Positioning and Resistance: A Narrative Inquiry of Undocumented Mexican Domestic Workers in New York City

Posicionamiento y resistencia: una investigación narrativa sobre trabajadoras domésticas mexicanas indocumentadas en Nueva York

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Abstract

This study explores the life experiences and empowerment of five emblematic undocumented Mexican domestic workers in New York City (NYC). Employing identity as a conceptual framework, we delve into the intricate aspects of the participants' lives, utilizing narrative inquiry and feminist methodologies to analyze the dynamics between their performative identities and the prevailing ideologies concerning undocumented immigrants. The narratives unveil feelings of rejection and exclusion among the participants in NYC. Additionally, the focus is on their efforts to challenge societal norms, resist dominant ideologies, and devise strategies for resistance. All five participants express a sense of empowerment derived from their experiences, enabling them to reconstruct their past and present themselves as resilient, proactive individuals, activists, and proficient English speakers. Ultimately, the findings demonstrate how the participants assert their narrative identities, reclaiming their subjectivities and subverting patriarchal norms by transcending conventional societal roles.

Key words: narrative inquiry, undocumented Mexican migrants, New York City, domestic workers, identity, positioning.

Resumen

Este estudio explora las experiencias de vida y el empoderamiento de cinco trabajadoras domésticas mexicanas indocumentadas emblemáticas en la ciudad de Nueva York (NYC). Empleando la identidad como marco conceptual, profundizamos en los aspectos intrincados de las vidas de las participantes, utilizando la investigación narrativa y las metodologías feministas para analizar la dinámica entre sus identidades performativas y las ideologías predominantes

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sobre los inmigrantes indocumentados. Las narrativas revelan sentimientos de rechazo y exclusión entre las participantes en NYC. Además, se enfoca en sus esfuerzos por desafiar las normas sociales, resistir las ideologías dominantes y diseñar estrategias de resistencia. Las cinco participantes expresan un sentido de empoderamiento derivado de sus experiencias, lo que les permite reconstruir su pasado y presentarse como individuos resilientes, proactivos, activistas y hablantes competentes de inglés. En última instancia, los hallazgos demuestran cómo las participantes afirman sus identidades narrativas, reclamando sus subjetividades y subvirtiendo las normas patriarcales al trascender los roles sociales convencionales.

Palabras clave: investigación narrativa, migrantes mexicanos indocumentados, Nueva York, trabajadoras domésticas, identidad, posicionamiento.

According to the American Immigration Council (2021), one in seven United States' (U.S.) residents is an immigrant. This population has been racialized over time as a means to count the diverse ethnic origins of United States' inhabitants. The U.S. Census introduced categories in popular everyday use and created the Latino category in 2000 to designate twenty different ethnic groups with ancestral roots in Latin America and Spain (Grieco and Cassidy, 2001). In the official discourse of the United States, Mexicans, both residents and undocumented, can belong to the Latino identity. In New York City (NYC), considered one of the greatest cultural hubs in the country, the Latino population makes up the largest share of foreign-born (31 percent) and undocumented immigrants (53 percent). Among them, immigrants from Mexico represent the second largest group (16 percent) (Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, 2020). Undocumented Mexicans in the U.S. belong mainly to two different generations (Rumbaut, 2004): the first generation migrated as adults and immediately joined the labor force, whereas generation 1.5 migrated as children with their parents and first went to school and then merged into the working class. These young people expressed and practiced notions of belonging and membership to the United States society (Unzueta Carrasco and Seif, 2014) because, unlike their parents, they were granted some form of legal protection, including access to K-12 public education.[1] This process of integration is abruptly interrupted (Gonzales, 2016) as undocumented students transition into adulthood and it is accompanied by migrant vulnerability, precarity and conditions of deportability (De Genova, 2005). After completing school, a small portion of generation 1.5 gained access to Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals

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[1] Undocumented children have access to school thanks to the Supreme Court issued Plyler v Doe, a landmark decision ruling that states cannot constitutionally deny them access to public education based on their legal status.

(DACA), a temporary work permit and protection from deportation. However, at the time of this study, during the Trump administration, even DACA recipients were afraid of being deported. In addition, the "others", the non-DACA migrants, are only offered "brown collar jobs"[2] (Catanzarite, 2000) and belong to the social space of "illegality" which erases their legal personhood because they are forced to be invisible, excluded, subjugated and repressed (Zavella, 2018). Among the "brown collar job" workers, the most invisible and silenced workers in NYC are undocumented immigrant women who work as domestic workers (Desilver, 2017). Much has been written about exploitation and discrimination of the undocumented Latino immigrant population in the U.S. (Massey, 2008; Catanzarite, 2000; Zavella, 2018; Desilver, 2017; Gonzalez, 2016, among many others), but we have not yet listened to the voices of Mexican undocumented domestic workers to understand their subjectivities and support them in their struggle against the social scaffoldings of silence and invisibility.

