DOMESTIC ECONOMIES

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Women, Work,

and the American Dream

in Los Angeles

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For "Carmen"

and all of the women

whose stories

make up this book

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Introduction

In January 2003, I observed two strikingly different versions of the "ten-chair exercise." Used to illustrate income distribution in the United States, this exercise calls for ten volunteers and ten chairs, each representing one-tenth of the country's population and wealth, respectively. The inequalities of our so-called middle-class society are then rendered acutely vivid: one person lounges on seven chairs, seven people fight over the remaining three, and two people are left standing. I first encountered this at a bimonthly gathering of mothers in an upper-middle-class neighborhood in Los Angeles. The moderator, an active member of the group, wanted her fellow mothers to pay attention to tax policies, to understand how deeply a seemingly arcane system influenced their daily lives. She emphasized how the tax structure squeezes individuals in the middle class, their economically precarious position objectified by the seven women scrambling to fit on three chairs. A few Mondays later, in a felicitous turn of events, I arrived at the weekly meeting of a domestic workers' cooperative and found the coordinator preparing to run through this same exercise. This time, however, participants would not recognize themselves in the seven women piled on three chairs, but rather in the two individuals with no place to sit. Members had been at odds lately, struggling to balance cooperative principles with a shrinking clientele, and the coordinator wanted to bring home the need for collective effort—only together would they be able to add another chair to the mix, to create a new source of wealth.

At first glance, this juxtaposition seems ironic, serving only to underscore the stark economic disparities between the two groups. In

this exercise, native-born, middle-class employers and the Mexican and Central American women who worked in their homes clearly represented distinct sectors of the population. Nevertheless, as evinced by this activity, both agonized about their financial stability. Despite glaring inequalities of privilege, all of these women could easily envision the economic brink and fought to guard against it. The perils of economic failure magnified as they all defined themselves in large part through financial mobility, through achievement of the American Dream, for themselves and for their children.

Both groups of women turned to domestic service in pursuit of the American Dream, but for both the Dream remained just out of reach, hampered by the ever-present fear of economic collapse, as well as the difficulties of becoming proper and valuable "Americans." These concerns are of a piece, firmly linked through the continued devaluation of reproductive labor and its association with women. This book explores the different ways that native-born employers and immigrant domestic workers navigate this context, each locating personal value and success at the intersection of economic advancement, re/productive labor, and national belonging. Attention to both groups illuminates alternative, coexisting understandings of individual and social worth, and in turn, varying ways to conceive of social membership and belonging. In so doing, it situates immigrant women firmly inside the nation, underscoring them as critical and active players in defining and producing contemporary "Americanness."

American Dreams

In an 1862 essay denouncing slavery, Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, "America is another word for Opportunity" (1862: 508). The America he extolled would be resolutely antislavery, allowing each man to own the fruits of his labor. Labor, he argued, was an essential component of morality and hence civility. Even so, his vision of America was also explicitly racialized (cf. Knadler 2002), composed of the correct kind of men—the civilized type, from "temperate" rather than "hot" zones. For Emerson's America valued labor, sharply in opposition to Indians and Africans, who understood neither its moral centrality nor its potential to transform the future.

Emerson's nineteenth-century ideal strongly resembles the contemporary American Dream. This Dream promises opportunity, holding that success and economic advancement are open to anyone who is willing to work hard. It is the very essence of this country—unfettered by her past, the driven, disciplined individual can become anything she desires. The Dream ostensibly rewards those who are worthy, while the less deserving languish. Placing the blame on individuals, it helps to constitute the moral borders of Americanness, since only those who have strength of character and determination will flourish. Of course, this version of the story is incomplete: emphasizing the individual helps to conceal the very limits that make the Dream possible. Not only is the American Dream increasingly elusive for its intended recipients, but it has always functioned through foreclosure. The labor of those not entitled to the Dream continues to subsidize the lifestyles of those who are. Further, these boundaries are still demarcated through race, even as the content of whiteness and its others has shifted over time.[1]

This ethnography examines how two groups of women seek to achieve the American Dream, however imperfect and slippery it might be. It takes domestic service as analytic entry point, illustrating how immigrant and native-born women struggle to realize the Dream; how each is indispensable to the other's quest; and the abiding importance of reproductive labor to this pursuit. This occupation provides a tangible intersection that brings together immigrant and native-born, foreign and "American," domestic worker and domestic employer. Although these categories exist only in relation to one another, their mutuality often remains invisible. The give and take of domestic service materializes these usually unseen connections, as it simultaneously facilitates, complicates, and transforms the processes of self- and nation-making for women on each side. Juxtaposing employers and employees reveals how these processes are neither smooth nor uncontested, and underscores how the Dream is not only racialized but also gendered. This view foregrounds how reproductive labor remains invisible but crucial—indeed, crucial in its invisibility—to shaping "Americanness." As such, it sheds light on an enduring cultural fault line, a struggle for personal worth and social recognition that centers the value and meaning of reproductive labor.

Checking the Dream: Gendered Exclusions and the Racialization of Immigrants

The inherent potential of the American Dream implies that everyone can become middle class. This category is fluid and almost meaningless in its alleged ubiquity, but it remains an important marker of self-identification, acknowledging that an individual accepts the terms of the deal—she is willing to put in the effort that the Dream requires. Yet, for the middle-class[2] women I met in LA, this bargain was neither satisfying nor viable. For this group, the American Dream was riddled with ambivalence and contradiction, pledging success but yielding mostly frustration. These women felt like individual failures, and yet they were set up by a system that continues to deny the economic value and social importance of reproductive labor. Although Emerson's belief in the moral value of work—of the worker—persists today, this view recognizes only paid employment, erasing reproductive labor and establishing an irreconcilable conflict for women.

In turn-of-the-millennium LA, female employers defined success as raising accomplished children as well as achievement in the paid workforce—in fact, the latter was vital to the former. Even so, these goals remained incompatible, both practically and ideologically. From a middle-class (primarily white) vantage point, proper motherhood is exclusively concerned with children, enacted through reproducing and caring for children. Fulfilling this requirement is paramount, for motherhood is inherent in womanhood, its most essential manifestation. These understandings clash with an analogous emphasis on self-realization through paid employment, and they collide with the urgent need to earn an income as well as with the ever-expanding reach of the workplace. The fact that neither the demands of the home nor the exigencies of work have abated creates an increasingly unmanageable situation. As Hochschild and Machung (1989) point out, after completing a full day at the office, most women return home to a "second shift."

