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Examining the Perils and Promises of an Informal Niche in a Global City:
A Case Study of Mexican Immigrant Gardeners in Los Angeles

By

Alvaro Huerta

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

City and Regional Planning

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Karen Christensen, Chair
Professor Karen Chapple
Professor David Montejano

Fall 2011

Examining the Perils and Promises of an Informal Niche in a Global City: A Case Study of
Mexican Immigrant Gardeners in Los Angeles

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by

Alvaro Huerta

Abstract

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The domestic household service sector of contract gardening dominated by Mexican immigrants in Los Angeles constitutes an important and under-examined component of the city's informal economy. Mexican immigrant gardeners, like Latina domestic workers and Latino day laborers, represent an important and undervalued labor source in this global city and other U.S. cities and suburbs. While domestic help has historically been a privilege of the affluent, the middle-class, since the World War II era, has also acquired the financial means to hire immigrants and racial minorities to perform traditional household duties. Due primarily to the American obsession with the front lawn, the increased influx of low-wage immigrants to the U.S. since the mid-1960s and the structural shift from a manufacturing-dominated industrial complex to a new, service-dominated economic complex during the past several decades, the demand for contract gardeners has become an integral part of local neighborhoods. Although this informal niche provides positive benefits to local neighborhoods—i.e., the (re)production of greener, healthier and aesthetically pleasing communities—scholars and urban planners have traditionally ignored this group. Moreover, scholarly publications and popular narratives commonly frame Mexican immigrants, including paid gardeners, domestic workers and day laborers, as a homogenous group of marginalized individuals who occupy low paying jobs associated with low social status and lack of upward mobility (i.e., “immigrant jobs”).

To address the scholarly shortcomings in the social science literature and debunk the pejorative popular views of Mexican immigrant gardeners, this dissertation provides a complex and nuanced interpretation of this informal niche. This dissertation re-conceptualizes this informal service sector from a homogenous group of immigrant workers to a heterogeneous group (i.e., immigrant workers and petty-entrepreneurs). It also re-frames the popular narratives of Mexican immigrant gardeners as ignorant, passive agents who perform simplistic, labor-intensive activities to intelligent, social agents with agency who engage in complex social relations and economic transactions in the informal economy.

My main finding, and contribution to the social science literature, centers on how the two sub-groups that I examine in this dissertation—immigrant workers and petty-entrepreneurs in an

informal economic niche, with similar low socio-economic backgrounds—differ in their outcomes because they self-organize in different economic models based on the availability of their strong social ties or migrant networks and the hierarchical nature of these webs of social relations. Migrant networks refer to co-ethnic ties that link and bond immigrants in the receiving and sending countries. These inter-personal networks consist of immediate family, extended family, friends and hometown associates.

Specifically, my main finding and contributions to the literature consist of four important, interrelated components. First, this dissertation focuses on an understudied group in the academic fields of immigration and ethnic economies: Mexican immigrant entrepreneurs. While much research has been conducted on specific immigrant groups with high rates of entrepreneurship in the U.S., such as Koreans, Chinese, Japanese and Cubans, less research has been conducted on Mexican immigrant entrepreneurs.

Secondly, this dissertation focuses on an understudied sector in the academic fields of the informal economy and urban planning: informal, small-scale enterprises in U.S. cities. While recent scholarly studies in this country's informal economy explore many economic sectors and industries, such as construction, garment, electronics and retail, few research projects focus on immigrant-owned, small enterprises as economic vehicles for upward mobility.

Thirdly, by developing and coining a typology of informal economic models and markets in Los Angeles' contract gardening niche, this dissertation contributes to a better understanding of how an understudied immigrant group creates informal institutions to pursue upward mobility opportunities in U.S. cities. This typology includes the following models and markets: (1) Informal Petty-Capitalism (IPC) model; (2) Informal Master-Apprentice (IMA) model; and (3) Informal Gardener Markets (IGMs).

Fourthly, this dissertation also uncovers how these social actors utilize their migrant networks in a hierarchical or rank order manner for differentiated outcomes (i.e., immigrant workers and petty-entrepreneurs). Moreover, it reveals how Mexican immigrant gardeners who migrate from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds organize and govern themselves in the informal economy, providing a paradigm for similar immigrant groups to emulate and improve upon throughout American cities and suburbs.

By better understanding the existing social capital, rich resources and sophisticated forms of organization that Mexican immigrant gardeners possess, scholars, policy makers, planners, civic and community leaders will be better informed to assist this group and other immigrant groups in a collaborative and strategic manner to improve the working and living conditions of all historically disenfranchised groups in American cities. Thus, in lieu of formalizing the contract gardening service sector with high entry costs, strict government regulations and coercive laws, which inevitably lead to the criminalization and further marginalization of this informal niche, as a society, we need to support and provide informal immigrants with the tools, resources and incentives they need to better incorporate them into American society.

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Dedications

In memory of my mother, Carmen Mejia Huerta—
a beautiful, wise *Mexicana*—who raised me to strive for success.

In memory of my father, Salomon Chavez Huerta Sr.,
who taught me to be resolute in the face of great adversity.

I miss you both dearly.

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Preface

On February 6, 2006, Mario Coria, a Mexican immigrant and owner of a contract gardening enterprise in The Hamptons of Long Island, New York, graced the cover of *Time* magazine.¹ *Time*'s prestigious cover—normally reserved for world leaders and Nobel Prize winners, highly acclaimed scientists and artists, and internationally renowned artists and humanitarians—portrayed Mr. Coria as an American success story. He first migrated to The Hamptons, which represents an exclusive area for the affluent and powerful, from a small Mexican town called Tuxpan in the state of Michoacán in 1979. His journey to work for a wealthy American family, represents an American success story and of an immigrant pioneer—an individual who first settles in the receiving country and then facilitates migration for others from the sending country (Gurak and Caces 1992; Hagan 1998; Mines and de Janvry 1982). Mr. Coria not only established a successful contract gardening enterprise but also purchased a house not far from the expensive estates and yards he and his workers service as a pioneer. In addition, he paved the road for other *paisanos*² to work as contract gardeners³ in the Hamptons via his migrant networks. (Migrant networks refer to co-ethnic ties that link and bond immigrants in the receiving and sending countries. These strong ties consist of immediate family, extended family, friends and hometown associates.)⁴ This includes many Mexican immigrants who toil as day laborers and domestic workers in the domestic household service sector (Mahler 2003).

The serendipitous timing of this particular *Time* cover story coincided with my campus interview at Cornell's Department of City and Regional Planning for its highly regarded Ph.D. program. Prior to starting my doctoral studies at UC Berkeley's Department of City and Regional Planning, I seriously considered attending Cornell. While flying to Ithaca, New York, I must admit that I felt a bit of trepidation about how the distinguished faculty at this Ivy League university would welcome someone like myself—an urban planner who grew up in East Los Angeles—with a dissertation proposal on Mexican immigrant gardeners and their social networks in Los Angeles' informal economy. Did Ithaca even have a Latino population, I wondered? Have the Cornell faculty ever met or conversed with a Mexican immigrant gardener? Would my proposed dissertation be dismissed as irrelevant by the faculty vis-à-vis the planning field? These were just a few questions that I pondered on my plane trip.

As it so happened, when my plane finally landed in New York, I headed straight to the magazine section of the airport, where, to my astonishment, I picked up a copy of *Time* magazine only to find a contract Mexican gardener on the front cover! Mostly ignored or ridiculed in U.S. popular culture, this cover story displayed a contract Mexican gardener in a dignified manner. Not only did Mr. Coria's amazing success story fit perfectly with my dissertation proposal, it also provided a common reference point for interview discussions with the distinguished Cornell faculty on the importance of contract immigrant gardeners to America's cities and suburbs. The story documented the transnational networks between Mr. Coria and members of his hometown

¹ Thornburgh, Nathan. 2006. "Inside America's Secret Workforce." *Time*, February 6, 34 – 45.

² *Paisano* is a Spanish and Italian term, referring to a fellow immigrant from the same country.

³ I use the term "contract gardeners" to refer to individuals who earn a living from landscape work. Moreover, I use this term in contrast to "leisure gardeners" (i.e., individuals who engage in gardening activities as a hobby). I also distinguish contract gardeners from homeowners and renters who perform their own gardening chores in lieu of outsourcing these domestic duties, traditionally performed by men. Lastly, in Spanish, contract gardeners are known as "*jardineros*" (Pisani and Yoskowitz 2005; Ramirez 2010; Ramirez and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2009). However, I don't use this term in this dissertation in order to keep Spanish terminology to a minimum.

⁴ For a detailed discussion of migrant networks, see Chapter 2 (Literature Review) of this dissertation.

from Mexico to the U.S, allowing for recent immigrants to settle and become an integral part of the domestic household service sector (Ibid.)

Although I eventually selected UC Berkeley for my doctoral studies, my visit to Cornell represented another important experience throughout my academic journey, starting at UCLA with my undergraduate and master's studies. Not only did the Cornell faculty welcome my research proposal as a viable research project for a dissertation, but they also reaffirmed my scholarly viewpoint that this informal niche represents an important part of domestic households and local communities in a global city like Los Angeles, and beyond, worthy of scholarly inquiry.

In short, during the past several years of conducting research on Mexican immigrant gardeners and their migrant networks in Los Angeles, I was pleasantly surprised to discover and report how these social actors organize and govern themselves in creative and complex manners, while building informal economic models and markets to both survive and thrive in the informal economy.

Chapter 1. Introduction

Why do we at the top of the system so recurrently see those who shine our shoes, repair our cars, and provide the substrata on which our prosperity rests, as a category of “others” strongly separated from the world which we belong?

— Lisa R. Peattie, 1980

Dominated by Mexican immigrants, the contract gardening sector in Los Angeles constitutes an important and under-examined component of the city’s informal economy. Mexican immigrant gardeners, like Latina domestic workers (*domésticas*)⁵ and day laborers (*jornaleros*),⁶ represent a valuable labor source in this global city and beyond. While paid domestic help has historically been a luxury of the affluent, since the post-WWII era, the middle-class has increasingly acquired the financial means to hire Mexican immigrants and other racial minorities to “outsource” their traditional household duties, such as childcare, house cleaning and yard work. The demand for paid gardeners in local neighborhoods throughout the United States has occurred at the intersection of several national trends: the American obsession with the front lawn (Robbins and Sharp 2003; Steinberg 2006), the demand for low-wage labor for the domestic household service sector (Light 2006), the increased influx of low-wage immigrants to U.S. cities since the mid-1960s (Massey 1986; Massey et al. 1987), and the structural shift from a manufacturing-dominated industrial complex to a new, service-dominated economic complex during the past several decades (Sassen 1994).

Although this informal niche provides many benefits to American cities and suburbs, planning scholarship lacks research on domestic household service sectors in general and the complex interactions of how residential landscapes get produced and maintained in particular. More specifically, few studies focus on the role of Mexican immigrant gardeners in the production of greener, healthier and aesthetically pleasing landscapes and neighborhoods (Huerta 2007; Ramirez and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2009). Given the dearth of scholarly studies and analysis on contract gardeners in the U.S., policy makers, planners and the public mainly rely on the stereotypical narratives of this group found in Hollywood movies, television programs, magazines, newspapers and other popular culture sources (for an example, see Appendix A). The popular narratives of Mexican immigrant gardeners commonly frame these individuals as a homogenous group of so-called ignorant, menial workers who take on “immigrant jobs” characterized by low wages, low social status and lack of upward mobility in the U.S. (Alvarez 1990; Gold 2005; Massey 1999; Waldinger 2003).⁷

Referring to contract gardeners and their heavy reliance on gas-powered leaf blowers, Steinberg (2006), in his book on the American lawn care culture, tellingly titles one of his chapters, “Mow, Blow, and Go.” While the author provides an unbiased portrayal of lawn care in the U.S., or what he refers to as the “green industry,” this chapter title perpetuates the popular myth of contract gardeners relegated to performing rudimentary, manual labor activities. This

⁵ Latina domestic workers in the U.S. typically work as domestic workers (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994, 2001).

⁶ For key studies on day laborers, see the groundbreaking scholarly work of UCLA Professor Abel Valenzuela (Valenzuela 1999, 2001, 2003) and colleagues (Valenzuela et al. 2006).

⁷ Compared to well-paying blue-collar and white-collar jobs, Kim and colleagues (1989) also refer to low-wage, immigrant-dominated jobs as “marginal” and “peripheral.”

catchy phrase, “mow, blow and go,”⁸ conveniently benefits residents who argue that contract gardeners represent a major source of noise and air pollution, specifically referring to the gardeners’ use of gas-powered leaf blowers (Huerta 2006a, 2006b; Cameron 2000; Steinberg 2006). In prior research (Huerta 2006a, 2006b), I uncover the contradictory position of a group of affluent Westside residents benefiting from the labor of Mexican immigrant gardeners, while simultaneously attacking these same immigrants for using a modern work tool (i.e., the leaf blower) to service the elite’s front lawns.⁹

To counter the simplistic and false narrative of this service sector and fill the gaps in the social science literature, this dissertation provides a nuanced portrayal of Mexican immigrant gardeners and their social networks in Los Angeles’s informal economy. By doing so, this dissertation re-conceptualizes these individuals from passive objects who allegedly perform simplistic, labor-intensive activities to active agents who engage in complex social relations and sophisticated economic transactions in the informal economy; from a homogeneous group of so-called marginalized immigrant workers to a heterogeneous group of interdependent, co-ethnic workers and petty-entrepreneurs.¹⁰

1.1 Main Research Question

In the absence of scholarly research, one can logically assume that immigrants with low human capital and low financial capital¹¹ from developing countries (e.g., Mexico) will experience upward mobility barriers in developed countries like the U.S. Initially operating under this false assumption, prior to conducting extensive research on Mexican immigrant gardeners, I too expected to find a homogenous group of low-wage Mexican immigrant workers in this informal service sector. To my surprise, I found a more complex case of inter-connected workers and petty-entrepreneurs, where these social actors create complex informal institutions via their migrant networks to survive and, for some, thrive in the informal economy.

To better understand and contextualize this heterogeneous niche, I formulated the following research question:

⁸ In short, “mow, blow and go” refers to the false notion that paid gardeners simply mow lawns, mainly rely on leaf blowers and quickly move on to the next job.

⁹ My prior research focused on the City of Los Angeles leaf blower ban and controversy during the late 1990s. See Chapter 3 for details of Los Angeles’ leaf blower controversy, during the late 1990s. Also, for additional references, see: Friend, Tad. 2010. “Blowback: The Great Suburban Leaf War.” *The New Yorker*, October 25, 50 – 55; Boyarsky, Bill. 1997. “Westside Elitism is Evident in Leaf Blower Ban.” *Los Angeles Times*, July 7, sec. B; Medina, Hildy. 1998. “Gardening Economics: Low Tech, Labor Intensive Businesses Jeopardized by Leaf Blower Ban.” *Los Angeles Business Journal*, January 12 – 18, sec. 1; del Olmo, Frank. 1997. “Leaf Blower Ban is a Gesture with Huge Hidden Costs.” *Los Angeles Times*, July 7, sec. B; Orlov, Rick. 1996. “Leaf Blower Ban Pushed to Riordan.” *Daily News*, December 4, sec. N; Pulgar, Pedro. 1995. “*Un Negocio de Sol a Sol*.” *La Opinion*, 5 de septiembre, sec. D; Purdum, Todd S. 1998. “Ban on Leaf Blowers Is Voted, and Noise Ensues.” *The New York Times*, January 7, sec. A; Rommelmann, Nancy. 2004. “Brown Dirty Cowboy.” *LA Weekly*, October 22 – 28; Gumbel, Peter. 1997. “If You Want to Hear This Catwoman Hiss, Just Blow in Her Ear: Actress Julie Newmar, Others Battle Noisy Leaf Blowers; LA Gardeners in Uproar.” *The Wall Street Journal*, December 3, sec. A; Huffington, Arianna. 1998. “President Blows an Opportunity.” *Chicago Sun-Times*, January 18, sec. E.

¹⁰ See below in Section 1.5 for an overview of the contract gardening niche.

¹¹ While human capital encompasses formal education, work experience and specialized skills, financial capital includes cash savings, household wealth and credit access (Bates 1995, 1997; Coleman 1988; Zhou 2004).

How and why do many Mexican immigrant gardeners experience occupational constraints as immigrant workers, while some enjoy upward mobility opportunities as owners of small-scale enterprises¹²?

In addition to investigating this main research question, I explored key aspects of this informal niche, such as how immigrants enter this service sector, how it's organized (e.g., organizational crew structure, differential pay scales, hiring) how it works (e.g., securing clients, establishing client routes, setting fees), working conditions, social hierarchies (workers and owners of small enterprises), ethnic makeup and its role in the domestic household service economy.

1.2 Hypotheses

I explored and evaluated the below hypotheses for this research study. I formulated the following hypotheses while investigating this informal niche. In addition to conducting extensive research on this informal niche and engaging the academic literature of related immigrant groups, such as Latina domestic workers (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994, 2001; Mattingly 1999, 2001) and Latino day laborers (Valenzuela 1999, 2001, 2003; Valenzuela et al. 2000), these hypotheses were informed by my previous research on Mexican immigrant gardeners in Los Angeles's informal economy (Huerta 2006a, 2006b).

For this dissertation, I conducted 50 in-depth, open-ended interviews with Mexican immigrant gardeners and engaged in other ethnographic research activities (see Chapter 3) to test the following hypotheses, establish relationships with my gardener informants, explore patterns of my informants and establish research findings:

- The informal economy allows for a select group of Mexican immigrant gardeners to pursue upward mobility opportunities not commonly available to them in the formal economy, primarily due to the formal economy's institutionalized barriers against some immigrant groups. Immigrants often experience barriers or "blocked mobility" in the formal economy due to discrimination, limited English language proficiency, lack of transferable skills and unaccredited human capital (Light 2005; Yoon 1995; Zhou 2004). By self-organizing and self-governing informal economic models and markets within the contract gardening niche, Mexican immigrants both survive and thrive in the Los Angeles' unregulated economy.
- Despite lacking high human capital and high financial capital—two key factors for business entry and success, according to key economists (Bates 1995, 1997; Bates and Dunham 1993)—some Mexican immigrant gardeners in Los Angeles's informal economy successfully access their migrant networks (e.g., family, friendship, hometown associates) to pursue entrepreneurial opportunities. I argue that migrant ties should not all treated equally in the academic literature, but in a hierarchical or rank order. In the case of the contract gardening niche, Mexican immigrants experienced a

¹² By small-scale enterprises, I am referring to very small establishments (VSEs), consisting of less than 10 workers (Granovetter 1984; Portes and Sassen-Koob 1987).

segmented labor market via their migrant networks, where some strategically position themselves in informal economic institutions for upward mobility outcomes while others experience limited opportunities, as hired worker, for social and economic promotion.

1.3 Key Findings

Driven by my main research question, my key findings center on the complex, informal mechanisms which Mexican immigrant gardeners self-organize and self-govern¹³ in Los Angeles' informal economy. To better understand these informal mechanisms and their role in this informal niche, based on my research, I've developed and coined a typology of economic models and markets. They include the following economic models and markets: (1) Informal Petty-Capitalism (IPC) model; (2) Informal Master-Apprentice (IMA) model; and (3) Informal Gardener Markets (IGMs). These informal institutions function within the immigrants' web of interpersonal ties or what the influential sociologist Douglas Massey and colleagues refer to as migrant networks (Boyd 1989; Gold 2005; Gurak and Caces 1992; Massey 1986, 1999; Massey et al. 1987). Migrant networks, as previously noted, include co-ethnic ties that link and bond immigrants in the receiving and sending countries. These strong ties refer to immediate family, extended family, friends and hometown associates.¹⁴ Specifically, in my research, I've found that Mexican immigrant gardeners utilize their migrant networks in a variety of ways with different outcomes, whereby providing many immigrants with employment constraints as hired workers and some with upward mobility opportunities as petty-entrepreneurs.

First, the Informal Petty-Capitalism (IPC) model represents a traditional employer-employee relationship, similar to that found in the formal economy. This includes a top-down employment structure with an owner-operator (*patrón*) as a sole proprietor¹⁵ and a small crew of workers (*trabajadores*). While there exists a co-ethnic bond in this model, where both the *patrón* and *trabajador* share similar social and cultural roots to rural Mexico—which I found based on my in-depth interviews and ethnographic fieldwork—this relationship remains a business arrangement within a hierarchical organizational structure. This model not only benefits the *patrón*, but it also provides the primary reason why many Mexican immigrants with low human capital and low financial capital remain as *trabajadores* in this informal niche. Lacking upward mobility opportunities, similar to most low-wage immigrants in the formal economy, such as dishwashers, bus boys and factory workers, *trabajadores* in the contract gardening niche operate within a constraining work structure with low pay, long hours and few opportunities for promotion.

Secondly, in contrast to the IPC model, the Informal Master-Apprentice (IMA) model represents a modern, informal variation of the old master-apprentice system. Under the traditional master-apprentice system, which dates back to the Middle Ages, a master craftsman provides training to a young apprentice under a multi-year contractual agreement; often, these

¹³ I borrowed the terms “self-organize” and “self-govern” from Ostrom (1990, 2008).

¹⁴ As members of cohesive, inter-connected communities, these migrant ties fall under the network framework of strong ties (Granovetter 1973, 1984; Wilson 1998).

¹⁵ Although the *patrones* represent sole proprietors, these petty-entrepreneurs mostly operate their contract gardening businesses like family-based operations, as noted in Chapter 5.

relations were marred by exploitation (Peil 1970; Sikes 1894).¹⁶ However, the informal modern model that I identified in the contract gardening service sector lacks the egregious nature of the old system, such as being “indentured” or the “bonded out” practice to the master for several years (e.g., three to seven years). In the IMA system, apprentice gardeners enter and exit the contract gardening niche at will.

This informal model, just like in the IPC model, also includes a top-down, employment structure with a *patrón* as a sole proprietor and a small crew of *trabajadores*. We also find co-ethnic bonds in the IMA, where both the master gardener and apprentice mostly trace their roots to rural Mexico. However, in this model, the *trabajador* experiences upward mobility opportunities given that the *patrón* provides him with the necessary training and support to one day, if all goes well, also become a *patrón*. Essentially, the IMA serves as a small business incubator for the next generation of *patrones*.

Thirdly, apart from the IPC and IMA, contract gardeners create and manage their own Informal Gardener Markets (IGMs) in this informal niche. In these informal markets, Mexican immigrants constantly exchange job-related goods, services and information among their migrant ties. This includes the informal exchange and sale of gardening tools, equipment (e.g., leaf blower, lawn mower, hedge trimmer), raffles tickets (e.g., gardening tools, equipment), truck(s), plants and small trees. Instead of exclusively purchasing goods at home improvement centers and other shops, like The Home Depot or lawn mower repair shops, contract gardeners access their migrant ties to meet their job-related needs and wants.

In addition, contract gardeners utilize IGMs as a labor pool source for immigrant workers. More specifically, *patrones* access IGMs to contract *trabajadores* for their labor services or what Marx (1994) calls “labour power.” Instead of relying on traditional employment sources found in the formal market, such as newspaper classifieds ads, company websites and internet-based services (e.g., Craigslist), *patrones* mainly rely on their migrant networks to meet their job-related needs in the informal economy.

Moreover, IGMs provide Mexican immigrants with opportunities to purchase contract gardening enterprises (or part of them) from *patrones* willing to sell.¹⁷ In this scenario, a Mexican immigrant who has some experience as a *trabajador* can purchase an established small enterprise or client route¹⁸ from a *patrón* (Huerta 2006a, 2007) and, theoretically, become a *patrón* without benefiting from the IMA model. Upon purchasing the small business, during a short period, the seller accompanies the buyer to ensure that the client will agree to the services of the new gardener. Given the lack of binding contracts, most clients agree to the new gardener under the condition that he maintains the same quality of work for the same monthly fee. If not satisfied, the clients always have the option to hire other gardeners.

¹⁶ For example, in her study of the apprenticeship system in Accra, Ghana, during the 1960s, Peil (1970) documents that apprentices received meager wages (if any), worked long hours, performed personal tasks for the master and lacked personal freedom since many of them lived in the household of the master—a common tradition. Prior to undergoing numerous laws to protect apprentices under the old system throughout Europe, Sikes (1894, 408) states that the “boy who wished to learn a trade was ‘indentured’ or ‘bonded out’ to an employer for a term of years.” This is not to say, however, that all master-apprentice relationships were marred by exploitation, since the old system also allowed for young men to learn a skilled trade, providing them with better opportunities upon completion of their contractual agreement, ranging from three to seven years (Peil 1970; Sikes 1894).

¹⁷ I’ve found in my research that the *patrón* commonly has an incentive to sell his business or part of it under particular circumstances, such as when he’s retiring, returning to Mexico, leaving this service sector to pursue other opportunities or has too much business to manage.

¹⁸ As noted below in Section 1.5 (Snapshot of Contract Gardening Niche), a client route represents a network of clients accumulated by the *patrón* over several years, representing the primary asset of these small-scale enterprises.

Fourthly, focusing on the variety of ways that Mexican immigrant gardeners utilize their migrant networks to create economic models for differentiated outcomes (i.e., employment constraints for many immigrants as *trabajadores* and upward mobility opportunities for some as *patrones*), I found that these social actors mostly treat their migrant ties in an ordinal or rank order manner (i.e., 1st, 2nd, 3rd). While immigration scholars commonly treat the different types of migrant networks equally (i.e., immediate family, extended family, friends and hometown associates) (Boyd 1989; Fawcett 1989; Gold 2005; Massey et al. 1987; Waldorf 1996), I found a hierarchical order among these different ties in this informal niche.

According to my research, when deciding which *trabajador* to channel into the preferred IMA model over the IPC model, the *patrón* commonly selects immediate family members over extended family members; extended family members over hometown associates; hometown associates over friends and so on.¹⁹ More specifically, while the *patrón* selects family members and *compadres*²⁰ for the IMA model and friends, he chooses neighbors and hometown associates for the IPC model.

To sum, I found that Mexican immigrant gardeners engage in complex and constantly contested webs of personal relations with differentiated labor market outcomes. The differentiated outcomes consist of the many *trabajadores* who experience work constraints in the IPC model and the few *patrones* who experience upward mobility opportunities in the IMA model. Given the complex and dynamic nature of this informal niche, however, I also discuss in Chapter 4 how a *trabajador* in the IPC model can still become a *patrón* via the IGMs by securing the necessary funds to purchase an established small business from another gardener. In my sample of *patrones* (i.e., N = 25), five *patrones* or 20 percent secured enough funds to start their own small-scale enterprises in this informal niche. For future research, I aim to explore this issue further with a larger sample of *patrones* to better determine the frequency of this pathway to self-employment (i.e., the purchase of established small businesses).

1.4 Scholarly Contributions

This dissertation contributes to the social science literature in three important, interrelated ways. First, this dissertation focuses on an understudied group in the academic fields of immigration and ethnic economies: Mexican immigrant entrepreneurs. While much research has been conducted on specific immigrant groups with high rates of entrepreneurship, such as Koreans (Bonacich 1988), Japanese (Hirahara 2000; Jiobu 1998), Chinese (Zhou 2004; Zhou and Logan 1989) and Cubans (Portes and Jensen 1989; Wilson and Martin 1982), less research has been conducted on Mexican immigrant entrepreneurs (Guarnizo 1997; Raijman 2001).

Secondly, this dissertation focuses on an understudied sector in the academic fields of the informal economy and urban planning: informal, small-scale enterprises in U.S. cities. While recent scholarly studies in this country's informal economy have explored many sectors and industries, such as construction, garment, electronics, retail and other areas (Fernandez-Kelly and Garcia 1994; Portes et al. 1989; Sassen 1994), few studies have been conducted on immigrant-

¹⁹ Similarly, I also found that the *patrones* also differentiate the place of origin among the *trabajadores* when allocating key support and resources, where *patrones* generally favor an individual from the same hometown over someone from the same state; an individual from the same state over someone from another state; and an individual from the same country (i.e., *paisano*) over someone from another country.

²⁰ A *compadre* represents a member of the *compadrazgo* social institution that connects the parents of a child and the child's godparents (*padrinos*) through the Catholic ritual of baptism in Latin America and beyond (Ebaugh and Curry 2000; Menjivar 1995).

owned, small-scale enterprises, as economic vehicles for upward mobility (Raijman 2001; Zlozniski 1994).

Thirdly, by developing and coining a typology of informal economic models and markets in Los Angeles' contract gardening service sector, this dissertation contributes to the scholarly knowledge of immigrant upward mobility for disenfranchised ethnic groups in U.S. cities. This dissertation also uncovers how these social actors utilize their migrant networks in a hierarchical or rank order manner for differentiated outcomes (i.e., immigrant workers and petty-entrepreneurs). Moreover, it also reveals how Mexican immigrant gardeners who come from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds organize and govern themselves in the informal economy, whereby providing a paradigm for other immigrant groups with similar SES to emulate and improve upon.

1.5 Snapshot of Contract Gardening Niche²¹

As an integral part of the domestic household service sector, contract gardeners provide valuable and inexpensive landscape services to homeowners.²² This informal niche, as noted above, consists of two social classes: *patrones* and *trabajadores*. The *patrón*, as the owner-operator of the contract gardening enterprise, negotiates a landscape maintenance agreement with a homeowner (i.e., client). Instead of legally binding contracts, the *patrón* and the client establish oral agreements based on the size of the yard, nature of landscape work requested (e.g., mow lawns, water plants, trim bushes), frequency of visits (e.g., bi-monthly, monthly) and estimated time to perform yard work. Based on all these factors, the *patrón* provides the client with an estimate to be negotiated.

Instead of charging on an hourly basis, the *patrón* charges the client a monthly fee based on the nature of landscape duties and time required to perform said duties. For instance, for a two-bedroom home in a middle-class community in Los Angeles, the *patrón* may charge the client in the range of \$75 to \$100 per month for bi-monthly visits. This includes basic landscape duties, such as mowing grasses, cleaning yards, trimming hedges and growing plants. However, due to the abundance of low-wage Mexican immigrant labor and intense competition among contract gardeners, the *patrón* may charge a nominal monthly fee, such as \$50 to \$60, to remain competitive. The intense competition among gardeners represents a negative aspect of this informal niche, which I discuss in the conclusion (see Chapter 6).

In general terms, in my research I found a heterogeneous, dynamic and complex set of relationships among Mexican immigrant gardeners in Los Angeles. On the one hand, while many Mexican immigrant gardeners compete against each other for scarce resources (i.e., clients or houses), they also engage in high levels of cooperation within their migrant ties.²³ However, given the inherent unregulated nature of the informal economy, Mexican immigrant gardeners constantly engage in a complex set of relationships in this informal niche, which includes both individualistic competition and mutual cooperation.

In this unregulated economy, clients regularly break their oral agreements with “their” gardeners, whereby replacing them with contract gardeners who charge less for the same services. Based on my research, this practice represents a major problem for the *patrones*, which

²¹ For an historical review of contract gardening in Los Angeles, see Chapter 5.

²² This also includes renters and commercial property owners.

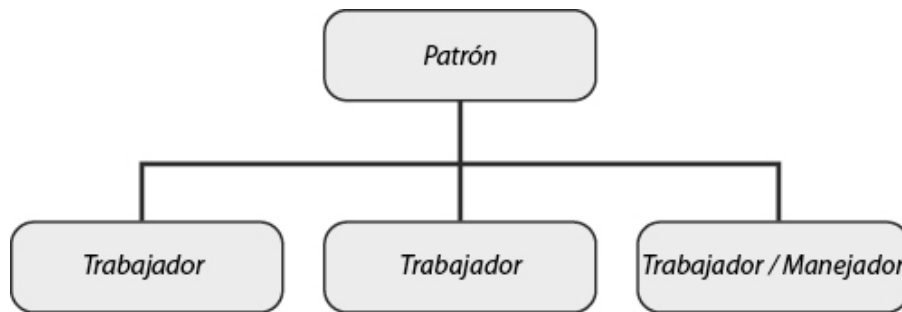
²³ Since there are thousands of Mexican immigrant gardeners from different states and hometowns, not all gardeners have direct links and solidarity bonds with each other.

partially explains why monthly gardening fees remain low and stagnant over the years. Ultimately, the fact that contract gardeners operate with non-binding, oral agreements benefits the client at the expense of all gardeners. Thus, to remain competitive in this informal service sector, gardeners usually maintain their gardening fees at a low rate.

Apart from their daily gardening services, contract gardeners earn additional income by performing extra jobs or “extras” (Hernandez 2010; Hernandez and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2009; Huerta 2006a, 2007). These jobs include gardening-related duties such as installing sprinklers, trimming trees and hauling debris (Hernandez 2010; Hernandez and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2009; Huerta 2006a, 2007). These jobs are typically performed during the weekends, where both the *patrón* and *trabajador* benefit financially, especially given that “extras” commonly pay more than routine gardening maintenance duties. For example, a *patrón* can earn anywhere from \$200 to \$2,000 per job to trim a large tree, install sprinklers or haul away large debris to a local waste facility.

Based on my previous and current research, I found that gardeners organize themselves in small crews (see Figure 1.1). Depending on the size of the contract gardening enterprise, a crew commonly ranges from three members to six members.²⁴ Crews consist of a *patrón*, a few *trabajadores* and a driver (*trabajador / manejador*). The *patrón* usually accesses his migrant networks to hire *trabajadores*, which typically include immediate family members, extended family members, friends and hometown associates.

Figure 1.1 Contract Gardening Crew Structure



Source: Author (2011)

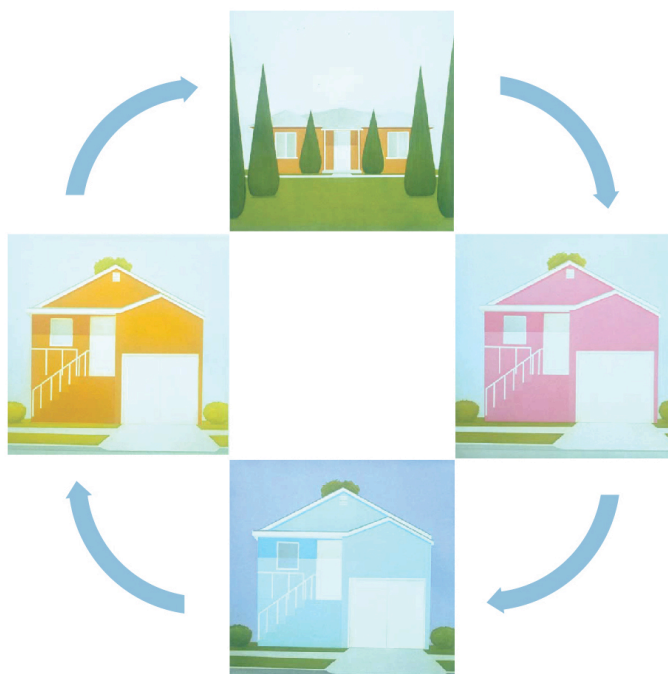
The *patrón* also manages all aspects of the business operations. This includes managing the crew, dealing directly with clients and being responsible for all other business related matters. In addition, the *patrón* owns all the tools, truck(s) and equipment (e.g., leaf blower, lawn mover, weed trimmer). Moreover, the *patrón* is responsible for covering all business costs, such as equipment maintenance, tool replacements, auto payments, insurance, gasoline and oil. The *patrón* is also responsible for hiring and paying his *trabajadores*. Contrary to the formal economy, where checks are the norm, the *patrón* usually pays the *trabajadores* in cash on a daily or weekly basis.

²⁴ When a *patrón* has a crew of six *trabajadores* or more, he requires two trucks to operate.

Apart from the *patrón* and *trabajador*, crews also include a driver or *manejador*. In addition to his driving duties, the *manejador* also takes on the same duties of a *trabajador*, making him as *trabajador / manejador* (see Figure 1.1). Given that undocumented workers cannot legally obtain driver licenses in California—a trend that has extended to other states in the U.S.—the *manejador* is usually in high demand, where he usually gets paid more than the *trabajador*.

The success of these small enterprises primarily depends on the number of clients or houses serviced by contract gardeners on a regular basis (Huerta 2007). Referred to as *rutas* by gardeners, these networks of houses represent the primary assets of contract gardening enterprises (see Figure 1.2). According to my gardener informants, *patrones* usually take several years (e.g., three to five years) to establish successful *rutas* (e.g., 100+ clients). Like all commodities traded in the formal market, *rutas* have exchange value (Huerta 2007). Specifically, as commodities, *rutas* are sold, purchased and gifted in Los Angeles’ informal economy.

Figure 1.2 *La Ruta*



Sources: Author (2011); Salomon Huerta “Untitled Houses” (2001)²⁵

As noted above, instead of relying on traditional employment sources found in the formal economy, contract gardeners utilize their migrant networks to exchange *rutas*. Both the size

²⁵ Re-published with direct permission from the artist. This includes all other images in this dissertation by Salomon Huerta.