The aim of this article is therefore to add to the field of Latino studies from a feminist and social constructivist perspective by listening and amplifying the silenced voices of five Mexican domestic workers in NYC, representative of undocumented workers from the first generation of migrants and generation 1.5. We focus here on their socially constructed voices and identities where identity is defined and understood as a process of "doing" rather than "being", both embedded within larger ideological structures and discursive practices. This approach allows us to pay close attention to the role of macro-social factors and surrounding ideologies towards undocumented immigrants in the U.S. in shaping participants' identity options as part of their border crossing experiences. This finding is important because even though organizing among domestic workers is steadily getting stronger, they have expressed the need to amplify their voices and strengthen their leadership identity and capacity as articulated by leaders of the domestic working associations. From a socially committed academic stance, this narrative inquiry study aims to support them to do so in any way possible.

 The article first examines Mexican undocumented migrants' and specifically domestic workers' situation in the U.S. Second, we focus on narrative and discursive identity as a theoretical framework that allows us to explore and analyze the stories of the five participants. Third, we explore women's subjectivities and experiences based on social constructivism and feminist methodological approaches. Finally, results of the research are followed by a discussion and closing remarks.

[2] "Brown collar jobs" refer to low-earning essential worker jobs that mostly migrants accept in the U.S.

Characterization of Mexican Undocumented Domestic Workers in the United States

Most Mexican undocumented migrants work in the service industry in restaurants as dishwashers, cooks, and waiters; others work in construction as day laborers or as domestic workers, and all of them are clearly aware that they can be deported any day. Their undocumented immigration status does not allow them any upward social mobility keeping them in a disadvantaged condition, compared with U.S. born citizens (Pérez-Soria, 2017), and forces them to be part of the reproduction of urban poverty. In NYC alone Latinos have the highest poverty rates of all immigrants (Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, 2020). Mexican unauthorized immigrants live mainly in Queens, Brooklyn and The Bronx, the poorest city boroughs. In addition to poverty and suffering under residential and job segregation, 38 percent of Latinos also reported experiencing discrimination (González-Barrera and López, 2020). At the state level, there are many organizations that serve and give public light to the subjugation of undocumented immigrants. However, in NYC, undocumented immigrants still face injustices such as wage discrimination, wage theft, lack of access to safety equipment, not being allowed breaks, or even harassment for participating in unions or union efforts (Ozment Law, 2022). Immigrant workers are often reluctant to report abusive employer practices because they may face retaliation such as withholding pay, termination of contract without notice or threats to call immigration authorities on them.

The most *invisibilized* workers in the U.S. and in NYC, are undocumented immigrant women who work as domestic workers. They represented 22 percent of all undocumented immigrant workers in 2014 (Desilver, 2017). This erasure is due to the fact that labor laws, until 2010, did not protect them because their work was and, in many instances, still is perceived as unproductive "women's work" (Human Rights Watch, 2001). The area of domestic work remains underregulated and develops an underground economy expanded on the backs of abused and ultra exploited women´s labor. However, some progress has been made in the last two decades, especially thanks to the activist work of different organizations such as the Domestic Workers Association (DWA)[3] which fights for better working conditions for domestic workers in the U.S. Since 2013, at the federal level, the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) protects people employed in domestic services in private homes. And at the New York state level, wage and hour laws apply to domestic workers. The Domestic Workers' Bill of Rights (DWBR) and the New York Labor Law protect domestic workers regardless of their immigration status and define that they are entitled to meal breaks, short

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[3] We used pseudonyms to protect the identity of the association and its members.

breaks, a minimum of three paid days off, overtime pay and a minimum wage of 15 USD per hour in NYC (Epstein Becker and Green, 2021). The DWBR also protects against harassment because of sex, race, color, national origin, religion, age, or disability. Today, undocumented Mexican domestic workers in NYC are therefore able to claim basic rights to be treated respectfully as workers, even though they still fear deportation if they complain (Piñeyro Nelson, 2020). Many of them come from very poor economic contexts from their country of origin, and a low income in the U.S. is quantitatively and qualitatively much better than what they could expect to earn by working in Mexico. It is therefore very difficult to mobilize a labor force which does not perceive itself as being highly exploited (Piñeyro Nelson, 2020). However, organizations like the Domestic Workers Association (DWA) try to develop and encourage a political "immigrant consciousness" to fight for their rights. Among other strategies, they urge and encourage domestic workers to articulate their voice and to express their everyday experiences through personal narratives. Telling their stories allows them to take the first steps to fight for their rights.

DISCURSIVE AND NARRATIVE IDENTITY

In this study, we use identity as a conceptual lens to capture the complexities involved in participants' lives, socially positioned as Mexican undocumented immigrant domestic workers in NYC, how they assert agency toward their aspired identities and how they navigate the dominant sociocultural discourses in order to reposition themselves differently (Davies and Harré, 1990). To capture these complexities, we weave a social constructionist theorization of discursive identity (De Fina, 2011; Bourdieu, 1991; Blackledge and Pavlenko, 2001) with a psychological perspective of narrative identity (McAdams and McLean, 2013).