Motherhood and paid employment thus exerted contradictory pulls, the first fulfilling the imperatives of femininity while the latter underpinned a socially recognizable and respected identity. From an employer's perspective, the domestic sphere remained ideologically distinct from the public domain, the world of *economic* value. Its association with the private sphere and with women rendered reproductive

labor invisible, uncounted in the GDP, and unimportant (e.g., Budig and England 2001; Folbre 2001, 2012; Budig and Hodges 2010; Brooks and Rogalin 2014). Paid employment provided a way to counteract these erasures—allowing middle-class women not only the ability to maintain a particular standard of living and ensure their kids' futures, but also the opportunity to be productive and thus successful persons, (economically) valuable members of society.

The widespread availability of domestic service in LA helped to ease the tug of war between work and home. But this did not solve the conflict, merely papered it over, bringing other inconsistencies into pointed relief. Hiring a domestic employee forced employers, often for the first time, to grapple with the inequalities, inconsistencies, and complicities required to sustain their lifestyles. Bringing difference into the protected space of the home, domestic service forced employers to see their privilege and thus to reconsider the myths and meanings of the American Dream.

When I started my research, I expected that employers' concerns around domestic service would center on issues of family, motherhood, and social reproduction—for instance, who was raising their children, how they were raising their children, how to define motherhood, and how to think about work and women's work. Although these did arise from time to time, to my surprise, privilege emerged as the principal trope in employers' stories of domestic service, foregrounding its disruptive potential. For example, whenever I described my project to employers, especially those I met in passing, they responded the same way: they loved their domestic employee, who was "like family." Many would then proceed to elaborate the various ways they had helped her out. This script never varied, an almost instantaneous justification for me, as well as for themselves, that redefined their particular relationship as different and more equal.[3] More importantly, employers also often pointed out that the women who labored in their homes were immigrants. Their insistence on foreignness helped to construct an insuperable distinction and underscored just who is entitled to the American Dream and where the "shifting human extractive frontier" (Liechty 2003: 10) is located. As a result, they temporarily replaced gendered limits with national cum racial boundaries.

This displacement represents merely another iteration of the racialized and racializing foundations of the American Dream. Immigrants

have been crucial to these processes, serving as both the cheap laborers and emblematic others necessary to defining national identity (e.g., Gordon and Lenhardt 2007; Johnson 2009). Engaging in domestic service further compounds these distinctions. Historically, racially marked women have provided the main supply of paid domestic labor in the United States. Although the ethnicity, race, or national provenance of the women who performed this work has varied according to region and historical moment, they have always belonged to groups "placed in a separate legal category from whites, excluded from rights and protections accorded to full citizens" (Glenn 1992: 8; cf. Barnes 1993; Katzman 1979; Tucker 1988; Palmer 1989; Dill 1994). The concept of "illegality," often projected onto all Mexican and Central American immigrants whether they have legal documents or not, further rigidifies these lines (e.g., Ngai 2004; De Genova 2005; Romero 2008; Goldsmith et al. 2009). In the present, the operative distinction is not one between full citizens and internal "others"; instead, we find "Americans" and (dangerous, encroaching, illegitimate) foreigners, outsiders who cannot expect any rights or protections.

See(k)ing Alternatives: Ethnography and the Unexpected

Their difference seemingly congealed and impossible to transcend, immigrant women nevertheless had a very different experience of the American Dream than their employers did. Despite the abiding indignities of immigrant life, these women consistently asserted their successes, their faith in the American Dream, and hence their claims on it. Certainly, the Dream has always been more myth than actuality, and especially in the years since the "Great Recession," its limitations have eclipsed its potential. Middle-class families, the very subjects of this Dream, increasingly doubt its relevance to their lives. How, then, could immigrants, who at best were afterthoughts, at worst the vehicle for others' attainment, of the Dream hold so steadfastly to it? Were they simply "duped," hoodwinked into upholding a system that exploits them?

This book argues that the American Dream was their reality—even as they were acutely aware and highly critical of the hardships they faced in this country. The promise of the Dream structured their daily lives and senses of self, and although they were most often on the wrong end of it, their stake in and demands on it pushed against its very boundaries. Initially jarring, and certainly humbling, this apparent incon-

gruity gives shape to my ethnography. I begin by questioning its very dissonance: *Why did I see a contradiction?* The answer, I realized, required a shift in analytic framework. How does a focus on a specific occupation shape *how* and *what* we know about Mexican and Central American women in the United States? More broadly, what are we already assuming about individual worth and social membership if we begin from the premise that productive labor, self, and value are isomorphic?

The efficacy of ethnography lies in its ability to undermine the assumptions of the researcher, but she must remain open to this. Doing fieldwork "at home" easily confirms what we take for granted, and so when I started fieldwork, I accepted that "domestic service" would be a critical category of experience. After all, I supposed, there was no way that performing such unsavory work could have less than a fundamental impact on an individual's sense of self. The injuries of this job are multiple and well known: domestic workers earn little and often put up with abusive treatment, even as they perform crucial tasks without which the economy could not function. Crystallizing both global and local inequalities through backbreaking, poorly paid, and socially disparaged labor, domestic work *should* be a defining category for the women who engage it—or at least that is what I expected. What I found, however, was that domestic service was inseparable from the broader immigrant experience, the struggle for survival and success in a context of economic and social erasure.

This became increasingly clear in the first months of fieldwork, as I tried to find "domestic workers" for my study. Shortly after arriving in Los Angeles, I contacted the Domestic Workers Group, an association set up by and housed within a well-known immigrants' rights coalition. I spoke to their coordinator, and she invited me to their upcoming meeting. That Saturday, I attended my very first gathering, where I met a number of women. As the session wound down, I found myself in conversation with Blanca and Carmen and offered to drive them home. Carmen accepted for both of them, explaining that public transportation was particularly erratic on weekends, and since Blanca had to change buses, it would take her at least an hour to get home.

After we dropped Carmen off, Blanca asked if I wanted to get a cup of coffee. She directed me to a Salvadoran bakery near her apartment, and over coffee and sweet tamales, told me her life story—she left Honduras after discovering her husband had cheated on her, arrived in LA

ten years earlier, initially worked in several homes, and now cleaned hotel rooms. I started to worry: Was Blanca a "real" domestic worker? Why was she at that meeting if she no longer labored in private homes? I tried to ask about work, but she wouldn't engage my questions, always shifting the conversation back to other stories—her neighbor whose husband had just left, her nephew who was gay and didn't practice safe sex, and her children who lived in Honduras.

We finished our coffee, and I took Blanca home. She promised to call me, and the possibility of further contact made me feel both relieved and increasingly anxious. I was pleased to be meeting more people but nervous that they weren't "real" domestic workers. Would it be okay to hang out with Blanca even though she no longer labored in this capacity? If I included her, did this mean that once a domestic worker, always a domestic worker? Did this job carry such force that it would mark you for life?

