Contextualizing Food Practices and Change Among Mexican Migrants in West Queens, New York City

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis is about food practices and change among Mexican migrants living in West Queens, New York City. Public health research suggests that Mexican migration to the US has a negative impact on food practices, with diets being less nutritious over a migrant's stay in the United States and obesity being more common among longer-term than more recently-arrived individuals. Through ethnography, I explore *how* migration shapes food practices and examine the nuanced process of nutritional change that is often obscured in large-scale epidemiological studies. Food practices are important not just because they shape vulnerabilities to chronic diseases but also because they serve as prisms by which to examine migrants' lives, pressures and aspirations.

The three aims of this ethnography are to explore the food practices that Mexicans engage in after migration; to examine the social, temporal and political-economic contexts shaping food practices and change; and to describe how migrants themselves makes sense of nutritional change. I explore these themes using the approach of structural vulnerability, which views health practices and outcomes as influenced by social structures, relationships and inequalities. In so doing, I provide a critique of the public health literature's use of the concept of acculturation to explain food practices, which largely obscures the role played by structural contexts and constraints.

Through participant observation, conversations and interviews with Mexican migrants in West Queens, NYC, I have identified three contexts shaping food practices and change after migration: household dynamics and labour division; time constraints and work schedules; and the 'food environment', referring to the availability of food items and weight loss products in one's neighbourhood. Gender dynamics, documentation status and class modified the way in which these contexts were perceived and negotiated by informants. Informants were often encouraged to consume high-energy foods and large portions, to replace meals with snacks, to eat prepared or convenience foods, and to experiment with weight loss products. To rationalize and explain nutritional change and body size disparities, informants employed multiple discourses. Some discourses emphasized the role of structural contexts and constraints related to time, money and documentation status, while others emphasized the role played by cultural beliefs, habits and acculturation. An ethnographic approach informed by the concept of structural vulnerability serves to articulate how the everyday lives and social contexts in which Mexican migrants are embedded, shape experiences of nutritional change. This thesis exposes a disconnect between the way in which the public health literature conceptualizes nutritional change and how it is lived 'on the ground'.

for my grandparents

Marie & John Messina
Mary & Luciano Macari

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BMI	Body Mass Index
BPA	Bisphenol A
FDA	Food and Drug Administration
IRCA	Immigration Reform and Control Act
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
NYC	New York City
NYC DOHMH	New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene
SNAP	Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program
US	United States
WIC	Women, Infants & Children (Special Supplemental Nutrition Program)

PART I
EXPLAINING FOOD PRACTICES & CHANGE AFTER MIGRATION

1. INTRODUCTION

> In Mexico, everyone is worried about paying the rent, paying their electric—they don't have time or money to worry about their weight. But here everyone talks about the same thing. 'You became fat' or 'I'm fat' or 'I'm fatter than you'. They all want to lose weight.
>
> *Selena*,[1] *mid-twenties, ama de casa* [housewife]

This thesis is about food practices and nutritional change among Mexican migrants in West Queens, New York City (NYC). Twelve million Mexican migrants, one tenth of the Mexican-born population, live in the United States (US) and NYC has become an important centre of this migration (Passel, Cohn & Gonzalez-Barrera 2012; Smith 2006). US-Mexico interdependence and the globalization of capital have shaped migration across the border where Mexicans often engage in precarious low-wage labour and lack documentation and health insurance (Segura & Zavella 2007; Galvez 2011). Processes of migration not only influence the social, political and economic lives of migrants but they also have profound effects on the body. In the case of Mexican migration this often takes the form of nutritional change. Public health research has demonstrated trends toward weight gain and non-nutritious dietary practices after migration to, and over a migrant's time in, the US (Lara et al. 2005; Barcenas et al. 2007). The pattern endures in subsequent generations, with the US-born descendants of Mexican migrants experiencing higher rates of overweight and obesity than their non-Latino white counterparts (Ogden et al. 2002; Ogden et al. 2006). Nutritional change, however, is not only a post-migration phenomenon. Migratory flows, industrialization and the globalization of markets have increased access to cheap,

[1] All names that appear in this thesis have been changed to protect confidentiality and avoid any revelation of documentation status and other personal details.

low-quality foods in Mexico, where overweight and obesity prevalence rates are rapidly rising and are second only to the US among nations with populations over a million (Popkin & Gordon-Larsen 2004; Sassi 2012).

Since low-quality diets and obesity pose risks for type 2 diabetes, hypertension, coronary artery disease, stroke and certain cancers (Kopelman 2007; Jebb 2007), exploring food practices and how they change after migration is vital to understanding and improving the general health of Mexican migrants. Moreover, food practices and nutritional change offer insights into migrants' everyday lives, experiences and pressures, and are local expressions of macro-processes of migration, obesity and inequality. In this thesis, I use ethnography to explore the contexts shaping food practices and to bring to light the nuances and heterogeneity inherent in processes of nutritional change that are often obscured in large-scale, quantitative studies. Although this thesis is primarily about food practices, or the procurement, preparation and consumption of food, investigating these practices led me to capture experiences of weight change and dieting as well as perceptions of body size and obesity. I use the overarching term 'nutritional change' in this thesis to refer to practices, perceptions and changes related to food and body size.

At the beginning of this chapter, Selena details her own impression of nutritional change after migration. She explains that weight gain took place alongside changing economic constraints, shifting everyday priorities and growing aspirations for weight loss. By briefly highlighting the social contexts in which nutritional change occurred and how it was experienced, Selena's perspective offers insights that epidemiological evidence cannot. Her account is one of the many diverse narratives explored in this thesis to unpack and contextualize large-scale nutritional trends and the explanatory models used to make sense of them.

By exploring household dynamics; time constraints and work schedules; and the affordability and accessibility of food (including dieting pills, teas and products) after migration, I investigate how nutritional change is intimately tied to the contexts, conditions and relations navigated by Mexican migrants in West Queens. I examine how food practices change in NYC as migrants negotiate diverse people, body sizes, relationships and constraints—in their new homes, workplaces and neighbourhoods—and also manage their ties and obligations to Mexico. In so doing, I show the sharp distinction between how migrant nutritional change is lived 'on the ground' and the way it is currently conceptualized in the public health literature. The focus of this thesis is not to measure the biomedical object of obesity or physical activity levels; instead, it is to study food practices, and how body sizes and weight change are perceived and understood by informants. My primary research questions are: What food practices do Mexicans engage in after migration to West Queens? What social, temporal, political-economic and gendered contexts and vulnerabilities shape food practices and changes? And how do Mexican migrants explain food practices and nutritional changes in the US? In addressing these questions, I also provide a critique of the way in which migrant nutritional change is currently conceptualized in the public health literature.

Why an Ethnography of Nutritional Change after Migration?

The public health and nutrition literature suggests that migration to the US has important impacts on migrants' food patterns (Monroe et al. 2003; Himmelgreen et al. 2005; Guarnaccia et al. 2012). Recently-arrived Latino migrants in the US eat more fast food, processed food, and artificial juices after migration than they did in their country of origin (Himmelgreen et al. 2007). Longer-term Mexican migrants consume more cereal, soft drinks, sugar, convenience foods and whole milk and fewer complex carbohydrates than recent migrants, but they also report eating less lard and more vegetables and fruits (Romero-Gwynn & Gwynn 1997;

Kandula, Kersey & Lurie 2004; Yeh et al. 2009). Mexican migrants living in New Jersey eat more red meat and fast food but fewer fruits than their counterparts in Mexico (Guarnaccia et al. 2012). Many (though not all) of the nutritional changes identified in the literature indicate trends towards diets of lessening nutritional quality after migration and over time in the US. Although defining nutritional quality is complex, in this thesis a high intake of calories, energy-dense foods, processed foods, saturated fat, added sugar, refined carbohydrates and/or low intake of fibre, vegetables and fruits are considered elements of a non-nutritious, low-quality diet that encourages energy intake and increases the risk of weight gain and chronic disease (Jebb 2007).

The migrant health literature has also repeatedly shown that obesity prevalence is higher among longer-term than more recently arrived migrants (Goel et al. 2004; Singh & Siahpush 2002). This relationship has been demonstrated among Latino, and specifically Mexican, migrants in the US at large, as in NYC, and remains after adjusting for age (Kaplan et al. 2004; Dey & Lucas 2006; Barcenas et al. 2007; New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene 2010; Singh et al. 2011). Considering that approximately 35% of women and 24% of men living in Mexico are obese, the fact that obesity prevalence continues to increase after migrants arrive in the US is of particular concern (Olaiz-Fernández et al. 2006).

Beyond food practices and obesity, Latino migrants experience increases in hypertension, high blood pressure and chronic disease, as well as worsening perinatal outcomes[2] over the duration of their stay in the US (Singh & Siahpush

[2] Perinatal outcomes relate to 'pregnancy complications, such as low birth weight, premature births, intrauterine growth retardation, and infant mortality' (Galvez 2011: 3). Mexicans arrive in the US with particularly good perinatal outcomes, considering their socioeconomic status, but this advantage declines during their time in the US, a phenomenon referred to as the birth-weight paradox.

2002; Galvez 2011). Since food practices shape vulnerabilities for these health conditions, their investigation can facilitate better understanding of why health declines, more generally, after migration (Singh & Siahpush 2002). Worsening health outcomes are of particular concern for Mexican migrants because the majority lack health insurance and have limited access to healthcare (Bergad 2011a; Galvez 2011).

Although a great deal of public health research on migrant nutrition has been carried out, it is dominated by food frequency questionnaires, dietary recall surveys and measures of Body Mass Index (BMI). These methods measure food consumption and/or body size but they fail to capture the social and structural contexts and constraints shaping food practices or processes of change; indeed, such research is fundamentally unable to explain how nutritional change is perceived and experienced (Ayala, Baquero & Klinger 2008). The exception to this trend is a limited number of qualitative studies that have used focus groups and interviews to uncover the mechanisms shaping food change among Latino migrants in ways that the quantitative research cannot (Himmelgreen et al. 2007; Sussner et al. 2008; Guarnaccia et al. 2012).

In order to understand food practices and nutritional change, it is important to move beyond measuring caloric intake or the mass of one's body. Ethnography enables an investigation of the diverse processes of nutritional change that cannot be captured by quantitative datasets that focus on explaining overall nutritional trends. The ethnographic approach has the scope to explore the multiple and contradictory ways in which food practices may change after migration and the contexts by which they are shaped. Whereas epidemiological studies focus on how individual-level factors (such as duration of time in the US) shape food practices, they do not take into account how social relationships in the household, workplace and neighbourhood mediate these practices. Furthermore, the ethnographic approach has the ability to investigate not only

what people say but also what they do, thereby providing an effective method for exploring nutritional change that moves beyond the limitations of recall, interviews and surveys (Henry & MacBeth 2004).

The anthropological literature on food provides such ethnographic understandings of food in the migrant experience, yet this literature is not primarily concerned with nutrition. Instead, in this literature, food is used as a lens through which to understand other social phenomena such as gendered, ethnic or class identity, as well as transnationalism, globalization and memory (Caplan 1997; Harbottle 2000; Lockwood & Lockwood 2000; Sutton 2001; Mintz & Du Bois 2002; Salazar 2007; Abarca 2007; Counihan 2008; Wise 2009). Thus, although this literature explores food practices after migration, it rarely gives attention to the nutritional consequences of these practices, which is where I place my focus.

The literature in the anthropology of migration also contributes ethnographic insights into how migration shapes health that are relevant to this thesis, though this literature tends to focus on health rather than nutrition. Qureshi (2012) acknowledges the importance of understanding the relationships between migration and health and argues that declining health is typical of 'industrial labour migration' and that challenging work conditions leave physical effects on bodies (ibid: 485). Anthropological research on migrant health has explored the structural, social and political-economic contexts, inequalities and vulnerabilities shaping health after migration, with specific regard to HIV/AIDS, occupational health, cancer and prenatal outcomes (Chavez 2003; Hirsch 2003a; Xiang 2005; Holmes 2006; 2011; 2012; Duke 2011; Galvez 2011; Qureshi 2012). My ethnography draws on this literature and shares its interest in examining the social and structural contexts shaping health after migration, but it differs in its specific focus on food and nutritional change. Nutritional change among migrants has not been a focus of the ethnographic research, with the exception of

Massara (1989). My ethnography differs from this research because I am interested predominantly on how social structures and relationships shape food practices, rather than how cultural perceptions of body size norms influence obesity.

Thus, despite the attention paid to migrant nutritional change in the public health literature, there has been limited anthropological exploration of this phenomenon. An examination of the public health literature on migrant nutritional change suggests that, indeed, it has developed independently from anthropological insights. A key characteristic of the public health literature is its overwhelming reliance on the concept of acculturation to explain *why* migrant food practices diminish in quality and body sizes get larger after migration (Goel et al. 2004; Hunt, Schneider & Comer 2004; Pérez-Escamilla & Putnik 2007; Ayala, Baquero & Klinger 2008). The acculturation concept suggests that after migrants enter the US they adopt unhealthy food practices and gain weight. Acculturation is theorized as a process of cultural contact whereby migrants adopt 'lifestyles' and the values, attitudes and behaviours of a 'host' culture that are thought to expose them to food practices that are non-nutritious and put them at risk for obesity (Kaplan et al. 2004; Goel et al. 2004; Yeh et al. 2009). Simultaneously, migrants are expected to abandon the cultural practices of their home country, which are considered to be protective against obesity (Abraído-Lanza et al. 2006; Yeh et al. 2009). The vast majority of the public health literature on migrant health is dedicated to collecting evidence that acculturation shapes food and weight change after migration. The literature has focused on identifying proxy variables and scales by which to measure cultural change in stages and has worked to link these measures of acculturation to food practices or BMI. This research has not only produced inconclusive results but is hindered by methodological and theoretical problems, and serves to promote stereotypes of migrants (Hunt et al. 2004; Zambrana & Carter-Pokras 2010). Despite this, the

public health literature has continued to consider acculturation to be the mechanism shaping nutritional change. Numerous literature reviews on the topic have been carried out, each arguing that more research on acculturation must be done to investigate the links between migration and nutritional change (Kandula et al. 2004; Perez-Escamilla & Putnik 2007; Yeh et al. 2009; Delavari et al. 2013; Sanou 2013). One recently published review article states that it is 'imperative to endorse the use of standardized scales of acculturation in future research' to better understand obesity among migrants (Delavari et al. 2013: 9). In the interest to produce more conclusive findings, the literature on acculturation has focused its attention on amassing more studies on the subject and creating more robust ways to measure the acculturation construct rather than questioning the fundamental value of the concept and its flawed theoretical underpinnings (Hunt et al. 2004).

To an anthropologist, the reliance on acculturation in the public health literature may seem anachronistic. Early in the 20th century, Park (1928) and Gordon (1964) posited that with increasing time in the US, migrants and their descendants progressively adopt the host culture in stages until they fully assimilate and abandon their 'native' (i.e. origin-country) cultural patterns and practices (Heisler 2000: 77).[3] Although this concept of acculturation once dominated the sociological and anthropological literature, by the 1960s it was widely criticized as being 'historically naïve' for failing to account for the historical and political contexts shaping processes of change and, as a result, more nuanced understandings of migrant trajectories replaced it (Heisler 2000; Chance 1996: 383). Among anthropologists of migration the concept has now been largely

[3] As early as 1940, Ortiz criticizes this conceptualization of acculturation in *Contrapunteo cubano del Tabaco y el azúcar*. Based on ethnographic work in Cuba, he argues for the replacement of the term with *transculturation* in an effort to recognize the complexity and multi-directionality of cultural change (Ortiz 1995: 102–3).

discarded. Newer conceptualizations place less emphasis on culture and more emphasis on the political-economic, institutional and local conditions shaping change after migration (Heisler 2000: 79; Portes & Zhou 1993). More current anthropological approaches recognize that continued migrant replenishment influences processes of adaptation (Waters & Jiménez 2005; Jiménez 2010). Concepts such as transnationalism suggest that changes after migration result from simultaneous processes of integration into the host society and maintenance of ties back home (Brettell 2000: 104; Glick Schiller, Basch & Blanc-Szanton 1992). Thus, trajectories after migration are now acknowledged to be flexible, multi-directional and hybrid rather than the result of uni-linear adoption of a host culture over time (Foner 1999). Recent anthropological literature on migration has redefined the way in which migrant practices are theorized and also reframed how migrants and the groups they encounter in the US are conceptualized.

In contrast to these anthropological developments, the acculturation concept continues to view migrants and the individuals they encounter after migration in static and essentialized ways. Proponents of acculturation view the group that migrants encounter in the US as the 'host' culture, yet they rarely describe or characterize the 'host' group and its characteristics (Hunt et al. 2004). Instead, implied in this literature is the idea that US-born, non-Latino whites are the group to which migrants are acculturating (Ponce & Comer 2003). Thus, as Hunt et al. (2004: 977) assert, 'In place of explicit consideration of what might constitute 'mainstream' [or host] culture…there are pervasive references to an unexamined, presumably homogenous dominant society…to which the ethnic group members are thought to be adapting' when they arrive in the US. However, migration scholars argue that it is not appropriate to assume that migrants encounter a homogenous, white, non-Latino population in the US (Suarez-Orozco 2000: 14). The way in which migrant and 'host' groups are

characterized in the acculturation literature can be challenged by anthropological insights. Anthropologists criticize the idea that people in the same place, nation-state or region or those who self-identify with the same ethnic group necessarily share a culture (Gupta & Ferguson 1997; Wimmer & Glick Schiller 2002; Barth 1969). Vertovec (2011) refers to this conflation of culture, ethnicity and nationality as the 'identities-borders-orders' triad, which presumes that people from the same geographical space share a cultural identity and social and political order. This 'triad' assumes that one's culture, ethnicity and nationality are integrated and referential (Vertovec 2011). The acculturation concept evokes this narrative because it suggests that all migrants from Mexico share the same culture and identity simply because they share the same birthplace. Similarly, it assumes that all individuals who identify themselves as 'Mexican', 'Latino' or 'American' will necessarily have the same culture and practices. This view homogenizes migrants as well as the groups and communities they encounter after migration. Furthermore, it suggests that migrant practices and perceptions can be presupposed by knowing a migrant's ethnicity or nationality.

The anthropological literature has critiqued these static conceptualizations of culture and the idea that culture is a knowable or measurable entity with internal coherence (Abu-Lughod 1991). Anthropologists have moved away from the idea that people *have* culture because it implies that culture is 'an object, thing or substance' (Appadurai 1996: 12). Rather than being whole or ordered, the contemporary anthropological literature views cultures to be partial, fragmented and contingent (Gupta & Ferguson 1997). Anthropologists posit that cultural forms change over time through exchange, interaction and re-interpretations (Werbner 1997). They are considered to be 'hybrid' (Gillespie 1995) and in continual flux aided by migration, globalization, media, technology and trade (Appadurai 1996). Cultures are constantly being reshaped through processes of creolization and through flows between powerful centres and peripheries

(Hannerz 1987; 1992). The acknowledgement of such hybridity has exposed the idea of an isolated, coherent culture anchored to a geographic space or national identity to be a fiction (Ingold 2002). In the anthropological literature emphasis is rather placed on the dynamism and unpredictability of cultural forms and the performance of culture rather than viewing culture as a bounded, rigid and finished object (Eriksen 1993; Baumann 1999). Nevertheless, the concept of isolated cultures continues to be reproduced in the public health literature on migration.

Newer conceptualizations of culture pay attention to how power, social and political dynamics shape cultures and place emphasis on the 'political processes through which cultural forms are imposed, invented, reworked, and transformed' (Gupta & Ferguson 1997: 5). The anthropological literature provides a critique of the acculturation concept. Current anthropological concepts of culture point to the impossibility of defining the culture of a group of people that share the same nationality, let alone quantitatively measuring cultural change and using it to predict health practices. It is valuable to consider these more nuanced understandings of culture and cultural forms, however, in the interest to understand food practices, a focus on culture continues to be problematic. As Baumann has warned, culture cannot be seen as 'predictive of individuals' behaviour, and ultimately a cause of social action' (Baumann 1996: 12). Models, such as acculturation, which mobilize culture to explain differences between people have been referred to as 'culturalist' and have been heavily critiqued in the social anthropology literature (Appadurai 1996). Migration scholars have also argued that culturalist narratives are too often utilized in popular discourse to understand migrants' lives and experiences (Vertovec 2011). So too does the public health literature invoke culturalist models to explain migrant health and nutritional change. The acculturation concept utilized in the public health literature could be considered culturalist because it

posits migrants to be members of an alien culture that is internally homogenous, unchanging and distinct from the dominant culture in the US. Although, culturalist discourses rely on outmoded anthropological understandings of culture, they are repeatedly evoked by institutions, and in the public realm, to serve certain ends (Appadurai 1996; Kuper 2003). The culturalist narrative of acculturation is mobilized in the service of public health and with the intent to explain health outcomes and nutritional disparities. Kuper (2003) warns against the habit of using culture and culturalist discourses to explain social phenomena. He writes, 'This is not to deny that some form of cultural explanation may be useful enough, in its place, but appeals to culture can offer only a partial explanation of why people think and behave as they do, and of what causes them to alter their ways. Political and economic forces, social institutions, and biological processes cannot be wished away' (Kuper 2003: xi). The work of social anthropologists and migration scholars illustrates the fundamental problems with using culturist discourses, like that of acculturation, to predict or explain nutritional practices and outcomes.

The medical anthropology literature has similarly challenged cultural-based concepts and critiqued the notion that culture is a determinant of, and can stand as a predictor for health practices and outcomes (Hunt et al. 2004; Singer 1990; Good 1994; Quesada, Hart & Bourgois 2011, Zambrana & Carter-Pokras 2010). Rather than referring to these concepts as culturalist, medical anthropologists have used terms such as cultural determinist, socioculturalist, empiricist and positivist (Singer 1990; Onoge 1975; Good 1994). Such approaches, which will herein be referred to as culture-based approaches, emphasize the roles that culture, belief and behaviour play in shaping health outcomes. These paradigms are central in the fields of medical behavioural sciences, biomedicine, public health and epidemiology (Good 1994: 37). Such models have been critiqued because they posit that individuals use their 'cultural apparatus' to make rational

decisions. Culture-based models suggest that individuals select health and nutrition-related behaviours in accordance with their cultural knowledge and beliefs. These approaches assume that social 'actors weigh the costs and benefits of particular behaviours, engaging in a kind of 'threat-benefit analysis', then act freely on their perceptions to maximize their capital' (Good 1994: 42). Medical anthropologists critique culture-based concepts for falsely positing that individuals operate as cultural automatons, independent of the larger economic, political, and social system. Critics have argued against approaches that emphasize cultural determinism where 'little or no attempt is made to encompass the totality of the larger society's social structure' (Onoge 1975: 221). Hirsch (2003a: 230) opposes these purely 'culturological' explanations of migrant health and warns against 'exaggerating the importance of culture as a determinant of health outcomes' (ibid: 231). Similarly, Hunt et al. (2004: 982) state:

> In the absence of a clear definition and an appropriate historical and socio-economic context, the concept of acculturation has come to function as an ideologically convenient black box, wherein problems of unequal access to health posed by more material barriers, such as insurance, transportation, education, and language, are pushed from the foreground, and ethnic culture is made culpable for health inequalities.

Acculturation can be criticized for its narrowly conceived conceptualization of culture and for its failure to acknowledge the political-economic and social structures shaping food practices and nutritional change. This approach places emphasis both on the cultural group to which an individual is thought to belong, and also on the individual, where culture is believed to be located. In this way, acculturation sees both culture and the individual as the primary factors shaping health outcomes and puts the 'onus' for change on the individual (Viruell-Fuentes 2007: 1525). Medical anthropologists argue against the use of culture-based approaches for understanding health because the interventions deriving

from these approaches focus predominantly on individual education. The logic is that educating migrants about nutrition and obesity will change cultural attitudes, beliefs and perceptions so that migrants make healthier decisions about what they eat. Thus, culture is conceived as the cause of obesity and the solution is deemed to be education aimed at the individual. Educational interventions to improve migrant health are rooted in rationalist and behaviourist ideas suggesting that if individuals are taught *what* is nutritious they will choose healthier practices. They suppose that individuals fail to eat nutritiously because they are ignorant and uninformed of what is nutritious. Sridhar (2008) refers to this as the 'ignorant mind' construct, for which education is seen as the antidote. Educational interventions encourage 'behaviour change through imparting knowledge, skills, motivation, and/or 'empowerment' based on a cognitive model of rational choice theory in medical decision-making' (Quesada et al. 2011: 342). Although education may be part of the solution, this logic fails to account for the fact that individuals are not necessarily able to *choose* their practices and that there may be a variety of structural constraints and conditions limiting an individual's agency to do so (Sridhar 2008).

Despite critiques of culture-based models, both from the medical and social anthropology literature, the concept of acculturation continues to dominate the public health and epidemiological literature. A Medline search of the health literature carried out by Hunt et al. (2004: 975) demonstrates that in the late 1960s approximately 85 articles had been indexed with the key word 'acculturation' whereas when the study concluded in the early 2000s that number had increased six-fold. I have carried out an updated Medline search showing that this number has continued to increase (Table 1.1). Thus, there is a striking contradiction in emphasis between the public health and the anthropological literature.

There is also a discrepancy, however, between the way in which the public health literature conceptualizes the nutrition of migrants, Latinos and Mexicans

and how it explains nutrition among the 'general' (i.e. non-migrant, non-Latino white) population. In fact, it is widely accepted that nutritional outcomes and obesity prevalence in the general population are shaped by structural, economic and environmental contexts. Models emphasizing individual habits, beliefs and rational-choice theory once dominated the literature explaining obesity prevalence in the general population, but recent work has argued that contextual factors rather than just individual behaviours or cultural preferences need to be taken into account so as to understand obesity in the general population (Hill, Sallis & Peters 2004; Lake & Townshend 2006; Black & Macinko 2008; Warin et al. 2007).

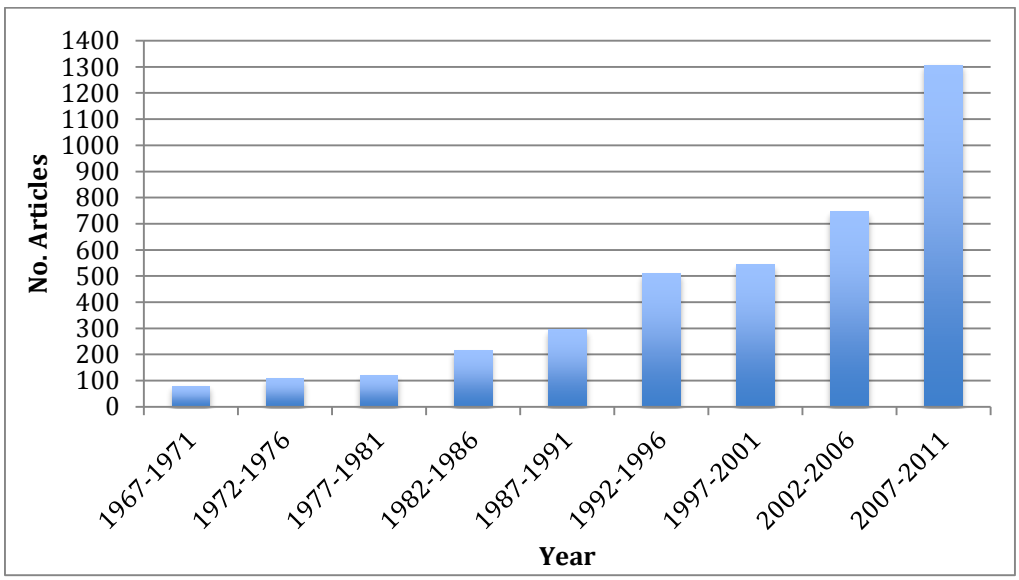

Table 1.1: Number of articles indexed for 'acculturation' on Medline, 1967–2011. Modified from Hunt et al. (2004: 975) with Stanley Ulijaszek in December 2012

There are two dominant ways of framing obesity in the general (non-migrant) population. The first emphasizes the availability of easily affordable energy-dense foods and the role of 'obesogenic environments' in shaping food practices and obesity (Sobal & Stunkard 1989; Swinburn, Egger & Raza 1999; Drewnowski & Darmon 2005; Ulijaszek 2007). This has been referred to as an ecological

approach to obesity (Swinburn, Egger & Raza 1999) because of its emphasis primarily being on the environmental and economic factors shaping nutritional outcomes. This approach is limited because it tends to see environments as having monolithic effects on individuals and because it fails to explore how individuals and households mediate environments, or how class and gender dynamics configure the local environment (Singer 1990; Guthman and DuPuis 2006; Guthman 2011). Nevertheless, these models give greater attention to how economic, environmental and structural factors impact obesity and nutrition than does acculturation.

The second and related approach for framing obesity in the general population is the welfare regime hypothesis. This approach attends to the role of structural factors in shaping obesity at the national level. The welfare regime hypothesis argues that market-liberal societies and agendas diminish individual economic security and posits that the stress, inequality and insecurity present in market-liberal societies predispose individuals to non-nutritious food practices and obesity (Offer, Pechey & Ulijaszek 2012; Pickett et al. 2005). The 'obesogenic' environment model and the welfare regime hypothesis have undoubtedly been important in shifting the narrative away from seeing population obesity as a result of individual behaviour and belief and towards understanding it in economic, political and environmental terms. However, despite the use of these frameworks in the non-migrant obesity literature, they are largely absent in the literature on migrant nutrition, with the exception of a small number of qualitative articles (Sussner et al. 2008; Lindsay et al. 2009; Yeh et al. 2009; Guarnaccia et al. 2012).

When nutrition among migrants, Latinos and Mexicans is explored in the public health literature the emphasis turns back to culture and the role played by individual beliefs and knowledge. A review of the literature carried out by Hunt et al. (2004) suggests that public health researchers are more likely to use the

concept of acculturation to explain the health of Latinos than that of any other ethnic group. The authors ask: 'One is led to wonder whether the focus on these particular groups may be based less on objective considerations than on widely held cultural stereotypes which purport that certain ethnic groups are particularly driven by traditionalism and folk beliefs' (ibid: 975). Discontent with the way in which acculturation narratives depoliticize Latino health, they suggest that the 'use of acculturation measures be suspended' (ibid: 982). They posit that:

> The lessons learned in anthropology's extensive experience in studies of culture change could provide significant depth and insight to this field of study. There is great potential for interdisciplinary research to generate more realistic and useful models of the impact of culture on health, incorporating consideration of the range of cultural, social, economic, and political conditions pertinent to the groups in question… Particularly important would be the careful examination of the specific cultural elements in question within their actual cross-cultural and historical context to replace sweeping assertions about Hispanic culture, which could lead to better understanding of the key issues that impact both cultural change and health, such as the practical realities of immigrant life and the harsh influences of discrimination (Hunt et al. 2004: 981–2).

Their call, however, remains unanswered. Some recent public health articles have specifically challenged the usefulness of acculturation on theoretical grounds (Abraído-Lanza et al. 2006; Zambrana & Carter-Pokras 2010), yet ethnographic evidence illustrating the limits of the concept to understand migrant nutritional change has not been presented, nor has a reframing of the phenomenon been offered. Indeed, the study of migrant nutrition through the lens of acculturation has intensified in more recent years. The use of acculturation continues to stereotype Mexican migrants and obscure the role that structural vulnerabilities play in shaping everyday practices and change.

This thesis investigates food practices and nutritional change among Mexican migrants, how change is experienced on 'the ground', and the contexts and relationships shaping it. In so doing, it challenges the usefulness of the concept of acculturation to understand nutritional change and offers an alternate way for analysing this phenomenon among Mexican migrants in West Queens. Furthermore, by drawing on critical medical anthropology, migration anthropology, and the interdisciplinary field of nutrition and obesity research, I seek to bridge the divide between the way in which migrant and non-migrant (i.e. general population) nutritional change is conceptualized.

Mexican Migrants and West Queens: A Rationale

The decision to work specifically with Mexican migrants was informed by a variety of factors. Mexican migrants consistently demonstrate increasing obesity and overweight prevalence over length of time in the US (Kaplan et al. 2004; Barcenas et al. 2007; Singh et al. 2011). Recently-arrived Mexican migrants have a 19% prevalence of overweight, whereas their long-term counterparts have an obesity prevalence of 31% (Singh et al. 2011). In contrast, prevalence rates of obesity among recent (11%) and long-term (19%) non-Latino migrants are much lower (ibid). Moreover, since Mexican migrants in NYC are more likely than any other migrant group to be uninsured, understanding nutritional change so that obesity and related chronic diseases can be prevented is particularly important in this population (Kim et al. 2006; Bergad 2011a).

Mexican migrants in the US experience difficult social conditions but the impact of these contexts on food practices has not yet been thoroughly explored. For many, the journey to the northeast US involves crossing the heavily patrolled US–Mexico border by land. Due to the tight housing market in NYC, immigrants often live in partitioned apartments that they share with multiple families and/or workmates and spend much of their salary on rent. Many of them work for

minimum wage (or below) in positions that are unstable and offer little opportunity for advancement or control over their time. Over half of Mexicans in NYC are undocumented (Galvez 2011), living not only with the threat of arrest and deportation but also excluded from accessing (most) social, financial, nutritional and health-related assistance from the state. They are often victims of exploitative occupational relationships, ethnic and racial discrimination, and political exclusion (Quesada et al. 2011). The act signed into law in 2010 in Arizona giving power to the police to arrest individuals suspected of being undocumented, coupled with the omission of undocumented migrants from the 2010 healthcare reform, all add to the atmosphere of exclusion directed at undocumented migrants, of which a large proportion are Mexican. This thesis aims to articulate the role that these contexts have played in shaping food practices by exploring the practices of predominantly low-income migrants who have not attended college, many of whom are undocumented. Although this thesis also explores the experiences of individuals of upper socioeconomic status and those with a college education, these groups are not at the centre of this ethnography because they are less prominent in NYC. Only 5% of Mexican migrants in NYC have a college education (Bergad 2011a). Furthermore, overweight/obesity is much more prevalent among Mexican migrants with a high school degree or lower (71%) than among Mexican migrants with some college education (33%), for these reasons low-income individuals with limited formal education are the focus of this study (New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene 2010).