Life stories define who one is or is becoming. The life stories of the five participants in this study belong to the "narrative turn" in social sciences which representes a shift away from quantitative paradigms towards a more qualitative approach to understand migrants' processes of becoming through the displacement and relocation as lived and expressed by themselves. The focus on identity here follows a de-essentialization of the self and refers to "doing" rather than "being" which represents two essential pieces of social constructionism: a movement where social reality does not exist independently but where it is rather constructed socially (De Fina, 2011). People therefore will perform their identities (Butler, 1997) and will only show to others what they want to be. In other words, identities are performed through language: "people are who they are because of (among other things) the way they

talk" (Cameron, 1997: 49). They become who they are, or who they want to become, based on different kinds of identities, such as individual and collective identities, social and personal identities, and even situational identities, but all of them become blurred in the ongoing processes of appropriating and negotiating identities in everyday interactions. For social constructionists, "focusing on the process allows for a consideration of the concrete ways in which people will assume identities, attribute to each other the membership of various categories or resist such attributions" (De Fina, 2011: 267). Hence, by defining themselves who they are or who they want to become, undocumented immigrants often create reactive ethnicities that view identity as arising in opposition to rejection and exclusion by members of the host society (Massey, 2008). Rejection and exclusion, in this context, is originated by a symbolic violence defined by Bourdieu (1991) as a type of non-physical violence manifested in the power differential between social groups. However, undocumented migrants may renegotiate and deconstruct their positioning as being perceived as a problem, or even as criminals. Migrants may therefore perform powerful "resistance identities" that may become associated with specific political projects (Castells, 2009), such as the DACA activists for example. Hence, the narrative inquiry of this research aims to put the five participants as the main actors in their social world by focusing on how their stories are indexed; how their lived experiences point to elements of the social context; how their identities and roles are context dependent; how these identities are relational and dialogical processes; and how they position and reposition themselves in a diversity of selves (Davies and Harré, 1990). The aim here is therefore to provide participants of this research a platform to amplify their voices, to allow them to author their own versions of their experiences and to present themselves as plural and heteroglossic subjects (Butler, 1997).

Methodology[4]

This research is influenced by social constructivism and feminist methodologies (Weedon, 1987; Bloom, 1998) because it aims to understand the multiplicity of routes by means of which power is articulated and to disclose the sites at which resistance is possible. For Weedon (1987), subjectivity refers to how a person inserts herself into a particular subject position within a chosen discourse. Subjectivity is therefore susceptible to change. To analyze how power is articulated and to highlight the sites at

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[4] The protocol of this research was reviewed and vetted under the number 100523732 by the vice-rectorate for research and postgraduate studies where two of the co-authors work.

which resistance is possible, we worked with five undocumented Mexican domestic workers who live in NYC. The participants are part of a wider study about Mexican undocumented migrants in New York City funded by a fellowship in a U.S. university awarded to the first author in 2018. The central concern of this article focuses on a subgroup of the wider study integrated by women who, at the time of the study, worked as domestic workers in NYC and participated in the dwa, the non-profit organization for the defense of domestic workers of color mentioned earlier and who will be presented next. The participants of the wider study were all located through personal connections and professional relationships. The first author of this manuscript knew a scholar located in NYC who was in contact with dwa. That scholar asked Norma, one of the five domestic workers, if she would be interested in participating in our research. After personally meeting with Norma, explaining to her the purpose of the interviews, and building a personal relationship with her, she agreed to participate. We then followed the snowball sampling with Norma who agreed to refer us to other colleagues and coworkers. Through this snowball sampling technique, we got in touch with Martha, Cristina, Lorena and Alicia who will be presented next. The other 15 participants, even though their narratives are also highly interesting, belong to other professional contexts which will be described in another article.

PARTICIPANTS

Martha, Cristina and Lorena migrated as adults, alone or with their partners, and directly integrated the undocumented workforce in NYC. Norma and Alicia are younger, grew up in Mexico and followed their respective mothers to NYC when they were 11 and 15 years old. They first went to school before joining the workforce. All five women met at the DWA. Even though they belong to a different migration generation, they are representative of their generation, and assert agency towards aspired identities, navigate the dominant sociocultural discourses and surrounding ideologies towards undocumented migrants in one way or another, and "resist those that serve to justify their exploitation and exclusion" (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001: 284).

First Generation:

- Martha was 46 in 2018. She was born in Puebla and has lived in NYC since she was 20. One of her daughters got DACA and the other one was born in NYC. Martha's husband died a few years ago from cancer. She defines herself as an

activist and a DACA mom. Her main concern is the exploitation domestic work-
ers suffer because they are undocumented. Even though she understands a
little bit of English, her world in NYC is in Spanish.

- Cristina was 43 and is from Mexico City. She arrived in NYC 10 years ago and
reunited with her husband who was already living there. Her two children
stayed in Mexico with her parents. She sends them money monthly. She works
as a domestic worker in Long Island and feels she is always underpaid. She
pushed herself to learn English and later enrolled at DWA.