These same doubts plagued me when Carmen introduced me to Raquel, a teacher's aide at an elementary school. Raquel was a nanny when she first came to Los Angeles but had been at her present job for the past three years. Still, she cleaned homes with Carmen during school holidays, and a few months after I met her, took a weekend job caring for a newborn from Friday night to Sunday afternoon. All the while, she was attending night school, hoping to pass the GED, start taking college classes, and eventually become a teacher. I wondered: Was Raquel a domestic worker? I could classify her as a domestic worker, but is that how she would choose to identify herself? Just what made someone a domestic worker? Did this occupation override other, concurrently held jobs, uniquely defining individuals?

The longer I was in Los Angeles, the more I started to question whether the categories of "domestic worker" and "domestic service" were the appropriate lenses through which to make sense of immigrant women's experiences. This occupation is one of the few available to Central American and Mexican women, and it is usually their "best" choice, higher paid and more flexible than the other jobs they could find. It remains, of course, poorly compensated, and to make ends meet, individuals worked long hours, often at nights and on weekends, in multiple positions. They scratched out an income through any combination of cleaning a house, taking care of children, working in a factory, selling beauty products, or other informal labor.

Mexican and Central American women did not attribute definitional force to "domestic service," instead characterizing themselves as mothers. They took up paid employment as *tool for* achieving rather than as *source of* individual and social worth. Their work allowed them to provide for their children—and it was this endeavor, along with the personal transformations it required and catalyzed, that rendered them successful, achievers of the American Dream, valuable and valued social beings (cf. Coll 2010). As such, they knew themselves and their lives in the United States as much through inclusion as through exclusion, tempering the very real experience of marginality through the equally real experience of gain.

To get at this complexity of experience, I take domestic service as an important but not by itself defining category of immigrant women's lives in the United States. My perspective builds on an extensive and growing literature on paid domestic employment. This body of work draws on feminist analyses of globalization, which underscore how such processes place growing responsibility on women; increasingly, it is women's remittances that support both their families and the economies of their home countries (Sassen 2000). The travails of immigrant domestic workers are crucial to understanding these global movements, highlighting not only what Sassen (2000) has called "women's burden" but also the disparities that reproduce the privilege of Western women through the labor of those from the Global South. Accordingly, scholars have examined domestic service across a variety of sites, including Filipinas in Hong Kong (Constable 1997), Los Angeles and Rome (Parreñas 2001), Taiwan (Lan 2006), and Vancouver (Pratt 1999); West Indian nannies in New York (Cheever 2002; Brown 2008) and Toronto (Stiell and England 1999); Sri Lankan women in the Middle East (Ismail 1999; Gamburd 2000); Indonesian women in Saudi Arabia (Silvey 2004); African women in Italy (Andall 2000); and Mexican and Central American women in the United States (Repak 1995; Luz Ibarra 2000; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001). They have explored the day-to-day of this occupation (e.g., Romero 1992; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001); its links to global economic transformations (e.g., Bakan and Stasiulis 1997; Momsen 1999; Anderson 2000; Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2004; Zimmerman et al. 2006; Lutz 2008; Romero et al. 2014); and its effects on the children and families of domestic workers (e.g., Parreñas 2001; Gamburd 2008; Romero 2011).

These studies provide invaluable insight into an occupation that simultaneously results from and sustains global relations of power, calling much-needed attention to households as key sites in the production of broad-scale inequalities. My research is deeply indebted to this scholarship and, at the same time, seeks to expand the scope of inquiry; now that we know that domestic service is multiplying, creating new family formations, and reproducing global asymmetries, how can we understand the daily lives and perspectives of the women who perform this work? For as much as this literature tells us about the occupation and its attendant injuries, it tells us relatively little about the individual women who labor in this capacity. In fact, a focus on one mode of employment can blur other aspects of immigrant life. Reading paid domestic employees through their jobs, we highlight inequality, exploitation, and exclusion.[4]

This ethnography refocuses the relationship of immigrant women with their work to consider how poverty and upward mobility, exclusion and belonging, hopelessness and possibility exist simultaneously. Thinking through paid employment and motherhood as part of the same endeavor elucidates multiple ways of figuring an individual's value and social position. This view does not elide the harsh realities of immigrant life or the destructive consequences of capitalism. Unquestionably in the United States, neoliberal[5] policies increasingly define the parameters of belonging, shaping experiences of social membership through its presumed connection to work (cf. Greenhouse 2009; Muelebach 2011; Weeks 2011; Brodkin 2014). This form of belonging, accrued through productive labor, reinforces the of-courseness of neoliberal logics and is tied directly to the interests of a particular class (Harvey 2011). In the present, however, most people's potential to fulfill these goals has evaporated, producing a new and ongoing state of crisis—a pervasive sense of hopelessness and precarity (e.g., Berlant 2011; Povinelli 2011; Stewart 2012; Allison 2013; Muehlebach 2013; Roitman 2014; Hébert 2015). Yet it is the very urgency of this moment, when the future no longer seems possible, that forces us to begin imagining alternatives (e.g., Halberstam 2011; Allison 2013).

Biehl (2013) encourages us to use ethnography as a way into these concerns, but also cautions us to account for constraints as much as for newly found openings: "What about life *inside* capitalism. Why this investment in a counter-ideology to capitalism that rests on the imaginary of a capi-

tal's *outside*? How to make sense of contemporary realities of society inside the State and people who mobilize to use the state, forging novel, tenuous links between themselves, the state, and the market place?" (2013: 589). Without romanticizing their predicaments, I investigate how individuals newly inhabiting this precarity, as well those whose destitution is enduring, conceive of and exploit emergent possibilities, gaps that not only reinforce but also challenge normative definitions of nation and belonging.[6] I explore both the difficulties and the potentialities of the present, particularly for those women relegated to the margins, where often just "managing *to be*" (Allen 2011: 30) or "simply trying to find room to breathe beneath intolerable constraints" (Biehl 2013: 574) is a triumph.

Domestic Economies

Examining both sides of domestic service at once underscores how immigrant and native-born are part of the same process, both requisite in the making of the American Dream, of "Americanness." It also reveals the importance of reproductive labor to this same project. Indeed, paid employment is integral to but not exclusively defining of individual women's subjectivities and their efforts to become valuable and valued. All of the women I met in LA located success at the intersection of motherhood and paid employment. They defined individual achievement through their own economic mobility, but also through the ability to ensure their children's future accomplishments; together these would render them valuable social members, proper "Americans." Crucial to realizing the American Dream, economic independence, self-discipline, and upwardly mobile aspirations worked to identify the desirable national subject. Importantly, these qualities transcended the individual, for they would only retroactively be proven by the successes of the next generation. In the present, a measure of economic prosperity coupled with working toward that future evinced the appropriate attributes of "Americanness." An individual's worth and social value, her sense of belonging, therefore spanned several selves, temporal horizons, and categories of labor.