Another reason for the focus on Mexicans is that they have been disproportionately targeted by the use of the narrative of acculturation to explain nutritional change (Zambrana & Carter-Pokras 2010). A systematic review of the literature suggests that out of 29 studies exploring the relationship between acculturation and nutrition among Latinos, 20 focus on Mexicans, either

exclusively or partially (Ayala et al. 2008). Public health and community health research has, for over three decades, reified and essentialized Mexican culture through the idea of acculturation. It has sought to categorize the perceptions, preferences and behaviours of Mexicans so as to measure levels of acculturation. Multiple tools have been developed to quantify a Mexican's degree of acculturation, such as the 'Acculturation Rating Scale for Mexican-Americans' and the 'Bidimensional Acculturation Scale for Hispanics' (Cabassa 2003). These scales and others like them measure proxy variables of culture such as preferences for preserving Mexican cultural origin, proficiencies and preferences in regard to English, attitudes toward traditional family structure and the extent that migrants associate with 'Anglos', cook Mexican food, identify as Mexican or accept Mexican customs (Hazuda et al. 1988; Cuellar, Arnold & Maldonado 1995; Cabassa 2003). These proxy variables are believed to indicate the cultural orientation of Mexican and/or Latino migrants. Since acculturation scales place Mexican orientation at one end and 'Anglo' orientation at the other, the assumption is made that culture is an expression of ethnic or national identity.

Here, I explore food practices and body size perceptions not as manifestations of Mexican culture or the adoption of American culture but as a reflection of the histories, contexts and relationships experienced by Mexican migrants in West Queens. I explore the processes by which social contexts influence food practices. Furthermore, by focusing this research solely on Mexican migrants rather than Latinos more generally, I unpack the socially constructed category 'Mexican migrant', and explore its within-group heterogeneity in a way that a more overarching study on Latinos would not be able to do.

In Mexico there is great diversity in food practices across regions and socioeconomic classes and the idea of an authentic national cuisine is an imaginary one (Pilcher 1996). Not only are Mexican practices extremely varied across regions but they have also been transformed by outside influences

beginning with the Spanish conquest of the 16th century (ibid). During the 20th century, economic globalization, international trade and the North American Free Trade Agreement of 1994 led to rapid dietary change and exchange. Interaction across the US–Mexico border has encouraged cross-pollination and hybridization of food practices (Pilcher 2005; Popkin 2006). Such exchanges challenge the idea inherent in the acculturation narrative that 'contact' with the US happens for the first time after migration (Hunt et al. 2004: 978-9). In fact, US–Mexico exchanges are likely to begin long before an individual's migration (Harbottle 2000; Park et al. 2008) through transnational lies, return migration and the media. Furthermore, changes in migration policies in the 1960s and 1980s as well as improved technology and access to air travel have encouraged shifts in food practices through processes of transnationalism and migration (Smith 2005). In this thesis, I acknowledge this fluidity to better understand food practices and how they change after migration, leaving the assumptions embedded in much of the acculturation literature behind.

NYC is an important location for such research because it has become a significant centre of Mexican migration to the US. Mexican migrants are one of the newest and fastest-growing migrant groups in NYC (Bergad 2011a), therefore this locale 'offers a snapshot of a recent immigrant community in which the first generation still overwhelmingly outnumbers the 1.5 and succeeding generations' (Galvez 2011: 13). However, with the exception of a few ethnographies focusing on Mexicans in NYC, including Smith (2006), who looks at migrant transnational practices, and Galvez (2009) who explores Mexican migrant devotional practices, and pregnancy and childbirth experiences (Galvez 2011), the narrative of Mexican migration has been biased towards the Southwestern US. Foner (2007) and Brettell (2003b) acknowledge that experiences of migration to the US are not monolithic and that the particular city to which a migrant arrives, the city's tolerance and acceptance of migrants, welfare system, labour market,

demographics and ethos have important consequences for migrant life trajectories. As such, this ethnography offers a perspective on Mexican migration outside the 'traditional' settlement areas of the Southwest. Since I have lived, worked and volunteered in NYC for many years, I had good access to and connections in the area, which further made West Queens an effective place to carry out this study.

The specific geographic area of West Queens was chosen as the research location for several reasons, not least because it has a higher density of Mexican migrants than any other section of NYC (Lobo 2006). It is also an ethnically diverse area, densely populated with newly arrived migrants from Latin American, Caribbean and Asian countries. Through migration and trade, the area has strong transnational ties with Mexico as well as other countries. It has a lively commercial centre where people with diverse backgrounds and migration histories live, work and interact. West Queens is also closely connected through public transport to more affluent areas of NYC where residents travel to work. Thus, West Queens' residents experience a diversity of everyday interactions across ethnic, socioeconomic, occupational and citizenship categories, as well as maintain continued ties with Mexico. Mexicans in West Queens also experience a variety of difficult economic, occupational and political constraints. The context of West Queens defies the parameters assumed by the acculturation concept. Non-Latino whites constitute a small portion of the total population. The population is 59% Latino, 25% Asian, 10% non-Latino white and 6% non-Latino black (New York City Department of City Planning 2011a, 2011b). Moreover, 59% of the population in West Queens is foreign-born, making the majority group the foreign-born not the US-born population, therefore challenging the assumptions of the acculturation concept and suggesting the need for further research to understand nutritional change in this context.

Importantly, the characteristics of West Queens are not anomalous but are broadly similar to those of other cities in the US and across the globe. Sanjek's (1998) ethnography 'The Future of Us All' describes the neighbourhood of Corona, West Queens, and argues that the diversity of West Queens will be characteristic of most US cities in the 21st century. Suarez-Orozco (2000) similarly argues that the experience of post-1965 migration from Latin America to the US can be characterized by continued contact and exchange with the sending society as well as exposure to an economically, culturally and socially diverse and unequal society in the US. Globally, the level of diversity characterizing contemporary society has been also well acknowledged. Vertovec (2007) uses the term 'super-diversity' to illustrate the layers of difference that individuals encounter which shape life trajectories and integration after migration, such as country of origin, ethnicity, local and regional identity, legal status, social networks, educational status, employment and government entitlements. In this way, West Queens is one of many diverse, urban centres where a study could be carried out to better understand food practices and nutritional change among contemporary migrants.

Conceptualizing Food Change after Migration: Structural Vulnerability

To analyse food practices and change among Mexican migrants in West Queens, this thesis will use the concept of structural vulnerability. This approach enables an understanding of how political-economic, symbolic, gendered and class-based inequalities shape health. Moving away from concepts such as acculturation that blame cultural beliefs and individuals for their food practices and nutritional outcomes, structural vulnerability places emphasis on how practices are shaped by social contexts, relationships, inequalities and vulnerabilities (Quesada et al. 2011). The concept of structural vulnerability is introduced in a special issue of *Medical Anthropology* to analyse the health experiences of Latino migrants in the

US. Quesada (2012) posits that structural vulnerability is a consequence of and 'accumulation of hardships' related to:

> Precarious living conditions, exploitative work conditions, low incomes, lack of health insurance, lack of transportation and restrictions on mobility, lack of proper housing, hunger, homelessness, language barriers, social stigmatization, restrictive and punitive immigration policies. The accumulation of these structural vulnerabilities shapes migrant subjectivities by leading them to adopt behaviours and practices, self-concepts and world views that are inextricably linked to networks of power and, crucially, that compromise their capacity to negotiate their everyday worlds (ibid: 895).

Structural vulnerability is conceived of as a 'positionality' that patterns the health practices, experiences and outcomes of individuals (Quesada et al. 2011: 340). The concept has been used specifically to analyse the contexts shaping Latino migrant health, though its value in understanding the health of non-migrant populations that share similar circumstances, constraints and marginalization has been acknowledged.

The concept is concerned with how individuals internalize and negotiate social structures and how such structures influence how the world and the self are perceived (Holmes 2006). Structural vulnerability is viewed to influence health practices not only by physically or materially constraining individual choices and actions but because it shapes individual perceptions, restricts worldviews, and structures understandings of the self (Ortner 1984: 153; Moore & Sanders 2006). This approach contends that social structures are fundamentally important in shaping health practices yet they do not determine them. Instead, structural vulnerability acknowledges that both social structures and individual agency, shape practices. In this way, the concept attempts to transcend the divide between agency and structure by conceptualizing health practices as being shaped in a 'space of vulnerability' where life conditions are experienced,

perceived, resisted and maneuvered (Leatherman 2005; Quesada et al. 2011). The refusal of 'the agency–structure polarity' derives from the fact that the concept of structural vulnerability is informed by Bourdieu's practice theory and concept of habitus (Quesada et al. 2011: 342). Bourdieu's work suggests the breakdown of the structure/agency dichotomy by emphasizing that social structures shape individual practice but also that practices reproduce and transform them (Bourdieu 1977; Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992; Ortner 2006). Thus, structural vulnerability does not posit individuals as powerless or unconscious victims of social and political-economic structures, but rather acknowledges an individual's agency, albeit constrained, to shape contexts and conditions.

The theoretical underpinnings of structural vulnerability are rooted in the sub-discipline of critical medical anthropology, which explores how political-economic, historical and social forces shape micro-level health processes and practices (Roseberry 1988; Singer, Baer & Lazarus 1990; Singer 1990; Singer & Baer 1995; Morsy 1996). The development of structural vulnerability grew out of the notion of structural violence, which views disease and ill-health to be the results of oppressive, exploitative and unequal institutional structures (Farmer 2004: 307; Holmes 2006: 1789). Structural violence has been criticized for being too deterministic, for failing to acknowledge individual agency and for attending too much to material constraints. In contrast, the notion of structural vulnerability posits that not only material and economic contexts shape health but that ideological, symbolic, gendered and ethnic forms of violence, vulnerability and marginality shape practices, health outcomes and wellbeing (Quesada et al. 2011). Thus, the term structural vulnerability is a broader term than that of structural violence because it includes a consideration of both material and symbolic forms of vulnerability and pays relatively more attention to agency.

The concept of structural vulnerability also draws on Bourdieu's (2004) concept of symbolic violence to focus attention on the way in which 'the dominated' use and reproduce categories constructed by 'the dominant' in order to understand their own domination. In the process, inequality is often misrecognized and natural and dominant cultural discourses are accepted as truth (ibid: 339). Symbolic forms of vulnerability naturalize social and structural inequalities such that they come to be recognized as normal and deserved (Holmes 2006: 1789).

In this thesis, I use the approach of structural vulnerability to examine the food practices and nutritional changes experienced by Mexican migrants in West Queens. Towards this end, I examine how social, political-economic, temporal and gendered contexts shape food practices. I also examine symbolic structures, such as the powerful discourses operating 'on the ground' in West Queens that posit unhealthy food practices and large bodies as indicative of cultural failings rather than social inequalities. Thus, I place emphasis on both the material and symbolic forms of vulnerability that shape migrant food practices. Inherent in the concept of structural vulnerability is a tension between structure and agency. Indeed, I am careful not to ascribe to a rigid understanding of 'structure' as top-down and deterministic and I pay attention to how individual agency mediates the influence that structures have on food practices. Nevertheless, considering the powerful structures, unequal social relationships and ideological constraints that Mexican migrants face in West Queens, I consider the agency of migrants to be limited and I place primary emphasis on the role played by structures in shaping their food practices.

Approaches related to the concept of structural vulnerability, which include 'everyday violence', structural violence and 'spaces of vulnerability', have been employed in a variety of contexts. They have been used to explore the reproduction of chronic under-nutrition and infant mortality in northeast Brazil, to explain how social and institutional inequalities shape HIV/AIDS and

tuberculosis in Haiti, and to analyse how poverty, class, and household dynamics influence illness in the Peruvian Andes (Scheper-Hughes 1992; Farmer 1999; Leatherman 1996; 2005). Structural vulnerability has also been used specifically to examine the health of Latino migrants in the US (Farmer 2002; Hirsch 2003a; Holmes 2011; Duke 2011), but not to examine migrant food practices and nutritional change, which is the focus of this ethnography.

This thesis also broadens the concept of structural vulnerability to incorporate the dimension of time. Noticeably absent in the theorization of structural vulnerability has been an analysis of time constraints and temporal contexts as aspects of vulnerability. The concept of structural vulnerability has focused predominantly on how economic, occupational, institutional, ethnic and class-based inequalities shape migrant health outcomes (Quesada et al. 2011). To enable an analysis of how time constraints shape vulnerabilities in relation to food practices, I will employ the concept of precariousness. Time constraints play a role in shaping social conditions, opportunities and outcomes after migration and have been explored in the migration literature in anthropology and sociology through the concept of precariousness. This notion refers to an individual's reliance on low-wage and impermanent employment, engagement in long-working hours, and failure to receive adequate payment for labour (Ahmad 2008; Anderson & Jayaweera 2008). Migrants are believed to be particularly susceptible to precarious labour as a result of discrimination, lack of documentation, and 'lack of recognition of qualifications' (Anderson 2010: 301). Precarious labourers often work multiple part-time jobs and have irregular schedules and late-night shifts that limit the control that they have over their time. The daily schedules of precarious workers can be characterized as irregular and the long-term permanence of their employment is uncertain. The unpredictability that comes with precarious labour hinders workers from planning their future (Ahmad 2008: 303), engaging in social life and maintaining

networks and familial relationships outside of work (Cwerner 2001; Anderson 2010: 303). Thus, the ability to achieve 'work–life balance' is limited as wage labour is forced to take precedence and other activities take a lower priority (Anderson 2010: 304). The precariousness of labour serves to make life after migration uncertain and temporary and shapes experiences of work and time (ibid; Griffiths, Rogers & Anderson 2012). This thesis incorporates an exploration of time and precariousness to better understand the vulnerabilities shaping food practices after migration.

Bourgois and Scheper-Hughes (2004: 318) argue that more ethnographic work must be carried out to better understand and 'disentangle' how everyday practices and health outcomes are shaped by history, politics and political-economic inequalities. This ethnography attempts such disentangling by exploring the role of three specific contexts in influencing food practices and nutritional change among Mexican migrants. These contexts are: household dynamics and labour division within the household; work schedules and time constraints; and the 'food environment'. I explore changes in household arrangements after migration and how this shapes division of labour and food preparation. Secondly, I examine how work schedules, time-use and time constraints shape food practices. Finally, I analyse the food environment, both the accessibility and affordability of different foods, as well as the availability of weight loss shops, and dieting products and regimens—such as those made by VitaVida[4]—all of which are part of the food landscape in West Queens.

I explore how these three contexts intersect with gender, documentation status and class to create vulnerabilities to certain food practices. I also examine the agency, albeit limitedthat migrants have to negotiate these structures.

[4]VitaVida is a pseudonym for a nutrition and weight management company.

Furthermore, I investigate the diverse discourses that migrants use to explain nutritional change, some of which emphasize the role of social structures and others that focus on the role of culture (i.e. habits, traits, beliefs). By analysing food change and the contexts by which it is shaped, I demonstrate the utility of the notion of structural vulnerability as a way to understand nutritional change among Mexican migrants and provide a critique of the concept of acculturation in this context.

Thesis Outline

To explore the food practices of Mexicans in West Queens it is important to situate their experiences within the larger context of migration to the US and to understand the political and economic reasons shaping their settlement in NYC. Mexico and the US have a history of interdependence and not only people, but goods, labour, knowledge and inequalities move across this porous international border. Chapter 2 will position this local study in its global and historical context, after which it will introduce the field site of West Queens, its landscape, demography, and the methodological approach guiding this ethnography.

The subsequent three chapters, which form Part II of this thesis, explore how social, temporal and political-economic contexts shape food practices. These chapters demonstrate the value of the concept of structural vulnerability to explain nutritional change after migration. Chapter 3 discusses how household dynamics and responsibilities have changed due to the gendered nature of migration to, and employment in, NYC. It examines how these contexts shape the division of labour within the house and responsibilities for the procurement and preparation of food. It asks which household members do their *own* food work and who is responsible for the food work of others.

Time and daily rhythms are the focus of Chapter 4. Daily life after migration is structured largely by work schedules and obligations in the workplace.

Informant experiences of time and their management of late-night shifts, unpredictable sleep schedules and precarious jobs all shape food practices. This chapter also explores how time constraints and temporal experiences are patterned by occupation, gender and documentation status.

Chapter 5 discusses the food environment, or the accessibility and affordability of food. The food environment, a key focus of the literature on non-migrant obesity, is explored here in connection to migration. Food is generally seen to be more abundant and accessible in NYC, though gender, class and occupation are shown to mediate negotiations of the food environment and entitlement to food.

Moving on from a discussion of the structural and contextual factors shaping everyday food practices, in Part III, I return to culture-based theories but from another vantage point. I examine how culture-based theories are used 'on the ground' to explain food practices, dieting techniques, body sizes and weight change. The two chapters in this section illustrate the tension between discourses that use culture and those that emphasize structure to explain nutritional practices. I examine the power dynamics shaping the continued use of culture-based theories to understand informants' nutritional practices and changes.

Chapter 6 shows how informants sometimes explain nutritional change using culture-based discourses that resembled the concept of acculturation. They often blame non-nutritious food practices and large body sizes on individual culture, class, ethnicity, indigeneity and laziness, while perceiving nutritious food practices and slim bodies as markers of wealth, whiteness, willpower and being American. This chapter discusses to what extent discourses similar to acculturation and structural vulnerability map onto informants' own perceptions of food practices and nutritional change.

Chapter 7 focuses on food practices, related to dieting and weight loss. It explores the important role that dieting plays in migrants' lives and the growing phenomenon of weight management. It discusses another aspect of the food environment, the physical availability of weight loss products, shops and clubs, with a particular focus on the nutrition and weight management company of VitaVida. This chapter shows that the discourses circulating at VitaVida clubs ignore the roles that structural contexts play in shaping weight gain and place the onus on the individual to educate and discipline themselves to achieve weight loss. The chapter further describes how time and economic constraints, documentation status and social relations shape dieting practices, specifically, just as they influence food practices more generally.

The thesis concludes in Chapter 8 with a discussion of the primary contexts shaping migrant food practices and nutritional change in West Queens. It stresses the importance of the concept of structural vulnerability for understanding food practices among Mexican migrants and outlines how this approach has been operationalized, and expanded upon, in this thesis. The use of the concept of acculturation to understand food change at this field site is challenged. I conclude that the concept of acculturation serves to apoliticize nutritional change by using an outmoded, reified notion of culture to explain nutritional practices while simultaneously ignoring the social, political and economic contexts by which they are shaped. I discuss the reasons why culture-based discourses, such as acculturation, continue to be used among Mexican migrants, as well as in the public health literature and I consider the risks of the public health's reliance on the concept. I also reflect on the use of weight loss products in West Queens and posit that studies of nutritional change after migration should acknowledge the role that weight loss products and regimens play in influencing everyday practices rather than focusing exclusively on weight gain. Furthermore, I demonstrate how nutritional research with migrant

populations can inform, and be informed by, nutritional research with non-migrants and suggest the importance of bridging these two literatures. I finish by urging researchers to explore migrant nutritional change as a local expression of the nutrition transitions occurring on a global scale.

2. MEXICANS IN WEST QUEENS: CONTEXT & METHODOLOGY

'Mexico N.Y'. is written in thick black letters in graffiti on a white brick wall on the third story of a building on Roosevelt Avenue (Figure 2.1). It came into view from the north-facing window of the 7 Train just as we approached 90th Street. Even if one missed the Mexican flags hanging from the apartment windows looking out onto the train tracks, one could not ignore the wall of graffiti calling attention to the presence of Mexicans in the area.

On this particular day, the train is mostly empty with the exception of a few school kids. I overhear two boys talking. One is explaining to the other that his father is sending money to Mexico to build a house. The boy exclaimed with annoyance, 'I asked him, 'Why can't you use the money to get us a bigger apartment here?'' They chat in agreement, the subway screeched to a halt and I get off.

In the streets below the subway, T-shirts hang outside shops, one featuring the *Virgen de Guadalupe* [a symbol of the Virgin Mary, patron saint of Mexico] blessing the NYC skyline. Besides them is a display of jeans decorated with studs and rhinestones and a sign reading *levantacolas* [bum-lifting jeans]. I pass the corner, a man slips me his business card and tells me to talk with him about a business opportunity called VitaVida where I could earn money by working from home. Further down the street is a man pacing up and down the avenue with a vest emblazoned with a large toothbrush. He is handing out information advertising the private dental services on offer up the block. From there I can hear two men screaming from competing stores 'Compra Oro' [Buy Gold]. They vary their screams, first one, then, the other, in rotation. There is a woman on the opposite corner ringing a small bell lightly until she attracts customers to her ice cream stand (Figure 2.2).

Walking down Roosevelt Avenue is both a feast for, and an assault to, one's senses. As I pass the *tiendas* [shops] and storefronts there is *cumbia* music playing loudly and Colombian, Ecuadorean and Mexican flags, posters and advertisements draped from the windows and awnings. As the doors to the shops open and close, the warm scent of baked bread mixes with the sour smell of rotten garbage on the sidewalks. Water spits from

the air conditioner units in the windows above, the traffic is backed up despite the green light. Deliverymen weave through the cars on their bikes carrying red-insulated packs filled with hot pizzas. Angry drivers honk their horns, pedestrians take their chances crossing the streets then the subway flies past again making everyone read lips for a few seconds. The streets are packed with women buying from the fruit and vegetable stands. Their children stand beside rather than *in* their strollers as bags of produce and watermelons have taken their place. The shop specializing in money transfers has a wrap-around queue. The meat frying on the street-side grills sizzles and I can hear the click of the metal spatula hitting against the grill to flip the meat.

Smoke covers the Ecuadorean carts that are lined up in succession, each selling roast pig and *elotes* [corn on the cob], a large pig head serves as the staple centrepiece on each of these carts. Alongside the carts is a woman scooping a creamy dessert into a wafer cone. Across from these stands are vendors selling cut fruit, smoothies and juice out of a full coconut. A woman with a cart passes by swiftly announcing '*empanadas, empanadas'* [filled pastry snack] as she walks back and forth the avenue selling her stack of treats hidden under a wool blanket. At around five o'clock in the afternoon a woman rolls a grill onto Roosevelt Avenue and starts to barbeque corn under the subway entrance. With some luck, I find a man selling *tacos de canasta* [tacos in a basket that are made to 'sweat' in a cloth-covered basket until they become soft and greasy]. The stores that line the main roads serve Dominican buffets combined with Italian food, other restaurants sell Cuban sandwiches, Filipino, Indian and Bangladeshi food. There are a variety of cake shops and Colombian bakeries where egg-based breads and lavishly decorated cakes are on display. People flip through a thick binder of sample cake photos before they place their order. Local Mexican restaurants which do 'fast food' like *Taco Veloz* [Fast Taco] sit alongside multinationals like McDonalds, Papa Johns and *Pollo Campero*, [Country Chicken, a Guatemalan restaurant chain].

Cops wait at the corner doing random checks for drivers' licenses when the light turns red. Incense wanders out from the *botanicas* [shops selling spiritual items, herbs, medicines] in the area. I pop into one, a young boy stocking the shelves sees me eyeing the candles, he asks, 'What are you looking for? Success, love, health?' I see that the candles have prayers on them for any occasion or

concern. A *Don Dinero* [Mr Money] candle for luck and success, other candles dedicated to love, safety and to 'open the road'. I overhear a mother point to the candle devoted to steady work for handymen, mechanics, butchers and gardeners. She says to her son, 'This is the candle I bought for your father'.

I leave the *botanica* and pass a few Chinese restaurants that are packed with people eating out of take-away boxes. The restaurant menus are written in English and Spanish, one storefront awning reads 'Mexican Chinese Food'. Folding chairs surround the Ecuadorean food trucks down the street; people sit to talk, eat goat stew and watch football on the televisions attached to the trucks.

I pass many electric poles in the area that are covered with handwritten signs noting available rooms for rent. One reads: 'Bonito Apt $2^{1/2}$ Dormitorios Cerca al (7)' [Nice Apartment $2^{1/2}$ Rooms near to the 7-Train] another 'Rento Cuarto Bonito $100 Semanale [sic]' [Nice Room $100 Weekly]. Two men and one woman are standing beside one pole dialling the numbers on the signs. I walk a bit more and the Dunkin Donuts shop on the corner is packed. Bagels and coffee cover the table tops. I move off from the commercial area onto the residential side streets. The houses are made of a wood frame construction covered by asbestos shingles, aluminium or vinyl-siding, other houses are made of brick. Remnants of green Christmas garland and posters of Santa Claus hang in windows and on doors despite it being almost March. People talk on their phones while sitting on their front porch, residents return to their home with carts of groceries or laundry and close the metal wire fences behind them.

-Observations of West Queens; text is an edited and expanded version of compiled field notes

Figure 2.1: Graffiti seen from 7 Train in West Queens

Figure 2.2: Ice Cream Cart Attracting Customers

The excerpt above provides an impression of West Queens from the street level. It illustrates the cacophony of goods, services and foods being advertised, traded and consumed in the neighbourhood. The shops, foods, as well as the national, cultural and religious symbols visible from the street provide evidence of a continuous migration from Latin America to West Queens and the 'super-diversity', or the convergence of multiple axes of diversity within the same space, across country-of-origin, occupation and life-stage (Vertovec 2007; Castles et al. 2003). West Queens is an urban, multicultural space, comprised of a commercial thoroughfare bustling with merchants, cheap food outlets and street life, densely populated with Latinos, continuously transformed by recently-arrived low-wage migrants and directly connected to Manhattan by subway.

This chapter contextualizes the field site by providing a brief history of the trajectory of Mexican migration to the US and describing my entry to the field. It illustrates the constructedness of the US-Mexico border and the social and political contexts that led Mexican migration to move from traditional settlement cities in the American Southwest and towards NYC. It describes the 'latinization' of NYC over the last few decades and how the socioeconomic conditions faced by Mexicans in NYC compare to those of the Latino population, more generally. The second part of the chapter depicts my research journey. It explains how I met people and integrated into the field and the difficulties that I encountered.

Mexican Migration to the United States

The US is home to 12 million Mexican migrants (Passel, Cohn & Gonzalez-Barrera 2012). In fact, Mexican migrants account for over a quarter of all migrants in the US and more than half of all Latino migrants (Passel & Cohn 2012). In fact, the number of Mexican migrants in the US is six times greater than the number of migrants from China, the second largest sending country

(Gonzalez 2009: 266). Over the last century, migration across the 2,000-mile border between the US and Mexico has been continuous, though its demographic and geographic characteristics have transformed over time. The literature is too extensive to be reviewed here in full but existing research by historians, demographers and sociologists (Griswold del Castillo & De Leon 1997; Massey, Durand & Malone 2002; Zúñiga & Hernández-León 2005) provide a more complete account of the history and demography of Mexican migration to the US.

Mexico-US relations date back to before the large-scale migration of Mexicans to the US in the early 20th Century. Indeed, boundaries between the two countries have been permeable and contested since the early 1800s when US desires for expansion led to ongoing invasion, conquest and annexation of Mexican land. The Texas War of Independence in the mid-1830s led to the US annexation of Texas from Mexico in 1845 (Gonzalez 2011: 41-2). A year later, Americans invaded Mexico again during the Mexican-American War (1846-8), a move that the US government rationalized through the discourse of 'Manifest Destiny', alleging that white Caucasians were culturally superior to Mexicans and that it was their divine right to expand westward to promote democracy and combat 'barbarism'. The end of the war led to the annexation of approximately half of Mexico[5] by the US. This included the land that makes up the contemporary US states of California, New Mexico, Nevada and Utah, much of Colorado and Arizona as well as portions of four other states (ibid). Although, at this time, many Mexican-Americans living in the annexed territories moved to areas on the Mexican side of the newly drawn border, hundreds of thousands of Mexicans migrated into the annexed territories to work in the mines and to build the

[5] Before the annexations, the size of the US (1.8 million square miles) and Mexico (1.7 million square miles) were roughly equivalent (Gonzalez 2011: 39).

railroads (ibid: 47). Migration and exchange across the shifting US-Mexico border during the 19th century foreshadowed the large-scale Mexican migration that was to begin at the dawn of the 20th century (Zúñiga & Hernández-León 2005).

This history challenges simplistic notions of 'Mexican' and 'migrant'. Many of the first Mexican migrants were crossing into territory that was once Mexico, while other Mexicans became Mexican Americans, not because they moved but because the border shifted. Notions of the border as a natural boundary separating two distinct people unravel when we consider how the border and these nation states have been (re)constructed through unequal power relationships, imperialist desires, economic and political instability and ideas of cultural/racial superiority. This ethnography acknowledges the exchange and interaction occurring across the US-Mexico border and challenges simplistic, internally homogenous characterizations of Mexican migrant groups and their practices.

The 'classic era' of Mexican migration to the US, was incited in 1910 with the beginning of the Mexican Revolution (Durand, Massey & Capoferro 2005). The revolution led to great instability in the country, as well as job loss and displacement. Simultaneously, the US experienced economic expansion and an increased demand for labour to build and maintain the rail system.[6] During this period Mexican migration to the US was focused in Texas, California and Arizona (ibid). Mexicans continued to migrate to the US unabated until the

[6] Mexicans were recruited to fill the labor demand, especially because traditional sources of labor from China, Japan and Europe were restricted at this time due to the migration policies in effect before and during WWI (1914-1918) (Durand et al. 2005).

Great Depression of the 1930s, which stalled labour demand and encouraged the deportation of migrants already in the US.

It was not until WWII (1939) that the need for labour in the US increased again and Mexicans were recruited to work on a restrictive basis arranged through the Bracero Accords (Durand et al. 2005). The Bracero Program (1942-1964) was a temporary measure to bring Mexican farm workers to carry out seasonal work in the US after which they were deported (Durand et al. 2005). Because California had the largest demand for agricultural labour it became the primary destination for migrants. During the Bracero era, migration was predominantly circular, with men migrating for work and returning to Mexico after their job was completed (Durand et al. 2005). Once the Bracero program ended in 1964 there were fewer opportunities to enter the US legally but the demand for unskilled labour remained high. Thus, the end of the program initiated a period of large-scale undocumented migration to the US (1965-86), while documented migration continued to increase (Borjas 2007).[7]

Migration beyond the Southwest

Mexican migration to the US was predominantly a phenomenon of the American Southwest until 1986 when the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) gave undocumented migrants, who had lived in the US since 1982, the ability to apply for documentation to remain in the country and to relocate their families to the US (Kraly & Miyares 2001; Shutika 2011). The act provided documentation to

[7] Also influencing migration were amendments made to the existing Immigration and Nationality Act in 1965. The 1965 amendments repealed the quotas that had previously limited the number of US visas granted according to a migrant's country of origin (Borjas 2007). After these amendments it was then easier for migrants from Mexico, Central and South America to obtain work visas in the US and migration from these regions greatly increased (Borjas 2007).

over 2.3 million Mexicans, providing them with rights in the labour force as well as the ability to move around the US more openly (Borjas 2007).

The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which took effect in 1994 and initiated commercial integration of the US, Mexican and Canadian markets, also encouraged migration at this time. It has been argued that NAFTA led rural Mexican farmers to abandon their livelihoods because they were unable to compete with the US-agricultural industry that was heavily subsidized by the government (Teslik 2009; Gonzalez 2011: 268-70). Mexico experienced a severe economic recession and a sudden devaluation of the peso in December 1994, which are also associated with the increase in Mexican migration to the US at this time (Durand, Massey & Capoferro 2005).

Due to immigration reform, labour market demands in the US, NAFTA, and the devaluation of the peso, the rate of Mexican migration to the US doubled from 1980-1990 and then doubled again from 1990-2000. However, the demography of migration dramatically changed at this time. Before the IRCA, Mexican migration was comprised predominantly of men moving to rural agricultural areas in the Southwest, especially California, on a seasonal basis, but after the act, migration to cities and metropolitan areas throughout the US became more popular and there were more women migrating along with the men[8] (Durand et al. 2005).

Furthermore, after the IRCA in 1986 the budget of the US Border Control increased which led to more frequent crackdowns on undocumented migrants. The increased security at the border, coupled with hostility and anti-Mexican

[8] Although research suggests that female migration to the US increased after the IRCA, it should also be acknowledged that female migration prior to the 1980s may be underestimated due to early biases in the literature that international migration was predominantly a male phenomenon (Brettell 2003a: 187; Houstoun, Kramer & Barrett 1984).

sentiment in California, diverted many migrants to cross the border into Arizona and New Mexico rather than California (Durand et al. 2005; Shutika 2011). At this time, many migrants who now had documentation moved away from the Southwest—which was saturated with Mexican workers and where discrimination was rife—towards states such as New York, New Jersey, North Carolina, Florida, Illinois and Idaho (Durand et al. 2005).

Mexicans began arriving in large numbers to non-traditional destination cities in the Midwest and on the East Coast ushering in a new geography of Mexican migration. At this time, the proportion of Mexicans in California and Texas had declined while the Mexican population in non-traditional cities had increased rapidly (Durand et al. 2005). For example, at the end of the 1980s and 1990s, the numbers of Mexicans migrating to San Diego and Los Angeles decreased while the numbers going to all other destination cities increased.

Mexicans in New York

By the 1990s, Mexican migration grew from a phenomenon affecting a few Southwestern states to a 'nationwide movement' affecting each region within the US (Durand et al. 2005: 18). From 1985-1990 the New York and Northern New Jersey area received more Mexican migrants than any metropolitan area except for Los Angeles.

Prior to the 1980s, Mexican migration to NYC had taken place but on a smaller scale. Smith (2001; 2006) posits that the earliest Mexican migration to NYC originated from the Yucatan Peninsula in the 1920s, but this continued only for a few years. The fact that some Mexican-born *Yucatecos* [Mexicans from the Yucatán] and their children continue to live in NYC provides evidence of this early migration (Smith 2001). Although migration from the Yucatán was short-lived, in the 1940s migration to NYC from the Mixteca region began to take place.

The Mixteca region is an area in the Southwest of Mexico that is comprised of the southern states of Puebla, Oaxaca and Guerrero.

Smith's (2001) ethnographic work provides an oral history with one of the early Mexican migrants to NYC. The account suggests that in 1943, two brothers from Puebla, in the Mixteca region of Mexico, were not successful in securing a Bracero contract to work in the US. They decided to go without one, and found their way by hitching a ride with an American family that was heading home to NYC after vacationing in Mexico during the summer (Smith 2001). It is suggested that migration to NYC from villages within Puebla has its roots in a few coincidental migrations such as that described above. In the 1960s, however, migration to NYC became more robust. More villages in Puebla were sending migrants and more women were migrating. This acceleration in migration flow was fuelled by economic deprivation, low wages and the political violence experienced in Puebla at the time (Smith 2006).

By the 1980s, Mexicans, particularly those from the Mixteca region, had established a critical mass in NYC, which allowed migration to the area to be easily sustained through their networks of family and friends. Furthermore, with the passage of the IRCA, many of the Mixteca migrants who were already in NYC were allowed to settle permanently and to bring their family. Also accounting for the increase in migration to NYC from the rural Mixteca region at that time was the fact that Mexico was restructuring its economy away from agriculture and towards manufacturing and farmers struggled economically as a result (Rivera-Batiz 2003: 26). These events coincided with NYC's expanding service and construction sector, which led to an increasing demand for migrant labour, particularly males (Foner 2001; Rivera-Batiz 2003). At this time, NYC was not yet considered a major centre for Mexican migration, thus it was a surprise to demographers when Mexicans were determined to be the second largest group,

after Dominicans, applying for amnesty in NYC under the IRCA (Smith 2006: 22).

