearly ten years and they had come to count on one another's presence.

One afternoon a local community member brought a cake to share with the workers at the DLC. As a worker went to reach for a slice, Hipolito said to him "No, no! You have to be careful. Your diabetes!" He did not say it loudly enough for others to hear but in a caring, conscientious way, signifying his concern for his friend who would get sick if he ate too much sugar. In another example of caring for one another as a result of getting to know each other, Martin understood Samuel's difficulty with a chronic illness. When Martin was contracted for a long-term project or a large job, he would usually hire Samuel to help him. Samuel had a chronic illness that was sometimes painful, and at times debilitating, making physical labor difficult. However, despite his illness, Samuel was a reliable, hard worker, as Martin had learned over the years of their friendship. The knowledge of ailments, injuries, and illnesses, including psychological distress, was apparent in the lives of the workers who had taken the time to invest in one another and get to know each other personally. In so doing, workers established ways to offer resources regularly and to support one another, much like family.

While current scholarship reveals that immigrants can be isolated (Negi 2013) and experience psychological distress (Galvan et al. 2015), workers at the DLC were able to mitigate such hardship by connecting with others. For example, Human Services workers

Frank Galvan and his colleagues found that day laborers experience chronic stress as a result of the precarity of day labor, financial constraints, and multiple "violations of rights, such as not being paid for their work, working under hazardous conditions, and receiving insults from employers" (Galvan et al. 2015, 76). In addition to these factors, migrants who are undocumented experience a higher degree of stress. Furthermore, Negi found that experiences with "discrimination and social isolation have an adverse and significant impact on Latino day laborers' mental health" (Negi 2013, 172). Negi advocates for "social service and advocacy organizations [to] focus outreach efforts for this hard-to-reach population at day labor corners" and suggests that facilitating "social activities, such as soccer games, to help ameliorate social isolation found to be associated with psychological distress" (Negi 2013, 173). The sense of being "known" by others was critical when facing illness, depression, and other challenges. For many immigrants, especially newcomers, it was easy to feel anonymous and disconnected, but the Day Labor Center served as a location where migrants could access support.

"We are Family"

Migrant day laborers revealed other challenges they faced as they transitioned to living in America. For example, Pierre told me that he did not understand American materialism. Coming from extreme poverty, he was overwhelmed by the opulence demonstrated by the Americans he had observed. In his perspective, Americans were "selfish" and he could not understand why they possessed so many things. Coming from a poor nation at war, he was concerned daily about the safety of his family. He had learned that many Americans were out of touch with the realities of war like he had experienced in

Cameroon. Pierre often educated others about what was happening in his home country and encouraged them to help.

One day he spoke in front of the entire Day Labor Center, a group of about 60 that morning. “I have something to say to everyone,” he began, and everyone listened respectfully. I translated while Ricardo recorded the whole event on Facebook Live. Pierre explained the details of the conflict in Africa, the dangers of the war, and asked for help for his own family:

> My brothers, you know what it is like! It is so hard. To be away is so hard. But I am here like you, to help my family. I need you to know what is happening. There is violence every day. I wonder if maybe today my family is killed or maybe it could happen tomorrow. Maybe they are safe. In my country, there is war. There is corruption. There is no safe place. I want to bring my family here, like many of you. Please pray for the people in my country. Pray for their safety. Please help us in this way.

Everyone listened to his plea, showing their support by being present and respectfully listening. Other workers related to the daily unpredictability that war and violence produce and nodded with him in solidarity.

At the end, Pierre led the group in prayer, an activity that was commonly accepted at the Day Labor Center. With their heads bowed, silence ensued, and he began to pray loudly so that everyone could hear. I translated for the group as Pierre spoke in English. The pastors who had come to visit that morning gathered around Pierre and prayed for him. They reminded Pierre to hold to his faith and to be encouraged that he was not alone. He was deeply touched, as were others, by Pierre’s words. The atmosphere was

familial as workers demonstrated solidarity and support by praying along with Pierre and listening to his story. Setting aside the focus on work for a few brief minutes that morning, Pierre reminded many workers that for their family and friends at home, life was still wrought with unpredictability, financial stress, and violence. Even though Pierre kept to himself most of the time, on this particular morning he affirmed that "these guys, they are my family now. I need them. They need me. We are all out of our countries. We are family."

Conflict: Banter, Mistrust, and Favoritism

I observed how migrant day laborers experienced a strong sense of connection to one another and received meaningful support at the Day Labor Center. Still, it was not without conflict, as with any organization. Organizing workers who come from various places and perspectives toward a unified goal is not always an easy task and was one that Ricardo was primarily responsible to coordinate. Additionally, spending so much time together meant that workers could become easily annoyed with one another or get frustrated over minor aggravations. In the following section, I address how workers dealt with conflict at the DLC, particularly when the goals of the DLC and trust between workers were undermined.

On many occasions, I likened workers at the DLC to siblings, who, as much as they supported one another, also experienced conflict. I regularly witnessed bickering over small annoyances such as listening to one's music too loudly on a Bluetooth speaker instead of using headphones. One morning Mateo demanded of Samuel, "Turn it down! We're trying to have a class!" He responded with a shrug and then said, "Okay, okay,"

turned off the music, and joined the class. On a few occasions, Rodolfo would yell at some of the younger workers to be quiet or "¡*callese*!" (shut up). Rarely did these small annoyances become major conflicts, but regular bickering was frequent because workers spent so much time together. Over time, day in and day out, they got on each other's nerves.

Each day workers took turns doing the "chores" for the Center such as sweeping, taking out the garbage, collecting recycle bins, and generally cleaning up. To appoint volunteers, they used the lottery system. Whoever's number was rolled was tasked to do the job. Sometimes, workers would harass one another, often joking that he had been chosen to do "the women's work." They would say, "look at how pretty he looks with a broom" or "find him an apron." As many of the chores were associated with women's roles in their homes, here, the men had to do all of the work, including cooking and cleaning up. For the most part, joking throughout the day was a norm and a sign of comradery, but there were occasions when the joking became quite serious or someone was particularly sensitive.

This was the case one day when Bautista got so upset that he began shouting "¡*Callese*! Stop it! Look at all of you – just ¡*callese*!" (shut up all of you) then took the broom and actually struck another worker on the back with it, breaking the broom handle! Everyone was surprised at the violent act, not realizing how bothered Bautista had become with their joking. Some said that he had been drinking and so he was overreacting. When these sorts of conflicts occurred, which were rare, Ricardo would intervene immediately in hopes of preventing serious harm. And, if it got really bad, the police were called, which Ricardo and the workers preferred to avoid. In Bautista's case,

he was banned from the Center for several days so that he could "cool down" as Ricardo explained.

Name calling and nick-names were often signs of acceptance, but were also interpreted as derogatory, at the DLC. For example, one worker who was noticeably skinny was called "*la flaca*." Another worker was referred to as "*ramen"* because when he first came to the Center all he would eat were ramen noodles which were all he could afford. Another day laborer was given the nick name "*chi-chi,"* a reference to his "Chinese-like" appearance though he was actually Filipino. Despite the fact that they had erroneously racialized this worker based on appearance the name was considered a sign of his acceptance as one of the few Asians among them.