- Lorena is from Querétaro and migrated to NYC when she was 40. She was 49 in
2018. She migrated after losing her job in Mexico. In NYC, she first felt lost and
then went to live with a Puerto Rican man who beat her and took her passport.
She escaped from him. Since then Lorena made a living for herself and sends
money home every month to her children who live with her parents. She talks
to her family everyday.

Generation 1.5:

- Norma was 34 years old in 2018, a single mother and head of household
where she lived with her sister and her mother. She is originally from Atlixco
and was sent to New York by her mother at age 11. She went to school in NYC
but could not study further because she didn't have a visa nor money. She al-
ways worked three jobs at the same time and got DACA in 2011. Today, she is
one of the leaders of DWA and gives undocumented Latino domestic workers
workshops on their labor rights. Norma denounced, after the start of #MeToo,
the sexual abuse she suffered along with 500 other domestic workers.

- Alicia was 25 in 2018, also an active member of DWA. She comes from Tlaxcala
and works as a nanny in New York. She migrated at 15. She did not finish high
school and dropped out without speaking English. She was "abandoned" by
her mother who remarried and went to work at 16. From there on, she worked
every single day in different jobs and factories. At 17, she began to learn Eng-
lish and now she lives again with her mother and her younger brother who
was born in NYC. Like Norma, she became head of the household.

Data Collection

We only use pseudonyms for participants and their immediate context and do not share
special life experiences that could put their lives in danger in any way. The collected

data was multiple in nature. It was collected based on 1:30 to 2 h face-to-face semi-guided interviews, led by the first author of the manuscript, that took place in different spaces defined by the participants themselves in New York City between May and June 2018 – in small coffee shops or at their homes. All participants agreed to participate voluntarily and read and signed a consent form that is kept safe. They were first asked about background information and then about their lives in Mexico, their families, the reason of migration, how they crossed the border, their adaptation process to the United States, their linguistic uses, their jobs in New York City, their subjectivities regarding their legal status and being migrants in NYC and finally, their future dreams. All interviews were then transcribed in Mexico by native Spanish speakers. Only some excerpts were translated for this paper. The first and second authors are bilingual in Spanish and English. Both authors verified accuracy in the translation of the excerpts used in this paper (Yunus et al., 2010). Additionally, the second author, being herself a transnational and native English speaker, revised the translation. The narrative stories were co-constructed between the participants and the interviewer as a conversational partner (De Fina and Georgakopoulou, 2012). In addition to interviews, the field notes documented contextual information about East Harlem, Sunset Park, Jackson Heights, Corona and Fordham Heights which allowed researchers to have a better sense of the Mexican neighborhoods where participants were living. This field journal also served to write down informal observations about several events, such as poetry workshops organized by DWA, where the first author —and principal investigator— was invited by the participants.

DATA ANALYSIS

This research focuses on narrative as data; narratives are therefore used here as a means to explore the content of the stories. We used dedoose as a qualitative software, and followed Mattew et al.'s (2019) fundamentals of qualitative data analysis by using a hybrid inductive and deductive coding strategy. Once we defined a list of inductive and deductive codes, we met to revise and discuss these codes, create pattern codes and sub-codes. Because we were a team of three, we wanted to assure analytic rigor, and therefore defined each code of the list which also served as a reliability check. We then identified interrelationships between pattern codes and categorized them. This hybrid coding strategy allowed us to develop a thematic analysis of the content (Barkhuizen, 2019; Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

Following, we present participants' narratives. First, we analyze how undocumented Mexican migrants are perceived in Mexico and how they are racialized and

humiliated in NYC by focusing on their social positioning by other Mexicans and by U.S. citizens. Second, we highlight how the five participants develop resistance strategies to overcome their social positioning by becoming their family's breadwinner, learning English and becoming DWA activists. Third, we explore how participants become empowered to write beyond the lines of the imposed social scripts by performing their own narrative identities.

SOCIAL POSITIONING BY MEXICANS AND U.S. CITIZENS: REJECTION, HUMILIATION AND EXCLUSION BY MEXICANS

All five participants expressed being excluded by both Mexicans and U.S. citizens in NYC. Alicia recalled that one of her many jobs was working in a Jewish candy store and that her boss was Mexican. However, instead of supporting her, the boss: "insulted [me] for everything (…) she threw things at [me], she treated [me] badly. Even at break time, she humiliated [me] because she would make fun of how [I] looked or how [I] spoke, or what [I was] doing (...) It was a real nightmare."

Alicia and Martha both agree that they often feel rejected by other Mexicans in NYC and that they can only rely on themselves. According to Martha "there is no worse enemy here than another Mexican". According to Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992/2014), these feelings of rejection, exclusion and humiliation refer to a symbolic violence which can operate with the complicity of the oppressed. In this case: Mexicans discriminating against each other. This is in line with an investigation of the Pew Research Center (Bustamante, 2022) which confirms that Latinos experience discrimination from other Latinos about as much as from non-Latinos. In Alicia's case, it is her darker skin color (Ortiz and Telles, 2012) and/or the fact that she was young and perceived as a "newer" migrant which triggered her boss' insults. This can be related with structural racism and discrimination based on skin color and social status which exists in Mexican social ideologies and practices that the boss may have migrated with to the U.S. (Gómez Izquierdo, 2006).