Some of my informants were directly affected by IRCA because they or their spouses had received amnesty, however, the majority of my informants arrived to the US more recently, less than fifteen years ago. I suspect that migrants who had lived in the US for longer than fifteen years, especially those who gained amnesty through the IRCA might be more prevalent in suburban areas of NY or other neighbourhoods in Queens and Brooklyn. The fact that the naturalization rate of Mexicans in West Queens is half the naturalization rate of Mexicans in NYC suggests that the Mexican population in West Queens is more recent than that in NYC overall (Rodríguez 2008; Bergad 2011a). My informants themselves expressed desires, or had plans, to move out of West Queens when they made more money, suggesting that West Queens was home to newer, less established migrants.

Since the late-1990s there has been a steady (but not increasing) flow of migration from the Mixteca region to NYC (Smith 2006). In addition, there has been an increase in migration from a poor, urban area on the outskirts of Mexico City, called *Cuidad Nezahualcóyotl*, or *Neza*. Smith's (2006) ethnographic work is based on individuals from Ticuani, Puebla, in the Mixteca region. He describes that when he first went to the Mixteca in the late 1980s, it was a mountainous and dry area where most people were struggling to survive as agriculturalists. The difficulty of making a livelihood led individuals to migrate out of the Mixteca to other areas of Mexico and to the United States, particularly NYC. Smith (2006) describes that most working age individuals had migrated out of Ticuani, leaving predominantly grandparents and grandchildren behind. He, thus, illustrates how migration to NYC has influenced life in Mexico and explains how the sending of remittances from NYC to Mexico has enabled the development of

a professional class in Ticuani. It has allowed many to study and to become teachers and doctors and has reshaped the structure of employment of Ticuani such that only 13% of individuals are farmers.

In the last decade, the trends in Mexican migration to NYC and the US overall have diverged. At the national level, Mexican migration peaked in 2000, and since 2006 there has been a decline in the number of Mexicans arriving to the US.[9] Furthermore, the number of Mexican migrants returning to Mexico also increased dramatically between 2005-2010 (Passel et al. 2012).[10] These recent trends are considered the result of a weak labour economy in the US, the global recession, increased surveillance at the border, anti-immigration measures, such as the 2010 Arizona Senate Bill 1070, and an increase in forced deportations (Passel et al. 2012; Quesada et al. 2011). The fact that fewer Mexicans have decided to come to the US and more migrants have decided to go back to Mexico, suggests that the political and economic environment facing Mexicans in the US has become less hospitable.

In contrast to the stagnation in Mexican migration to the US at the national level, in NYC, foreign-born Mexicans continue to arrive. More Mexicans migrated to NYC between 2000-2010 than in any previous decade (Bergad 2011a: 7-8). Between 2005 and 2010, NYC's Mexican-born population rose to 200,000 (Bergad 2011a). Although in 1990 Mexican migrants were the seventeenth most populous migrant group in NYC (Lobo 2006: 11), by 2009, they were ranked number three, after Dominicans and Chinese migrant populations (Salvo 2012). The Mexican-

[9] In 2001, the US recession led to a decrease in migration but it picked up again between 2004 and 2006 (Pew Hispanic Center 2007).

[10] From 2005-2010, 1.4 million Mexicans migrated to the US, yet the same number of migrants returned home during this period (Passel et al. 2012).

origin population in NYC is dominated by foreign-born Mexicans, this contrasts with other receiving cities in California and Texas, which have a lower percentage of foreign-born Mexicans and more second generation Mexicans. Domestic-born Mexicans in NYC are likely to outnumber foreign-born Mexicans in the coming years, however, because of the high birth rates of the Mexican population (Bergad 2011a).

In 2001-2, it was estimated that two-thirds of Mexican migrants in NYC were from the Mixteca region (ibid: 20). Among Mexican migrants living in NYC who applied for a Mexican passport or a *matricula consular*[11] in 2004, approximately 46% of migrants were from Puebla, 10% from *Distrito Federal* (Federal District), 9% from Oaxaca, 8% from Guerrero,[12] 5% from Morelos and 4% from Mexico State (Vilar-Compte 2010: 47). The Federal District is the capital of Mexico and the State of Mexico includes the area of *Neza*. Of the 80 informants who provided me with sociodemographic information, 37 individuals were from Puebla, 11 were from the Federal District, seven were from each Guerrero and Tlaxcala, five from Morelos, four from Oaxaca, three from both Veracruz and the state of Mexico, and one from Hidalgo, Sonora and Tamaulipas.

Sociodemographic Profile of Mexicans in NYC

Quantitative research documents the economic, educational, occupational, social

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[11] A *matricula consular* is an identity card issued by the Mexican Government at Mexican Consulates in the US, which is often used by Mexicans without documentation in the US, as it enables them to open a bank account and establishes their identity with local agencies (Vilar Compte 2010: 47).

[12] Thus 63% of migrants come from the three states in which the Mixteca region is located: Puebla, Oaxaca and Guerrero. Importantly, the study carried out by the Mexican Consulate captures all migrants coming from theses states not just those arriving from the portion of these states that comprise the Mixteca region.

and gendered contexts faced by Mexicans in NYC, and how their contexts compare to that of other Latino groups. The median household income for Mexican-born men is $44,300 and for women it is significantly less at approximately $30,000 (Bergad 2011a). Of the Mexican-born population, approximately 36% is living in poverty (ibid). Compared to other Latino groups, Mexicans have the second greatest number living in poverty, after Puerto Ricans (Bergad 2011b: 38). Although there is a high rate of poverty among Mexican migrants, there is also a presence of high-earning Mexican migrants in NYC, but they tend not to settle in West Queens.

With regard to education, Mexicans have the highest high-school [ages 14-18 years old] dropout rate (51%) of any Latino group. The dropout rate specifically for foreign-born Mexicans (63%) is significantly higher than that of US-born Mexicans (14%) (Bergad 2011a). Employment among Mexican migrants in the labour force demonstrates interesting patterns, 51% of Mexican-born women consider themselves not in the labour force, this contrasts with only 7% of males who are outside of the labour force. Among the Mexican-born that are in the labour force, only 42% of women are employed, whereas 89% of men are employed, suggesting that it is easier for Mexican men to find work than Mexican women (Bergad 2011a: 17). It is possible, however, that female employment has been underestimated, as I have noticed in my own fieldwork that sometimes women state that they are housewives and do not work although they often work informally as babysitters or food preparers. Approximately 43% of Mexicans are employed in the service sector, they are primarily involved in the food preparation and service industries, 24% are in the transport and production sector, 20% in office and technical work, 10% in management or professional work and 6% in construction. This estimate combines both foreign and US-born Mexicans and it would be expected that the foreign-born data would have even fewer individuals in the technical and professional sectors due

to barriers related to education and language.

Mexican migration to NYC is distinctly male-dominated. For every 100 women, there are 142 men. This contrasts with other Latino migrant groups such as the Dominicans, Puerto Ricans and Colombians who have female majorities. The only exception is the Ecuadorean-born population, which has a ratio of 100 women to 113 men (Bergad 2011b). Mexicans also have the lowest naturalization rate of all Latino migrant groups (6%), the second lowest is that of Ecuadoreans which is 23% (Bergad 2011b). It is estimated that half of the Mexican migrant population in NYC is undocumented (Galvez 2011) and 71% of Mexican migrants do not have health insurance.

The sociodemographic data specifically for West Queens is less complete than that for NYC overall but it suggests that low-wage, non-professionals dominate in this neighbourhood. Higher-earning professionals and university students from Mexico seem to cluster in other parts of NYC, such as Manhattan, Brooklyn and other neighbourhoods of Queens. Residents of West Queens are predominantly employed in the service sector (New York City Department of City Planning 2011b). The median income of Mexican-origin individuals (foreign and US-born combined) in West Queens is approximately $45,000, only 2% own their own homes, 7% have a bachelor's degree and 3% of the foreign-born population has been naturalized (Bergad 2011a; Rodríguez 2008).

Eighty of my 120 informants provided me their basic sociodemographic information. In general, I collected sociodemographic information from the informants with whom I spent the most time and from those who felt comfortable providing me with their details. Just over half of the 120 informants were men. Of the eighty for whom I have sociodemographic information, 45 were women and 35 were men. The vast majority of informants, 62 individuals, were in their 20s and 30s, while 13 informants were in their 40s, three informants

were 50 years of age or older, and two were teenagers. In terms of education, 66 informants had no education beyond secondary school (ages 12-14 years). Of those 66 individuals, 27 had attended some or all of primary school (ages 6-11 years), and 39 had attended some or all of secondary school (ages 12-14 years). Fourteen informants had completed education beyond secondary school, of which 9 had attended some, or graduated from, preparatoria, or high school (ages 15-17 years). Five had attended some, or graduated from, college or graduate school. Thirty-two of my informants were married, 15 were in a *union libre*, or lived together as spouses with no written contract, 27 were single or casually dating, and 6 were separated or divorced. My informants had been in the US from a few months to 25 years. The majority had lived in the US for less than 10 years (50 people), 18 informants had lived in the US between 10 to 15 years, and 12 informants had lived in the US for 15 years or more. The following chapters will ethnographically explore how the socioeconomic characteristics described here shaped food practices and nutritional change (see Appendix A for sociodemographic chart).

An 'Immigrant City'

NYC's migrant population is extremely diverse and continues to be transformed as newer migrants replace and mingle among long-term migrants. The first major wave of migration to NYC occurred at the beginning of the 20th century from Italy, Ireland and Eastern Europe. Following WWII, there was another influx of migration to NYC. At this time, Puerto Ricans arrived due to a worsening economy at home, followed by Cubans fleeing the Revolution (1959) (Gonzalez 2011; Foner 2001). In the 1960s, Dominicans and Colombians migrated to flee political persecution and violence (Gonzalez 2011). Then, with the removal of quotas in 1965 due to amendments made to the Immigration and Nationality Act, Asian, Caribbean, West Indian and Jewish Soviet migrants

began arriving in large numbers (Foner 2007). Worsening economic conditions in the 1980s throughout Latin America coupled with the IRCA encouraged the migration of Dominicans, Colombians, Ecuadoreans, Peruvians, Cubans and Salvadorans to the US, and specifically NYC (Aparicio 2005).

Smith notes the heterogeneity of migration to NYC, suggesting that its 'great diversity means that most immigrant groups…do not constitute a majority of the population, even in 'their own' neighbourhoods…Hence most Mexicans in New York experienced being Mexican as being a minority, usually among other minorities' (Smith 2006: 30). Due to the national and ethnic diversity in NYC, Mexicans generally live in neighbourhoods that are not dominated by Mexicans or any one national or ethnic group. Mexicans are constantly reminded of the immigrant nature of the city and must negotiate complex hierarchies related to race and country-of-origin differences. This diversity shapes migrant experiences in the household, workplace and neighbourhood.

NYC is noted for its history of receiving new migrants and celebrating cultural diversity (Foner 2001; 2007). The first wave of migrants arrived to the iconic port of Ellis Island, yet today Ellis Island does not greet migrants but tourists. Jiménez (2010: 4) draws a contrast between Ellis Island and the border crossing between San Diego and Tijuana, which has 'no museums, exhibits, ancestral research centre, or monuments' nor a 'Wall of Honour' celebrating early migrants. There is a nostalgia surrounding migration to NYC and a narrative that migrants make a better life for themselves and their families there, and this too shapes migrant experiences of the city. Kasinitz, Mollenkopf & Waters (2004: 398) state if 'Italians are yesterday's newcomers and today's establishment, then maybe Colombians are the new Italians and, potentially tomorrow's establishment. New Yorkers…are happy to tell themselves this story. It may not be completely true, but the fact that they tell it, and believe it, is significant'. The

nostalgia surrounding migration to NYC constructs a narrative that migrant struggles are respected and ultimately rewarded.[13] Such impressions are salient because they factor into how migrants perceive their life conditions, constraints and possibilities and rationalize their practices in NYC.

The immigrant diversity of NYC also marks it as a space of modernity (Griffiths, Rogers & Anderson 2012). This is reflected in the way in which migrants discuss NYC to family and friends in Mexico. For example, one of my informants in his late forties, Miguel, posted photographs of NYC on Facebook, a caption beside one photograph of the Empire State Building read in Spanish 'Living in the capital of the world', another photograph of Jorge, an informant in his early thirties on the Brooklyn Bridge received the response *'Ah, como te envidio muchacho!!!!!!!!!! Jajajajaja'* [Oh, how I envy you pal! Haha]. These discourses imagine NYC to be exceptional: a place of exceptional suffering, opportunity and diversity (Foner 2007). The diversity of NYC and its iconic status as an 'immigrant city' and a city of opportunity is important because it has implications for how migrants perceive their experiences, conditions and constraints.

Migration to West Queens, NYC

Mexican settlement in NYC is not localized but is dispersed among a variety of neighbourhoods (Map 2.1). Areas that have high concentrations of Mexican migrants include Jackson Heights, Elmhurst and Corona, Queens; East Harlem,

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[13] The idea that NYC offers migrants the promise of a better life is captured by the sonnet inscribed on the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty. Written in 1883 by Emma Lazarus, the sonnet 'The New Colossus' ends with the lines 'Give me your tired, your poor/Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free/The wretched refuse of your teeming shore/Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me/I lift my lamp beside the golden door!'

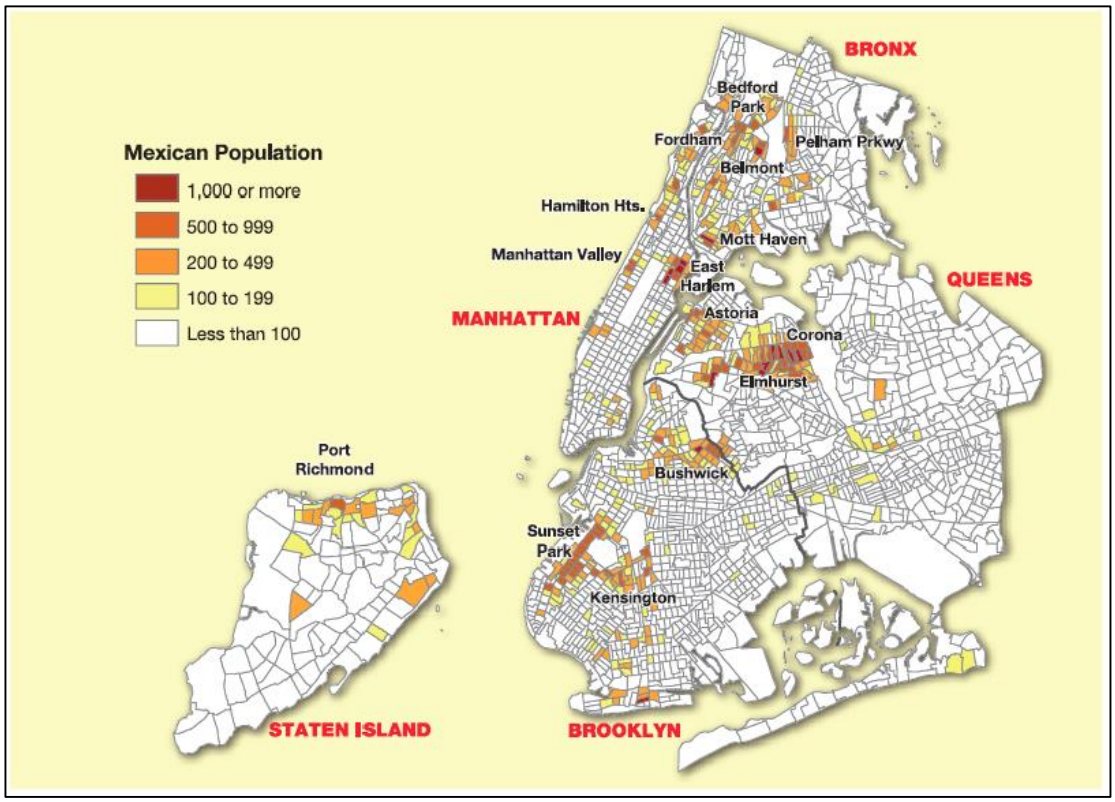
Manhattan; Sunset Park and Bushwick, Brooklyn, and the North end of Staten Island (Solis 2001; Bergad 2011a). However, despite their relatively high concentrations, Mexicans are still not the dominant migrant or ethnic group in many of these areas. My field site of West Queens, NYC is comprised of the neighbourhoods of Elmhurst, Corona and Jackson Heights**.**

In the 1980s, Mexicans, Colombians, Peruvians and Ecuadoreans moved in large numbers to West Queens. At this time Latinos began to populate the main thoroughfare of West Queens, Roosevelt Avenue, which previously served to divide the traditionally white population of Jackson Heights, and the Asian and Latino populations of neighbouring Elmhurst (Kasinitz, Bazzi & Doane 1998). Since 1990, the Latino population in West Queens has doubled to reach over 62% of the total population, and the composition of the Latino population has changed dramatically. Dominicans and Colombians who once dominated the area are now outnumbered by Ecuadoreans, and their numbers are almost equalled by the rapidly rising Mexican population. Between 1990 and 2006 the Mexican population in West Queens increased from 2,471 to 16,461 (Rodríguez 2008). In 1990, Mexicans made up only 4% of the Latino population in West Queens and by 2006 they comprised 15% of it (Table 2.1).[14]

One major attraction of the area is that it is extremely well connected to other parts of the city through the 7-Train subway line, which makes frequent express and local stops to Midtown Manhattan. The 7-train also connects easily to trains going throughout the Bronx and Queens as well as to the Long Island Railroad, which travels east. West Queens is also situated between two major expressways that provide easy connection to Brooklyn and Long Island. Its location, thus,

[14] The data on the Mexican population in West Queens, described above do not trace the exact boundaries of my field site but they offer the best estimate.

enables residents to commute relatively easily to a variety of areas where there is opportunity for employment.



Map 2.1: Showing Density of Mexican Population in NYC (Lobo 2006)

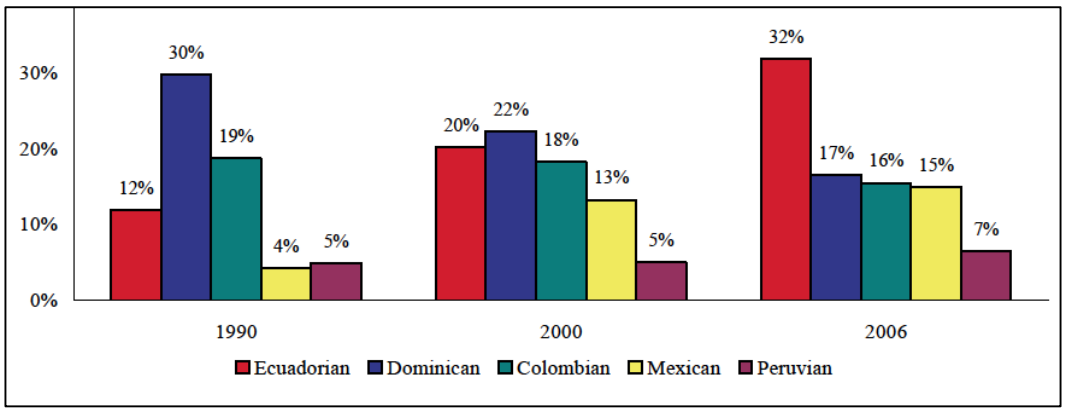


Table 2.1: Rise in Mexican Population in West Queens between 1990-2006 (Rodríguez 2008)

Fieldwork

My fieldwork focused on individuals born in Mexico who lived or worked in West Queens, NYC. This ethnography is based on conversations, interviews and participant observation with approximately 120 people. Not all are mentioned by name in this thesis but their experiences have informed my analysis. Most of my time in the field, however, was spent with a smaller group of around 40 individuals who I had the chance to get to know best and to participate more fully in their everyday lives.

During the development stages of this project I planned to collect measures of BMI, assuming that such quantitative measures would allow me to better understand nutritional experiences among Mexican migrants. In the field, I decided that I would ask people for general impressions about their food practices and weight experiences. Only if I felt it was appropriate did I ask them to estimate their current height and weight and their height and weight when they arrived in the US. Although initially I planned to collect this data from all informants I soon acknowledged the difficulty of collecting these measures and the biases inherent in them, leading me to question their usefulness. Informants were often quite forthcoming that their weight estimates were far from exact. Even if they knew their current weight, they acknowledged that it was very difficult to estimate their weight when they first arrived with any accuracy. Furthermore, I realized that by looking at estimated measures of weight and height just after arrival in the US and at present I was not getting any closer to describing the contexts that shaped these changes and I was reproducing the narrative that change happened over time without understanding the particular contexts that shaped this change.

I decided to continue to elicit information simply by talking about food practices and discussing experiences of food change with less emphasis on body size or

weight. In this way, I still ended up with many estimates of body size, changing weights and trouser sizes due to open-ended discussions and interviews, but they became less important in my analysis. My ethnographic observation suggested that important changes in food practices had taken place and I wanted to document them even if it was not possible to link them directly to weight change over time. Informant descriptions of food change were extremely rich and because individuals negotiated food practices everyday there was immediacy to their accounts. When informants spoke about food practices they naturally spoke about the everyday contexts in which they lived and the struggles they faced, often this immediacy was lost when the discussion turned to weight gain and obesity. Thus I decided to focus predominantly on food practices and change, though body size and weight change were explored to a lesser extent (see Chapters 6 and 7).

Prior to embarking on fieldwork, I planned to study not only food practices and obesity but also physical activity practices. This decision was influenced by the fact that food intake and physical activity levels are considered the two key factors shaping obesity when addressed from a biomedical or public health perspective. As my project moved away from its focus on obesity, the importance of investigating physical activity also faded. Indeed, at the outset I asked questions about daily movements, physical activities and commuting habits, but these questions quickly took a backstage to the topic of food practices which were more salient in the lives of my informants. I found there was enough work to be done in uncovering the nuances of food practices and the contexts shaping them and I felt increasingly that a simultaneous focus on food practices, physical activity and biomedically defined obesity—the logic inherent in the public health literature—did not serve my ethnographic project. Indeed, I hope that an impression of everyday activities was brought to light a by my

discussions of street life (Chapters 2), time use (Chapter 3) and work (Chapter 4) but it is only hinted at rather than being a focus of this ethnography.

My research is based on ethnographic fieldwork carried out from April 2010 to March 2011, with follow-up visits carried out in August 2011 and December 2011-January 2012. I also made feasibility visits prior to beginning fieldwork, during July and August 2009 and January 2010. Prior to fieldwork I began meeting with professors and practitioners who worked with migrants in NYC, staff working both at the Mexican Consulate and at organizations in Queens and local residents in order to meet potential informants and to facilitate my entry into the field.

When I first arrived in West Queens to begin fieldwork, I had to figure out how best to meet people and engage in everyday life. In the first few days, I took too many materials with me, stuffed into pockets, purses and a backpack, eager not to miss an opportunity for a photograph, recording or interview. I learned to streamline my approach drastically in order to navigate more easily. Mobility was very important, as much of the day was spent standing or talking for long periods of time on make-shift seats, upside down pails and ledges. Most days also involved substantial walking to meet people in both the residential and commercial areas of West Queens. The fact that the summer of 2010 had the hottest average temperatures ever recorded in NYC's history and the following winter received more than five times the amount of snow than in an average year made moving around West Queens complicated at times for my informants and myself.

At the beginning of fieldwork, I linked up with many contacts that I made during my earlier feasibility visits. I anticipated that institutional connections would allow me easy access to informants, though one early experience suggested otherwise. I met up with a teacher who I had met during my

feasibility visit to the area. He worked a few days each week at a small organization in West Queens that assisted people with visa concerns and documentation. He was extremely kind and told me that he taught a class on Citizenship[15] and that I should come to one of his classes over the weekend to meet his students. He said that many of the attendees in the class were usually Colombian, Ecuadorean and Peruvian, but that it changed every week.

I returned on a Saturday and he eagerly took me into the classroom and put me at the front of the class. He introduced me by name and informed the class that I was doing a project and I would like to talk to anyone who was Mexican. I panicked a bit because I was now in the front of the classroom, which sat silent and suspicious and I was afraid that they might think I was looking to report undocumented migrants because of the manner in which he presented me. Trying to make things right and make my intentions seem more innocuous, I briefly described my project and said that I was interested to know more about what people cook and eat and how this has changed over time and after migrating to the US. One woman in the audience with a pink shirt and reddish hair then responded by very matter-of-factly saying, 'no, our food has not changed'. The teacher, trying to counter her short, curt response, then said to the woman, 'but you aren't Mexican', to which the class let out a little laugh. I realized that I had completely disrupted the class and I just started thanking everyone and smiling and apologizing and ducking out of the classroom when the woman said, *'los Mexicanos estan en las calles. No estan aqui'* [The Mexicans are in the streets. They are not in here]. She said that if I wanted to find Mexicans I should go to Roosevelt Avenue. Then some of her classmates chimed in, telling me that I would find Mexicans on the street blocks in the eighties and nineties.

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[15] His class (free of charge) instructed people on how to apply for citizenship and helped them with the process.

I was embarrassed for ending up in the front of the classroom holding a clipboard with the teacher introducing me as someone who wanted to talk with Mexicans, but I learned two things from this experience. First, if I was going to be introduced to potential informants through a gatekeeper, I needed to try to manage this introduction better. Second, the comment made by the woman in the class suggested an association between Mexicans and 'the streets'. Her comment spoke not only about the presence of Mexicans on the streets but also about their absence in the citizenship class, likely because many of them did not have a pathway to citizenship.

Many informants reiterated the relationship made between Mexicans and the street. For example, Nacho, a Mexican in his late twenties who worked a variety of different jobs, used the phrase *'andamos por las calles como perros*' [we wander around the streets like dogs] when he described to me what life was like for him in the US. He suggested that he spent most of his time in the streets, working or trying to find work, and felt that other Mexicans did as well. Associating Mexicans with the street seemed to be one way in which people in West Queens conceptualized the social, political and economic position of Mexicans in NYC.

Similarly, Alberto, a Mexican who worked with his wife selling snacks on the sidewalk made a distinction between Mexicans and other ethnic and migrant groups. He said,

> The Chinese, Indians, Mexicans and Guatemalans they get along but the Ecuadoreans are different, they are very proud. They say, for example, they come in this shop [pointing behind him] and they say, 'Oh, how much does this cost, two dollars? I will pay fifty cents'. They say, 'I have papers but you are different from me because you do not have papers'. The others *arreglan los papeles* [sort out their papers] before they get here or during their time here but Mexicans do not. It is different for us. For example, licenses, you see all the Mexicans walking their carts, their pushcarts, their shopping carts and riding their bikes but they

> cannot get a car. They cannot get a truck. If they get caught driving they will be locked up and arrested. It is not easy here. We cannot get services here…other nationalities they get in line and get their citizenship but not us. We have to drive bicycles around in the rain and snow because we are illegal.

Alberto argued that Mexicans did not gain documentation or citizenship as frequently as other migrant groups. This disparity is partially due to the fact that many Mexicans arrive to the US without documentation or overstay their visa. Without documentation they do not have a direct path to citizenship. Alberto's remark also indicated that Mexicans were associated with the street and that lack of documentation was signaled at the street-level by a migrant's mode of transport.

As these examples show, Mexicans had a presence at the 'street-level', and this presence marked occupational and economic positions and documentation status. Thus, I decided to spend less time expanding my network through institutional connections and more time using informal interactions at the 'street level'. My ability to meet people was facilitated by the fact that sidewalks doubled as workspaces, as well as spaces for eating and socializing. I took advantage of the presence of Mexicans at the street level and the dynamic street life in West Queens to meet potential informants.

This approach took time and was often quite awkward, especially at the beginning. I leaned on some of the first contacts I made, some of which were made during feasibility visits, and used them to meet other potential contacts and their own friends and acquaintances. Once I was able to meet a few vendors and shop keepers in the area, I was able to hang around less conspicuously. Having the support of a few informants who kindly let me sit around at the street level and do small errands for them gave the signal to their clients, acquaintances and neighbours that I could be trusted, and in this way I was able

to expand my networks and observe interactions and conversations among different informants and potential-informants. Importantly, by expanding my contacts through the individuals that I met at the street level I was able to meet their family members and clients, many of whom worked out of their home, or were neighbours in the apartments above their shops. In this way, I was able to expand my network of informants slowly to include those who did not work. I spent a lot of time trying to develop rapport, gain more of a presence in the lives of different informants and to gain their trust so that they would tolerate me hanging out with them, or as some referred to it *'hangeando'* [Spanglish term for 'hanging out/hanging around'] more often and in different contexts. The approach I took to finding informants involved a multiple snowball approach.[16] Snowball sampling is when 'the researcher makes initial contact with a small group of people who are relevant to the research topic and then works with these [people] to establish contacts with others' friends, family and colleagues (Bryman 2004: 100. Hirsch (2003b) utilized a multiple snowball sample in her ethnography with Mexican women in Georgia and Western Mexico. Hondagneu-Sotelo (2001) also utilized this approach to find informants for her ethnography with female migrant domestic-workers.

Because many of my informants spent a large amount of time at their workplace, I ended up doing so as well. I decided that the pre-fieldwork distinction that I made, which was to work only with individuals who lived in West Queens was

[16] Snowball sampling is useful for anthropological research because it allows for the recruitment of research participants by using the networks and relationships that already exist among individuals, and thus allows for a socially contextualized investigation (Holmes 2006). It is also useful for studying hidden populations, such as those that are not easily identified, or recruited (Schensul, Schensul & LeCompte 1999). Mexican-born individuals, especially undocumented migrants fit this description because many are faced with constraints that make them hard to reach through more formal recruitment methods such as poster and newspaper advertisements (Rivera-Batiz 2003).

not appropriate. This was because for many, the fact that they worked in West Queens meant that they spent much of their time there and ate many of their meals there, despite not living there. I realized that the way in which I constructed the field prior to fieldwork placed more emphasis on where informants lived than on where they worked. This was a result of my failure to realize their long working days and weeks before I began fieldwork. I soon realized the constructedness and amorphousness of the field (Foster & Kemper 2002: 132) especially an urban setting like that of West Queens, which informants entered and exited many times in one day. I decided to include informants who both lived and worked in West Queens. This allowed for more rich and contextualized participant observation, which took advantage of the embedded social relations of my informants. It also gave me more time to talk and participate in social life in West Queens rather than dedicating an inordinate time finding informants who both lived and worked in West Queens.

Men on the Street

I noticed one thing during the first few weeks of my fieldwork as I worked to meet people in the area. I spent a lot of time talking to men. This was of particular concern because I had intended to focus my study on Mexican women. Men often seemed easier to access in public spaces and sometimes I felt that they had more time to talk. For example, I often found men congregating on chairs outside trucks or they would eat their food on the street, sometimes talking to the shopkeepers or street vendors that I already knew.

Furthermore, women tended to have the client-facing jobs, and while they were often busy at the cash register or assisting or serving patrons, men were often working in the same spaces but in jobs where it was easier for me to talk with them while they worked. For example, Gabriela worked in the same warehouse as Hector but she was always busy assisting people to pay their bills. She

worked in a tiny booth in which could barely fit a chair and a small desk. She locked the door of the booth (because she dealt with cash) and she, and sometimes her small dog, stayed there for many hours of the day. In contrast, Hector worked at the side of the warehouse in a huge refrigerated room trimming the ends off of radishes and cleaning up vegetables. I was able to spend time with Hector much more discretely than I could hang out with Gabriela so it was harder to get to know her.

Similarly, Noé, who worked at the grocery store owned by his in-laws was often packing and unpacking groceries at the back of the shop and I was able to talk and sit with him while he worked. His sisters, however, usually worked the cash register at the front and were busy moving the queue along, so they had less patience for hanging out with me at work. Furthermore, in workplaces where both men and women worked together, it sometimes seemed that I needed to gain the respect of the men before the women would engage in conversation. Sometimes, when I engaged with women in the workplace they would call upon their male employees, brothers, husbands and cousins to talk with me, while they sat and listened. This was sometimes because women were taking care of their children while they worked and they were literally moving around too much to have an easy conversation with a new acquaintance. When I first began visiting a small *tienda* selling Mexican goods, the female employees encouraged me to talk to the male employee and only after I consistently visited did the women begin to enter into the conversation. Sometimes it was only after the men opened up to me that the women decided to as well. This was not always the case but in workplaces where there were both men and women, it often took more effort to talk with the women than the men.

In some cases, this may have been partially the result of power dynamics within the workplace. For example, Sofia who worked in a bakery did not like to talk

with me when her boss was around. Although the boss engaged Sofia and me in superficial conversation when I visited to buy breads, Sofia and I did not express that we knew each other when the boss was around. Similarly, Sonia who worked at another bakery that she and her husband owned, did not like talking when her husband was around. I used to visit her in the mornings when her husband was out delivering bread or on Sunday when he did not work. After I was able to help them find some medical clinics in the area, the husband began to say hello to me but I had my best conversations with Sonia when he was not around.

Power dynamics within the workplace and among couples, as well as the gendered positions occupied by women in the workplace created a situation where women who worked in public spaces were often harder to engage than men. I think this was a result of women having a disinterest in openly sharing their stories for fear of reproof from their male partners for engaging with me or due to their own suspicion of me. In many of these cases it was important that I gained the respect of the men before the women would engage with me. Similarly, the fact that they were busy working or tending to their children made them less available. Pessar (1999) also acknowledges the difficulty of engaging female migrants in conversation when she first began fieldwork. The women she did engage with often seemed to provide a 'safe, respectful, and respectable 'text', rather than one that expressed conflict or tensions' (ibid: 586). Pessar (1999) emphasizes the need for informal interactions and long-term relationships to overcome these more reserved narratives. I similarly felt that over time women were more interested/able to confide in me.

At the beginning of my research I engaged both men and women, thinking that I would narrow down my research over time, but I realized from my experiences talking with both that they often had very distinct experiences with food after

migration. I decided that it would be important to explore these gendered experiences of food and weight change rather than to focus on only women.

The Mexican Consulate in NYC

In addition to engagement in informal participant observation in West Queens, I also met some participants at the Mexican Consulate. The Cónsul General and the directors of *La Ventanilla de Salud* [Health 'Window'/Station] agreed to allow me to recruit informants at the Consulate, while also volunteering at the centre. *La Ventanilla de Salud* is a service located in the Mexican Consulate and provided by the Mexican Ministry for External Affairs.[17] The centre aims to put Mexicans in NYC in touch with essential services. Most days of the week, representatives from different organizations or hospitals in NYC came to the Consulate as part of this initiative. They walked around the waiting area of the Consulate, which spans three floors, to engage with those waiting to process their papers or receive legal advice. The services provided by the directors of the *Ventanilla* and the organizational representatives are diverse. The *Ventanilla* assists visitors to the Consulate with medical referrals, it also informs individuals about what health and social services they are entitled to receive in NYC, and in many cases individuals are able to learn about and sign up for food, nutrition, welfare and medical programs while at the Consulate. Towards the end of my fieldwork, when I went to the Consulate, I focused more on volunteering and less on meeting new informants.