(e.g., 100 houses) and quality (i.e., average monthly fee charged per house) of the *ruta* determines the *patrón*'s gross monthly earnings and how many *trabajadores* he can afford to employ. A very successful *patrón* with a very large *ruta* (e.g., 125 - 149 clients) needs two separate crews to provide gardening services on a daily basis throughout the City of Los Angeles, including adjacent cities.

Lastly, all of my gardener informants expressed a high level of job satisfaction. They all expressed a sense of pride and joy about working outdoors and engaging with nature (e.g., plants, trees) on a daily basis. They also expressed high satisfaction with their fluid work schedules, where gardeners constantly travel from one neighborhood to another neighborhood to perform landscaping duties. In contrast, many immigrants who occupy “immigrant jobs” primarily have a rigid schedule while working in fixed locations, such as dishwashers, janitors, carwash workers, factory workers and farm workers.

1.6 Place: The American Lawn

This dissertation situates the study of Mexican immigrant gardeners within the confines of the American lawn—a ubiquitous place in the American urban (and suburban) landscape. While there was a time in U.S. history when only the affluent enjoyed the aesthetic pleasures of the American lawn, during the post-World War II era, with the rapid increase of suburbanization, the rise of the middle-class and increase of home ownership, the lawn has also become accessible to many individuals and families from various socio-economic backgrounds (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2010; Huerta 2007; Milesi et al. 2005; Robbins et al. 2001; Steinberg 2006). Consequently, the American lawn—adopted from pre-Romantic gardening—has become a common and monolithic feature of U.S. society (Robbins et al. 2001; Robbins and Birkenholtz 2003).

However, while the American lawn represents an important symbol of homeownership and the “American Dream” narrative, planning scholars have historically ignored this important locale—both as an ecological space and domestic household worksite for hired help—until now. Given the scope of this dissertation, I contextualize the American lawn as an unexplored worksite, where contract Mexican immigrant gardeners engage in complex interactions and relations with co-ethnics, clients and the environment.

In addition to the dynamic human relations in the production of the American lawn, yard work—both contracted and leisure—also represents a connection between people and the non-human world (i.e., the environment) (Robbins and Sharp 2003). Yet, while contract gardening in Los Angeles (and beyond) represents immigrant-dominated work—characterized as an example of “immigrant jobs” (Gold 2005; Massey 1999; Waldinger 2003) or “dirty jobs” (Ramirez 2010; Ramirez and Hernandez 2009), associated with low wages and negative social stigma in the U.S.—leisure gardening symbolizes meaningful and therapeutic activities for many Americans (Robbins and Sharp 2003).

Ignoring the negative social stigma and low social status associated with this immigrant-dominated service sector, Mexican immigrant gardeners do not view their work (and themselves) in a pejorative manner or as something to be ashamed of. In contrast, they view contract gardening as an honest way of making a living to support themselves and their families. Apart from supporting themselves and their families, yard work provides these immigrant workers and petty-entrepreneurs with a direct link to rural Mexico, where they once labored during their youth in agricultural fields (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2010).

Unlike factory workers or assembly workers who perform isolated and **monotonous** job duties and responsibilities where, according to Marx (1994), wage-laborers become alienated from the product of their labor, contract gardeners enjoy the fruits of their labor by transforming nature and enjoying the outcome, as an aesthetic production (Robbins et al. 2001), with a sense of accomplishment and pride. This is not to imply, however, that the Mexican gardener becomes the owner of his product (i.e., the American lawn he services), but mainly enjoys the aesthetic outcome of his labor (see Figure 1.3).

Figure 1.3 American Lawn Illustration



Source: Salomon Huerta, “Untitled” — Green House (2001)

The American lawn has both positive and negative ecological aspects. On the positive side, gardening contributes to soil carbon sequestration; the “mitigation of urban heat effect”,²⁶ enhanced water infiltration; slower storm runoff; holding soil in place in sloping; protection of property values; and increased aesthetic value to property (Milesi et al. 2005; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2009; Robbins et al. 2001; Robbins and Sharp 2003; Robbins and Birkenholtz 2003). On the negative side, the costs include the use and overuse of lawn chemicals hazardous to the environment and humans, which include insecticides, herbicides, pesticides and fertilizers; over use and consumption of water, especially during summer time and in arid areas; emissions from

²⁶ In general terms, this phenomenon refers to an urban area that’s warmer than adjacent rural areas due to the development impacts on urban environments.

gardening equipment, such as leaf blowers, hedge trimmers and lawn mowers; and economic costs associated with lawn care (Ibid.).

Taking these ecological benefits and costs into consideration, contract Mexican gardeners in Los Angeles and beyond play a major role in the (re)production of the American lawn (Huerta 2007; Pisani and Yoskowitz 2005, 2006; Ramirez 2010; Ramirez and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2009; Thornburgh 2006). In doing so, they have allowed for many Americans, especially men, to relieve themselves of traditional household yard duties in order to pursue leisurely and economic endeavors. Like in the case of Latina domestic workers (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994, 2001; Mattingly 1999; Menjivar 1995) and day laborers (Valenzuela 1999, 2001, 2003; Valenzuela et al. 2006), Mexican immigrant gardeners in Los Angeles represent a domestic example of American “outsourcing.” Like the outsourcing of American jobs overseas, U.S. household families and individuals “outsource” their traditional domestic duties (e.g., house cleaning, child rearing, yard work) to an informal immigrant workforce.

Similar to other service sectors in this country, before policy makers, government officials and planners implement policies and programs to assist contract gardeners, individuals in a position of power and influence must first understand the nature of this informal niche, its organization, how it operates and its role in shaping the built environment. Thus, this dissertation not only aims to contribute to the social science literature, but also to these key individuals with the information they need to improve the working conditions of Mexican immigrant workers and petty-entrepreneurs.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

As interdisciplinary researchers, urban planning scholars engage in a diverse range of academic literatures, theoretical frameworks and research methodologies. This includes, among other fields, economics, political science, history, geography, sociology, architecture, anthropology, engineering, urban and regional planning. Following this tradition, this dissertation draws from a wide range of academic literatures: (1) Immigration; (2) Ethnic Entrepreneurship and Labor Market Integration & Disadvantage; (3) Informal Economy; and (4) Social Network Analysis (SNA). By engaging in these academic disciplines, this dissertation aims to contextualize the case of Mexican immigrant gardeners in the informal economy within broader fields of study in a global city like Los Angeles. More specifically, this dissertation aims to better understand how and why a select group of historically disenfranchised immigrants benefits from Los Angeles' contract gardening niche. By doing so, the research study contributes to the social sciences by generating both empirical knowledge about this understudied service sector niche and policy implications for Mexican immigrant gardeners, as well as other informal service sector workers, such as domestic workers and day laborers.

2.1 Immigration

In this immigration section, I focus exclusively on the importance of migrant networks and ethnic niches to better understand the case of Mexican immigrant gardeners and their social networks in Los Angeles' informal economy.

2.1.1 Migrant Networks

The scholarly and popular notion that recent immigrants in the United States dramatically sever ties from the sending countries and represent “marginalized” individuals in receiving countries—best articulated by the Chicago School of Sociology—prevailed throughout most of the 20th Century. Prior to the 1960s, scholars and policy makers commonly viewed immigrants as disconnected “strangers” who promoted social disorder in American cities (Tilly and Brown 1967). Countering this hegemonic paradigm, during the past three decades, immigration scholars have shed light on the dynamic and strong network ties between recent immigrants and settled immigrants in receiving countries (Boyd 1989; Gurak and Caces 1992). Not only do recent immigrants benefit from their interpersonal networks (e.g., kinship, friendship, hometown members) from sending countries (e.g., Mexican villages) throughout the migration journey, they also benefit from these similar networks during the settlement process from those who already established roots in the receiving countries (e.g., U.S. cities) (Fawcett 1989; Leslie 1992).

During the settlement process, recent immigrants draw on their migrant networks to secure jobs, temporary housing, food, loans, social bonds and other services (Baily and Waldinger 1991; Gold 2005; Gurak and Caces 1992). By focusing on interpersonal relations as a key aspect of international migration and the settlement process, immigration scholars and others debunk traditional views of international migration flows. This includes the formerly dominant, neoclassical economics approach that primarily views immigrants as individual actors or rational actors who make an individual choice to abandon their motherland based on wage differentials between sending and receiving countries.

In an excellent summary of the international migration literature, focusing on the migrant network framework vis-à-vis other models, Gold (2005, 257) provides a concise definition of the neoclassical economics approach:

Neoclassical economics depicts wage differentials as determining migration. Its macro formulation sees migration as a consequence of geographic differences in the availability of demand for labor.... The micro neoclassical model understands migration to be determined by atomized, choice-making individuals who go abroad with the expectations of enhanced returns on their labor.

This supply and demand labor approach still prevails in many academic circles, yet has been discredited as the primary theory of international migration (Davis et al. 2002; Light et al. 1993; Waldorf 1994; Wilson 1994; Winters et al. 2001), especially since it does not explain how immigrants secure the financial means and knowledge to immigrate in the first place, along with other non-economic factors that produce international migration, such as family reunification, domestic wars and natural disasters.

In addition to these factors, recruitment efforts by private contractors and bi-national labor agreements also play a role in promoting international migration from developing countries to developed countries. Labor contractors and U.S. government officials played a key role in the U.S. – Mexico sponsored guest worker program, the Bracero Program (1942 – 1964) (Krissman 2005). During the program's duration, private and public sector actors recruited an estimated five million Mexican immigrants to work primarily in agricultural production throughout the U.S. (Boyd 1989; McKenzie and Rappaport 2007). This program also provided legal entry to an estimated 450,000 migrants under a work visa plan. However, while primarily drafted as a temporary guest program, the program's unintended consequences included an increase in Mexican migration to the U.S. According to Krissman (2005, 11), many "former braceros stayed on or returned later without new contracts at the request of their employers."

This is not to imply that immigrants from developing countries, such as Mexico or El Salvador, do not seek better economic opportunities in developed countries, such as the United States or Canada, where immigrants can secure higher paying jobs and benefits. The main point here is that scholars need to pursue other theories and incorporate other frameworks, such as the migrant network framework, that fill the gaps or shortcomings found in neoclassical economics theories.

If the neoclassical economics approach has its limits, what role do migrant networks play in international migration? According to Massey (1999, 43 – 45), migrant networks represent the driving force behind international migration:

Migrant networks are sets of interpersonal ties that connect migrants, and non-migrants in origin and destination areas through ties of kinship, friendship, and shared community origin. They increase the likelihood of international movement and increase the expected net returns to migration. Network connections constitute a form of social capital that people can draw on to gain access to various kinds of financial capital: foreign employment, high wages, and the possibility of accumulating savings and sending remittances.

By challenging the neo-classical economists and their models, Massey (1999) and other scholars (Boyd 1989; Gold 2005; Massey et al. 1987; Waldorf 1996) shed light on the dynamic social relations among recent immigrants from sending communities (e.g., rural Mexico) and

established immigrants from receiving (e.g., U.S. cities) to provide a more complex and comprehensive perspective of international migration.

In short, migrant networks perform several key functions to induce, perpetuate and maintain international migration. This includes the formation of complex, interpersonal ties in time and space between (and within) sending and receiving countries; the reduction of migration costs and risks; the role of pioneers (i.e., original immigrants from local community); the transfer of social and financial capital (e.g., gifts, loans, remittances); the facilitation of labor-market participation (which may be either negative or positive); protection from hostile environments (e.g., institutional racism); encapsulation from mainstream society (i.e., ethnic enclaves and niches); the maintenance and increase of a supply of immigrants; the exchange of vital information; and the valuable support to facilitate the settlement process (e.g., jobs, housing, social services, counterfeit Social Security cards) (Gold 2005; Gurak and Caces 1992; Massey et al. 1987). In this dissertation, I establish how Mexican immigrant gardeners benefit from their migrant ties to both survive and thrive in Los Angeles' informal economy.

The migrant network concept provides an important theoretical framework to better understand how Mexican immigrants enter this service sector niche. It also contextualizes how they organize themselves, survive and, for some, thrive in the informal economy. Based on my research, I found that many recent immigrants originally secured work as paid gardeners through their migrant networks, such as a family member or hometown associate (e.g., *rancho*).²⁷ During most of the 20th Century, Japanese immigrants and their descendants dominated the contract gardening in Los Angeles and California (Hirahara 2000; Jiobu 1998; Tengan 2006; Tsuchida 1984; Tsukashima 1995/1996). Currently, Mexican immigrants have replaced Japanese gardeners to become the hegemonic ethnic group in this informal niche (Cameron 2000; Huerta 2007; Ramirez 2010; Ramirez and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2009; Tsukashima 2000, 2007).

2.1.2 Immigrant / Ethnic Niches

Similar to the migrant networks framework, theories of immigrant / ethnic niches in the U.S. economy dispel the myth perpetuated by neoclassical economists predicated on supply and demand models to explain immigrant employment patterns in this country. An immigrant or ethnic niche corresponds to the concentration (or saturation) of a particular ethnic group in a specific occupation (Baily and Waldinger 1991; Waldinger 1994, 2003). This phenomenon cannot be reduced to neoclassical economics where workers, as isolated individuals, seek employment opportunities based on their employment history, educational attainment level and specialized training. While economic niches also obey supply and demand laws, they also include the role of strong social networks, institutional racism, political opportunities and other factors.

According to Waldinger (1994, 27), migrant networks play a key role in the creation of ethnic niches:

The social structures of migration facilitate job search, hiring, recruitment, and training because they fulfill the needs of workers and employers alike, furnishing reliable, low-cost information about the characteristics of jobs and workers, while also providing a set of controls that increase the probability that firms and / or

²⁷ *Rancho* is a Spanish word for a small, rural village in Mexico and beyond. This term usually differentiates Mexicans immigrants from those who migrate from the countryside, working in the agriculture sector, to those who migrate from the city, working in non-agricultural sectors.

workers will use the skills in which they have invested. Once in place, ethnic hiring networks are self-reproducing since each new employee recruits others from his or her own group.

The self-reproducing process of ethnic niches takes place over time and it remains an informal and internal process within the workplace. For example, an employee who has earned a good reputation as a good and reliable worker will recommend to his or her supervisor a relative or family friend from the same hometown region to fill a job opening. In return, the hired worker more often than not feels a sense of obligation to perform well on the job. Over time, the hired worker will likely do the same for a family friend or hometown associate, especially given that the workers maintain strong, co-ethnic bonds.

Moreover, focusing on the geographic concentration of immigrants in specific destinations throughout the U.S., some scholars refer to the “channelization of migration” as the concentration of recent arrivals in particular occupations (Gutierrez 1984; Gurak and Caces 1992). Gurak and Caces (1992, 157) argue that migrant networks facilitate the concentration of immigrants in particular communities and occupations in the receiving country: “The clustering of migrants from particular origin regions in particular destination cities and neighborhoods and in particular occupations, all attest to the channeling and selectivity mechanism of migrant networks.”

This is not a new story, however. Throughout American history, immigrants have concentrated in particular neighborhoods and occupational niches. In the early 1900s, immigrants (and ethnic groups) from Europe dominated particular occupational positions in New York City, such as Irish (as police officers and fire fighters), Italian (as sanitation workers) Jewish immigrants (as teachers) (Waldinger 1994). This is also the case for racial minorities, such as African Americans, in public service. Waldinger (2003, 352) finds that African Americans successfully carved a niche for themselves working for the government: “In 1990, one out of every four employed blacks held a government job; close to half of the country’s African American civil servants worked on municipal payrolls.” This is very important given the many obstacles that African Americans continue to experience in the American labor market, especially during times of national economic trends.

Although recent immigrants enjoy employment opportunities in this country primarily due to their migrant networks, too often, these jobs represent low social status positions with negative stigmas (Waldinger 2003). According to Massey (1999, 46), “once immigrants have been recruited into particular occupations in significant numbers, those jobs become culturally labeled as ‘immigrant jobs’ and native workers are reluctant to fill them, reinforcing the structural demand for immigrants.”

While American citizens typically reject “immigrant jobs” because of low wages and low social status associated with immigrant-dominated jobs (Alvarez 1990; Gold 2005; Massey 1999; Waldinger 2003), immigrants flock to these jobs due to economic necessity and familial obligations, such as supporting their families in the U.S. and sending remittances (e.g., money) to family members in their communities of origin. In the case of contract gardeners, based on my research, while many workers receive low wages for physically demanding work, a subset of contract gardeners (i.e., *patrones*) enjoy upward mobility opportunities, where many of them can afford to purchase a home and send their kids to college.

There’s a gap in the immigration literature, however, due to the lack of research on segmented ethnic niches (immigrant workers and owners of small enterprises), such as the case

of Mexican immigrant gardeners in this informal service sector. While scholars have traditionally focused on the low socio-economic status of Mexican immigrants from the countryside and the channelization (Gutierrez 1984; Gurak and Caces 1992) of these immigrants into dead-end jobs (i.e., “immigrant jobs”), such as domestic workers, day laborers and janitors, few have researched how some immigrants manage to succeed in this country as owner-operators of small enterprises. This dissertation aims, in part, to fill this research gap and debunk the popular myth of contract gardening simply as an “immigrant job,” as another example of low-paying, dead-end jobs.

2.2 Ethnic Entrepreneurship and Labor Market Integration

During the past four decades, scholars have developed various theories and frameworks to better understand how recent immigrants and other ethnic minorities (e.g., African Americans) integrate into the U.S. labor market. This includes the differentiation among various ethnic groups vis-à-vis manual labor and entrepreneurial activities. Challenging the framework of straight-line assimilation that prevailed throughout most of the 20th Century, where recent immigrants entering the city first experience racism, while eventually prevailing over time as they adopt the norms and customs of the dominant culture, scholars have proposed competing models to refute this simplistic claim. The competing theories and frameworks include: (A) Middleman Minorities; (B) Dual Labor Market; and (C) Ethnic Enclaves and Ethnic Economies.

2.2.1 Middleman Minorities

Advanced by Bonacich (1973, 1993), the “middleman minorities” framework focuses on immigrants who traditionally engage in complex economic activities in the host society as “middleman traders.” Concentrated in particular sectors, such as trade and commerce (Light 2005), these entrepreneurs primarily serve as middlemen between the dominant societies (or elite classes) and the general public. More specifically, these middlemen entrepreneurs, according to Bonacich (1973; 1993), function as buffers for the dominant existing order, playing a key role in the racial and class division between producers and consumers, employers and employees, owners and renters, elite and masses.

While these middlemen play a key role in maintaining the status quo, as sojourners, they face hostility not only from the dominant class but also from the public. In this hostile environment, these middlemen entrepreneurs maintain the cultural and social norms from their ethnic or religious backgrounds, promoting group solidarity and mutual support (Aldrich and Waldinger 1990; Light 1979). As an ethnically defined group, they depend on each other for their business ventures, such as capital investments, low-interest loans, rotating credit associations, information, training and jobs (Bonacich 1973). They also rely on unpaid family labor. These attributes, social norms and economic practices afford these minorities a competitive edge against native workers and entrepreneurs in the labor market (Light 1979). Historical examples of successful middleman minorities throughout the 20th Century include Jewish immigrants (New York), Japanese immigrants (San Francisco) and Korean immigrants (Los Angeles).

2.2.2 Dual Labor Markets

Focusing on unequal labor market outcomes, some economists developed alternative approaches to mainstream economics, such as the dual labor market, to help explain the social and economic disparities of immigrants and racial minorities. By doing so, the scholars conceptualized a segmented labor market consisting of primary and secondary firms (Tolbert et al. 1980). While the primary labor market consists of large, monopolistic firms, the secondary labor market consists of small, competitive firms (also referred to as periphery firms) (Granovetter 1984; Tolbert et al. 1980). Moreover, according to Wilson and Portes (1980), primary labor firms are geographically dispersed, vertically and horizontally integrated, possess large cash reserves and advertisement budgets, maintain a stable workforce with good pay, ample training and upward mobility opportunities. Secondary firms, on the other hand, are small and subjected to constraints of competition, independent, possess low cash reserves and maintain a workforce with low pay and no upward mobility opportunities. Wilson and Portes further argue that low-wage immigrant labor is destined for the latter market, which helps explain their lack of upward mobility opportunities.

2.2.3 Ethnic Enclaves

In addition, other scholars, particularly sociologists and immigration researchers, provide yet another framework to help explain the role and status of immigrants in the labor market: the ethnic enclave. In their article, Wilson and Portes (1980) introduce the concept of the ethnic enclave to account for immigrants who operate outside of the mainstream labor market (both primary and secondary). This includes ethnic entrepreneurs and their co-ethnic workers. Focusing on Cuban immigrants and citizens in Miami, Wilson and Portes identify this ethnic group as a key example of immigrants who successfully created self-enclosed, inner-city communities with viable enterprises for the benefit of the Cuban American community, including co-ethnic entrepreneurs and workers.

Led by the influential sociologist, Alejandro Portes, additional studies in Miami and beyond (Portes and Jensen 1987, 1989, 1992; Wilson and Martin 1982) refined the ethnic enclave concept through a series of studies based both on fieldwork, surveys and statistical analysis of census data. According to Portes and Jensen (1992, 930), an ethnic enclave refers to “a concentration of ethnic firms in physical space—generally a metropolitan area—that employ a significant proportion of workers from the same community.”

As part of this definition, Portes and associates argue that ethnic enclaves²⁸ provide positive economic benefits for Cuban immigrants in terms of wages, greater opportunities for self-employment and foundation for ethnic success in host country. In addition to economic benefits, according to Portes and associates, ethnic enclaves serve as positive entry points for immigrants who lack English skills, work experience and, overall, experience discrimination in a hostile, anti-immigrant environment.

Challenging the positive findings of ethnic enclaves, numerous scholars question the claim of ethnic enclaves as havens for recent immigrants and racial minorities, particularly in the case of workers (Bates and Dunham 1993; Bonacich 1988; Boyd 1989; Guarnizo 1997; Sanders and Nee 1987a, 1987b, 1992, 1996; Waldinger 1993b). More specifically, in a series of highly critical articles, Sanders and Nee argue that while ethnic entrepreneurs may benefit financially in

²⁸ Also referred to as the ethnic enclave hypothesis.

ethnic enclaves compared to their participation in the mainstream labor market, co-ethnic workers do not benefit equally. According to Sanders and Nee, ethnic workers commonly receive lower wages while employed in an ethnic enclave compared to their counterparts in the mainstream labor market.

To counter this critique, Portes and associates (Portes and Jensen 1987, 1989, 1992) argue that Sanders and Nee misinterpret the ethnic enclave hypothesis by focusing on place of residence instead of place of work. In their original concept, Portes and associates claim that studies that focus outside of a spatially concentrated ethnic enclave (i.e., place of work) fail to understand the model in the first place and, therefore, the critics' results do not apply to their hypothesis. Despite this defense, other scholars find similar results to substantiate Sanders and Nee's critique regarding the issue of low wages for workers in an ethnic enclave. Focusing on a Chinese ethnic enclave in New York City, for instance, Zhou (1989) finds that female workers in particular receive negative returns for wages compared to male workers.

Apart from the issue of poor wages, some scholars have also shed light on the "other side" or "dark side" of ethnic enclaves in particular and ethnic economies in general. Guarnizo (1997, 19) argues that "immigrant entrepreneurship is part and parcel of a capitalist economy that inherently reproduces social unevenness." Also, Boyd (1989) claims that workers experience exploitation in ethnic enclaves in the form of low wages and so-called menial work. In addition, Waldinger (1993) claims that ethnic entrepreneurs relate to their workers in a form of paternalism and do not provide internal training structures to promote upward mobility.

Moreover, some scholars have criticized the ethnic enclave hypothesis for being too narrow, since it mainly applies to particular ethnic groups, such as Cubans, Chinese, Koreans and Jews in the United States, who have successfully established businesses within geographically defined areas in this country. The case of "Chinatowns" in large cities like Los Angeles, San Francisco and New York, where Chinese immigrants and Chinese Americans work and own ethnic businesses exemplify ethnic enclaves commonly known to most Americans.

This framework, however, excludes other immigrants and racial minorities who lack geographically concentrated places of ethnic-owned businesses. For example, Mexican immigrants and Salvadorian immigrants are excluded from this limited definition since neither group has established similar concentrated businesses compared to Cuban immigrants in Miami and Asian immigrants in New York or San Francisco. In the social science literature and popular press, Mexican immigrants, with few exceptions, typically represent manual laborers, lacking entrepreneurial activities (Alvarez 1990; Rajzman 2001; Rajzman and Tienda 2000; Valenzuela 2001).

2.2.4 Ethnic Economies

To address this issue directly, some scholars argue for a broader concept, such as the ethnic economy or ethnic economies, which encompass all immigrant groups and their economic activities, as workers and petty-entrepreneurs, within and outside the mainstream labor market. A leading proponent of the ethnic economies, Light (2004, 389) defines this broader framework as follows: "Ethnic economies consist of business firms owned and managed by immigrants as well as the co-ethnics they employ for wages and salaries."

By considering Light's more encompassing framework in lieu of the ethnic enclave model, this dissertation examines the contract gardening niche as a viable case of ethnic entrepreneurship for a select group of immigrants who traditionally lack human capital and

financial capital in this country. In addition, this dissertation analyzes the plight of the workers and their opportunities (or lack thereof) to start their own small businesses as a means of upward mobility denied to them in the mainstream labor market.

2.2.5 Labor Market Disadvantage and Upward Mobility

In an attempt to explain the high rates of immigrant entrepreneurship or self-employment²⁹ among particular groups in the U.S., scholars who conduct research on ethnic entrepreneurship, primarily sociologists, argue that labor market disadvantages or “blocked mobility” factors play a major role in understanding this phenomena from a structural perspective (Bonacich 1988; Light 1979, 2004, 2005; Raijman and Tienda 2000; Waldinger et al. 1985; Yoon 1995; Zhou 2004). Immigrants from the early 1900s, who experienced obstacles in the formal labor market, such as Jewish, Chinese, Italian and Greek immigrants, sought self-employment as an avenue for upward mobility (Aldrich and Waldinger 1990; Waldinger et al. 1985). Moreover, given the growth of small businesses since the early 1970s (Evans and Leighton 1989; Granovetter 1984), many immigrants currently continue to seek self-employment as a viable route for upward mobility opportunities (Waldinger et al. 1985).

Instead of focusing exclusively on individual characteristics of particular immigrant groups (e.g., dynamic, innovative, risk-taking) to explain high rates of immigrant self-employment (Bates 1997; Waldinger et al. 1985), some scholars argue that “blocked mobility” factors in the formal labor market, such as work-place discrimination, high level of English fluency, recognized educational degrees, transferable work experience and work skills, prevent many recent arrivals from experiencing upward mobility as salaried employees or wage-workers (Bonacich 2000; Kim et al. 1989; Light 1979, 2004, 2005; Waldinger et al. 1985; Yoon 1995; Zhou 2004). In their study of three Asian immigrant groups in the U.S.—Chinese, Koreans and Asian Indians—Kim et al. (1989, 74) provide an excellent synopsis of the labor market obstacles immigrants experience in an unfamiliar American social system:

... In general, they also have serious language problems, encounter various forms of culture shock, and experience subtle and sometimes not so subtle forms of discrimination. Further, American employers generally do not recognize the immigrants’ education and work experience accumulated in their native countries, unless the immigrants are additionally trained in the United States. Consequently, immigrants are forced to accept jobs at the bottom of the occupational hierarchy.

Following in the rich tradition of sociological research on ethnic entrepreneurship since the 1960s, Kim and colleagues also argue that these labor market barriers and limited job opportunities provide an incentive for some immigrants to pursue self-employment as an alternative path to social mobility. However, according to the authors (Ibid., 74 – 75), prior to pursuing self-employment, immigrants need to consider the “comparative value of self-employment versus the opportunity of being an employee.” Moreover, following in the groundbreaking scholarship of the sociologist Ivan Light, the authors also stipulate that successful immigrants require the necessary class and cultural resources³⁰ to enter self-employment. According to Light (1979, 40), while class resources include human capital (e.g.,

²⁹ I also use the term “petty-entrepreneur” throughout the dissertation.

³⁰ Sociologists and other scholars also refer to “cultural resources” as “social resources.”

education, work experience), financial capital,³¹ cultural resources include “information, skills, values, attitudes, motivations, institutions, and contact networks.”³²

In contrast, while not completely dismissing the aforementioned labor market disadvantages or “blocked mobility” factors that immigrants experience, Bates (1995, 1997) and colleagues (Bates and Dunham 1993) strongly argue that the high rates of immigrant entrepreneurship or self-employment among particular groups in this country can be attributed to two major factors or characteristics: high human capital and high financial capital. This includes both self-employment entry and success rates.

In his classic book on race, self-employment and upward mobility, Bates (1997) conducts a comprehensive, quantitative-based study on Asian immigrants and African Americans, using data from the Characteristics of Business Owners (CBO) survey, focusing on over 25,000 firms that started operation from 1979 to 1987.³³ Given the unpredictable nature of self-employment in terms of success and failures rates in the U.S., the author posits that contemporary immigrant groups, such as Chinese and Koreans, who arrive in this country with college degrees from their home countries and access to financial capital (e.g., household’s financial worth or wealth) have higher rates of self-employment entry compared to other immigrant groups or ethnic minorities (e.g., African Americans) who lack these same valuable resources.

In short, as an economist, Bates (1995, 15) does not examine cultural factors, but argues that human capital and financial capital are sufficient to explain self-employment outcomes:

Human and financial capital are properly thought of as prerequisites for success in most lines of self-employment: for persons lacking the requisite skills and capital, self-employment rates are low; for those lacking appropriate human and financial capital who nonetheless start a small business, business failure and self-employment rates are high.... Thus, the limited ability to compete that typifies weak small business combines with entry barriers to keep many potential entrepreneurs on the sidelines: low-human capital and financial-capital endowments translate into low self-employment rates.

2.3 Informal Economy

Although it has been almost four decades since Hart (1973) first introduced the term “informal sector,”³⁴ this term remains a contradictory and contentious concept (Bromley 1978; Peattie 1980, 1987). We can, for instance, find numerous and divergent terms commonly used in the social science literature and popular culture referring to the informal sector. This includes the following terms: the urban informal sector, the informal economy, unregulated economy, underground economy, irregular economy, shadow economy, dark economy, hidden sector,

³¹ Aldrich and Waldinger (1990, 127) provide a succinct elaboration of Light’s definition of class resources: “Light defined class resources as private property in the means of production and distribution, human capital, money to invest, and bourgeois values, attitudes, knowledge, skills transmitted intergenerationally.”

³² Examples of cultural resources found among many immigrant groups, such as Chinese and Koreans, which include family networks and Rotating Credit Associations (RCAs) (Aldrich and Waldinger 1990; Bates 1997). (See Section 5.3.2 of this dissertation for a brief description of RCAs.)

³³ This CBO survey was compiled by the US. Bureau of the Census in 1992.

³⁴ While most scholars cite this classic 1973 article, where Hart first introduced the term “informal sector,” Portes and Schauffler (1993) argue that the author originally articulated his findings on the dichotomous “formal” and “informal” income opportunities he found in Accra, Ghana, at a 1971 conference held at the University of Sussex.

black market, off-the-books market, invisible sector and cash economy (Bromley 1978; Flaming et al. 2005; Hart 1973; Peattie 1980, 1987).

Based on this short list, we can clearly see some ominous words, like “shadow” and “dark,” where we can logically assume illegal activity, such as the illegal sale of drugs and prostitution. There’s also a racist association linked to some of these terms, such as the words “black” and “dark” to connote illegal behavior, which can be directly associated with African Americans in U.S. ghettos. By rejecting these ominous terms and avoiding confusion over divergent terminologies, like Sassen (1994) and other scholars, I use the term “informal economy” as an interconnected and integral part of the formal economy. According to Sassen (Ibid., 2289), the informal economy cannot be separated from the state’s formal regulatory apparatus:

As I shall employ the term, the ‘informal economy’ refers to those income-generating activities occurring outside the state’s regulatory framework that have analogs within that framework. The scope and character of the informal economy are defined by the very regulatory framework it evades. For this reason, the informal economy can only be understood in terms of its relationship to the formal economy—that is, regulated income-generating activity.

Additionally, Castells and Portes (1989) provide an oft-cited definition, emphasizing the key characteristics of the informal economy. “The informal economy,” Castells and Portes (Ibid, 12) state, “[is] a process of income-generation characterized by one central feature: *it is unregulated by the institutions of society, in a legal and social environment in which similar activities are regulated* [authors’ italics].”

In general terms, the informal economy encompasses companies and individuals operating in an unregulated economy, where earned income (often in cash and personal checks) goes unreported or underreported to the government. In addition, these informal companies and individuals usually evade taxes, ignore work-site regulations, violate minimum wage laws, disregard occupational health / safety standards and ignore zoning rules. The garment industry represents a well documented sector, where scholars and worker / immigrant advocates argue that informal workers—mostly immigrant and female in major cities like New York and Los Angeles—commonly toil in sweatshops, engage in industrial homework, receive piece-rate earnings below the minimum wage, experience worksite exploitation abuse and humiliation (Fernandez-Kelly and Garcia 1994; Rajiman 2001; Sassen 1994; Zolniski 1994).

While the early literature on the informal economy predominantly focused on developing countries throughout Africa and Latin America (Bromley 1978; Hart 1973; Maloney 2003, 2004; Peattie 1980, 1987), during the past two decades, numerous scholars have conducted extensive research on the informal economy in advanced countries (Portes et al. 1989; Sassen-Koob 1989; Stepick 1989; Zolniski 1994). Debunking the once dominant notion that the informal economy will dramatically decline or disappear in highly developed countries (Sassen 1994), contemporary scholars have shed light and uncovered the ongoing existence and growth of informal economic activities in the U.S. and other Western countries (Portes et al. 1989; Sassen 1984; Sassen-Koob 1989; Stepick 1989; Zolniski 1994).

Major research has also been conducted on key sectors in the informal economy, establishing clear and symbiotic links between the informal and formal economies, such as construction, garment, transportation, footwear, electronics, street vending and retail (Portes and Sassen-Koob 1987; Sassen 1994; Stepick 1989; Zolniski 1994). The dichotomous notion that

the informal economy and formal economy represent two separate and unrelated economies has been clearly refuted by recent scholarship (Bromley, 1978; Maloney 2003, 2004; Peattie 1980, 1987; Sanyal 1991; Sassen 1994). According to Sanyal (1991, 40), the formal economy and informal economy represent connected and interdependent segments:

The initial view of the urban economy, that it comprised two separate segments, the formal and informal, with diametrically opposed attributes, is not correct. The two segments are neither disconnected nor distinctively different in all their characteristics. For example, UIS [urban informal sector] firms often serve as subcontractors to firms in the formal economy.

Scholars who study the informal economy also make a clear distinction between licit and illicit economic activities occurring within the unregulated economy (Portes et al. 1989). For example, there's a major difference between a street vendor who sells corn on the cob (i.e., licit goods) on the corner and a drug dealer who sells crack cocaine (i.e., illicit goods) on the same corner. Although both actors engage in informal economic activities outside of the state's regulatory framework, where they generate unreported income, we can clearly distinguish between the type of the goods (i.e., licit foods versus illicit drugs) and the legal consequences for individual actors, if caught by the authorities. Thus, while the drug dealer may spend many years in prison for his or her crime, the street vendor may have his or her goods confiscated and forced to pay a fine. Like street vendors who sell corn on the cob on the corner, paid Mexican gardeners engage in the informal arena of licit goods and services.

As noted above, the informal economy does not offer the same legal protections that most workers enjoy in the formal sector, such as minimum wage guarantees, occupational safety regulations and prohibition of child labor. Nevertheless, for those who lack legal status in this country or viable employment opportunities due to limited English skills or low human capital, the informal economy provides a viable means of survival. This is true not just for many immigrants, racial minorities and members of the working-class, but also those who aspire to be entrepreneurs yet lack the necessary resource to do so in the formal economy.

By focusing on Mexican immigrant gardeners in Los Angeles' domestic household service sector, this dissertation contributes to the informal economy literature by examining how these immigrants utilize their social networks and engage in sophisticated economic activities in order to survive and, in some cases, succeed in a highly competitive and hostile economy. More specifically, this dissertation focuses on how and why many Mexican immigrants are relegated to hired worker status in this informal niche, while some become owner-operators of these small-scale enterprises.