BY U.S. CITIZENS

Mexican migrants in NYC also feel violence inflicted upon them by U.S. citizens on several levels. First, they feel oppressed on an occupational level by working long hours. Lorena works as a domestic worker, cleaning houses, since she arrived in NYC and recalled that: "for 5 years, I worked 7 days a week, because I had to send money

to the boys. I had two jobs". Lorena never rests. All undocumented Mexican migrants we met in NYC were working all the time, and nearly had no free time. Meeting them for the interview was not an easy task. Norma mentioned that "in my free time, I wash clothes, iron, fix the house [...] Free time is something that we just don't have." Mexican undocumented migrants work all the time without resting because it is very difficult for them to make ends meet as mentioned by Martha: "the job is poorly paid, and everyday, they want to pay you less". Employers take advantage of migrants' disadvantageous legal status to pay less and to manipulate them "if you accuse me, I will send you to immigration and make sure you get deported", as stated by Norma. The migrant women have to accept very low-income jobs if they want to work. Moreover, undocumented migrants are humiliated because they do not know their rights. Martha expressed that: "Some [employers] want to humiliate people. They try to get us clean on our knees [...] they don't give us a broomstick to clean, no. We must get down on our knees, on the floor [...]. Many of our colleagues are devastated because they have been through many humiliations."

Feeling humiliated made them feel totally violated in their rights as human beings. This symbolic violence showcases a non-physical violence manifested in the power differential between domestic workers and their U.S. employers which, according to Martha, made her hit rock bottom and look for support at DWA. Participants also feel discriminated against linguistically and ethnically. Alicia recalled that: "when you go to buy something, they often treat you differently if they see you with a dark skin, that is, if you are not white, they don't pay attention to you or they don't listen to you." Language based discrimination also put a hold to Norma's educational opportunities. Her dream was to study and to fulfill her mother's *American Dream*, a discourse she still feels identified with today. However, she felt discriminated against at school because she did not speak English. When she looked for educational opportunities she was told: "look, you don't know how to speak English, you're undocumented, there really aren't many options for you (…). Everything closed in front of me, so where do I go? I don't speak English, I am undocumented, I don't have money to apply [to university]."

She felt that her whole world closed in front of her eyes. Based on the above expressed excerpts, we can see that the racialization and stigmatization participants experience is not only perpetrated by the state by not allowing them a path to citizenship, but also by different social groups —Mexicans in Mexico, Mexicans in NYC and by U.S. citizens, all of which limit their participation in society (Massey, 2008). These groups categorize and position them as traitors of their homeland, as cheap labor workers, as non-English language speakers or simply as Mexicans, but with a negative connotation. By being imposed these social and relational identities, participants are

socially positioned at the bottom of the social hierarchy as being inferior human beings. Hence, undocumented domestic workers are segregated to "brown collar jobs" (Catanzarite, 2000) because of their migration experience and status, and therefore, clearly feel the reproduction of patterns of oppression, humiliation and discrimination (Massey, 2008). However, as we analyze further, participants in this study do not want to accept this positioning. They resist. They do not want to be perceived as inferior human beings, and therefore try, each one in their own way, to resist such attribution (De Fina, 2011) by creating their own discursive identities and showing what they want to be. Nevertheless, some of the ascribed identities, such as "undocumented migrants," cannot be negotiated (Blackledge and Pavlenko, 2001) so easily. Shifting from an undocumented status to a resident one is often hardly re-negotiable. However, there are other ascribed identities, such as being perceived inferior, that can be renegotiated, especially when they arise in opposition to rejection and exclusion by members of the host society as shown next.

Resistance Strategies

As a response to the symbolic violence experienced in their daily lives, participants try to deconstruct the above mentioned social positionings, resist the dominant ideology and perform resistance identities (Blackledge and Pavlenko, 2001) through different strategies, such as becoming the family's breadwinner, learning English, and by becoming activists by DWA. This allows them to create narrative identities that reconstruct their past, imagine their future and reposition themselves differently in their new complex sociocultural context.

Becoming the Family's Breadwinner[5]

After Martha's husband died, as mentioned earlier, Martha was forced to earn a living for the whole family: "I became very strong because I went through many very strong experiences. I went through what I had never gone through there [in Mexico] [...] here I experienced what it really means to be the only responsible person for everything and having no [money] [...]".

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[5] Breadwinner refers to the family pattern which emerged in the mid 19th century known as breadwinner/homemaker system, which is characterised by men as the sole family wage and women as fulltime homemakers (Coleman and Ganong, 2014).