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[17] *La Ventanilla de Salud* was a small desk on the second floor of the Consulate equipped with a phone and a multitude of packets, forms, directories, pamphlets, posters and small free gifts. Volunteers and Consulate employees man the desk and meander around the waiting area depending on the day. Since my fieldwork, *La Ventanilla de Salud* has been redesigned.

My days at the Consulate were varied. Some days I moved up and down the stairs seeing if anyone had any questions, also telling people about the types of services offered there. Sometimes I helped people find the correct line to stand in, other times I just listened to people voice their frustrations or talk about the difficulty they encountered trying to access resources. Generally, when I was volunteering, I assisted people to find the contact details of low-cost clinics or hospitals in their neighbourhoods where they could receive health services and I told them what they needed to bring to their first appointment. Finding a low-cost clinic was one of the most popular requests. Other times I made doctor and dentist appointments for them or referred them to other individuals at the Consulate who dealt with educational needs, medical bill reimbursements or legal services. The kind staff at the Consulate as well as the volunteers and representatives at the *Ventanillas de Salud* taught me the necessary skills.[18]

My mornings and afternoons at the Consulate were unstructured in that I sat and talked with people, sometimes about their own health, education or welfare needs and sometimes about my own project. Some days were busy and I had limited opportunity to introduce visitors to my own project and to talk about food practices. Other days were much quieter and I took more time to meet potential informants. I would tell individuals one-by-one that I was a volunteer at the *Ventanilla de Salud* and also a student. Often they had questions for me, and other times they were happy to hear about my own project and talk to me about food practices and change.

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[18] I also helped to update the Consulate's Health Directory by confirming the best contact number for each clinic, hospital and organization listed in the directory in the states of New York, New Jersey and Connecticut. This greatly helped me to familiarize myself with the available resources.

My ability to talk with people was assisted by the fact that many individuals were looking for something to do while they waited. I think it was also facilitated by the fact that the subject of my research seemed somewhat innocuous. For example, I remember another student researcher who came to the Consulate wanting to do structured interviews with Mexicans discussing their journey of migration to the US. I remember him leaving without having found any participants, which I think was a result of the sensitivity of his project topic. I also think that I was able to find informants for my own research because it was often the case that we had already spoken for ten or fifteen minutes addressing their own concerns, and this served to break the ice. Often in discussing their own queries, they exchanged information about their health trajectories or those of their family members, their difficulty in finding and affording services in NYC, their documentation status and other sensitive issues. In these instances, I think that shifting the conversation to discuss more general issues like food practices, their family, work and who cooks and cleans in their household often seemed harmless after we had already discussed these other topics.

In instances when people said that they would talk to me to help me with my own research, I described my project. When people agreed to talk to me, the discussion progressed in a few different ways. Sometimes people would wait for me to ask general questions to which they would respond. Other times, people would launch right into what they wanted to talk about. For example, Alonso wanted to tell me about his experiences in NYC and how Coca Cola tasted different in the US than it did in Mexico. He was interested in food marketing and wanted to discuss that. Laura wanted to tell me about her negative perceptions about school lunch in the US and how much her children disliked it. In this way, the structure of the interviews varied from very unstructured to more structured questioning based on some general themes and the expectations of the informants. Conversations at the Consulate lasted between fifteen minutes

and one and a half hours. After meeting with individuals, I asked them if they wanted to meet me again and we often exchanged telephone numbers and met near or in their house or workplace.

Although I exchanged numbers with many people that I spoke with, when it came to making plans to meet with them again there was varying enthusiasm. Some people were very difficult to contact. In some instances I suspect this might have been due to the fact that their cellphones were out of credit or their house phones had been disconnected, which I knew to be the case among many of my informants. In other cases, when I called, informants' described their schedules and emphasized how busy they were, and I did not press them if it seemed an inconvenience. The salience of time constraints in the everyday lives of my informants is explored more fully in Chapter 4. In some cases, informants kindly agreed to meet up again. In these cases I was able to expand my informant network in important ways. In particular, carrying out interviews with individuals whom I met at the Consulate allowed me to access women who I had more difficulty meeting around West Queens. It also allowed me to talk with people who did not have as much a presence at the street level, either because they worked in their home or in offices or in construction. Also, at the Consulate, I met many undocumented Mexicans who were coming to get a Mexican passport or a *matricula consular*, and it is possible that they would have been more suspicious to talk to me if we had met outside of the Consulate. I also learned of different places and events where I could go to meet informants and expand my contacts, through talking with other volunteers, NGO and Consulate workers, security guards and visitors.

I found more informants through informal connections in West Queens than at the Consulate, however my time at the Consulate was extremely useful. My interactions at the Consulate provided me the ability to meet a variety of other

organizations working with migrants. As a result, I was able to go to town hall meetings, conferences and learn more about the services provided to Mexican migrants and the interventions and outreach programs which were targeted at them, which I otherwise would not have known about. It was also through my connections with the Consulate that I learned about a variety of celebrations, holiday fairs and events occurring in NYC, where I could not only invite informants but also carry out participant observation. Furthermore, my time volunteering there gave me insight into the types of health and nutritional information that was available to migrants and the type of health programs, low-cost health plans, screenings and clinics that they could access. It also gave me a better idea of the key players addressing migrant needs in NYC and the difficulties they faced. The ease with which I could casually talk with Mexican migrants at the Consulate also gave me insight into how to engage potential participants, explain my research project and ask questions. It gave me good insight into the topics that concerned Mexicans in NYC and enabled me to contextualize my research project and better understand the difficulties migrants faced with regard to citizenship, health and welfare.

My volunteer work at the Consulate also educated me about the resources available to migrants, which I passed on to my informants. Some informants wanted to enroll in English classes at which point I was able to take them to different organizations or give them numbers to call, others needed services and mentors for their children. Some were looking for more information on how to get a *matricula consular*, or wanted to know when the 'Consulate on wheels' would be in West Queens. These were things that I was able to help with modestly as a result of my involvement with the Consulate. Furthermore, by finding informants through both informal and institutional contacts I was able to avoid some potential biases that would result from using either one method or the other.

I lived a few miles outside of the bounds of West Queens because it was the most affordable and appropriate option. Although I am sure I would have had even additional sources of data to draw on had I lived with informants, I decided not to because of the crowded conditions in which many of my informants lived. I did not feel comfortable asking families to give up their common room or to share their bedroom. I became aware through fieldwork of the difficulty that many of my informants already had negotiating the visits of family members who often came from Mexico for a few months at a time and ended up sharing informants' bedrooms and displacing them and their children.

Building Relationships & Developing Themes

The first few months of fieldwork were concerned primarily with meeting people and expanding my network. By the second and third month of fieldwork I focused more on getting to know people, developing relationships further and carrying out participant observation in work and home spaces. I participated whenever I could in the daily activities of my informants to understand the challenges and opportunities they faced in their daily lives as well as their experiences procuring, preparing and consuming food. I tried to get a better sense of the activities that my informants engaged in, and their views and preoccupations related to food. I carried out informal interviews at this time generally guided by broad themes and in response to the issues that informants wanted to discuss. I conducted interviews in homes and at work, and at the Consulate. At this time, I also carried out a variety of interviews with people who had specialized knowledge such as supermarket workers, restaurant owners, food distributors, truck drivers, *tienda* and *botanica* owners and employees at shipping outlets where goods were shipped between Mexico and the US.

To capture the interviews, I took notes and learned to do it quickly. Sometimes informants would watch to see what I wrote down, other times they would be in disbelief at the basic things that they saw me jot down. I hesitated to ask to record the interviews. I always felt that it would create an unnecessary level of discomfort for them. When I did ask to record an interview, sometimes they were very eager to agree, whereas other times they hesitated, and either said 'no' or shyly said 'yes'. If I sensed that they just said 'yes' to please me, I opted out of using the tape recorder, and they usually seemed relieved.

When I began fieldwork, I did not ask to take photographs because I was afraid it would make them uncomfortable, but when I did actually ask, informants were generally very eager to take multiple photographs in different configurations. I suspect that perhaps both my hesitation about taking photographs and making recordings were pre-empted by my own assumptions about what they would and would not feel comfortable with, especially if they were undocumented migrants. In many instances, however, there was a lot of background noise—from the *cumbia* music in the restaurants, to the sound effects of children's video games, or the drum of blenders mixing up weight loss shakes at the VitaVida bars—that perhaps it was appropriate that I did not record most of my interviews. Interviews were carried out in Spanish with the exception of four, which were carried out in English or a mix of English and Spanish. I learned Spanish before I began fieldwork and had experience conducting interviews in Spanish during a research project on malnutrition that I carried out in Guatemala in 2008. I continued to learn from my informants who kindly and enthusiastically introduced me to new phrases and slang and were patient with me.

During the final few months of fieldwork, my main aim was to focus my interviews and observations more and to carry out more in-depth interviews.

This sometimes involved doing migration histories with informants, focusing on themes such as work, life course trajectories, food or body size trajectories and body size preferences. In other cases, it meant carrying out an interview on a specific topic that was of particular salience to an informant. In many cases, this phase of 'focusing' involved deeper participant observation with particular informants. This was often the case when an informant had told me something but I had not yet witnessed it. During this focusing period, I worked to deepen my interviews and observations. I chased up and followed through to better understand ideas or themes that came up in prior stages of fieldwork. It was often a bit like a scavenger hunt. I kept a running 'theme' list, which contained the topics and situations I wanted more exposure to and the contexts of informant's daily lives that I wanted to learn more about. During this period, I tried to follow up some of these 'leads' as well as to clarify information that was contradictory or unclear. One important aspect of the focusing phase was to place more emphasis on investigating dieting practices and the phenomenon of VitaVida and other dieting products and regimens in the area. Early participant observation suggested that informants spent a lot of time and money experimenting with dieting products and programs and I explored these dieting practices in more detail during the final months of fieldwork.

Ethical Considerations

The Inter-Divisional Research Ethics Committee (IDREC) approved my research plans and methodology. Procedures carried out in the project adhered to the guidelines set forth by the Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC), along with Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and Commonwealth (ASA) *Code of Ethics.*

Informants for this research were recruited on a strictly voluntary basis. Each time I interviewed informants for my research, I emphasized that they did not have to

participate and that if I asked them something that they did not feel comfortable answering, they did not have to answer it. I was very cautious to emphasize that all information that I collected was to be held confidentially and that their names or documentation status would not be attached to any data they provided. I worked to respect the privacy of my participants and not to record sensitive information, which I suspected, or which they explicitly told me they wished to suppress.

I received *written* or *oral* consent from informants depending on the circumstance and the formality of the interaction though in most cases I received oral consent. Informed consent involved obtaining approval from each informant. I orally communicated information about my project or gave informants a participant information sheet. There was always a bit of a tension between wanting to provide enough information to contextualize the research without overburdening potential informants with a description that was complicated or that could make them suspicious of me. I had to negotiate this continuously, depending on the circumstances. I also gave informants my phone number and email address so that we could stay connected. I tried hard to ensure that people felt comfortable in my presence and that I was not 'overstaying my welcome'.

As is the nature of participant observation, when research was carried out in settings where more than one person was involved, such as at a social gathering, family dinner or party, I gave special consideration to matters of consent. It was not possible to receive informed consent from all individuals present, and, thus, I received consent as far as practicable. If I talked with, or observed anyone extensively or carried out a semi-structured interview with anyone at such social events, I told them about my project and obtained oral consent from them.

I am cognizant of the specific risks involved in work with undocumented migrants (discussed by Galvez 2011; Düvell, Triandafyllidou & Vollmer 2010). I was careful

to emphasize to my informants that documentation status would not be made known and that informants would be protected through the use of pseudonyms. I worked to ensure as far as possible that this research would not reveal the identity of informants. I also changed or concealed many place names to ensure that identities are not disclosed and to minimize any risks to my informants. The name of the nutrition and weight management company examined in this thesis has been changed to VitaVida and some street names have been changed or suppressed to protect the confidentiality of my informants and the individuals working with VitaVida.

With regard to documentation status, I worked to be very clear that I was a student, that I was not associated with the state and that any information they provided to me would be kept confidentially and anonymously. I did not ask informants if they had documentation because I did not want to make them uncomfortable. Luckily informants tended to volunteer the information or it came out over the course of fieldwork. Often, I asked indirect questions to see how they accessed health services, or if they had a license, or a *matricula consular*. These questions helped to suggest their documentation status. I was surprised about how willingly informants volunteered the information about their status. The topic seemed to come up when we spoke about a variety of circumstances, such as their work conditions, their education or that of their children, how long they had been in the US or the configuration of their household. This suggested to me the salience their status had in their everyday lives. When I began fieldwork, I was not prepared for this. When informants casually said, *no tengo papeles* [I do not have papers] or *me faltan papeles* [I have no papers] I was hesitant. At first I felt that it must have accidentally slipped out, and I tended to gently change the topic and not dwell on this idea, but this happened continuously, which made me think that perhaps in certain contexts they were open to discussing such issues, despite their gravity.

Although prior to fieldwork I had anticipated that the hardest ethical issues that I would have to work through would be those of documentation status, I found myself often in the position where discussing food practices and particularly body size seemed to present the greatest ethical challenge. Although I theoretically distinguish myself from researchers and health practitioners who address obesity as a problem of individual behaviour and education, while carrying out fieldwork it was harder to untangle myself from these approaches. I had to constantly be aware of how I interacted with my informants when they talked about food and body size, when we ordered food out at a restaurant or purchased food at *tiendas*. Sometimes I would visit informants just as they were eating cookies or crisps, and they would scold themselves for snacking. In other instances they would criticize or mock fun at their own body shape in my presence. I sometimes felt this was their way of expressing to me that they valued nutritious foods and slim bodies, and they did not want me to suspect otherwise. In other cases I felt they were thinking, 'no need to tell me that I am eating unhealthily or that I am overweight, I already know'. I was reminded of this uncomfortable aspect of my research when I was doing fieldwork one day and someone who knew about my project, though who was not an informant, had just heated up her lunch in the microwave while I was walking by. She blurted out, 'I know, I shouldn't eat this if I want to lose weight'. Meanwhile, I had barely registered that she had lunch in her hand, nor could I see what was in the Tupperware and I definitely was not judging the nutritional quality of her food. In some instances, it was hard to convince people that there were no 'right' answers to my questions and that I was not judging them for their food choices or body size. I worked to be empathetic and non-judgmental with informants to encourage them to share openly with me. I also found it important to talk about food with informants and eat food indiscriminately without having a discussion about its nutritional content. Indirect questioning, observation and engaging with people in a variety of different circumstances and settings helped to develop rapport and reduce self-consciousness related to food

practices. The sensitivity surrounding the topic and my firm desire not to make people more self-conscious about their weight than they already were further encouraged me to focus my research primarily on food practices rather than obesity. The fact that I am not overweight also made me feel that regardless of what I said or how I acted, my body size might speak for itself and suggest certain values or opinions to my informants. My own self-consciousness of my body size was also a factor encouraging me to focus primarily on food practices.

However, it was not only concerns about lack of documentation and objectifying individuals' food habits and weight that urged me to consider the ethical implications of my research but also the fact that many of my informants dealt with pressing issues of money and time. This made me question if I was going to be just one additional burden demanding the time and attention of informants. I dealt with this issue in a few ways.

Unfortunately, I know I cannot fully compensate informants for their participation, engagement, friendship and time. At the very least, I am committed to share their stories and opinions as accurately and satisfactorily as possible. Moreover, I followed the advice of Hondagneu-Sotelo (2001) that most people enjoy receiving flowers, and also that of a family friend who used to tell me never to arrive at someone's house with your arms swinging. When I went to someone's house or workplace, for the first time, especially if I knew I was planning to do a long interview, I often gave them a little thank-you card and often placed a MetroCard in it, usually filled with $10-15 worth of subway rides. However, it depended on the situation. Some informants did not use the subway much, in which case, I gave them some books for their children, flowers or invited them to lunch.

I tried to support informants' stores and carts where possible, and it almost always was. I bought my own meals and groceries from informants' stands and I bought small gifts for one informant by patronizing others. I bought *tamales*

[corn dough with various fillings wrapped in a corn husk or banana leaf and steamed] from Graciela and gave them to Andrea. I bought flowers from Rosa Maria and gave them to Clementina. When I saw Sonia had a surplus of *pan de fiesta* [holiday bread] left over after the holidays I bought two and gave them to other informants. I also bought fruits from Noé and gave them to many of my informants. By virtue of just being there I tried to help out, whether it was coming early for a birthday party to help set up, running errands when people were too busy, going on shopping trips, doing the chopping and frying for informants when they were cooking, or helping them to navigate the medical or education system in NYC. I realize that many times when I thought I was helping I was really more of a hindrance, for example, I know that sometimes the meals were made more elaborate because of my presence. I tried to minimize the inconvenience that I caused them, even if it just meant washing the dishes. I also realize that these modest ways of compensating informants still falls short of repaying the assistance and kindness they have shown to me.

Relations in the Field

During fieldwork I had to constantly reflect on my interactions with informants to better understand how I was being perceived and it was often not entirely as I had expected. The concept of reflexivity acknowledges how the characteristics of the researcher influence ethnographic accounts (MacDonald 2001). Reflexivity suggests that observation is not an objective lens through which one can know the truth, since observed actions and interactions are constructions that cannot be separated from the observer (Ellen 1984).

It was initially easier to speak with men and engage them both at the Consulate and through informal interactions in the neighbourhood, despite being a woman. This contradicted the logic of other anthropologists that female researchers might more easily gain access to women and a women's point of view (Bell, Caplan &

Karim 1993; Gillespie 1995). However, over time, I realized that although women often were harder to make contact with initially, once the contact was made it was easier to become close, and to spend time together without my efforts being misconstrued by informants or their friends as a sign of romantic interest. Hirsch (2003b), who worked with Mexicans in Georgia and Mexico experienced a similar tension. Over time, these tensions subsided, but it is important to mention that my closest relationships in the field tended to be with women. Although I would have suspected that because I was unmarried and without children during fieldwork it would have been easier to relate to single women, in fact, I felt these women were hard to develop relationships with. Single women in NYC without a family, and generally young, often worked as waitresses, nannies, and in bars and nightclubs. It was hard to meet up with single women as they tended to be less established in NYC, often sharing a house that they did not feel was their own and where we could not easily meet to chat. In the workplace they often had bosses and workloads that precluded the opportunity for small talk. I met many young, single women but, unfortunately, it was sometimes hard to forge relationships with them. I think the fact that I was often older than these women also made the relationship a bit more difficult to establish. As a result, I developed more ties with women who had husbands and/or families in NYC and they are better represented in this thesis.

With regard to my relationship with men in the field, there were also many settings that I was eager to have more exposure to, these included the nightclubs and the bars that I always passed and where some of my male informants hung out but I generally did not feel comfortable tagging along. Invitations to shared-male houses or to bars at night sometimes seemed appealing but the risk that my intentions would be misconstrued, that I would alienate our mutual female acquaintances, or alternatively that I would get into a situation that would be difficult to step away from led me to resist these points of access. The fact that

Spanish is not my first language also led me to avoid these invitations as I felt it might become difficult to extricate myself from, or argue my way out of certain situations. As a result, I cannot claim to have a complete understanding of male nightlife and the patterns of drinking and eating that take place in these contexts.

In Queens, it was quite normal for people to ask each other where they were from when they met each other and this applied to me as well. This was also true at the Consulate. If I was with other Mexicans or at the Consulate people often thought I must have Mexican ancestry, probably because of the context and the fact that I have dark hair and brown eyes. Although I corrected this assumption, I suspect that such initial impressions, and informants' own assumptions of what Americans looked like served to ease my initial access and make my presence more discrete.

I usually said that I was from the US, or from NY or sometimes I said I was a 'gringa', following Hirsch's (2003b) advice. But if I stopped my description there, I was almost always asked for more information, no one ever seemed to be satisfied until I told them where my family was from so I often informed them that my grandparents were from Italy. Many informants had positive relationships with Italians, and a few mentioned that Italian employers had given them a job, or paid for their English classes when they first arrived to the US. A few other informants were married to, or had siblings who were married to, second or third generation Italians. This might have helped me a bit in a few instances.

I was concerned that my status as a US citizen might influence how I was perceived and accepted by my informants. I was afraid that they might think that I was an agent of the state or a customs agent. In this matter, I think perhaps my short stature, gender and status as a student may have helped to mitigate fear and suspicion. The fact that I was studying in England and my informants

knew that I lived there before and after fieldwork may have also helped to create some distance between the US government and myself. However, the fact that I was a student in England, where many wealthy Mexicans sent their children to study—as one informant told me—signified class-distinctions between my informants and I that we had to negotiate. Such distinctions marked me as an outsider. I had to work to move beyond these differences and develop trust by emphasizing our commonalities, be it related to life experiences, life stages, family, food, Queens, being a woman (as appropriate), and also simply by confiding in them and doing things together

The fact that my partner is from Mexico may have also made my presence in West Queens and my interest in Mexican food make a bit more sense. Many informants kindly articulated recipes and cooking techniques to me in the interest that I impress my 'in-laws'. Many, however, advised me to be very careful as most Mexican men, in their opinion, drank too much. One female informant was quite convinced that I should look for a tall British man for her and myself once I returned to England! I think that having a partner from Mexico helped to personalize my connection with Mexico in a way that helped to build rapport, foster conversation and encourage informants to see me beyond my role as a researcher.

NYC is an important receiving centre for Mexicans. Migrants continuously arrive to NYC and mark its identity as a 'modern' and multicultural city with strong transnational linkages. By acknowledging this diverse setting, I have shown the difficulty of a priori characterizing Mexican migrants and their food practices. By highlighting the socioeconomic conditions encountered by Mexican migrants in West Queens, I have suggested their salience in informants' everyday lives. These contexts and dynamics, largely obscured by the concept of acculturation, will be further explored in the chapters that follow to better

understand their influence on food practices and nutritional change. By hinting at how gender dynamics, documentation status, time constraints and work conditions patterned my interactions in the field and my methodological approach, this chapter has also brought to light the importance of these forces in shaping life after migration, which will be echoed in the following chapters.

PART II
THE CONTEXTS & STRUCTURES SHAPING FOOD PRACTICES

3. HOUSEHOLD FOOD WORK AFTER MIGRATION

> I live alone, no family, no kids. We don't think the same as the Ecuadoreans who bring their whole family here, I disagree with that. For us, it's easier to leave your family in Mexico...it's cheaper. Here, I get paid $7.15 an hour to work twelve hours a day. I send my money home for my family and for my business, [I send] $200-300 dollars a month, then I pay rent, and for the telephone and for food. If my whole family was here how could I do it? I would have to spend $500 dollars a week on food. I can't do that. Here, for one person, ten dollars will last you one day, but in Mexico you could eat for a week with ten dollars. Because of this, I left my wife and family in Mexico. Why would I bring my kids here? To suffer? Why? Here, *I* [my emphasis] suffer for them [*Para sufrir? Porque? Aqui sufro yo por ellos*]…If you have a *pareja [*partner], from Mexico you eat Mexican food. If you have an *antojito* [snacks or cravings] you may eat something else but normally you eat what your partner cooks and this will depend on where she is from. Mexicans who settle in the US we don't watch, we eat everything but there is a difference between those who are married—who prepare classic food in a Mexican style— and those that live alone who buy their food. Next time you are on the subway in the morning, just look, you don't have to ask any questions. The [Mexican] men with a *pareja* in the US, you will see that all of them carry a book bag in which they bring their *comida* [lunch] to work. Gringos don't do this, but the married Mexicans do.
>
> *-Miguel, late forties, construction worker in West Queens*

Migrants often come to NYC without their parents, spouses or children, leading them to form new households and to renegotiate division of labour within the home. This chapter examines how migration reshapes households, food work responsibilities and food practices. Food work refers to the work of preparing and procuring food. The way in which migration shapes division of labour has been well studied in the anthropological and sociological literature (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Zlolniski 2006; Shaw 2000; Foner 1999; Pessar 2003). Ethnographic research suggests that after migration men sometimes take on more of the

domestic responsibilities because of women's growing engagement in the workforce and due to changing gender norms. In other instances, women continue to be responsible for domestic chores despite taking on more paid work (Hirsch 2003b; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Abarca 2007; Smith 2006; Foner 1999; Menjivar 2003). This chapter examines how changing household arrangements and division of labour responsibilities specifically shape food practices. It explores how migration patterns, household and gender dynamics shape whether or not migrants engage in food work at home. When food work does not take place in the household, I explore who ends up doing it and to whom this responsibility is outsourced to (i.e. restaurants, street vendors, friends, neighbours).

Household configurations were extremely diverse among my informants; extended families lived together; single mothers ran households; men and women lived on their own or with housemates; and couples lived with their children. Many of my informants were living, or had lived at some point during their time in NYC, without their spouses, children or parents. Men and women who migrated without their immediate families in NYC often lived with their extended family, sometimes with a more established married couple. Men who migrated alone lived in apartments with other male acquaintances and women who migrated alone often lived as cleaners, babysitters or home-carers in their employers' household. Informants described moving into the homes of relatives for a few months after their arrival or until they found a job, after which they moved out. Some continued living with their extended families or friends until they married, had children or their Mexican partners came to join them. Other informants stayed in the same household yet experienced it change over the years as visitors and relatives came and went.

'Ellos no Guisan' [They Don't Cook]: Delegating the Food Work

Regardless of whether migrant men had partners in Mexico, they were often referred to as *solos* [all by oneself] in NYC if they lived without their wife and children. Men who migrated without their families often lived with other men and this shaped the fact that many of them 'outsourced' their food work. When Alejandro moved to the US he shared an apartment with his friends and uncle. '*Puros hombres'* [only men] he said to me when he described his living arrangements.

Los Solitos [Those Who Live Alone]

Carlos was in his early thirties, he was a gregarious man who had lived in NYC for four years. He shared an apartment with six men. Prior to moving to the US he lived with his mother in Puebla. In Mexico, his mother cooked for the family and did the food shopping. In NYC, he said matter-of-factly that he did not go grocery shopping but instead ate prepared meals and snacks, spending approximately $25 each day on food. Carlos explained that he did not like cooking after a long day at work nor did he know how to cook. He worked at a street truck selling *quesadillas* [folded *tortillas* filled with cheese and melted] and *tacos* [*tortillas* topped with meat, lettuce and cilantro], with Martín, his colleague. Martín was a little younger than him and took a few opportunities to make jokes about Carlos's reliance on eating outside of the home. When I asked Martín what he ate, he said that he ate more in the house than did Carlos. Carlos did not want to give Martín too much credit for eating in the home, however, Carlos explained: 'It is different for him. He lives with his mother-in-law'. Martín smiled as if to agree that he was able to eat at home because his mother-in-law shopped and cooked for him.

Miguel's quote at the opening of this Chapter suggests that he felt Mexican men relied on their partners to do the food shopping and cooking (see p. 85). Miguel

was in his late forties. He owned two fish restaurants in Mexico, which his family managed. He periodically travelled to Mexico to set up restaurants with his earnings and then returned to the US to continue working and to save more money. He was in the process of earning money to open another business when I met him. Miguel had moved around quite a bit, he originally migrated to California but then he heard through friends that there was work in NYC so he moved there to work in construction. He lived alone, and although he left his family in Mexico he had a close group of friends living in the US and Canada who relied on each other for help, jobs, and a place to stay when necessary. Miguel made a sharp distinction between the food habits of men who lived with their spouses in the US and those who live alone, the *solos*. He believed that those without a spouse ate out of the house while those with a spouse ate at home and brought a packed lunch to work. Although many of my informants preferred to eat home-cooked food rather than to eat out, they ended up eating out because their partners and families were not around to cook for them and they did not have the time or skills to cook for themselves. He too ate out on days when he worked although he tried to eat home on his days off in order to save money.

Gabriela, in her late twenties, worked at an *abarrotería* [corner shop] six days a week where they sold Mexican goods at wholesale prices. Her parents owned the shop and her mother took care of her kids while Gabriela worked in a small room in the centre of the warehouse. The room was enclosed behind a glass booth where she processed bills, and which was decorated with an elaborate display dedicated to the *Virgen de Guadalupe*. Gabriela was a single mother with two young children aged three and five years old. While we were talking about cooking one day, she called out to Félix, another man who worked as a cashier at the *abbarrotería* and asked, 'Félix when you go home, after you eat [lunch] at work, what do you eat? Do you cook?' Félix, who was in his late-twenties, and

shared an apartment with a married couple, explained that the couple cooked in the kitchen but he ate out because he did not know how to cook. 'In Mexico, my mom always cooked for me' he said. Now, after work, he usually picked something up at a nearby restaurant. When he said this, Gabriela nodded her head as if to acknowledge that his comments confirmed her suspicions about men who lived alone.

Gabriela acknowledged, however, that it was not just single men who ate out rather than preparing their own food but also single women. She told me that before her boyfriend Renaldo moved into her house she would eat out after work rather than cook. Gabriela used to spend about $100 a week going to restaurants with people after work but after her boyfriend moved in she began eating dinner in the house. With the same amount of money, she was able to cook dinner for herself and her boyfriend. Her example demonstrates that households changed not only with migration but also over time due to new relationships and meeting new partners. In this way, the fluidity of the household and its impact on food work responsibilities and eating practices becomes clear. Gabriela's changing food practices changed rather circumstantially, suggesting the multiple dynamics at play in shaping food practices in the household, some of which were not migration-specific. Gabriela demonstrates, however, that although the stereotype was that single men did not cook for themselves when they lived without a partner, Gabriela notes that single women also had a tendency to eat out.

Maritza, a single woman in her late twenties, worked full-time cleaning houses. She lived with her older sister's family and her brother. When talking about the food practices of her family members, Maritza commented with dismay that her uncle, who lived alone in NYC, ate *Maruchan* noodles [instant microwavable noodles in a cup] for dinner. When I asked about her brother, she said with a laugh, that he does not know how to cook but rather he 'steals' from the food

that she and her sister have purchased. Although at first Maritza joked of the food practices of her male relatives, she acknowledged that she did not cook for herself because her mother used to cook for her when she lived in Mexico and she never learned how to prepare food to her liking. In NYC, she often ordered take-away and sometimes relied on her older sister Andrea to cook for her. Maritza usually prepared a sandwich for lunch, which she ate in the car while driving from one cleaning job to the next and for dinner she either ate out or ordered take-away or she ate what the sister cooked. Maritza said, 'I eat whatever I can 'steal'/nick from my sister. I eat like a man who lives alone'. Andrea laughed in agreement. One night when I was over, Andrea was beginning to prepare dinner and Maritza was considering to order in food from a local Mexican café. In the end, Maritza convinced Andrea not to cook and to order food with her. Although eating out of the house and not cooking for oneself were seen as characteristics of single male migrants, my fieldwork illustrated that single migrant women, especially those with full-time jobs, shared similar practices due to the fact that they too migrated to the US without the person who was responsible for doing their food work in Mexico.

Elu, however, emphasized the fact that it was men who lived alone that did not cook. Elu was in her early thirties and lived with her husband, her sister and her sister's daughter. Elu and her sister, Paula, both worked in the evenings cleaning offices as well as the homes of many migrant men. They were always animated when they talked about the apartments that they cleaned. When I visited Elu at her new apartment she said:

> They live six, eight, ten in a house. Two or three in a room but no women…They don't have much in their house…Well, Ecuadorean men who are *solos* they *guisan* [cook] in their house, Guatemalans *guisan mas* [cook more] and eat in their house and they are a bit more worried for their health but Mexican men, no! Our *paisanos solos* [the countrymen who live alone]? Oh! Shoes over there, shoes over here, they throw them everywhere—they are worried

> more about work and not about their personal life…A can of beans, *picantes* [spicy salsas], cheeses, the *despensa* [basic food items]. *Los solos* don't keep food in the house but they buy. Others that work in restaurants *eat* at the restaurants. Those that work in construction, or in grocery stores or laying carpets these men eat out or they find a woman or a neighbour who can prepare food for them...They only keep *cervezas* [beer] in the house.

Elu's perception was that single men did not cook for themselves. Elu acknowledged that a lot of men worked in restaurants and knew how to cook but she said, 'Those that *da flojera* [do not bother, are lazy], they eat pizza, hamburgers. They don't cook, *cocinan por trabajo pero no por hambre*' [they cook for a living but not because they are hungry]. At first she explained that it was because Mexican men were too occupied with work to worry about their personal life but then she suggested that it was also laziness. This idea that men did not cook, partially due to a lack of care or due to laziness was common among my informants.

By talking with male informants I drew a more nuanced understanding of the experience of single Mexican males who lived on their own. Arnoldo, a man in his early forties, lived in a three-bedroom apartment. He shared one room with his nephew, in the second room a Mexican couple lived with their children, and in the third room two Mexican men lived.

> Arnoldo: I hardly eat at home there is no time. No! well, besides, I don't know what [ingredients] the food needs, my nephew he knows and because of this he can prepare food but I cannot.
>
> Marisa: Where did he learn to cook?
>
> Arnoldo: I think that he [learned] in Mexico the poor are very strong, sometimes their fathers, their families are working and they have to make their own food. So I think that his parents taught him so he knows. But in my case it is a little different because maybe we lived a bit better. I had my wife and before I

had my wife I had my mother and my sisters and we ate together and when I married, then my wife made food and I never [had to learn]—I used to work outside of the home and would just give her money and she would prepare food and I would arrive home and the food would be ready. I worked close to my house so I would come home to eat every day. His case [referring to nephew] is a bit different because his parents were very poor so that they went to work and he had to learn how to make his own food so I think that probably his mom taught him and for this reason he can make his food and I can't do it! *Comida sabrosa* [yummy food], he can make it, but I can't do it not even rice. I have to learn…

Marisa: Do you do your own food shopping?

Arnoldo: I don't do shopping, neither does he! Well, he buys in the *tienditas*, [little shops] there but he buys his eggs and his tomatoes, his beans and I just buy *comida preparada* [prepared food]. Yes, there is no time and I don't know how…And one has to bring the plates back, clean them…

Marisa: Do the people you live with do the same?

Arnoldo: The *señora* [lady] and her husband. She makes food and they eat there, together.

Marisa: Do they invite you to eat with them?

Arnoldo: No, because, it is the same apartment but everyone has their room. For example, for me, every day, I am working and walking the streets all day and when I get home I close the door and that is it [*cierro la puerta y ya*], I am inside and they are in their rooms or in the kitchen and so they make their own *comida* but I stay in my room.