2.4 Social Network Analysis (SNA)

During the past four decades, a growing number of scholars who engage in social network analysis (SNA) research have conducted important research on relational ties among actors and organizations within social structures, challenging individualistic-oriented approaches in the social sciences. These social network researchers follow in the groundbreaking work of Moreno (1934) in the early 1900s, the Manchester School (British social anthropologists) of the mid-1900s (Barnes 1954; Bott 1971 [1957]; Mitchell 1969) and the Harvard structuralists of the late 1960s and early 1970s (Granovetter 1973; Wellman 1983; White et al. 1976). According to Wellman and Wasserman (2000, 351), SNA represents "the study of social structure and its

effects.” While it has become recognized within the social sciences over the years, however, SNA mostly recently consists of a highly quantitative field of analysis, thanks to the Harvard structuralists, with a strong emphasis on mathematical language and statistical techniques, making it inaccessible to many scholars outside of this field (Barnes and Harary 1983; Boissevain 1979; Scott 2000). Instead of centering on SNA’s abstract mathematical formulations and computations, this dissertation focuses primarily on its general concepts and network-oriented approaches with an emphasis on key frameworks, as noted above, such as the social network concept, the egocentric approach and the strength of weak ties thesis.

2.4.1 Social Network Concept

The basic idea of a social network consists of a structure comprised of nodes³⁵ (individuals or agents) and lines³⁶ (representing relationships or ties) (Hanneman and Riddle 2005; Scott 1988). The focus here is not on the node or individual actors and their attributes, as commonly found in economics and other academic disciplines, but on the relations among nodes or individual actors (Hanneman and Riddle 2005). “A core theoretical problem in network analysis” Knoke and Yang (2008, 8) argue, “is to explain the occurrence of different structures and, at the actor level, to account for the variation in the linkages to other actors.”

Researchers commonly depict a network concept in diagram form,³⁷ providing a visual representation of the structure and relationships among the nodes. Hanneman and Riddle (2005) conducted research to illustrate the social networks on friendship ties. In this case, the researchers collected data “about friendship ties by asking each member of the group (privately and confidentially) who they regarded as ‘close friends’ from a list containing each of the other members of the group. Each of the four people could choose none to all three of the others as ‘close friends.’”

The researchers used arrows to demonstrate the relationships among four actors. When the arrow points in both directions, this indicates a reciprocal relationship where the individual actors selected each other as ‘close friends.’ For instance, when actor X selects actor Y as a close friend, yet Y does not select X, this relationship is indicated by a single-headed arrow or directed tie. As researchers gather the data on all four actors, we can clearly see in a graph form how the connections, the direction of the connections and lack of direct connections among a set of actors provides us with valuable information to better understand the social structure of a particular social group. This basic graph can be applied to a workplace or local legislative body, where both scholars and practitioners can identify the relationships among individuals to acquire a better understanding of organizational structures, decision making processes and mutual interests.

This example, however, only demonstrates how researchers aim to understand social structures and relations on a small-scale basis. For large-scale studies, this type of graph and analysis will not suffice, since researchers need to organize and analyze large data sets not suitable for visual representation. To handle large-scale data sets, SNA researchers use matrices.

³⁵ More specifically, apart from individual actors and agents, nodes can represent companies, corporate boards, associations, and countries (Borgatti and Foster 2003; Wellman 1983).

³⁶ In a social network, nodes can be connected or not connected, where a researcher is able to determine the meaning of the social structure and relationships or lack thereof.

³⁷ These graphs are also referred to as sociograms. In 1934, Jacob Moreno pioneered the technique of a “two-dimensional diagram for displaying the relations among actors in a bounded social system, for example, an elementary school classroom” (Knoke and Yang 2008, 45).

“An algebraic representation of network relations [i.e., matrices],” Knoke and Yang (2008, 46) posit, “can express all the quantitative information embedded in a sociogram, while enabling a much larger set of analysis than possible with the corresponding visual representation.” More over, the use of computers has facilitated the use of matrices by researchers to examine and reveal key underlying features of complex social structures (Wellman 1988).

Network scholars analyze social structures both at the local (ego-centric or personal networks) and global level (or whole networks) (Knoke and Yang 2008; Knox, Savage and Harvey 2006; Wellman 2008). While Knoke and Yang (2008) deconstruct the local level into egocentric networks, dyadic networks and triadic relations, the most commonly cited levels in the literature include the egocentric networks and whole networks.

2.4.2 Egocentric Approach

The egocentric approach—advanced by Mitchell (1969) and the Manchester social anthropologists of the 1950s through 1960s (see below)—focuses on individual actors (egos) to investigate partial social networks.³⁸ “In this kind of study,” Scott (2000, 31) posits, “individuals are identified and their direct [alters] and indirect links to others are traced. Such research generates a collection of ego-centered networks, one for each of the individuals studied.” Classic studies based on egocentric network approaches include Bott’s (1971 [1954]) study of household relations (husband and wife) and patterns of conjugal roles in London and Barnes’ (1954) research of a Norwegian island parish (Bremnes), where Barnes first introduced the concept of social networks as an analytic and rigorous approach to the study of social structure (Mitchell 1969; Scott 2000).

In the case of networks and social support, egocentric approaches provide researchers with valuable information to better understand individual behavior and how individuals relate to each other. “The ego-centered approach,” Wellman and Wasserman (2000, 352) state, “leads to viewing community as a personal community: an individual’s (or a household’s) set of informal interpersonal ties. It analyzes relationships such as kinship, weak ties, frequent contact, and providing emotional or instrumental aid.”

In her classic study of poor Blacks in a segregated American community, Stack (1974), challenges historical stereotypes of Black families as dysfunctional by demonstrating how community members (women in particular) effectively access their social ties (e.g., kinship, friendships, neighbors) for daily survival. By gaining trust among her informants and relying on key individuals through a three-year long ethnographic study, Stack (*Ibid.*, 124) demonstrates how low-income community members develop complex social relations and lifelong bonds, such as exchanging goods (food, clothes), information (advice, leads for housing options) and support services (child care, rides to hospital), to deal with the “socioeconomic conditions of poverty.”

2.4.3 Strength of Weak Ties Thesis

In his classic article on social networks, Granovetter (1973, 1378) argues for the importance of weak ties (i.e., social connections outside cohesive groups) “as indispensable to individuals’ opportunities and to their integration into communities.” Earlier scholars primarily argued in favor of strong ties (i.e., social connections within cohesive groups) as a means for individuals and groups to secure employment, housing and other basic necessities. For instance,

³⁸ In this dissertation, the *patrones* represent the egos.

the popular idiom, “It's not what you know, it's who you know,” remains a powerful idea and practice in the academy, business community and public sector when it comes to individuals or groups to secure faculty positions, private employment and government contracts. While not dismissing the relevance of strong ties altogether, Granovetter (Ibid., 1360) highlights the key role weak ties play outside the confines of cohesive groups and relationships:

Most network models deal, implicitly, with strong ties, thus continuing their applicability to small, well defined groups. Emphasis on weak ties lends itself to discussion between groups and to analysis of segments of social structures not easily defined in terms of primary groups.

While Granovetter demonstrates that strong ties (e.g., close friends) can be beneficial to individuals of a particular community, they can also be counterproductive, since these individuals tend to isolate themselves and form cliques whereby preventing effective community action outside of their group. Citing Herbert Gans' (1962) seminal book *The Urban Villagers*, about Italian Americans in Boston's West End, Granovetter asserts that a cohesive, working class ethnic group failed to defeat the federal government's urban renewal efforts due to their lack of formal organizations and effective weak ties with influential outside groups.

In contrast, the author argues that weak ties (e.g., acquaintances) provide positive bridges between different social groups, especially for the less advantaged, closed groups. Unlike the case of Boston's West End, Granovetter makes reference to the case of Charlestown, also part of Gans' research study, where a working-class community with a rich history of organizational activity successfully defeated the government's urban renewal efforts by effectively accessing their weak ties. The weak ties included outside groups and individuals with the necessary financial and political capital to make a positive impact in Charlestown.

In comparing these two cases, Granovetter provides a strong case in favor of weak ties, where disadvantaged community members reaped positive benefits from building bridges and seeking assistance from outside individuals and groups. While individual community members need to rely on their strong ties to organize themselves, Granovetter makes an excellent argument about the need for disenfranchised community members to go beyond their communities by creating and tapping into their weak ties to create positive change.

To conclude, by accessing the social network analysis literature, along with the other social science literatures, this dissertation examines the case of Mexican immigrant gardeners as dynamic, interconnected members of both recent and settled immigrant communities in Los Angeles and throughout the U.S. As social actors with agency, contract gardeners—both as *trabajadores* and *patrones*—represent important subjects of study in Los Angeles' vibrant ethnic economies. Thus, not only do the above literatures inform this dissertation in important ways, but also, the case of Mexican immigrant gardeners contributes to the social science literature in the areas of immigration, ethnic economies, informality and social network analysis. Moreover, the case of Mexican immigrant gardeners provides a lens into how immigrants from low socio-economic backgrounds successful organize and govern themselves, without the state intervention, to both survive and thrive in Los Angeles' informal economy.

Chapter 3. Research Design and Methodology

Why pursue a single-case study for this dissertation? How will I generalize to a broader population based on the findings of a single-case study? Should I conduct a comparative study of Mexican immigrant gardeners to domestic workers or day laborers? How about a comparative study of Japanese contract gardeners from the early 20th Century to Mexican contract gardeners of the present? Should I explore Mexican immigrant gardeners in more than one research site, such as comparing Mexican immigrant gardeners in Los Angeles to those in Menlo Park, California? While these questions appear legitimate on the surface, the unifying assumptions here center on questions of representativeness, generalizability and validity of the single-case study in one specific site for a dissertation. The following section (3.1) examines these assumptions in more detail.

3.1 The Rationale for the Single-Case Study

After conducting extensive research on case study research design and methodology (Creswell 2009; Flyvbjerg 2006; Small 2008, 2009; Weiss 1994; Yin 1998, 2003), I decided on this qualitative research strategy, especially given that I'm focusing on an informal service sector outside the purview of governmental census agencies and, consequently, unknown universe (Cornelius 1982; Hondagnue-Sotelo 2001): Mexican immigrant workers and petty-entrepreneurs in the informal economy. For instance, how can researchers conduct conventional, random sampling procedures to generalize about this particular group if we lack official census data and lack access to a known population or universe to select from?³⁹

As a highly regarded expert on case study research, Yin (2003, 45) provides the following five rationales for the single-case study approach:

Overall, the single-case study is eminently justifiable under certain conditions—when cases represent (a) a critical test of existing theory, (b) a rare or unique circumstance, or (c) a representative or typical case or when the case serves a (d) revelatory or (e) longitudinal purpose.

Of these rationales, this dissertation meets three of the five noted conditions: (1) a critical test of existing theory; (2) a rare or unique circumstance; and (3) revelatory purpose.

First, as a critical test of existing theory, this dissertation challenges the ethnic enclave economy framework (Portes and Jensen 1987, 1989, 1992; Wilson and Martin 1982; Wilson and Portes 1980), where scholars neglect Mexican immigrants, as entrepreneurs, in a concept that describes the concentration of ethnic businesses (sellers and buyers) and co-ethnic workers in a particular spatial place. The ethnic enclave economy, according to the prominent sociologist Alejandro Portes and colleagues, has been mainly applied to Cubans, Chinese, Koreans and Jewish people in the United States. The best visible examples can be seen in the case of Cuban Americans in Miami and Chinese Americans throughout major U.S. cities in the case of Chinatowns.

By neglecting Mexican immigrants in the ethnic enclave economy framework, as well as with other ethnic entrepreneurial approaches, such as the “middleman minorities” framework (Bonacich 1973, 1993), scholars have minimized the entrepreneurial activities and contributions

³⁹ See Cornelius (1982) for recommendations on effective research methodologies for scholars who study disenfranchised communities, such as undocumented immigrants in this country.

of the largest immigrant group in this country: Mexican immigrants. According to Raijman (2001, 1), Mexican immigrants in the U.S. have been “understudied as a field of ethnic entrepreneurship.” Instead, this group has traditionally been portrayed both in the academic literature and popular press as a homogenous group of manual laborers who occupy “immigrant jobs” (Alvarez 1990; Massey 1999; Waldinger 2003). These “immigrant jobs” mainly consist of low-wage, dead-end jobs associated with low social status and negative stigmas, where many U.S. citizens disregard these occupations as viable employment options due largely to the overwhelming presence of poor immigrant workers (Ibid.). For example, the following occupations typically represent “immigrant jobs” mainly occupied by Mexican immigrants and other poor immigrant groups in this country, such as Central Americans: farm workers, dishwashers, busboys, housecleaners, meat packers, dairy workers, garment workers and day laborers.

Secondly, this dissertation represents a rare or unique circumstance. “In case studies,” according to Small (2009, 18), “rare situations are often precisely what the researcher wants.” In the case of Mexican immigrant gardeners, we have a group of individuals who lack financial capital and human capital—two key characteristics for successful business entry and success in the U.S. (Bates 1995; Bates and Dunham 1993)—and occupy an immigrant-dominated niche, yet, some of these immigrants manage to become successful petty-entrepreneurs. This is not the case with other immigrant-dominated jobs, such as domestic workers or day laborers, where these informal workers typically earn low wages and lack upward mobility opportunities (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994, 2001; Mattingly 1999, 2001; Valenzuela 1999, 2001, 2003; Valenzuela et al. 2006).

By examining the unique case of Mexican immigrant gardeners in Los Angeles’ informal economy, this dissertation uncovers the complex nature of this informal niche, where many immigrants remain as low-paid, hired workers, while some experience upward mobility opportunities via self-employment.

Lastly, this dissertation consists of a revelatory case since it provides an in-depth study of a phenomenon “previously inaccessible to scientific investigation” (Yin 2003, 42). While other scholars have conducted research on Mexican immigrant gardeners in Los Angeles (Hernandez 2010; Hernandez and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2009), these studies were presented in journal articles with inherent limitations in terms of the time invested and depth of the subject matter. In contrast, as a dissertation, this research study represents many years of scholarly study and fieldwork, where I spent countless hours—as a community organizer from 1996 to 2004 and researcher from 2004 to 2011 (Huerta 2006a, 2006b, 2007, 2010a, 2010b)—to gain the trust of Mexican immigrant gardeners and learn about their lifestyles, their social networks, cultural norms, their views on contract gardening and how they navigate the informal economy.

Consequently, this dissertation sheds light on the nuanced and complex nature of this informal service sector, which has escaped the gaze of social scientists. Similar to the scholarly research of Latina scholars and feminists on the question of female domestic workers in the U.S., this dissertation aims to provide a holistic portrayal of this male-dominated, domestic household service sector. Hondagneu-Sotelo’s (1994) highly acclaimed book on Latina domestic workers in Los Angeles provides scholars, students, policy makers and others with a better understanding

of this heterogeneous group, which includes live-in nanny / housecleaners, live-out nanny / housecleaners, nannies who do not clean and housecleaners who do not care for children.⁴⁰

By highlighting the strengths of qualitative research with small sample sizes, Small (2008, 2009) cautions for qualitative scholars to avoid the language of quantitative research, where scholars typically conduct conventional, random sampling procedures with large sample sizes to establish causal relationships and generalize to a larger population. While scholars who engage in case studies with small sample sizes often times feel compelled to defend their methods and findings, Small (2008, 170) frames in-depth case studies as an integral part of the inquiry process and social sciences:

.... The strengths of qualitative work come from understanding *how* and *why*, not understanding *how many*, and improving the reliability of its answers to how and why questions. For qualitative researchers to attempt to make their works statistically representative is to engage in a losing race, one in which those who have large samples, by design, will always win. It is the equivalent of evaluating success in one language on the basis of the grammar and vocabulary of another. In science, many tongues are better than one.

In his rigorous defense of case study research, Flyvbjerg (2006) challenges the conventional wisdom and misconceptions of this method of inquiry. More specifically, the author directly challenges the argument that single case studies represent inherent biased and limited research methods since, according to the critics, qualitative researchers cannot generalize to the larger population.⁴¹ Like Small, Flyvbjerg posits that in-depth case study research with small sample sizes has its advantages and disadvantages as an integral part of the social sciences, similar to quantitative research. “The advantages of large samples is breadth,” Flyvbjerg (Ibid., 241) argues, “whereas their problem is one of depth. For the case study, the situation is the reverse.”

Moreover, focusing his attention on the advantages of case study research, Flyvbjerg (Ibid., 221) provides five misconceptions of this method:

- Misunderstanding 1: General, theoretical (context-independent) knowledge is more valuable than concrete, practical (context-dependent) knowledge.
- Misunderstanding 2: One cannot generalize on the basis of an individual case; therefore the case study cannot contribute to scientific development.
- Misunderstanding 3: The case study is most useful for generating hypotheses; that is, in the first stage of a total research process, whereas other methods are more suitable for hypotheses testing and theory building.

⁴⁰ On a personal note, given that my late mother was a domestic worker (house cleaner) for over forty years in this country, I appreciated reading Hondagneu-Sotelo’s book, along with other scholars who have treated these informal workers with the dignity and respect that they deserve.

⁴¹ In addition to Small and Flyvbjerg, Yin (1998, 239) makes the argument that “generalizing from case studies is not a matter of *statistical generalization* (generalizing from a sample to a universe) but a matter of *analytic generalizing* (using single or multiple cases to illustrate, represent or generalize to a theory).”

- Misunderstanding 4: The case study contains a bias toward verification, that is, a tendency to confirm the researcher’s preconceived notions.
- Misunderstanding 5: It is often difficult to summarize and develop general propositions and theories on the basis of specific case studies.

Apart from referencing his own highly acclaimed research in Aalborg, Denmark, where he investigates issues of power, rationality and democracy, Flyvbjerg cites major historical scientists to support his claims. This includes Galileo Galilei and Karl Popper. In Galileo, the author documents how one of the greatest scientists of history toppled Aristotle’s law of gravity, using a conceptual experiment and practical case to falsify this 2,000 year-old theory. Moreover, the author refers to Popper’s “falsification” test—where if scientists find one observation that does not fit with the proposition, the proposition must be rejected or revised—to defend the case study approach. Here, Flyvbjerg (Ibid., 228) refers to Popper’s famous example of “all swans are white” where Popper “proposed that just one observation of a single black swan would falsify this proposition and in this way have general significance and stimulate investigations and theory building.”

The author also applies Popper’s approach to his own research. “The case study,” Flyvbjerg (Ibid.) argues, “is well suited for identifying “black swans” because of its in-depth approach: What appears to be “white” often turns out on closer examination to be “black.”” Like Popper and Flyvbjerg, I also encountered black swans during the initial phases of this dissertation research. While I initially considered contract immigrant gardeners to be part of what scholars refer to as “immigrant jobs” (Massey 1999; Waldinger 2003), whereby being excluded from the ethnic enclave economy and “middleman minorities” models, I was surprised to find that a subset of this group represents petty-entrepreneurs.

Thus, by finding “black swans” (i.e., Mexican immigrant petty-entrepreneurs), I embarked on a long-term, in-depth case study of Mexican contract gardeners to better understand this segmented group of workers and petty-entrepreneurs and contribute to the social science literature. By providing a “thick description” (Geertz 1973) of this occupational niche in the context of Los Angeles’ informal economy, I aim to contribute to the social science literature and equip scholars, policy makers and planners with the knowledge they require to foster positive change in this immigrant-dominated service sector.

3.2 Network Approach

The boom in network research ... is a part of a general shift away from the individualist, essentialist and atomistic explanations toward more relational, contextual and systematic understandings.

— Stephan P. Borgatti and Pacey C. Foster (2003)

Instead of understanding Mexican immigrant gardeners as isolated individuals or rational actors who migrated to this country exclusively to pursue higher wages and other opportunities not found in their home country, I utilized a network approach or structuralist viewpoint to better understand these individual immigrants and their complex social relations. Based on a structuralist viewpoint, where systemic and structural forms play a major role over individual

attributes and characteristics, such as age, gender and values, network analysts focus on “broader interaction contexts within which social actors are embedded” (Knoke and Yang 2008, 4). By de-emphasizing an individualistic-based, social science approach commonly found in neo-classical economics and other traditional fields, Wellman (1988, 31 - 38) provides the following social network analysis (SNA) principles:

- Structural social relations are a more powerful source of sociological explanation than personal attributes of social systems;
- Norms emerge from location in structural systems of social relations;
- Social structures determine the operation of dyadic [two-person] relationships;
- The world is composed of networks, not groups.

In attempting to understand human behavior, network analysts examine how individual agents (or groups) relate to one another (micro level) and to society (macro level) and how these relationships both constrain and enable individual agents (or groups) (Burt 19980; Emirbayer 1994; Innes 2004; Mitchell 1969; Wellman 1983). By examining these social relationships, versus analyzing an aggregation of individual traits found in a standard survey, network analysts have made major social science contributions in studies of kinship structure, social mobility, power structures, corporate networks (e.g., interlocking directorships), community elites, community networks, friendship networks, job referrals, international trade exploitation, class structure, diffusion networks, exchange networks and many more fields (Fredericks and Durland 2005; Scott 1988, 2000). We can also find applications of SNA in “organizational behavior, inter-organizational behavior, inter-organizational relations, the spread of contagious disease, mental health, social support, the diffusion of information and animal social organization.”⁴²

Apart from studying individual and group behavior, network analysts also seek to understand social structures. “The most direct way to study a social structure,” Wellman (1983, 157) argues, “is to understand the patterns of ties linking its members. Network analysts search deep structures—regular network patterns beneath the often complex of social systems. They try to describe these patterns beneath and use their descriptions to learn how network structures constrain social behavior and change.” While most economists and other traditional social scientists argue that individuals make choices based on their self-interest (i.e., rational choice theory, where individuals attempt to maximize their benefits and minimize their costs), network analysts seek to understand the social structure and how it impacts individual behavior.

These two diametrically opposed approaches, one that focuses on social structures and social relations versus the other that emphasizes individual choices and personal traits, have opposing policy implications in the real world. In the case of Mexican immigrant gardeners, do those who become owner-operators of small enterprises do so because they benefit from their social networks, where they benefited from their strong ties with existing owners of small businesses, or is it simply because those individual who succeeded worked harder and are smarter? In the case of the former, urban planners and policy makers can provide programs for more individuals to have access to owners of existing businesses through small business mentorship for Spanish-speaking individuals or business incubators. In the case of the latter, the

⁴² See the official website for the International Network for Social Network Analysis (INSA): <http://www.insna.org/sna/what.html>.

urban planners and policy makers will simply provide small business grants for individuals to compete for.

3.3 Research Methodology

I mainly employed ethnographic techniques for my research methodology. This includes the following research activities: in-depth interviews with Mexican immigrant gardeners (both *trabajadores* and *patrones*⁴³), participant observation, observation, archival research and document analysis. In addition, my many personal conversations, informal meetings and social engagements with numerous gardeners also informed this dissertation. Lastly, I also engaged in the literature of Japanese-American gardeners—the ethnic group which dominated this niche in California starting in the late 1800s throughout most of the 1900s (Hirahara 2000; Jiobu 1998. Kobashigawa 1988; Tengan 2006; Tsuchida 1984; Tsukashima 1991, 1995/1996, 2000). In short, this dissertation represents a complex and holistic research project where I managed, as Yin (1998, 230) suggests, “a variety of evidence derived from diverse data collection techniques.”

As a single-case study (Yin 2003 and Creswell 2009), this dissertation provides a nuanced understanding of this under-examined, service sector niche. Since I’m focusing on Mexican immigrant gardeners and their social networks in the context of the informal economy, the single-case study represents an ideal approach for understanding the complex and multi-faceted nature of this heterogeneous group.

3.3.1 Sample Frame and Recruitment Techniques

I conducted in-depth, open-ended interviews with Mexican immigrant gardeners who live and work in the City of Los Angeles. I conducted interviews with both *trabajadores* and *patrones* of these small-scale enterprises. Given the absence of Census data on this service sector and lack of legal status of many Mexican immigrant gardeners, “conventional random sampling methods” are not feasible for this group (Corneilius 1982). Thus, due to the inability of government agencies or researchers to define the universe of Mexican immigrant gardeners in Los Angeles, in-depth interviewing techniques represent one ideal research approach to better understand this informal niche.

To obtain access to Mexican immigrant gardeners in Los Angeles, I collaborated with key leaders (i.e., gatekeepers) from the Association of Latin American Gardeners of Los Angeles (ALAGLA) to access their membership base. Founded in 1996 in response to the City of Los Angeles’ leaf blower ban, ALAGLA represents the first organization of Mexican immigrant gardeners, which includes other Latino immigrants, to protect the rights of those who toil in this niche in Los Angeles and beyond (Cameron 2000; Huerta 2006a, 2006b; Steinberg 2006).

Prior to pursuing my master’s at UCLA (2004 – 2006)⁴⁴ and Ph.D. at UC Berkeley (2006 – 2011), I worked closely with ALAGLA’s leadership core, providing them with organizational

⁴³ Throughout this dissertation, apart from “*patrones*,” I use the terms “owners,” “owner-operators” and “petty-entrepreneurs” interchangeably.

⁴⁴ In 2006, I received my M.A. from UCLA’s Department of Urban Planning, where I wrote my thesis on ALAGLA’s successful efforts to reform the City of Los Angeles’ 1996 leaf blower ban (Huerta 2006a). In short, ALAGLA successfully pressured the city to remove the following harsh penalties: a misdemeanor charge, \$1,000 fine and up to 6 months in jail (Huerta 2006a; Cameron 2000; Steinberg 2006). While the city continues to ban leaf

and professional support to protect their social and economic rights as workers and petty-entrepreneurs. Consequently, I established a high level of trust and rapport with 10 gardener leaders for the past 15 years, allowing me to gain privileged access to ALAGLA's membership roster.⁴⁵

ALAGLA's roster includes 603 members (both new and former members), consisting of two lists: one of 300 *trabajadores* and another of 303 *patrones*. ALAGLA leaders kept two separate rosters in order to meet the particular needs of their members. Overall, however, given that the Los Angeles leaf blower law negatively impacted all gardeners, ALAGLA leaders targeted an equal amount of members from the sub-groups. The members primarily reside in the following areas: (1) Central Los Angeles (Central LA); (2) West Los Angeles (WLA); (3) San Fernando Valley (SFV) and (4) South Los Angeles (South LA).

Since I aimed to interview 50 gardeners in total (i.e., 25 *trabajadores* and 25 *patrones*), I targeted 50 individuals from each sub-group. Thus, to obtain my 25 informants from each sub-group, I conducted two separate random sampling procedures from ALAGLA's roster lists. That is, to get 25 *trabajador informants*, I first randomly sampled 50 members from the *trabajador* membership roster for my dissertation research project. I repeated this same process for the *patrones*.

I then proceeded to make telephone calls to these individuals, starting with the *trabajadores*.⁴⁶ While obtaining access to the rosters represented a relatively easy research task for me, getting these individuals to participate resulted in a problematic investigative task. I expected this part of my dissertation research to be challenging since I'm dealing with a vulnerable population of immigrants who work in the informal economy, where there exists an understandable suspicion against unknown individuals, be they researchers, community organizers or government officials, asking questions about their personal and financial matters. Eventually, through a lot of hard work, patience and follow-up, I was able to reach my goal of 25 *trabajadores* and 25 *patrones* to interview. Throughout this process, I also experienced a high level of rejections. Of the 50 *trabajadores* from my random sample, 24 individuals or 48 percent refused to participate.⁴⁷ Moreover, of the 50 *patrones* from my random sample, 23 individuals or 46 percent refused to participate.⁴⁸

For those who eventually agreed to participate in my dissertation research study, as part of my screening process, my goal was to target individuals who lacked high levels of human capital and financial capital prior to migrating from Mexico to this country.⁴⁹ In fact, all of the potential informants that I contacted met these pre-requisites. My original concern was to avoid individuals from Mexico with high levels of human capital and financial capital. According to

blowers, the current penalties only include a \$271.00 citation. While this still represents a lot of money for many gardeners, it is far less expensive and harsh than the original draconian penalties.

⁴⁵ From these 10 gardener leaders, I've known one key leader, Jaime Aleman, for many years prior to the City of Los Angeles' anti-leaf blower law, which originally passed on December 3, 1996, and later reformed. (Huerta 2006a).

⁴⁶ I obtained research assistance in making calls to potential informants from Antonio Sanchez (UCLA urban planning graduate student), thanks to a dissertation grant I received from UC MEXUS (University of California).

⁴⁷ Having a pool of 26 *trabajadores* as informants allowed me to have one individual as an alternative, just in case someone dropped out of my dissertation research project, which didn't occur.

⁴⁸ Having a pool 27 *patrones* as informants allowed me to have two individuals as alternatives just in case a couple dropped out of my dissertation research project, which didn't occur.

⁴⁹ After introducing myself and describing my dissertation research project, I asked them if they received college degrees or specialized training in Mexico and had access to high levels of financial capital or credit when they initially migrated to this country.

some economists (Bates 1995, 1997; Bates and Dunham 1993), these two factors represent important pre-requisites for individuals to enter self-employment and succeed in this country. For example, if a Mexican immigrant arrives in the U.S. with advanced college degrees and access to high level of financial capital, he or she has a higher likelihood of owning a small business over another Mexican immigrant who lacks both of these key factors.

Once I secured my informants, I scheduled the interviews with them individually. I asked my informants to select the time and place of the interviews. Given that contract gardeners typically work long hours per day, typically six-days-a-week, the interviews took place during the night at the homes or apartments of my informants. I conducted the interviews in Spanish and audio-recorded them. Shortly thereafter, I transcribed the interviews into a text format (i.e., Microsoft Word).

Prior to initiating and recording the interview, I explained to my informants the purpose of the research study and provided them with consent letters in Spanish and English with pertinent research information (see Appendix B and Appendix C, respectively), as delineated in my UC Berkeley Committee for Protection of Human Subjects (CPHS) approved application. I then requested oral consent from them to proceed with the interview. This included requesting consent from them to allow me to record the interview session. As noted in the consent form, I informed them that I would stop the audio-recording at any time they felt uncomfortable. Also, I informed them that they had the right to decline to answer any question and could stop the interview at any time. Moreover, I notified them that I would destroy all audio-recordings, upon completing and filing this dissertation at my home university (i.e., UC Berkeley).

In addition, I explained to them about the research procedures I implemented to protect their identity. This includes the use of a numerical system to identify all audio and written materials, along with using pseudonyms in this dissertation. I assured them that I was the only person that had access to their personal information and that it was stored in a secured place. Since many of these individuals lack legal status in this country and get paid on a cash basis, I reassured them that I, as a researcher, had a professional and ethical responsibility to protect their rights and welfare, as stipulated by CPHS.⁵⁰

On average, the interviews took one hour to complete. For each hour of audio-recording, it took an estimated four hours to transcribe into a text document. After listening to the audio-recordings, reading the transcribed texts and taking notes, I coded the documents manually. I coded the interviews based on themes and concepts that I developed from this dissertation research, academic training and the interviews (Weiss 1994). I then created files to organize parts of the coded interviews to analyze, establish relationships, integrate into specific chapters / sections and seek findings for this dissertation.

My sampling frame consisted of immigrant men from rural Mexico. These men mostly migrated to the U.S. from central-western Mexican states. These Mexican states, which include Michoacán, Zacatecas, Jalisco and others, have a long history of migration to this country. These men entered Mexico's agricultural workforce during their early teens with a mean age of 11, including some who started working as early as eight years of age (see Chapter 5 for details).

When compared as sub-groups, the *trabajadores* tended to be younger with a mean age of 27 compared to the *patrones* with a mean age of 53. In terms of formal schooling, the *trabajadores* on average obtained a level of 6th grade, while the *patrones* on average obtained a level of 5th grade (see Chapter 5 for details). Given that all my informants received their formal schooling in poor, rural communities in a developing country (i.e., Mexico), this level of primary

⁵⁰ For details, see <http://cphs.berkeley.edu/>.

education cannot be compared to the same level of primary education found in poor urban communities in a developed country (i.e., U.S), where the latter is far superior.

In addition to interviewing Mexican immigrant gardeners, I interviewed key informants, such as policy makers, scholars, immigrant advocates and gardener leaders, to inquire about policy recommendations aimed to improve the upward mobility opportunities of Mexican immigrant gardeners and other immigrant groups in this country's informal economy.

3.3.2 Interview Instrument

The interview instrument consisted of open-ended questions aimed at obtaining a better understanding of this informal, service sector niche (see Appendix D). The instrument focuses on how this service sector niche operates, how it's organized, the function of social networks among contract gardeners, the role of gardeners in the domestic household service sector and how gardeners view themselves in the context of the informal economy. In addition, the instrument aims to understand my main research question: How and why do many Mexican immigrant workers remain as hired workers (i.e., *trabajadores*), while some become owners of these small enterprises (i.e., *patrones*)?

More specifically, I organized these questions based on my hypotheses (see Chapter 1), where I revised my questions and hypotheses after conducting several pilot interviews. By directly linking my hypotheses to specific questions, I sought to obtain the necessary information I needed from my informants to answer the questions that I've identified and developed for this dissertation to better understand this informal group. This included gathering information on their personal background in Mexico, personal characteristics,⁵¹ migrant networks,⁵² migration history, work background, entry into the contract gardening niche and perspectives of this understudied niche.

In addition to providing a comprehensive portrayal of this domestic household service sector, part of my questions focused on obtaining information for the benefit of urban planners, policy makers and community activists to be able to promote effective programs and policies aimed at assisting this historically disenfranchised group. Given the inherent limitations of academics, part of my goal with gathering this information centers on providing key players, such as planners, policy makers and community organizers, the necessary information they need to improve the working and living conditions of this group.

3.3.3 Ethnographic Fieldwork

Apart from conducting in-depth interviews, I engaged in participant observation activities for my dissertation research. Specifically, I accompanied several of my gardener informants as a gardener's assistant at their job sites to get a better sense of how they organize themselves, function as crews and manage their daily gardening work throughout their routes. As someone far removed from the physical demands of manual labor, I incurred emotional and physical stress while trying to keep up with the fast work pace and laborious gardening tasks. I quickly learned that I needed to work harder and not complain if I wanted to earn the respect from these individuals. This was not a simple task since I lack the physical strength, endurance and work ethic to keep up with them and their physically demanding work schedules. These direct

⁵¹ See Chapter 5, specifically Section 5.5.

⁵² See Chapter 4.

experiences, however, provided me with a better perspective and respect for these hard-working men and daily hardships they experience at their multiple job sites.

Contract gardeners typically start their workday early in the morning, usually beginning between 5:00 a.m. to 6:00 a.m. Prior to leaving their homes, especially for those without secured garages, owners must load their tools and equipment onto their trucks before picking-up their workers for their daily routes. Depending on the size of the *ruta* and amount of time spent per individual house / yard, gardeners typically service anywhere from 10 to 15 yards per day. According to my gardener informants, they work between 10 to 11 hours per day.

As part of my previous research (Huerta 2006a, 2007), I attended weddings, dances and birthday parties with Mexican immigrant gardeners with the aim of getting an insight into their daily lives outside of their gardening work. Like an anthropologist who lives with local villagers in remote sites around the world to better understand their daily lives, cultural norms, social interactions and their perspectives on life and work (Geertz 1973), I spent many years getting to know these hard-working men, as part of my scientific endeavor. These direct experiences also informed my dissertation research.

I gained valuable information about this informal niche from two separate groups of gardeners. First, from previous research, the first group includes 10 ALAGLA leaders whom I originally met in the summer of 1996. Through my previous social justice advocacy work and prior research, I've established long-term relationships with these key gardeners. Throughout the years, I learned a great deal from them about contract gardeners, their occupational perspectives and gardening work.

Secondly, for this current research, I randomly sampled from ALAGLA's membership roster. In this latter group, I obtained my 50 gardener informants (i.e., 25 *trabajadores* and 25 *patrones*), where I conducted in-depth personal interviews with each of them at their place of residence.

As a social scientist, my goal is to gather valuable information from my informants via various research means and settings without allowing my personal relationships or feelings to bias my research. Given my privileged status as a UC Berkeley-trained scholar and future professor at a college or university, I am aware that I must always remain objective and professional when it comes to my research and policy recommendations. In order to maintain a professional relationship with my informants, I never went "native," as Geertz (1973, 13) eloquently warns social scientists against:

We are not, or at least I am not, seeking either to become natives (a compromised word in any case) or to mimic them. Only romantics or spies would seem to find point in that. We are seeking, in a widened sense of the term in which it encompasses very much more than talk, to convene with them, a matter a great deal more difficult, and not only with strangers, than is commonly recognized.

Given that contract gardeners work in the informal economy, where many of them lack legal status in this country, the issue of trust (or *confianza*) represents an important issue for any researcher interested in studying this particular group or other immigrant groups working in the informal economy, such as domestic workers, day laborers and street vendors. Over the years, I've been able to gain the trust from one group of Mexican immigrant gardeners (i.e., ALAGLA leaders), allowing me, as a social scientist, to obtain access to unknown informants (via randomized methods) in order to obtain valuable information normally denied to most researchers.