On one occasion, Pedro asked me to help him to tell the others to stop calling him by a derogatory name. Pedro was offended by the nickname "towel head" which was given to him because many of the workers said that he looked Middle Eastern. Pedro was concerned about the perception of potential employers if they heard him being referred to by this name. He had asked the men to "back-off" and then asked me, "teacher, tell them to stop." I never intervened to assist in conflict resolution unless it was disturbing our class time. I did not want to upset the normal process of conflict resolution, nor did I want to appear to side with anyone. Only because many of my regular students were distracted by some of the workers did I ever ask anyone to change behaviors such as lowering their voice or turning their music down. For the most part, conflicts were resolved between workers or with the help of Ricardo.

I also witnessed bantering during English classes when workers would make comments about each other's abilities (or lack thereof) to speak English. In the early

weeks of my ESL course, I learned how few workers were literate. They knew letters and sounds but had little knowledge of grammatical rules or phonetics. There were times when workers would insult one another's abilities, making a few of my students uncomfortable and eventually, causing them to stop coming to class. When I inquired about this, two workers, Geraldo and Esteban, shared with me that it was because they were not advanced enough to understand the lesson and wanted me to go over the basics, but also did not want to appear as if they were "*tonto*" or uneducated. I began to incorporate elementary lessons, such as the alphabet, into every English class and slowly graduated to more complex concepts as there was demand. I was very careful to consider how the men were perceived by others.

As time went on and my student base became more regular, I found that workers would encourage each other to try harder and challenge others to attend classes as they announced, "Classes! English classes are starting! *La maestra* is here! What else are you going to do but wait for work?" They frequently helped each other to complete phrases and spell out examples of words, and they began to feel comfortable asking more questions regardless of how basic or complex. Although many of the day laborers did not want to be seen as uneducated, they simultaneously did not want to seem like they knew too much or were noticeably more advanced than others. I had to be careful about how I praised individual students as I was used to saying, "Excellent job!" or "That was great!" causing some students to make fun of the "teacher's pet."

Over time workers became more comfortable with me and my regular visits and included me in their banter. Though I was nicknamed *la maestra* (the teacher) they often joked that I was the "girlfriend" to all of them. Pedro regularly gave me flowers when the

weekly donations came from Foodstuffs and several of the men commented, “Look at him flirting! *Su novia está aquí.* Don’t make your girlfriend jealous!” During a lesson when I introduced terms for friends, family, and relationships, Santiago practiced, “*You* are my best friend,” pointing and smiling toward me. As we practiced the days of the week another said, “My favorite day is the day that *la maestra* comes to teach us” with gestures of flirtation such as winking and shrugging. Clearly, name calling and shouting, but also playful banter, were a part of everyday life at the DLC.

Compromising the Collective

Although on a day-to-day basis workers generally engaged in minor conflict and banter, there were a few notable occasions when conflict became very serious. Ricardo told me that he had stepped in on a few occasions to stop physical fights, saying, “Sometimes, it’s like watching children. You have to intervene so no one gets hurt.” On one occasion, Omar and Felipe got into a fight and they began to throw punches. Ricardo told them to stop before it got “out of hand,” and insisted they apologize to one another and shake hands to affirm the end of the argument. If workers did not resolve a conflict in the moment, Ricardo said that he would involve the police since violence was unacceptable at the Center. Both Omar and Felipe had been reported previously to the authorities for domestic disturbance and so the threat of police intervention was considerably more serious. They respected Ricardo’s leadership and took his warning seriously, and thus, they complied. Though they were still clearly agitated with one another, the tension between them faded after a few days.

Serious conflicts usually arose when the cooperative nature of the collective was threatened. In other words, when the goals of the Center were at risk, conflicts were more serious and the consequences were greater. For example, one day I arrived to find Elena and Mike in a serious conflict. The mood of the Center was tense and the feeling of discord, palpable. Though I did not know the details, I could tell something had happened. Apparently, as Elena explained to me, the *vaquita* had occurred that morning. As with the excitement of the *vaquita* every day, there was a lot of noise as Mike sold the tickets. In a rush of activity, Elena had been handed her tickets, but she had not yet paid for them. She got distracted talking with others and taking her time to get money from her car to give to Mike for the tickets. Suddenly, the numbers were being drawn and her ticket number turned out to be the winner. She was so excited to win the pot of money but when she went to claim the winnings, Mike objected saying "she hasn't paid for her tickets! She can't win!" Elena insisted "but I was going to my car to get the money. Of course I would have given it to you." Mike claimed that this was unfair and that the sum of money should not be given to Elena but instead, another number should be chosen.

This turned into a heated debate as both Elena and Mike were long-time regulars, and their argument brought about questions of trust between them. Several workers commented on the situation saying that Elena should have won the money; though it was not an ideal situation, they trusted that she would have given the money to Mike for the tickets. As I sat among the workers, we observed the ongoing dispute. Mike continued to yell, telling the pastor who had arrived and was beginning to speak to "*¡callete!*" or "shut up!" Mike insisted that he was in the right as he yelled to the pastor, "I'm on the right path. *¡Estoy derecho!*" (I'm straight!) Elena told him he was being ridiculous, saying,

"You're whining over two dollars! Don't you hear yourself? Over two dollars!" Their voices grew louder as the rest of us sat quietly around a table and waited for them to calm down. Mike yelled that Elena should be quiet too, and that everyone should "shut-up! The teacher is here anyways – shut up!" Elena responded to him, "This is a place for working, not for yelling. This drama! You're making such drama!" Eventually, they lowered their voices, but it was a tense moment and everyone felt it. Elena quietly came and sat down and asked to have our English lesson begin. I agreed, recognizing a good distraction was exactly what was needed to ease the tension.

Elena was very offended that Mike accused her of being dishonest. She gestured with signs of frustration and hung her head, lamenting, "He should not say these lies about me. They're not true. To say those things is not right." Elena and Mike remained tense for a few days following the incident but, eventually made peace with each other. Further, the whole group was bothered by the disagreement because it brought up deeper questions of trust for everyone. When activities meant to foster support were undermined by conflict, it disrupted the cooperative goals of the DLC. Conflicts like this reflected the importance of maintaining a collaborative, supportive atmosphere that would advance the primary goals of the Center.

On another occasion, Mike's actions undermined workers' trust through a more serious violation. One morning, an employer arrived at the Center to hire a worker and explained the parameters of the job to Mike, who was the coordinator that day and in charge of distributing jobs. After Mike learned about the details of the job, he snuck into the employer's vehicle telling him that he would do the job. The employer agreed since he was unaware of the DLC's procedures. When it was discovered that Mike had

essentially “stolen” the opportunity and not followed the DLC protocol, several workers became upset. Because Mike was so close with Ricardo, he had been accused of receiving leniency for other minor abuses, but many agreed that this action crossed the line. Ricardo was confronted with the conflict which eventually led to “judgment day” as Leonardo described it to me. Ricardo decided that a trial would determine the punishment for Mike whose actions were perceived as a significant betrayal to the collective. Stealing a job opportunity broke the most basic trust that workers had for the coordinator and each other.