Arnoldo's account suggests that he does not cook due to the fact that he lacks cooking skills, shares a cramped kitchen and because the women who used to cook for him are in Mexico. When I was at Graciela's *puesto* late one Saturday night, I met Olmedo who gave a similar account about why he did not cook in the house. He was a tallish man wearing a light ski-jacket, who pulled up in a truck and parked at the meter in front of her *puesto*. He ordered an *elote* and then

stood by his car eating it. He then came back and ordered another one. He explained that he liked her *elotes* better than the ones sold at the *puesto* just outside of his house because those were not well cooked. He told her, laughing a bit at himself that he was actually in bed but he couldn't sleep because he was hungry so he got up to get a snack. When I got to know Olmedo better I learned that he had lived in the US for fifteen years and was originally from Mexico City. He worked putting down wood floors and had done so for most of his time in NYC. Olmedo emphasized that he had very good working conditions, his boss was not always supervising him, he took breaks whenever he wanted to and his work hours were from nine o'clock to half past three in the afternoon. He lived with a Colombian man but neither of them cooked in the house. His housemate worked long hours and Olmedo was also on a salsa team that practiced four nights of the week in Manhattan. As a result, no one used the kitchen at his apartment, but he clarified that 'I know how to cook but I don't cook because I am alone'. He explained that he used to live with his two brothers, together they would shop for groceries but Olmedo's brothers went back to Mexico so he no longer had anyone to cook with. Olmedo said:

> Ok, I will tell you why I don't cook. First, because [to cook] you have to go shopping and that is an expense, second you have to cook and that takes time and third you cook and you are only one so you can't eat everything and you have to throw it out which is like throwing money into the garbage. You cook for yourself, for example, chicken with rice, but you can only eat half of the rice, well, I don't want to eat the rice the next day so I end up throwing it out so it is like throwing away money and time.

Although Olmedo no longer cooked for himself, he argued that it was not due to his inability to prepare food or due to laziness but simply due to the practicalities of living on his own. These comments suggest that it was more than laziness that led to eating out. It was due to the difficulties of sharing a house and kitchen

with strangers, the fact that cooking for one person did not seem efficient or economical and also in many cases that migrants did not have cooking skills.

Many female migrants also felt discouraged from doing the food work in the household because they lived in their boss's households. Female migrants who arrived to the US without partners or families went through job placement agencies to find work as live-in babysitters, caretakers or cleaners in exchange for a small salary, room and board. Although these jobs did not pay well working as an *interna* or *niñera* [live-in nanny] allowed women to save on food and rent, therefore enabling them to send the bulk of their salary back to Mexico. Informants noted that they aimed to shift from being *internas* to being live-out nannies over time, especially, once their partners or children migrated from Mexico to the US to join them.

Niñeras emphasized that live-in situations were difficult because they were not given full access to the kitchen or the ability to cook their own food. They often ate what the families or the children for whom they worked ate. In the case of Mireya, she was encouraged to eat the food that her female employer cooked. Mireya, who was in her early forties, had arrived in California in 1986 where she worked in a textile factory with her sister. Shortly after she arrived, she met her future husband, married and subsequently had two children. She decided that raising children in the US was too difficult and expensive and in 1992 she went back to raise her children in Mexico with her parents while her husband continued working in California. She and her children moved back to the US in 2000, this time to NYC, to join her husband who had moved there a few years earlier. After a few years, she decided to apply for a job as a *niñera* [babysitter] with an agency so that she could earn money. She left her children with her husband during this time and she found a position in Great Neck, Long Island, working for an Iranian Jewish family. She worked during the week and travelled by train back to her family on the weekend. She described her time

working as a *niñera* as one that afforded her little rest.

> They had a large house, one with many bedrooms and bathrooms, but you know where they put me? In the basement, in a big basement where the kids played. What kind of rest is that? There were no walls, no privacy…I didn't feel well in that house. [Working] five days a week for $300.

She said that she lost weight while working as a *niñera* because she was not able to eat the foods that she liked, and she also believed that the stress of her job reduced her appetite during the week. Mireya explained that she ate the same thing everyday. The woman who employed her cooked once for the whole week: grilled chicken, rice and vegetables. Mireya felt that her boss's food was healthy but very bland and offered little variety. Referring to her experience, she said, 'I did not care what I ate, I was given such little food that I ate whatever I was given'. Mireya said that she could not wait to return to her own house on the weekends to eat her favourite foods. She said that she could have purchased the foods that she desired but she said that it was both hard to cook in a kitchen that was not her own and it also seemed unwise because she was paid a low salary ($300 for five days) because food was included in the work agreement. Mireya said that when she lived as a *niñera* she would always be thinking of food.

> On the weekends, I would call up my husband before I arrived [at our house] I would ask him to prepare me all of my *antojitos*, like my *frijolitos* [beans] and *tortillas*. Over the weekend I would eat whatever I could, I had to take advantage [of my weekend]…. I would ask him if he can get something ready for me. Maybe he can buy me a *mamey, [mamey sapote is a sweet fruit native to Mexico]* or some chocolate so that I could arrive home and eat immediately.

After a few months working as a *niñera,* Mireya quit her job and began working out of her house again by taking care of her own children, her grandchildren and sometimes her friend's children, which she much preferred. Mireya did not enjoy living in another person's home or eating her employer's food. Like

Olmedo, she wanted to cook for herself but did not feel that it was comfortable or economical to do so.

Comida Casera [Homemade Food] from Someone Else's Home

Many single informants preferred home-cooked food to eating out because they found homemade food to be more affordable and of better quality. Single migrants who did not cook in their homes but desired home-cooked meals, found friends, neighbours and even ex-wives to do the food work for them. Through these relationships informants were able to access homemade food and avoid eating at restaurants while still circumventing the need to cook for themselves.

I met Matteo through Graciela and Felix who worked at a street stand. Matteo often worked the night shift at Graciela and Felix's *puesto*, or stand, in West Queens after they went home for the night. Matteo knew Graciela because their families had been neighbours in Veracruz, Mexico. Graciela was old enough to be Matteo's mother and she looked out for him. Matteo had come to NYC from Mexico two and a half years ago and admitted that he did not often cook and his eating practices and meal times lacked structure or regularity. He lived with nine people, four Mexican men, two of which he knew from back home, one Ecuadorean man as well as a Mexican couple and their son and baby. He had just lost his job at a Chinese restaurant before we met and during the time of my fieldwork he was doing various jobs. Graciela acknowledged that he was having difficulty and she explained that she tried to help him out. He was making only $200-50 a week and he tried to keep his costs to about $15 a day. He did many different jobs, some seasonal, and was always searching for work. I found out about one of his short-term jobs when, one day, I asked Graciela if she had seen him and she directed me to 88th street with a big smile on her face. I couldn't miss him, she joked, as he was wearing a big sign saying '*el niño Dios' [Baby*

Jesus]. I realized that he was indeed wearing a sandwich board that said 'Baby Jesuses' to direct people to a local shop where they could buy and repair dolls in preparation for the *El Dia de la Candelaria*.[19] Matteo also worked at Graciela and Felix's food stand at night. He vended fruits and drinks, like *champurrado* [a drink prepared with Mexican chocolate, maize flour, milk and cinnamon] and *arroz con leche* [a drink of rice, milk and cinnamon]. If he ran low on any drinks he called Graciela on his cellphone, she made more, and her partner brought it down to him. Graciela valued the fact that she could trust him to vend at the *puesto* and not to burn anything or steal money. A few days each week, Matteo came down to the *puesto* to ask if he could do any errands or pick up groceries for Graciela. She paid him a little and usually offered him *arroz con leche* and *tamales* for free, which he happily accepted.

Matteo also ran errands for a Mexican woman who lived in the same apartment building as he did. The woman had young children, which made it difficult for her to leave the apartment, so she paid Matteo to do errands for her and to pick items up at the *tienda*, or market. Sometimes she gave Matteo money to purchase items and other times he would bring back food for free. The *señora*, or lady, would repay Matteo by cooking for him at her house or treating him to a meal. One day when I met up with Matteo, he had just eaten a pint of shrimp soup purchased from the supermarket. He said, 'the *señora* invited me for a shrimp soup…it is expensive [nodding his head] but she bought it for me because sometimes when I go to the market I bring her and her kids food for free'. Although Matteo did not usually cook for himself, he did small jobs for a few female acquaintances and in exchange they prepared him food. Thus, he was

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[19] This celebration, on the 2nd of February, forty days after Christmas, is when baby Jesus dolls are dressed elaborately and brought to mass to be blessed.

able to eat home-cooked meals and to afford eating out occasionally despite the fact that he lived without his family and that he had little money.

I visited Graciela when I returned to the field the following summer after completing fieldwork. I hoped to run into Matteo who was more difficult to contact because his phone was almost always out of credit but she told me that Matteo had found a full-time job working at a supermarket. When I asked Graciela if she had seen him lately or if he still worked at her stand at nights, she said, 'he's [working] in Manhattan, he forgot about '*los pobres*' [the poor people] in Queens'.

Laura was in her early thirties and was a mother of three boys. She lived in her own apartment, down the street from her sister's family and nearby to the father of her children, Marcelo, from whom she was separated. Laura's story demonstrates how relations outside of the household were called upon to fill the desire for homemade food for those who did not cook. When I met Laura she told me that when she was living with Marcelo he complained that she cooked too healthily. In fact, she thought that one of the reasons that their relationship did not work out was because she did not always follow his rules and did not always cook the foods that he wanted. She complained that he ate out of the house a lot, at delis and restaurants, and that he drank excessively. Towards the end of my fieldwork, however, she told me that Marcelo was tired of eating out and had admitted that he actually preferred her homemade food to prepared foods. As a result, once or twice a week, he gave Laura money so that she could purchase and prepare food for him to his tastes. Laura said that she did not mind because he paid her a little to do this for him, which suited her because she was looking for part-time work.

In these examples, exchanges were gendered such that women carried out the food work in exchange for money or labour. Rather than eating out everyday,

these single men who lived without their families found a way to access home-cooked food by relying on neighbours, friends and ex-wives to do their food work.

Interestingly, more formalized arrangements also developed whereby individuals relied on *señoras*, or older women, to prepare a home-cooked meal for them each afternoon or evening. Paying a *señora* to do one's food work was one important way in which migrants circumvented the fact that they did not prepare food in their own homes. This was also one way in which women started their own part-time, flexible businesses.

Such an arrangement operated at the *abarrotería* that Gabriela's parents owned, and where many of the Mexican restaurants, groceries and carts in the area purchased their meats, vegetables and candies at wholesale prices. Hector worked in a large refrigerator in the back room of the shop. It was located on a quieter street a few blocks from the subway alongside the live-kill butcher and a textile factory. Hector had lived in the US for five years and had worked in restaurants in the area for the first three and spent the last two working full-time at the *abarrotería*. He currently lived with six people, all men from Ecuador and Mexico. He preferred his current job to his previous employment because he worked fewer hours, left work by six o'clock in the evening yet made approximately the same amount of money that he was making in the restaurants.

Hector received truck deliveries at the *abarrotería*, unloading deliveries into the refrigerator and reloading them onto trolleys and trucks when the restaurant delivery workers came to pick up their shipments. He also spent a large part of his day tearing off the ends of beans, removing the stalks of radishes and sifting through tomatoes to remove the rotten ones, being interrupted every time a delivery needed to be carted out to the trucks. Most of his daily meals and snacks were eaten when Hector was at work. He and his colleagues often

ordered Chinese take-out at noon, which was delivered to his workplace. He referred to this as a 'cheap, light snack', which would fill him up until he ate his lunch at two o'clock.

With the exception of the Chinese food he purchased at noon, his meals were provided by a *señora.* At first, I thought he was referring to a woman in his household who prepared his meals. However, Hector explained that he was talking about the woman parked just at the entrance of the *abarrotería* each day. She stood with her small pushcart in front of the black iron gates of the shop. When I first saw her, I thought she was selling *tamales* like many of the other women with pushcarts. However, her location was unusual because she was located away from the crowds on Roosevelt Avenue and the subway, on a block dominated by residences and industrial warehouses where pedestrian traffic was comparatively light. Hector informed me that the *señora* was stationed out front each day to provide meals all day for the employees at the *abarrotería*. I learned later that many workers in the area relied on her for food each week, but the majority of her customers were those working in the *abarrotería*.

The *señora*, Carolina, used to work for another vendor who sold *tacos, tortas* and *antojitos* about two blocks down from the *abarrotería*, but eventually the man who owned the stand had to move because he lacked a permit. Carolina decided to start her own business, she began selling breakfast but then she noticed she could make more money if she sold lunch as well. Eventually, she provided meals throughout the day to many workers in the *abarrotería* and surrounding businesses. Rather than paying per item or meal, she charged each worker on Saturday for an entire week (six days) of meals. She kept a pad with her at all times and noted what dishes and the size of the drinks that people purchased. Carolina arrived to the *abarrotería* at half past seven each morning, except Sunday, to serve breakfast. She usually varied her offerings and provided a few different options. She always brought *pan Mexicano* [Mexican sweet bread] and

tamales. In addition, she brought *tortas,* or sandwiches filled with ham, cheese or breaded chicken, at other times she brought pancakes or Mexican hot dogs. She varied her drinks, serving alternatively *arroz con leche*, *champurrado* or *avena* [[a drink prepared with oats, sugar and milk], as well as milkshakes and fruit juice. She brought more juices during the warmer months.

Then at half past one or two o'clock, Carolina returned with a heavy lunch. This included chicken in a tomato broth with noodles and carrots and squash followed by chicken or Mexican steak or pork ribs in *salsa verde* [sauce made with green tomatoes, or *tomatillos*, and *chile*] with rice, beans, *tortillas* [thin, unleavened bread made usually with corn] and a little salad on the side. The salad contained lettuce, tomato and carrots and most importantly according to one of the customers, a dressing made with *chile chipotle* [a smoked *jalapeño*]. At four o'clock sometimes she returned with tea, coffee and *pan mexicano* and then she left for the day. Gabriela and Carolina both noted that the *señora's* food was cheaper, the portions were smaller, the ingredients used were fresher and the *sazón,* or seasoning, was thought to be more authentic than what is found in Mexican restaurants. Carolina explained that in a Mexican restaurant a single broth or salsa is made and then ingredients are added to it depending on what is ordered from the menu. It is only at that moment that the specific spices and ingredients are combined to make the specific dish and as a result, she claimed that the restaurant meals have little flavor. In contrast, she expressed that she gives her soups and salsas time to stew and to pick up the flavors of the *chiles* [chili pepper], vegetables and broth so that they have more *sazón*. Gabriela also noted that when she prepared lunch for her husband, her portions were larger than those Carolina served. Similarly, one of the few workers at the *abarrotería* whose wife prepared his lunch ate larger portions than those served by Carolina, and this was something that the workers and Carolina remarked on.

Señoras, such as the one stationed outside of the *abarrotería* were also present at many construction sites in NYC. One construction worker, Jesus, had lived in the US for nine years. He worked in the suburbs of Long Island and explained that it was normal for workers to eat lunch together. He said that for the last three years he had been working with the same colleagues, most of which were from Ecuador. The wife of one of his colleagues had a car and cooked for her husband, Jesus, and their other colleagues at the construction site. He explained that because most of the men did not have wives or girlfriends in the area, or they had wives or girlfriends who worked, the men did not bring home-cooked lunch to work. As a result, the wife of the Ecuadorean colleague cooked for everyone for approximately ten dollars a day, which they paid to her at the end of the week. She cooked potatoes, white rice, as well as grilled beef or chicken. Although Jesus said that he would prefer to go to a deli, it was not easy to travel to one because he was dropped off at the worksite where he remained, without a car. He said:

> I'm Mexican, I'm not accustomed to Ecuadorean food. I don't like Ecuadorean food. The form of preparation, the ingredients that they use, I don't like them. Because of this, I like to go to a deli but we build houses far from delis so we have to get the food brought to us. The majority of men at construction sites have *señoras* who come to the construction site to feed them.

Jorge also observed the different ways in which construction workers procured their food. He had a job doing renovation and repairs in office buildings, usually in Manhattan, and ate lunch at restaurants in the area with his Mexican friend. Jorge explained that the people working at new construction sites often had *señoras* waiting outside selling lunch to them. Since he worked inside already-built office buildings he did not have this option but he said, 'the *señoras* find where construction work is going on around Queens, they go where the construction workers are. They hear the accents of the construction workers and

they know immediately where they are from and whether they would want Ecuadorean, Colombian or Mexican food'. While to some extent traditional gendered division of labour was reproduced through these strategies, it was also transformed because preparing food became paid labour as *señoras* made a living from doing the food work of others. Elu and her sister also noted that some of their friends who cleaned houses for single Mexican and Guatemalan men also prepared their meals. They cooked and left food in the apartments of these men so that they had something to eat when they returned home from work.

In some workplaces as well, such as a small grocery store in Corona, employers prepared meals for their staff. They recognized that most of their employees did not cook or have someone at home to cook for them. Noé worked at a grocery store located on one of the busiest streets in West Queens. Squeezed into the front of the store were aisles of fruits and vegetables stacked high in cardboard and Styrofoam boxes. The grocery store was almost always cramped with mostly women and children nudging their way through the aisles with their small trolleys. Hanging from the ceiling were Mexican style plastic buntings of red, green and white, the colours of the Mexican flag, that extended from one end of the store to the other and *cumbia* music was always blaring on the radio.

Noé was busy most days unpacking and cleaning vegetables in the back of the store. I asked him what he was going to eat for lunch, to which he replied, 'to be honest, I don't know. We have to see'. He told me that if I wanted to know what he was going to eat for lunch I had to ask his sister. Noé ate lunch at the grocery store each day. His sister cooked for him and the other thirteen people who worked at the store.

His sister, Angela, spent much of the late morning running back and forth from the cash register in the front of the store to the small kitchen in the back. She grabbed potatoes and vegetables from throughout the store and asked the

butchers for some meat. She assembled the items in the back of the store where there was a narrow countertop and a sink. A few of the other women working at the store would wash and peel the potatoes and cut the vegetables. Noé's sister, Angela, would prepare the meal, often a *guisado* [stew] that was assembled in a large stainless steel pot. Angela said that she decided to cook for her employees because she did not want to cook lunch only for herself and her family and she knew that most of the other workers did not have anyone to cook for them. The timing of the lunch meal varied but generally it happened around half past two or three o'clock in the afternoon. On the stove in the back of the grocery store there were two huge pots, one pot for the stew, covered with tin foil, and the other was a large pot of white rice and a large container of table salt. The offerings changed each day, about three or four days there was chicken or turkey in the stew and the other days the stew had a vegetable, like squash or string beans, rather than meat. Noé emphasized that rice rather than tortillas was eaten. Although, Noé preferred tortillas he said that it was time-consuming to heat up tortillas on the stove and it was not possible to keep them warm when feeding so many people, so they ate white rice instead.

One day in early February, Noé waited for his lunch to be ready. His sister had cooked a tomato stew of chicken legs and spices with cinnamon, cloves and red *jalapeños*. The first to eat was Noé, his younger sister and their cousin. The three of them sat down and they each took a bowl and filled it with a large spoonful of rice, a piece of chicken and some carrots and squash, all bathed in the soupy stew accompanied by a large glass of water. The grocery store was cramped and there was little room that could be dedicated to the kitchen and eating area. The stove was in the corner, sandwiched between the back exit door and the large, metal meat slicer that the butchers use to prepare meat cuts for their customers. I joined them and ate on upside-down milk crates in front of the stove. After we finished

eating, the butchers ate and then the pot was passed downstairs to the men who were working in the basement, after which point Angela ate.

By collaborating with *señoras,* friends, neighbours and employers, informants found alternatives to doing their own food work. Even though they did not have someone in their house to prepare food for them, they found a way to access homemade food through these various arrangements to avoid eating all of their meals at restaurants or on the street.

Doing Food Work in the Household

Sisters, Aunts & Wives

In addition to the migrants who delegated food work beyond the household there were some migrants who did the food work in the home and relied on individuals in their household to prepare home-cooked meals for them. This was the case for Laura's family. Towards the end of my fieldwork, Laura's two relatives from Mexico had decided to come to NYC to earn money. She was not sure how long they would stay but she agreed to house them while they were in NYC. Thus, Laura had to share her two-bedroom apartment, which she already split with her three sons, with her two visiting relatives. She cooked for everyone in the apartment. Although they did not eat together because they had different schedules, she cooked once a day and left the food on the stove for the relatives to heat up. Her relatives each contributed $20 every week with which she did their food shopping and cooking, with the assistance of government supports, which provided her some additional money for groceries. One of her relatives came home while we were talking and Laura went to the stove to show him that she had prepared chicken, rice and tortillas and he helped himself.

Jorge had arrived to NYC a few months before we met. He had come with a tourist visa and with plans to learn English. He was living in a fifth floor

apartment in Corona with his aunt, uncle, cousin, cousin's husband and the cousins' two children as well as two distant relatives with whom he shared a room. The second time we met, we made plans to meet about two blocks from his house. I was eager for Jorge to tell me what he thought about the places we passed and I was hoping he could suggest a place he liked where we could get something to eat. When I asked him, he immediately called his cousin who was at work but who called him right back. He asked her if she knew of any good Mexican restaurants in the area. She directed him to Northern Blvd. Jorge told me that his cousin knew better than he did the eateries in the area. He said that he rarely ate out. He rationalized it in this way, 'If I'm at home, then I'm not going to eat out on the street. It is only when I am working out of the house that I eat out'. When he was in his own neighbourhood, or close to home, he said that he had no need to eat out of the house because his aunt cooked for him.

At this time Jorge was focused on improving his English and reviewing for his Saturday class at the local community college. Although he felt that it was very important for him to grow 'economically and professionally' in the US he felt that this could only happen after he improved his English. It was only during the second half of my fieldwork that Jorge got a job in construction. Before he found a job, he spent most of his time at home working on his computer on a project with some friends in Mexico. He was helping to do the online marketing for his friend's website. Most days he stayed in the house, worked on the computer and ate at home. For breakfast he had *pan dulce* [sweet bread] that his aunt picked up from the corner bakery and then around ten or eleven o'clock he had a sandwich or a *torta* that she would prepare in the house, or sometimes he heated up dinner from the night before. Then around three o'clock, his aunt would cook him the heaviest meal of the day. It would often start off with a soup, made with small star-shaped pasta in broth, which he called *sopa de estrellas*

[star-shaped pasta soup] and then for the second course it might be *chile rellenos* [dish of *chiles* stuffed with meat and cheese] and tortillas or another hot meal.

He mentioned that his aunt and uncle would soon go back to visit Mexico where they would stay for at least half a year. His uncle and aunt had US residency so they were able to move across the border, but they had not been to Mexico for many years because of the expense of doing so. When I met up with Jorge after his aunt and uncle had gone back to Mexico, he told me that he was now able to finally have his own room, because he took his aunt and uncle's room while the nephews stayed in his old room. This time, when I asked him where he wanted to eat he suggested that we go to a Mexican Deli on the corner. He told me that he thought they had the best Mexican food. He said:

> Now that my aunt has gone, there is no one to cook. I eat out more and I spend more. I used to spend about $60 on food. I would give most of it to my cousin or aunt so that they could shop. But now, I spend about $80, I can save less this way. When I am working at home, I run out to Tulcingo [a Mexican bakery] and get a *cemita*—I ask for that a lot—a *cemita* with *pastor* [sandwich with slow-roasted pork, avocado and cheese and chipotle, lettuce and onion, accompanied by *pápalo*, a Mexican herb, and *chipotle chile*] or I go to the American deli to get an egg sandwich with bacon and cheese. Yesterday, we cooked *tacos de alambre* [a type of taco with a combination of beef, pork, bacon and cheese] but this is unusual. It was just because it is a Saturday and my cousin only has one day off so that is when we can eat together.

While Jorge's aunt went back to Mexico he began to rely more on prepared foods, suggesting the important roles that household arrangements and the fluidity of the household played in shaping his food practices.

Men & Food Work

There were also instances where men took the responsibility for cooking for themselves and for other men and women. For example, Jenny, a US-born

trained chef was married to Ruben, a cook from Oaxaca, Mexico, whom she met while working in the restaurant industry. Jenny explained that Ruben really enjoyed cooking at home and trying new recipes, and although she was often tired when she returned home after cooking all day he came home and cooked for both of them. Domingo, who was in his late thirties, was married and had lived in the US for 23 years. He too offered an example of men who cooked for their wives. He said 'I cooked before I was married and then I cooked for my wife because I did not want her to cook when she was pregnant…now I cook Italian [food], I am always watching the Food Network [A channel dedicated to cooking on cable TV] and making new things'.

A few of my informants lamented that they had not learned to cook before they came to the US but since they did not live with their mothers or wives, they cooked for themselves, admitting that they often read the back of the food packages to figure out how to cook certain foods. Andrés, who was in his early thirties and worked as a lawyer in NYC talked about how he learned to cook in the US. Andrés said:

> In Mexico, well, it is still very traditional [almost apologizing for it]. I lived with my mom and my mom cooked and then I lived with my girlfriend and she cooked for me and they would cook Mexican food. But Mexican food is hard to cook, you need lots of ingredients and I am afraid I am going to miss some spices or some ingredients so I don't cook it. I learned to cook pasta. I make pasta with tomato sauce, sour cream and meat and lots of vegetables, always with vegetables. I figured when I came here [NYC], well I like pasta, potatoes and rice so I just started making pasta. I did not want to cook Mexican—I never cook Mexican—because I am always afraid that I am going to miss ingredients but pasta is much easier to cook. At the beginning [when he first arrived] my family said 'You should eat Mexican food, poor guy' but not anymore. They don't care about me anymore [laughs]. But, well, we are in NY so we should just talk about NY.
>
> Marisa: Who taught you how to cook pasta?

> Andrés: I learned from my mom. I call my mom and she tells me what to buy and how to cook different types of pasta.

Andrés seemed apologetic when he described that he relied on his mother and his girlfriend in Mexico to do his food work and he emphasized his efforts to cook, albeit with his mother's advice, in NYC. These examples demonstrate that some men did cook for themselves rather than outsourcing their food work. I think Andrés was eager to demonstrate the fact that he cooked for himself and he seemed quite bashful when he told me that his mother cooked for him in Mexico. I think he wanted to emphasize his appreciation for a less rigid gendered division of labour. The fact that he commented to me that I asked a lot of questions about Mexico and remarked that we should talk about NYC instead, also suggested that he wanted to position himself in NYC and with the practices and gender norms that he associated with the city rather than with the 'traditional' way of life that he attributed to Mexico. Hirsch (2003) in her ethnographic study of marriage and sexuality among Mexican women in Mexico and the US demonstrates that performing gender norms and division of labour are ways in which individuals construct their identities. She suggests that individuals often explain their gender relationships and identities in order to construct themselves as 'modern' selves and to mark a contrast between their practices and the 'traditional' practices, which they tend to associate with Mexico (Hirsch 2003). I think Andrés emphasized the fact that he cooked for himself to mark his 'modern' identity and progressive understanding of gendered norms.

Women and Employment Beyond the Home

Although food work was negotiated in a variety of different ways in NYC, in many cases Mexican women played pivotal roles in carrying it out and men often relied on women, wives, relatives, neighbours and se*ñoras* to prepare their food. In this way, food work continued to be associated with 'women's work'. In this final section I demonstrate how the gendered nature of employment in

NYC helped to reproduce food work as women's work. For example, restaurant work was among the most popular migrant employment option in NYC but males rather than females dominated these jobs. Women more frequently worked at food stands, bakeries or as *señoras, amas de casa* [housewives], babysitters and cleaners, often these positions were part-time or took place within the home rather than outside it.

I rarely met women working in the kitchen of a restaurant. Men served as the chefs, prep workers, cooks and dishwashers, even though many women were qualified to fill these roles. Fewer female informants worked in restaurants than did male informants and those who did were usually un-married waitresses. Emma, a woman in her mid-twenties who worked in her family restaurant, associated both kitchen and restaurant delivery work with men. She explained that the men are the ones who work in the kitchen because it is very difficult work. She described them as running up and down from the basement to bring up foods and supplies all day. Emma said that the men would be sweating in the kitchen all day long. She and the other young women who worked in the restaurant waited tables, worked at the cashier and heated up pizza. The men delivered the pizza, prepped and did the heavy lifting.

> Sometimes I do the delivery but it is heavy to carry the pizza on the bike. I can ride a bike but with all of the cars it is too busy and it is difficult. People are beeping at me and— I will not do it. Even if you get tips I will not do it. The men do it faster and they get the jobs and they say 'I don't care what people say I will do it'. But the women, if they have to do delivery they will just walk rather than take the bike and then they will do closer deliveries and take more time.

At the restaurant that Emma's family owned the men worked in the kitchen and carried out deliveries, while the women, with the exception of her mother who was the chef, were waitresses and worked the cash register. Working in a restaurant was a less popular job option for married women. Emma's mother

was one of the few women I knew who worked in the kitchen of a restaurant and I suspect this was because it was the family's restaurant and it was necessary to keep the business going. Informants knew from experience that waitresses in West Queens were paid an hourly wage often far below minimum wage. Ultimately, their income was based on tips, which resulted in very low wages especially on daytime shifts. The exception would be at more expensive restaurants in Manhattan where tips were more substantial but in these restaurants the waitresses generally needed to speak English. At these more expensive restaurants, Mexican men tended to work in the kitchen and English-speaking individuals, who were sometimes the children of Latino migrants served as waitresses and waiters. Since kitchen work was seen as a male space and waitressing work was poorly paid, women tended to work in the home doing cooking, cleaning and babysitting or in the streets in more flexible, vending work. Many owned their own street stands or worked in *tiendas* and at jobs where they were able to take care of their children while they worked. Carla, a woman in her late twenties who worked in a *tienda* in West Queens noted that women, especially those with children, preferred vending food on the street or working in a *tienda* to working in a restaurant because such jobs allowed them to care for their children alongside. For example, many women allowed their children to play in the back of the *tienda* and female vendors could take their kids with them when they sold their goods on the street. Elu recounted her first job after she arrived in NYC. She found a waitressing job in Queens but made such little money that she quit after a few weeks. She is now a cleaner and prefers cleaning to waitressing because it pays more and offers more flexibility, for example, she can choose which jobs she takes and she does not work alongside her boss.

Laura's situation hints at why fewer women prefer to work in the restaurant industry. Laura, the single mother of three young boys was looking casually for a

job when I met her. She had recently left her husband and wanted to make her own money but she was uneasy leaving her youngest son with a babysitter. While she sought work, she took care of her neighbour's son and a friend's child a few days during the week to make some money. By the late fall of 2010, Laura found a job working in a store that sold socks, stockings and clothes. It was not ideal because it required that her oldest son pick up her youngest son at daycare and Laura did not return from work until seven o'clock. The hours were difficult, but Laura continued working in this job until the summer when her children were out of school for the break.

When Fall 2011 began, she became eager to get a job again. She made business cards, which outlined her ability to care for children and to clean houses. Her sister cleaned houses for a living, but there was not enough work for Laura to gain employment through her sister. She wanted work that was similar to that of her sister because she perceived her sister's hours to be flexible. Her oldest children were home from school by three o'clock, so preferably she wanted a job that allowed her to be home in the afternoons and evenings, which was not possible in restaurant work. She often highlighted the heavy drinking that took place at restaurants and bars in the area, noting that men worked and drank during their shifts at the restaurant and then, after work they went out and made trouble at the bars. She explained that she did not like leaving her house after eight o'clock in the evening because she wanted to avoid such scenes, as well as the robberies and crimes that took place after dark. She briefly considered the possibility of selling food on the street but she was concerned about the police presence and permit issues, and she felt that it would be too time consuming to prepare food in the house. Eventually, she ended working in the same store as she did the previous year. Laura's aversion to working in a restaurant stemmed from the difficult hours of restaurant work and due to her perception that those spaces were unsafe or dominated by males and drinking.

Laura explained that she only worked two years during her eleven years in the US, the period after she had her first son and before she had her second. She said that her husband had not wanted her to work. One day when I was at Laura's house, the role that husbands played in shaping the spaces in which women worked was made clear to me. On this day, Laura was caring for her three children and her neighbour's son. They were watching 'Harold & Kumar Go to White Castle' on the television when Laura's neighbour, Sandra, stopped by to pick up her son. Laura asked if Sandra needed her to watch her son this week while Sandra went to work but Sandra replied that she was no longer working at the restaurant because it required her to work too late and her husband disapproved. When Sandra left, Laura said to me, 'The majority of men, not just Mexicans, all Hispanics, they think if you have kids, you should stay home and watch your kids. If a woman has to work at two o'clock in the morning because of her work schedule, her husband won't let her—she will leave her job, rather than leave her partner'. Laura said that Sandra quit her job because of her husband's '*machismo*' attitude, or his reliance on traditional gender roles and male authority. Laura suggested that Sandra's husband expected her to defer to his control and to carry out the role of caretaker in the home, rather than work in a public, male space such as that of a restaurant. However, even Laura was not eager to work in a restaurant because of her own associations with those spaces, especially at night. These comments suggest that working in restaurants was not a desired position and women were discouraged and disinterested to work in these places.

Ana, was in her mid-twenties, and worked as a waitress at a Mexican restaurant in West Queens while also taking English classes. She expressed dislike for her job saying that she received a lot of attention from men. Sometimes, she articulated, men that she had never seen before came into the restaurant and they would kiss her and give her little gifts. She said that she did not like this, but she

felt she could not do much about it. In fact, working in a restaurant especially at night, was frowned upon by women and men, partially because of informants' understanding of what went on at these restaurants, many of which doubled as bars and clubs in the night time. For example, Emma once spoke to me about a job she had for a brief time when she was in high school. She worked at a restaurant and bar that doubled as a dance club. She was certain to emphasize that she was a waitress not one of the women who worked the bar, who were called *'niñas de la noche'* [girls of the night] *or 'catarinas'* [ladybugs]. She said:

> So what happens at these clubs is that the guys buy beer and they dance at the bar with these women, but this is different than a waitress at a restaurant. A waitress at a restaurant just does her job and serves the food but a woman at a bar, well she is the kind of girl that drinks with the guys. Girls charge two dollars per song [to dance with a guy]. A beer for a woman is ten dollars but for a guy is it five dollars. So five dollars goes to the house and the other five dollars goes to the girls. Guys can buy girls a juice for seven dollars but the guys don't like that. Waitresses don't get as much money—women go to do this [dancing] because they like that kind of thing and they like to dance. They start at (age) 17-18 and sometimes they lie. It is a fine if they are under age but the police do not go if there is no trouble. Mexicans, Dominicans and Colombians all do it…If I go dancing with my boyfriend we go somewhere else because it is strange dancing together with all of these women around.

Although Emma did not speak disparagingly about these women who worked at night she wanted to make it clear that she had been a waitress not a *catarina*. People on the street and signs on bar and restaurant windows often advertised the need for women to work as dancers and waitresses at bars (Figure 3.1).