3.3.4 Archival Research and Document Analysis

In addition to conducting in-depth interviews and ethnographic field research, I conducted archival research and document analysis of periodicals, government documents and other documents related to this informal niche. This included revisiting sources from prior research to inform this dissertation (Huerta 2006a),⁵³ such as the following:

- Reviewed and analyzed numerous news clips from periodicals, such as the *Los Angeles Times*, *La Opinion*, *Daily News*, *Rafu Shimpo*, *LA Weekly*, *New Times Los Angeles*, *Los Angeles Business Journal*, *Ventura County Star*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *San Jose Mercury*, *Chicago Sun-Times*, *Tri-Star Defender*, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Hispanic Magazine*, *Z Magazine*, *The New Yorker*, *Time*, *Forbes* and ALAGLA's *La Yarda* newsletter.
- Reviewed and analyzed photographs, graphics, comic strips and art illustrations of contract gardeners. Throughout my research, for example, I've found many comic strips in the *Los Angeles Times* relating to contract gardeners and Americans' fascination with the front lawn. While many of these comic strips perpetuate negatives stereotypes of contract gardeners and leaf blowers, some are humorous and innocuous.
- Accessed Internet sites of local, state and federal governmental agencies.

3.4 Research Site: City of Los Angeles

Given the City of Los Angeles' large Latino population, this global city represents the ideal place for this research study. According to the most recent U.S. Census data (Ennis et al. 2011), the city has a total population of almost four million, where Latinos represent an estimated two million or almost 50 percent of the total population. As a global city with the largest population of Mexicans outside of Mexico City and a significant informal economy (Flaming et al. 2005), this city remains a special place and popular destination for people of Mexican decent, both citizens and immigrants alike, especially since their ancestors founded the city, *El Pueblo de la Reina de Los Angeles*, under Spanish rule on September 4, 1781. "Apart from pueblos that evolved from the missions and the presidios," Acuña (2004, 125) argues, "there were pueblos such as Nuestra Señora de Los Angeles that the crown chartered. Planted on the site of the Yanga ranchería next to what is now the Los Angeles Civic Center in 1781; its first settlers were *castas* [castes] from what would become the northern states of Sonora and Sinaloa."

Taking into account the historical significance of Los Angeles to individuals of Mexican decent, along with the current demographic data, as noted above, this global city represents both the ideal and logical place for this research project. Consequently, this dissertation examines Mexican immigrants who either live or work in this metropolitan area. Since contract gardeners represent an informal, mobile workforce, in addition to working in the City of Los Angeles, these

⁵³ I originally gained access to many of these sources while conducting research for my master's thesis at UCLA's Department of Urban Planning (2004 – 2006).

individuals work in adjacent cities, such as Santa Monica, Beverly Hills, West Hollywood and Culver City.

3.5 Researcher Positionality: “Insider / Outsider”

Scholars commonly experience inherent obstacles while conducting fieldwork research on vulnerable populations in this country, such as racial minorities and disenfranchised immigrants. In her study of poor African Americans and West Indian immigrants in New York, Harvard sociologist Mary C. Waters (1999) expressed concerns about her status as a white, privileged scholar studying black identities in her ethnographic research study. To deal with some of her field research concerns, she hired African American researchers to help with some of the interviews at an inner-city public school. Discussing her methodology, Waters (Ibid., 357) writes:

The question of trust and access was a very serious one in this research [i.e., fieldwork in inner-city schools, New York]. Would young black students answer honestly my probing questions about their family life, their racial identity, their behaviors, and their beliefs about touchy issues like race relations and weapons on school? I had hired an African American student from Harvard to do interviews for me because I was worried that my race, gender, and age would make it difficult for students to trust me.

Unlike Waters, however, I share the same ethnic background (Mexican) and gender (male) of my target population and had already pre-established strong levels of trust and rapport with many Mexican immigrant gardeners in the Los Angeles area, prior to embarking on my graduate studies at UCLA and UC Berkeley. I had the opportunity of working directly with hundreds of Mexican gardeners as an advocate for immigrant rights, as part of the gardeners’ organizing efforts to challenge the City of Los Angeles’ 1996 leaf blower ban, preventing gardeners from using gas-powered leaf blowers within 500 feet of residential areas.⁵⁴ My direct involvement in this grassroots movement also informed my scholarly research for this dissertation. However, as an urban planning scholar, I am deeply committed to maintain my objectivity with respect to my informants and research findings, regardless of my personal feelings or views towards these individuals.

Since this dissertation focuses on a vulnerable and disenfranchised group—i.e., Mexican immigrants in the informal economy—as a researcher, I am cognizant of my “insider/outsider” status (Baca Zinn 1979; Chavez 2008; Merriam et al. 2001). On the one hand, I am an “insider” given my familial lineages to rural Mexico, fluency in a foreign language (Spanish) and product of a traditional, Mexican male-dominated household.⁵⁵ On the other hand, I am an “outsider”

⁵⁴ As mentioned above in a note, proposed penalties by the city for violators of the leaf blower ban, which originally passed on December 3, 1996, included a misdemeanor charge, \$1,000 fine and up to six months in jail. For details on the gardeners’ organizing efforts, see Cameron (2000) and Huerta (2006a, 2006b). Also see the following newspaper articles: Bill Boyarsky. “Westside Elitism is Evident in Leaf Blower Ban.” *Los Angeles Times*, July 7, 1997, sec. B; Frank del Olmo. “Leaf Blower Ban is a Gesture with Huge Hidden Costs.” *Los Angeles Times*, July 7, 1997, sec. B; Rick Orlov. “Leaf Blower Ban Pushed to Riordan.” *Daily News*, December 4, 1996, sec. N.

⁵⁵ I am the son of poor Mexican immigrants from the state of Michoacán. Both my parents lacked formal education, where my father worked in Mexico’s agricultural fields, while my mother was a homemaker. In the U.S., lacking basic English skills, my father worked as a farm worker and janitor for many years, while my mother worked as a domestic worker for over 40 years.

among Mexican immigrants given my privileged status as a U.S. citizen, mastery of a native language (English) and life-long immersion to American culture. In addition, as an educated individual with advanced, research training from two of the best public universities in the world, UCLA and UC Berkeley, I am far removed from the daily realities of Mexican immigrants and the many hardships they experience in the U.S.

Consequently, as an academic with strong ties to the Latino community and academy, I'm in a unique position to conduct this research study on a relatively unknown service sector where rapport and trust represent key elements to gain privileged access to sensitive and important information. While many non-Latino academics would encounter major difficulties approaching random Mexican immigrant gardeners in a neighborhood to secure an interview, my ethnic background and aforementioned factors would provide me with easier access to these same individuals.

Nevertheless, the "insider-outsider" question remains a problematic issue among researchers who focus on vulnerable communities, such as the poor, low-wage immigrants and racial minorities. According to Chavez (2008, 478), based on previous theoretical debates, qualitative researchers conducting fieldwork must contend with the inherent advantages and disadvantages of the "insider-outsider" issue:

...the debate around insider-outsider has stagnated by the heavy focus on the differences between types of bias associated with either being an insider or an outsider. For an outsider, the danger is the imposition of the researcher's values, beliefs, and perceptions on the lives of the participants, which may result in a positivistic representation and interpretation. For an insider bias may be overly positive or negligent if the knowledge, culture, and experience she/he shares with participants manifests as a rose-colored observational lens or blindness to the ordinary.

In their synthesis of numerous researchers who conducted studies within and across one's culture, like Chavez, Merriam and colleagues (2001) argue against the false dichotomy of the "insider / outsider" debate that once dominated the anthropology and sociology literatures. Instead of a static position, Merriam et al. favor a more fluid and complex relationship where boundaries are not clearly delineated among scholars and informants. According to the authors, the "insider/outside" debate raises important issues of positionality, power and representation for researchers who conduct fieldwork to both understand and learn from in the research process.

Thus, as an "insider/outside" researcher, I am well aware of the asymmetrical relationships between my informants and I, where my social status as a privileged member of an elite university (UC Berkeley) and future professor situates me in an advantageous position over Mexican immigrants in this informal niche. To avoid any misunderstandings with my gardener informants, I explicitly informed them that I am conducting this research project to obtain my Ph.D. in order to pursue an academic career. Moreover, I told them that they possess valuable information, which will serve to educate scholars, policy makers, planners and others to improve the informal economy.

3.6 Ethics: “Do No Harm”

The history of scientific inquiry in this country (and beyond) has produced both positive societal benefits and negative consequences for many vulnerable subjects. From U.S. government officials and scientists infecting African Americans with syphilis in Tuskegee, Alabama, to Nazi officials and scientists conducting experiments on Jewish concentration camp prisoners, all researchers must learn from these horrific examples in order not to repeat them. The dark side of scientific inquiry remains a problematic issue that all academics must grapple with and take appropriate measures, as required by institutions of higher education in the U.S., when conducting research on human subjects. This is especially the case when academics conduct research on vulnerable populations, such as the homeless, children, low-wage immigrants, racial minorities, prisoners, drug addicts, gang members, prostitutes (or sex workers) and the poor—both in the U.S. and around the world.

Academics, however, should not treat the ethics of research or human subject protocol guidelines as a mandatory checklist, but should aim to grapple with the question of ethics both in the classroom and research field. It’s not enough for academics to superficially adhere to the medical principle of “do no harm” while conducting research on vulnerable populations. When dealing with sensitive and controversial issues, academics should seriously consider the long-term consequences once they abandon the field and publish their findings. For example, let’s say that an academic obtains instant fame and benefits by publishing a scholarly article on an unknown tribe in Brazil’s Amazon forest, suddenly creating more problems for this already vulnerable tribe.⁵⁶ In this scenario, do the individual benefits of the academic (and the readers who read the article) outweigh the collective costs of the tribe?

Given that this dissertation focuses on a vulnerable group—Mexican immigrants in the U.S. informal economy—I too had to grapple with serious ethical issues in this exhaustive research project. Since I benefit directly from the completion of this dissertation—receiving a Ph.D. from a prestigious university like UC Berkeley affords me with social prestige, the opportunity to secure a tenure-track faculty position, monetary reward and professional advancement (Baca Zinn 1979)—I fully acknowledge that my informants will not receive any of these benefits, despite the fact that they played an instrumental role in the completion of this dissertation. Without allowing me to enter their universe, observe their social and occupational behaviors, go to worksites with them and, finally, obtain sensitive data from them (personal and professional) via countless informal discussions and in-depth interviews, I could not have conducted this exhaustive research project. To some scholars, the unequal relationship between the researcher and informant represents a form of exploitation (Baca Zinn 1979; Patai 1991).

In her excellent, yet polemical article on the ethics of research, Patai (1991, 149) provides a severe critique of academics, focusing on feminist scholars, whose research centers on “Third World women”:

In the end, even “feminist” research too easily tends to reproduce the very inequalities and hierarchies it seeks to reveal and to transform. The researcher departs with the data, and the researched stay behind, no better off than before. The common observations that ‘they’ got something out of it too—the opportunity to tell their stories, the entry into history, the recuperation of their own memories, perhaps the chance to exercise some editorial control over the

⁵⁶ This scenario is actually based on a true story. See: <http://www.wired.com/wiredscience/2011/02/uncontacted-tribe/>. (Accessed November 5, 2011.)

project or even its products, etc.—even when perfectly accurate, do not change the inequalities on which the entire process rests.

While I have no illusions that this dissertation, alone, will change the social and economic inequities that Mexican immigrant experience in Los Angeles and throughout the U.S., I informed my informants of my research goals in order to avoid any misunderstandings about the nature and potential impact of this research project.

In this research project, I did not aim to investigate and provide data on how many undocumented immigrants work in this service sector, only to give the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) a rationale to conduct mass deportation raids. Also, I did not aim to investigate and provide data on whether or not these individuals paid taxes on their earnings, only to give the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) a reason to audit these individuals. By doing so, I would be violating the “do no harm” maxim. Instead, I provided a nuanced and comprehensive portrayal of the contract gardening niche and of the men who toil every day on America’s front lawns.

Chapter 4. A Typology of Informal Economic Models & Markets

Petty capitalism, often supplemented with wage-employment, offers itself as a means of salvation. If only the right chance came, the urban workers could break out of the nexus of high living costs and low wages which is their lot.

— Keith Hart, 1973

Jaime Juarez,⁵⁷ 49, is a successful owner of a contract gardening enterprise.⁵⁸ As a petty entrepreneur, family man and homeowner, Jaime has come a long way from his humble origins. Like many immigrants from rural Mexico, he entered the workforce at a very young age in the north-central state of Zacatecas. Beginning at nine years of age, Jaime quickly learned the value and hardship of manual labor by joining his siblings and father, harvesting corn and beans. While only obtaining a primary school education, during his teens, Jaime typically worked between 10 to 12 hours per day (starting his workday between 5:00 a.m. to 6:00 a.m.).⁵⁹ In the early 1980s, he migrated to the U.S. as an undocumented immigrant.⁶⁰ Given his limited educational attainment, agricultural background and lack of English skills, Jaime faced limited employment opportunities in this country's formal economy. Once settled, he worked as a garment worker in downtown Los Angeles. Thereafter, in his early 20s, he worked at an office supply warehouse for several years. Lacking the opportunity to enroll in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, he learned to speak English at the warehouse, communicating with several of his U.S.-born co-workers.

It's not until he married his childhood sweetheart, Leticia Aguilar, however, when Jaime first experienced upward mobility opportunities outside of the low-wage jobs in the formal economy, especially for individuals with similar impoverished backgrounds from rural Mexico. Fortunately for Jaime, his father-in-law, who owns and operates a contract gardening enterprise, hired him with the goal of helping Jaime become a *patrón*. The father-in-law, thanks to the help of his *compadre*, started his contract gardening enterprise in the mid-1970s.

Wanting to make a good impression with his father-in-law, Jaime worked hard and diligently to learn all aspects of this informal niche—from landscape duties to the business operations to customer relations and so on. Consequently, after three years of on-the-job training, Jaime slowly transitioned from a *trabajador* to *patrón*. To do so, the father-in-law gifted Jaime 25 clients or houses (i.e., a very small *ruta*) to get him started. While Jaime worked his small *ruta* without help three-days-a-week, he continued to work for his father-in-law the remaining three days.⁶¹

This informal, business incubator arrangement gradually allowed for Jaime to grow his *ruta* to the point where he had enough clients to become fully independent and hire a couple of

⁵⁷ To protect the identity of my gardener informants, I use fictitious names for all of the Mexican immigrant gardeners.

⁵⁸ I conducted an in-depth interview with Jaime on January 13, 2011, in the San Fernando Valley.

⁵⁹ As he assumed more work responsibilities, he sometimes started his workday as early as 2:00 a.m., where he was responsible for two hectares of crops.

⁶⁰ Jaime became a U.S. citizen via the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA). Like the other three million undocumented immigrants found in the U.S. at the time, Jaime benefited from this federal amnesty law (North 1987, 2005).

⁶¹ Contract gardeners typically work six-days-a-week, Monday through Saturday.

trabajadores. Today, more than four decades after toiling in Mexico's agricultural fields, Jaime has 125 clients, employs five full-time *trabajadores* (with two trucks operating simultaneously)⁶² and runs a profitable contract gardening enterprise. Although Jaime worked very hard to become a successful *patrón*, without taking credit away from his strong work ethic and business savvy, he benefited tremendously from his familial relationships, as part of his migrant ties, and years of apprenticeship in the Informal Master-Apprenticeship model.

Moreover, Jaime's story is not simply an isolated anecdote of a poor immigrant who accomplishes the American Dream with the support of his family, but, more importantly, an archetypal case that helps explain why some Mexican immigrants with low human capital and limited financial capital experience upward mobility opportunities in the U.S.

4.1 Types, Forms and Functions of Informal Economic Models & Markets

The following typology of informal models and markets primarily explains why many Mexican immigrants experience work constraints as *trabajadores* in the informal market while some experience upward mobility opportunities as prospective *patrones*. These informal institutions function via the contract gardeners' interpersonal networks, where these social actors utilize their migrant networks in a variety of ways, providing both employment constraints and upward mobility opportunities.

Referring to migrant networks, Massey (1999, 44) posits that these interpersonal networks represent a form of social capital: "Network connections constitute a form of social capital that people can draw upon to gain access to various kinds of financial capital, foreign employment, high wages, and the possibility of accumulating savings and sending remittances."⁶³ Similarly, as illustrated below, Waldinger (2003, 343) argues that interpersonal contacts within immigrant communities in the U.S. serve as an important source of social capital with positive outcomes: "These ties constitute a source of social capital, providing social structure that facilitate actions, in this case the search for jobs and the acquisition of skills and other resources to move up the economic ladder."

Originally introduced by the economist Glenn Loury (1977), Coleman (1988, S98) provides this definition of social capital:

Social capital is defined by its function. It is not a single entity but a variety of different entities, with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of actors—whether persons or corporate actors—within the structure. Like other forms of capital, social capital is productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible.

In this definition, Coleman focuses on the structural basis and outcomes aspects of social capital. Like other types of capital, such as financial capital, social actors who accumulate social capital receive potential benefits or positive outcomes compared to those who lack it. In the case of Mexican immigrant gardeners—who lack the human capital and financial capital upon arrival to be competitive in the formal market—these social actors access their migrant networks, as a key

⁶² Usually, a crew of three gardeners uses one truck. When the crew is larger, then the crew uses two trucks to perform daily gardening duties.

⁶³ According to Massey et al. (1987), Massey and colleagues were the first to make the direct connection between migrant networks and social capital.

form of social capital to both survive and thrive in the informal economy.

4.1.1 Informal Petty-Capitalism (IPC) Model

The IPC model represents a traditional employer-employee relationship, similar to the typical capitalist relations found in the formal economy. On the one hand, the *patrón* owns and manages the small enterprise, which includes the tools, equipment, truck(s) and, most important, the client base or *ruta*. The *ruta* represents a network of clients or houses, usually accumulated by the *patrón* over many years in the business. He⁶⁴ also incurs all the risks and benefits of owning and operating a contract gardening enterprise. This includes business-related costs, such as business licenses,⁶⁵ auto insurance, fuel for truck(s) and machinery, equipment maintenance, client demands and complaints, and the daily pressures of maintaining clients and recruiting new ones. This also includes the physical and stress-related costs associated with operating a small enterprise in a highly competitive and informal economy, where non-binding, oral agreements between contract gardeners and clients prevail.

On many occasions, the *patrón* cannot afford to increase his monthly fees over time for fear of losing clients to the competition. Not being able to increase monthly rates creates additional stress on the *patrón*, especially when operating costs rise, such as gasoline, car insurance, equipment maintenance and salaries. While many companies in the formal economy increase the price of their goods and services when operating costs rise, where the customers or clients assume additional financial costs, contract gardeners do not enjoy this luxury.

Salvador Martinez, 68, is an owner of a contract gardening enterprise with modest financial returns. Raised in a rural community in the western state of Jalisco, Mexico, Salvador worked in agricultural fields prior to migrating to the U.S. in 1969. Despite being a *patrón* since 1977, his *ruta* consists of only 90 clients, where he only hires one *trabajador* to assist him. Charging nominal monthly fees from \$50 to \$90 during the past decade, Salvador, during a personal interview that I conducted with him,⁶⁶ expressed frustration about the inability to raise his fees:

Unfortunately, my monthly fees haven't changed much over the years. If I compare how much the price of gas has gone up with the fact that my fees haven't gone up during the past five, seven to nine years, I've been losing money. If I raise my fees, I will lose my clients and lose even more money, which will make it difficult for me to support my family. I do not want to take that risk, so I do not bring it up to my clients.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ I use "he" because this is a male-dominated niche. Similarly, in the case of Latina domestic workers in Los Angeles and beyond, we find a female-dominated niche (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994, 2001, 2010; Menjivar 1995; Mattingly 1999, 2001).

⁶⁵ Since there does not exist a stateside license or permit in California for contract gardeners to operate and work, cities impose their own rules and regulations associated with contract gardening. This is very important since contract gardeners, as mobile workers, typically work in various cities, such as Los Angeles, Beverly Hills and Santa Monica, on any given day.

⁶⁶ I conducted an in-depth interview with Salvador on March 20, 2011, in South Los Angeles.

⁶⁷ I conducted all interviews in Spanish and translated them into English. As a son of Mexican immigrants and native Spanish-speaker, I am highly qualified to translate oral and written interviews from Spanish to English and vice versa.

Also, the *patrón* normally does not legally challenge the client who refuses to pay for rendered services in California's Small Claims Courts. As part of California's judicial process, these courts handle civil cases for less than \$7,500 in common disputes, such as disagreements over security rent deposits, purchased store items and personal loans.⁶⁸ Given that the *patrón* loses precious time, energy and money to file a claim, apart from finding someone to fill out the paperwork and help navigate the bureaucracy, it's not in his best interest to take this legal recourse. Also, while U.S. citizenship status is not required, this formal system inherently favors privileged citizens with formal education over marginalized immigrants with low levels of educational attainment, lacking legally binding contracts.

Upon calculating all business costs, the *patrón* benefits directly from any profits. A profitable business allows for the *patrón* to enjoy the fruits of his labor by being in a financial position to support his family, buy a home, send remittances to family members, enjoy family vacations and take visits to Mexico annually for personal and religious celebrations. These are luxuries that the *trabajador* lacks, like many other low-wage Mexican immigrants, given their poor wages and work constraints. Apart from lacking funds to pay for travel expenses, the *trabajador* often times cannot afford to lose too many days from work for fear of losing his job, according to many of my gardener informants.

Moreover, owning a small enterprise provides the *patrón* with a relatively high level of prestige and status among his migrant networks, including family, friends, hometown associates and individuals from country of origin. For instance, a successful *patrón* who returns home years later with cash in his pockets, gifts to distribute and a small business to his name—represents a success story and positive role model for those who stayed behind and future migrants. I found that both *trabajadores* and *patrones* expressed similar desires to succeed in *el norte*, as part of the American Dream trope.

While the *patrón* and *trabajador* regularly share similar occupational goals and dreams, the *trabajador* remains in a precarious financial position. Regarding wages, the *trabajador* gets paid on a daily rate in the form of cash (e.g., \$80 per day).⁶⁹ Should any disputes over wages arise, given the lack of governmental regulation, the *trabajador* or *patrón* may terminate the employment arrangement without cause or liability to either party. However, just like in the formal economy, the *trabajador* typically stands to lose more in a wage dispute given the unequal relationship. Apart from wage issues, according to my research findings, the *patrón* does not provide the *trabajador* with basic worker rights and benefits often found, yet not guaranteed, in the formal economy, such as minimum wage, worksite safety regulations, 40-hours per week work schedules, anti-child labor laws, vacation time, paid holidays, overtime pay, sick time and employer-covered health insurance.

Also, the *patrón* does not pay into the U.S. safety-net system on behalf of the *trabajador* through payroll withholdings and direct contributions that employers in the formal economy commonly contribute to, such as unemployment insurance, workers' compensation insurance, life insurance, health insurance (not always), individual retirement accounts (not always), Social Security and Medicare deductions.⁷⁰ To be fair, as independent contractors in the informal economy, *patrones* also lack these benefits and rights via their small-scale enterprises. Usually, those with health benefits directly rely on their spouses' employers. I interviewed 2 *patrones*, for

⁶⁸ For details, see <https://www.courts.ca.gov/selfhelp-smallclaims.htm>.

⁶⁹ This is an average daily rate based on my interviews with both *trabajadores* and *patrones*.

⁷⁰ If the *trabajador* lacks legal status in this country, he would not qualify for most of these benefits.

example, who had access to health insurance via their spouses' employment with the Los Angeles School District (LAUSD).

Lastly, without any financial investment in the small enterprise, such as owning part of the business or sharing in the profits, the fundamental benefit for the *trabajador* in this relationship consists of securing employment and earning enough to survive or subsist at the margins of society. Earning \$80 per day, for example, is not sufficient for an individual to support himself and his family (both here and abroad via remittances), in a global city like Los Angeles with a high cost of living.

To compensate for meager wages, like many low-wage immigrants in California (Zolniski 1994), *trabajadores* employ several survival strategies, such as saving on living expenses by sharing rent with other fellow immigrants or living with family members—either staying rent-free or paying a nominal amount for room and board. By saving money on living costs, *trabajadores* can support their families in the U.S and/or Mexico. It is very common, for example, for Mexican immigrants and other immigrant groups to send money and goods to family members from their home countries in the form of remittances (Boyd 1989; Gold 2005; Roberts and Morris 2003; Taylor 1986; Tilly 2007).

Despite the low wages, however, the *trabajador* benefits by gaining work experience in this informal niche. For the fortunate ones, this experience will lead to upward mobility opportunities. Also, by working in the contract gardening niche, the *trabajador* has the opportunity to work outdoors with nature, making a direct connection to his rural background experience in Mexico (Hernandez 2010; Hernandez and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2009; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2010; Huerta 2007). Given that all of my gardener informants performed agricultural work prior to migrating to the U.S., the idea of working in America's front yards represents a smooth transition for these individuals, despite the apparent differences of growing corn in Michoacán, Mexico, to mowing lawns in Santa Monica, California.

However, this hierarchy does have “winners” (i.e., *patrones*) and “losers” (i.e., *trabajadores*).⁷¹ Like other unequal forms of business models in the formal economy, those on the top often times benefit at the expense of those on the bottom. In the particular case of this informal niche, by providing the *trabajador* with low wages, the *patrón* reaps economic opportunities not available to the *trabajador*, such as being in a better financial position to support a family and afford leisurely perks. For instance, most of my *patrón* informants are homeowners (80 percent)⁷² and make regular visits to their hometowns in Mexico to visit family and enjoy religious festivities in their hometowns.

While the top-down, organizational structure of contract gardening enterprises remains the norm in this service sector,⁷³ *trabajadores* typically do not challenge or contest this inherently unequal business model, especially since they too often aspire to become *patrones*. They do, however, have the option to quit. By quitting, they usually seek employment with another *patrón*, unless they pursue the entrepreneurial route, which requires self-motivation, initial capital, business know-how and access to key migrant networks, as illustrated below.

⁷¹ By “winners” and “losers,” I am referring to economics and not any morale judgments towards these sub-groups. Being an immigrant worker in it and of itself does not imply that an individual should be ashamed of his profession or that he / she represents a failure in society, especially since there should be dignity, from my scholarly perspective, in all honest labor.

⁷² See Chapter 5, specifically Table 5.1.

⁷³ See Figure 1.1. Contract Gardening Crew Structure.

4.1.2 Informal Master-Apprentice (IMA) Model

In contrast to the IPC, the IMA model represents a modern, informal variation of the old master-apprentice system dating back to the Middle Ages. In this modern model, the *trabajador* experiences upward mobility opportunities, since the IMA functions as a small business incubator. According to my in-depth interviews with both *trabajadores* and *patrones*, the *patrón* provides the *trabajador* with the needed training and financial support to become an owner of a contract gardening enterprise. This applies to a select group of *trabajadores*, as discussed below in detail.

The master-apprentice relationship in the contract gardening niche goes beyond a strictly business relationship. Although the IMA model also consists of a hierarchical system, in stark contrast to the IPC model, this system primarily explains why some Mexican immigrants with low-human capital and low-financial capital will, after several years of on-the-job training and support from the *patrones*, will most likely become *patrones*.

In this model, similar to the IPC model, the *patrón* owns and operates the small enterprise. For the *patrón*, this includes incurring the business costs and benefits of owning a small-scale enterprise in the informal economy. In this model, for example, the *patrón* reaps all the potential profits from the small enterprise. Similar to the IPC, apart from reaping the benefits of owning a business, the *patrón* also incurs the risks, pressures and stresses of owning and managing a small enterprise in a highly competitive market with demanding clients. This includes constantly fending off the competition, maintaining low monthly fees for the clients, maintaining low operating costs, ensuring quality work and constantly meeting the particular needs of clients.

However, unlike the IPC model, in the IMA model, the *patrón* selectively identifies a *trabajador* to mentor and support for upward mobility opportunities. Based on this objective, the *patrón* takes on the role of master gardener and the *trabajador* of apprentice. As a master gardener, the *patrón* provides the *trabajador* with the needed training to become successful in the contract gardening market. (However, given that the *patrón* needs a stable workforce to be competitive and profitable in this informal niche, it's not in his best interest to take on too many *trabajadores* to mentor and support in this fashion.)

Specifically, the *patrón* provides the *trabajador* with the needed training and financial support for the *trabajador* to eventually own a contract gardening enterprise. For instance, over an estimated period of three to five years,⁷⁴ the master gardener teaches the apprentice the best practices of working with plants, trees, grasses, shrubs and other ecological aspects of America's residential landscapes. For the *trabajador*, this also includes on-the-job training and learning the complex natures of lawns, plants and trees, such as understanding when, where and how to plant a particular plant or tree, to nurture it and see it grow over time. While *trabajadores* in the IPC model also learn these lessons while on-the-job, they generally do so without the hands-on mentorship and supervision of the master gardener.

Also, the master gardener teaches the apprentice how to work effectively and efficiently with various gardening tools and equipment involving various gardening duties. In addition, the master gardener teaches the apprentice various landscape-related duties, such as installing and fixing sprinklers, trimming trees and other duties. Moreover, the master gardener teaches the

⁷⁴ Based on my research, I've found that *trabajadores* currently spend between more than five years working as hired workers before owning and operating their own small enterprise, if the opportunity arises.

apprentice all aspects of operating a contract gardening enterprise, including how to hire and fire workers, deal effectively with clients and maintain / expand business operations.

The master gardener, however, does not provide his apprentice with English lessons. This falls outside of the linguistic and educational capacity of the master gardener, since he most likely only received a primary education in rural Mexico and learned English, however limited, over the years while on-the-job. This includes his personal interactions with clients and sales clerks at landscape nurseries, home improvement centers and lawn mower repair shops, including other business related duties with insurance companies and government officials. For those with U.S.-born children, the master gardener also acquires limited English skills while communicating with his English-speaking children. In a similar manner, it's incumbent upon the apprentice to learn limited English skills, at minimum, through his own initiative to succeed as a potential *patrón*.

In the IMA model, like in the IPC model, the *trabajador* earns a daily rate (e.g., \$80 per day). (I found no wage differences between *trabajadores* in both models.) Given the particular type of relationship between the master gardener and apprentice, however, the business relationship in the IMA model tends to be more personal and supportive compared to the IPC model. For example, in the case of a father-son relationship, the father will most likely be more invested in his son's success. While the father may pay his son the same rate and expect equal work performance, whereby teaching him the importance of forming a strong work ethic in this niche, the father frequently aims for his son to become a successful *patrón*. (One exception, according to my gardener informants, is when the father wants his son to pursue college and a professional career.)

Hence, the father invests extra time and effort to teach his son important lessons on owning and operating a successful contract gardening enterprise. In this particular case, the burden falls on the son to take advantage of an opportunity not afforded to the other *trabajadores*, who lack the same benefits associated with the master-apprenticeship relationship. In addition to acquiring important lessons from the master gardener, the *trabajador*, over several years of apprenticeship, also learns about the contract gardening market under John Dewey's "learning by doing" motto (Friedmann 1987).

While the IPC model perpetuates the hierarchical employer-employee relationship, where the employee lacks upward mobility opportunities, the IMA model provides the employee or apprentice with the needed training and financial support to seek business entry and success in the informal economy. In short, these two models mostly explain how Mexican immigrants with similar socioeconomic status consist of two sub-groups in the informal economy: *trabajadores* and *patrones*.

In terms of the plight of older *trabajadores* who never achieve *patrón* status, based on my research, it's unclear given the scope of the scope of this dissertation. Do they settle for meager wages as long as they get hired? Do they give up and leave the niche all together? Do they return to Mexico? To seek answers to these questions, further research is required, particularly long-range studies, following the same *trabajadores* for numerous years.

4.1.3 Informal Gardener Markets (IGMs)

In addition to the IPC and IMA models, contract gardeners self-organize and self-manage Informal Gardener Markets (IGMs). Relying on their migrant networks, Mexican immigrant gardeners constantly exchange work-related goods and services in this informal niche. This also

includes the sale and purchase of *rutas*. Instead of purchasing all of their goods and services at formal markets, contract gardeners create their own informal markets to meet their job-related needs and wants. Mainly conducted via word of mouth, these informal markets consist of efficient and effective means for contract gardeners to save energy, time and money.

While contract gardeners also patronize home improvement centers (e.g., Home Depot), lawn mower shops and landscape nurseries in the formal markets, the IGMs represent a valuable resource for them to meet their job-related needs and wants at below-market rates. For example, if a *patrón* needs to purchase a lawn mower and he does not want to pay full price for a new one, which ranges between \$290 for a Craftsman to \$700 for a Honda,⁷⁵ he may purchase a used one via the IGMs at a lower price. By doing so, he successfully lowers his short-term business costs.⁷⁶

IGM's function within the strong ties (e.g., close friends) and weak ties (e.g., acquaintances) among gardeners and their immigrant communities. In the case of strong ties, there exists a high level of trust among these inter-connected networks (Coleman 1998; Ebaugh and Curry 2000; Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993). Unlike formal markets or online services, such as Craigslist and eBay, where strangers frequently exchange goods and services, IGMs often operate within inter-connected networks of immigrant communities, where individual reputations and status in these cohesive communities generally ensure that individuals do not take advantage or swindle other individuals. For example, if a gardener purchases a faulty hedge trimmer or leaf blower from a hometown associate and the seller refuses to return the money to the buyer, the buyer can inform other hometown members that the seller cannot be trusted, whereby damaging his reputation and standing among members of cohesive communities.

In the case of weak ties, we find similar opportunities in the IGMs for gardeners to exchange goods, services and *rutas*. For instance, a *trabajador* can purchase a *ruta* from an unknown *patrón*,⁷⁷ such as a friend of a close friend. By doing so, the *trabajador* bypasses the IMA model to acquire a contract gardening enterprise. This may occur in the case of a highly motivated, risk-taking *trabajador* or a frustrated *trabajador* who lacks upward mobility opportunities despite working many years for the same *patrón*. When a *trabajador* purchases a *ruta* from a weak tie, these informal markets represent a substitute or alternative route for a *trabajador*—who lacks the strong ties found in the IMA model and the upward mobility benefits associated with this apprenticeship model—to become a *patrón*.

4.2 Ordinal Migrant Networks

In the immigration and ethnic entrepreneurship literatures, scholars primarily treat migrant networks equally, which include family, friends, neighbors and hometown associates (Boyd 1989; Fawcett 1989; Gold 2005; Massey et al. 1987; Waldorf 1996). In contrast, I found that Mexican immigrant gardeners utilize their migrant ties in an ordinal or rank order manner for differentiated outcomes (i.e., employment constraints for many immigrants as *trabajadores* and upward mobility opportunities for some as prospective *patrones*), representing an important finding. While the *patrón* commonly selects family members and *compadres* for the preferred

⁷⁵ “Best and Worst Home and Yard Products.” *Consumer Reports*, May 2011: 42.

⁷⁶ In the long run, purchasing used goods may be more costly since they tend to break down quicker and require unanticipated service costs.

⁷⁷ A *patrón* may sell his *ruta* (or part of it) for a variety of reasons, such as when he's retiring, leaving the business, managing too many clients or helping a *trabajador* become a *patrón*, as documented in a previous note.

IMA model, for instance, I found that he solicits friends, neighbors and hometown associates for the IPC model. Essentially, these models demonstrate the heterogeneous aspect of migrant networks.

Based on my 25 in-depth interviews with *patrones*, for instance, 15 individuals (60 percent) received business entry assistance from family members and *compadres*, while two (eight percent) received similar help from friends and hometown associates. The remaining eight (32 percent) received assistance from their previous employers, including individual efforts to become entrepreneurs via the IGMs (i.e., purchasing a *ruta* in the informal markets).⁷⁸

This hierarchical order, as noted in Figure 4.1 (see below) partly relates to the “channelization” process many immigrants depend on to secure employment (Gutierrez 1984; Gurak and Caces 1992). However, for immigrants in marginal jobs, this process can be very restrictive. According to Gurak and Caces (1992, 155), this process tends to restrict poor immigrants to occupations with limited upward mobility opportunities:

Heavy reliance on a network of migrants concentrated in marginal jobs increases the concentration of new immigrants in such positions. Thus migrant networks can slow long-term integration or adaptation given that the impact of network assistance is conditional, logically enough by the resources (type and heterogeneity) controlled by the network members.

In contrast, while also depending on the “channelization” process, Mexican immigrants in the contract gardening niche experience differentiated outcomes (i.e., employment constraints for many immigrants as *trabajadores* and upward mobility opportunities for some as prospective *patrones*),

This hierarchical order, however, shouldn’t be interpreted as a static list of categories, but as a fluid one where *trabajadores and patrones* rely on access to key information, goods and services. That is, while a *patrón* may select a *trabajador* for the preferred IMA model from the top three relationship types in Figure 4.1, depending on the particular nature of the relationship, he may also select one from the bottom three, especially given that this complete list falls within the contract gardeners’ migrant ties.