The primary purpose of the collective was to create fair, equal opportunities for employment. Mike undermined the process and the trust of others, and the workers demanded a sanction. Thus, Ricardo allowed the workers to air their complaints regarding the situation and any other issues they had with Mike during an open forum on a Saturday morning. Interestingly, Ricardo filmed this occasion for Facebook Live. Several workers commented that Mike often behaved like a “bully,” and could be annoying but that these were minor issues. However, stealing a job was serious and they petitioned for a severe punishment. In the end, Mike was “sentenced” to a one-month hiatus from the DLC during which he was not allowed to get jobs through the DLC system.

Ricardo explained to me that sanctions like this for uncooperative workers had been enforced in the past, and that regardless of the fact that he and Mike worked closely together and were good friends, it was only fair to follow through with the punishment. So, Mike was “banned” for one month. I was surprised to see him there immediately after he was disciplined, however, so I asked Ricardo why he was allowed to return. Ricardo

replied that Mike was only coming to visit and to apologize, but that he would not be allowed to participate in the lottery or any other benefits of the Center for a month. Enforcing this kind of punishment demonstrated the role of the Day Labor Center to help maintain and encourage collaborative efforts among migrants.

Favoritism and Exceptions to the Rules

The notion of favoritism also became a source of conflict among workers during a difficult season at the DLC. Though workers were very cautious to outright say so, several alluded to the ways in which Ricardo showed favoritism toward his friends. During a busy season in November and December, Ricardo asked an old friend, Phil, who had helped to establish the Center, to return to help coordinate workers in the mornings. Phil was not interested in returning to work regularly for the Center but suggested that Ricardo hire his girlfriend, Krissi, who was looking for a job. Ricardo hired her, a decision that later proved to be problematic. Many workers complained that Krissi could not understand them since she did not speak Spanish. Other workers, however, praised her friendly nature and her desire to get to know workers as she called them by name when she greeted them each morning.

What became more bothersome to the workers, however, was that Phil began to accompany Krissi daily to the Center as a sort of protector and volunteer. After a few weeks, Phil made comments about how he noticed empty bottles of liquor were frequently found all around the Center, primarily stashed in corners or discarded in the trash cans. He argued that this indicated Ricardo was allowing drinking on the property, a violation of legal code and the understanding between the DLC and the local police

department. Ricardo never admitted to encouraging drinking, but he passively allowed it by not addressing it directly. Ricardo did not allow obvious drunkenness, and, in fact, he ordered workers to leave if they were drunk and acting belligerent. There were a few occasions when someone was hung over or drunk, when Ricardo allowed them to stay in the office area as he nursed them back to health. Being drunk while at the Center was far too risky as potential employers might witness such behavior and affect the reputation of the Center. Thus, while it was never officially permitted, there was evidence that drinking alcohol on the property did in fact occur.

Phil became more troubled about the use of alcohol and what he described as the "chaos" that had come to characterize the Center over the years in his absence. In addition to permitting alcohol, Phil was distressed at how the workers were responding to Krissi's enforcement of the rules. Krissi insisted that workers who arrived after 7 a.m. not be allowed to sign in, per the rules. When she would enforce the rule, workers would object saying, "Ricardo always lets me come a little late!" or "I sent so-and-so to sign in for me." Krissi was not completely inflexible and she expressed compassion toward those who had to use the public transportation system, which ran notoriously late, or those who had to ride their bikes long distances or drop off their children at school. However, when there were regular violations of the rules, Ricardo told her to enforce the rule, but, when she did, workers would object. Phil said that they were upset because Ricardo showed favoritism toward certain workers. When I brought this up during interviews, workers were careful about how they worded their positions; though many affirmed that the lottery system itself was fair, they also alluded to the reality that there were certain advantages to being friends with Ricardo.

Phil made other accusations that Ricardo garnered favoritism during private parties and through favors which took place at bars and strip clubs after hours. My concern was not with the particulars of these accusations, but with how it affected the spirit of collectivity at the Center. Workers seemed to continue to respect Ricardo's leadership and they still put their trust in the system as a fair way to obtain work opportunities. In fact, many workers responded that they could not be bothered by interpersonal issues, what they saw as a waste of energy. The focus, many said, was to make money, secure work opportunities, and move on. The rest was peripheral. I observed, however, that though many of the issues were secondary in the minds of the workers, the way that it affected their ability to work together proved critical, and thus they gave sufficient attention to emotional discord and uncooperative attitudes and behaviors.

One morning, the conflict about favoritism and the violation of the "7 a.m. rule" came to a head. Phil became irate, yelling loudly about how uncontrolled and chaotic the Center had become. Ricardo frequently laughed off Phil's ranting but this particular morning he decided to bring it to a vote. He asked workers to consider if it was fair for someone who would be late one morning to allow another worker to sign in for them. Would doing so create an unfair advantage to the worker who woke up extra early or who could not take their children to school or had some other obligation in order to be at the Center on time? These questions were exchanged and debated. Phil expressed his objections to allow exceptions to the rule.

Then, one by one, workers came forward and shared their opinions. Many commented that they were unbothered by allowing exceptions saying, "What's the big

deal?" One worker objected saying, "It's not right. It's not fair. I don't have a friend to sign in for me when I'm late! It's favoritism. There should be one rule for everyone to follow." After everyone had shared their opinions, workers voted on the issue. The outcome was that workers would be allowed to sign in for their friends if they were late. Phil was disappointed and made physical gestures to show his frustration stating, "This place is ridiculous! It's unfair! Of course they agree with you, Ricardo." When I interviewed Phil on another date after this event, he had come down from the heat of that moment. However, he insisted that Ricardo's rapport with workers was based on favoritism and that workers would not want to appear to disagree with Ricardo even if they felt the system was unfair.

When there was conflict and discord, I observed that many workers were concerned primarily by the loss of potential work prospects. They only wanted what would be fair so that everyone could have labor opportunities. Much like a family, the DLC demonstrated that when conflict occurred, whether minor or major, workers wanted to make peace in order to uphold the central goals of the Center. In the end, Krissi actually left the job after only a few months, and thus, Phil no longer volunteered. Ricardo had trouble finding a replacement helper after that, but he was happy to see the "drama" end with their exit.

Dealing with issues as they came up was an important part of life at the Day Labor Center. Participants at the Center worked together to create a cooperative environment that would foster relationships characterized by trust, support, and mutual respect. Having a central leader to help identify and facilitate conflict resolution spoke to the importance of having a coordinator who can act as a mediator and advisor. While day

laborers who gather informally on street corners do employ a set of "unspoken" rules as part of a social system that regulates behaviors to some extent (Malpica 2002, 8), a director can help workers to enforce agreed-upon regulations and sanctions and serve as mediator.

Conclusions: Finding Community and Family at the Day Labor Center

Labor migrants face difficulties connecting with family members and friends because of state policies that prevent family reunification (Abrego 2014; Boehm 2012) and that have resulted in greater dangers when crossing the border (Cornelius 2007, Diddier 2011). Financial constraints also prevent frequent visits across borders (Dreby 2015; Lee 2013). Separated from their families and home communities, many migrants view themselves as part of a larger migrant community where they may make sense of their situations alongside the experiences of others through what Benedict Anderson (1983, 6) describes as "imagined communities." Anderson proposes that there is a sense of belonging that draws individuals together through their connection to a nation, though in reality, members of the nation may never actually meet. Migrant day laborers at the DLC demonstrated that migrant workers are indeed connected, as Anderson proposed, but in their case, through their shared experiences as migrants outside of their nations. My analysis of workers' relationships with one another at the DLC revealed that day laborers can be more directly empowered as they build actual communities through their collective efforts.