Graciela and Felix who worked at a street cart in West Queens also negatively characterized women who worked in restaurants and bars at night. Graciela emphasized that it was not just men who drank in these venues but women as well. She raised her eyebrows with a disapproving glance, shook her head and

told me that she women are called *catarinas*. Felix agreed. He said these women are *floja,* or lazy. 'They don't want to do anything', he exclaimed. Felix explained that these women get drunk for free because the men pay them to drink. Felix added in English, 'easy money' and explained that the men spend a lot to drink and dance with these women.

Figure 3.1: Solicitation for Female Dancers and Waitresses at Bar

These examples show the ideas people had about females working in restaurants, kitchens and bars. Women seemed to be limited in the type of work that they could find and when they did work in restaurants and bars they were stigmatized for doing so. Working in a restaurant kitchen was largely considered the space of a Mexican male. Women more commonly worked as waitresses although waitressing work was seen as more acceptable for unmarried women.

Women often engaged in bar work, although it was stigmatized, not respected and seen as 'easy' work for 'lazy' women. Such work was thought to be carried out at unacceptable places and at late hours and was perceived as undesirable, risky and inappropriate for women, especially because such late-night work was also associated with prostitution and drinking. Arnoldo explained why he thought men rather than women worked in restaurants:

> Arnoldo: I say that the men, well in the majority of the restaurants it is all men. All men work there because I think that here in NY it is a city where everything is done fast and people eat fast and everything and women can't do this job in a restaurant.
>
> Marisa: Do you think they can't or they don't want to?
>
> Arnoldo: I think that the bosses think 'oh this is a woman, she can't do it'. She is not going to be able to bear this in the restaurants here because they have to move in these restaurants it's hard work! So, you don't find women in restaurants here, I think because of that. I know women who work, who do nails, who work in *tiendas* but [women] who work in a restaurant? No! I think that women work, for certain, but they work in different businesses. They work in beauty salons where they cut hair.

Thus, Arnoldo reiterated the perception that the restaurant was the domain of men, whereas women were more likely to work in other professions. He perceived women's work as that carried out in nail and hair salons and *tiendas.* These jobs were often associated with migrant women's work. Arnoldo also felt that women did not engage with certain types of work due to the preferences of their male partners.

> I think that the majority of us men do not want our women to leave the house because we are very jealous. I don't like if my woman goes to work because we know each other, I know the guys. I know they may say things like 'oh I like you, you're pretty' so they may 'win her' and manage to convince her to do 'something else'. This is why they prefer that their women stay in the house. Now, okay, but also there are women today, they don't

> want to just stay at home because they think, in case of a problem, they have to have some savings. What happens if tomorrow comes and he leaves me? What will I do? So, okay there is a problem and sometimes people separate because of this. Or sometimes they make an agreement with each other, otherwise they leave each other.

As the conversation ensued, Arnoldo hinted that restaurants and bars were less acceptable spaces for women because males dominated them, unlike nail salons and other spaces, which were dominated by women. As a result of the understandings of what restaurant work entailed and the perceptions related to the gendered space of the restaurant, Mexican women who were married or had children were less likely to engage in this type of work. Instead they found work as housewives, caretakers, *señoras,* babysitters and cleaners, this work was often part-time and flexible and took place in the home. Ultimately, this created a situation where women, especially married women with children, continued to spend much of their time in the domain of the home and be responsible for much of the food work and reproductive labour in the household. Importantly, some household responsibilities (i.e. cooking, cleaning and caring for children) became monetized as women did them not only for themselves but for others, however, this situation reproduced the idea that women were responsible for doing the household labour and food work.

Discussion

Household dynamics were reshaped by gendered patterns of migration to, and living arrangements in, NYC, and ultimately these changes influenced food work responsibilities and eating practices. Many migrant men and women came to NYC without their families and responsibilities for the preparation and procurement of their food was renegotiated. Migrants who lived without their families often relied on prepared food, take-away or restaurant food rather than doing their own food work. The difficulties of cooking in a cramped, shared kitchen, and the perception that cooking was 'women's work' influenced

informants' decision to outsource their food work. Informants' noted that food was served in larger portions in restaurants than at home. This is important from a nutritional standpoint because existing research has shown that larger portion sizes lead individuals to consume more, rather than leaving food on the plate once satiety has been reached (Rolls 2007). Furthermore, food consumed out of the house has been demonstrated to have higher energy and fat content than foods prepared in the house, and among overweight individuals, cooking at home is shown to be protective against obesity (French, Story & Jeffery 2001; Kolodinsky & Goldstein 2011).

Although informants often ate out of the house, they noted their preference for homemade food. In fact, migrants employed a variety of creative approaches to access 'homemade' meals. Some informants received food from their neighbours in exchange for small tasks/chores. In other cases, individuals paid female acquaintances, neighbours and relatives, to prepare for them a hot, home-cooked meal each day. Despite these approaches, however, migrants found themselves eating out more and eating in the house less in NYC as compared to Mexico. This chapter suggests the impact that migrating to, or living in NYC without one's immediate family had on food work and eating practices. It also suggests how contextual factors rather than solely individual choice shaped eating practices. That married women often became responsible for doing the food work of single women and men was not just influenced by household arrangements, but also by the fact that married women were less able to access well-paid jobs outside of the home and due to the fact that migrant workplaces (such as restaurants) were considered 'male spaces' and particularly unsuitable for married women. By selling homemade food, however, many married women were able to transform their domestic work into paid labour.

Thus, food practices were not shaped solely by individuals and their cultural preferences, as the acculturation narrative suggests. Instead, macro and micro

processes, such as patterns of migration, household arrangements, the separation of families after migration, as well as individual perceptions of the gendered division of labour shaped changing food work responsibilities and practices. Existing literature on migrant nutrition rarely addresses the fact that household arrangements and responsibilities may have been disrupted, and families separated, due to migration. It focuses research on women and their children and implicitly takes the nuclear family as its starting point (Sussner et al. 2008; Lindsay et al. 2009; Guarnaccia et al. 2012). In contrast, this chapter captures how less traditional arrangements, such as households comprised of acquaintances, friends, all males, and extended families influenced cooking and eating practices and changes. Moreover, it shines a light on how households shaped food practices, rather than focusing attention solely on the individual.

Dynamics within the household, however, did not single-handedly shape food practices. Time constraints and work schedules led many migrants to rely on someone else to do their food work. Since many informants spent much of their day at work rather than in the home, their food practices (and those of their family members) were strongly influenced by their work schedules. The next chapter looks deeper at how daily schedules, time usage and work patterns shaped food practices among informants.

4. THE LAST ONES TO EAT

> In the kitchens, the men, we don't eat well. Everyone has their own plastic pitcher that they fill up at the bar with soda [soft drinks] every few hours. Standing in front of a hot grill for ten hours you get thirsty. You don't have time to sit for *una comida* [a meal]. [Working as a cook] you have to trim the fat off of the meat and the steak and remove the bones from the fish. The customers only want the good parts of the meat so when I was hungry, I ate these *pedacitos* [little pieces] of meat or fat around the bones, well, if I didn't eat them, they'd be thrown out. I would fry them all with onion and garlic and throw them on the grill while I worked.
>
> *-Alejandro, mid-forties, discussing his job in the kitchen of an Italian restaurant*

Work experiences were central to the lives of my informants and daily schedules, rhythms, and time pressures were key themes that emerged in conversations with them. Schedules and sleep patterns were perceived as inconsistent, long, stressful and often out of control. The long and late work shifts and precarious schedules characteristic of the service sector—where the majority of informants were employed—shaped consumption patterns, food preparation practices, meal timing and the frequency with which migrants ate outside of the home. The fact that many informants worked in food establishments also influenced their relationship with food after migration. This chapter explores how time was managed, negotiated and perceived by informants and how time-use was also influenced by gender, occupation and documentation status. It demonstrates how work hours, unpredictable and precarious schedules shaped vulnerabilities towards certain food practices and whether informants considered their time schedules to be constraints or opportunities.

Eating Rhythms at Work

The daily routines described by informants revealed patterns in how they experienced time. Their overnight or late-night shifts and 'off-peak' schedules—

in which informants worked beyond the nine to five o'clock business day and on weekends—disrupted sleep and meal times and led to an inability to plan meals or control meal times and an increase in irregular snacking. Informants reflected on their long shifts which left them with no opportunity to plan when they were to break for lunch or dinner. They found themselves eating snacks throughout the day to stave off their hunger and buying prepared foods at restaurants and street stands close to their workplace because they did not have time nor permission to travel further afield to eat.

El Turno Por La Noche [The Night Shift]

The schedules endured by many Mexicans in West Queens become apparent from a walk down Roosevelt Avenue at nine o'clock in the morning. At this time of day, it would be unusual to see a food truck or cart in operation. Only in the late afternoon did the streets and corners become more and more crowded with stands, push carts, shopping carts, hand carts, trucks, tables, grills, and even prams filled with food and merchandise for sale.

My informants predominantly worked in service jobs, especially in restaurants, bars, delis, street carts, supermarkets and salons and as cleaners, nannies, construction workers and flower sellers. The long and 'off-peak' hours worked by employees in the service sector trickled down to affect the schedules of self-employed Mexicans and entrepreneurs who ran the street carts and trucks populating West Queens as well as the families and stay-at-home mothers related to these workers. For example, many food trucks arrived to the street at five in the evening and remained until eight in the morning while others did a single shift, arriving at twelve midnight and remaining until six in the morning.

Domingo, a married man in his late thirties, owned a successful *taco* truck with his wife. His truck was one of the most popular *taco* trucks in the area and he

was usually busy all night. He worked at the truck until late in the evening and was relieved by his wife Adriana, who usually came by at midnight to work through the morning. Queues developed at Domingo and Adriana's truck late at night. The men waiting at the truck or at the fast food *taco* venue across the street *Taco Veloz* [Fast/Quick Taco] often bought more than one order of food. Domingo pointed out that you could hear brief conversations taking place over the phone while the men waited in line, men asking what their housemates, friends or wives wanted them to bring home for them to eat. At night when the subway came to a halt on the platform above Roosevelt Avenue, you were likely to see a handful of men descend the subway steps to line up at the nearby food stands and trucks. One night, Domingo said to me:

> All these men are cooks in fancy Manhattan restaurants but they come back home and they want *taco*s. We're here, we're open, and we take the time to cook *carnitas,* [braised meat cut into pieces, usually pork] even when it's late, and they appreciate that.

There was a constant flow of (mostly) men ordering their food and perching over a small metal ledge eating *tacos* and *tostadas* on paper plates (Figure 4.1). As November approached a complete illegal winterization of the trucks and carts in the area took place as owners worked to encapsulate the small area in front of their street business with curtains, plastic insulation and even doors in a race to offer the most insulated environment for their customers. When spring arrived, tables and chairs began to cluster around the stands and trucks, with some even providing a waitress and table service for customers, much to the upset of the restaurant owners in the area, who felt strongly that they were taking their business away from them.

Restaurant owners and employees were also subject to working long and late hours to accommodate their clientele. Emma, who had been living in the US for fourteen years, worked at her family's restaurant in West Queens. She was the

oldest of three children. She had a younger sister (fifteen years old) and a younger brother (eleven years old). She came to NYC when she was ten, migrating with her parents and her younger sister to Elmhurst to live with her mother's sister.

Figure 4.1: Men Eating at Taco Truck in West Queens just after Midnight

Emma's family's restaurant sold 'specialties' from her town in Puebla, Mexico. They sold *tacos*, *tostadas* [fried *tortillas* topped with meat, cheese, avocados and lettuce], and *gorditas* [thick *tortillas* topped with meat, beans and cheese] as well as grilled meats with *salsa verde*, *salsa roja* [sauce made with red tomatoes and *chiles*] and *mole* [a dark, thick sauce made with *chile*, spices, nuts, herbs, fruits, chocolate and sesame seeds]. They also sold hamburgers and pizza. Emma

worked at the restaurant six days a week and she usually had to close it down at three o'clock in the morning. Emphasizing the 'off-peak' hours at which she worked. Emma said:

> No one is ever at home, [they are] always here; definitely the house is just for sleeping. My mom works here [at the restaurant] all day, my father comes in when he has time and I lock up. When I arrive home, everyone is sleeping, and when I wake up no one is home.

Household work schedules, such as those described by Emma, have also been observed in studies of time-use among working class families. Conflicting work schedules lead family members to have different sleep patterns, leisure time schedules, and days off of work, therefore limiting their ability to spend time together or to share meals (Warren 2003: 736).

Emma remarked that she liked to start her day with a heavy meal so that she could wake up. Because she felt that it was boring to eat the same thing all of the time, she would sometimes go to nearby restaurants, like the Greek diner up the block. At the diner she would eat her first meal of the day around three o'clock in the afternoon. She would usually get eggs, chips and coffee. Otherwise, she might just go to her family's restaurant and make something in the kitchen like scrambled eggs with *salsa verde*, rice, beans and tortillas with water or a soft drink.

During the day Emma's mother made soups, stews and *salsas* in the back kitchen. Emma worked at the cash register, heated up pizza pies and waited tables if the waitresses needed help. The restaurant was large but never very busy. Emma expressed disappointment that she had to work the night shift. On a few occasions she asked her mother if she could work less at the restaurant but her mother disagreed, arguing that Emma should actually be working more. Towards the end of 2010, the family expressed concerns that one of the

waitresses was taking money out of the cash register and Emma's mother wanted Emma to keep an eye on her by working longer hours.

Emma was unhappy that she had to work so many hours and upset that she never had time to see her friends or her boyfriend. She mentioned that she worked much more than her younger siblings and she felt that they had fewer responsibilities than she did when she was their age. She seemed to be both proud and resentful of this fact. Proud because she worked while her siblings played Xbox or Play Station but she also seemed jealous of both of them. She once remarked that they had an 'easy life' compared to her. She argued that because her sister arrived to the US when she was still young, she picked up English quicker than did Emma. Furthermore, since her brother was born in the US, his English was not only perfect but he would have more opportunities in the US than would Emma. He would be able to drive a car, to go to college out of state, which she desperately wanted to do, and he had a US passport.

Due to the hectic schedules that Emma and her family maintained, they were not able to find a time to eat together until late in the evening. When the family finally sat down, it was usually between nine and eleven o'clock at night. Emma and the mother agreed that they did not usually feel like eating anything heavy nor were they in the mood to cook for themselves at that late hour. Emma said:

> All other people they eat dinner but for us it is too heavy and we've been cooking all day for other people. We have to eat *pan mexicano*.

Usually in the evening someone in Emma's family was elected to pick up *pan mexicano* at a Mexican *panadería*, or bakery. Especially because it was very cold towards the end of my fieldwork no one wanted to get the bread so the younger sister, Erica, whom Emma often accused of not helping enough with the family business was chosen to go.

One night when Erica did not come to the restaurant, I offered to pick up the bread. There were a variety of Mexican *panaderías* in the vicinity and I nearly went to the wrong one the first time. I accidentally assumed Erica would go to the closest *panadería,* which is noted for its bread and is always crowded but Emma told me that they went to the *panadería* that was slightly further because you could get two breads for one dollar, whereas the closer shop offered only *one* piece of bread for one dollar.

Often at the nightly meal, everyone in the family had a hot drink, the mother and Erica drank *avena*, which sometimes the mother made, Emma's brother had *champurrado* and Emma ordered *arroz con leche*. The Mexican bakery was often packed at this time with a line filled with men and women bringing home bags of sweet bread and Styrofoam cups filled with sweet milk-based drinks. When the bakery bags arrived at the restaurant, Emma's family members each took their breads and their drink and sat and ate them in front of the two big televisions mounted on the restaurant wall. When I asked Emma to talk a bit about the evening meal she said:

> My brother just likes the top of the *concha* [sweet bread with thick sugar coating on top] and my mom eats the rest of it. My dad likes the donut with the sugar. I like the donut with chocolate on the top. My sister likes the *ojo* [a sweet bread shaped like an eye].

However, even this meal was not a nightly routine and whether or not they ate together depended on how many customers were at the restaurant and whether or not the entire family was at the restaurant at the same time. Her family's work schedule allowed them to eat together only if the cooking for the other customers had finished. At this late hour Emma's family was tired of preparing food because they had been busy cooking for their customers all day. Emma said that her family wanted 'something light', rather than a hot meal because most of Emma's family was going directly home to sleep after eating.

Emma described the happenstance of her eating schedules, which followed the rhythms of her family and work life, and were neither consistent nor predictable. Until the 'light' late night meal, she ate piecemeal throughout the day. For example, one day, after arriving to the restaurant she ate a piece of pizza while she was reheating pizza pies in the oven, then her mother's friend stopped by and they all sat down to keep him company. Emma sat with them as well and helped herself to banana and strawberry ice cream while she socialized. When the family went home after their late night meal, she snacked on foods in the kitchen while waiting to lock up.

Even on her day off Emma was often at the restaurant. One Sunday I stopped by the restaurant and was surprised when I saw her there dressed up in heels and a sequined top. I said 'I thought this was your day off!' to which she replied, 'Oh for us, this *is* a day off'. Emma was at the restaurant to meet a potential client to whom she sold Mary Kay, a line of mail-order beauty and makeup products. Direct selling[20] of beauty and diet products was very popular in West Queens, as I will discuss further in Chapter 7. It was about half past seven in the evening and Emma explained proudly that she had sold a few perfume bottles that day after which she was going to have dinner at the restaurant before going home. She emphasized that she needed to come to the restaurant even on her 'day off' because that is where the wholesale distributor delivered their weekly groceries and that is where her mother cooked for the family.

Emma made it clear that her eating practices were not always this way, despite the fact that her family had owned a restaurant for most of her life. She noted that her work schedule and eating practices changed drastically after they

[20] The term 'direct selling' refers to the selling of products to customers without being in a retail location.

opened up the current restaurant. After I got to know her better I realized that it was not just restaurant work but instead the particular contexts and unequal social relationships in which she was embedded that shaped her time schedule and food practices.

Prior to opening this restaurant, Emma's father Arturo co-owned another restaurant with a Colombian man who had papers, and thus they were able to secure a beer license. They were making a profit and doing well financially. A few years before I met Emma, the Colombian partner tried to move Arturo out of the business, feeling he no longer needed him. He used Arturo's illegality as a threat to make him leave the business but when Arturo did not leave, he accused Arturo of molesting waitresses at the restaurant. Arturo was arrested and the family had to pay large legal fees to a lawyer to get him released. Ultimately, the judge on the case shut the restaurant down because of the unsettled problems between the owners. Arturo started a new business eponymously named after Emma's hometown in Mexico.

At the time of my fieldwork, Emma's family was struggling to pay the bills in their new restaurant. Emma and her parents felt that obtaining a liquor license would solve their financial troubles. She declared in English 'no beer no business' and explained that having the license would allow them to raise their earnings substantially and turn the restaurant into a sports bar. Their lack of documentation prohibited them from applying for a license directly and they were forced to pay someone with documentation to apply on their behalf. This had proved quite difficult and they had already paid multiple people over many months to apply for a license for them, all of whom ended up taking some money without completing the job in its entirety. As a result, Arturo was almost always away from the business 'doing paperwork' while Emma and her mother worked double shifts.

Emma explained how her routine had changed once her father bought the new restaurant. She said that she and her mother were almost never home because they had to run the business. Furthermore, Emma had to quit community college to help the family in the business and to pay the rent. She described how her daily routine and food practices changed substantially after the closing of the previous business and the opening of the new one. She said:

> We began to get fat because of this new restaurant. Too much stress, sometimes we eat at one time and another day we eat at another time. I think it's a disorder or confusion of food or time—you eat what's in the street, there is no time to eat…Before we were here [before opening this restaurant] we would usually eat breakfast, lunch and dinner, a light dinner, because, you know, we are women [referring to her mother and herself] so you try not to eat after six [o'clock], or only a fruit, or some cereal. But we would eat in the house because [at that time] we only worked weekends, so my mom cooked and cleaned the house and we did the rest to help, but now she is always at the restaurant, so we have to eat out or in the restaurant, not at home. In the house we would eat different, we would eat specialties of my mom. It was better because my mom would cook less at the restaurant and more for us.

Emma associated her eating practices and weight gain with the fact that she and her mother had long work shifts, irregular meal routines and less time to cook for the family since they were usually cooking for the restaurant clientele. Although she blamed her eating practices on her work schedule and time constraints, it is important to recognize that they did not operate alone. Her experience of time was shaped not only by her family's involvement in the restaurant business but also by their economic difficulty and documentation status. Without a business partner or liquor license it was more difficult to financially maintain the business. Emma had to quit college and her mother had to spend more time away from her family. Furthermore, their inability to secure a liquor license due to their documentation status made their restaurant less

profitable. Emma's position as the eldest female child also made her more prone than her younger siblings to work long hours. Despite having graduated high school in the US, because she lacked documentation she felt there were few employment alternatives for her. She viewed her food practices as consequences of stress and a 'disorder of time'. It is important to recognize how a variety of stressful circumstances, such as her family's growing financial difficulties, her father's recent arrest, her dropping out from college, and the family's lack of documentation, patterned the time pressures that Emma experienced. To consider her food practices to be a result of changing cultural values, beliefs and preferences, or a process of acculturation, would be to ignore the web of vulnerability in which she was embedded and the time constraints that she faced which played key roles in her eating practices. Furthermore, the fact that her practices changed after the new business opened suggests that her nutritional change cannot be described as linear, or as a result of subtle change over her duration of time in the US, but rather due to particular contexts that she encountered at a certain point after migration.

Eating Piecemeal

Mexican migrants who worked as employees at restaurants also experienced irregular eating practices throughout that day. In addition to the set meal that employees were often entitled to at the beginning of their shift (see Chapter 5, p. 192-4), there was inconspicuous food consumption throughout the work day. The kitchen staff rarely had time off during their shift for a meal. They prepared meals and stood over the sink or the grill all day. Regardless of how cold the weather was outside, it was usually extremely hot in the kitchen. Employees had free access to drinks on tap at the bar, such as soft drinks and juices, which they would utilize to keep themselves hydrated and caffeinated. During work, if they ate, it would often be piecemeal. Informants sometimes threw an extra rib or chicken wing on the grill for themselves and it was in this way that they ate

during their shift, as the excerpt at the beginning of this chapter suggests (see p. 121). I spoke to one man, Alex, who worked as a bartender in an expensive Cuban restaurant. He was in his early thirties, born in the US but considered himself Colombian. He described the experience of being in charge of the grill at a restaurant:

> Look, you are working in the kitchen, sometimes in the basement of the restaurant, and the room is hot. You are working over the grill—which is 300-400 degrees Fahrenheit—you are working over it all night and you are not hungry but you are thirsty. Well, the soda and drinks are on the house. I used to work over the grill in Miami but when I moved here, I applied for a job and they were going to pay me nine dollars for the same job that I got paid $16 in Miami for.

He was quite dismayed because he thought that NYC would pay a better salary because of the higher cost of living compared to Miami, especially at an expensive restaurant. He soon learned that, in NYC, the kitchen staff was composed of Mexicans who earned a low hourly wage. He decided to become a bartender where he was able to make more money per hour. He described the hierarchy of the restaurant and the difference between his role and that of the Mexicans working in the kitchen basement. Individuals who had knowledge of English, such as he did, worked as bartenders and wait staff. Those who had limited fluency in English worked in the basement. He described the particular difficulties faced by kitchen employees, many working ten to twelve hours at a stretch in a hot basement kitchen:

> We are upstairs getting tips and yelling at them if the order is not right. They have the worst job in the restaurant. They are down there and we are upstairs at least making tips…so we try to keep them happy. For Christmas we got them scratch cards and three bottles of tequila, which they drank during work. We always send tequila and liquor down there [to the kitchen] because it gets tough and they need to keep going.

As well as eating piecemeal, they also drank piecemeal as alcohol was used to ameliorate the difficult work conditions endured by kitchen workers. The pace of restaurant work and the precariousness of their work left employees, especially those working in the kitchen, little time to eat. Restaurant workers, however, were not the only ones to experience time pressures, many informants who worked in construction also noted the limited amount of time that they had to eat. Miguel explained:

> I work ten days in construction and then I have a day or two off. My food changes every day, [it depends on] when I work, when I don't work. When I don't work I cook at home, it is more economical than eating out but when I work I don't have time to cook. For us in construction I would say Chinese food is the most popular food, and more popular than other fast food. With other fast food and KFC [Kentucky Fried Chicken] you have to order at one window and then you get referred to another window and this all takes time but if you eat Chinese food you order it and *al momento* [on the spot, immediately] it is ready.

Miguel, who lived alone without his family, notes how his work schedule influenced his eating routine. He describes his reliance on Chinese food primarily because it was faster to order and pay for than other types of fast food. This excerpt illustrates the severity of time pressure that Miguel faced, such that even fast food was not fast enough for him. It also suggests that time constraints were a primary factor in shaping decisions about what to eat for lunch.

Horarios Desordenados [Messy Schedules]

Informants often referred to their days and schedules as '*desordenado*' [messy]. Although informants eventually found some time to shop, eat or cook during their days, it was often hard to plan at what point in the day they would have time to do these activities. As a result, they dealt with a degree of uncertainty in their schedules that led them to rely on convenience and prepared foods.

Clementina, a married woman in her early forties, who has been living in NYC for twenty-one years, was originally from Puebla. She rented her own *puesto* selling freshly made potato crisps, *churros* [fried dough covered in cinnamon and sugar], *gelatinas* and instant coffee. She worked six days a week from the late morning/early afternoon until eight or nine o'clock in the evening. Some days she received help from a young woman who just recently arrived from Mexico who would fry the *churros* and crisps. Clementina emphasized the unpredictability of her schedule, when I went grocery shopping with her one evening. It was one of the few days when Clementina was not working at her street stand during the course of my fieldwork. In fact, hardly any carts were out that day because the snowfall had been very constant (well over 25 inches had piled up over the winter) and the weather was so cold that many vendors felt it was not worth their time to endure it. Most could not even find a strip of sidewalk without ice or snow where they could set up their *puesto* on level ground.

We went to a grocery store that many informants frequented just north of Hidalgo Avenue. It had one of the largest selections of fruits and vegetables among the local supermarkets and my informants often commented that it had the best prices. Clementina and I walked through the produce aisle passing piles of fruit: apples, a variety of mandarins, mangos, watermelon and avocados. Clementina hesitated as we passed the aisle but did not put anything in her basket then she doubled back and picked up a bunch of bananas. She bought a few items, some for her house and other items for her *puesto* but she did so sparingly. She said that she tended to go shopping a few days a week and to purchase only a few items at a time. She felt that because her and her husband's schedule were unpredictable she did not know in advance what she would need so she preferred to shop frequently for only a few things. Looking at the bananas

she picked up, she noted that they would probably go bad before she had a chance to eat them or use them to make a smoothie.

Sometimes she would go to the larger depot where she purchased items for her *puesto* for less money but such a trip required waiting for a car service to pick her up because the depot was in another area of Queens. The car service was much cheaper than a taxi but difficult to rely on. Once when Clementina wanted to go to the depot to pick up cooking supplies, she called the car service and left a message to reserve a car but it was only hours later that they returned it. When she did hear back from the service they told her they were too busy to pick us up. This type of unpredictability typified Clementina's daily schedule.

By describing Clementina's routine on a specific day, the variety of temporal circumstances shaping her eating practices becomes clear. Although Clementina did not have to set up her cart until about eleven o'clock, she had a lot of preparation to carry out in the morning. She had to pick up her cart from the local garage where she stored it overnight and walk it to her spot on the street, or she had to wait for it to be delivered by a man whom she paid to do so. In the morning she also had to make the bottom layer of the *gelatinas* that she sold the following day.

Clementina explained that she usually attempted to make a *licuado* [a smoothie or shake] for breakfast in the morning but many days she was running late so she went to the Mexican bakery near her house and grabbed a ready made yogurt smoothie made by Lala (a leading Mexican milk brand available in supermarkets and *tiendas* in West Queens) rather than making her own. Although she expressed her preference for the homemade smoothie, the packaged one was more convenient, and she also found it to be tasty, 'it's from Mexico', she said, as if to suggest its authenticity.

Due to the relatively strict rules governing street cart vendors, it was essential that she did not leave her stand alone with someone who did not hold the vending permit for that cart, because otherwise a ticket could be raised against her. Thus, she tended to eat foods that she was able to purchase without spending much time away from her stand. At noon a *señora* selling *tamales* in the area passed her stand. She purchased a *tamal de rajas con queso* [cornmeal with cheese and strips of *chile* wrapped in a corn husk] and a large cup of *arroz con leche*. At three in the afternoon she had another snack. Her *puesto* was just in front of a Colombian restaurant and so she ordered a few dollars worth of *empanadas* [fried pastry with potato, meat, cheese and/or vegetable filling]. On other days she would order *chicharrones* [fried pork skin] to satisfy her hunger or go to the bakery to get a sweet Mexican bread to take back to her stand to eat. Her preference, she said was for 'something quick that I can eat at my stand with my hands'.

In the late afternoon, for lunch, Clementina often ordered from the nearest branch of *Taco Veloz*. It was not her favourite restaurant but it was close to her stand and she was able to place her order by telephone. After ordering, her assistant or the man selling identification cards in the stairwell behind her *puesto* could pick it up quickly. There were also a few Mexican and Colombian restaurants that would deliver directly to *puestos*, a practice that developed due to the large demand for take-away among cart owners. On that afternoon she ordered from *Pollos Mario*, a restaurant that offered different Colombian specials each day and had delivery service. She purchased a grilled steak with rice, beans and a salad for approximately six dollars. She preferred this restaurant because they offered *lunch* specials until five o'clock, and this enabled her to eat affordably in the late afternoon when many other restaurants had already applied more expensive dinner prices.

With regard to dinner, Clementina said that, for her, it was *una sorpresa* [surprise] because her husband picked it up on his way home or brought it back from the Italian restaurant where he worked. Clementina was very clear to reiterate that she did not cook at home. 'Almost never, well, maybe I might cook dinner once a week'. When I first met her she told me that she was probably not the type of person I should be talking to because she did not know much about Mexican food because she never cooked. She often acknowledged that she did not cook at home and she explained her mother's disapproval of this. She remarked:

> I talk to my mom over the phone, we talk all of the time because she sends me the ingredients and *esencias* [flavors] for my *gelatinas*, but she says, 'Clementina, why can't you cook?' She thinks that I am lazy and she doesn't understand why I eat on the street. But I tell her that it just isn't practical to cook here. When I get back from work, I have to make the two layers of *gelatina* [she is referring to the bottom two layers of her jello molds] so that they can set over night in the refrigerator. When I finish there just isn't time to cook and I just can't bear [the thought of it] it *[no lo aguanto]*.

Clementina described the constraints that she negotiated in NYC. She explained that in Mexico she did not work formally and her job was to assist her mother with the *torteria* [sandwich shop] that she operated out of her house. She said that she had more time to do aerobics and play basketball in town and to cook with her mother, but she also had less money to buy food and fewer opportunities for work. She reflected on these contrasts, saying 'there [in Mexico] we can't find jobs, we can't get enough money, but here there are more work options but no hour for lunch'. For Clementina, improved employment opportunities placed new constraints on her time that ultimately shaped her food practices. Although she made more money in NYC she had less time, suggesting how economic and temporal constraints together shaped food practices, and one resource was often sacrificed for the other (see pp. 152-4).

Clementina not only experienced a lack of time and an exhaustion towards cooking and preparing food but also a feeling that she could never anticipate when she would have time for cooking and eating. These conditions shaped Clementina's reliance on fast food, prepared food and foods that were affordable and easily accessible from her cart. Her unpredictable schedule also influenced the context in which she ate and it de-socialized and in-formalized her eating routine as she was generally eating on her feet and while working and serving her customers, thus eating became secondary to other (paid) activities.

'Para Matar el Hambre' [to kill/satisfy hunger]

One or two months after meeting Graciela and her husband Felix, I started helping them out with some errands. Graciela was in her late thirties and Felix was in his early forties. They lived together with Graciela's adult son. Felix used to eat from Graciela's street cart, which is how they met three years ago. As he told me this story, he pointed down the street to a shopping trolley that was locked to a sign on the sidewalk. He explained that the shopping trolley, which they continued to use to shuttle food back and forth from their apartment, was the one in which Graciela sold food when they first met. Soon after Graciela and Felix met, he quit his job as a handyman and joined her to sell food on the street. As a result they were able to set up a stationary street stand, which was a step up from the street cart.

At first I was not sure if either of them wanted me to help them with errands. Graciela, however, seemed to appreciate my helping Felix. She could not help him because of a back problem. Similarly, Felix appreciated my sitting with Graciela to help her vend, because he was always busy preparing and shuttling food from their home to their stand during the day.

One day, Felix and I went to a few supermarkets to find the best price for frozen corn and mangos—this would allow him to make maximum profit on these

items at his stand. On our way back from the supermarket we passed Subway, a sandwich restaurant chain. A huge sign was on the awning that read: '$5 foot long'. Felix decided to stop off to get a foot long sandwich for the man who worked at the *tienda* outside of which Felix and Graciela set up their stand. Their relationship with the man who owned the *tienda* who they referred to as *el Árabe* [the Arab] was crucial for them. The *tienda* owner allowed them to set up their table outside his shop, thereby giving them legal permission to vend on the street. Without this agreement, Graciela and Felix would probably have to vend in a more clandestine way, using a mobile shopping cart, like the *tamal* vendors. While we were in Subway, Felix remarked on the low price of the sandwiches and he decided to also get one for his wife Graciela. It was about four o'clock and we traipsed back carrying twelve mangoes, six kilos of frozen corn and two foot longs filled with turkey, American cheese, jalapeños, zucchini, tomato, lettuce, ketchup and mayo. Graciela ate the sandwich, managing bites every so often while serving customers. She remarked that the reason why it was hard for her to eat during the day was because when she ate, she could not yell out the names of her specialties to the walkers-by nor make eye contact with them, which she felt was key to bringing in customers. As a result, she always preferred to have someone else at the stand while she ate so that they could bring in business. A couple of days later I was talking with Graciela while folding napkins and she said:

> We eat two times during the week and on weekends we don't eat at all. Listen, I don't worry about this because these days [weekends] are better because we earn a little extra.

Graciela's comment brings to light two important points. Firstly, it suggested that her priority to earn money was more urgent than having a regular schedule or eating routine. Secondly, Graciela's comment contrasted my own perception of events. Although I knew that Graciela and Felix's consumption practices were

sporadic and inconsistent I thought that they usually managed to eat something during the day by picking up food or a sandwich at some nearby venue or running back to their house to make something fast. Graciela clarified this impression:

> Listen, for me, a sandwich is not *una comida*, for Americans a sandwich is *una comida* but for me it is more like a snack. It is something to stop the hunger for a bit—to hold you over until you can get home to make a meal [*un sandwich es para aguantar hasta llegar a la casa*]…beans, tortillas and *chile* make a meal.