⁷⁸ These figures should not be confused or conflated with those reported in Chapter 5, specifically Table 5.2, where the figures in Table 5.2 represent the social networks that *patrones* accessed to first enter contract gardening as *trabajadores*.

Figure 4.1 Migrant Networks Hierarchy Types

1. Immediate Family — fathers, sons, siblings
2. Extended Family — in-laws, uncles, aunts, first cousins, second cousins
3. *Compadrazgo* — *compadres, comadres, godparents, godsons*
4. Hometown Associates — members of origin communities in Mexico
5. Friendship — established in U.S.

Source: Author (2011)

4.2.1 Immediate Family

Not surprisingly, the immediate family (or nuclear family) represents the strongest bond for Mexican immigrant gardeners. Given the key role that family networks play for Mexican immigrants and other immigrant groups in the international migration and settlement process (Boyd 1989; Roberts and Morris 2003; Taylor 1986; Tilly and Brown 1967; Wilson 1994, 1998), especially for those with large families from rural backgrounds, Mexican immigrants in this informal niche commonly rely on their immediate family network for support in the workplace and beyond. “Kinship,”⁷⁹ Massey et al. (1987, 140) posit, “forms one of the most important bases of migrant social organization, and family connections are the most secure bonds within the networks.” According to Leslie (1992), family relations or “familism” plays an important role among Latino families. “The term ‘familism,’” Leslie (Ibid., 245) argues, “is frequently used to describe a system of mutual obligation and cooperation that characterizes the family relations of Hispanics.” This is not to argue, however, that Mexican immigrants have a monopoly on “familism,” especially since many other immigrant groups in the U.S. have historically relied on family migrant networks to settle and congregate in similar communities, as illustrated by the rise of “Chinatown” and “Little Italy” districts (MacDonald and MacDonald 1964; Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993; Zhou and Logan 1989).

Throughout the international migratory process, family bonds serve as vital conduits of financial, social, cultural and emotional support (Boyd 1983; Chavez 1988; Curran and Rivero-Fuentes; Wilson 1994). “As socializing agents,” Boyd (1989, 643) posits, “families transmit cultural values and norms which influence who migrates and why. Families also transmit norms about meaning of migration and the maintenance of familial based obligations over time and space.” In this context, a father helping his son (where both are foreign-born) or an older brother helping his younger one secure his own contract gardening enterprise represents a familial

⁷⁹ I use terms “kinship” and “family” interchangeably in this dissertation.

obligation versus a personal favor with conditions attached to it. I found this to be the case with all my gardener informants, where family-based obligations over self-interest actions prevailed as the cultural norm. Generally speaking, this family-based value system of Mexican immigrants goes against the U.S. individualistic-centered, cultural norm.

I did find, however, one common difference regarding a father's expectations for his son(s),⁸⁰ depending on whether the son(s) was (were) born in Mexico or the U.S. On the one hand, when dealing with a foreign-born son, the father (as a *patrón*) commonly encourages his son to enter his contract gardening enterprise as a *trabajador* via the IMA model. By doing so, the father ensures that his son—a rural Mexican immigrant who typically lacks the adequate formal education, English language skills and job training to compete in the U.S. formal market—not only secures employment, but also pursues upward mobility opportunities as a *patrón*.

On the other hand, when dealing with a U.S.-born son, a father (as a *patrón*) typically dissuades his son from entering contract gardening as a career choice. In this scenario, given the son's access to formal education in the U.S. and many other advantages afforded to U.S. citizens, such as learning the dominant language (i.e., English) at a very young age and being immersed in the American culture, a father generally prefers for his son to pursue his academic studies and seek a professional career.

For instance, of the 25 in-depth interviews I conducted with *patrones*, when asked about their children,⁸¹ they all wanted their U.S.-children to do well in school and pursue professional careers.⁸² Specifically, they all made it very clear to me that they didn't want their children to perform manual labor jobs as contract gardeners, like themselves, especially given the grueling work schedule, physically demanding work and lack of work-related benefits. For those with children, my informants also informed me that they work hard and sacrifice so their children could enjoy an easier life with more opportunities than they had growing up.

The idea of immigrants wanting their U.S.-born children to pursue higher education and professional careers in this country represents a common story (Bates 1997). While Japanese immigrants (*issei*) pursued contract gardening throughout most of the 20th Century in California, by the latter part, older Japanese immigrant gardeners encouraged their children (2nd generation Americans or *nissei*) and grandchildren (3rd generation Americans or *sansei*) to pursue professional careers outside of contract gardening (Hirahara 2000; Kobashigawa 1988; Tsukashima 2000).

Regardless of whether a father wants his son to enter the contract gardening service sector as a means of earning a living or to pursue a professional career, the father typically employs his son (usually in his teens) as a *trabajador* to teach him the importance of possessing a strong work ethic. While considered by many as an "immigrant job" characterized with low wages and low social status (Alvarez 1990; Massey 1999; Waldinger 2003), contract gardening allows for teens to learn valuable lifelong lessons where they can apply their strong work ethic outside of this informal niche.

⁸⁰ This case also applies when the father has more than one son.

⁸¹ For those without children, they expressed the same sentiment, just in case they have children in the future.

⁸² This includes children who were born in Mexico, yet arrived in the U.S. as children who could still take advantage of educational opportunities in this country, compared to those who migrate to the U.S. in their late teens and early 20s.

4.2.2 Extended Family

Second to immediate family ties, extended family networks provide valuable sources of support for immigrants in this informal niche. The extended family, as noted in Figure 4.1, includes in-laws, uncles, aunts, cousins and others. While immigration scholars commonly do not differentiate between immediate family and extended family members within the “family migrant network” category, especially given that we can find similarities in questions of mutual obligation, cooperation and special bonds, based on my research, I found a clear difference between the father-son relationship and uncle-nephew relationship. For instance, while the father (as a *patrón*) will not hesitate to gift a *ruta* or part of one to his son, the uncle (also, as a *patrón*) will most likely sell the *ruta* at a below market price or on credit to his nephew. Not surprisingly, the difference in these two scenarios represents the degree and nature of help based on the type of relationship within the family (i.e., immediate versus extended).

Noel Baltazar, 41, is an owner of a contract gardening enterprise. Migrating from Zacatecas, Mexico, to the U.S. in 1990, he started working as a *trabajador* for his uncle (a *patrón*). Two years later, Noel purchased a *ruta* from his uncle who moved to another state. Needing assistance, Noel recruited his brother, as a business partner, to help him with the business. After several years of working together, the brothers divided the *ruta* equally so each could have his own business.

As a successful *patrón* for the past 15 years, Noel explained to me in a personal interview that I conducted with him⁸³ how his uncle helped him and his brother:

When our uncle offered to sell us his *ruta* to help us, we first had to come up with the money. Between my brother and I, we had half of the needed money to purchase it. Fortunately for us, our uncle gave us a chance and he took only the half we had up-front, so we could work and save up for the balance to pay him. Once we made enough money through our work, we paid him the balance on a monthly basis.

In this particular case, we can see how the uncle preferred to sell his *ruta* to his nephews versus putting up the *ruta* for sale at market rate in the IGMs. Also, the fact that the uncle accepted only 50 percent (up-front) of the total cost demonstrates the level of trust that exists among extended family members. While there’s no guarantee that Noel and his brother would pay his uncle the balance, since they didn’t sign a legally binding contract or secure the remaining 50 percent balance with collateral, the close-knit bonds among extended family members, familial norms (Boyd 1983) and “good standing” status (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993) provide expectations for the nephews to pay their debt to their uncle.

On a related note, the case of Noel and his brother banding together to purchase a *ruta* represents another example of family members helping each other to seek upward mobility opportunities. This is slightly different than the uncle-nephew relationship, given that luck plays a major role in the equation for the nephews since having a *patrón*, as a family member, provides them with opportunities not available to other *trabajadores*. In my research, I found many gardeners directly linked as siblings, cousins, uncles, etc.

⁸³ I conducted an in-depth interview with Noel on June 23, 2011, in the San Fernando Valley.

4.2.3 *Compadrazgo*

In addition to the immediate and extended family networks, *compadrazgo* represents another key network that *patrones* access to channel *trabajadores* into the IMA model. As a form of fictive kinship—family-type relationships based on religious rituals or close friendship ties (Ebaugh and Curry 2000; Stack 1974)—*compadrazgo* represents a social institution found throughout the world, such as Latin America and parts of Europe, based on Christian religious rituals of baptism, confirmation, marriage and communion (Davis et al. 2002; Menjivar 1995; Kana'iaupuni et al. 2005). Focusing on the religious ritual of baptism and special relationships from the Catholic Church, Ebaugh and Curry (2000, 191) provide an excellent explanation of *compadrazgo* as a

... concept that refers to a web of interpersonal relationships established primarily through participation in the Catholic ritual of baptism. This rite involves three individuals or groups of individuals: the initiate, usually a child, who is being baptized; the parents of the child; and the ceremonial sponsor(s) [godparent(s)] of the child. As a result of baptism, three sets of relationships are established. The first links the child and his or her ceremonial sponsors, one or more persons often, but not necessarily, outside the limits of the child's immediate biological family; the second links the parents to the child's ceremonial sponsor(s); and the third consists of the ties between the sponsors (when there is more than one).

In this explanation, we can clearly see that *compadrazgo* creates a special relationship that bonds the parents of a child and the sponsors or godparents outside the boundaries of the biological family (both immediate and extended). In this particular relationship, the parents of the child and godparents refer to each other as *compadres* (co-fathers) and *comadres* (co-mothers).⁸⁴ Unlike family relationships where birth or “blood” determines which family one belongs to, in the case of *compadrazgo*, the parents of the child select the godparents for the child on a voluntary and selective basis. Given the set of obligations bestowed on the godparents (*padrinos* and *madrinas*) in the life of the godson (*sobrino*), be it spiritual or material, and especially in the case of special occasions (e.g., birthdays) and emergencies (e.g., death), the *compadrazgo* bond represents a strong tie built on trust, reciprocity and mutual obligation (Bourdieu 1986; Coleman 1988; Ebaugh and Curry 2000; Kana'iaupuni et al. 2005; Roberts and Morris 2003). For instance, Tilly (2007, 6) stresses the importance of trust or *confianza* for close-knit relationships like *compadrazgo*: “Labels such as kinsman, *compadre*, *paisano*, fellow believer, and co-member of a craft provide a first indication of a trust relationship.”

Ismael Gomez, 53, is an owner of a successful contract gardening enterprise. In 1979, he migrated from the western state of Michoacán, Mexico, to the U.S. Once settled, he worked in dead-end construction jobs for many years. In 1989, his *compadre* (a *patrón*) recruited Ismael to work for him. He also told Ismael that if he worked hard enough, he too could earn a decent living as a *patrón* compared to construction work. Thus, thanks to his *compadre*, Ismael no longer relies on the unstable construction market to support himself and his family.

In a personal interview that I conducted with Ismael,⁸⁵ when I asked him who originally introduced him to this line of work, he credits his *compadre*:

⁸⁴ The literal translation for *compadres* and *comadres* is “co-parents” (Menjivar 1995).

⁸⁵ I conducted an in-depth interview with Ismael on June 13, 2011, in the San Fernando Valley.

Actually, it was my *compadre* who first told me about working as a gardener. He told me that it was a very difficult job, but since I've worked in agricultural work in Mexico since I was very young [nine years of age], that I would have no problems. Also, he told me that I could earn more money than in construction. Since he gave me a start in the business and showed me how it works, I was able to get my own clients, one by one, and eventually go on my own. I couldn't have done it without him.

Ismael not only has a profitable *ruta* of over 100 clients and employs four *trabajadores*, he also performs light construction jobs for his clients as extra jobs. While he always considered himself a hard worker with dreams of owning his own business one day in the U.S., his *compadre* provided him with a roadmap of how to become a successful petty entrepreneur.

4.2.4 Hometown Associates

To secure reliable and trustworthy *trabajadores* for the IPC model, the *patrón* commonly accesses his network relationships of hometown associates. Hometown associates represent members of common origin from sending countries, especially in rural communities found throughout Latin American (Krissman 2005; Massey et al. 1987; Munshi 2003). While Latin American immigrants from the same countries typically refer to each other as *paisanos*—this is also the case for Italian immigrants—where they share a common geographic heritage and bond in receiving countries, those from the same small towns or rural communities typically share a stronger linkage, especially given the shared local customs, traditions and religious celebrations (Krissman 2005; Massey et al. 1987; Munshi 2003).

Referring to the network relationships of hometown associates in the U.S. as *paisanaje*, Massey et al. (1987, 143) discuss the importance of these close ties within the international migration context:

Given the cultural distance between Mexico and the United States and the large number of Mexican immigrants living and working abroad, it is not surprising that *paisanaje* has become an important relationship in recent years.... In an unknown, alien, and often threatening milieu, migrants share a variety of life experiences that draw them together in the pursuit of common goals.... They often produce new forms of association that not only promote the cohesion of migrants in the United States but also facilitate their reintegration into the community.

Consequently, *paisanaje* becomes relevant once hometown associates find themselves in an unfamiliar environment or foreign place, such as the U.S., where belonging to the same community of origin (e.g., rural village) translates into a meaningful relationship for many immigrants in the receiving country (Munshi 2003). These ties, like those of family and *compadrazgo* relationships, serve as key mechanisms of support for immigrants throughout the migratory and settlement process. Similarly, MacDonald and MacDonald (1964, 88), in their study of Southern Italian migrants to the U.S. based on a 1880 – 1914 survey, refer to the Italian concept of *campanilismo* or hometown loyalty: “The ‘Little Italies’ abounded in mutual benefit societies with membership limited to fellow townsman.”

The *patrón* usually recruits a hometown associate as a *trabajador*. By hiring a *trabajador* from his hometown ties, the *patrón* secures a known and trustworthy workforce in an

efficient and effective manner. Instead of interviewing strangers to fill a job opening, the *patrón* saves time, energy and the uncertainty associated with hiring an unfamiliar individual. Not being at the mercy of ex-employer referrals to verify whether a job candidate is honest, reliable and hard-working, by hiring someone he is familiar with, the *patrón* reduces his risks.

As for the *trabajador*, given his limited employment opportunities in a highly competitive and saturated job market for low-wage immigrants in cities like Los Angeles (Light 2006), he benefits from securing a job. Additionally, the *trabajador* also has the opportunity, after gaining job experience and knowledge of the service sector, to become a *patrón* by purchasing a *ruta* via the IGMs. This self-employed opportunity is typically not available to other low-wage immigrant workers, such as day laborers, car wash workers, farm workers, garment workers, dishwashers and bus boys.

Also, while the *patrón* may not gift him a *ruta*, since it's not in the *patrón*'s self-interest to have a high turnover rate of *trabajadores*, the *patrón* may provide the *trabajador* with the opportunity to purchase a *ruta* (or part of one) on credit or below market rate, given his hometown relationship. Depending on the size, *rutas* (or partial *rutas*) can be sold in the thousands (e.g., \$2,000, \$5,000, \$10,000). For future research, I aim to get more accurate figures on these informal financial transactions.⁸⁶

4.2.5 Friendship

In addition to hometown associates, the *patrón* commonly accesses his friendship networks—which include neighbors, roommates, soccer mates, former co-workers, etc.—to secure *trabajadores*. The *patrón* commonly seeks out individuals with rural backgrounds and specific work characteristics, such as possessing a strong ethic and being reliable. In short, the *patrón* ideally seeks out *trabajadores* who match his work ethos and passion for working outdoors with nature in order to maintain an efficient and effective enterprise.

The *patrón*'s decision-making process to hire from his friendship network represents a perfect example of how the network concept of homophily applies in the workplace. To begin, what is homophily? According to McPherson et al. (2001, 416), homophily refers to the tendency of individuals with similar characteristics to associate with each other:

Homophily is the principle that a contact between similar people occurs at a higher rate than among dissimilar people. The pervasive fact of homophily means that cultural, behavioral, genetic, or material information that flows through networks will tend to be localized.

This concept is divided into two categories or types: status and values. While status homophily refers to informal, formal and ascribed socio-economic positions, values homophily consist of attitudes and beliefs. More specifically, the former refers to race, sex, age, religion, education, employment and behavior patterns and the latter refers to individual world outlooks and future orientation. Furthermore, the authors (Ibid., 416) provide some insightful implications of this network concept to the nature of close relationships, such as friendships:

⁸⁶ On December 7, 2011, in a follow-up phone conversation I had with Jaime Aleman, a key informant (see Chapter 6), the price of a *ruta* is usually based on how much revenue it generates per monthly. Once this figure is determined, then the seller quadruples this amount to set the final sale price (often negotiable). For example, if a *ruta* generates \$5,000 per month, then the price is set for \$20,000. Often times, this price includes gardening tools and equipment (excluding truck).

Homophily implies that distance in terms of social characteristics translates into network distance, the number of relationships through which a piece of information must travel to connect two individuals. It also implies that any social entity that depends to a substantial degree on networks for its transmission will tend to be localized in social space and will obey certain fundamental dynamics as it interacts with other social entities in an ecology of social forms.

This network concept is also very important for the recently arrived Mexican immigrants who rely on their interpersonal networks or strong ties to secure employment in an often hostile and competitive environment, especially during economic upheavals and high unemployment rates. According to Gurak and Caces (1992, 161), strong ties refer to individual relationships based on close bonds: “Strong ties consist of those in which there is an important emotional linkage and/or frequent, routine interaction, and similar to primary groups.”⁸⁷ Moreover, based on their research, the provision of supportive resources among different types of ties in East York, Canada, Wellman and Wortley (1990, 564) provide the following three characteristics of strong ties:

... (1) a sense of the relationship being intimate and special, with voluntary investment in the tie and a desire for companionship with the tie partner; (2) an interest in being together as much as possible through interaction in multiple social contexts over a long period; and (3) a sense of mutuality in the relationship with the partner’s needs known and supported.

While we can clearly see that strong ties form special bonds among individual members within cohesive communities, this is not the case for weak ties (i.e., members outside cohesive communities). Wilson (1998, 397), in her research on Mexican immigration in the U.S., provides the following definition: “Weak ties describe the relationship between ego and his/her ‘acquaintance network.’ Such acquaintances are not usually unknown to one another or to members of the ego’s dense network.” In addition to this definition, Gurak and Caces (1992, 161) argue that weak ties include “ties among individuals that simply lack emotional strength (such as neighbors who interact on occasion, but only in a polite, detached manner).”

Given the nature of weak ties, one can safely argue that acquaintances lack the mutual trust and obligation compared to individuals with strong ties. For instance, the *patrón* will most likely hire a friend over a stranger, all other things being equal. This is not to imply that hiring a friend does not represent risks for the *patrón*, such as when problems arise over pay or other work related issues. Since it’s generally easier for the *patrón* to discipline, reprimand or fire a stranger over a friend, according to some of my gardener informants, some *patrones* hesitate to hire friends as *trabajadores* in the first place. That said, friendship ties among Mexican immigrants remain a viable labor source for *patrones* and an opportunity to earn a living for *trabajadores* in this informal niche.

In addition to accessing his friends to recruit workers, the *patrón*, like other business owners and supervisors in the formal economy, also access the friendship (and family) networks of his *trabajadores*. This represents a cost-effective and efficient way for the *patrón* to meet his labor needs. For instance, Gold (2005, 264) discusses the benefits for employers in the formal economy who access their workers’ migrant networks for new workers: “Little costs or effort

⁸⁷ Also see Chapter 2 for a review of Granovetter’s (1973, 1983) groundbreaking research on tie strength (i.e., strong and weak ties).

need be expended when new workers are located through employees' contacts.... Moreover, such hires are likely to be competent and reliable, since present workers must take responsibility for them.”

Javier Chavez, 28, works as a *trabajador* for a contract gardening enterprise. He has worked as a *trabajador* for numerous *patrones* during the past 10 years. Originally from the north-west state of Durango, Mexico, he entered the workforce at 14 years of age, working in agricultural fields. He also worked with his father raising livestock, particularly cattle. When Javier first migrated to the U.S. at 18 years of age in 2001, he found work as a *trabajador* via a friend from the same hometown. He explained to me in a personal interview that I conducted with him⁸⁸ how his friend helped him secure his first job in this niche:

I first started working as a gardener because a friend of mine recommended me to his boss. If not for my friend, I do not know where I would be working. He does not work as a gardener anymore, but I still do because I like this type of work. I also have a lot of friends that are also workers.

In my research, I found Javier's story to be very common. Of the 25 *trabajadores* I interviewed, for example, 10 individual (40 percent) entered this niche via friendship networks (i.e., strong ties). I also found in my research that many of these *trabajadores*, primarily the single ones, live with other Mexican immigrants, as renters. Sharing rent with close friends serves as an effective economic strategy for *trabajadores* to save on housing costs and other expenses, such as meals and entertainment, especially given their meager wages. By doing so, they are able to provide for themselves and, often times, send remittances to family members in Mexico. While conducting interviews, I also observed that many roommates also worked as *trabajadores* for either the same *patrón* or a different one.

In short, by examining the hierarchical, dynamic and complex social structure of migrant networks in this informal niche, this dissertation examines the significance of these strong ties for Mexican immigrant gardeners to both survive and succeed in the informal economy. Access to these migrant ties represent valuable resources (i.e., social capital) for these *paisanos* to provide and exchange financial support (e.g., monetary gifts, loans), vital information (e.g., job referrals, settlement destinations), direct assistance upon settlement (e.g., food, shelter) and emotional support (Davis et al. 2002; Gold 2005; Munshi 2003; Wilson 1994). In the particular case of the contract gardening service sector, this also includes the exchange of key resources and support for some immigrants to become petty-entrepreneurs.

⁸⁸ I conducted an in-depth interview with Javier on June 3, 2011, in the San Fernando Valley.

Chapter 5. *Jardinería*:⁸⁹ A Way of Surviving and Thriving in Los Angeles

The first requisite of a good servant is that he should conspicuously know his place.

— Thorstein Veblen, 1899

Roberto Librada, 90, owned and operated a successful contract gardening enterprise in West Los Angeles for over two decades.⁹⁰ Currently depending on Social Security benefits and personal savings, he retired from his contract gardening business at 70 years of age.⁹¹ Given that Roberto reported his earnings to the government as an independent contractor and also worked for the Malibu Colony as a gardener for many years, as a means to supplement his earnings from his contract gardening business, he qualified for Social Security benefits, unlike many of his co-ethnic gardeners. Originally from the western state of Nayarit, Mexico, Roberto entered the workforce at seven years of age, working alongside his siblings and father in agricultural fields, primarily cultivating corn. Like most of my gardener informants, Roberto only attended a few years of formal education in his rural community, which limited his employment opportunities in Mexico. In his early teens, he worked 12-hour days for meager wages to help support his impoverished family. Hoping to earn higher wages in *El Norte*., during his mid-20's, Roberto, like millions of his compatriots, joined the Bracero Program—the U.S.-Mexico guest worker program from 1942 to 1964 (Acuña 2004; Krissman 2005).⁹²

During the mid-1960s, once his agricultural contracts expired, Roberto remained in the U.S. without legal authorization as an undocumented worker. This was a common practice among *braceros*, especially after earning relatively higher wages compared to the meager wages in Mexico and experiencing new opportunities outside of their rural communities (Krissman 2005; McKenzie and Rappaport 2007). As a result, U.S. employers also benefited from the abundance of low-wage Mexican labor. According to Krissman (2005, 11), many “former *braceros* stayed on or returned later without new contracts at the request of their employers.” Thus, while drafted as a temporary guest program, the Bracero Program’s unintended consequences resulted in an increase of Mexican migration to the U.S., especially after the end of this program (McKenzie and Rappaport 2007).

In 1967, after engaging in day labor work for a few years, Roberto, with the help of a friend, secured employment in a West Los Angeles landscape nursery. Given his agricultural background, working with garden plants and other landscape products represented a smooth transition for him in the U.S. labor market. At the nursery, he mostly interacted with two sets of clients: (1) contract gardeners of Japanese ancestry (who dominated the contract gardening niche during this period, as noted below) and (2) white homeowners (those who still performed their own landscape gardening as part of their domestic household duties and for leisurely purposes).

⁸⁹ In the U.S., the Spanish term “*jardinería*” refers to contract gardening in the informal economy (Ramirez and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2009). In Los Angeles, Mexican immigrant gardeners also refer to this service sector as “*el jardín*,” which literally means “the garden” in English.

⁹⁰ I conducted an in-depth interview with Roberto on April 24, 2011, in West Los Angeles.

⁹¹ Since this dissertation focuses on full-time workers and owners of contract gardening enterprises, I use the year 1991 for data gathering purposes, when he transitioned to part-time work, supervising his small *ruta*.

⁹² During the period of this guest worker program, U.S. and Mexican officials recruited an estimated five million Mexicans to work primarily in agricultural areas throughout the U.S. (Boyd 1989; McKenzie and Rappaport 2007).

In the summer of 1970, a regular customer—homeowner customer and longtime acquaintance—asked Roberto to perform landscaping work for pay at his Malibu home. Shortly after earning extra money from this weekend job, Roberto realized the potential of earning more money and enjoying more flexibility as a contract gardener compared to his nursery job. Roberto then offered his landscape services on his off-days to his other regular customers, where, one year later, he eventually secured enough clients to quit his nursery job to start a contract gardening enterprise.

In Roberto's particular case, we can clearly see how his weak ties (i.e., homeowners / acquaintances) allowed for him to enter self-employment as an owner of a contract gardening enterprise. Not benefiting from other *paisanos* to assist him, Roberto relied on referrals from his mostly white clients to build his *ruta*. According to Roberto, he invested a lot of time and effort on each yard in order to perform quality work, especially given his limited gardening tools and equipment, to satisfy his clients.

To get ahead, Roberto also relied on his strong ties: his wife. For example, to purchase his first truck, he turned to his wife, a *doméstica* in West Los Angeles, to access her personal savings. Her cash income also allowed them to survive at the early stages of his small business venture. Given the lack of Mexican immigrants who owned and operated contract gardening enterprises during the late 1960s and early 1970s, Roberto represents a pioneer immigrant gardener in this informal niche.

In the immigration literature, the immigrant pioneer—an immigrant who originally settles in the receiving country—paves the road for future immigrants who benefit from established contacts in the areas of housing, jobs and support services (Gurak and Caces 1992; Hagan 1998; Mines and de Janvry 1982). Lacking strong community ties, the pioneers typically incur higher migratory and settlement costs compared to future immigrants (Hagan 1998; Mines and de Janvry 1982). These costs include the lack of financial capital, established contacts and support services needed to successfully settle and incorporate in the receiving country.

While Roberto incurred higher financial costs and emotional stress to enter the contract gardening niche compared to future *patrones*, especially during the past three decades, he does have another co-ethnic group to thank for pioneering the contract gardening niche as a viable economic vehicle for immigrant upward mobility: Japanese immigrants and their descendants.

5.1 The Original Gardeners: Japanese Immigrants

The history of Japanese immigrants and their descendants in the U.S. has been one of struggle, perseverance and triumph. Starting in the late 1800s, many Japanese immigrants or *issei*—first generation Japanese immigrants—settled in California, primarily working in produce agriculture, from farm labor to produce to distribution, including contract gardening (Hirahara 2000; Jiobu 1998; Tsukashima 2000). Given their success in produce agriculture, where they successfully developed economic niches in all aspects of productions, primarily prior to WWII, Jiobu (1998, 353) proposes a model of ethnic hegemony, referring to “a situation in which an ethnic group achieves economic control over an important economic arena that interfaces with the majority.” According to numerous scholars (Jiobu 1998; Tsuchida 1984; Tsukashima 1991; Tengan 2006), the *issei* succeeded in California's agricultural industry primarily due to their agricultural background (both as workers and small landowners), strong work ethic and reliance co-ethnic bonds. In addition to agricultural labor, as early as 1891, the *issei* first engaged in contract gardening in northern California (Hirahara 2000; Tsukashima 1995/1996).

According to Tsuchida (1984), the first contract gardeners in Southern California originally worked as paid domestic workers, while occasionally performing yard work for their mostly white employers. Contract gardening represented an ideal niche for the *issei* during the early 1900s since, like agriculture labor, it created a smooth transition for those with rural backgrounds working in U.S. urban settings. According to Tsuchida (Ibid., 437) compared to domestic work and other manual labor occupations held by the *issei* and other low-wage immigrants during this period, contract gardening represented a more profitable and independent means of earning a living:

Because lawn mowing turned out to be quite profitable, many Japanese immigrants entered into contracts to cut lawns for affluent Americans. Gardening yielded \$2 per day, as compared with the prevailing daily wages of \$1.35 for railroad workers in the Pacific Northwest or \$1.75 for day laborers in Los Angeles.

While the *issei* pioneered the contract gardening service sector in Los Angeles and throughout the state, their reputation for excellent work and the demand for lawn care services from affluent residents, allowed for these immigrants to carve out a niche for themselves and future generations to benefit from (Hirahara 2000). Also, given the anti-immigrant laws in California in the early 1900s against Japanese immigrants in the agricultural industry, many *issei* pursued contract gardening as a viable occupation in urban settings like Los Angeles (Hirahara 2000; Tengan 2006; Tsukashima 2000). For instance, Tsukashima (2000, 75), documents the impact of California's 1913 anti-immigrant land act, which denied "aliens ineligible for citizenship" from owning agricultural land, on *issei* farmers:

Many *issei* farmers entered the city to find work. Continuing their entrepreneurial spirit, former farmers turned to floral and nursery ventures. Others adopted gardening, which required little capital. The numbers entering the field were likely large because there was, at one point, a temporary shortage of gardening jobs in Los Angeles. The housing boom of the 1920s, however, more than offset the shortage created an unprecedented demand for maintenance gardening.

As pioneers, the *issei* paved the road in Los Angeles and beyond for other immigrant groups, such as Mexican immigrants, to earn an honest living in this informal niche. For many recent immigrants from rural backgrounds, contract gardening represented an opportunity to work in the U.S. informal economy, especially given the low costs and lack of formal prerequisites, such as a high school diploma and high level of English fluency. "Although it was an exhausting job," Tsuchida (1984, 443) argues,⁹³ "gardening could be undertaken without much capital, knowledge of English, or special skills."

However, while the *issei* gardener pioneers easily entered this service sector with little competition and low business costs, today's immigrants face greater competition and higher costs to enter this informal niche and become successful owners of contract gardening enterprises. While there are many similarities in terms of the nature of landscape work (e.g., mowing lawns, planting flowers, growing trees) between Japanese immigrant gardeners of yesterday and Mexican immigrant gardeners of today in Los Angeles, the latter group experiences more competition given the high immigration patterns of Mexican immigrants to this

⁹³ Here, the author refers to Japanese immigrant gardeners during the early 1900s in the U.S.

city. Also, today's Mexican immigrant gardeners must contend with increasing costs for more expensive gardening equipment and rising gasoline prices.

Like today's Mexican immigrant gardeners, Tsuchida (Ibid., 444) also argues that the *issei* commonly relied on co-ethnic ties to enter this trade: "To enter the field of gardening, a Japanese immigrant often received help from *issei* who had previously entered this occupation." Discussing the role of kinship and co-ethnic relations, both domestically and internationally, Tsukashima (2000) documents the importance of strong ties among Japanese immigrants to join this service sector, including the direct recruitment of family members from Japan.

For Japanese immigrants and second-generation Japanese Americans, contract gardening represented a respectable occupation throughout most of the 20th Century, providing them an opportunity to earn a living for themselves and their families, especially given the history of anti-Japanese hysteria in this country. Relying on their strong work ethic, discipline, perseverance and co-ethnic ties, Japanese immigrants (*issei*) and their children (*nissei*) paved the way for the third-generation Japanese (*sansei*) to pursue higher education and white-collar professions (Hirahara 2000; Tsukashima 2000). Kobashigawa (1988, 326) writes about this transition with mixed feelings:

... The post-war American social system is gradually being transformed, and it is time for the young Japanese American *sansei* [third-generation American] to apply their genuine abilities to whatever line of work they wish. Very few young people among the *sansei* are doing gardening. Therefore, the future of Japanese American gardening is a declining one... However, we are happy that the young Japanese Americans are now free to pursue any line of work. For this, we should be grateful.

In addition to the generational transition from contract gardeners to white-collar professions among individuals of Japanese ancestry, the dramatic influx of Mexican immigrants following the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 created a large labor pool of rural Mexican immigrants for the remaining Japanese American gardeners to hire from. (Apart from contract gardening, many Mexican immigrants worked for Japanese American employers in their lawn-mower repair shops and landscape nurseries.) By working as hired gardeners for an aging Japanese American group of contract gardening enterprises, Mexican immigrants eventually became the dominant ethnic group in this informal niche in Los Angeles and beyond (Huerta 2007; Pisani and Yoskowitz 2005, 2006; Ramirez 2010; Ramirez and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2009; Steinberg 2006; Tsukashima 2007).

5.2 Passing the Green Torch: Japanese Immigrants to Mexican Immigrants

This informal niche, according to my research, provides both opportunities and perils for Mexican immigrants in Los Angeles. On the one hand, similar to Japanese immigrants and their descendants, recent Mexican immigrants who experience xenophobia and a hostile formal labor market benefit from employment and entrepreneurial opportunities in the informal economy. In the informal economy, for instance, recent immigrants avoid many occupational barriers found in the formal economy, such as providing proof of legal status in this country. Moreover, recent immigrants with very limited English skills and low levels of formal education (e.g., primary school only) enjoy easy entry into this service sector via their migrant networks.

On the other hand, the informal economy is ripe for worker exploitation and poor working conditions (Portes et al. 1989; Sassen 1994). Due to the lack of governmental regulations and protections, workers in the informal economy suffer from work-related abuses similar to workers prior to President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal in the early 20th Century. For example, immigrant workers and other individuals who work in the informal economy lack basic worker rights and protections enjoyed by many workers in the formal economy, such as minimum wage protections, workers' compensation benefits, work-site safety rules, employer-based health insurance, anti-child labor laws, 40-hour work weeks, overtime pay, federal holidays, sick days, overtime pay and the right for collective bargaining.

Consequently, many informal workers, including contract gardeners, work long hours and, often times, six days per week with little pay. They also lack governmental protections and benefits. However, the case of contract gardening should not be confounded with the exploitative practices found in sweatshops, such as the garment industry (Fernandez-Kelly and Garcia 1994; Sassen 1994; Sassen-Koob 1989), since many workers or *trabajadores* who enter the contract gardening niche enjoy the upward mobility opportunities (i.e., in the case of the *patrones*).

Mexican immigrant gardeners often experience workplace verbal abuse from their clients. For instance, according to all of my gardener informants, they all experienced verbal abuse over the years from their clients and, often times, remained silent for the fear of losing their clients. Also, too often, clients refuse to pay contract gardeners for their services, where gardeners lack the resources and know-how to pursue legal claims against the clients. This is especially the case for gardeners who lack legal status in the U.S. Moreover, my gardener informants also expressed frustration about being robbed by thieves at their job-sites. For instance, while performing landscape work in the back yard, gardeners will sometimes return to their trucks only to find their tools and equipment stolen.

5.3 Re-examining the Informal Economy

In re-examining the informal economy literature, Maloney (2003, 2004) provides important contributions to the academic field focusing on developing areas, such as Latin American countries. According to Maloney (2004, 1159), many scholars perceive the informal economy or informal sector⁹⁴ in many developing countries, such as Mexico, as a "residual comprised of disadvantaged, workers rationed out of good jobs." Lacking the same protections and benefits (e.g., wages) found in the formal economy, Maloney (2003, 72) refers to the traditional perception of the informal economy as precarious and undesirable, leading to a "source of indecent work, or poverty trap." While acknowledging the pitfalls of the informal economy, such as the absence of benefits, irregular work conditions, high turnover rates and lower rates of return, Maloney (2003, 66) posits that the informal economy "should be seen as a *relatively* [author's italics] desirable entrepreneurial sector that at the margin that offers poor workers jobs as 'decent' as those they could get in the formal sector."

Arguing that there is nothing "instinctively inferior" about informal self-employment, Maloney does an excellent job of re-framing (Lakoff 2004) the informal economy to encompass both the negative and positive characteristics. Maloney stipulates that scholars, specifically

⁹⁴ While scholars like Maloney, who conduct research in developing countries, use the term "informal sector," like Sassen (1994) and other scholars in the U.S., I use the term "informal economy" to describe unregulated economic activities in the U.S. For a review of the informal economy literature in advanced countries, such as the U.S., refer to Chapter 2.

economists, focus too much attention on wage differentials between the formal and informal economy, where the former typically offers higher wages. Instead, Maloney (Ibid., 72) argues that scholars should view the total package of job qualities in the informal economy, especially for the self-employed, such as wages, benefits, independence and so on. More specifically, referring to both developing and developed countries, Maloney (Ibid., 66) argues in favor of informal self-employment: “The characteristics that make self-employment attractive in the industrialized countries—flexibility, being one’s own boss, the possibility to do better on one’s own, freedom from mind-numbing assembly lines; greater ease in balancing family and work—appeal in developing countries as much as they do in the industrialized world.”