When I first came to study at the DLC I noticed that there was a pattern to where workers chose to sit. There was one long bench that extended from the office area to the

bathroom lined with workers in two distinct groups. A third group would congregate around the tables and along the benches on the opposite side of the Center. Each visit I realized that workers tended to separate themselves regularly into these three groups. There were, also, a few outliers who stood away from the main Center or who would sit in Ricardo's office area. These groups seemed to function much like high school "cliques" where the same men would hang out together each day. I asked workers about this, wondering if it was significant. One worker described that Mexicans sat with Mexicans, Guatemalans with Guatemalans, and "others"—meaning people from other countries—with each other. Affinities among migrant workers were rooted in geography in addition to other factors such as their personal experiences with poverty, violence, and migration. These shared experiences became the foundations for bonding with one another. The common goal among all workers—to find and secure employment—unified them regardless of geographical origins, but there was a comfort in knowing that others could share memories of locations and spaces that were reminiscent of "home." For many, sharing the circumstances under which they migrated brought comradery as they recalled together what they missed alongside what they were happy to leave.

Violence and poverty were common reasons that migrant workers came to the United States. Several Guatemalan workers spoke of the violent gangs whose dangerous presence made them fearful and organized crime organizations threatened the upper class with bribes for protection. Though they were grateful for the opportunity to live and work in the United States, family separation brought a shared sadness. When Mitchell's brother died and everyone pitched in money to help his family pay for the expenses, workers shared their stories of having to miss important family gatherings, especially funerals.

Emiliano, whom I introduced in the opening of this chapter and whose mother was in her eighties and sick with diabetes, felt a deep sadness and he longed to be with her. Emiliano, like others, took some comfort in knowing that his wages were helping to support her needs and so, he continued to live and work in America.

Being away from family was incredibly stressful for most day laborers, straining relationships and causing them to miss out on important family events including funerals, weddings, graduations, and birthdays. During group discussions, workers described where they were from and told me about the geography, the landscape, and the things they missed the most. Every time these conversations emerged, multiple workers would contribute to the conversation, sharing their stories and relating to one another. They enjoyed talking about "home." Santiago would share about how much he missed the food saying, "the fruits and vegetables in my country are so much richer than here." Rodolfo agreed, affirming that South American produce was far more flavorful than the bland choices offered in America. Leonardo insisted that Guatemala had more varieties of flavors, brighter colors, and a beautiful landscape unlike urban Los Angeles.

These conversations provided important opportunities to talk about what migrants most missed. At the close of one interview, Manuel thanked me for the chance to share. "It's good for us too…to have someone to listen. It feels good to talk to you." The more I asked about "home" the more migrants wanted to share. I learned about famous archaeological sites in Guatemala and southern Mexico, the vast avocado trees in Hipolito's village in Mexico, and the hustle of daily life in Mexico City. Each worker had a unique history and they longed to share it. The Day Labor Center was a place that facilitated these conversations and that gave migrants an important avenue to process

their experiences. Such a model, I argue, can be very effective to ameliorate migrants' suffering and could arguably, reduce their stress through the forging of kinship-like relationships that provide much-needed support.

During my interviews, I posed a question about how workers felt about their relationships with others at the DLC. Were they friends? Did they participate in activities together outside of the Labor Center? Nearly all of the workers responded that they were not at the DLC to make friends but to work. They revealed that while there were relationships that they enjoyed, the main reason they utilized the DLC was to find work. However, my observations and deeper probing proved otherwise. Perhaps without realizing it directly, workers benefitted from an environment that fostered kin-like relationships. As I have discussed, workers spent long days together waiting for work; they tired of one another and there was conflict. Still, although they would not always say so outright, they also supported one another in critical ways. By helping one another, workers became interdependent upon one another and shared in the benefits of a trusted community. Over time, they built a system that relied upon mutual trust, support of one another, and workers' desires to maintain their cooperative efforts. And, by employing sanctions for workers who did not follow DLC norms, the Center was able to regulate, to some extent, discord that undermined its goals.

Additionally, employing a system of reciprocity ensured relationships that would foster mutually beneficial exchange. Helping one another with tasks, lending money, or purchasing *vaquita* tickets for others were all ways that workers engaged in mutually beneficial reciprocity and exchange, demonstrating their desire to share in the collective efforts of the DLC while also building alliances. Mauss (1925) provides a framework

through which we might evaluate how migrant workers use exchange and rules of reciprocity to better their situations, as I addressed in chapter five. In this chapter, I have more closely examined familial ties that were strengthened through reciprocal exchange.

Finally, I observed that many of the most difficult problems of transnational life seemed to be ameliorated as workers shared in their experiences together. Though there were conflicts, workers at the Day Labor Center focused on the aspects of daily life that united them far more than potential divisions. The Center served as a place to foster positive, productive relationships, creating a space for migrant workers to be encouraged and comforted while also finding work opportunities. For some, the Center became like a surrogate family and provided something familiar. When conflicts did arise, swift resolution was encouraged so as to maintain a cooperative and supportive atmosphere.

Throughout this chapter, I have shown how migrant day laborers experience many challenges when their families live across borders. However, my research also underscores how day labor centers can serve to ameliorate some of the hurdles that migrant workers face by providing an environment that is conducive to building and maintaining family-like relationships. Importantly, no one person is solely responsible for the success of the Center. Migrant workers, the community, and the leadership have together made the Day Labor Center what it has become: a space that nurtures a helpful environment where migrants can build relationships, find resources, and seek support.

Chapter 7

"*Queremos Respeto*" – Imagining Possibilities

One cool, crisp Saturday morning, Ricardo and I hosted a training for the workers at the DLC. Saturdays were the busiest days and on this particular morning there were over fifty workers present. Everyone sat along the benches as I taught them the English names of tools and we practiced phrases and terms for negotiation. With colorful printed worksheets, we recited the names of tools: "hammer – *martillo*; nail – *clavo*; Pass me the hammer, please. Pass me those nails, please." We repeated phrases together, and then practiced exchanges with each other. During a role-playing exercise, Diego and I played the part of a day laborer and employer where I asked, "How much do you charge per hour?" He responded in English, "If you treat me with respect, give me a nice lunch and respect my work, I will charge you a fair price. I do good work." Then he turned to me saying, "We want mutual respect, you know." Several others affirmed Diego's remarks noting that respect is equally important as a good wage.

Other workers chimed in, offering their input. They spoke out about their high levels of experience in different fields, including construction, painting, and landscaping. "Employers don't want to pay us what we're worth," they said. "They pay so little. They would never pay a regular plumber so little for the work they do, but us…" another chimed in. One by one, workers shared the challenges they faced and after a while, I realized we were not only teaching English-language skills but hosting a town hall gathering for workers where they were learning from Ricardo and me, but also one another. They told cautionary stories, "I heard about a guy last week who was killed

under a house!" and another, "I knew a guy who was injured because he didn't turn off the electricity correctly because he didn't understand." What began as a basic English training session soon turned into an engaging workshop, with migrant workers offering advice and warnings, while Ricardo and I facilitated. "But what if they don't want to pay more?" one asked, and another, "How do I ask them where the electric box is?"