The chapters that follow discuss how immigrant and native-born women grapple with this always-mutable terrain, foregrounding the significance of reproductive labor to national belonging. This is not incidental, for the processes of reproduction highlight the values upheld,

assumed, or contested within a society; they clarify what it means to be a (desirable) person as well as how personhood is constituted within a specific cultural context (Ginsburg and Rapp 1995). We see then how belonging is always already gendered. I use "belonging" for its ambiguity, to emphasize how particular dispositions and aspirations, along with the sense of a shared future, work to shape a desirable and proper "American." My analysis deliberately moves away from the notion of citizenship,[7] from an emphasis on rights, for as I found out in the process of fieldwork, citizenship is not in itself the ultimate goal for most women from Mexico and Central America. It is certainly important, indeed increasingly imperative,[8] but its value does not necessarily translate into economic stability, acceptance, or recognition. I am concerned instead with the attachments that immigrant women form to this country, and the ways in which their very being frays on a series of borders that seek to exclude them.

Thus, I draw on scholarship that attends to affective and temporal forms of belonging (e.g., Young 1989; Yuval-Davis 1997, 2006, 2007; Bell 1999; Hage 2003; Ahmed 2004; Ramirez 2007; Winarnita 2008; Gálvez 2009; Ho 2009; Coll 2010; Ramos-Zayas 2012). These authors underscore how "citizenship" exceeds legal definitions and is most broadly concerned with "the meaning and scope of membership of the community in which one lives. Who belongs and what does 'belonging' mean in practice" (Hall and Held 1989: 17; cf. Walzer 1983; Rosaldo 1994; Ong 1996)?

In the day to day, belonging is variegated, its experience refracted through diverse and overlapping categories of difference. And as feminist scholars have shown, gender remains pivotal to these processes (e.g., Pateman 1989; Young 1989; Yuval-Davis 1997; Werbner and Yuval-Davis 1999; Bosniak 2006; Caldwell et al. 2009), especially in relation to motherhood and reproductive labor (e.g., Colen 1995; Ginsburg and Rapp 1995; Schultz 2000; Kessler-Harris 2001; Herd and Harrington 2002; Bosniak 2006; Lister 2007). Further, intersectional analyses have shown us that differences persist between and within groups of women, for individuals must contend with multiple, cross-cutting forms of identity, exclusion, and belonging (Crenshaw 1991; Collins 1998). As Colen (1995; cf. Ginsburg and Rapp 1995) insists, the work of social and physical reproduction is valued and allotted differently depending on an individual's position within other social hierarchies, including race and class. Only those women whose children rank highly within a given

economy of value are supposed to be mothers. In the United States, ideas about good and desired mothers follow ethnic and racial stratifications: white women are supposed to have children, while women of color, in this case Latinas, are tied to uncontrolled and uncontrollable reproduction (cf. Chavez 2008). We also find the abiding belief that the mothering instincts of women of color, often immigrants, are more profitably diverted into caring for the children of white, middle-class women. Proper supervision and care of their own children, who are also understood to be less desirable members of society, becomes secondary (cf. Romero 2011).

Accordingly, *Domestic Economies* situates the processes of "Americanness," of belonging, *inside* the home, in the everyday struggle to make a living and to make a life. In so doing, it illustrates the concomitant production of the domestic sphere—the quintessentially intimate domain—with domestic, or national, borders (McClintock 1995; Stoler 1995, 2002; Kaplan 1998).

Los Angeles, Immigration, and the American Dream

If home- and nation-making are concurrent and interconnected projects, the location of these homes in Los Angeles is also notable. LA serves as an exemplary site in which to examine the simultaneous making of "Americanness" and difference—especially of the interplay between Americanness and the labor of immigrants from Mexico and Central America. Indeed, from the inception of U.S. control, Mexicans have been a key foil to Americanness-as-whiteness in LA. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which ended the Mexican-American War, specified citizenship for Mexicans wishing to remain in territories conquered by the United States, but in application never lived up to its spirit (Menchaca 1993; Gutiérrez 1995). Individual states could legally impose restrictions on citizenship, and they availed themselves of this freedom to ensure that the right type of people would maintain political control. The new state of California, consciously working to erase any trace of its Mexican past, to *become* "American," allowed only white males to vote, thereby denying rights to most Mexicans, who were Indians or mestizos (Menchaca 1993: 588).

This move further ratified the presumption that Americanness was whiteness, rendering Mexicans as immutable foreigners—a project that secured both the ideological and material grounds of difference. For middle-class status anchors both Americanness and whiteness, and

especially in LA, class privilege has always relied on the labor of immigrants. Conveniently, classifying Japanese, Chinese, and (the majority of) Mexican inhabitants as nonwhite created the necessary workforce to sustain LA's "American" population (e.g., Lowe 1996; Ngai 2004).

Immigrants, especially Mexican immigrants, have been crucial to each of the city's economic booms, but their reception has been ambivalent at best. Often invisible, immigrants were seen as a necessary ill in times of prosperity and a pernicious presence during economic downturns. These (racialized) perspectives joined with immigrants' economic contributions to mold a white Angeleno identity.

First, the city itself expanded through attempts at "Protestant racial purification" (Scott and Soja 1996: 4). Originally part of Mexico, LA grew by over 200,000 people in the last quarter of the nineteenth century (1996: 4); most of these new arrivals were WASPs, often retirees, from the Midwest, lured through concerted efforts to whiten the city (Davis 1990). The majority of these new settlers were white, economically prosperous individuals who wanted to escape the perceived deleterious effects of large, overcrowded cities like New York or Chicago.

LA's Anglo elites, themselves fairly recent arrivals, had set out to build a paradigmatically "American" (read: white) city, and this required a particular demographic (cf. Hise 2004; Deverell 2005; Molina 2006). Accordingly, they promoted LA as an Eden—a place of health, wealth, and leisure—successfully targeting large numbers of relatively well-off, white Protestants. These migrants sought space, privacy, and homogeneity, convinced that this would prevent the conflicts that plagued contemporary urban areas (Weinstein 1996).

Initially, LA prospered through agriculture, real estate, and leisure services. The depression of the mid-1890s, however, forced a rethinking of the economic base, and at the turn of the century, Angelenos increasingly turned to industrial production (Scott and Soja 1996: 5). The years between 1900 and 1920 witnessed unprecedented economic development, fueled by the growth of the ports, aircraft manufacturing, and oil refineries. Importantly, it was immigrants who provided the labor force. Mexicans began arriving in droves to work in the railroads, agriculture, and the city's fledgling industries; by 1920, they comprised the largest immigrant group in LA (1996: 6).

During the 1920s, the economy continued to grow, as did the number of immigrants, prompting increased unease about their presence.