Similar to Maloney, while this dissertation documents the perils of the informal economy in the U.S., it also recognizes the promises that an unregulated economy offers to disadvantaged Mexican immigrants and similar groups in this country. While many scholars have conducted excellent research on the poor working conditions and workplace exploitation of immigrant workers in the U.S. informal economy, such as the sweatshop conditions of garment workers in New York and Los Angeles (Fernandez-Kelly and Garcia 1994; Sassen 1994; Sassen-Koob 1989), this dissertation contributes to recent research on the informal economy as a viable pathway for immigrant entrepreneurship (Rajman 2001; Rajman and Tienda 2000; Zolniski 1994). While contract gardening in Los Angeles continues to be plagued with similar working conditions prior to FDR’s New Deal for millions of American workers, this informal service sector remains one of the few promises for Mexican immigrants with low human capital and low financial capital to pursue self-employment and upward mobility compared to the constraints and workplace barriers found in the formal economy for many immigrants.⁹⁵

5.4 Key Characteristics of the Contract Gardening Niche

Influenced by the groundbreaking work of the anthropologist Keith Hart on the informal economy in Accra, Ghana, during his ethnographic research of the mid-1960s and subsequent lectures in the early 1970s (Hart 1973; Portes and Schauffler 1993), the International Labour Office (ILO) produced a comprehensive study to understand and support Kenya’s economic productivity and employment opportunities (ILO 1972). Categorizing informal activities as a “way of doing things,” the ILO (Ibid., 6) report delineates the following characteristics:

- (1) Easy entry
- (2) Reliance on indigenous resources
- (3) Family ownership of enterprises
- (4) Small-scale operations
- (5) Labor-intensive and adaptive technology
- (6) Skills required outside the formal school system
- (7) Unregulated and competitive markets

While these informal characteristics represent a different era (early 1970s) and an underdeveloped region of the world (Kenya, Africa)—including the fact that it only describes one category of informal economic activity (Peattie 1980) and represents a false “informal /

⁹⁵ See a brief discussion workplace barriers or “blocked mobility” factors, see Chapter 2.

formal” dualistic model (Bromley 1978)⁹⁶—this “way of doing things” surprisingly describes how Mexican immigrant gardeners navigate Los Angeles’ informal economy.

Moreover, while Mexican immigrant gardeners experience vastly new realities and barriers in an advanced country like the U.S. in the 21st Century, compared to an underdeveloped country like Kenya almost four decades ago, the following characteristics provide an excellent framework to better understand this under-examined service sector in Los Angeles’ informal economy.

5.4.1 Easy Entry

Regarding the issue of employment entry into Los Angeles’ contract gardening niche, based on my research, Mexican immigrants pursuing employment as *trabajadores* experience few obstacles, especially for those with close ties to established *trabajadores*. In this informal niche, Mexican immigrants need not worry about providing prospective employers (or *patrones*, in this particular case) with proof of legal status in this country, such as a Social Security card, driver’s license and birth certificate. Also, once hired, *trabajadores* do not fill out Employment Eligibility Verification Forms (i.e., I-9 forms), as required from hired workers in the formal economy. Moreover, given the informal hiring process, Mexican immigrants do not submit resumes and ex-employer references. Moreover, Mexican immigrants without high school diplomas and very limited English skills will not experience occupational entry barriers. Lastly, these job seekers need not worry about preparing for formal interviews or submitting resumes, since *patrones* primarily rely on their migrant networks to determine whether the applicant represents a good fit for his crew.

Salomon Chavez, 19, migrated from Michoacán, Mexico, to the United States in 2007, as an undocumented immigrant. He first entered the workforce at 12 years of age, working alongside his siblings in agricultural fields—cultivating corn and tomato. Given his limited formal education, low level of English proficiency and lack of employment contacts in the U.S., Salomon relied on his father to secure employment. His father asked a friend from his hometown (a *patrón*) to hire his son (starting when he was 16 years of age) as a *trabajador*,

In a personal interview that I conducted with Salomon,⁹⁷ he explained to me how he first started working as a *trabajador*:

I didn’t have any problems finding a job when I was here in this country. My father asked his friend for a favor to hire me. The boss only asked if I was a hard worker and had experience working with my hands in agriculture. The rest, he said, I could learn on the job. It’s been over three years now and I’m still working for this same boss. I learn a lot from him. He tells me to work hard and save my money if I want to be a boss too, like him.

While Salomon has taken a few ESL classes at night school to improve his employment opportunities, very few of my *trabajador* informants have taken similar classes. According to my informant, they lack the time and energy to take advantage of ESL classes held at adult school at the Los Angeles School District (LAUSD), vocational training centers, community colleges and/or non-profit organizations. Given their physically demanding work and demanding work

⁹⁶ I concur with scholarly criticisms of the critical assessments of the ILO report (Peattie 1980; Bromley 1978). Thus, by no means am I adopting this report in its entirety.

⁹⁷ I conducted an in-depth interview with Salomon on March 24, 2011, in South Los Angeles.

schedule (e.g., working long hours, six days a week), along with familial and social obligations, these individuals get home too tired and too late to benefit from ESL classes.

In lieu of taking ESL classes, many of my gardener informants, especially the *patrones*, acquired limited English fluency by communicating with their English-speaking clients and other individuals as part of their routine business-related activities. Other individuals include retail and customer service workers at home improvement centers, lawn mower repair shops and landscape nurseries. Many of them also learned limited English skills from their U.S.-born children. However, acquiring a high level of English fluency to improve their socio-economic status in this country remains a major area of need for Mexican immigrant gardeners (see Chapter 6).

5.4.2 Reliance on Indigenous Resources

Mexican immigrant gardeners, both *trabajadores* and *patrones*, rely on indigenous resources, specifically the existing social capital⁹⁸ found in many immigrant communities to both enter and succeed in this informal niche. For instance, instead of relying on external resources, such as private bank loans and government aid to start small businesses, Mexican immigrants in this informal niche rely on their personal resources (e.g., savings) and migrant networks (e.g., gifts, interest-free loans) to secure the initial capital to purchase business-related tools, equipment and trucks. Also, to secure information on how to start and maintain a successful contract gardening business, these individuals exchange key information among each other, in lieu of taking business courses at a local community college or university.

Like other immigrant groups in the U.S., such as Chinese and Koreans, I found that Mexican immigrants in this informal niche self-organize to pool their financial resources for personal and business-related purposes. During my ethnographic research, for instance, I observed that many gardeners participated in rotating credit associations (RCAs)⁹⁹ to cover business related expenses, such as securing a down payment for a truck and purchasing landscape equipment. RCAs represent a concrete example of how Mexican immigrants and other groups rely on their indigenous resources to survive and succeed in the U.S. and beyond. Describing RCAs, which can be found in many parts of the world, Coleman (1988, S102) succinctly outlines how these associations generally operate:

These associations are groups of friends and neighbors who typically meet monthly, each person contributing to a central fund that is then given to one of the members (through bidding or by lot), until, after a number of months, each of the n persons has made n contributions and received one payout.

In addition, as a form of social capital, Coleman (Ibid.) argues that RCAs operate under two key elements found in many cohesive communities: "... trustworthiness of the social environment, which means that obligations will be repaid, and the actual extent of social obligations held." In their article on social "embeddedness" and immigration, Portes and Sensenbrenner (1993) provide an excellent analysis of social capital using examples from the immigration literature, focusing on the key elements, among others, of trust and reciprocity (or social obligations).

⁹⁸ As noted in Chapter 4, migrant networks represent a form of social capital (Massey 1999).

⁹⁹ Both Mexican nationals and Mexican immigrants in the U.S., including Latino citizens, often use the following Spanish terms interchangeably when referring to RCAs: *tandas* and *cundinas*.

5.4.3 Family Ownership of Enterprises

While the *patrones*, during my in-depth interviews, universally articulated the importance of being self-reliant, possessing a strong work ethic and embracing manual labor to succeed in this informal niche, I also found that these petty-entrepreneurs mostly operate their contract gardening enterprises as family-based operations. This includes the direct and indirect role of family members, assisting the *patrones* in various roles both in a paid and unpaid.¹⁰⁰ In the husband-wife relationship, for instance, I commonly found the wife preparing lunches, washing work clothes and counseling / advising the husband (*patrón*) regarding work-related matters and problems. In another common scenario, I found the wife preparing invoices, paying the bills, collecting money from clients and taking business-related messages.

Regarding children, I also found teenagers performing similar business-related tasks, such as preparing invoices, paying bills, collecting gardening monthly fees and taking messages. I also found the U.S.-born children to play a vital role in translating for the father, especially when work-related issues and problems arise with the client. Based on interviews with my *patrón* informants, they all indicated that they comprehend enough English to maintain simple, work-related conversations with their clients. However, as a group, they lack the sufficient English skills to engage in complex or deep conversations with their clients, sometimes leading to miscommunication and confusion.¹⁰¹ Moreover, I found that teenage boys often go to work in their father's business. Apart from earning extra money and learning the virtues of possessing a strong work ethic, teenage boys often serve as a reliable source of labor for the *patrón* on weekends, school breaks and summer time.

Martin Alvarez, 47, is an owner of a contract gardening enterprise. He started his business in 1987. Born in Zacatecas, Mexico, he first entered the workforce at 12 years of age in Mexico's agricultural fields, working with his father and 6 siblings. In 1979, at the age of 15, he migrated to the U.S., where he worked as a carwash worker. Two years later, his *compadre* helped him secure a job as a *trabajador*. Working for over five years as a *trabajador*, he saved enough money to become a *patrón*.

According to Martin, he initiated his business out of his car, working every single day during his first year of self-employment, allowing him to save enough money to purchase a truck. However, while he has invested a lot of time, energy and labor to become a *patrón*, in a personal interview that I conducted with Martin,¹⁰² he informed me how his wife deserves a lot of credit for his current success:

My wife is from my pueblo in Zacatecas, but she arrived in the U.S. at an earlier age. This allowed her to go to school and attend college. She's now a teacher and has been very helpful in making my business more professional. I do not worry about the bills since she does it all on the computer. She emails my clients when they do not pay. I do not worry. This makes me focus on my business to make it better. I also get health insurance through her school, so I do not worry about health issues.

¹⁰⁰ For the single *patrones*, I found that their family members, such as their fathers, siblings and cousins play a key role in their business operations.

¹⁰¹ As noted in Chapter 6, access to ESL classes represents an area of need for Mexican immigrant gardeners.

¹⁰² I conducted an in-depth interview with Martin on June 20, 2011, in the Central Los Angeles.

In the below-mentioned case, I found the spouse to play a more direct, “hands-on” role in the business, whereby performing contract gardening duties alongside her husband. While this case represents an anomaly, it demonstrates the different ways Mexican immigrants organize themselves in the contract gardening niche to survive and thrive in the informal economy.

Jesus Banderas, 70, owns and operates a contract gardening enterprise. Working alone, he started his business in 1981. Originally from Zacatecas, he first entered the workforce at six years of age, working alongside his siblings and father in agricultural fields. Lacking formal education in Mexico, Jesus, along with his younger brother, migrated to the U.S. in 1976. When his younger brother first secured a position as a *trabajador*, he soon recruited Jesus to join him as a *trabajador*. Five years later, they pooled their financial resources to purchase a *ruta* from their *patrón*.¹⁰³ Over the years, once they accumulated enough clients, Jesus and his brother amicably separated so each could have his own contract gardening enterprise. While his younger brother eventually recruited two *trabajadores* for his business, Jesus relies solely on himself and his wife to perform his gardening work.

In a personal interview that I conducted with Jesus,¹⁰⁴ he explained to me the role of his wife in the business:

I do not have any workers. I’ve never had any since I started my own business with the help of my brother. After we divided the business in half, me and my wife started working together. Since we both work together, the work is not hard. I do not have a big *ruta* so we always finish the work on time. I like working with my wife because we get along and I do not have to worry about paying for workers and all the problems workers give the boss. She likes the work too. We have three sons, but they have their own careers.

While considered masculine work (Ramirez 2010) or gendered work (Ramirez and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2009), due to economic necessities or personal preferences, contract gardeners organize themselves in different manners, including breaking away from the idea or practice that this type of so-called “dirty work” can only be performed by males, as illustrated by this case.

5.4.4 Small-Scale Operations

In an article on labor markets, Granovetter (1984) refers to very small establishments (VSEs) as business ventures employing less than 10 workers. Arguing against the notion that large establishments controlled the U.S. workforce throughout the 20th Century, Granovetter uncovers the importance of VSEs for U.S. workers in particular and the economy in general. “Small may or may not be beautiful,” Granovetter (Ibid., 334) writes, “... but it certainly is bountiful, and thereby deserving of its fair share of attention.”

Based on my research, I found contract gardening enterprises to represent VSEs, given that these informal enterprises range from zero to six workers (i.e., crews). Small-scale enterprises commonly operate with no workers, where the owner, as a self-employed individual, works alone (Bates 1997; Evans and Leighton 1989; Granovetter 1984; Maloney 2004). The crew size depends on the size of the *ruta*, the amount of yard-work required on a daily basis and the profits generated by these small enterprises. While no official data or statistics exist on size

¹⁰³ This represents one form in which siblings help each other to establish contract gardening enterprises.

¹⁰⁴ I conducted an in-depth interview with Jesus on March 23, 2011, in the Central Los Angeles.

of contract gardening enterprises in Los Angeles, based on my ethnographic research, I found the following workforce patterns: a *patrón* with a *ruta* of 50 houses or clients typically works alone; the *patrón* with 50 to 75 clients needs one *trabajador*; the *patrón* with 75 to 100 clients needs two *trabajadores*; and the *patrón* with 100 to 150 clients needs three or more *trabajadores*.

Joaquin Ramirez, 51, owns and operates a very successful contract gardening enterprise. He started his business in 1987. Born in Zacatecas, Mexico, he entered the workforce at eight years of age, raising cows and working in agricultural fields. Completing only one year of formal schooling,¹⁰⁵ he first migrated to the U.S. in 1976, after which he occasionally returned to Mexico for several years for personal reasons before permanently residing in the U.S. Fortunately for Joaquin, his father owned a contract gardening enterprise, where he always had a job to return to. Once ready to start his own business, Joaquin's father gifted him a *ruta*, allowing the ambitious son to make a smooth transition from *trabajador* to *patrón* in a couple of years.

Compared to the other *patrones* I interviewed, along with many others I observed during my ethnographic fieldwork, Joaquin represents a very successful petty entrepreneur. Divided into two crews, he employs five *trabajadores*. In a personal interview that I conducted with Joaquin,¹⁰⁶ he discussed with me his business success:

I do not like to have a large *ruta* where I charge a little per house. It's too much work. I rather have a small *ruta* and do a good job. This way I can charge more per house. These are clients who have a lot of money and big properties. I need to hire 5 workers and make many visits. Whenever I raise my prices, I tell them that I spend a lot of money on trucks, equipment and gas. It's not cheap to have a small business. I do not want my business to grow too much because I will lose control of it.

5.4.5 Labor-Intensive and Adaptive Technology¹⁰⁷

Contract gardening represents a labor-intensive service sector in Los Angeles and beyond. For instance, in their exploratory study of contract gardening in South Texas,¹⁰⁸ Pisani and Yoskowitz (2005, 230) discuss the physically demanding character of this informal niche:

Like construction workers, gardeners are able to ply their trade year around in south Texas due to a favorable climate, though plant growth slows significantly in December and January. The work is hard, dusty, and sweaty with the ever-present sun absolutely stifling from April through October. It is no wonder that once households attain a middling income they "contract out" for others to care for their lawns.

Whether it's South Texas, The Hamptons of Long Island, New York, or the City of Los Angeles, contract gardening requires men to perform hard and sweaty work, as the above authors illustrate, while also being exposed to a wide range of weather elements, such as sun, rain, heat

¹⁰⁵ Like many other gardeners, Joaquin acquired limited English skills over the years via his regular conversations with English-speaking clients and other individuals related to his business activities.

¹⁰⁶ I conducted an in-depth interview with Joaquin on March 28, 2011, in West Los Angeles.

¹⁰⁷ In terms of technology, the question of adaptive versus exported technology raised in the ILO Kenya report does not apply to the case of this service sector.

¹⁰⁸ Like in the place of Los Angeles, these contract gardeners represent mostly Mexican immigrants.

and cold. This is in contrast to other low-wage immigrants who primarily work indoors, such as inside residential homes, warehouses, factories, restaurants and office buildings. However, this is not to imply that outdoor work by itself represents more laborious work compared to inside work.

The laborious demands of this informal niche include some of the following physical activities performed by both *trabajadores* and *patrones*: repetitive bending and stooping; constantly kneeling and crouching; pushing and pulling; loading and unloading; heavy lifting, carrying and throwing; handling heavy machines; and climbing trees.

Considered “dirty work” by the dominant U.S. culture (Ramirez 2010; Ramirez and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2009), not only do gardeners work with dirt daily—getting their hands and clothes dirty regularly—this labor intensive service sector also poses many work-related problems to gardeners. Too often, many of the aforementioned physical activities lead to physical injuries and, sometimes, death. According to my informants, gardeners often suffer work-related injuries to the back, waist, neck, shoulder, hands and knees. Also, since gardeners work with dangerous equipment with sharp blades, including climbing trees without proper training or equipment, the risk of death is omnipresent in this line of work.¹⁰⁹

Based on my interviews with both *trabajadores* and *patrones*, the labor-intensive nature of contract gardening, however, does not appear to be a point of contention for them. This also applies to the demanding work schedule, such as 10 to 11 hour work schedules, as noted in Table 5.1 (see below). Since performing labor-intensive work all of their lives, starting at very young ages in Mexico, my gardener informants did not complain about their current work schedule and physical demands. Actually, all expressed satisfaction with contract gardening, where many stated that it reminded them of the agricultural labor they performed in Mexico, as teens and young men. Compared to cultivating crops and raising livestock in Mexico, contract gardening represents a less physically demanding job for Mexican immigrant gardeners.

5.4.6 Skills Required Outside the Formal School System

While institutions of higher educations, learning centers and trade associations offer horticultural classes for individuals interested in gardening, contract gardeners do not need to pursue formal education classes and professional development trainings. Instead, following in John Dewey’s classic dictum, “learning by doing” (Friedmann 1987), Mexican immigrant gardeners acquire their gardening skills and knowledge via prior work experience (i.e., pre-migration work in agricultural fields in sending country) and on-the-job training (i.e., work experience in contract gardening enterprises in receiving country). While prior agricultural work experience is not a pre-requisite to acquire gardening skills, like in the case of Japanese immigrants during the 20th Century, possessing an agricultural work background facilitates the successful job entry of immigrants into this informal niche (Huerta 2007; Tsuchida 1984; Ramirez and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2009).

Sergio Sanchez, 37, works as a *trabajador* for a small contract gardening enterprise. Not interested in becoming a *patrón*, he has worked as a *trabajador* for numerous *patrones* during the past 11 years. He originally migrated from Durango, Mexico, to the U.S. in 1991. During the past two decades, he has returned to Mexico over six times for personal and work-related

¹⁰⁹ To read about the tragic death of a gardener (Gregory Rodriguez) at 19 years of age, see: Sam Quinones. 2006. “Perils in the Palms.” *Los Angeles Times*, October 26, sec. A.

reasons. Obtaining only an elementary school education in his rural hometown, he first entered the workforce at 17 years of age, working in Mexico's agricultural fields.

In a personal interview that I conducted with Sergio,¹¹⁰ he spoke to me about how he first learned the trade:

When I first starting working as a gardener, I didn't know anything about this trade. Working outdoors in the fields in Mexico did help me, but I've never worked as a gardener in Mexico. I was lost at first. The other workers in my crew worked very fast and it was hard to keep up. I got a lot of help from my brothers who are also gardeners. My *paisanos* in my first crew also helped me learn the trade, though. The boss showed me gardening too. After many years, I know everything about plants and grass.

Here, we can see that Sergio didn't require any formal training to enter and learn this informal niche, since he relied on his migrant networks for training and support. The support he received on the job from his siblings, co-workers and *patrón*, for instance, allowed him to enter and adapt to this line of work.

5.4.7 Unregulated and Competitive Markets

As an integral part of urban and suburban communities in Los Angeles and beyond (Huerta 2007; Mahler 2003; Pisani and Yoskowitz 2005, 2006; Ramirez and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2009), contract gardening represents an unregulated service sector niche. Lacking government rules and regulations, contract gardeners operate as independent contractors, creating their own forms of organizations, informal training mechanisms, norms, economic models and markets (Ibid.). For instance, whether the *patrón* pays his *trabajadores* in cash or hires them without requesting proof of legal status in this country, the state does not intervene. Moreover, if he deems it necessary, the *patrón* brings his sons to work without being preoccupied of violating federally mandated age requirements.

Although the unregulated nature of this informal niche provides gardeners with a lot of freedom and flexibility to operate and organize themselves as they see fit, the costs associated with contract gardening also need to be considered. Based on my research, for instance, I found the contract gardening niche to lack minimum wage protections, anti-child labor laws, workplace safety rules, employer-based health benefits (not guaranteed in formal markets), sick leave, vacation time, overtime pay and many others gains that many workers and employers take for granted.

In addition, contract gardeners in Los Angeles' informal economy operate in a large and highly competitive market. In an in-depth study on Los Angeles' informal economy, Flaming et al. (2005) provide a snapshot of the large scale of informal economic activity in this global city. Since the U.S. Census Bureau does not provide data directly on informal workers and petty-entrepreneurs, the authors used the U.S. Census Public Use Microdata Samples (PUMS), combined with other sources, such as the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS),¹¹¹ to generate figures on the amount of informal workers.

¹¹⁰ I conducted an in-depth interview with Sergio on June 3, 2011, in the San Fernando Valley.

¹¹¹ After the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the U.S., the INS has been replaced with the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), under the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

While this report lacks specific data on Mexican immigrant gardeners, this important study does provide valuable data regarding the size and type of business enterprises operating in the city and county. For instance, the authors find a significant informal workforce in Los Angeles's informal economy (Ibid., 1)¹¹²:

Our best estimate is that on a typical day in 2004 there were 679,000 informal workers in the county and 303,800 in the city. These workers are estimated to account for 15 percent of the county's labor force and 16 percent of the city's labor force. Undocumented workers are estimated to make up 61 percent of the informal labor force for the county and 65 percent for the city.

Apart from Los Angeles' large informal workforce, where informal workers compete against each other in a wide range of occupations and industries, clients¹¹³ play a major role in competitive markets for contract gardeners. According to my gardener informants, clients often break oral contracts—both short and long-term—when a competing gardener offers a lower rate for gardening services. By doing so, clients engage in a form of divide and conquer, whereby pitting gardeners against each other with positive economic outcomes.

Unlike in the case of *domésticas*, where clients frequently form personal and intimidating relationships with these mostly Latina immigrant workers in places like Los Angeles (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994, 2001), too often Mexican immigrant gardeners rarely meet or converse with the clients, unless problems arise. The lack of personal contact allows for the clients to dispose of the gardeners at will without any sense of betrayal, guilt or shame. It's purely an economic decision for the client, like changing television cable providers.

In this context, while gasoline prices and other operating costs increase over the years, gardening fees remain stagnant and, sometimes, decline during this period. Thus, according to my *patrón* informants, gardeners need to maintain a fast-paced work schedule and increase the size of their *rutas* to compensate for low gardening fees. Essentially, the low gardening fees contract gardeners charge contribute to lower profits for the *patrones* and depreciated wages for *trabajadores*.

The constant fear and threat of losing clients not only creates a competitive environment for gardeners, but it also symbolizes an unequal and unjust society with winners (clients) and losers (gardeners). In their critical portrayal of the plight of immigrant service workers, Ramirez and Hondagneu-Sotelo (2009, 74) describe Mexican immigrants in this informal niche and beyond in bleak terms:

Mexican immigrant men—those with legal status and those without it—provide an institutionalized source of labor in many industries and occupations, in construction, hotels, restaurants, and as painters, parking valets, and car *washeros*. *Jardineria* [contract gardening] is simply one of the many service occupations in which they work, serving as part of a caste-like labor force in a post-industrial plantation-like economy.

¹¹² This includes both the city and county.

¹¹³ While clients mostly consist of homeowners, they can also be renters and business owners.

5.5 Characteristics of Mexican Immigrant Gardeners

As a group, Mexican immigrants occupy the lower stratum of society and experience limited upward mobility opportunities in the U.S. This is especially the case for immigrants from rural backgrounds with low human capital and low financial capital. According to a recent report on Mexican immigrants (Pew Hispanic Center 2009, 3), researchers found the following demographic characteristics for this ethnic group:

... They [Mexican immigrants] are less likely to be U.S. citizens than other immigrants, in part because they are more likely to be unauthorized. Mexicans have lower levels of education, lower incomes, larger households and higher poverty rates than other groups. They are slightly more likely to be in the labor force, where they are more likely to work in lower-skilled occupations....

Taking into consideration this bleak, general assessment of Mexican immigrants in the U.S., this dissertation aims to uncover the particular opportunities and constraints for Mexican immigrant gardeners in this country's second largest city—Los Angeles. To better understand this informal service sector and the individual characteristics of this segmented niche (i.e., *trabajadores* and *patrones*), I provide the following data based on my in-depth interviews with my gardener informants (i.e., N = 50). For my data analysis, I also incorporate my findings from my other research methods for this dissertation (i.e., participant observation, observation, archival research and document analysis),¹¹⁴ including previous research (Huerta 2006a, 2006b, 2007, 2010a) and other studies on contract gardeners in Los Angeles and beyond (Cameron 2000; Hirahara 2000; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Pisani and Yoskowitz 2005, 2006; Ramirez 2010; Ramirez and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2009; Steinberg 2006; Tsukashima 2007).

As a gendered occupational niche (Ramirez and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2009), Mexican immigrant men dominate the contract gardening market in Los Angeles. Since yard work in the U.S. has historically been traditionally assigned to men (and often times to teens) (Steinberg 2006), it is rare to find females working as contract gardeners. I did, however, find one case where Jesus Banderas (see above quote, under Section 5.4.3) works together with his wife in his contract gardening enterprise.

In addition to being a male-dominated niche, I found similarities and differences between *trabajadores* and *patrones*. In terms of similarities, we can clearly see in Table 5.1 (see below) that individuals from both sub-groups have low levels of formal schooling or educational attainment in Mexico, where *trabajadores* achieved a mean level of 6th grade and *patrones* achieved a mean level of 5th grade. Given the limited resources in Mexico's public education system, these levels of educational attainment do not meet the same standards compared to those found in the U.S.'s public education system, where the latter remains far superior.

In addition to formal schooling, *trabajadores* and *patrones* entered Mexico's agricultural workforce at similar early ages. On average, individuals from both sub-groups started working in the agricultural economy at 11 years of age. This included cultivating crops such as corn, wheat, fruits and vegetables, and the raising of livestock. Regarding daily work hours, while *trabajadores* worked on average 10 hours per day in Mexico, *patrones* worked slightly more with an average of 11 hours per day.¹¹⁵ The long workdays that these individuals experienced in Mexico prepared them, from an early age, to the physically demanding work schedules of

¹¹⁴ See Chapter 3.

¹¹⁵ Both *patrones* and *trabajadores* work similar hours in the U.S. (see Table 5.1).

contract gardening in the U.S. Also, their rural background facilitated for individuals from both sub-groups to easily transition from Mexico's agricultural fields to America's front lawns.

In contrast, in this same table, we find see major age differences between the sub-groups. For instance, while *trabajadores* have a mean age of 27, *patrones* have a mean age of 53. This major age difference represents a factor for some who experience upward mobility opportunities. For instance, given that *trabajadores* tend to be much younger compared to *patrones*, provides *patrones* with a clear labor market advantage in terms of work experience, acquired wisdom and additional opportunities for upward mobility (yet not guaranteed). This finding coincides with Bates' (1997) research on ethnic minorities and entrepreneurship in the U.S., where age represents a factor for business entry and success.

In particular, the question of age remains a key issue for *trabajadores* since *patrones* usually assign them the heavier work-related tasks throughout the average working day. Also, this type of work requires *trabajadores* to work quickly in order to meet their daily quota of houses / lawns to service, which could range from 10 to 15 per day, depending on the size of the *ruta*. Of the *trabajadores* I interviewed, I only found one between the age of 40 through 50 and one from the age of 51 to 55, where the vast majority ranged between 17 to 30 years of age.

While all of the *trabajadores* expressed satisfaction with their job (with the exception of the pay), based on my research, I found that the older they get without entering self-employment (as *patrones*), the more likely they are to exit this informal niche. For those *trabajadores* who do not become *patrones* after several years (i.e., before reaching 10 years), I found that these individuals access their migrant networks to seek employment in other "immigrant jobs," such as dishwasher, janitorial worker, factory workers and related jobs. For future research, I aim to conduct a longitudinal study on Mexican immigrant gardeners, where I track a group of young *trabajadores* over many years to get a better idea of how prevalent it is for *trabajadores* to exit contract gardening and why many do so.

I also found that *trabajadores* on average have seven years of work experience as hired workers. Meanwhile, *patrones* had on average four years of work experience as hired workers before becoming self-employed (i.e., *trabajadores*). For *patrones*, this also includes on average an additional 23 years of experience as owner-operators of their small-scale enterprises. These figures coincide with the major difference in the amount of years residing in the U.S. for these individuals, where *trabajadores* have on average resided in this country for 10 years, while *patrones* have on average resided in this country for 31 years, as noted in Table 5.1 (see below).

Apart from the age factor, length of residence represents an important factor between today's *trabajadores* and the *patrones* when they first entered this niche many years ago as *trabajadores*. For instance, I discovered that today's *trabajadores* find themselves in a more competitive and saturated contract gardening market compared to the one found 25 years ago, when many of the *patrones* I interviewed still worked as *trabajadores* themselves. As part of the informal economy, contract gardening represents an open market without limits, leading to overpopulation and exploitation of finite resources (Hardin 1968), where the finite resources in this particular case, I argue, represent the clients or houses (i.e., the *ruta*). (See Chapter 6 for a discussion of Hardin's "tragedy of the commons" argument and its relevance to the contract gardening niche in Los Angeles.)

Table 5.1 Selected Characteristics for *Trabajadores* and *Patrones*

| Variable | <i>Trabajadores</i> | <i>Patrones</i> |
|--|---------------------|-----------------|
| | (Means / %) | |
| Age | 27 | 53 |
| Highest School Grade Level in Mexico | 6th | 5th |
| Age Entered Workforce in Mexico | 11 | 11 |
| Daily Work Hours in Mexico | 10 | 11 |
| Daily Work Hours in U.S. | 10 | 11 |
| Number of Years Residing in U.S. | 10 | 31 |
| Number of Years Employed as a <i>Trabajador</i> | 7 | 4 |
| Number of Years Self-employed as a <i>Patrón</i> | N/A | 23 |
| Marital Status | | |
| Single / Never Married | 68% | 16% |
| Married | 20% | 84% |
| Divorced or Separated | 12% | 0% |
| Housing Tenure | | |
| Renter | 100% | 0% |
| Homeowner | 20% | 80% |

Source: Author (2011)

Notes: N = 50

Also, as noted in Table 5.1 (see above), I examined the marital status of both sub-groups. In this table, we find stark contrasts between *trabajadores* and *patrones*. On the one hand, *trabajadores* are mostly single (68 percent), while less tend to be married (20 percent), along with a few who seek divorce or separation (12 percent). In contrast, compared to *trabajadores*, *patrones* tend to be single at a lower rate (16 percent), while most are married (84 percent).

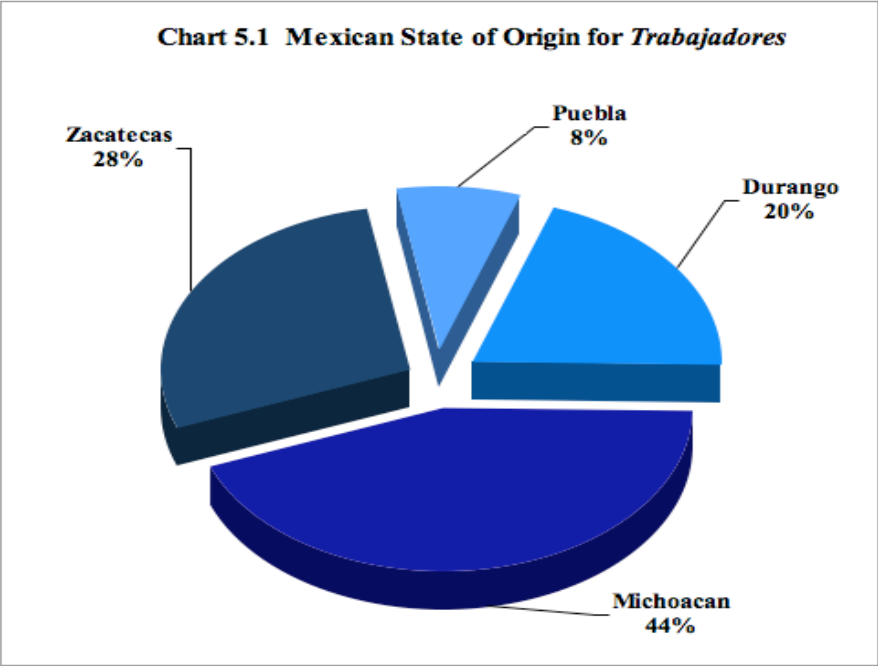
According to Bates (1997), while financial capital and human capital remain the primary factors for self-employment entry and success, married status also represents a characteristic or factor of small business owners. Referring to sociological studies on Asian immigrant entrepreneurs, for instance, Bates posits that family members often represent sources of cheap and unpaid labor. By accessing family members for their labor needs, Asian immigrants and other immigrant groups save money on labor costs, resulting in a labor market advantage. I also found that Mexican immigrant gardeners, specifically *patrones*, regularly access their family networks to meet their business related needs. This may include the wife preparing lunch for work, washing work clothes, taking messages from clients and helping with bills. For those with children, this may also include teenage boys to work as *trabajadores* during weekends and/or

summer breaks, as well as teenage daughters who help with translation needs and business paperwork.

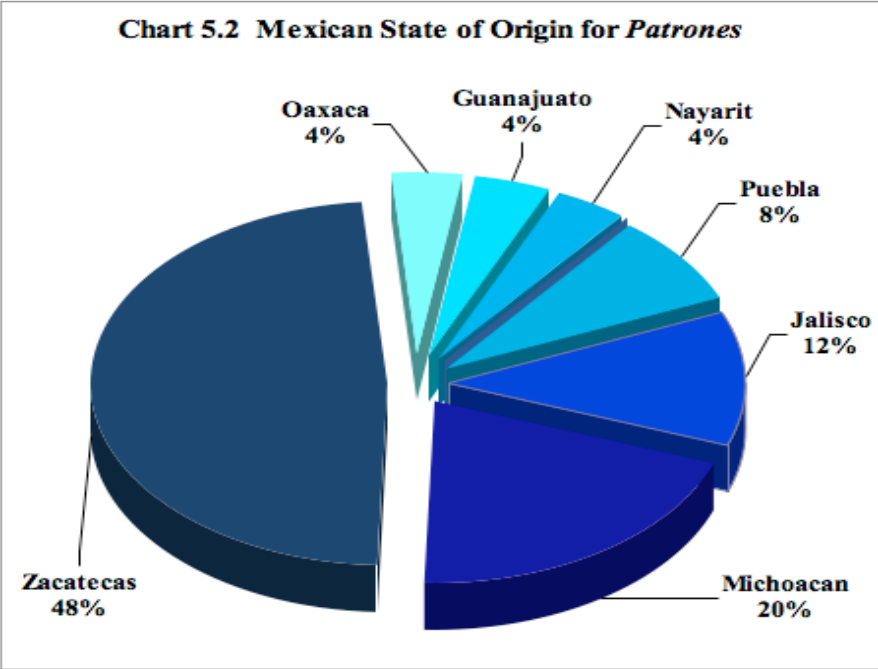
I also examined the housing tenure of both subgroups, as noted in Table 5.1 (see above). In this table, we can clearly see a major contrast between the sub-groups, where all of the *trabajadores* are renters (100 percent). Meanwhile, while a minority of *patrones* are renters (20 percent), the vast majority are homeowners (80 percent). This dichotomous housing scenario indicates that *trabajadores* remain at an economic disadvantage compared to *patrones* regarding homeownership rates. Moreover, this table illustrates that *patrones* have reached a relatively high level of economic achievement in the U.S. as homeowners, especially given that fact that they migrated to this country with low human capital and low financial capital.