And so, we practiced. I helped field questions and taught phrases in English to clarify with employers the exact details of a job in hopes of avoiding dangerous situations. Using several volunteers for role-play activities to exemplify possible scenarios with employers, workers shared more stories from their experiences, asked many "what-if" questions, and aired their grievances about employers. In this type of setting, with these types of exchanges, the DLC simulated a typical staffing or training agency under the organization of a supervisor where such workshops might take place. As an organized, grassroots collective, workers served one another by offering opportunities to learn, share, and solve problems together.

My research at the Day Labor Center has demonstrated how worker collectivity, central leadership, and services provided to migrant workers have improved their situations. The DLC provides one model for how labor centers can "together, with a variety of other migrant serving non-profit organizations, [become a] part of an emerging migrant civil society that is responding to the unique socioeconomic problems facing migrant workers in the United States" (Theodore, Valenzuela, and Meléndez (2009, 434). In coming together to employ specific strategies that serve to protect workers and employers, day laborers at the DLC have built and maintained a strong relationship with government

officials, law enforcement officers, and residents of the local community. Ricardo's role as the director of the DLC demonstrates how central leadership can effectively facilitate workers' collective efforts as well as serve as an important connecting point for newly arrived immigrants. Finally, offering services for migrant workers at the DLC has proven invaluable as workers receive assistance through their participation at the DLC. Training and mentoring that are offered at the Day Labor Center has helped to mitigate or prevent injuries, wage-theft, and other potential hardships.

As I observed throughout my research, workers experience many tensions between exerting agency in their own lives and being constrained by structural barriers, racism and discrimination, unfair labor practices, immigration status, distance from family, and more. Still, the Day Labor Center serves as a critical model for what collaboration between workers, communities, and local authorities could look like as it helped to mitigate so many of the challenges that migrant workers faced. The role of the DLC has remained consistently crucial as a place where migrant workers received emotional, financial, and familial support which contributed to their empowerment. This ethnographic inquiry into the lives of migrant day laborers provides a critical perspective for anthropologists who continue to study how state policies affect immigrants in their everyday lives. In an increasingly anti-immigrant environment, the perspectives of migrants themselves can guide policymakers to see immigrants as already (and rightfully) embedded into local communities. In Portbridge, as migrants have become a part of the informal economy, they—with the support of the DLC—have secured a place for themselves in the local community.

Strength in Numbers: Empowered by Collectivity

Workers at the DLC aimed to create an atmosphere where collectivity and cooperation were fostered. They realized that the reflection of one worker was a reflection on the group. One of the reasons the DLC functioned so well and was accepted by the local community was its positive reputation. If a worker did not do a good job, an employer could complain to Ricardo who could enforce sanctions as I discussed earlier. Since most of the workers were regulars at the DLC, employers were likely to be able to identify a particular employee and discuss an issue with Ricardo.

For example, during my fieldwork there was a two-month period or so when Ricardo received several complaints from employers that workers could not understand them. Even though workers told the employers that they could speak English, they were unable to effectively understand the employer to do the job well. Employers returned the worker to the DLC, frustrated about the lost time. If the employer wanted a replacement, Ricardo would offer the job to other workers and he felt badly if the employer was not satisfied. Workers commented that everyone should be honest about their abilities, whether it was speaking English or having qualifications for a specific type of job because, "it reflects on all of us." Workers wanted others to get hired and to do a good job so that they all might benefit. If an employer had positive experiences with day laborers from the DLC, the chances that they would return were greatly increased.

Workers also wanted to avoid drawing negative attention to themselves, recognizing their vulnerability as openly visible, individual migrant workers, most of them undocumented. Maintaining a collective sense of order, then, was important so as not to attract attention, particularly from police. Carolyn Turnovsky's fieldwork among

day laborers who congregated on a visible street corner in New York City revealed a similar desire for all to maintain an orderly, professional appearance, to avoid behaviors that would threaten the reputation of the corner for potential employers or attract authorities. She writes:

> The men who were most looked down upon were those who participated in unlawful activities or were flippant about looking for work on the corner. The men also discouraged drinking alcohol and least of all using drugs on the corner since they were aware that distinctions in their appearance were critical in presenting themselves as desirable workers. The men considered these public displays as visible markers that would discourage a potential employer from pulling up in front of that particular person or group (2006a, 34).

Day laborers on the corner in New York City shared the same priorities as the men I observed. They did not understand why, having already risked crossing the border, someone would risk their position in the United States by behaving in ways that would threaten their situation.

The primary goal for most workers at the DLC was to find and secure labor opportunities. While Turnovsky made a distinction between the Temps and the Regulars, describing that the Regulars took work far more seriously (2006a, 31), I found that nearly all of the workers at the DLC, whether part-time or full-time job seekers, valued their labor and did not take kindly to workers who would make trouble. In one of my early interviews with Santiago, he made a motion toward some of the "less-serious" workers as he perceived them and waved dismissively, saying "they don't care so much. They are not educated, and they don't know. This is work. This is important." For day laborers,

finding the balance between being visible, but not too visible, was difficult and as a collective, workers at the DLC tried to regulate behaviors that would detract potential employers or attract negative attention, especially from police.

Workers also wanted to strengthen one another's chances for repeat customers by upholding a high standard for the quality of work that they performed. For example, Berto went on a job to install a door which apparently, did not go well. The employer came back to complain to Ricardo that Berto had done a poor job. Berto apologized and said that he would refund the employer some of the money and would gladly return to the job to fix his mistakes. The employer was grateful, and the problem was easily resolved. If workers were willing to fix their mistakes and solve conflicts with employers, it benefitted both parties and protected the reputation of the DLC. Workers wanted to be known for their integrity as one worker Nicolas shared with me:

> We are honest people. We might not be angels, you know, but you can take us into your home. We're not gonna steal from you or anything like that. Sometimes, guys go to a job, [and] they're not honest. Some guys don't take this seriously and that creates problems for us and for the employers. The guys do a bad job because they can't really do the job, but they say they can, whether to hang a ceiling fan or do dry wall or whatever. It gives the Center and the workers a bad name. They should be honest about what they can do.

The sentiment that "if one guy does it, it reflects on all of us" was a shared ideal not only about how well a worker performed on the job, but also related to an individual worker's attitude and behavior. Some workers shared that they had never stolen from an employer and were quick to chasten those who did and later bragged about it. Stories about getting

away with anything or taking advantage of an employer were rarely seen as conquests, but rather frowned upon. If one worker stole from an employer, it affected the whole group by reducing the chances of that employer returning to hire workers. Additionally, workers could lose potential business from other community members when employers had negative experiences and told their friends and neighbors.