The 1924 Johnson-Reed Act, which instituted national origin quotas, further compounded this discomfort. Although this law did not set quotas for Mexicans, it established a legal regime, maintained through paperwork and surveillance at the border, that effectively rendered large numbers of them "illegal" (Ngai 2004). Fears about this "illegal," dangerous population only intensified after the stock market crash in 1929, when economic anxiety led to increased xenophobia and, by 1930 to the forced deportation of Mexicans; between 1930 and 1933, LA lost one-third of its Mexican population (Valadez Torres 2005).

World War II led to a strong resurgence of LA's economy and with it renewed Mexican migration. During the war, the Bracero program brought Mexicans on temporary visas to work in agriculture and railroads (cf. Daniels 2004; Hayes-Bautista 2004; Ngai 2004). The war, however, also reinvigorated racism in Los Angeles, culminating in the Zoot Suit riots in 1943 (cf. Sanchez 1993).

In the postwar era, LA's economy flourished once again—gaining particular strength from Hollywood, an expanding housing market, electronics manufacturing, and a newly powerful defense industry (Scott and Soja 1996: 9)—and with it the population of immigrant laborers. In addition, business owners, especially large agriculturalists, lobbied successfully to extend the Bracero program, for the continued presence of imported and undocumented Mexican workers kept wages low (Ngai 2004). Yet, as before, the growing number of immigrants was greeted with suspicion; increased alarm over "illegals" resulted in Operation Wetback, which saw the deportation of about 1 million Mexicans, whether citizens or immigrants, between 1953 and 1955 (Valdez Torres 2005: 32).

The end of the Bracero program in 1964 and the Immigration Act of 1965, which restricted Mexican (and Latin American) immigration for the first time, created a surge in undocumented migration, especially to Los Angeles, whose thriving economy continued to rely on cheap, immigrant labor. For the first time, more women than men began to arrive in LA, shifting the balance away from farm work and industrial manufacturing to service sector and sweatshop labor. Beginning in the 1970s, global economic transformations altered the nature of LA's economy, splitting the workforce into well-paid, high-skilled "managers, business executives, scientists, engineers, designers, and celebrities and many others in the entertainment industry" (Scott and Soja 1996: 12), and their low-skilled counterparts whose labor in the service sector enables

middle- and upper-class lifestyles. The economic calamities and civil unrest that swept through Central America in the 1970s and 1980s also precipitated the influx of Central Americans into LA. Always "illegal" in the public imagination, Mexicans and Central Americans are seamlessly folded into a single category, the "foreigner-within" (Lowe 1996: 5).

This "re-Latinization of Los Angeles" (Soja and Scott 1996: 16) began in the late 1960s with increased migration, but reached critical mass only in the 1980s with the rapid influx of undocumented Mexicans and Central Americans. In 1970, LA's population was 70 percent Anglo (Soja and Scott 1996: 14). However, by 2008 Anglos were in the minority, 48.7 percent, while the Latino population had grown to 47.7 percent.[9]

Fueling LA's economic miracle, the presence of immigrants has therefore been crucial to the city's white inhabitants from the start. As "illegal" or permanently foreign, immigrants provided the obverse of an Anglo identity. Equally important, this group has made possible the prosperity that defines white middle-class subjectivities. At the turn of the millennium in LA, employers in large part derived their sense of self from their class position and subsequent efforts to reproduce it, and this continued to depend on the availability of immigrant (domestic) workers. Yet the perceived dangers of immigration from Mexico and Central America endure: the media, scholars, and politicians still characterize these immigrants as a contagion that threatens the very existence of the American way (cf. Huntington 2004).

Los Angeles, then, has always been exceptional and a preview of what's to come for the rest of the country; its very roots imagine it as the definitive "American" city, one that assessed the mistakes of older places and used these lessons to produce an authentically "American" place. However, in its present and future forms, LA's destiny, and the fate of "Americanness," is never secure. It remains exposed to increasing numbers of outsiders, threatened by its own "foreign" past. It is in this way that, in the contemporary moment, LA most stands for the national future.

Fieldwork and Fieldworker

Carmen greeted me excitedly through a small window as she jangled the keys to the front gate. She and I had arrived in Guatemala City two days earlier and each headed off to our respective homes. This morning, my sister had walked with me from my grandmother's house,

three blocks away, to meet Carmen, who always stayed with her former employers when she came to Guatemala. Finally landing on the right key, Carmen threw open the gate and gave me an emphatic hug. I introduced her to my sister, who wasn't staying, and after assuring my sister that she would take care of me, Carmen directed me to follow her in. We had planned to go for a walk, but she had to get ready first.

Inside, Carmen led me directly to Don Mario, whom she'd known for fifty years and frequently referred to as her other father. At the age of twelve, Carmen ran away to Guatemala City; there, she landed a job working as a maid for Don Mario and his late wife Doña Clara, who were kind to her, always sympathetic and supportive. A few years later, she got pregnant and had to leave them, but Don Mario and Doña Clara continued to help her out, providing both advice and practical assistance whenever possible. Even after Carmen departed for Los Angeles, they continued to be close, as Doña Clara kept an eye on Carmen's sons. Now, when Carmen returned to Guatemala on her yearly pilgrimage, she went directly to Don Mario's.

Introducing me to Don Mario, then, was the first thing on Carmen's agenda that morning. Opening the door to the house, she called out his name, grabbed me by the hand, and pulled me into his office. She explained that I was a friend from LA and that she was going to show me the neighborhood. We exchanged greetings, and then Carmen gave me a tour of the house, taking me through the living room, dining area, kitchen, and bedrooms. Walking into the kitchen, she pointed directly to the new microwave, which she'd purchased the previous day after noticing that the old one was emitting sparks. It was top-of-the-line, she assured me—only the finest for Don Mario.

Carmen's place in this house had shifted greatly over the years: from servant to guest with the wherewithal to purchase expensive items for her former employers. Nevertheless, she had not been able to shed her previous self entirely, for she still slept in Alma's, the maid's, room when she visited. This tiny room, a narrow space with two twin beds, a television, and its own bathroom, was the archetypical maid's quarters, smaller and starker than the parts of the home occupied by employers. Such spatial distinctions reproduce relations of power, reminding all the inhabitants of the house of their particular locations within social hierarchies. But Carmen found herself in an interstitial place: simultaneously welcome as guest and relegated to the maid's room,

she remained less than equal, yet she was more than she had been before LA.

Carmen's new position, her changing location within local regimes of value, was enabled by her experiences in the United States. This became ever more clear on our walk that morning. After showing me the house, brushing her hair, and reviewing everything she'd done for the last two days, down to the coffee and bread she'd eaten for breakfast, she was ready to "*salir a vagar*" (go out and wander). She was feeling restless, and besides, she wanted me to see her neighborhood.