When we talked about food, Graciela often mentioned the difference between the food that she ate in the street to stave off hunger, which she referred to as *antojitos*, and the food she ate in her home, which she referred to as *comida*. Graciela and Felix usually returned to the house to eat around ten or eleven o'clock in the evening, but until then Graciela would 'satisfy her stomach' with small snacks or *antojitos*. She often went into the *tienda* behind her stand to buy a roll of Maria-brand biscuits, fried plantain crisps, a sandwich or a bagel with cream cheese. Sometimes, if there weren't that many customers, she would run to buy *tacos.*

The availability of *antojitos* in West Queens was readily apparent. The street stands and the sides of food trucks usually made a mention or reference to *antojitos* (Figure 4.2). Some signs simply said '*quesadillas*, *tacos* y *antojitos*' or '*antojitos mexicanos'*. The term *antojito* comes from the verb *antojarse*, which means to want, crave or desire. Usually when informants talked about *antojitos* they were referring to fast food and street food but inherent in the term was the idea of satisfying one's craving. Many informants did not consider the street food that they ate to replace full meals but rather it was thought to 'hold them over' until they had time for a full meal. One informant explained how he perceived migrants' changing food practices over their course of time in the US, he said:

> In Mexico, people eat a lot of *guisado* [stews or savoury cooked food] and *comida balanceada* [balanced food] but here Mexicans eat *tacos, tostadas* and *quesadillas*, they eat hamburgers and cheeseburgers too, but the big change is that in Mexico they eat Mexican dishes [meals], but here they don't have time so they eat Mexican fast food— *antojitos*—on the streets.

Figure 4.2: Street Stand selling Mexican *antojitos*

The consumption of *antojitos* is important to better understand food practices and change. Informants replaced and/or supplemented Mexican stews and home-cooked meals with convenience foods, snacks and Mexican *antojitos*, often in efforts to stave off hunger and due to the inability to stop work for a full meal. There is a substantial qualitative difference between these foods. Whereas Mexican stews and savoury dishes are often tomato-based and often contain

boiled and broiled meats and vegetables and may be served with beans and tortillas on the side, Mexican *antojitos* are usually prepared with tortillas [often fried], cured, salted or fried meats, cream, cheese and sometimes *chicharrones*—foods that are generally energy-dense. The supplementation of meals with prepared foods and *antojitos* has implications for informants' food practices and nutritional outcomes. It also further challenges the narrative of acculturation concept, which suggests that it is a switch from 'Mexican' foods to 'American' foods that is responsible for nutritional change. Perhaps, what is more important in understanding changing patterns is the switch from eating home-cooked foods to enjoying *antojitos* and street food due to time constraints.

Gendered Experiences of Time

The examples below illustrate how gender relations, documentation status and occupation shaped daily routines, experiences of time, and ultimately food practices. Ramiro and Ana were married and both in their mid-thirties. They moved from Puebla ten years ago and settled in Corona, Queens. In Corona, they sold *tamales* in the late night for people coming home from work and the bars and then again in the early morning for construction and service workers commuting to their job. In the late afternoon and evening they also sold *gelatinas*, fresh potato chips, and fruit.

Approximately eight hours were needed to prepare and cook 120 *tamales*. It took Ana two hours to prepare the *tamales*: to knead the *masa* [dough] with the *manteca* [pork lard] and to make the salsas and the meat fillings, and around five to six hours to cook two batches, each of sixty *tamales.* She was responsible for cooking and selling the *tamales* and preparing the snacks that her husband sold later in the evening. Ramiro and Ana and their two teenage daughters described how this process shaped their sleeping and eating practices and how the smell of the steaming *masa* would percolate through their tiny apartment while they slept. While Ana was cooking the first batch of *tamales* around eleven o'clock in the

evening she tried to get some sleep. Then, before she went out to sell the first batch, around two o'clock in the morning, she put the second batch on the stove to cook. She returned home, maybe slept for a bit and after the next batch was ready, around five or six o'clock in the morning, she went out to sell it. After selling both batches she came home to have a breakfast such as *champurrado* and *pan Mexicano*. After breakfast, her children went off to school and she went to sleep until two or three o'clock in the afternoon.

Ramiro and Ana almost always ate in their house. Ana usually ate one meal a day and had snacks for the rest of the day but Ramiro had two meals a day [one meal was usually leftovers from the day before]. When I asked why Ana only ate one meal a day she said that it was because she did not always have an appetite for a large meal and that she was too exhausted to prepare food for herself. She noted that her family had a variety of different food preferences. Her husband liked spicier foods than her kids did; because her children were born in the US, she rationalized. Furthermore, her husband liked vegetables and stews but Ana preferred rice and breads and disliked vegetables. By the time she finished making and vending the *tamales* and cooking a variety of different dishes for her family, she had little time and enthusiasm to prepare a meal for herself.

Both Ramiro and Ana had challenging time schedules, dictated by when the demand for *tamales* was greatest in West Queens. The result was a busy and disruptive sleeping and eating schedule, especially for Ana. As Brettell (2003a) describes, women, especially after migration, are often faced with having to take on 'productive' activities outside of the house in addition to 'reproductive' activities within the house (see Chapter 3). This often leads to increased responsibilities and burdens (Foner 1999; Brettell 2003a). This phenomenon is referred to as the 'double day' or the 'second shift' (Brettell 2003a: 190-1). It has been suggested that gendered productive and reproductive responsibilities result

in women having less time for themselves and greater 'time poverty' than men (Warren 2003; Bryson 2007). Ana actually appeared to have a 'triple burden' of work. She was expected to feed her family, vend *tamales* and because of the gendered nature of food preparation she was also expected to prepare the snacks and *tamales* that she and her husband sold each day. She was the last person to eat; she ate after her customers, her husband and her children. She sat at the bottom of the food entitlement hierarchy and relied on quick high-density snacks, like *champurrado* and breads rather than prepared meals to take care of her hunger throughout the day. Research has suggested that power dynamics shape entitlement to 'free' time and that the degree to which one's time is taken up by others is patterned across class and ethnicity (Griffiths, Rogers & Anderson 2012; Schwartz 1978). In the case of Ana and Ramiro, gender dynamics within the household shaped Ana's limited entitlement to 'free' time or time to care for her own nutritional needs.

The gendered nature of food preparation and *tamal* vending led Ana to shoulder the burden or work, have a disrupted sleep schedule and little time to care and cook for herself. It was extremely rare for men to sell *tamales* and informants often signaled that it was 'women's' work. When I asked Ramiro if he ever made the *tamales* he said his wife made them because it was *her* specialty not *his*. When discussing the dearth of male *tamal* vendors, Arnoldo explained to me:

> Women are the ones who sell *tamales*. Men don't sell them because, you know, we from Central America we can't do this. We think it is the work of a woman. The trucks [that sell food], well men can do that but not sell *tamales*. This is an opinion, though it is very ignorant, very closed. Those that can't sell *tamales* are very closed-minded they just don't know, they don't understand that men and women can do these jobs. They think that men need to work in construction, they need to do hard labour, they need to do heavy labour, that is for men, not the *tamales*…but it is also that the street is filled with women from the *pueblos* [village], they are

> serving their *tamales*. That is what they know how to do, so they continue to do it when they come to NYC.

The examples of Ramiro, Ana and Arnoldo allude to the gendered nature of food preparation, and *tamal* vending, and suggest the ways in which gendered responsibilities for cooking shaped time-use and food practices.

Arnoldo's characterization suggests that rural Mexican women continued living in NYC as they did in Mexico without changing or adapting to their new circumstances. However, many Mexican women sold *tamales* not because it was a natural practice for rural Mexican women or because they were grasping to their 'traditional' life ways but because it was one of the few practical ways in which women with children could negotiate a living in NYC. It was also a business that required little overhead or advance investment and it offered women more flexibility than other forms of employment because they could carry out *tamal* preparation work in their house while also caring for their children. Furthermore, since *tamales* could be prepared in the home [rather than upon order like many other street foods] and because they were able to be kept warm for a few hours without the aid of an electric hot plate, they could be sold in the street without the use of electricity or a preparation table. This made *tamal* vending a viable option for women who might need to quickly vacate a space on the street to avoid being ticketed by police for failing to have a permit. Thus, although Arnoldo suggests *tamal* vending to be a natural employment option for rural Mexican women, it may rather be a result of a more complex negotiation of structural contexts.

The case of Rosana further describes how time experiences were patterned by gender and documentation status. Under the elevated tracks of the 7-train that runs along Roosevelt Avenue, there were many Mexicans selling *tamales* out of old shopping trolleys. They were easy to spot because they almost always carried two large plastic thermoses, one containing *arroz con leche* and the other

champurrado and an aluminium *tamal* steamer—filled to the top with 100-150 *tamales.* If you pass by when the *señora* lifts the lid of the steamer to pick one out, you can smell the *masa* or cornmeal immediately. I was hoping that I would be introduced to Rosana who sold *tamales* under the 7-train, by other street vendors, but it always proved difficult. After exchanging pleasantries and buying *tamales* over the course of a few weeks I sat down beside her to chat. Rosana talked about her business but a bit reluctantly. Eventually she mentioned that she did not usually spend much time talking on the street because the quicker she sold her *tamales* the faster she could go back home.

She lamented that she recently received four tickets for vending *tamales* on the street. 'This is why I have to get out here early and sell my *tamales*. If I am early the police don't bother me, but if it is late…who knows?' Rosana explained that she usually woke up around half past one in the morning to prepare and steam her *tamales*. She would spend the majority of her time vending under the train, selling one *tamal* for one dollar but she would also drop by different *tiendas*, or shops, to sell to Mexicans working the early shift. Laureano, another informant who worked stocking vegetables and *chiles* at a Mexican deli nearby, always waited for a señ*ora* to stop in to deliver tamales and a hot drink to him in the morning. The women selling *tamales* out of shopping carts were some of the most vulnerable vendors in the area. They held a position that could be referred to as 'double illegality': they did not have a permit to sell on the street and many of them, as Rosana told me, did not have documentation to reside in the country. In this way, Rosana's work schedule and daily routine was extremely precarious, she did not have a permanent position in which to vend and she was never sure when or if her vending would be interrupted by the police.

Without documentation it was impossible to apply for a vending permit. Although vending permits were free in principle, there was a cap on how many vendors were allowed in a defined area of the city. Thus, even if someone had

documentation and thereby could theoretically apply for a permit, the ability to move to the top of the waiting list could take years and often the only way to do so would be to 'buy out' someone who was already at the top of the waitlist, an extremely expensive option (Smith 1996). Vendors could be fined hundreds of dollars if they were caught for vending without a permit or license. My other informants who did have vending permits, often proudly remarked that they could vend at all hours because they were 'legal', they often contrasted their situation with the situation of the women selling *tamales*, joking that the *tamal* vendors only vend at certain hours.

In the case of Ana and Rosana, time constraints, unpredictable schedules and precariousness at work, altered appetites and disruptive sleep routines led to a reliance on easily accessible and high-caloric snack foods that were prepared, cheap and ready at a moment's notice. Their busy schedules lead them to eat in an unstructured way, in the sense that they did not have the opportunity to plan or cook their meals, nor the ability to plan or control their meal times and they relied more on snacks than meals. Their experiences demonstrate how time-use intersects with gender and documentation status to shape food practices. Thus far I have discussed the perception and experience of time among a variety of migrant workers. Among individuals who were not in the workforce the experience of time was different, and is described below.

I met Luzma when I was visiting Monica who worked at the *botanica*, a shop selling candles, religious items, herbs and natural medicines. The walls of the *botanica* were covered from floor to ceiling with candles and images of the *Virgen de Guadalupe* or San Domingo and herbs, votives and amulets to bring wealth, protection, health and love. Monica worked there from ten o'clock in the morning until eight o'clock at night, five to six days a week. When I entered the *botanica*, Luzma was sitting on an upside-down crate eating a chicken sandwich that she had just bought at the *tienda* up the street, while they watched a talk

show on TV. I initially thought that Luzma was a new employee at the *botanica* but she was quick to tell me that she was an *ama de casa* and that she was at the *botanica* only for *chisme,* or gossip. Luzma, in her late-thirties, was married with one teenage daughter. Monica, a woman in her late twenties, had one young son and lived with her boyfriend. In previous visits, when Monica was alone, she explained that she thought that she ate more in the US than in Mexico, and she associated this with stress. She also described that she sometimes did not have time to cook in the house and she would eat 'bad things' like hamburgers. When talking with Monica while Luzma was there, Monica began explaining how stress shaped what she ate in NYC. Upon Monica's mention of stress Luzma chuckled [shaking her head from side to side] and said:

> You eat because you are stressed? No, you eat because the food is delicious. The food tastes better here. When the food is good, you don't eat more [looking at me]? Yes, of course [you do].

Monica reconsidered. 'Well, maybe it is that I don't have time to cook', she said. Luzma responded:

> Time! But time, there *is* [my emphasis]—time to eat! Time to eat at home almost all day long. I get home and start eating. I don't eat out much, well chicken wings and rice from the Chinese -*that* [my emphasis] I like, and I get fruit [with *chile*] from the street, snacks, potato chips [crisps] and Cheetos, you know, the things you eat when you're watching television.

Luzma often waited for her husband to return home before she ate her full meal. She said that she cooked for her family and sent her husband to work with lunch. She waited to eat dinner with him when he arrived in the evening. Although it was late when he arrived home each night, she said that it would be an 'offense' if she did not have a heavy meal waiting for him. She would get something to eat, like a sandwich, or baguette from a Mexican deli to hold her over in the early evening and then she would eat with him when he arrived home from work.

In both instances, time was used as an idiom through which consumption practices were experienced and described, albeit quite differently. Monica blamed her food practices on not enough time and Luzma blamed them on too much time. Interestingly, Monica used the terms *time* and *stress* interchangeably to explain and understand her food experiences. Monica may not have felt comfortable expressing feelings of anxiety or stress after Luzma's comments and thus she shifted her emphasis from stress to time. In Monica's example, time may have been used as an idiom to 'explain away' the precarious contexts and stresses that shaped her eating practices.

Andrea, who worked part-time at an office building two doors down from her apartment, expressed similar sentiments. She was in her mid-thirties, lived with her husband, her teenage son and eight month-old baby, her sister, Maritza, and their brother. Andrea was the only one in her house who worked only twelve hours a week, the other three worked full-time. It was often the case in Mexican households in West Queens that one adult would be unemployed or only partially employed and be responsible for the cooking, cleaning and childcare for the entire household. Andrea was looking for more work, though she expressed concern that it might not be economically worth her while. It cost her $30 for an acquaintance to watch her son for a day, and she was not likely to make much more than that for a few hours of work.

Andrea was living in a basement apartment, the entry of which was through a long, snaky staircase covered with a thick forest-green carpet. There were two bedrooms, one where Andrea and her husband lived, another bedroom for her siblings, and another room that had the oldest son's bed that doubled as a couch, office, playroom and living room during the day. The hall had been converted into a kitchen with a large pantry and refrigerator. There was only a little light peaking in from a small basement window.

After I began visiting Andrea in her house, her experience of time became clearer to me. She worked two doors down from her house, she did her grocery shopping a few blocks down and then she returned to her house to cook, clean and take care of her son. Andrea said:

> There are not many places for me to go. I do my work, I have lots of work to do here, but I am just in the house and it is lonely. I often end up watching TV at night and eating cereal or crisps, while I wait for my husband to come home.

Andrea explained that she tried to eat only once in the evening but her son would come home after school and she would eat with him and by the time her husband came home in the late evening she would be hungry again. She would make a little something for herself to eat while she was reheating food for her husband. Andrea commented that before she had her second child she worked full-time in an office and her eating practices were different. She explained:

> When I was working, I did not eat much, I might have eaten something small during the day, but I ate something standing up or something that I could eat in five minutes.

Then she jokingly picked up her youngest son who was crawling on the bed and said laughing, 'it is you! It is because of you that I am fat and don't have a job'. Andrea felt that the surplus of time she had after she stopped working led her to move less and eat more while she was waiting at home alone. She found that she ended up eating more meals each day: a large meal with her son and then again when her husband arrived home late in the evening. Andrea and Luzma carried out the food work, domestic chores and caretaking for the household. Their experience of time as *amas de casa* was different than that of full-time workers because that they spent much of their day in the house waiting for others to return. Their temporal experiences were shaped by the gendered nature of household responsibilities as well as employment. In these cases, having too much time was blamed for eating too much. Unlike the full-time employed

migrants that I spoke with, these part-time or unemployed women felt they had too much time. To pass time, some of which was spent waiting for others to return home, they noted that they watched television and snacked in their house, often staying up late. This practice may influence nutritional outcomes as the literature suggests that snacking often takes place while watching television and that television watching may lead to overeating because it distracts individuals from monitoring what they eat (French, Story & Jeffery 2001).

Andrea mentioned being lonely while watching television at home and Luzma sometimes left her house to visit Monica at work where they watched television together. These cases illustrate the experience of having too much time, as has been demonstrated among 'migrants excluded from work or education, who can have so much free time that they feel socially abnormal, outside the 'rush' of the rest of society' (Griffiths, Rogers & Anderson 2012: 21). For Andrea—who wanted to work more hours but acknowledged that due to childcare costs it did not make economical sense—her routine gave her the feeling of being isolated, lonely and somewhat excluded from the social world beyond her apartment. What was shared by these informants who felt they had too much or too little time was the feeling that they had a lack of control over their time and routine. Furthermore, there was a disconnect between the amount of 'free' time they desired and the amount of 'free' time that they had. In both instances, informants felt that they did not have the *right* amount of time. Reisch's (2001) work on time-use, argues that having 'time wealth' (i.e. the converse of time poverty) is not about having a lot of time but about having the *right* amount of time, not too much and not too little, similarly, it is about having autonomy over one's time. Thus, for Luzma and Andrea who felt their time-use was partially dictated by the schedules of their working husbands as well as for those informants who felt their time was dictated by their employers or clients, time was seen as beyond

their control and eating practices were similarly seen to result partially from their inabilities to control time.

Time as a Constraint: 'Freedom' versus 'Free' Time

The entrepreneurial endeavors of Clementina and other informants like Rosana, Ana and Ramiro ensured busy days and precarious schedules. They often noted, however, that they preferred working for themselves rather than for an employer even if it meant longer hours. Clementina said that although she probably worked more hours at her stand and earned the same as she did during her previous job working in a factory, she liked this job much more because it gave her more freedom. She made friends with people on the street, she was able to take off from work if she wanted to, [though she rarely did] and she was able to work near to her home. She said that she did not mind working long hours as long as she was working for herself and she did not have to take orders from anyone. Her decision to start her own *puesto* gave her a feeling of independence in her day-to-day activities that she considered to be a worthwhile trade-off. Clementina's rationale for starting her own *puesto* mirrors that made by many informants in Harbottle's (2000) study of Iranians in Britain. These individuals set up food businesses because they liked the autonomy of working for themselves because such self-employment allowed them to avoid the discrimination and difficult employer-employee relations, which they faced in the labour-market (Harbottle 2000: 77).

Among my informants, autonomy in the workplace and flexibility were prioritized over having time 'off'. For Clementina and many other self-employed informants, there was no clear division between work and home life. Work responsibilities constantly encroached on the time available to prepare and organize personal eating practices. Despite this, many preferred this condition and actively sought it out, this is perhaps because the alternatives offered less flexibility and the pay was not better, and sometimes worse. Clementina

emphasized that she went to work everyday but if she did not want to, she would not have to. In this way, informants exerted a degree of agency by seeking self-employment, but in doing so they perhaps created more time constraints for themselves. Although they realized that their eating practices and time schedules suffered as a result of self-employment, they seemed to consider this a necessary sacrifice in order to retain a degree of autonomy in their everyday life or to work while raising a family.

Not only was autonomy in work prioritized over 'free' time but financial gain was also prioritized over 'free' time. To understand this, it is important to examine the aspirations of many of my informants, which included providing for their families in NYC and in Mexico, earning money, returning to Mexico and giving their children opportunities. To work towards these aspirations, 'free' time often took a low priority. Indeed, many informants described their willingness to sacrifice time in the interest to make money, such as Graciela, and Clementina, who often skipped meals or ate while working in order to maximize their business. Domingo, the *taco* truck owner also expressed a similar sentiment. Domingo was under doctor's care for type II diabetes and although his doctor told him that he should be eating more regular meals and working less he said that it was often difficult to follow this advice. He told me that he often skipped meals while he was working and instead drank a bottle of Mexican coke[21] when he felt that he needed 'energy'. He said that he suffered from diarrhoea partially as a result of his type II diabetes. Because he worked on the truck alone he was not able to easily leave it to go to the nearby gas station to use

[21] Glass bottles of coke imported from Mexico were popular among informants. Domingo and many other informants said that they preferred Mexican coke to American coke. Mexican coke was served in a glass bottle and contained sugar whereas American coke contained High-fructose corn syrup (glucose-fructose syrup) and was sold in a tin can.

the toilet. To avoid having to leave the truck, he said that he drank coke during his shift rather than a full meal to prevent upsetting his stomach. He also reflected on a few other reasons why he drank Coke:

> I know what I am supposed to drink and eat but I am stubborn. I don't bring food from home. But [also] when you work you are not hungry. I think it is the same for all Mexicans. You work, and you work more, and you are not hungry. I don't want to eat a meal.

When Domingo talked about his life in NYC he remarked that it was hectic and did not allow him the opportunity to improve his health. He often drew comparisons between him and his son. He reflected on the fact that his son spent his time after school listening to music and playing video games and that his son did not have to work as Domingo did when he was a teenager. Domingo was careful to emphasize that he was not criticizing his son. He repeated, 'don't think I am complaining'. Domingo emphasized that he was happy to have provided this opportunity for his son through his own hard work and did not seem inclined to change his work practices, by paying a relative to work at the truck for more hours, even if it this could augment his health. Informant priorities and aspirations shaped the way in which they navigated life in NYC. Informants negotiated economic and occupational constraints in ways that exacerbated time constraints and nutrition, but for many, these consequences seemed worthwhile because they brought about feelings of independence or economic freedom.

Discussion

Night shifts, long hours and employment in the service sector influenced time for procuring, preparing and consuming food. Time constraints and precarious schedules led to a reliance on snacks rather than meals. Eating patterns were disparate and unpredictable, often leading migrants to eat late at night or just before going to bed. Informants often ate alone, standing up, or while they

worked. Thus, eating became a secondary activity that happened alongside, or in-between, another activity. Since many informants spent much of the day cooking for others or working in a kitchen they were often too exhausted to cook for themselves. Gender and documentation status also patterned how time was experienced. For migrants lacking documentation, their work schedules often reflected their efforts to avoid detection by the police. For *amas de casa*, their days were viewed as lonely and slow-paced and were characterized by waiting for the working members of their households to return home. For these women, food practices were seen as a result of boredom, stress and waiting rather than due to a *lack* of time as was the case of migrants working outside of the home. Although some informants felt they had too much time, while others felt they had too little, what these individuals had in common was the feeling that time was out of their control and that someone else dictated their routine. As a corollary, they experienced their food practices as somewhat out of their control and unable to predict. Concerns for having too much time or too little were often associated with stress, uncertainty and anxiety, which is important because these emotional states may shape patterns of over-eating (Wardle 2007). In this chapter, I have illustrated how time-use and daily routines played a role in shaping the structural vulnerability and eating practices of Mexican migrants.

Nutritional research among non-migrants has shown that busy schedules lead to less time to prepare and eat meals at home, that work schedules of low and middle income parents influence family food practices and that time constraints lead to a reliance on convenience and high-energy foods (Devine et al. 2003; Neumark-Sztainer et al. 2003; Drewnowski & Eichelsdoerfer 2010). Furthermore, sleep deprivation, or short sleep duration has been linked to increased appetite and obesity, more generally (Patel & Hu 2008; Whybrow 2012). Specifically among migrants, there has been little research exploring how time constraints shape food practices, with the exception of a few qualitative public health studies

that briefly mention the connection (Sussner et al. 2008; Patil, Hadley & Nahayo 2009). This chapter has used the idea of time and the concept of precariousness to characterize migrant time experiences and daily rhythms and suggested the value of incorporating the dimension of time in studies of migrant nutrition.

Importantly, informants did not always view unpredictable schedules and lack of 'free' time as constraining. In some cases the ability to use one's time carrying out productive labour was considered an opportunity, and one not afforded in Mexico where jobs were harder to find. Informants negotiated their time resourcefully in West Queens in efforts to earn money and to circumvent the economic constraints that partially encouraged migration in the first place. Many migrants took on extra shifts or worked late when possible in order to provide for themselves, their children or to earn extra money to send home to Mexico. Migrants were forced to make trade-offs whereby they exchanged their time and nutritious practices for the welfare and economic improvement of their families. To some extent, migrants accepted their frenzied tempo of life in NYC and somewhat preferred it to the slow-pace of life and lack of opportunity and employment, which they associated with Mexico. The negative association between country of origin and backwardness has been observed by Vathi & King (2011) who showed that second generation Albanians viewed Albania as backwards and traditional and contrasted it with the modernity of the European cities to which their parents migrated. My informants perceived time constraints to be unavoidable consequences of life and work after migration to NYC, and one that was not necessarily viewed as wholly undesirable.

Time constraints and work schedules did not shape food practices in isolation but interacted with economic constraints and food availability. The following chapter will explore how perceptions of income, food affordability and accessibility also influenced eating practices.

5. MEAT, PEACHES AND OREOS: FOOD AFFORDABILITY & ACCESS

> If you are ugly, you don't have work. Only if you know someone then you get a job—if you are a man. If you are a woman you need a beautiful face, boobs and a cute *pompi* [behind], if you do, you get a job, if you don't you don't—don't even think about it…my husband is a chemical engineer but he did not have work [in Mexico] and here he works in a restaurant – but he doesn't care, he makes money and that is all we care about—I mean we can only get these types of jobs here, but we don't care. I work as a cleaner and he as a cook but we have kids. Kids are very expensive here. It takes about $30 to pay for kids everyday so we need these jobs. We have a job working in the kitchen, it is for the kids. It is for my mom and her husband who live in a house in Mexico with my nieces and nephews.
>
> Here it is easier to buy food. I have money from work and I use it for chocolate or *pan mexicano*. I buy *pan dulce* [sweet bread]—because *here* we can! In Mexico, no, we don't have money to buy it. That is why we all come here so that we can buy these things that we can't get in Mexico. I come home from work and I have my own money that I can use for chocolate and crisps. Here I can buy these things but in Mexico we can't. It's good here because of the money you make, but in Mexico—you eat breakfast and dinner with your family and you don't eat out.
>
> *-Andrea, early-thirties, cleaner, mother of two*

This chapter looks at how the accessibility and affordability of food—referred to here as the food environment—shaped food practices after migration. It demonstrates that not all informants experienced the food environment in the same way. Class, gender and documentation status mediated perceptions of food affordability and accessibility. Memories of economic deprivation before migration also shaped negotiations of the food environment. Narratives indicate that just as Mexicans experienced changes in food accessibility and affordability after migration to NYC so to did their friends and family in Mexico due to return-migration, globalization and the receipt of remittances. The cost and accessibility of food has been widely acknowledged as a factor shaping nutrition

and obesity among non-migrants (Foresight 2007; Drewnowski 2012). Less research has focused on how food affordability and accessibility shape nutrition among migrants, though the importance of these factors has been acknowledged (Yeh et al. 2009; Guarnaccia et al. 2012). This chapter explores the processes by which the food environment influenced everyday food practices and how informants negotiated environments. In this chapter, I will speak about the availability of food items, but in Chapter 7 I will take up the discussion of the food environment again to specifically explore the availability of weight loss products in West Queens.

Experiences of Affordability, Accessibility and Entitlement

Walking down any sidewalk in West Queens, there were various food shops, stands, supermarkets and *tiendas* most of which displayed their prices prominently. Supermarket displays often cascaded into the sidewalk so that cardboard boxes overflowing with fruits and vegetables greeted passers-by on the pavement. Inside supermarkets piles of snacks and *refrescos* [soft drinks, sodas] were stacked from floor to ceiling in every aisle. Signs were out front of local restaurants and their menus illustrated the diversity of options. Mexican restaurants served pizza. Chinese restaurants served Mexican and Colombian foods (Figure 5.1). Chinese restaurant menus (written in English and Spanish) listed over two hundred food options to choose from, while some Mexican restaurants offered over three hundred. Many restaurants also served a daily special for a low-price, which was often preferred by my informants. Street food vendors scrawled their prices all over their trucks and *puestos* and vendors called out to the people passing on the sidewalk that they could satisfy their hunger with four quarters. In West Queens food seemed accessible, affordable and abundant.

Figure 5.1. Cuisine on offer in West Queens

The history of migration to, and ethnic and country-of-origin diversity in NYC, which is described in Chapter 2, is also reflected by the food options in West Queens. Some supermarkets labelled each aisle with a different national flag to denote the availability of country-specific ingredients throughout the stores. The cafes, *tiendas* and bakeries in the area served up Colombian, Argentinian, Brazilian, Mexican, Peruvian, Dominican, Cuban, Ecuadorean, Indian, Italian, Chinese, Philippine and Nepalese foods. Many food venues were associated not only with a country but with a region or state within a country. In this way, the diversity of the population of West Queens was echoed by the hybridity of its cuisine.

Informants had good access to foods specifically from Mexico or those that they associated with Mexico. A variety of companies imported foods from Mexico to NYC, and many large companies and factories across the US produced meats, creams and cheeses in styles and techniques that emulated those used in Mexico. Their foods were sold in local *tiendas* with names like 'Mexican Brand' to suggest their authenticity. *Paqueterías*, or parcel services, in West Queens also facilitated the availability of Mexican foodstuffs in NYC. *Paqueterías* shipped *envíos*, or packages, between Mexico and NYC. They serviced areas that were not the focus of major global shipping companies, delivering goods at a low-cost to rural areas or low socioeconomic areas in Mexico, rather than major cities or business centres, because these were the areas where migrants in NYC were from. Deliveries took approximately three to five days and cost approximately four dollars per pound. In most *paqueterías* there was a refrigerator in the back of the shop filled with the foods that had just arrived from Mexico.

Sandra, in her late-thirties, from Puebla, who worked at one *paquetería* in the area said that the most popular items to ship were homemade cheeses and sweet breads, in particular, *pan de fiesta*. Homemade sweets and candied fruits, *gomitas* [gummy candies], *mole* as well as nuts from Mexico, *chile jalapeño and guajillo* [varieties of chili pepper] and homemade tortillas were also popular items. In contrast, shipments to Mexico were filled with toys, cellphones, chargers, cameras, shoes, sneakers, socks, jackets and clothes. Some of my informants, like Elu and her sister, Paula, received shipments from their families every other week, mostly filled with fresh tortillas that they wrapped in a lace tablecloth and stored in the refrigerator. While others, like Andrea, and her sister Maritza, thought that using *paqueterías* was too expensive. They said that they never received packages. Andrea felt that the fact that some migrants sent and received these shipments was further proof that families in Mexico think migrants make a lot of money in NYC. 'Who pays for that [the *envíos*]?' she

asked, 'They think we live like kings here'. Whether or not they received *envíos,* informants noted that they had access to foods that they associated with their home in Mexico as well as a variety of cuisines that they described as American, Italian, Chinese and Hispanic, as well as access to street food, restaurant food, fast food and take-away. That informants had access to a diversity of cuisines in West Queens illustrates that the food environment that migrants navigated differed substantially from the homogenous food environment, which is assumed in the acculturation literature. The concept of 'super-diversity' could be used to describe the complexity of the food environment of West Queens, just as it has been used to characterize other aspects of diversity that migrants are exposed to after migration (Vertovec 2007).

Food was not just accessible but also affordable in West Queens. Informants were very knowledgeable of the cost of different ingredients and prepared foods and they knew at which supermarkets, restaurants or street stands they could get the best deal. Individuals who tended to eat out were able to effortlessly describe the price hierarchy of prepared foods in West Queens. Restaurant food was the most expensive but the daily specials were very economical. At one of the most popular Mexican restaurants among my informants, the weekday special was commonly ordered. On one weekday, it was ribs with *salsa verde* served with *tortillas*, pinto beans, *arroz Mexicano* [Mexican rice dish containing tomatoes and rice] and a soft drink, for just less than nine dollars. The less expensive meal options were Chinese take-away, where the popular dish of chicken and broccoli in garlic sauce (served with white rice) cost $5.15. On the cheaper end of the spectrum was street food as well as foods listed in the '*antojito'* section of the restaurant menus. On the street as well as in restaurants and *panaderías*, snacks such as *tamales, tacos, pan mexicano* and *champurrado* sold for one to two dollars. A pizza shop on Roosevelt Avenue lowered the price of a slice of pizza to one dollar by making his slices smaller and using less cheese to compete with the

dollar menus in the area. Other popular and economical food items according to informants were *Maruchan* noodles, especially among employed male informants. *Tiendas* and supermarkets sold these noodles in a cup, which contained dehydrated vegetables, shrimp or chicken and high amounts of sodium. They cost less than one dollar, sometimes for that price two cups could be purchased. During work breaks either before or after lunch, men often stopped at a *tienda* and bought a *refresco*, and *Maruchan* noodles. The owner of the *tienda* would heat up the noodles on the spot, squirt some lime and hot sauce over them, and they were ready to be eaten. This was a practice that many men said they carried out in Mexico as well.

Extensive knowledge of food prices was reinforced by the fact that many informants worked in the food industry and finding a bargain and maximizing profits was part of doing business. For both informants who owned food businesses and for those who ate at them, food cost was important. Informants in the food industry often used frozen fruits, meats and fish, canned vegetables, and packaged tortillas, rather than fresh ingredients to keep costs down. Restaurant owners and employees admitted to using more salt as well as salt-based seasonings such as monosodium glutamate at their restaurants than in their homes. They did so to improve flavor without driving up costs. For example, Emma's family was struggling to make money in the restaurant business and Matteo was having difficulty paying for his food. For these informants low-cost, tasty food served in big portions made sense even if it meant food that was less nutritious and fresh.