At the same time, workers protected one another by sharing information about employers. Just as many of the workers at the DLC came regularly, so did local employers. If an employer mistreated or underpaid an employee, the workers would provide that information to others and warn them not to go on a job for them. On one occasion an employer in a yellow Corvette approached the Center and asked for a worker. Before I could learn the details of the offer, Santiago said to me, "He's been here before. I [won't] go with him; other guys should not go with him either. He is not a nice man and he pays too little." Workers also talked to one another frequently about local employers in terms of how they were treated, the accuracy of an employer's description of a job, how hard or easy a job was in general, and the "benefits" such as if water or lunch was provided. If a repeat employer with a bad reputation came for a worker, it was unlikely he or she would find a willing day laborer to do the job.

Alex Jr. described his experience with an offensive employer who called him out from the parking lot near the DLC. He explained that the employer agreed to pay him $15 per hour and would provide lunch and transportation. While on the job, Alex Jr. asked for a break to smoke a cigarette, which he was reluctantly granted. According to Alex Jr. after the short break

> He just treated me like crap. We were puttin' down cement for bricks and he paid me $12 an hour and he left me in [neighboring city]! And I've seen him come back. I've talked to a couple of workers and they had almost the same thing happen with the same guy. When he comes we yell – *"¡piojo! Ese juedo – ¡piojo!"* Yea, if you treat the guys wrong here, they'll tell you, they'll tell everybody else – it's like high school around here.

Piojo refers to lice, and especially how lice feed on the blood of a human to survive. *Juedo* is a derogatory term for a white person, much like *gringo*. Hence, the connotation of the term "blood -sucker" indicates that an employer will take advantage of workers.

Finally, workers protected on another by taking pictures of employers' license plates, asking for addresses for work sites rather than following an employer, and obtaining business cards or cell phone numbers from clients. This way, if an employer refused to pay, underpaid, or treated a worker poorly, day laborers could report the employer with sufficient identifying information. Since these requests became a norm at the DLC, employers were usually compliant and offered the information willingly. Sharing information about employers contributed to workers' ability to make a more informed decision about whether or not to accept a job.

Workers at the DLC demonstrated that collectivity can lead to greater agency over their employment. Out of their desire to maintain a positive reputation in the community, workers were more apt to follow the expectations of the collective while employers counted on hiring good workers from the DLC. Workers valued their labor and they took day labor seriously, expected honesty from one another regarding their abilities, and took pride in being a part of something that the community could count on. Together, migrant

day laborers employed strategies which resulted in more labor opportunities and empowered workers to protect themselves and have greater control over their work lives.

Central Leadership at the DLC

During one of my early visits to the DLC I met Marcus, a young man who looked decidedly ill early one Saturday morning. He was half-asleep, sitting on a crate in Ricardo's office area, and vomiting into a bucket. He had a brown paper bag which held a tall can of Budweiser. He was in no condition to work and I wondered why he was at the Center at all. As it turned out, Ricardo told him it was alright to stay and sober up as he clearly needed assistance. Marcus had a drinking problem and because Ricardo had witnessed the damage that drinking can do to migrant workers, he offered his support. Drinking is a common coping mechanism for migrant workers who are away from their families, under financial strains, and struggling to find work (Organista, Arreola, and Neilands 2017; Worby and Organista 2013). Over the years, Ricardo helped a few workers get treatment for drinking or gambling, behaviors which can result in getting less work, among other consequences. As a form of prevention, Ricardo had also helped to guide some of the younger men, especially as they adjusted to living in the United States. Gael shared about the prominent role Ricardo played in helping to shape his growth as a young adult in the United States:

> The more I worked, the more money I made. I have never seen money like that before. I bought everything. I had so many clothes and shoes. My apartment was always changing [décor]. I didn't know how to save nothing. Without this guy

> [pointing to Ricardo] I would know nothing. He taught me how to save and to be careful of where to spend and how to spend. He's a good guy.

Marcus's and Gael's experiences show how leaders and staff at day labor centers have the opportunity to get to know workers personally and can help ease them into everyday life in the United States, cope with problems and issues, and help them to navigate unfamiliar terrain. Connecting with a local leader of an organization like the DLC can play a critical role in the migration process. Longitudinal studies of worker centers and the migrants who use them can show the lasting effects of participating regularly in the services and activities that such worker centers provide.

Ricardo also tried to protect workers from being taken advantage of or getting scammed. For example, when a vendor who sold stolen tools came to the Center, Ricardo warned workers not to purchase anything from him but ultimately left it up to each person to decide. Another time, I observed an employer who came to hire a worker for one hour to take his truck full of materials and to dump the contents illegally in a back-alley so that he could avoid the fee at the city dumpster. Ricardo, understanding the situation clearly, recommended that no one accept the job. If they were caught, the fine could exceed $200 along with the risk of getting into trouble with authorities. Migrant workers prioritized protecting their records as they had witnessed other immigrants in the community be apprehended, especially at unruly day-laborer gathering spaces. Ricardo did what he could to protect workers from being coerced unwittingly into illegal activities, especially for newcomers who were more vulnerable to falling prey to unscrupulous situations.

Early in my fieldwork, Ricardo shared a story with me about a recently-arrived migrant worker who was hired at the DLC. The employer requested a worker for an "unskilled labor job" though he was not specific about the details. Thinking that the job would be for cleaning or yardwork, the worker accepted the job and went with the employer. Upon arrival, the employer made sexual advances toward him and, according to the day laborer, nearly forced himself upon him. The worker ran out of the house and was lost since he was unfamiliar with the city and had no concept of where he was in relationship to the DLC. After stopping to ask for help, he eventually made his way back to the Center where he shared the experience with Ricardo. Though rare, other situations like this have occurred, according to Ricardo. Ricardo did his best to inform newcomers to be cautious and encouraged them to connect with other migrant workers at the DLC to guide them as they adjusted to work and life in the United States. The leader's role, alongside veteran day laborers in guiding new migrants away from peril, was built into the social structure of the DLC. Thus, immigrants at the DLC received much-needed assistance, exemplifying how day labor centers that employ centralized leadership and encourage connections to other migrants can be incredibly valuable, especially for new migrants to the United States.

Ricardo also educated migrant workers about negotiation strategies with employers and offered some job safety training. For example, he taught them to wear safety gear at all times, especially gloves when working with chemicals and protective eyewear for any type of work involving cutting, sawing, or woodworking. He told workers to ask employers what sort of protective gear they provided. Many workers, especially newcomers, were unaware of the relationship between the amount of pay and

risk of a job and that they could and should negotiate. During one training event, Ricardo told workers not to charge less than $100 as a flat rate to go under a house because of the risk involved. He encouraged workers to consider potential dangers when negotiating wages and taught them strategies like charging for a whole job rather than hourly to maximize their pay. Higher pay was expected for tasks such as going underneath a house, dealing with electricity, or being on a roof because the risks for injury were high. Ricardo also explained that first-time cleaning jobs should be charged a higher rate than a regular, consistent cleaning job because the first visit would likely involve much more work. Then, if a worker is hired on regularly, they could maintain the level of cleanliness and would have less to do at each subsequent visit than in the beginning. Trainings like these have become essential for workers as they constantly engage in a variety of different jobs and may not know all the safety precautions to take for different situations or the norms for what to charge.