Our walk took us away from her quiet street, across a busy thoroughfare, past McDonald's, and toward some tourist shops. These were located a short distance from several major hotels and next to an expensive shopping area, restaurants and boutiques frequented by the wealthy. We visited several stores, looking at Guatemalan textiles and other souvenirs. Every time we walked into a store, a salesperson would scurry over, eager to help us. And each time, Carmen delivered the same response: we were only looking around, she had just arrived from LA, and she was staying nearby. This unchanging refrain foregrounded her new self—she was different now, a successful visitor from the north. Carmen was keen to show off this achievement, expecting that a Guatemalan audience, unfamiliar with life in the United States, would be more easily impressed than her peers in LA.

More than that, as an accomplished immigrant, she interacted differently with these shops; once a maid, supermarket clerk, and waitress struggling to find food, she now walked through these places, the domain of tourists and well-to-do Guatemalans, as a potential customer; she had become someone who *would* enter these stores and *could* buy something there. Her transformation also manifested palpably in the ways Carmen strolled through the city. After thirty years in Los Angeles, Guatemala City looked, felt, and meant something completely different to her. The streets were now small, dirty, and unfamiliar, a temporary inconvenience, not a daily cross to bear. She walked gingerly, trying not to get her white sneakers dirty and looking over every new store, always comparing it to Los Angeles. Her comments, her movements, her attitude—all of these marked her as a visitor, as no longer of this place. And it was this new status, gained through migration, that afforded her these possibilities in the first place.

I experienced a similar shift, as the meaning of each place and of myself in it, changed with Carmen's presence. I knew this neighborhood

well, for my grandmother lived there, but I had always occupied it as an upper-class-Guatemalan-cum-*gringa*.[10] What this meant, effectively, was a well-developed fear of the streets, since insecurity suffuses the imaginations of wealthy Guatemalans, who live behind gates and barbed wire, protecting their homes with elaborate alarm systems, dogs, and, at times, armed bodyguards. From this outlook, walking leaves you prone to attack and is thus to be avoided—the street is best navigated in a locked car, preferably armored or protected by bodyguards. Although no one in my immediate family lives under such dire protective measures, I was nevertheless socialized into this sense of constant danger. With Carmen, however, the fear dissipated, for I was no longer myself—at least not the self usually highlighted in this context. Instead, I was a fieldworker, an "American" student, learning about a new place. If Carmen's triumphant return allowed her to move about in different ways, my newfound role as researcher also altered, at least momentarily, my relationship to these streets. Through migration, then, Carmen and I came to occupy radically different places, both physically and metaphorically, the ground literally shifting beneath our new selves.

The possibility for us to converge here, blocks from where we both started out, required that we each travel a tremendous distance; migration and life in the United States transformed us into different kinds of people, presenting options not readily available in Guatemala. Carmen was able to make a better living and to fulfill her lifelong dream of learning to read. I became an anthropologist, studying "maids," assuredly a topic in which I would have had little academic interest without the distance provided by the United States. Only in the United States could we have met in this way. Of course, our experiences in the United States have also varied enormously: even as there are more opportunities here, inequalities persist, and your social location continues to shape who and what you can become: I became an academic and at sixty-five Carmen continued to clean houses.

I bring up this story to emphasize my background, which played a major role in the ways I understood and interacted with the subject of domestic service and immigrant women I met in LA. Born in Guatemala and raised in a household with servants, I came to the United States at the age of eight. In upstate New York, I quickly learned English and became as "American" as the rest of my friends. However, becoming a full-fledged *gringa* required more than letting go of my Guatemalan

ways; in the United States, my Guatemalan privilege became an encumbrance and an embarrassment, something that I couldn't shed fast enough, although, of course, it was impossible to separate myself from it. I highlight this only to explain how it shaped my interest in domestic service and how it inflected all of the interactions I had while doing fieldwork.

Conducting fieldwork, I found myself not only doing research between two very different worlds, those of native-born employers and immigrant domestic workers, but occupying an in-between place in each of these. I do not mean in-between as in between these two sides; finding domestic workers and employers who had no relationship to one another, I avoided becoming an intermediary. Rather, sharing both similarities and differences with each of these groups, I constantly had to negotiate myself and my position, especially among immigrant women.

While my research examined both domestic workers and their employers, the bulk of my time in Los Angeles was spent with immigrant women, whom I met in a variety of ways. I began with two different organizations, the Domestic Workers Group (DWG) and the Sparkle and Shine Cooperative (the Co-op), a group of six women who cleaned houses together. When I arrived in LA, I was determined to meet domestic workers on my own, but soon found out that it was not always so easy. It therefore became more practical to go through these groups and to get to know their members, who then introduced me to friends and family.

I spent a considerable amount of time with each of these organizations. Aside from attending DWG meetings and events, I regularly accompanied Josefina, the group's organizer, on her outreach efforts. Together, we would the ride the buses, visit domestic employment agencies, and hang out in parks where nannies congregate with their charges. We handed out information on the rights of domestic workers and listened as countless women related their particular stories. This experience proved invaluable, teaching me about the occupation itself but also about different ways of moving through and inhabiting the city. I also became a regular presence at the Co-op, sitting in on weekly meetings, participating in their yearly retreat, helping in the office, providing rides to work, and translating during job estimates.

As I became closer to members of both organizations, I started spending time with them in other contexts and meeting their friends and

family members, many of whom I got to know quite well. In the main, my time in LA revolved around the concerns of daily life. The immigrant women I knew told me all about their jobs and employers, tried to sell me beauty products, gossiped about friends, demanded to know about my social life, and confided in me about their husbands, boyfriends, and children. They called me with daily updates and generously invited me to their homes for meals, coffee, or just to hang out. They also took me to parties, friends' houses, and meetings of other organizations to which they belonged. I drove people to the store when they needed to purchase things in bulk or just buy something heavy. We shopped across the city, at the 99-Cent Store, Target, the alleyways of the garment district, and Costco, among others. I also took people to work, where they would often let me watch but would rarely allow me to lift a finger.

Ironically, perhaps, it was the fact of being Guatemalan, especially my native Spanish skills, that made my research possible. Speaking the same language and sharing a claim to another world, however different our claims might be, gave me an in, a way to relate and to be recognizable to immigrant domestic workers. Yet, while there was something familiar about me, I was also patently different: my skin was lighter, I spoke English fluently, I was in graduate school, and I had a car. My privilege was evident, but not as easy to characterize as it would have been in Guatemala. In the United States, social hierarchies are differently organized, and for Mexican and Central American women in LA, the operative experiential distinction remained immigrant versus native-born. Growing up here, knowing English, having an American passport—these reflected my "American" privilege, but my accession into this position was fully informed by my social standing in Guatemala. And so I remained firmly in between the two worlds; I wasn't so much Guatemalan or American as a strange admixture of both.