Being a strong and responsible breadwinner is a common feature shared by Lorena, Norma and Alicia like nearly half of the Mexican households in the U.S. (Mexican Government, 2014). Lorena does not live with her family in NYC, but sends money to her children and parents to Mexico. She mentioned: "I always get up. I define myself as the eternal juggler. I'm always on the tightrope, but I never fall [...] I came here so my kids can study at university". The reality of Lorena's family, to receive remittances from the U.S., aligns with the reality of other 10 million families in Mexico. In fact, Mexico consolidated its position as the second largest recipient of remittances worldwide (Li Ng, 2023). In the case of Lorena's family, the remittances they receive from her are their only source of income. Her children and her parents rely on her.

Norma tried to see the positive side in her difficult life experience. Just like Alicia who had, as time went by, to play the breadwinner role and adopt her brother as her own child because the mother could not communicate with her English monolingual son. Alicia stated: "he [my brother] gave me my life back. He is my treasure, he is what sustains me, I must take care of him." Because Alicia's mother stayed as homemaker, she also gave her daughter the responsibility of becoming the breadwinner: "so, now it's like I decide everything, I take care of everything." Alicia accepted this responsibility and feels it gives her a sense of purpose in life. To be the main source of income of their families, even though they did not deliberately choose to do so, leads Alicia and Lorena to deconstruct their female role in the Mexican patriarchal system where women don't necessarily have this role as it is one of power. In addition to becoming the sole family's wage earners, participants all recalled that what empowered them was to learn English, the dominant language in NYC.

LEARNING ENGLISH

To acquire a certain competence in English allowed participants to get out of the shadows imposed through their undocumented status, and to resist humiliation, discrimination and exploitation. Cristina, who migrated to NYC 10 years ago, at the time of the study, wants to be recognized as someone who defends and can stand up for herself. She recalled that when she was working in a Dry Cleaners, her boss shouted at her and did not want to pay her salary. She could not defend herself for not speaking English. On this day, she truly became aware of the linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1991) that proficiency in English represents. This constituted an important turning point for her: "And from there on, I just said no. I went to study English [...] and I keep going." Speaking English would allow her to resist her boss' abuse and advocate for herself. Lorena also shifted her social positioning since the day she learned to

express herself in English: "I gained more confidence, more power in English. And I can tell you that I feel a very radical change [...] People see you differently when you speak English, or at least when you try. They respect you. You gain respect."

Norma gained that same respect through English, but added an additional characteristic – the accent - to reposition herself in the Anglo-Saxon elitist world: "I will learn it [English], but well. There will be no accent […] when I wanted to speak English, they made fun of my accent; this annoyed me a lot and pushed me to improve."

In the three above-mentioned excerpts, we can see how Cristina, Lorena and Norma renegotiated their social positioning reflexively from being non-English speaking Mexican undocumented immigrant domestic workers who had to live in the shadows to a counter hegemonic perspective in a different subject position (Davies and Harré, 1990) by learning English and defending their rights in the dominant language. Through speaking English, they perceived themselves as more powerful and even reproduce the predominant English ideologies in the U.S., such as, to speak English with U.S. standard accent (Pac, 2012), as mentioned by Norma. In addition, as shown next, participants also felt empowered through DACA and activism.

Getting daca and Becoming an Activist

Norma felt her situation changed once she obtained DACA and got a leadership position at DWA. Before DACA, she recalled "[I felt] so much frustration in so many jobs that I hated, but I needed them". Once she got DACA, her wage increased, and she could opt for different types of jobs such as working as a teacher assistant in a school or at DWA: "I feel that [my work situation] improved a bit, it was more humane, they treat you differently, they are not shouting at you anymore [...] DACA has really opened many doors for me.". Norma is aware of her narrative shift and how she got there over time: "Now I can do this job that I enjoy, where I am helping so many people and when I speak, they listen to me, an undocumented immigrant who came to this country without speaking the language, who thought she was worthless because she didn't study, didn't have documents, didn't have a job."

Today, Norma tells that she wants to support her colleagues: "I can make this change because I went through it myself and I don't want more people to go through it anymore." She is also aware that DACA and speaking English increased her power. However, DACA does not guarantee a path to citizenship and she still fears deportation because NYC is both her and her daughter's home. Alicia did not get DACA because she could not afford to pay for the application but she also became an activist at DWA in NYC where she created a subgroup for nannies. She gives workshops

where she explains undocumented Latino immigrant domestic workers their rights and trains them on how to negotiate their salary. She guides them to empower themselves at work and helps them to write their resumes. Her aim is that DWA women gain respect. She feels that other women at DWA gave her the power she has today by being able to use both languages, Spanish and English. She adds: "I do not feel empowered; however, I feel that I am given more power". The other women that Alicia calls "the submissive ladies" do not want to speak because of the patriarchal context in which they grew up and ask Alicia to be their spokeswoman. Like her mother, these women gave her all the responsibility to be their cultural and linguistic broker (Dorner et al., 2008), even though she does not really want to do that. She wants them to speak, defend and advocate for themselves.