Trainings like these are similar to those offered at formal staffing agencies, where employees receive job-specific and safety trainings, as well as prevention trainings to understand sexual harassment in the workplace or labor laws. Workers in the informal economy typically are not aware of their legal rights or how to protect themselves from violations but labor centers can "address the problem of nonpayment of wages through worker education programs" as part of a more comprehensive service model for filing wage-claims (Theodore, Valenzuela, and Meléndez 2009, 433). Formal and informal leadership as exemplified at the DLC served to prevent serious injury, legal violations, or other calamities that might befall migrant workers.

Possibilities: Where to Go from Here

As my research has shown, day labor centers can be empowering spaces for migrant workers to engage in collective efforts that could improve their lives and add to their sense of agency in significant ways. Anthropologists have explored migrant workers' collective efforts as empowering in other contexts. For example, Davide Però's ethnography of Latino organizations in the United Kingdom (2008) revealed that when immigrants experienced critical needs such as protections from abusive employers, they mobilized, joined forces, and got involved in collective organizing. The results of two organizations that he examined not only "improve[d] the work lives of Latino migrants in the United Kingdom, but, importantly, strengthened the overall integration of Latin American migrants into British society, particularly in the sociopolitical sphere" (Però 2008, 120). Additionally, migrants' involvement led to feeling empowered and confident that they "possess the resources and skills that can turn them into a collective capable of positively influencing their integration into the United Kingdom" (Però 2008, 115).

Parallel to these findings, the Day Labor Center demonstrates that grassroots organizing can have positive outcomes such that migrant workers have been able to exercise agency over their work, and together they have employed strategies to minimize workers' exploitation and abuse. As a consistent presence in the community, migrant workers in Portbridge at the DLC have also become part of the community with a kind of local citizenship that, arguably, has helped them to feel more at ease in their host country. This project with migrant workers at the DLC has contributed to scholarship about migration and labor, while also suggesting potential directions for future research.

Further, the Day Labor Center presents a possible model for other cities seeking to find more inclusive reception for migrant workers, particularly for migrant day laborers.

Future Research Considerations

Through nearly two years of research, my fieldwork has yielded significant results, and yet, there were some limitations to the questions I was able to address and the spaces I was able to access. This project is not exhaustive–in some ways I have only begun to unpack the distinct contributions that day laborers add to understandings of migrant labor more generally. This research points to additional areas of inquiry for future anthropological scholarship. First, there were spaces and people that I could not easily access; for example, conducting observations at work sites and completing interviews with employers would augment findings about the experiences of day laborers. Speaking with employers about why they hired day laborers and what they saw as the benefits and limitations of the Day Labor Center would add to an analysis of day labor. As anti-immigrant rhetoric posits that immigrants have a negative impact on the American economy (Gomberg-Munoz 2017), a counter-narrative might focus on employers who hire undocumented migrant day laborers. At the DLC, there were many repeat employers who appreciated the efficacy of the Center, and such perspectives could be examined further.

Additionally, interviews with community members would be beneficial to understanding the full scope of how migrants and community members engage with one another. Not only were employers part of the community who interacted with day laborers, but many residents, community organizations, and individuals frequently spoke

with workers at the DLC. I was able to observe many of these interactions, but did not have the opportunity to interview community members directly. What did they think about the Center? Were they as open to the immigrant community as city officials and law enforcement seemed to be? What were their thoughts about migrants' place as residents of the community? Addressing more direct questions to community members could augment my observations of Portbridge and the workers at the DLC.

While I also observed cooperation and kinship-like relationships fostered at the Day Labor Center, I also wonder about for whom the Day Labor Center does not work within the community. Since the space has become socially and culturally significant for migrant workers from Latin America, does/how does the DLC reach out to non-Spanish-speakers? What about English-speaking residents of Portbridge who may seek employment opportunities through the DLC? What, if anything, prevents English-speaking job-seekers from utilizing the DLC?

Finally, talking with migrant day laborers at nearby gathering sites who did not utilize the DLC could provide a greater understanding of the DLC, as well as the possibilities and/or limitations of day labor centers more generally. Why, when it seems accessible and successful, would migrant workers *not* utilize the DLC? Many workers at the DLC shared that they did not like the disorganized, often "chaotic" atmosphere at street corners where laborers gathered, and thus, they chose to frequent the DLC. However, there are many workers on corners who know about the DLC but do not utilize its services. Future research could include comparative studies at different day laborer sites to demonstrate the advantages, but also the disadvantages, of being a part of a center such as the DLC. Understanding why workers would choose to not engage in a collective

effort like the DLC could offer insight into how migrants perceive their own sense of agency in ways that I did not observe.

The Day Labor Center: A Potential Model

Many communities incorporate ways to "formally recognize and include [immigrants] as local citizens" (Villazor 2010, 575). Whether through the implementation of a municipal identification card to allow migrants access to city services (de Graauw 2014, 309), by utilizing non-profit groups to influence local government to provide multi-lingual access to bureaucracies (de Graauw 2015a, 156), or by offering healthcare services to migrants (Castañeda 2013), cities are looking for ways to encourage—and practice—the inclusion of immigrants (see also Castañeda 2018a, 2018b; Gonzalez 2007). I suggest that day labor centers are constructive locations where local citizenship can flourish. By supporting the Day Labor Center, Portbridge fosters local citizenship and provides a place where migrant day laborers engage with the local community, earn money, and collaborate with other migrants. My observations of workers and interviews with them reveal that the DLC has been empowering for immigrants as a source of work opportunities, but also as a space of belonging.

The DLC fostered belonging by offering services, collaborating with local authorities and engaging with the local community. The DLC demonstrated how day labor centers can provide sanctuary spaces and can serve local cities by encouraging the practice of "sanctuary." Though immigration policies today call for the strict enforcement of federal immigration laws, the DLC as a sanctuary space exemplifies how local polities are resisting exclusionary laws that continually push migrants to the margins. Day labor

centers are sources of support and can be critical places for migrants to gather and to find some level of protection and safety.

Portbridge has experienced first-hand the advantages of collaborating with migrant workers through the DLC for migrants, community members, businesses, and local police authorities since they established the Center nearly ten years ago. As the notion of "sanctuary" is currently being contested in the wake of an increasingly anti-immigrant social climate in the United States, the DLC offers important lessons for conceptualizing how immigrants can be accepted into local communities and participate in meaningful ways (Varsanyi 2008). Future research may also address how day labor centers can serve to meet the changing needs of migrant workers. Perhaps an extension of their services to include, for example, filing labor grievances with the city, or connecting to city services, may illuminate how migrants utilize resources when they are more easily accessible (Organista 2008).

The Day Labor Center serves as a potential model for adoption in cities where officials, migrant workers, and residents are considering the establishment of day labor gathering sites. As I have discussed, several cities have considered such moves, including Farmingville in Long Island, New York; there, residents held conflicting opinions about if/how to implement a day labor center. And, as I discussed in Chapter five, in Pasadena and San Rafael, California, residents did not ultimately approve a day labor center, demonstrating how communities vary in their reception of day laborers (Esbenshade 2000, 34).