The whole time I was in the field, then, I found myself playing a game of bait-and-switch: offering up my Guatemalanness to reassure people that I wasn't just another *gringa*, but asserting my *gringa*-ness to negate my Guatemalan upper-class status, which I naïvely imagined was possible. At times I successfully walked the line between the two, but often I fell flat on my face. In these moments, it was clear that I was fooling no one but myself and that my privilege, however it was defined, was always visible. That they sometimes chose to overlook it did not mean that they were not acutely aware of my difference.

These uncomfortable situations wound up being incredibly instructive. Through them, I was able to see just how immigrant women constituted themselves in relation to upper-class Latin Americans and to *gringos*—what they valued in each and what was to be repudiated. In their reactions to me, I learned a lot about who these women were and who they wanted to be; in particular, the need to assert themselves as moral, valuable, and intelligent seemed especially relevant in relation to their marginality.

The other side of my work, research with employers, produced a different set of concerns. While the initial approach proved easier, sustaining durable relations with these women was more difficult. Most of them worked and had young children, leaving them little free time. Since I did not connect with them through their jobs, my time with them was more limited.

I met employers through personal contacts, as well as through two women's organizations. The first, a networking association for professional women, mainly provided a venue for meeting individuals, while the second, a mothers' group, became an important site in itself. I joined this mothers' group, attended bimonthly meetings, participated in their book club, was on their email loop, and helped out at a few special events. The only member with no children, I certainly stood out, but the mothers were very open to my presence, generously telling me about their daily lives and concerns, at times even thanking me for my interest.

I spent a lot of time with several couples in their thirties; all of them had children under two and were just reentering the workforce after completing professional training. As such, they were trying to figure out who they were as individuals, as they struggled to reconcile a new family with the pressures of the working world.

If my privilege informed the ways I interacted with domestic workers, it also shaped my relationships with employers, whose lives seemed both terribly familiar and radically different from my own. There were a lot of commonalities, as I was working with women who were well educated, had professional careers, and belonged primarily to my generational cohort. On the other hand, we inhabited separate realities: while I was in graduate school, accustomed to life in New York, and completely distanced from the world of work, these women had high-powered jobs, husbands, children, and houses. Because of our sameness and because at first they seemed unaware of their privilege,

I found myself being critical of their choices. As I got to know them better, however, I began to appreciate their points of view. Most of all, I realized that they were themselves conflicted and felt reined in by social expectations, economic anxiety, and concern for their children. Like the immigrant women who worked in their homes, they were just trying to get through each day as best they could.

I originally conducted fifteen months of ethnographic fieldwork from 2002 to 2003, fully immersed in the daily lives of the women whose stories make up this book. In the intervening years, I have kept up with a number of individuals through frequent phone calls and less-frequent visits to Los Angeles. This long-term perspective lends analytic distance and added context to the immediacy and intensity of the initial research. This book is about the crunch that both groups of women experience as they try to make a living, define themselves as successful, and raise accomplished children. The lives of these women have undergone transition since I met them, as they and their children have moved through different biographical moments. Yet they continue to jostle against these constraints, albeit in different manifestations. Childcare, for instance, fades as a concern as children attend school and become old enough to care for themselves. Nevertheless, just as finding the time and income to support this necessity wanes, parents begin to balance the schedules and costs of after-school activities, college preparation programs, and so on. Eventually, especially for middle-class families, the skyrocketing costs of college take center stage, placing an even more unreasonable squeeze on finances.

While the local and national terrains have been transformed in the wake of the financial crisis and subsequent recession, I argue that the tightening economy only heightened the everyday struggles and experiences that I followed so closely from 2002 to 2003. For employers, middle-class status became even more insecure, as individual families now had to balance the same requirements on a tighter budget. Immigrant women, on the other hand, had to contend with job losses, as their employers found that cutting back on household work or childcare was a relatively convenient way of reducing spending. If the financial crisis aggravated the already precarious economic position of most immigrants, an increased focus on immigration, "illegality," and deportation only exacerbated it. Many domestic employers became concerned with legal documents for the first time. Additionally, a surge in

workplace raids encouraged factories to tighten hiring restrictions. In the last ten years, everyone's hold on the American Dream has become more tenuous, the "immigration crisis" has captured the national dialogue, and these two have become progressively interlinked in the public imagination. Thus, the worries and stresses I first observed in the early 2000s have only magnified for everyone.

Overview of the Book

This book attends to both immigrant and native-born women, individuals on either side of domestic work. However, my discussion of immigrant women's lives is more intimate, delving beyond the immediate pressures of paid work, household management, and children. This reflects both deliberate choice and methodological constraint. The vagaries of fieldwork are well known. The process is uneven, serendipitous, and improvisational; every opening piles on every obstacle, lending particular shape to our knowledge. Access, then, is crucial—the type of access especially so. As I indicate above, my time with employers was more limited than my time with immigrant women. Both were generous with their time, but immigrant women were more so. Perhaps they were more amenable to my presence because I had something to offer, such as rides that would help them avoid the drudgeries of public transportation, if only for one morning or afternoon. As well, this could be a consequence of their social invisibility. Individuals who feel acutely erased, unrecognized, are perhaps more willing and open to sharing their stories when someone expresses interest in listening (Myerhoff 1978). On the other hand, access was harder to negotiate with employers, individuals whom I could not accompany to work and to whom I could only provide a sympathetic ear. Further, as multiple scholars have remarked, it is often much more difficult to find a way in when "studying up" (Nader 1972) or "sideways" (Ortner 2010).[11] Powerful individuals and institutions tend to guard their boundaries more carefully, knowing all too well the vulnerabilities entailed in being a subject of academic inquiry. Of a higher or equal social standing relative to the anthropologist proposing to study them, members of these groups feel no obligation to please. I experienced this firsthand: both groups of women were harried and overextended, but employers more easily said no.

Despite these disparities in access, the story that emerged was one of remarkable parallels, underlining similar preoccupations and aspirations. Throughout these chapters, the invisibility of women, of immigrants, and of reproductive labor recurs again and again, as does their continued importance to processes of U.S. nation-making. To be sure, immigrant domestic workers and native-born employers inhabit distinct positions within these processes, and therefore my approach to each varies. Even as native-born women wrestle with gendered exclusions, nobody challenges their place *within*. Racial, national, and class privilege conspire to render their "Americanness" a certainty. While the erasure of reproductive labor creates persistent hurdles, they can wield their economic and racial privilege to mitigate these pressures. By contrast, immigrant women do not have the economic or racial capital to cushion the effects of gendered inequities. They live on the margins, with seemingly little recourse for improvement. Still, as I argue above, analyzing their lives solely through the lens of abjection—their poverty, the abuses they endure at work, their racialization as immigrants—works to fix them at the margins. Therefore, I provide a more intimate view of these women's lives, exploring their hopes, dreams, and stories in fuller detail, to stress their centrality to as well as their position inside the American Dream. Their commitment to and assertions of belonging foreground that they are already "American," actively shaping and reshaping the meanings of this term.