Also, as illustrated in Chart 5.1 and Chart 5.2 (see below), I found that my gardener informants migrated mostly from Mexican states with major agricultural economies. This includes Michoacán, Zacatecas, Jalisco, Durango and similar states. The major difference between individuals from the sub-groups is that *trabajadores* tend to be, in descending order, from Michoacán (44 percent), Zacatecas (28 percent), Durango (20 percent) and Puebla (eight percent), while the *patrones* tend to be, in descending order, from Zacatecas (48 percent), Michoacán (20 percent), Jalisco (12 percent) and the remaining from other states (12 percent).

In particular, as shown in Chart 5.2 (see below), we can see how immigrants from Zacatecas or *Zacatecanos* have a labor market advantage as *patrones* compared to Mexican immigrants from other states. This is consistent with my previous research (Huerta 2006a, 2007), where I found many *patrones* to be from Zacatecas compared to other rural Mexican states. For future research, I aim to explore this issue more in depth to better understand how and why immigrants from particular states get channeled into these sub-groups (*trabajadores* and *patrones*) in Los Angeles and other cities throughout California with large immigrant populations.

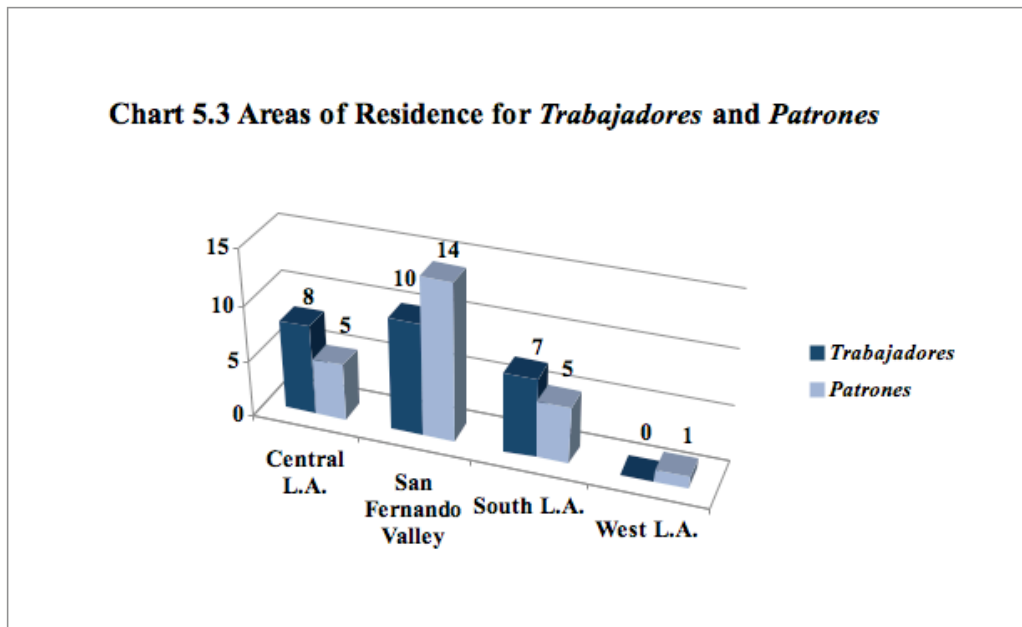


Source: Author (2011)
 Notes: N = 25



Source: Author (2011)
 Notes: N = 25

Moreover, in terms of patterns of residence within the City of Los Angeles, as noted below in Chart 5.3, I did not find major geographical discrepancies between *trabajadores* and *patrones*. We can clearly see, however, that individuals from both subgroups tend to reside in the San Fernando Valley, where 10 *trabajadores* (or 40 percent) live in the Valley, while 14 *patrones* (or 56 percent) also live in this area. I did not find in my sample, however, any gardeners who reside in East Los Angeles. One reason is that contract gardeners tend to live closer to more exclusive residential areas, such as West Los Angeles, Beverly Hills and exclusive parts of the Valley, where many their affluent clients reside. Again, further research is needed on this issue with larger sample sizes to better determine where contract gardeners reside, especially when drafting policy recommendations and allocating resources to these individuals.



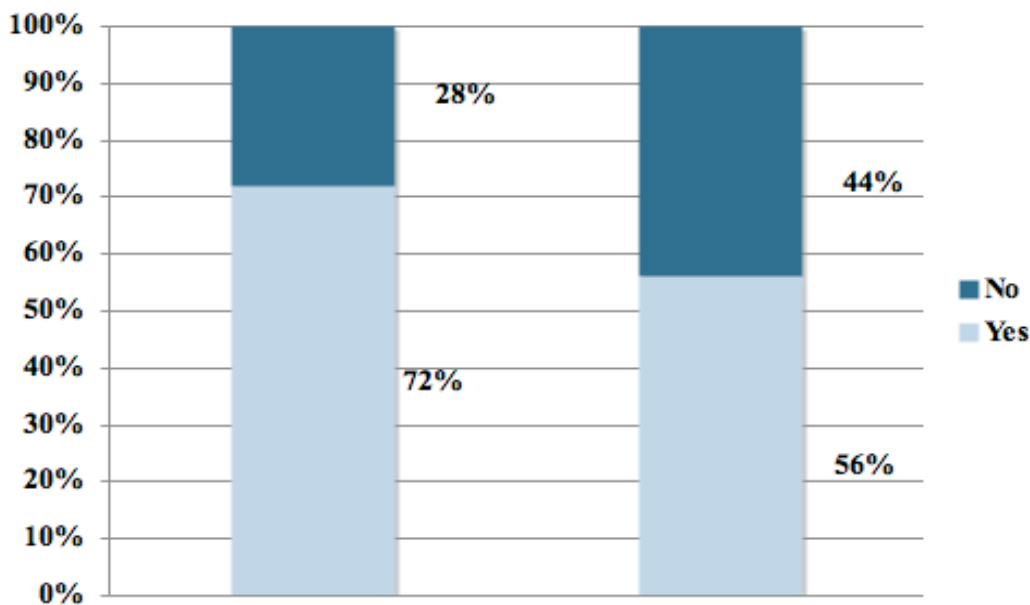
Source: Author (2011)
Notes: N = 50

I also asked my gardener informants whether they send remittances to Mexico, as illustrated in Chart 5.4 (see below). Remittances constitute an integral aspect of international migration (Boyd 1989; Gold 2005; Koser 2007; Roberts and Morris 2003; Taylor 1986; Tilly 2007), where they represent the transfer of money by immigrant workers in the receiving country to family members in the sending country. This common view, however, provides a superficial understanding of this transnational transaction, especially since remittances link and bond individuals and families beyond national boundaries. Boyd (1989), for example, argues that remittances highlight the existence of migrant social networks across time and space. Similarly, Tilly (2007, 5) postulates that “the sheer volume of migrant remittances [from the U.S.] to relatively poor countries, including those of Latin America and the Caribbean, nicely dramatizes the genuinely transactional social ties created by long-distance migration.”

In the context of existing transnational networks, *trabajadores* tend to send remittances at

a higher rate to family members in Mexico compared to *patrones*. For instance, while 18 (or 72 percent) of *trabajadores* stated that they regularly send remittances, 14 (or 56 percent) of *patrones* indicated that they regularly send remittances. While family members in Mexico benefit from these money transfers, given that *trabajadores* on average earn \$80 per day, sending remittances regularly represents an additional financial burden for these low-wage earners. These types of financial obligations only serve as obstacles for those *trabajadores* who want to save enough money to one day purchase a *ruta*.

Chart 5.4 Remittances for *Patrones* and *Trabajadores*



Source: Author (2011)

Notes: N = 50

Furthermore, I solicited information from my gardener informants about the different informal economic models they originally entered in this informal niche, as noted in Chart 5.5 and Chart 5.6 (see below). This includes, as documented in Chapter 4, the Informal Petty-Capitalism (IPC) model and Informal Master-Apprentice (IMA) model. For those Mexican immigrants who pursued self-employment outside of the IMA model, this includes the Informal Gardener Markets (IGMs). In addition, for Chart 5.6, I include “Independent” as a category.¹¹⁶ By “Independent,” I refer to Mexican immigrant gardeners who originally entered this niche independently without participating in either the IPC model or IMA model. This includes pioneer immigrant gardeners like Roberto Librada,¹¹⁷ who became self-employed as a contract

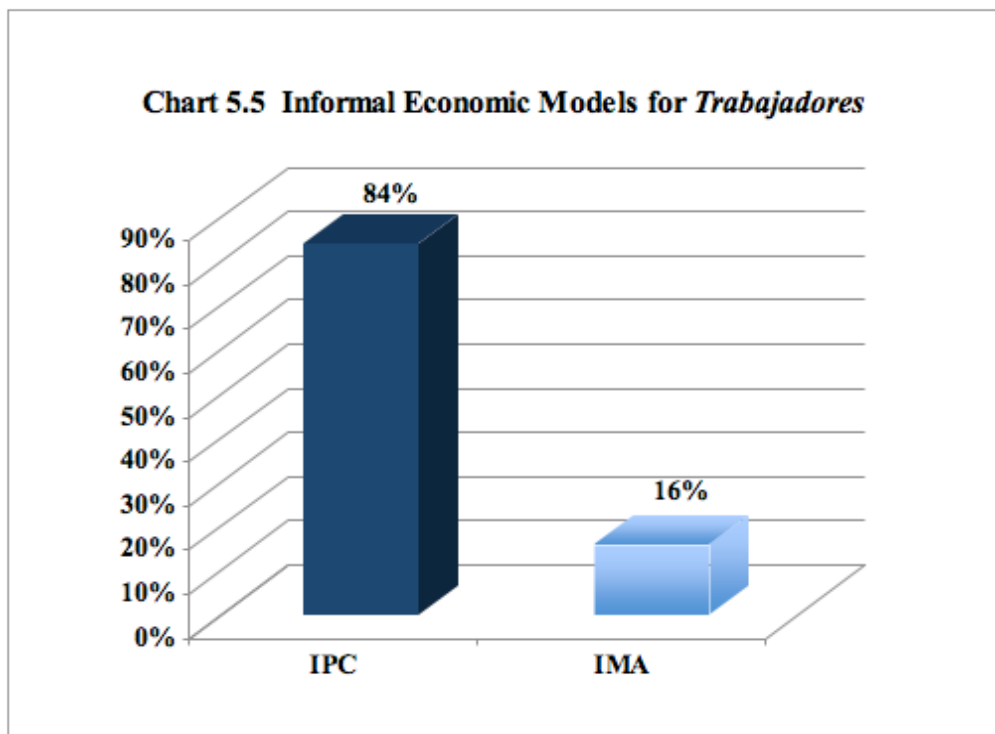
¹¹⁶ Since “Independent” only refers to *patrones* who started their own businesses without first working for an owner of a contract gardening enterprise, I did not include this category for Chart 5.6.

¹¹⁷ For details, refer to introductory paragraph of this chapter.

gardener during a period of time when Japanese immigrant gardeners still dominated this informal service sector (i.e., late 1960s – early 1970s) (Hirahara 2000).

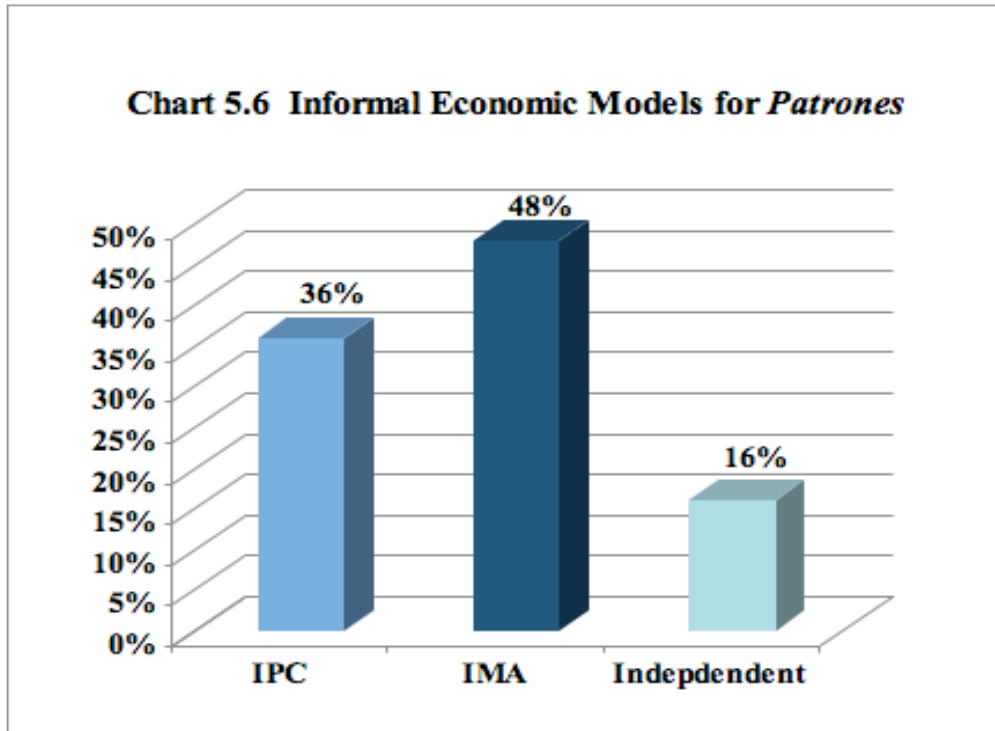
Firstly, we can clearly see from these charts that today's *trabajadores* have been channeled into the less favorable IPC model at a higher percentage rate (84 percent) compared to *patrones* (36 percent), when they originally entered this niche as *trabajadores*. This represents a precarious scenario for today's *trabajadores* since the IPC model, as documented in Chapter 4, only perpetuates an unequal and hierarchical structure where *trabajadores* lack upward mobility opportunities as hired workers. Essentially, to become a *patrón* under this model, the ambitious *trabajador* either saves or borrows enough money to purchase a *ruta* via the IGMs and/or steals clients from his current *patrón*.

Secondly, and on a related point, we find in these same charts that today's *trabajadores* have been channeled into the more favorable IMA model at a lower percentage rate (16 percent) compared to *patrones* (48 percent). This reinforces the point that today's *trabajadores* have fewer opportunities for upward mobility within these informal economic models compared to *patrones* when they first entered this niche. Based on my research, I primarily attribute this problem to a saturated contract gardening market in Los Angeles. For instance, when asked how the competition from other contract gardeners impacts their businesses, the vast majority of *patrones* stated that they have lost clients over the years due to underbidding from a competing gardener and forced to maintain their fees at a nominal rate to avoid losing additional clients.¹¹⁸



Source: Author (2011)
Notes: N = 25

¹¹⁸ As an example, if a *patrón* charges \$100 per month for bi-monthly, gardening maintenance services, it's very easy for a competing contract gardener to approach the client and offer his services for \$75 or less per month.



Source: Author (2011)

Notes: N = 25

To obtain better understand how my gardener informants originally entered this informal niche, I asked them about their contact person who originally helped them secure employment as *trabajadores*, as noted in Table 5.2 (see below). Firstly, this table shows that both *trabajadores* and *patrones* relied equally on their immediate family members (32 percent) to enter this niche. While on the surface these figures show similarities between *trabajadores* and *patrones*, in terms of access to these strong ties, we need consider the amount of resources available to the contract providing the job referrals before establishing patterns and findings. For example, an immediate family who works as a *trabajador* has less financial resources and social capital available at his disposal via his work compared to one who owns a contract gardening enterprise. Thus, the latter is in a better socio-economic position to assist family members and others in this market. In this context, I found that *patrones*, on average, had more resources available to them in the form of financial and social capital, when they originally entered this niche compared to today's *trabajadores*.

Secondly, this table demonstrates that *trabajadores* relied more heavily on their friends or friendship networks (40 percent) compared to *patrones* (eight percent), when they originally entered this informal niche. Based on my research, I found that all of the friendship networks for today's *trabajadores* represented individuals who also worked as *trabajadores* or other "immigrant jobs" characterized by low wages and low social status (Alvarez 1990; Gold 2005; Massey 1999; Waldinger 2003).¹¹⁹ Moreover, by depending on other immigrants from low socio-economic status, today's *trabajadores* experience a negative aspect of migrant networks,

¹¹⁹ See Chapter 1 for more information on "immigrant jobs."

where low-wage immigrants tend to be channeled into “immigrant jobs” or institutions with limited upward mobility opportunities, such as the IPC model. Discussing a negative aspect of migrant networks and employment outcomes, Gurak and Caces (1992, 55) make the following argument:

Heavy reliance on a network of migrants concentrated in marginal jobs increases the concentration of new immigrants in such places. Thus migrant networks can slow long-term integration or adaptation given that the impact of network assistance is conditioned, logically enough, by the resources (type and heterogeneity) controlled by the network members.

Table 5.2 Social Networks Accessed by *Trabajadores* and *Patrones*

| Variable | <i>Trabajadores</i> | <i>Patrones</i> |
|---|---------------------|-----------------|
| Social Networks to Enter Gardening Niche | | |
| Immediate Family | 32% | 32% |
| Extended Family | 8% | 16% |
| <i>Compadrazgo</i> | 8% | 12% |
| Hometown Associates | 8% | 20% |
| Friends | 40% | 8% |
| Independent & Acquaintances* | 4% | 12% |

Source: Author (2011)

Notes: N = 50

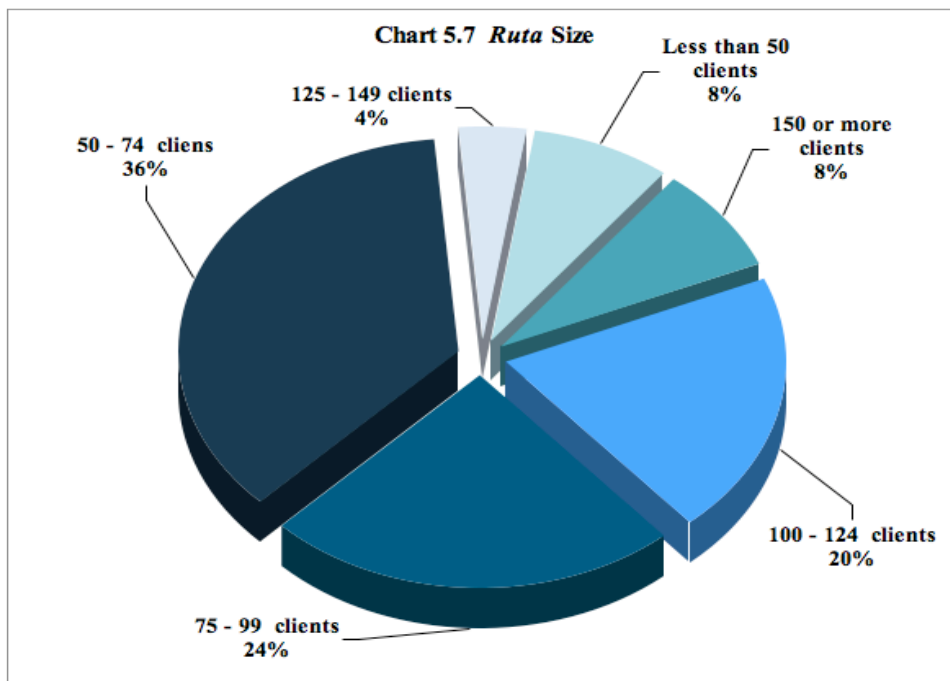
*These variables refer to individuals who entered contract gardening independently and/or with help from weak ties.

Lastly, as illustrated in Chart 5.7 (see below), I also inquired about different *ruta* sizes from my *patrón* informants. The *ruta*, as documented in Chapter 1, represents the primary asset for the *patrón*. Like any commodity in the formal market, it can be sold, purchased and gifted (Huerta 2007). It not only allows for Mexican immigrant gardeners to escape wage-labor in the formal economy, it also allows for these individuals to experience upward mobility opportunities compared to similar individuals who occupy “immigrant jobs,” such as domestic workers, day laborers, carwash workers and farm workers. For instance, by acquiring, maintaining and expanding *rutas*, *patrones* generate enough revenue to purchase trucks, gardening equipment and hire *trabajadores* to own and operate successful small-scale enterprises. Many are also able to support their families, purchase modest houses and take regular trips to Mexico to visit family.

In the below chart, we find that *rutas* range in various sizes, which I categorized the below figures as follows: Very Small (49 or less clients); Small (50 to 75 clients); Medium (75 to 99 clients); Large (100 to 124); and Very Large (125 to 149 & 150 or more clients). Based on

the percentage breakdown, we find that most *rutas* fall in the Small (36 percent), Medium (24 percent) and Large (20 percent) categories. While *ruta* size is important in terms of how much monthly revenue a *ruta* generates for a *patrón*, the quality of the *ruta* (i.e., the average amount charged per house) must also be taken into consideration. For example, if *patrón* X has a *ruta* of 50 clients or houses and charges on average \$100 per house (on a monthly basis) and *patrón* Y has a *ruta* of 100 clients or houses and charges on average \$50 per house (monthly basis), both generate an equal amount of gross revenue: \$5,000 per month.

Moreover, when I asked my *patrón* informants how much monthly revenue their *rutas* generate, they provided an average, gross figure of \$4,312 per month. Given the inherently sensitive nature of asking individuals for personal financial data, especially for individuals who earn a living in the informal economy—where many do not report or underreport their earnings to the government (Portes et al. 1989)—this monthly figure remains questionable in terms of its accuracy. During my interviews with the *patrones*, this issue caused them much pause, where they understandably hesitated to provide actual figures. Thus, I only solicited rough estimates from them, when they expressed concern over sensitive information, especially since they represent a vulnerable group (see Chapter 3).



Source: Author (2011)

Notes: N = 25

To summarize, the above characteristics of *trabajadores* and *patrones* uncover some key factors that help explain why many Mexican immigrant gardeners remain as hired workers while some experience upward mobility opportunities as petty-entrepreneurs. On the one hand, individuals from both sub-groups originally migrated to the U.S. with low human capital and low financial capital resources. Also, while these individuals entered Mexico's agricultural

workforce at a very young age in Mexico, they currently work long hours in the U.S. and possess strong work ethics. Moreover, in terms of English proficiency, both *trabajadores* and *patrones* expressed low levels of competency. However, while *trabajadores* appear to be slightly less proficient in English compared to *patrones*, only minimal English languages skills are required in this immigrant-dominated niche.

On the other hand, *trabajadores* on average have resided in the U.S. for fewer years compared to *patrones*. Also, *trabajadores* tend to be single and reside in apartments as renters compared to *patrones*, who have high rates of marriage and homeownership. In addition, *trabajadores* on average tend to be channeled into the less preferred IPC model and experience fewer upward mobility opportunities partly due to a saturated market compared to *patrones*, when they first entered the contract gardening market. Finally, both *trabajadores* and *patrones* stated that owners of contract gardening enterprises possess other key characteristics, such as being risk-takers, independent, self-driven and frugal with their money.

Chapter 6. Conclusion

In the short term ... a worker with few skills that would be rewarded in salaried work may prefer to be independent: s/he may prefer being the master of a lowly repair shop to endlessly repeating assembly tasks in a formal assembly plant. Neither job will necessarily lead to an exit from poverty, but the informal option may actually offer a measure of dignity and autonomy that the formal job does not.

— William F. Maloney, 2004

In providing nuanced and complex case study of Los Angeles' contract gardening niche, this dissertation uncovers how a group of Mexican immigrants utilize their migrant networks to both survive and thrive in the informal economy. By self-organizing and self-governing economic models and markets, without state intervention, these social actors engage in complex social and economic relations where many experience labor market constraints as *trabajadores* or hired workers, while some experience upward mobility opportunities as *patrones* or petty-entrepreneurs. Despite the fact that some key economists stipulate the importance for individuals to possess high human capital and high financial capital for self-employment entry and success, (Bates 1995, 1997; Bates and Dunham 1993), the successful owners of contract gardening enterprises (i.e., *patrones*), from low socio-economic backgrounds, challenge this argument and provide alternative routes and models for other low-wage immigrants to emulate and improve. While I found many positive findings and outcomes in this informal niche, I also found negative aspects and area of need that need to be addressed to protect those who make a living in this domestic household service sector.

In his classic article, "The Tragedy of the Commons," Hardin (1968) discusses the dangers of overpopulation and the negative impacts of open access policies to public resources on the environment. Specifically, he expresses concern over rational actors behaving in a self-centered manner regarding the use and exploitation of finite resources. Using the example of herdsman and open pastures (i.e., the commons) to make his point, Hardin provides a compelling argument against unregulated markets. He writes of the dire consequences to all herdsman when each herdsman behaves in his own interest without taking into account the long-term costs for the entire group. In the short-term, for instance, a herdsman benefits directly from adding additional cattle to the commons to graze without limits. In the long-term, however, he and the other herdsman, who behave in similar self-centered manners, collectively suffer the costs of overgrazing. According to Hardin (Ibid., 1244), this type of "open to all, without limit" system inevitably leads to environmental devastation for all the herdsman:

Each man is locked into a system that compels him to increase his herd without limit—in a world that is limited. Ruin is the destination toward which all men rush, each pursuing his own best interest in a society that believes freedom of the commons. Freedom of the commons brings ruin to all.

In another example of the "tragedy of the commons," Hardin discusses the case of national parks with the same "open to all, without limit" policy. In order to avoid the decline of the nation's finite resources—in this case, Yosemite Valley—the author (Ibid., 1245) offers the following solutions:

What shall we do? We have several options. We might sell them off as private property. We might keep them as public property, but allocate the right to enter them. The allocation might be on the basis of wealth, by the use of an auction system. It might be on the merit, as defined by some agreed-upon standards. It might be by lottery. Or it might be on a first-come, first-served basis, administered to keep queues.

Here, and in other parts of this article, Hardin advocates for privatization, strict regulations and coercive laws, whereby limiting access to the “commons,” as viable solutions to what he calls the “population problem.”

Directly challenging Hardin’s support of centralized governmental agencies and private property interests to control the “commons,” in her seminal book, *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*, Ostrom (1990) argues in favor of users to create their own institutions to self-organize and self-govern as a form of collective action. In reference to common-pool resources (CPRs), Ostrom dismisses the notion that individuals only behave as “short-term, profit-maximizing actors,” citing numerous empirical cases where individuals or users (e.g., fisherman, farmers, hunters) also behave in long-term, collective manners for the benefit of all. In contrast to Hardin’s pessimism, this includes the preservation of the “commons.” In this scenario, the users organize and govern themselves without the need of a top-down, centralized government agency or private property authority.

For instance, Ostrom (1990, 19) refers to a case in Alanya, Turkey, where a group of 100 local fishermen, starting in the 1970s, organized themselves into cooperatives where they created an “ingenious system for allotting fishing sties to local fishers.” These fishermen, through “more than a decade of trial-and-errors efforts,” Ostrom writes (*ibid.*), successfully established a set of rules, protections and regulations for the benefit of all users, including the “commons.” Apart from numerous other cases that Ostrom cites in her research, according to the author (1990, 20), the Alanya case study provides an alternative model for others to learn from and emulate:

The case of the Alanya inshore fishery is only one empirical example of the many institutional arrangements that have been devised, modified, monitored, and sustained by the users of renewable CPRs [common-pool resources] to constrain individual behavior that would, if unconstrained, reduce joint returns to the community of users....

Given that contract gardening in Los Angeles (and elsewhere in the U.S.) represents an unregulated, “open to all” market, I refer to this niche as the “green commons.” Instead of environmental hazards that Hardin warns us about, however, I focus on how the “open to all” or easy access into this domestic household service sector results in the saturation of this informal niche, which perpetuates intense competition among these co-ethnics, among other negative consequences. For example, the saturation of this informal market and competition of contract gardeners increases the likelihood of contentious relations among Mexican immigrant gardeners, specifically *patrones*, who compete for the same market share (i.e., clients or houses) to build, maintain and expand their small-scale enterprises.

Moreover, similar to Hardin’s story of herdsman and open pastures, many Mexican immigrants enter the “green commons” to pursue economic self-interest objectives without limits. This scenario inevitably depreciates the working conditions and earnings for all Mexican immigrant gardeners, including both *trabajadores* and *patrones*.

Also challenging Harding, similar to Ostrom, I do not subscribe to centralized governmental agencies or private property interests imposing top-down measures, whereby government agencies and officials impose strict regulations, fees and coercive laws. By doing so, policy makers, government officials and planners would only increase the entry costs of this service sector, severely restricting Mexican immigrants—especially those with low human capital and low financial capital—access to entrepreneurial activities in this informal niche.

This is not to imply, however, that this informal niche in particular and the informal economy in general does not need governmental intervention to protect the social and economic interests of both workers and petty-entrepreneurs. As previously noted,¹²⁰ the informal economy in this country lacks many of the benefits and protections found in the formal economy, such as minimum wage protections, worksite safety regulations, 40-hour work weeks, anti-child labor laws, vacation time, paid holidays, overtime pay, sick time and employer-covered health coverage.¹²¹

Yet, while policy makers, government officials and planners should intervene to protect workers and petty-entrepreneurs in the informal economy, they should do so strategically and effectively without raising the costs too high for those engaged in licit economic activities. They should also do so based on the specific characteristics and needs of each informal niche or service sector. Moreover, Maloney (2003, 80) argues that governments around the world, when intervening in the informal economy, should be careful to not extinguish the good qualities found in unregulated economies: “The challenge for governments is for governments to design a comprehensive system of protections that do not displace efficient informal mechanisms, or dampen the potential for growth and poverty reduction in the [informal] sector.”

The case of California’s contract landscapers, operating in the formal economy, serves as a perfect example of a sector with high entry costs, whereby restricting self-employment entry or access to Mexican immigrants with low human capital and financial capital. For instance, in discussing the case of contract landscapers, Ramirez and Hondagneu-Sotelo (2009) discuss the high entry costs in this formalized trade:

Landscape contractors are required to work with a state-issued specialty contractor’s license, and this necessitates successfully passing a comprehensive written exam administered by the California Contractors State License Board (CSLB). The Board’s landscaping examination is rigorous, covering every facet of the occupation, from landscape design and job estimation to contracts and business practices, irrigation system installation, landscaping maintenance, and job site safety. It also requires more financial capital. In 2007, it cost \$400 in fees to obtain a landscaping contractor’s license. To qualify for a license, applicants must also undergo a criminal background check, submit their social security number, and possess more than \$2,500 in operating capital. Contractors must file a \$10,000 bond and present proof of worker’s compensation insurance coverage as a condition of licensure.

In addition to these requirements, landscape contractors must also comply with state and federal mandated business practices and codes, such as providing their employees with workers’

¹²⁰ See Chapter 2 and Chapter 4

¹²¹ Actually, access to employer-covered health insurance, among other benefits, also remains a major problem in the formal market.

compensation insurance, disability insurance, unemployment insurance, government employment taxes (Ibid.).¹²²

While there exist many costs associated with licensed, contract landscapers in California, there remain many financial benefits linked with this profession. Being licensed, bonded and insured, for example, allows for contract landscapers to bid on more lucrative contracts with commercial properties, residential complexes and government contracts not available for those who lack these pre-requisites and operate on a cash-based economy. For instance, if the property manager of a large commercial or residential building wants to hire a landscaper to maintain the green space surrounding the building, he or she will mostly seek a licensed contractor for liability purposes. In contrast to charging \$80 to \$100 per month like contract gardeners for residential homes, state-licensed contract landscapers can charge more for their services.

Applying similar state-wide regulations, fees and coercive laws to contract gardeners as a means of formalizing this service sector inevitably excludes and further marginalizes many Mexican immigrants who lack the required human capital and financial capital to successfully pass a state-administered exam and comply with the government imposed standards to legally operate a small business in California. Essentially, the formalization of the contract gardening niche with the same or similar regulations, fees and laws that govern licensed contract landscapers eliminates one key characteristic, among others, of this service sector: easy entry. As previously noted,¹²³ “easy entry” represents a key characteristic of small-scale enterprises in the informal economy.

Moreover, by imposing strict government regulations, fees and coercive laws on contract gardeners, individuals who cannot or refuse to comply would be operating small-scale enterprises in violation of the law. By doing so, these individuals become subject to severe fines and penalties. For instance, according to the California Contractors State License Board’s (CSLB) official website,¹²⁴ which regulates licensed contract landscapers, anyone who performs work above \$500 without a license may be subjected to misdemeanor charges, a maximum of 6 months in jail and/or up to a \$1,000 fine. Repeat offenders may receive harsher penalties.¹²⁵

In her excellent article on the informal economy in the U.S., Sassen (1994, 2304), contrary to Hardin, argues against the criminalization of informal economic activity:

Simply criminalizing informal work may be effective if the informal economy is essentially an anomaly. But if, as I have argued, informalization is embedded in the structure of our current economic system, particularly manifest in large cities, then criminalization may not be the most effective policy. Informalization emerges as a set of flexibility maximizing strategies employed by individuals, firms, consumers, and producers in a context of growing inequality in earnings and in profit-making capabilities. Its expansion invites us to focus on the broader fact of a growing set of problems in the relationship between new economic trends and old regulatory frameworks.

¹²² As a state-licensed, professional group, like other professional groups in the U.S., landscape contractors in California benefit from their own professional trade association, California Landscape Contractors Association (CLCA): <http://www.clca.org/>.

¹²³ See Chapter 5.

¹²⁴ CSLB operates under the jurisdiction of California’s Department of Consumers Affairs.

¹²⁵ For details, see: <http://www.cslb.ca.gov/GeneralInformation/About/BasicFactsAboutCslb.asp>.

Based on my research, contract gardening does not fall outside the purview of “an anomaly,” to use Sassen’s terminology. On the contrary, contract gardening in Los Angeles represents an integral and important part of the city’s landscape (Cameron 2000; Hirahara 2000; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Huerta 2007; Ramirez 2010; Ramirez and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2009; Steinberg 2006). Contract gardeners in Los Angeles and beyond not only perform valuable landscape services to local communities, they also help produce green environments and aesthetically pleasing neighborhoods. Thanks to their labor, contract gardeners also maintain and increase property values for homeowners.

6.1 Interviews with Key Informants

In an effort to get feedback from key informants on what policy makers, government officials and planners could do to help recent and settled immigrants achieve upward mobility in this informal niche and other immigrant-dominated service sectors, I solicited the opinions of several key informants.

In an interview with Los Angeles City Council Member Ed Reyes,¹²⁶ I asked the council member for his input on the role of government in improving the working / living conditions for immigrants in the informal economy. In response, he expressed both optimism and pessimism regarding the complex nature of the informal economy and the limitations of city government. For instance, he discussed his leadership role in several cases involving informal workers and petty-entrepreneurs, where he experienced both success and failure. This includes the cases of carwash workers, day laborers and street vendors in the MacArthur Park area. By exploring these successes and failures, scholars, policy makers and planners can learn important lessons to be applied to other immigrant groups, such as contract gardeners and domestic workers.

In the case of carwash workers, according to Council Member Reyes, the city effectively intervenes to improve the working conditions of the mostly Latino immigrant workforce in Los Angeles. Given that carwash owners depend on the city for water use and draining permits to operate, the City Council imposed specific environmental and safety worksite regulations and standards to the car wash industry. Although the car wash industry remains part of the formal economy, the working conditions for many of these immigrant workers represent sweatshop conditions, including being paid in cash, minimum wage violations (in many cases workers get paid in tips only), verbal and physical abuse, health and safety violations.¹²⁷

Also, in the case of day laborers, the city has a successful partnership with a local non-profit group IDESPCA—*Instituto de Educación Popular del Sur de California*—to provide key programs and services for day laborers and other immigrant groups. By providing funds to IDESPCA, the city recognizes the importance of non-profit groups catered to meeting the particular needs of disenfranchised immigrant groups in Los Angeles. For instance, IDESPCA operates six day labor centers throughout the city, where day laborers receive important skills, training and support, as documented in the group’s official website¹²⁸:

¹²⁶ On September 6, 2011, I conducted a telephone interview with Council Member Reyes, who represents the City of Los Angeles 1st District. First elected in 2001, he received a master’s degree in urban planning from UCLA’s Graduate School of Architecture and Urban Planning Urban Planning—currently known as UCLA’s Department of Urban Planning. For a more detailed bio, see: <http://laeastside.com/>.

¹²⁷ For information on the working conditions of these workers and ongoing campaign to organize this industry in Los Angeles, see: <http://www.cleancarwashla.org/>.

¹²⁸ For more details, see: <http://idepsca.org/daylabor>.

The Day Laborer Community Job Centers provide a humane way to look for work and offer a learning environment through literacy, English classes and information about health, labor and immigrant laws. These centers also function as a public safety alternative to soliciting employment on the street corners and suffering from severe exploitation and unsafe working conditions.

Due to the supply and demand paradigm, the day laborers are forced to compete with each other prompting employers to take advantage and ending in paying day laborers from \$6 to \$10 per hour. However, \$8.00 an hour is the norm due to the extreme pressure of trying to make ends meet. At IDEPSCA centers, the workers have established their own minimum wage.