Martha also identifies as an activist: "I am an activist and work with the Domestic Workers Association". She mentioned that Mexican men often do not accept their wives to be activists: "many of them say that we are gossipy [...] I am not a feminist, but I do want a person who supports me, who respects me". Martha thinks that it is time for them to empower themselves, "to grow up and to value ourselves, because what's the point of having documents if you are cleaning the floor on your knees with your documents?" She feels more powerful now that she knows her rights.

Based on these excerpts, we can see how the five participants developed a myriad of strategies to resist the inferior social position imposed by other Mexicans, in Mexico and in NYC, and by U.S. citizens in NYC. We can see how their life stories evolved over time, how they shifted from a position where they were only enduring their immediate social context to a position where they began to play an active role to counteract multiple forms of oppression. Hence, they performed a different identity (Butler, 1997) by becoming their families' breadwinners, by learning English, and by becoming DWA activists. By becoming financially independent, and speaking English, they were able to get out of the shadows and negotiate with the dominant sociocultural discourses in order to reposition themselves differently (Davies and Harré, 1990). This changed not only their economic and social position, but also the marital roles of wives: it gave them the ability to negotiate in ways they could not before. These resistance strategies seemed to allow them to reconstruct their difficult past by showcasing many moments of redemption sequences (Mc Adams and McLean, 2013) which in turn, created narrative identities of who they wanted to become and how they wanted to be perceived by others: active, strong and responsible which responds to the cultural expectations of men. Hence, even though at first it seems that the five participants appropriated traditional male expectations of power and respect and unconsciously reproduced patriarchal characteristics of success and responsibility to enter the public arena (Bloom, 1998), they seem to do so in a counter

hegemonic way which allowed them to somehow write "beyond the lines" of the master social script imposed on them and create a narrative on their own (Bloom, 1998).

Writing Beyond the Lines:
Participants' Own Narrative Identities

By having a closer look at their life stories, it seems that participants shared their narratives based on a more feminist genre which shows anger, pain, suffering, contradictions and therefore no longer "misrepresent and limit women's experiences and identities" (Bloom, 1998: 70).

Lorena for example, as a first-generation migrant, tried to write her own narrative by reflecting on her own changes and attempting to show what she really feels. She expressed that "now I see my achievements and I see them with humility [...] I love my change. I am more open with friends; I am more open with my family. I no longer pretend I am the strong woman who can do anything; now I allow myself to fall and cry." Lorena is clearly aware of her changes, who she wants to be today compared to who she was back in Mexico and tries to be strong and responsible, but by acknowledging her emotions, weaknesses and strengths, which is a much more female gaze than the one of the patriarchal breadwinners.

Alicia, as a generation 1.5 migrant, tried to rewrite her own narrative by redefining her identity as a Mexican in NYC. She recalled that one day, a white New Yorker friend stereotypically identified her immediately as Mexican because she worked so much. This observation made her react with anger: "if you work, therefore you are Mexican which means that Mexicans are in this country just to work. This impacted me. After reflection, I found that observation very racist. How did he dare call us like this? Do Mexicans only exist to work or what?"

This incident allowed Alicia to contest and resist the discriminative social representations towards Mexicans who serve only for hard work and cheap labor. She wanted to redefine what a Mexican really is for her, to reinvent a new avowed identity which affiliates her to a group with whom she could really feel identified. In the following excerpt where she speaks in first person plural, Alicia suddenly accepts the fact that Mexicans work a lot. She uses the stereotype she did not accept earlier as an expression of resistance to show that "the hard work" Mexicans are positioned with shows that, in the end, they do not let themselves down so easily; it shows that they migrated to the U.S. to earn a better living and to fight for their families: "We Mexicans are a bunch of fregones,[6] and even though this is not our country, we come

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[6] Competent, hard-working people.

with all our will to work hard and get ahead. So, when they ask me if I am Mexican, yes, I do consider myself Mexican because I am a person who fights and who likes to work hard and that is an important Mexican characteristic for me."

This new definition of her identity as a Mexican in NYC is interesting because the attribution she first rejects, i.e. hard-working people, is the one she uses to reposition herself within the wider socio-cultural context and which allowed her to create her own resistance identity.

Hence, it seems that their repositioning as activist leaders, such as in Norma's case, and as having more feminine approaches of strength and responsibility as in Alicia's, Martha's and Lorena's cases, leads to the reconstruction of their own narrative identities in different ways as is discussed next.

DISCUSSION

Results of this research convey how Mexican immigrant domestic workers in NYC navigate the symbolic violence they experience from different groups (U.S. citizens and fellow country people). We can also observe how, as expressed by Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992/2014), symbolic violence operates with the complicity of the oppressed, i.e. Mexican migrants discriminating each other in the U.S. Based on participants' narratives, it became evident that the ascribed identities are context dependent and relational: Participants are positioned by U.S. citizens as second-class human beings in the U.S. because they do not fulfill the expectations of what a "real" U.S. citizen should be. It is important to note here that the complicity brought forth by symbolic violence not only affects the people who mistreat other Mexicans. According to Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), symbolic violence is a sort of violence that can only exist with the complicity of the oppressed, i.e. undocumented Mexican migrants accepting that they have to live in the shadows. In other words, they often consent that living in the shadows is a "natural course." Hence, this kind of symbolic systems categorize social groups and then legitimize such categorization.