The five chapters that follow consider different aspects of the give-and-take among invisibility, inequality, and belonging. They argue that the processes of "Americanness" require inequality, but that this inequality has to be invisible. In other words, the American Dream is only possible if we classify certain people and particular types of work as less worthy and less valuable. However, these processes will not function smoothly if we admit this, and thus we must find ways to disavow, or at the very least to ignore, these disparities. Focusing on the unseen and unrecognized, I seek to illustrate not only the underside of the American Dream but also the different ways in which putative outsiders make claims on this Dream.

I begin by looking at racialization and then shift into an examination of gendered exclusions, moving from the marginalization of particular types of people to the devaluation and revaluation of reproductive labor. The first two chapters sift through the coincident production

and erasure of immigrants' difference, situating these processes in the city and inside middle-class homes. Chapter 1 considers Los Angeles, the material context of this study, discussing how each group of women conceives of and inhabits the city. Homing in on the immigrant version of Los Angeles, it shows how everyday spatial practices reflect, challenge, and affirm social hierarchies—how immigrants' difference is simultaneously materialized and hidden. Chapter 2 scrutinizes how middle-class employers understand the American Dream: how they define success, how they have an increasing reliance on domestic workers to achieve their goals, and how the presence of an immigrant inside the home disrupts and reproduces the logics of belonging. Forced to see inequality, employers reinscribe immigrants' difference, thereby reproducing the very processes of middle-class and the borders of Americanness.

I center the remaining chapters on the in/visibility of reproductive labor, discussing diverse renderings of the relationship between self, work, and social value. Chapter 3 inquires into how neoliberal forms of belonging, which negate the value of reproductive labor, confine the choices available to middle-class, native-born mothers. These mothers aspire to success in the workplace as well as to raising accomplished children, but these aims increasingly conflict with each other. Further, even as they devote time and effort to their children, these women are embedded in a system that erases the import of their endeavors, rendering hollow their value as persons.

The final two chapters analyze how immigrant women, twice marginalized by their immigrant status and the devaluation of their labor, simultaneously reproduce and interrupt the logics of their alterity. Focusing on reproductive labor, they strive to make themselves visible and to affirm their value as Americans. Chapter 4 points out that, unlike their native-born counterparts, Mexican and Central American women define themselves through their roles as mothers rather than workers. I investigate two separate efforts to organize domestic workers, demonstrating that these women locate success in providing for their children rather than in paid employment. Chapter 5 argues that this alternative reckoning of success produces a more expansive version of "Americanness." Underscoring personal stories of success and hardship, I trace how immigrants claim their place within the nation, how they experience belonging and exclusion.

NOTES

Introduction

1. Liechty explains: "Over the centuries, slavery, steady influxes of vulnerable immigrant populations, and more recently, highly productive migrant labor populations . . . have all served as a kind of shifting human extractive frontier (hidden within the nation) that has helped make possible the 'classless' middle-class American lifestyle" (2003: 10).

2. Defining middle-class in the United States is a thorny endeavor. Some scholars use occupation rather than income to define the middle class, or sectors within it (e.g., Ehrenreich 1989; Ortner 2003; Devine 2005). Others argue that occupation is not necessarily a good indicator of class status, as the meaning of different occupations has shifted over time (e.g., Walkowitz 1999; Bledstein 2001). Moreover, even individuals whose occupations would position them as working class continue to identify as middle class (e.g., Halle 1984; Zussman 1985). I rely on self-ascription, since every employer I encountered placed herself in the middle class.

3. Ironically, many would also add that if I was interested in domestic service I should talk to "their" domestic worker, disregarding the relations of power that underlay this statement—could a domestic worker ever offer her employer up for an interview without a second thought? This suggestion also revealed that they could not imagine themselves as part of a study on domestic service, for what did domestic service have to do with them? They were ordinary—not worthy of study in and of themselves.

4. As Biehl and Locke observe: "People are not just the sum of the forces—however overwhelming—constructing and constraining them. Neither 'biopolitics' nor 'structural violence' is sufficient to account for the movements and meanings of their lives . . . just as often—more often—people curve around

impasses or push through anyway, carving out small life chances against the odds" (2010: 332–33).

5. A broad (and growing) literature illustrates the multiplicity of neoliberalism—how it shapes and threads its way through different types of systems; it is not singular or ahistorical, but always shifting and embedded within different types of politics (e.g., Ong 2006; Kingfisher and Maskovsky 2008; Kipnis 2008; Brenner et al. 2010; Ferguson 2010; Collier 2012; Goldstein 2012; Hilgers 2012, 2013; Peck and Theodore 2012; Jessop 2013; Ganti 2014). As Ferguson (2010) notes, broad discrepancies in the very meanings of the term allow for its efficacy (cf. Mirowski 2009).

6. Similarly, Beltrán (2015) explores how DREAM activists seek to "queer the politics of immigration—to operate successfully at the intersection of liberal inclusion and radical possibility" (2015: 81).

7. "Cultural citizenship" has provided an alternative lens for analyzing how marginalized groups assert legitimacy and demand rights, both within the nation-state and in diasporic contexts. In Ong's conceptualization, it is "a dual process of self-making and being-made within webs of power linked to the nation-state and civil society" (1996: 738). Ong's research on Chinese cosmopolitans and Cambodian refugees highlights the role of social institutions and state agencies in positioning and producing citizens/subjects; here citizenship functions "as less a legal category than a set of self-constituting practices in different settings of power" (2003: 276). In contrast, the Latino Cultural Studies Working Group highlights empowerment, defining cultural citizenship as "a broad range of activities of everyday life through which Latinos and other groups claim space in society and eventually claim rights" (Flores and Benmayor 1997: 15). Yet as Gálvez argues, both of these views "paradoxically reify the state's power as grantor of citizenship rights, even within arguments couched to celebrate the agency of individuals in asserting their rights irrespective of state acknowledgment" (2013: 724).

8. As I edit this in 2017, the national context has shifted radically, rendering the possession of legal status, especially of citizenship, more vital than ever. The intense urgency surrounding questions of citizenship must be acknowledged, and my argument above in no way seeks to deny or contradict this. Rather, I am saying that even as citizens, individuals are not insulated from the poverty, racism, and discrimination that mark their lives in the United States.

9. http://censtats.census.gov/cgi-bin/usac/usatable.pl?State=&County=06037&TableID=AAA.

10. *Gringo/a*, at times derogatory, refers to anyone from the United States.

11. Ortner argues that "what is called studying up is really 'studying sideways,' that is, studying people—like scientists, journalists, and Hollywood filmmakers—who in many ways are really not much different from anthropologists and our fellow academics more generally" (2010: 213; cf. Ginsburg 1995; Himpele 2002).