The Day Laborer Program provides honest, organized, and respectful workers to do the job that may be required from an employer. The employer may call ahead or request a worker in person. Each center follows a registration system to distribute the jobs, but the employer is free to choose a worker in particular. IDEPSCA centers do not charge any fees to the employers or the workers.

While several day labor centers cannot possibly meet the many needs of day laborers in Los Angeles (Valenzuela 1999, 2001, 2003; Valenzuela et al. 2006), the city's partnership with IDESPCA provides a successful model to serve the particular needs of Mexican immigrant gardeners. By including literacy and English as a Second Language (ESL) classes about key issues to immigrants, IDESPCA prepares these individuals to survive and succeed beyond the job sites.

In contrast to these successful, yet limited in scope cases, Council Member Reyes discussed his frustrations with the city's efforts to regulate street vendors at the MacArthur Park area. Implemented in 1999, when he worked as the chief of staff for then-Council Member Mike Hernandez, the city initiated a program to formalize street vendors in the crime-plagued, MacArthur Park area (Sandoval 2007). At the time, city policy makers and officials, in partnership with non-profit groups—the Central American Resource Center (CARECEN)¹²⁹ and then The Institute for Urban Research and Development (IURD)—initiated a well-intended program to regulate and control the street vendors who sold a variety of foods and goods. In his excellent case study of the MacArthur Park area, Sandoval (2007, 177) provides a detailed list of the foods and goods, both licit and illicit, street vendors peddled, catering to immigrant communities and other groups:

During the late 1980's and into the mid-1990s, MacArthur Park was inundated with street vendors. A strong part of the informal activities in the neighborhood, the street vendors sold mainly hot foods from their "*carritos*" (street vending carts), which were mobile and let them respond quickly to changes and shifts in their informal markets. The *carritos* were filled with various food products, such as tamales, *atole de elote*, pupusas, tacos, and snacking foods such as *chicharrones*, mangos on a stick, ice-cream and *churros*. Some street vendors also sold illegal items such as pirated music, cigarettes, and illegal drugs.

Despite the city policy makers' and government officials' good intentions, the attempts to formalize street vendors failed. By implementing an expensive and highly regulated system, where street vendors who sold food needed formal approval from the Los Angeles Health

¹²⁹ For more information on CARECEN, see: <http://www.carecen-la.org/>.

Department, the regulated street vendors suddenly incurred high costs to enter and remain competitive in the market. By incurring high costs such as insurance, strict regulations, costly permits and new carts, costing up to \$8,000, the regulated street vendors could not compete with the unregulated vendors who continue to operate in the area to the present.¹³⁰

While police officers continue to enforce existing laws against street vendors in the MacArthur Park area, this type of informal activity, unless illicit, represents a low priority for police enforcement in an area that continues to be plagued with high crime rates, violence, drugs, gang activity and the sale of illegal documents (e.g., false driver's license, Social Security card, U.S permanent residency card) (Sandoval 2007). Thus, policy makers like Council Member Reyes recognize the limitations of city government, especially with scarce resources, given one of the city's main priorities to protect residents from violent crimes and other illegal activities.

By examining the failed governmental policies to formalize street vendors in MacArthur Park, scholars, policy makers, government officials and planners can learn important lessons about how specific informal markets operate, including the benefits and costs of formalization without considering all factors, such as competition from non-conforming street vendors. In the case of the contract gardening niche, before implementing a one-size-fits all approach to formalize or improve this service sector niche, scholars, policy makers, government officials and planners first need to understand how this informal sector operates, how it's organized and the social actors who engage in this niche. As an understudied niche, this dissertation partly focuses on developing a better understanding of this important domestic household service sector to improve the working and living conditions of immigrant workers and petty-entrepreneurs.

In addition to the Council Member, I conducted an interview with Assistant Professor Gerardo Sandoval,¹³¹ from the Department of Planning, Public Policy and Management at the University of Oregon, where I asked Gerardo about the role of planning scholars and policy makers in improving the working and living conditions of immigrants in the informal economy. According to Gerardo, policy makers, planners and non-profit leaders should respect the existing resources found in immigrant communities while attempting to formalize sectors of the informal economy:

Policy should aim to formalize much of the informal activities without destroying the important economic and cultural functions that these activities provide for the low-income immigrant workers. The best scale to do this at would probably be the local government or at the state level but working with intermediary Community Based Organization's (CBO's) that have a lot of experience interacting with these types of communities and labor markets. Generative planning approaches that seek to harness these activities from the ground up might be an appropriate policy approach.

By forming partnerships between government and CBO's, Gerardo argues in favor of successful models, such as day labor centers, building on the existing networks and social capital found in immigrant communities:

¹³⁰ See Gilbert Estrada. 2005. "Los Angeles Street Vendors Under Scrutiny." *Eastern Group Publications*, May 9. http://news.newamericamedia.org/news/view_article.html?article_id=d940ca8d120eb99c441e609b3e5a083b.

¹³¹ On August 4, 2011, I conducted a telephone interview with Gerardo, who teaches urban studies courses at said university and conducts research on immigrants in this country. In addition to our interview, Gerardo provided me with a written response to my inquiry to avoid any discrepancies regarding his views.

CBO's might be able to help formalize some of the networks that already exist within the immigrant gardener communities and increase their informal ties. They could also provide protection from the exploitative relationships that are many times present within informal economic activities. Day labor centers serve this important function for day laborers as they provide links to immigration lawyers, advocacy organizations, and at times negotiate a more livable wage for the day laborers.

Hence, I believe that appropriate policy interventions need not come from new laws or rigid bureaucratic programs aiming to formalize the informal activities, but more nuanced and sensitive generative interventions. Policy interventions might at first seem as being small scale but can have dramatic ripple effects that strengthen the informal networks within the immigrant gardeners' labor markets and in turn strengthen their chances of economic success.

Here, we can clearly see that Gerardo argues against strict regulations and government coercion as a means of formalizing and controlling the informal economy. In addition, by taking a nuanced, bottom-up approach to meet the needs of the particular group, such as Mexican immigrant gardeners or day laborers, scholars, policy makers and planners can better theorize and implement effective and efficient programs and services for disenfranchised immigrant communities.

Apart from Gerardo, I interviewed Ruben Lizardo,¹³² Associate Director of Policy Link,¹³³ whom I asked about the role of local policy makers in improving the working and living conditions of immigrants in the informal economy. In responding to my question, Ruben recommends that cities tap into their redevelopment funds to assist immigrants in pursuing upward mobility opportunities:

I think that cities and other local governments could use their economic development and revitalization resources to harness the leadership and assets of immigrant-led small businesses and social enterprises that offer a pathway to economic self sufficiency. This includes groups like gardeners, street vendors, janitorial and cleaning companies.

Like Gerardo, in this statement, Ruben argues in favor of identifying and working with the existing resources found in immigrant communities, as a means of improving upon the social capital and other organic resources, to improve the economic opportunities for the various immigrant groups in the informal economy.

Moreover, I also interviewed Agustin Cebada,¹³⁴ a veteran community organizer and advocate of social justice and immigrant rights since the late 1960s, to get his input on the same question I posed to the above key informants. In my extensive interview with Agustin, he raised many key points that echo those of my other informants:

¹³² On August 15, 2011, I conducted a telephone interview with Ruben, who has been a strong advocate for social and economic justice causes in California and beyond.

¹³³ Founded in 1999 with its headquarters in Oakland, California, Policy Link is a national non-profit organization working to promote economic and social equity in this country. For more information, see: <http://www.policylink.org/>.

¹³⁴ On October 8, 2011, I conducted a personal interview with Agustin in the City of Los Angeles.

I believe that the government should do more to stop the racism against Mexican immigrants and other immigrants in this country. We can see in Arizona and, now, the Southern states like Georgia and Alabama passing many racist laws against undocumented immigrants and brown-skinned people. While the Obama Administration has intervened via the courts to challenge many of these racist state laws, he needs to do more as a leader to set the same example that JFK set against racist Southern governors in the 1960s.

I also strongly believe that the government should pass another amnesty law for all the undocumented immigrants in this country. All 11 million or 12 million of them, depending on your source. This is very important since without legal papers, immigrants are very vulnerable to abuse by unscrupulous employers who will never give them an opportunity to advance or get promoted on the job.

Finally, I also believe that to help adult immigrants, we also need to help their children with access to scholarships and higher education opportunities. In exchange, these individuals will be able to better help their parents in many areas, such as learning English, in their work and businesses and in life. Too many children, kids of immigrants, drop out of high school and lack the basic skills to survive in this country. As a result, they become a burden to their parents, which brings the entire family down. So, by helping the kids of immigrants, the government kills two birds with one stone: the kids and the Spanish-speaking parents both benefit.

Finally, I interviewed Jaime Aleman,¹³⁵ the founding member and Vice-President of the Association of Latin American Gardeners of Los Angeles (ALAGLA), where I asked him about his views on the role of government in the lives of Latino immigrants. In response, Jaime expressed similar views to those of my other key informants. In contrast to the above informants, however, Jaime represents an organic leader in the Mexican immigrant gardener community where he, as a *patrón*, for the past two decades, has owned and operated a contract gardening enterprise. Thus, according to Jaime, his viewpoint on the role of government impacts him directly:

I want other gardeners to have the same opportunities that I had. When I came to this country many years ago I had a hard time finding decent work since I didn't speak the language [English] and experienced discrimination because I was an immigrant. In the mid-1980s, however, things started to work out for me because I benefited from the amnesty law. This changed my life for the better. Once I became a citizen, I didn't fear my employer. I felt like I could speak out and, if fired, I could find another job with the help of my friends and family. I believe that the government should do the same thing for the millions of immigrants without papers in this country. I have many relatives who don't have papers [legal status in this country] and they have a hard time at work, where they have to put up with abusive employers because they're afraid to get reported to the authorities. I believe that the government needs to do another amnesty law to give all of the gardeners without papers an opportunity to work without being afraid of being pulled over and deported. Also, they can become successful owners like

¹³⁵ On November 25, 2011, I conducted a personal interview with Jaime in the City of Los Angeles.

myself to support themselves and their families. This is the best thing that the government can do right now.

6.2 Policy Recommendations

In addition to the above policy recommendations from key informants, I asked my gardener informants to provide me with specific feedback on what policy makers, government officials, planners and civic leaders could do to help more immigrants achieve upward mobility in this informal niche, including other immigrant-dominated service sectors. While the following list represents the most common recommendations by my gardener informants, policy makers first need to be educated and convinced of the need for the below programs and services to be rendered to immigrant workers and petty-entrepreneurs in the informal economy. This remains a monumental task for both those individuals interested in improving the working conditions of the informal economy, given the current U.S. economic crises where government funds and resources have become scarcer.

Like Maloney (2003, 2004) and other scholars (Portes et al. 1989; Sassen 1994; Raijman 2001; Zolniski 1994), I argue that the informal economy discourse in this country and beyond—in academia and the public—needs to be re-examined and re-framed (Lackoff 2004) to better understand the complexity and heterogeneity nature of informal economic activities. By conducting more research and engaging in rational public dialogue on the question of the informal economy in U.S. cities, especially in immigrant communities, policy makers and government officials will be better informed to implement improved governmental policies and practices.

As part of the academic and public discourse, we need to differentiate between licit and illicit economic activities in the informal economy. While we can clearly see a major difference between a street vendor selling fruits on the street versus a drug dealer selling cocaine in a park, government intervention and police enforcement should reflect this qualitative difference. Also, I concur with Maloney (2004) that we need to reject the false dichotomy between “bad jobs” found in the informal economy versus “good jobs” in the formal economy. In terms of undocumented immigrants in this country, for example, “bad jobs” can be found equally found in all areas of economic activity (i.e., “immigrant jobs”).

Moreover, like Sassen (1994, 2289), I argue against the “informal / formal” dualistic model and support the notion that “the informal economy can only be understood in terms of its relationship to the formal economy—that is, regulated income-generating activity.” Thus, it is in this context that I argue in favor of the following policy recommendations:

Immigration Reform

Amnesty for Undocumented immigrants: This includes an amnesty program for the estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants in this country (Passel and Cohn 2011), similar to the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA), where over three million undocumented immigrants secured citizenship via this federal law (North 1987, 2005). This proposed amnesty program must include low-cost classes to assist undocumented immigrants obtain citizenship via the established application process. Too often, unscrupulous lawyers and other individuals charge immigrants huge fees to “assist” immigrants through the application process without any guarantees of success.

California Driver Licenses for Undocumented Immigrants: Currently, undocumented immigrants in California and in many other states do not qualify for driver licenses due to their lack of legal status in this country. While California State Assembly Member Gil Cedillo has attempted, on numerous occasions, to pass legislation allowing for undocumented immigrants to legally drive in the state, his efforts have been unsuccessful in becoming law. By providing contract gardeners with access to driver licenses, these individuals will be able to work without the additional fear or burden of being cited and fined for driving without a license. This includes the harsh practice of local police impounding the cars of unlicensed drivers in cities like Los Angeles.¹³⁶

This remains a challenging goal, however, given that many Americans, especially non-Latinos, need to be educated about the importance of allowing for immigrants to drive with licenses, especially for safety-related purposes, and to receive other public benefits in this country. In one of a series of syndicated op-eds published in numerous newspapers throughout the U.S., “We Need to Stop Blaming Immigrants,”¹³⁷ I write about the current trend of xenophobia found in this country, as illustrated by a growing number of states passing anti-immigration laws, such as Arizona, Georgia, Indiana, Utah and Alabama, and the need for citizens to stop blaming immigrants for all of America’s social and economic ills. For instance, in the recent student-led movement to grant immigrant students access to financial aid and a pathway towards citizenship via DREAM Act legislations at the national and statewide level, according to a recent poll conducted by the USC Dornsife / *Los Angeles Times*, researchers found that while the majority of Latinos (79 percent) approve of the recently passed law in California (i.e., California DREAM Act), only a minority of whites (30 percent) do.¹³⁸

Workforce Development Training, Services & Technology

English as a Second Language Classes: While adult schools and community colleges offer ESL classes, too often, Mexican immigrant gardeners lack the time and energy to attend these classes. Contract gardeners, for instance, get out of work too late and too tired to take advantage of these programs. Instead, ESL classes should be tailored around the particular work-schedule of contract gardeners, where classes can be held at the times and places convenient to these busy individuals. This may include once-a-week class schedules.

Computer Training for Spanish-speaking Individuals: In general, Mexican immigrant gardeners lack access to computers and the technical know-how to operate basic software programs, such as Microsoft Word and Excel, which represent important software programs for professionalized, small-scale enterprises. By providing contract gardeners with the computer instruction they need (in Spanish) to improve their existing small-scale

¹³⁶ See: <http://articles.latimes.com/2011/mar/12/local/la-me-lapd-tow-20110312>

¹³⁷ Huerta, Alvaro. 2011. “We Need to Stop Blaming Immigrants.” *Las Vegas Sun*, June 27, sec. D.

¹³⁸ Gordon, Larry. 2011. “Survey Finds Ethnic Divide Among Voters on DREAM Act.” *Los Angeles Times*, November 19. <http://www.latimes.com/news/local/la-me-poll-higher-ed-20111119.0.4108035.story> (Accessed December 9, 2011.)

enterprises, they will be better equipped to compete in this technologically advanced society.

To complement this list, based on my research findings, I propose the following recommendations for policy makers, government officials and planners to assist immigrant workers and petty-entrepreneurs in the informal economy. Many of these recommendations also apply to recent and settled immigrants in the formal economy. However, while these policy recommendations and programs will not solve all of the problems plaguing Mexican immigrants and other racial groups, these proposals represent concrete steps to improve the lives of recent and settled immigrants in America's cities and suburbs.

Workforce Development Training, Services & Technology (to complement above)

Small Business Training: If provided, small business classes will assist Mexican immigrants and others who want to start a contract gardening enterprise from scratch. This also includes individuals who already own a contract gardening enterprise and want to improve it with best business practices. These classes should be tailored to the individual needs of these informal workers and petty-entrepreneurs. Instead of replacing the existing, informal business practices and norms found in this informal niche, the goal of these business classes should be to provide these individuals with the additional tools and know-how they need to improve their business skills and enterprises.

Technical Assistance to Establish Worker-owned Cooperatives: In contrast to the hierarchical crew structures of existing contract gardening enterprises, in worker-owned cooperatives, all of the workers share equally in the costs and benefits of these small-scale enterprises. Gardener cooperatives could be organized and managed by a group like ALAGLA, whereby providing an alternative model to the status quo.

For example, based in Oakland, California, a non-profit group called Women's Action to Gain Economic Security (WAGES) works directly with Latina domestic workers in the Bay Area to assist these low-wage immigrants to form cooperatives. According to its official website,¹³⁹ WAGES “has worked with low-income immigrant Latinas to launch green business cooperatives, a model that enables women to work together to succeed. As co-op members, women have healthy work, good pay, and a voice and a vote in key decisions – and they distribute business profits equitably. WAGES provides training and technical assistance to incubate the co-ops and a framework for continued learning and business growth through our Co-op Network.”

Transition from Informal to Formal Self-employment: In addition to assisting contract gardeners with business-related trainings to assist them with their existing small-scale enterprises (especially for *patrones*) and to form worker-owned cooperatives (especially for *trabajadores*), if offered, contract gardeners will benefit from technical assistance programs and services catered to interested individuals to transition from informal to formal self-employment. For instance, participating petty-entrepreneurs in the contract gardening niche may seek help to start small-businesses in landscape-related

¹³⁹ See <http://wagescooperatives.org/about-us>.

enterprises, such as lawn-mower repair shops and nurseries. By doing so, these petty-entrepreneurs will be able to transfer their business skills from their contract gardening enterprises to a related business with more security and further upward mobility opportunities.

Computer and Software Technology: While millions of Americans benefit at the workplace from the technological advancements in computers, smart-phones and other devices spearheaded by Apple Inc. and the late Steve Jobs, Mexican immigrant gardeners in their daily work lack access to these same devices and technology. By collaborating with computer experts and app developers, policy makers and planners can assist contract gardeners by introducing computers, smart-phones and other devices, such as computer tablets, into this informal niche to improve the business operations of these small-scale enterprises. For example, by developing user-friendly apps in Spanish for the iPad, which contract gardeners can use for creating estimates, sending invoices, receiving payments and scheduling their daily routes, Mexican immigrant gardeners will benefit tremendously. In the case of daily routes, an app can be used to help contract gardeners schedule their daily routes (e.g., 10 – 15 houses per day) in the most effective and efficient manner to save gasoline, time and money. By reducing the amount of travel by contract gardeners, while making their routes throughout the City of Los Angeles and adjacent cities, the public will also benefit due to the reduction in automobile congestion and pollution.

Access to Financial Capital and Group Healthcare Coverage

Micro Loans and Lines of Credit: While many immigrants access their migrant networks to secure interest-free loans, for those who lack the necessary networks to secure financial capital, government-backed loans and lines of credit will benefit them greatly to establish and expand small-scale gardening enterprises.

Access to Group Healthcare Coverage: Like millions of other Americans, Mexican immigrant gardeners mostly lack access to health insurance. By joining a large group or association, such as ALAGLA, contract gardeners will potentially benefit from group-discount, health insurance.

Government Protections and Permits

Workplace Safety and Health Issues Training: Working in conjunction with the California Occupational Safety and Health Administration (CAL/OSHA),¹⁴⁰ government officials and ALAGLA members will provide Mexican immigrant gardeners with information and training regarding workplace and health-related issues. Given that contract gardeners work with dangerous gardening equipment, pesticides and fertilizers, they require the proper training to protect them from on-the-job injuries and long-term health problems. In addition, contract gardeners often get injured while climbing trees and performing other gardening-related activities.

¹⁴⁰ See <http://www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/>.

Laws to Protect Contract Gardeners at Worksites: Too often, when a contract gardener gets injured on the job site, the homeowner or renter does not provide the injured gardener with the medical coverage he requires or injury-related, financial reimbursements. Thus, legal protections and related medical coverage are needed to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all contract gardeners at residential job sites.

Legal Protections Against Non-paying Clients: All of my gardener informants indicated that they have clients who refuse to pay for gardening services. This also includes clients who allow two to three months to pass without paying their monthly gardening fees, including clients who request costly extra jobs, such as tree trimming, without paying the amount in full. To assist gardeners with these issues, local government officials and planners should provide gardeners with the required legal assistance to help contract gardeners collect monies owed to them. These legal services can be facilitated via government agencies and/or non-profit, legal aid agencies.

Statewide-based Contract Gardening Permits: In lieu of the existing, city-based permit process, where cities randomly impose permits for contract gardeners to operate in residential communities, the state should provide a single permit for contract gardeners to operate their small-scale enterprises. The status quo allows for cities to arbitrarily impose fees for gardeners to operate, where a gardener operating in several cities, such as Los Angeles, Beverly Hills and Santa Monica, must purchase more than one permit to operate. This city-by-city system is too costly and cumbersome for Mexican immigrant gardeners to operate.

Implementing the above policy recommendations requires a collaborative effort by policy makers, government officials, planners, civic leaders and others at the local, state and federal levels.¹⁴¹ Given the significant role that immigrants play in the domestic household service sector in particular and economy in general, assisting these vulnerable individuals and their families also requires the full support of the American public. For instance, as members of a privileged society, many middle-class and affluent Americans benefit directly from Mexican immigrant labor: from the front lawns they maintain to the houses they clean to the children they care for to the food they cultivate in agricultural fields.

In conclusion, as individuals in a position to influence social justice and equity in America's cities and suburbs, it behooves all planning scholars and practitioners to heed Paul Davidoff's (1965, 337) words by preparing the future generations of leaders to better serve *los de abajo* / those on the bottom:

As a profession [city planning] charged with making urban life more beautiful, exciting, and creative, and more just, we have had little to say. Our task is to train a future generation of planners to go well beyond us in its ability to prescribe the future urban life.

¹⁴¹ For a related list of policy recommendations catered for Latino immigrant day laborers, see Valenzuela et al. (2006). Given that contract gardeners and day laborers share similar personal characteristics and constraints in the U.S., this groundbreaking study conducted by Valenzuela and colleagues serves as an excellent example for scholars, like myself, interested in immigrant labor in American cities and suburbs.

Appendix A: Latino Gardener Comic Strip

The below comic strip by the syndicated cartoonist Lalo Alcaraz not only satirizes the lack of Latinos in Hollywood, but also serves as an excellent example of how Latino gardeners are portrayed in a pejorative manner in American popular culture.

Figure A. Latino Gardener Comic Strip



Source: Lalo Alcaraz, *Los Angeles Times* (April 21, 2005)¹⁴²

¹⁴² Re-published with direct permission from the artist / author.

Appendix B: Consent Letter in Spanish

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA AT BERKELEY

BERKELEY • DAVIS • IRVINE • LOS ANGELES • MERCED • RIVERSIDE • SAN DIEGO



SAN FRANCISCO • SANTA BARBARA • SANTA CRUZ

Consentimiento oral para participar en un investigación con grabación de audio

*Examen de los peligros y promesas de la economía informal en una ciudad global:
Un estudio de caso de jardineros mexicanos en Los Angeles*

Introducción y Propósito

Mi nombre es Alvaro Huerta. Soy un candidato par el doctorado en la Universidad de California, Berkeley, y estoy trabajando con mi consejero de la facultad, la profesora Karen Christensen, en el Departamento de Planificación Regional y Urbana. Me gustaría darle las gracias formalmente por participar en mi estudio de investigación, que se trata de los jardineros mexicanos que ganan dinero bajo la economía informal Los Ángeles.

Procedimientos

Si usted se compromete a participar en mi investigación, podemos empezar la entrevista ahora, o en el día y horario de su elección. La entrevista incluirá preguntas sobre el comercio de jardinería pagado, cómo funciona y cómo uno se convierte en propietario de estas pequeñas empresas. Durará de 1 a 2 horas. Con su permiso, voy a grabar con la conversación y tomar notas durante la entrevista. La grabación consiste en registrar con exactitud la información que usted proporciona, y será usado para los propósitos de la transcripción solamente. La grabación será destruida de inmediato una vez que su transcripción.

Si decide no ser grabado, voy a tomar notas. Si está de acuerdo en ser grabado, pero se siente incómodo en cualquier momento durante la entrevista, puedo apagar la grabadora en cuanto usted lo decida, O si usted no desea continuar, puede detener la entrevista en cualquier momento. También, puesto que se trata de una entrevista voluntaria, puede negarse a contestar cualquier pregunta si se siente incómodo.

Espero realizar sólo una entrevista, sin embargo, los seguimientos pueden ser necesarios para aclarar algunas dudas. Si es así, me comunicaré con usted por teléfono para solicitar su permiso. En caso de no terminar todas las preguntas en mi lista, le pediré que hagamos otra cita para terminar. La entrevista de seguimiento, si es necesaria, sólo se producirá en el momento y el lugar de su elección.

Beneficios

No hay ningún beneficio directo por participar en este estudio. Esta investigación servirá para que otros se eduquen acerca de la complejidad del comercio de jardinería y los beneficios positivos para la sociedad.

Riesgos y Molestias

Hay riesgos mínimos de este estudio para usted o alguien más en su comercio. Sin embargo, como se señaló anteriormente, si algunas de las preguntas de investigación lo hacen sentir incómodo o molesto, usted puede negarse a contestar cualquier pregunta, o detener la entrevista en cualquier momento. También, como con toda investigación, existe la posibilidad de que la confidencialidad pueda verse comprometida, sin embargo, estamos tomando precauciones para minimizar este riesgo. (Ver abajo para más detalles.)

Confidencialidad

Sus datos serán guardados con la mayor confidencialidad posible. Si los resultados de este estudio son publicados o presentados, los nombres y otra información de identificación personal no serán utilizados.

Para reducir al mínimo los riesgos de confidencialidad, vamos a asignar un número a cada entrevista en lugar de utilizar su nombre real. Este número aparecerá en la cinta de audio y la transcripción. Sólo voy a tener acceso a la lista de nombres con números asignados. Esta se mantendrá bajo llave en un lugar seguro en mi casa.

Cuando la investigación haya finalizado, guardaré la transcripción en un lugar seguro en mi casa con caja cerrada durante la investigación y para su uso en futuras investigaciones hechas por mí solamente. La grabación será destruida de inmediato una vez que su transcripción.

Por último, en lugar de consentimiento firmado, le voy a pedir el consentimiento oral en lugar de consentimiento por escrito. Esto ocurre con la participación tanto de la entrevista de grabación.

Compensación

No se le pagará por participar en este estudio.

Derechos

La participación en la investigación es completamente voluntaria. Usted es libre de negarse a participar en el proyecto. Usted puede negarse a contestar cualquier pregunta y es libre de dejar de participar en el proyecto en cualquier momento. Si usted no decide participar en la investigación y si o no va a contestar una pregunta o seguir participando en el proyecto, no habrá sanción para usted.

Preguntas

Si usted tiene alguna pregunta sobre esta investigación, no dude en ponerse en contacto conmigo al 310-384-9528 o ahuerta@berkeley.edu.

Si usted tiene alguna pregunta sobre sus derechos o su tratamiento como participante en la investigación en este estudio, por favor póngase en contacto con la Universidad de California en Berkeley Comité para la Protección de Sujetos Humanos al 510-642-7461 o e-mail subjects@berkeley.edu.

CONSENTIMIENTO

Se le entregará una copia de este formulario de consentimiento para mantener sus propios registros.

Si usted decide participar, por favor diga sí o no: _____

Asunto #: _____

06/10/2010

Appendix C: Consent Letter in English

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA AT BERKELEY

BERKELEY • DAVIS • IRVINE • LOS ANGELES • MERCED • RIVERSIDE • SAN DIEGO



SAN FRANCISCO • SANTA BARBARA • SANTA CRUZ

Oral Consent to Participate in Research with Audio-taping

*Examining the Perils and Promises of an Informal Niche in a Global City:
A Case Study of Paid Mexican Gardeners in Los Angeles*

Introduction and Purpose

My name is Alvaro Huerta. I am a Ph.D. Candidate at the University of California, Berkeley, and am working with my faculty advisor, Professor Karen Christensen in the Department of City and Regional Planning. I would like to formally thank you for considering to participate in my research study, which concerns the case of paid Mexican gardeners in Los Angeles' informal economy.

Procedures

If you agree to participate in my research, we can start the interview now or I will conduct an interview with you at a time and location of your choice. The interview will involve questions about the paid gardening trade, how it works and how one becomes an owner of these small businesses. It should last about 1 - 2 hours. With your permission, I will audiotape and take notes during the interview. The taping is to accurately record the information you provide, and will be used for transcription purposes only.

If you decide not to be audio-taped, I will take written notes instead. If you agree to being audio-taped but feel uncomfortable at any time during the interview, I can turn off the tape recorder at your request. Or if you don't wish to continue, you can stop the interview at any time. Also, since this is a voluntary interview, you can refuse to answer any question you don't feel comfortable with.

I expect to conduct only one interview; however, follow-ups may be needed for added clarification. If so, I will contact you by phone to request this. I will only seek a follow-up interview if we don't get through all of the questions on my list. The follow-up interview, if one is needed, will only occur once at the time and location of your choice.

Benefits

There is no direct benefit to you from taking part in this study. It is hoped that the research will, however, serve to educate others on the complexity of the paid gardening trade and positive benefits to society.

Risks/Discomforts

There are minimal risks from this study to you or anyone else in your trade. However, as noted above, if some of the research questions may make you uncomfortable or upset, feel free to decline to answer any questions you don't wish to, or to stop the interview at any time. Also, as with all research, there is a chance that confidentiality could be compromised; however, we are taking precautions to minimize this risk. (See below for more information.)

Confidentiality

Your study data will be handled as confidentially as possible. If results of this study are published or presented, individual names and other personally identifiable information will not be used.

To minimize the risks to confidentiality, we will assign a number to each interview instead of using your real name. This number will appear on the audio-tape and transcription. Only I will have access to the list of names with assigned numbers. This will be kept in a secured space.

When the research is completed, I may save the tapes and notes for use in future research done by myself only. I will retain these records after the study is over for research purposes only. If I have no need for them, I will destroy tapes and transcriptions. The same measures described above will be taken to protect confidentiality of this study data.

Lastly, instead of signed consent, I will ask you for oral consent. This goes for both interview participation and audio-taping.

Compensation

You will not be paid for taking part in this study.

Rights

Participation in research is completely voluntary. You are free to decline to take part in the project. You can decline to answer any questions and are free to stop taking part in the project at any time. Whether or not you choose to participate in the research and whether or not you choose to answer a question or continue participating in the project, there will be no penalty to you or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Questions

If you have any questions about this research, please feel free to contact me. I can be reached at 310-384-9528 or ahuerta@berkeley.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights or treatment as a research participant in this study, please contact the University of California at Berkeley's Committee for Protection of Human Subjects at 510-642-7461, or e-mail subjects@berkeley.edu.

CONSENT

You will be given a copy of this consent letter to keep for your own records.

If you wish to participate in this study, please say yes or no: _____

Subject #: _____

06/10/2010

Appendix D: Interview Instrument

Interview ID #: _____

Date: _____

Location: _____

Introductory Comments (without recording):

I appreciate very much the time you are giving me for this interview. I asked you for this interview because I want to learn about your life and work-related activities as a contract gardener in Los Angeles. Please note that your identity will be protected at all times, where I will not use your real name in any recordings or written documents. This is a voluntary research project and you have the right to refuse to answer any question(s). My intent is not to ask you about any sensitive information that will cause you harm. If it's okay with you, I'll be recording this interview. I'm recording the interview so that I can capture all of your information without missing any important facts or stories. Do you have any questions or concerns before we start?

HYPOTHESIS # 1: Informal Economy & Immigrant Work Ethic

Demographic Profile:

- What part of Mexico are you from? _____
- Is this a city, town or rancho? _____
- What's the highest level of schooling that you obtained? _____
- How old are you? _____
- How many years have you lived in this country?: _____
- What neighborhood do you live in? _____
- Are you married or single? _____
- Do you have kids? _____
- Do you send money to family in Mexico? _____
- If yes, to whom? _____
- Do you own a home or rent? _____
- Do you live with family or friends? _____

Background:

- Do you come from a small or large family? _____
- At what age did you first start working? _____
- What type of work did you perform in Mexico? _____
- What were your working hours in Mexico? _____
- What are your working hours now? _____
- Did this type of work help you in your current job? _____
- If yes, how? _____
- Did you own or operate a business in Mexico? _____
- If so, what kind of business and how many employees? _____

Personal Traits:

- In your opinion, what are some characteristics that an individual needs to become self-employed and successful in *el jardin*? _____

HYPOTHESIS # 2: Strength of Strong Ties

Entry into Paid Gardening Niche:

- Who originally helped you to enter *el jardin*? _____
- Can you explain how this individual (or individuals) helped you? _____
- Prior to working in *el jardin*, did you work in a related landscape field in the U.S., such as a nursery or lawn mower shop? _____
- Do you have family, friends or hometown associates who are *trabajadores* in this business? _____
- Do you have family, friends or hometown associates who are *patrones*? _____

HYPOTHESIS # 3: Informal Economy and Business Entry

- How would you compare *el jardin* with working in a factory, warehouse or restaurant in this country? _____
- _____
- What are some of the advantage of working in *el jardin* where the government doesn't get involved? _____
- _____
- What are some of the disadvantages? _____
- Do you have health benefits or retirements benefits through your job? _____
- Do you think you could start your own business where the government is involved and regulates? _____
- If yes, how so? _____
- Where does one get the information he needs to start his own gardening business? _____

HYPOTHESIS # 4: Co-ethnic Ties and Privileged Ties

- Do you speak English? _____
- If yes, how did you learn it? _____
- How well would you say you speak it? _____

Note: For patrones, go to Questions (A); for trabajadores, go to Questions (B).

Questions (A): Patronos

- How did you become an owner? _____
- If you started as a worker, how many years do you work as a worker before starting your own business? _____
- How many years have you owned your current business? _____
- How did you get the start-up capital? _____
- _____
- What type of tools, equipment and transportation do you need? _____
- _____
- What are the different ways that a gardener starts a *ruta*? _____
- _____
- What are the different ways a gardener grows his *ruta*? _____
- _____
- How common is it for a worker to steal clients from his boss? _____
- How common is it for a gardener to steal clients from another gardener? _____
- What's the minimum number of clients needed to break even or make a modest profit? _____
- Is there a point where the *ruta* is too large where it's unmanageable or non-profitable? _____
- If yes, please explain? _____
- How long does it take to establish a profitable *ruta*? _____
- How much on average do you charge per house? _____
- Has this amount changed over the years? _____
- What's the size of your *ruta*? _____
- How much revenue does your *ruta* generate on a monthly basis? _____
- How much revenue do you generate from weekend jobs? _____
- Have you ever hired a worker with the intention of helping him start his own business? _____
- If so, please explain? _____
- How do you deal with verbally abusive clients? _____
- How do you deal with clients who don't pay? _____
- Do you get help at home from your wife, kids and other relatives for you business? _____
- If yes, how do they help you? _____
- How many workers do you employ? _____
- How much does a worker usually earn per day? _____
- How much does a worker usually earn from weekend jobs? _____
- How about for a driver? _____
- How do you recruit your workers? _____
- Do you ever recruit workers directly from Mexico? _____
- How does competition from other gardeners impact your business? _____
- _____
- How does the flow of new immigrants to L.A. impact your business? _____
- _____
- What do you like most about this business? _____
- What do you dislike? _____
- Can you share any insights you might have why some immigrant gardeners are able to become owners of paid gardening businesses and others are not? _____

Questions (B): *Trabajadores*

- How many years have you worked in *el jardin*? _____
- Do you have a 2nd job outside *el jardin*? _____
- If so, what kind of work is it? _____
- What do you most like about *el jardin*? _____
- _____
- What do you dislike? _____
- _____
- How much does a worker usually earn per day? _____
- How about for side jobs or weekend jobs? _____
- How about for a driver? _____
- Do you want to start your own gardening business? _____
- If yes, why? _____
- _____
- What do you think it takes to become an owner? _____
- _____
- What's currently preventing you from starting your own *ruta*? _____
- _____
- What obstacles do you expect to face to become a successful owner? _____
- _____
- What type of help do you get from your family regarding your job? _____
- _____
- How does the flow of new immigrants to L.A. impact you in your job? _____
- Can you share any insights you might have why some immigrants are able to become owners of paid gardening businesses? _____

Final Questions

- How has the current recession impacted you? _____
- _____
- How do you feel about the value of manual labor? _____
- _____
- How do you feel about being a paid gardener in this country? _____
- _____
- If you have children or plan to have any in the future, would you want them to work in *el jardin*? _____
- Please explain, why or why not? _____
- _____
- What do you think the government / planners could do to help recent and settled immigrants achieve upward mobility in this country? _____
- _____
- Finally, is there anything else I should know about *el jardin*? _____

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