However, based on the symbolic domination and violence undocumented immigrant domestic workers experience in their daily lives, we observed that some participants in this study used personal agency which emerged as a key element in their narrative. To do so, they developed resistance strategies to counteract exclusion and discrimination and to perform resistance identities that reposition (Davies and Harré, 1990) them differently in the NYC context. The first strategy Alicia, Lorena and Norma developed was to become their families' head of household and main income earners. Women's new breadwinner status changed the dynamics of relations

between husbands and wives and between mothers and children. This new status changed their economic and social position; it empowered them and therefore allowed them to negotiate in ways they could not before. The second strategy was to learn English which allowed them to acquire a voice and reposition themselves differently in their immediate context. All five participants were clearly aware of the linguistic capital English represents (Bourdieu, 1991). As mentioned by Lorena, it gave them confidence, power and respect which allowed them to perform avowed identities (Butler, 1997) through the use of language (Cameron, 1997) to advocate for themselves. Interestingly, Norma wants to speak English with a U.S. accent which will reposition her before U.S. citizens as a Mexican immigrant, but one who speaks "Standard" English, one who may be a "native-speaker" or one who reclaims ownership of English language (Canagarajah, 2020). Hence, it seems that Norma recreates the same monolingual linguistic ideologies of the U.S. nation-state she suffers in her own flesh. In this case, paradoxically, she performed an identity of assimilation / acculturation by adopting U.S. monolingual linguistic ideologies to resist the linguistic violence she experienced. The third strategy they all used to reposition themselves away from being seen and treated as second-class citizens was to become activists at DWA and to get to know their rights as undocumented domestic workers in NYC. Knowing their rights and being able to help others allowed them to redeem their former negative state to a positive outcome which increasingly emphasized the ability to control their world and make self-determined decisions (McAdams and Mc Lean, 2013). In other words, they gained agency in their lives. Overall, we found that participants' narratives positioned them as strong and responsible to counter symbolic violence.

This new positioning led the women to gender ideologies and roles that seem to be quite different between the first generation and generation 1.5. First generation migrants seemed to follow more rural Mexican traditional patriarchal ideologies, even though Martha also challenged them by positioning herself as an activist which somehow maintains and nurtures a collective self and formulates sentiments of belonging (Bloom et al., 2021). Alicia and Norma, in turn, as generation 1.5 migrants, challenge Mexican "dominant forms of relation between men and women and ways of thinking about gender" (Courtney Smith, 2005, p. 94) in a more open manner. Both were mostly educated in the United States and therefore challenge and resist male authority, the patriarchal constraints within their own families, including the unequal division of household labor, and try to renegotiate them. Generation 1.5 renegotiates the typical marriage of respect of Mexicans' first generation and rather looks for a marriage where the relationship emphasizes egalitarian companionship (Courtney Smith, 2005). These new positionings were clearly enhanced by participants' participation

in the DWA, and may not have been possible without the support of the organization as there is no official structure in the U.S. which allows undocumented domestic workers to tell their stories and fight for their rights. Being able to fight for their rights in the U.S. allowed them not only to reposition and resist surrounding ideologies, but also to reconstruct their own narrative identities by "doing". In other words, the five participants in this research, became who they wanted to become partly because of the arising collective identities (Massey, 2008; De Fina, 2011) generated through their activism at DWA.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, it seems that the five emblematic participants aimed to represent themselves with "alternative languages of self and storytelling" before us (Bloom, 1998: 63). They did not seem, at varying degrees, to respond to the general cultural expectations about appropriate female behavior. That is, they did not want to embody all the characteristics of patriarchal expectations. On the contrary, they reclaimed male characteristics of patriarchal culture such as strength and responsibility as their own, in addition to making conflict and rebellion against marginalization central to their stories and therefore seemed to experiment a more women-centered discourse. This female centered discourse, which took them an average of 8 to 10 years to develop, seemed to allow them to have a voice and to position themselves politically and strategically in a different way within their own context. In that way, they allowed for a positive representation of their subjectivities as "nonunitary, fragmented, conflicted, fluid, and in flux" (Bloom, 1998: 63). Hence, they tried to write "beyond the lines" (Bloom, 1998) to create their own narrative identity that would transform their accounts of suffering and redemption to mature and positive personal growth frameworks (Bauer, McAdams and Sakaeda, 2005). Nevertheless, not all undocumented domestic workers possess the agency to renegotiate their position vis-à-vis dominant U.S. ideologies and construct their own narrative identities. A significant portion of this demographic lacks the resources, such as time and energy, to acquire proficiency in English, adheres to patriarchal norms, remains invisible, and resides on the margins of society. However, as demonstrated by the results of this study, entities such as the Domestic Workers Association (DWA) are instrumental in driving change by elevating the voices of marginalized domestic workers within mainstream society in the United States.

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