Drawing on my research findings at the DLC, and research conducted at centers that have been established in other locations (Organista 2008; Theodore, Valenzuela and

Melendez 2009; Valenzuela 2003; Valenzuela et al. 2006), cities might consider how public spaces can be shared with *all* residents of local communities. The DLC in Portbridge speaks to how collaboration and cooperation can be facilitated to create greater equity between migrants and their communities in productive ways. By employing some of the same strategies, offering services, and directly engaging with migrants, city officials and local residents could benefit from adopting many of the practices that I observed at the DLC.

Furthermore, because migrant workers have collaborated with the local police department and city authorities, migrants at the DLC expressed their feelings of safety and some level of security as visible, undocumented migrant workers. Their experiences can inform our understanding of how membership may be embodied at the local level and, more broadly, expand our concept of different forms of "citizenship." While scholars have documented the many tensions between immigrant communities and law enforcement (e.g. Provine et al. 2016; Stuesse and Coleman 2014), my research shows that cooperation and collaboration with local authorities is also possible. Perhaps this model of cooperation could be extended in the context of national policy. By employing greater flexibility in defining "citizenship" and belonging, policymakers could (re)consider how to officially recognize and legitimize migrant workers in ways that more adequately, and perhaps, more justly, acknowledge and appreciate the valuable contributions of immigrants in the United States.

While the DLC potentially offers a model for other cities, there are also limits to the extent to which day laborer centers might succeed in different settings around the country. More than 10 million immigrants live in California and nearly 27% of

California's population was foreign born in 2016 (Public Policy Institute of California)– nearly double that of the United States overall. In other states, the number of immigrants may be much lower and might affect the reception of migrants into local communities (as demonstrated by Farmingville, for example). Furthermore, an important factor in the establishment of the Day Labor Center in Portbridge is that this city has access to financial resources in large part because the mean household income is relatively high. Other communities may not have the resources to put toward an effective day labor center. Thus, a center like the DLC may not be possible financially regardless of how receptive community members may be to welcoming migrant workers in the local community.

In California, several factors have made the state a place where local communities are demonstrating greater tolerance for diversity and creating inviting places for immigrants. Additionally, since California is a border state, it also facilitates migration from Mexico and other Latin American countries. Because of large Latino and Spanish-speaking communities throughout California, it is a destination where migrants are likely to feel more welcome. For many migrant day laborers, they feel at home in communities and networks with other migrants and where they can connect to labor opportunities, housing arrangements, and other resources.

Finally, California has a long history of receiving immigrants from all over the world and has become a uniquely diverse and progressive state. For example, today in San Francisco, residents have welcomed immigrants with tolerance and appreciation. The "City and County of Refuge Ordinance" or "Sanctuary Ordinance" was implemented in 1989 as a step toward their primary goal of reaching out to immigrants so that *all*

residents would feel safe and have access to city services (San Francisco Government Organization 2016). Additionally, the fact that Governor Brown recently declared California a "sanctuary state" in October of 2017 exemplifies how political leadership prioritizes immigrants' sense of belonging and safety in California more generally. Perhaps in time, more cities in California will follow suit and create centers like the DLC to help facilitate migrant day laborers.

California is currently one of six officially declared sanctuary states; eleven other states have implemented some type of pro-sanctuary policies (Henderson 2018). Significantly, states which have greater representation of city and county sanctuary status are also those where migrants make up a significant part of the work force. For example, the agricultural sector in states like Oregon and Washington largely depend on a migrant labor force (Holmes 2013) and have implemented pro-sanctuary policies in many cities and counties. This is also true of California's central valley (Horton 2016). While there are correlations between the use of migrant labor and the degree of immigrant inclusion within local communities, future research could more directly consider such factors and identify locations that might benefit from the establishment of centers like the DLC, while also pointing to specific barriers that prevent the use of day labor centers.

Conclusions

My research has revealed that migrant workers at the Day Labor Center experienced multiple hardships, including harsh working conditions, poverty, depression, and injury and illness. Additionally, the state's production of "illegality" (De Genova 2002, 420) shadowed their everyday experiences. Still, workers at the DLC exercised some of the

freedoms that day labor provides, including negotiating wages, accepting and rejecting jobs, making their own schedules, and learning a variety of skills. The ways that migrant day laborers demonstrate resilience in the face of adversity broadens our understanding of how migrant workers in general resist their marginalization and participate in local communities.

Robbins (2013) challenges anthropologists to move toward an anthropology of the good; this study addresses how migrant workers who may suffer, may also experience "the good" in varied ways. By outlining migrant workers' demonstrations of agency, I have suggested complicating the ways that migrant workers are often represented as disadvantaged and exploited workers. In focusing on the autonomy that migrant workers possess and how the degree to which they employ it shapes their experiences as migrant workers in the United States, this study serves as an example of one "line of inquiry that [reveals] how people living in different societies strive to create the good in their lives" (Robbins 2013, 457). I have discussed how migrant workers expressed their aspirations while recognizing their limitations as undocumented migrant workers in the United States. Despite the many hardships and suffering they endure, migrant day laborers at the DLC expressed resilience as they built a community together that, arguably, increased their potential for—and ultimately allowed them to realize—a greater sense of "the good." Migrant workers at the DLC are making the most of their situations to improve their lives through collectivity, cooperation, and collaboration.

As I have presented, there are several ways that the Day Labor Center demonstrated the power of collectivity. As workers found community amongst one another, they provided critical emotional and financial support. As they developed

friendships with one another, exchanged favors, and engaged in conflict resolution, workers at the DLC created a family-like atmosphere. Though the challenges of transnational life are many, day labor centers can provide immigrants with support and services that might ameliorate the hardships of being far from home. By sharing in each other's experiences, migrant workers found comradery based upon their commonalities and links to one another. Being at the DLC for some was like being "home," demonstrating the importance of connecting to other migrants. This research expands our understanding of the strategies that migrants use to connect to one another and cope with being far from home; strategies that will continually adapt as migrants confront rapid globalization and shifting immigration policies. While many of the strategies I observed are particular to workers at the Day Labor Center because of its origins–a grassroots organization created in cooperation with the city of Portbridge–other locations might use a similar structure to foster collaborative efforts and, hopefully, to see similar results.

While migrant workers have made great strides to improve their work and living conditions in the United States, migrant laborers continue to face multiple challenges that need to be addressed. And, though policies have transformed throughout the history of labor migration, immigrants still face increasingly severe anti-immigrant laws and a culture of exclusion in the United States. Perhaps through anthropologists' ongoing research into the lives of migrants as they experience vulnerabilities and express resilience, we may shape the direction of policy to reflect greater equity for labor migrants within their local communities.

Arguably, as I have addressed, undocumented migrant workers may not be "officially" included as part of society by legal parameters, and yet they provide a labor

force that has undoubtedly contributed to society. We need to consider diverse forms of citizenship, recognizing that immigrants are already living in local communities and have become a part of the social and economic fabric of U.S. life and culture. I suggest we attend to a more expansive understanding of belonging–perhaps through social, local, or cultural citizenship. If so, the implications for what exchange might look like between migrant workers and their employers could transform our perspectives about to whom we have obligations and how we fulfill them. In addition, a broader understanding of community and inclusion could be constructive as we consider how to engage migrant laborers as part of local communities and encourage policies that reflect greater inclusion and more equitable exchange.

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