Although food was considered more affordable and accessible in West Queens, informants emphasized that one thing was not easy to find: foods that were as fresh, and that tasted the same as the food they remember from Mexico. Meat was thought to be stored in refrigerators for weeks rather than being sold fresh, beans were canned rather than dry, corn tortillas were packaged rather than

fresh and fruits and vegetables were believed to be grown with the help of pesticides rather than organically. Emma talked frequently about how the taste of the food was different in Mexico than that in the US. She explained the differences in ingredients and seasoning. She frequently used spice as a way to distinguish the food from the different countries. She described that in NYC, the way in which *chorizo* and *longaniza,* two types of spicy sausages, were made, resulted in the chorizo being spicier than the *longaniza* whereas in Mexico, the *longaniza* was spicier than the chorizo, a fact that she attributed to the *longaniza* being homemade. She complained that when she made salsas from *chile guajillo* in NYC she had to use many *chiles* to make it hot but if she made it from *chiles* from Mexico she would only have to use four because the *chiles* were reliably more spicy. Emma's family in Mexico sent her cheese, nuts and *pan de fiesta.* Her boyfriend's family sent him dried mushrooms and *mole* paste. Many of these things could be purchased in NYC but they did not taste the same. She let me sample the walnuts that her family sent from her hometown, which were softer and less bitter than those on the supermarket shelves in NYC. Gabriela made a similar observation when she compared the fullness of taste found in foods from Mexico with those in the US, noting that it was not the foods that changed upon migration but the taste and quality of the foods.

> I don't think what we eat changes that much. The change is in how the food tastes because it is not the same ingredients, well, I mean, it is the same but it does not taste the same. I can say this because I have been to Mexico, I go once or twice a year and I can tell the difference between a *tortilla* that I buy here and what I eat over there. Just a simple soup, there is a lot of difference between the chicken that you buy here and what you get there…My parents always try to make food here like the food that we ate [in Mexico] and so that is how I grew up, like [with] whatever my mom used to cook in Mexico. She cooks it here but it is not the same ingredients or the same taste because we don't always find them but we try to always.

Gabriela focused on the difference in the taste in the food eaten in Mexico and in NYC. Similarly, when Jorge talked about Mexican pastries in NYC he impressed upon me that their taste was not equal to those made in Mexico. He thought that the difference was due to the fact that the Mexican pastries were made with butter in NYC, whereas in Mexico they were made with *manteca*. Bakers working in two Mexican *panaderías* in West Queens also indicated that the recent trans-fat legislation put into full effect in 2008 in NYC, prohibited the use of artificial trans-fat in foods, which led food outlets to use butter or vegetable shortening rather than *manteca* to make pastries and breads. The effect of this legislation suggests how macro-level changes in the food environment influenced experiences of food change after migration.

Clementina also complained about the freshness of vegetables and fruits. She believed that the potatoes that she purchased in the supermarket were old and of lower quality than those she cooked with in Mexico. She needed to buy pounds of potatoes each day so that she could make crisps at her street stand. However, each morning, she purchased one bag to test a few potatoes to see if they developed black spots after being fried. She noted that this problem, which often left her with many unsellable black potatoes, was due to the age of the potatoes or the fact that they had been frozen and defrosted. She also felt that the fruits and vegetables in the stores were produced with many more pesticides than those grown in Mexico. She told me about her friend who worked in agriculture on Long Island and how he described how many pesticides and chemicals were used on the farm where he worked. She contrasted this with the way in which she remembered fruits being grown in her hometown.

Although informants argued that foods in NYC were lacking in freshness, spiciness, authenticity and taste, they described foods as more available and accessible in NYC than in Mexico. In particular, red meat, chicken, cheese, cream, fruit, snacks as well as prepared foods were considered more affordable

in West Queens than in Mexico. It was impressive the degree to which people talked about eating more meat in the US. Clementina described:

> In Mexico, you just don't have any money. It is not like here. In Mexico, you eat meat two times a week but now I eat it every day, sometimes more than that, because I can. I will have it during the day and at night…*carne de res* [beef], *puerco* [pork] or *pollo* [chicken]. In Mexico…you have a job and you get paid 50 pesos [$4.10[22]] but that is every *day* [i.e. not per hour]. In Mexico, if you don't go to school it is really hard to get a job without having studied [because] there are only jobs for people with connections. You can work in construction but you can't work your way up. There are just no options for you, so how are you to afford meat?

Mireya expressed a similar sentiment as she prepared *res Milanese* [breaded beef] in her kitchen. She described the variety of meats that she and her sister prepared for their family each week.

> We cook meat three to four times a week. When we don't have meat we have vegetables like *chayotes* [squash variety] with *salsa verde* or I will make *picaditas* [thick corn cakes with beans, cream, cheese and onions]. On the weekend we go to the diner and everyone gets their *antojito*, my husband and I will have hamburgers.

Mireya's sister, Alma, added:

> Here with the economy everything is accessible. In Mexico, you would go to the market once or twice a week and we could not go more, it all depended on the fluidity of the economy. If no [fluidity] well then no meat and you eat something else. In our family there were eleven so we didn't have money for meat, vegetables or fruit but here it is different. We have so many great things in Mexico, but you can't afford them there. Well my family couldn't afford them. Listen, I can make $500 housekeeping as a

[22] Conversion is based on the April 2010-March 2011 mean exchange rate of 1USD per 12.10 MXN.

> nanny for 5 ½ days but in Mexico for the same amount of work I would make $500 pesos which is $50 dollars, with $50 you can barely buy your *despensa* [basic food basket] – your milk, cereal, eggs and beans. So there is a huge difference between what you can buy. You can't buy meat, fruit and vegetables with this income.

Meat was enjoyed and valued highly among informants. Many meals centred around beef or pork which was affordable in the US but cost-prohibitive in Mexico. The high value that informants placed on meat combined with its increasing availability and comparatively low price encouraged consumption in the US. Sussner et al. (2008) and Guarnaccia (2012) also identified the desire and preference for meat consumption among Latino migrants in the US due to the high status or value that is associated with it.

Shrimp was another item that was highly valued among informants and more affordable in the NYC than in most of my informants' hometowns. When individuals talked about special foods that they ate on Sunday or the foods they ate when they went out for a special occasion with their families, or had a day off from work, they mentioned their preference for fish and particularly *coctel de camarones* [shrimp cocktail]. For example, when Graciela talked about the money that *catarinas* make after a night of work (see pp. 114-5), she added with a laugh, 'yeah, the next day, the women eat well and the men are poor [laugh]! *Sopa de camarones* [shrimp soup] for the women and *sopa Maruchan* [Maruchan-brand soup] for the men!' Matteo added, 'Si, alitos con arroz' [Yes, chicken wings and rice]. This example highlights the way in which informants associated the consumption of different meals with particular economic conditions. Shrimp soup was a desirable and costly food, in contrast, *Maruchan* noodles were inexpensive, as were chicken wings and rice which was a popular dish served at many Chinese take-away restaurants. In fact, the way in which shrimp was associated with wealth among my informants also seemed to be acknowledged by the *Maruchan* noodle company. A business journal reports that Latinos in the

US and Mexico are *Maruchan*'s fastest growing market and a representative for the company says that they began selling shrimp flavoured soup to give customers a 'deluxe' feeling, while keeping the cost to less than 'two *taco*s and a Coke' (Ito-Peterson, 2001).

Cheese, milk and cream products were also considered more affordable in the US than in Mexico. Many informants commented on the affordability of these items and were pleased that they could buy them at supermarkets and *tiendas* every week and put them on their *tostadas*, *tacos* and *quesadillas*. They were satisfied by the fact that they did not have to use them sparingly, but rather they were able to afford them easily. Luz, a mother of one, in her mid-thirties, worked at a salon cutting hair and doing nails. She felt that dairy products were much more affordable in the US, and described how she incorporated these items into her diet after she migrated.

> Cream and milk are more available here. In Mexico you can't buy milk everyday. Here, I make shakes and malts, and I also put it in my coffee. I put a bit of cream in my spaghetti and I pour it on my tostadas, but in Mexico, well, I put it on my tostadas but much less, I needed to conserve it. Sometimes I went with my family to a street stand in Morelos to have tostadas but this was two times a month—because of the economy, not more.

Informants also found fruit to be more affordable in NYC than in Mexico (Figure 5.2). Julia, a single mother of three, in her mid-thirties, who worked as a manicurist, described the affordability of fruit.

> When I was in Mexico we didn't have [fruit] but it was because of the economy. We were many. When I was there we were five kids and two adults. My mom would buy one kilo of oranges and there would be about eight oranges. My mom would give one orange to you, one to her and… you know you couldn't just finish a banana on your own. No, it was not easy. When I left my kids at my parents' house—they went to visit Mexico over the summer

Figure 5.2: Street Stands Selling Affordable Fruit

> —they said, 'Mom, she gave us only one piece of orange not the whole'.
>
> But here there is everything. I buy peaches, they love strawberries, mangos, watermelon…everything, whatever we want we can buy. But there maybe we can eat a few strawberries or watermelon or one thing or another but not all three. Josefina, [her daughter] she said it is because I am poor. She said that I must have been poor when I was in Mexico, *pobrecita mama* [poor mom], she said to me when she got back [from Mexico], 'your family is poor!' But now we are not poor my daughter thinks.

Andrea, a mother of two, also described the greater affordability of snacks in West Queens than in Mexico (see p. 157). Although Andrea only worked part-time, she was able to earn enough money so that she could buy snack foods that she was not able to afford in Mexico. This was particularly the case because in

NYC she had her own 'disposable' income and could treat herself to some of her favourite foods. Just as the previous chapter described how time and work schedules led to a heavier reliance on snacks, so too did perceptions of improved finances. Julia, had similar perceptions of the affordability of snacks: 'I mean, we try not to eat [snacks] but sometimes, yes, we do, for example, when we are watching a movie we get popcorn and lollipops. Before I came here, no, I didn't because I didn't have money but now yes'. Although informants noted that snacks were available in Mexico and were becoming increasingly accessible over time (see pp. 194-8) they felt that they had less money to spend on snacks and that their schedules and meal routines did not encourage eating snacks as much in Mexico as in NYC.

Luz also described how her higher income enabled her to eat out more often in the US than in Mexico. She explained that there were restaurants and fast food venues in Morelos, where she was from, but she frequented them more in the US because they were more affordable. She said, 'yes, restaurants there are, but they are only for tourists. There are *puestos* where I would go once in a while to eat, for example, to have *tacos*, *horchata* [rice drink] or *refrescos* on a weekend…there were McDonalds in Mexico too, but I did not go'. In contrast, in NYC, because of her improved financial situation, she cooked less in the house and ate at *puestos* and fast food restaurants more often. She ate Chinese food two times a week, usually *arroz con alas* [rice with chicken wings], also she picked up McDonalds and called for take-away from Mexican restaurants during the week. In the morning, before work, she picked up bacon, egg and cheese sandwiches at a deli or stopped at a diner for French toast and coffee. For Luz, it was the economy and the accessibility of prepared food that she associated with these changes: 'It is not that food is less expensive it is just that you can earn more money here so that you can buy more food. Food is more accessible [*más accessible*] here because of what you make'.

Carlos, a single man in his early thirties who worked at the street truck with Martín said that before he moved to the US he lived in Puebla with his mother and sold small children's toys on the street at traffic stops. In Mexico, he made about $66.10 USD [$800 MXN] each week. In NYC, he made about $400-500 USD a week and spent about $25 USD a day on food. Both in Mexico and the US he ate two meals, but he was able to afford more elaborate meals in West Queens than in Mexico. Usually at ten o'clock in the morning he stopped at a Colombian or Mexican restaurant for a meal, and in the afternoon, around four o'clock, he ate in the street. Since he made more money he was able to afford the increased cost of eating out while still sending remittances to Mexico.

Ultimately, most foods were perceived as more affordable in NYC than in Mexico. This perception was prominent among undocumented and low-wage Mexicans living in West Queens. Although many migrants earned less than the NYC hourly minimum wage $7.25 USD, their wage earnings, were usually substantially more than the minimum wage in Mexico, which is approximately $4.70 USD [$56 MXN] per day (Servicio de Administración Tributaria 2012).

The ethnographic examples in this section suggest that although economic deprivation has been cited as a main driver of obesogenic food practices and obesity (Drewnowski & Darmon 2005; Drewnowski 2012; Drewnowski, Rehm & Solet 2007; Sobal & Stunkard 1989; Yeh et al. 2009), from the perspective of many informants, changed food practices and the lessening quality of diets were seen to be the results of economic improvement and increased food affordability. These cases suggest the need to understand how structural vulnerabilities are perceived from informants' perspectives. Economic conditions were not perceived to be constraining but rather as opportunities that enabled informants to access and afford food in NYC that they could not access in Mexico. These cases illustrate how informant perceptions of the food environment were shaped by their memories of economic deprivation and food insecurity in Mexico and

their improved wage in the US. This is not to suggest that informants felt able to afford all foods they encountered in NYC without limitation, they recognized that they could not afford large quantities of certain foods and they felt that they could not easily access high quality, fresh versions of the foods that they liked. They were also aware that quality cuts of meat, fish, organic produce as well as meals off of a menu at a fancy sit-down restaurant (unless they worked there), were out of their price range. However, overall they felt many food items were more affordable and accessible in West Queens than in Mexico.

With regard to fruit, perceptions of affordability and accessibility were intriguing because they ran counter to the idea prominent in the acculturation literature on migrant obesity, that fruit was not as easily accessible in US as it was in migrants' countries of origin (Dixon, Sundquist & Winkleby 2000; Yeh et al. 2009). Existing literature argues that less fruit is consumed after migration and that this may be responsible for the shift to less nutritious diets. However, my informants argued that more fruit was eaten after arrival to the US. One woman replied to my enquiry about fruit accessibility in Mexico as if she had heard similar ideas before, 'it's not that we can just grab fruit off a tree in Mexico! It is hard in Mexico, only the rich can afford it. It is only those who live in a big house and have land that can do this'.

Some informants who had fruit orchards and easy access to fruit trees in their hometowns contradicted this option, but even these informants stated that their trees did not produce fruit all year round and that they sometimes felt limited by the small variety of fruit that they could access in Mexico. Thus, although the taste and freshness of the fruit in Mexico was regarded as superior to that in NYC, in terms of affordability and accessibility, informants suggested that West Queens was preferable. This is illustrated by Luzma, in her mid-thirties, who was from a rural town in Puebla, Mexico. She said that although the fruit was much more expensive in the US, she was able to afford it because the wages were

higher. Moreover, she pointed out that in Mexico there is a lot of unpredictability in terms of fruit due to weather and seasonality. In contrast, in the US, she was able to access a great variety of fruit at an affordable price throughout the year.

> In Mexico, each village has its fruit, and you have to go to another village if you want to buy different types of fruit, or fruit in particular seasons but you don't do that because it is too expensive. [In our town] we have our *sapotes* [soft, sweet fruit], *guayaba* [guava] and *cherimoya* [soft, sweet, creamy white-fleshed fruit] but that is it. Here [in NYC] you can't find these, but here there is fruit everywhere. Mostly, I eat it on the street, it is cut up well and I pour some lemon and *chile* on it but it is still not *cherimoya*.

The observations suggest that the acculturation narrative that posits that individuals will arrive from Mexico, having enjoyed ample access to low-cost fruit does not hold true when applied to Mexicans in West Queens. The 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement, as well as growing economic globalization and north-south inequalities over the last few decades, has resulted in worsening economic conditions for rural Mexicans (Quesada et al. 2011). This has made it difficult for them to grow fruit competitively and to afford US imports. These conditions help to contextualize why many informants felt they had greater economic access to fruit after migration.

Although access to, and affordability of, fruit could be beneficial for health by decreasing risk of chronic diseases (Krauss et al. 2000), it often seemed that fruit and fruit-based products supplemented informants' diets in the form of snacks or treats rather than replacing less nutritious items. For example, Gabriela drank green juice, which was a mixture of fresh vegetables and fruits to accompany her Mexican hot dogs that she purchased from the *señora* stationed outside her workplace. Other informants who worked as truck drivers and loaders purchased a quart of fresh pineapple juice for two dollars to drink while

working in the heat. Although high in Vitamin C, pineapple juice is also very high in sugar. Thus, it is difficult to know how the availability of fruit contributed to the nutritious-ness of one's diet.

These ethnographic insights about fruit availability present a picture of West Queens and food access that differs from the public health literature on nutrition. Much of the existing literature considers poor urban neighbourhoods to be 'obesogenic environments' or 'food deserts', characterized as offering little access to affordable fruits and vegetables and an over-abundance of high-energy foods due to patterns of retail provision (Swinburn et al. 1999; Horowitz et al. 2004; Yeh et al. 2009). In contrast, informant depictions of food abundance emphasized access and affordability of both nutritious and non-nutritious foods. This suggests that the availability to high-energy foods in the environment did not necessarily imply a lack of availability of fruit. In West Queens, there was an abundance of both high-energy foods and fruits.

The Meanings of Food & Affordability

Not just price but the perceptions and meanings that informants associated with food affordability and access also created vulnerabilities towards eating non-nutritious foods. Mireya and her sister, Alma, constantly talked about the affordability of food in the US. Alma pointed to the two refrigerators in their kitchen which bookended a huge shelving unit filled with gallon sized containers of Hi-C mix [flavoured juice drink made by Coca Cola], chocolate mix, grains, cereals and powdered chicken stock, 'we are not lacking in much over here', she emphasized.

Alma fluctuated in her opinions about her own migration to the US. She spoke with great regret that her children were being raised in Mexico by her parents. She felt sad for them and regretted that she was not able to move them to the US

because she could not afford to, and because her children's father refused to sign the papers to enable her to move them. However, she also felt that in some ways her children were lucky and at least much better off than she was when she was a child. Alma always sent remittances back to her parents, and she would send a little extra so that the kids could buy something special. One week it was extra money so that the children could go out for pizza and coke with their grandparents, and another week it was enough to pay for a television.

During part of my fieldwork, Alma was out of work and she felt quite bad that she was not able to send them as much money as she had previously sent home. One day I arrived to her house in the morning and she described the conversation she had with her daughter the night before. Imitating her daughter with a childlike voice, Alma said, ''*Mama, por favor, quiero ir a McDonalds, puedes mandar dinero?'* [Mom, please, I want to go to McDonalds, can you send some money?], but I told them that I can't this week, because I don't have a job and I told them that I am sorry but maybe next week or next month. I don't have many hours [of work] now so I don't have that much to send back'. Alma felt quite upset about her inability to provide this treat to her kids. She explained:

> When I pay for McDonalds for both of them I have to pay for a driver for the car that can take them to McDonalds. It is expensive, but if I can do it, I do it. Anything I can do, I do, whatever I can give them—I try to give them what they want. I just hope that I can return soon.

Alma was careful to emphasize that McDonalds and pizza were not cheap in Mexico, nor were televisions and cellphones. She explained that they cost just about what they cost in NYC. Although she was quite dismayed by this fact, she seemed to feel that buying these treats for her children was the least that she could do for them since she was not living with them. She was happy to be able to give them to her children, even if they were not reasonably priced from her perspective. Alma recounted the story of her last visit to Mexico:

> My kids wanted pizza and hamburgers, so I had to get them. They just had to go. I don't really like pizza so for me I hated to spend so much money on that. I thought $13 USD to buy a big pizza in Mexico? …and then you have to add soda and I don't like that, but my kids, you know, I go home [to Mexico] and I want to get them whatever they want and I want to make them happy, because, in reality I am very happy to go there and to treat them so I do get pizza but, really, I couldn't believe what I had to pay for things there and I just don't understand it.

For Alma, the ability to afford McDonalds and other consumables for her children in Mexico signaled her improved financial situation. Before she migrated, she and her family could not afford McDonalds and viewed it as a relative luxury, which could be afforded only on special occasions. These items were much more affordable for her than prior to her migration, although she argued they were still too expensive. Regardless, she purchased these items for her children to reward her children's hardship. Alma's provisioning of McDonalds could be considered one way in which she performed motherhood 'transnationally' and upheld bonds with her children while she was in NYC. The concept of 'Latina transnational motherhood' was introduced by Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila (1997) to describe the way in which Central American mothers working in Los Angeles as nannies and housekeepers transformed the mother-child relationship in light of their migration to the US. In some cases they redefined 'good mothering' practices so that working outside of the home, even if it meant being separated from their children in space and time, was viewed respectably because it was done with the aim of securing a better future for them. In this way, breadwinning rather than caregiving responsibilities came to define motherhood and providing money for food, clothes and schooling became the 'currency of transnational motherhood' (ibid: 562). Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila (1997) discuss the importance that transnational mothers' placed on providing better nutrition for their children through their wage-earning work. In Alma's case, good mothering also involved the provisioning of treats and *antojitos.*

Alonso, a student from Mexico City, temporarily living in NYC with his family to make some extra money, also described his reaction to the affordability of food in NYC and the way in which it marked his improved financial situation.

> You arrive here, you go to the supermarket and you find 21 different types of gum. In Mexico, we have only 5 brands, so what do you do? You want to try them all. I was overwhelmed when I arrived looking at all the new products. I had eaten Oreos [crème-filled chocolate sandwich cookies] in Mexico, but you come here and they don't only have Oreos-the classic, they have any variety you can imagine, different flavors, even Oreos with chocolate sprinkles, of course you have to try them, and every time [at the supermarket] it is the same. You went through a lot to get here and finally you earn enough to buy these things, so you do.

Sonia, in her early forties, had lived in NYC for nineteen years with her husband and three children. She and her husband were struggling to maintain their Mexican bakery in Corona. She expressed her enthusiasm to try new foods when she first arrived to NYC:

> I arrived and everything was more obtainable and cheap. In Mexico there was not as much possibility because of the economy, unlike in the US. When I arrived [to NYC] I ate meat, flour, milk, sodas, cookies, ice creams, pizza and hamburgers but now I eat less of this. I was excited [*emocionada*] to see what there was…the selection of food that we didn't have in our country. I wanted to try pizza…I didn't know—I didn't have it in Mexico.

Sonia acknowledged her enthusiasm to try the foods in NYC when she arrived but she mentioned that she began to eat fewer of these foods after her third daughter was born six years ago and she began cooking in the house and at her bakery more. These cases suggest how informants were able to enjoy the 'fruits' of their improved economic situation and upward mobility through the purchase and consumption of food for oneself and others. Consumption, in this way, allowed individuals to reward themselves and their families for the hardship

caused by their migration. Furthermore, the sheer variety of the foods that migrants were exposed to, played a role in shaping eating practices. This idea is echoed in the public health literature, which demonstrates that exposure to novel and varied food items as well as abundant displays of food (i.e. in supermarkets) influence eating practices and encourage consumption (Cohen 2008; Ulijaszek & Lofink 2006; Rolls 2007). In fact, some migrants noted that when they first arrived to the US they were encouraged to eat many of these new foods but the novelty wore off over time, therefore indicating the influence of novel food items on eating practices.

For these informants, increased wages and the affordability of food allowed them to participate in a market economy and to engage in consumption practices in ways that were not possible in Mexico. Food consumption provided a way for informants to become active participants in the economy and to construct identities as financially viable consumers both for them and their families back home. The foods that Mexican migrants afforded in the US were those that existed in Mexico but were rarely within financial reach. Thus, not only the affordability of these items in NYC but also their status shaped eating practices and preferences. These observations can be understood by drawing on Galvez's work on Mexican migrants' prenatal practices (Galvez 2011). Galvez states that 'Although even the most idealistic immigrants are rarely under any illusions that they will quickly or easily strike it rich in *el norte,* they measure their worthiness of their investment in a migration project in incremental and metonymic alterations in their quality of life and security' (Galvez 2011: 24). She asserts, 'consumption of health care becomes a measure of social capital that marks the distance travelled from hometowns in which most migrants describe not having access to affordable, modern biomedical care' (ibid: 24). Similarly, by consuming foods not accessible or affordable prior to migration, my informants signalled their improved life conditions and economic achievements in NYC.

Although informants were eager to purchase foods items that they could not purchase prior to migration, they also were encouraged to purchase foods that reminded them of home, or that had the taste of home, even if these foods were expensive. A variety of shops in the area sold Mexican foods. They prominently displayed fruits and vegetables such as *nopales* [vegetable made from the pads of the prickly pear cactus], *jicama* [root vegetable], *jalapeños, chayotes, jitomates* [green tomatoes], *guayaba* and Mexican herbs such as *pápalo* and *hoja santa* that were either imported from Mexico or associated with its cuisine but grown in the US. Refrigeration cases in *tiendas* and markets were filled with popular types of meats such as *carne cecina* [thinly sliced, marinated and salted beef], *carne enchilada* [pork coated in chile], *longaniza* and *chorizo* and a large selection of Mexican cheeses, creams and *refrescos* were on display. Noé, who worked at one grocery store, said that the ingredients that 'originate from our country' were those most sought out by the customers. Informants sometimes paid more for foods that were considered from Mexico or prepared in a way that mimicked food preparation in Mexico. Informants preferred these foods and believed they were tastier and fresher. Noé said that 'chicken is $3.70 per pound and [*carne*] *cecina* is $5.50 per pound, a little more, but for the same amount [of meat], but it is meat that originates from our country, so the people—like you can see with the vegetables as well, like the jalapeño and other types of vegetables that are from our country—they eat them'.

Many informants also occasionally sourced their meat from the local live poultry butcher. The butcher had a warehouse filled with chickens and turkeys, where customers chose their bird after which it was killed and de-feathered. The cost of this meat was more than that found in the grocery store but it was preferred because it was considered fresher and the taste was more similar to what they were used to in Mexico.

Similarly, Mexican coke, sold in a glass, was often sold alongside coke in a can. Although Mexican coke had a smaller portion size and was more expensive it was still preferred by many Mexicans. Clementina, for example, sold canned coke at her stand, which she bought wholesale at a low price. When she wanted a coke she would run to the local Mexican bakery and buy a Mexican coke for almost double the cost rather than drink the coke she sold at her stand. Domingo, the *taco* truck owner and father of two, also emphasized the preference for Mexican items despite their cost. One Sunday afternoon in November when Domingo's son was helping Domingo serve his customers, he left the truck for a bit to chat on the sidewalk. Domingo recollected his memories of Mexico and explained some of his attempts to re-create similar food experiences in NYC. He said:

> We sell Mexican cola. For two dollars it is more expensive than American coke. I love Coca Cola. We used to play soccer, I mean, when I was little, and whoever won, paid. They were 1.5 litre bottles. One person would have to go and buy the coke—whoever won [smiling]. We, Mexicans, adopted it. It is ours. It is ours like *tacos* and *tortillas*. Everything tastes different when you have a [Mexican] coke. You go into a restaurant in Mexico and there is a bottle of coke on every table.

For, Domingo, drinking imported Mexican Coke in the US brought back memories of his childhood. These examples suggest that the taste and meanings associated with certain foods encouraged consumption. It was not just price or availability alone that dictated the foods and drinks that informants consumed. Accessibility interacted with concerns for taste, palatability and nostalgia. Although, many of the items that informants felt were tastier and fresher were more expensive, informants sometimes purchased them anyway. In West Queens, informants had access both to foods that they could not purchase before migration and also to some items that reminded them of home. The result was a

diverse and abundant food environment, though not for everyone, as the next section will explore.

Class-based Perceptions of Affordability: Abundance Vs. Scarcity

Although the majority of informants found food to be more affordable in the US, perceptions of food affordability were not uniform. This section suggests how perceptions differed according to class and documentation status.

Fernanda, in her early thirties, was studying in Manhattan at a music conservatory training as a jazz singer and also playing music gigs in the area. She was from Mexico City, and in NYC on a scholarship while living with her American boyfriend. When I asked her about food prices she had a completely different perspective than the majority of my informants. She responded very emotively:

> The food is very expensive. We eat a lot more pasta because it is cheap here but I don't buy whole wheat pasta like in Mexico because it is too expensive. In Mexico City, I could buy a lot of fruit, and I would buy the organic fruit but here I can't afford it. All health foods and the health shops are not cheap. And yoga. I used to do yoga after work during the week when I lived in Mexico, but do you know how expensive a yoga class is here? I just can't afford it.

Fernanda's ability to afford food in Mexico was possibly much greater than other informants due to her economic position. She had a professional job, lived in Mexico City in her own apartment and had a car. Thus, Fernanda's point of comparison for measuring affordability was different than the majority of informants who had limited economic means and access to food in Mexico. Fernanda was also a scholarship student, living on a small stipend in NYC, and, thus, could be considered downwardly mobile in the US with regard to income. In contrast, the majority of informants were upwardly mobile because they were

accessing better jobs and higher wages in the US than in Mexico. This also may account for their differing perceptions of affordability.

Similarly, Jorge was college educated and living in NYC on a tourist visa. He had a degree in marketing but was working as a freelancer (for a job in Mexico) and, later as a construction worker in NYC. He moved back and forth from Mexico to the US to avoid over-staying his 3-month visa. Jorge's experience with purchasing fruit was quite different from that of the majority of informants with which I spoke. Jorge often remarked to me that fruit was much more accessible in Mexico than in NYC. One day when we were walking past the stands selling mango and watermelon on the street near to Jorge's apartment, I commented on the amount of fruit available right outside his home. These were the same stands that many informants used as evidence to suggest the availability of fruit. But when I pointed out the stands, Jorge disapprovingly remarked that the fruit on the streets was very expensive. He clarified that in Mexico he was in charge of making the salsas and the *aguitas* [flavoured waters] in his house. He would make *aguitas* by combining water, sugar and the juice of tamarind, strawberries, kiwis, limes or watermelon. He said, however, that in NYC, because fruit was so expensive he would not even consider juicing it just to make an *aguita*, instead, he said his family drank soft drinks. Jorge described the way in which his family would shop in Mexico. They purchased food at markets and *tiendas* during the week, and once every 15 days, just after payday they would drive to the local Costco do a large shop and then stop at the cinema and eat in the food court which was located in the same shopping area. He was clear to say that food was much more expensive in NYC than it was for him in Mexico, but he also recognized that his opinion might be quite unique.

> I don't believe the lower classes shop at Sam's or Costco [in Mexico] because they don't have a car to get there and they may not be able to afford the membership fee. They shop at the local *tiendas*, *tianguis* [local markets] and *tortillerias* [tortilla shops].

In this way, Jorge indicated that his position was slightly different from that of the other migrants from Mexico. For Jorge who had the equivalent of a bachelor's degree, lived in Mexico City, had access to a car, and referred to himself as 'middle class' his experience of food prices in Mexico greatly differed from that of the majority of informants because he was able to access and afford more in Mexico than they did, and thus, his perception of food prices in NYC was distinct from theirs. However, despite these differences in perception, Fernanda and Jorge also suggested that their diets became less nutritious in NYC.

Andrés, from Northern Mexico, worked in Manhattan to mediate legal issues for Mexicans. Like Fernanda, Andrés was a college graduate and arrived to the US with a visa. Andrés was quite disappointed with the cost of food in NYC. In fact, the amount of money that he spent on food was a source of embarrassment and upset rather than one of satisfaction. One Monday morning in late July, I ran into him near to where he worked. He told me that he and his friends took the train to the beach on Long Island on Saturday and then had dinner in Manhattan, followed by karaoke and *cervezas*, [beers]. At the beginning of his story, he was quite enthusiastic to describe where he went to eat and drink, but towards the end of the conversation he started to shake his head, saying, 'but you know, I spent almost $100 in one day! Can you imagine? Can you believe it?' He emphasized that someone in Mexico could live a whole week off of $100. He repeated, 'I don't feel good about it. I'm embarrassed'. Rather than being boastful or proud that his economic situation enabled him to spend $100 on entertainment over a long Saturday, he seemed to be ashamed that he spent so much, and regretful because he knew in Mexico he was able to purchase the same for less. Whenever I spoke with Andrés, the conversation often turned back to money. He was constantly looking to find a new job so that he could make more money, as he felt he made too little money, and he was always saying that he wanted to move out of NYC and maybe even move to Europe, because he

felt NYC was too expensive. Andrés's perception of cost in NYC contrasted that of the majority of informants because he showed shame rather than pride in his expenditure on consumables and he found food to be expensive.

One time I met up with Jorge at a Colombian restaurant. I was in the process of looking for a photograph to append to the front of my participant information sheet.[23] I wanted to ask Jorge what he thought about me using a photograph that I had found online. I had been searching all over for a photograph without much luck. I thought about putting an image of a store or a street scene in NYC but I did not want to draw attention to a particular place in the neighbourhood. I also did not want to put a stereotypical photograph of fruits or vegetables or something that looked too much like an image one would find in health education literature. Nor did I want to put a photograph of hot sauce, *tortillas* or a *tienda* packed high with *comida chatarra* [junk food] for fear that I would be essentializing the diet or pointing to foods that were generally considered unhealthy. I finally settled on a photograph of a food stand in Mexico. At the time it seemed like a good idea, though Jorge promptly told me that it was not. The photograph was aesthetically pleasing, the stand was located under a red and white striped tent and there were mirrors affixed (in an ad hoc way) to the back of the tent. On the tables there were huge stone *molcajetes* [mortars] filled with cilantro, onions, cucumbers, radishes, limes and a pineapple. I had just written to the photographer to ask for permission to use the photograph informally and I wanted to show Jorge to get his opinion before I did. I showed him the photograph and he paused and then said:

> I don't know—this photo for me is, it does not make me feel good. I looked at this and you see it is street food. Street food is the

[23] The participant information sheet describes my project in brief and provides my contact details for the informants.

> lowest level of food that one can buy. It is for the poorest people. Eating on the street, well it is not what everyone does. I mean sometimes I do it, but I also eat in restaurants and at home. People don't want to eat on the street. Sometimes they have to but it does not make them feel good. [Pointing to the photograph] This guy is selling just *tacos* nothing else. It reminds me, when I first came to the US, I went to the statue of liberty. A Chinese family wanted to take a picture when we were on the ferry and we then had them take photos of my cousin and me. We started talking and they told me that they thought all Mexicans wear *sombreros* [referring to wide-brim hats].

A bit disheartened that I had chosen this photograph, I then asked Jorge what kind of photograph he would have liked to see, and he said, 'I think that it is best to put a photograph of a family on the flier; a family eating at home'. Jorge ended up sending me two photographs to use that he found on the Internet, one was of a family sharing a meal on a back porch and the other was a photograph of a fruit and vegetable aisle in a modern supermarket. A slim woman was standing in front of the aisle with her grocery cart.[24] Jorge's comment taught me an important lesson. It pointed out that he associated street food with cheap food that was served predominantly to the lower classes. Jorge argued that he too ate on the street but it was not because he wanted to. He mentioned that he ate on the street if he was at work and too far from his neighbourhood to go home for lunch. He impressed upon me that it was necessity rather than preference that led him to eat on the street. The photographs that Jorge sent to me suggested that he wanted to portray Mexicans as eating in the home and choosing healthy fruits and vegetables at the supermarket. I think that Jorge's middle-class position helped to shape his perception. He wanted me to know that not all Mexicans ate on the street and he definitely did not want me to think

[24] In the end I ended up not using a photo at all because I decided that it introduced more problems than it solved.

that he ate on the street often. Jorge suggested that he sometimes had to eat on the street like the lower classes but he did not feel particularly good about this. In this way, Jorge rationalized his eating practices in the US while distinguishing himself with the lower classes.

Fernanda, Jorge and Andrés perceived their changed eating practices as an unfortunate consequence of food un-affordability and scarcity. By contrast, the majority of other informants generally welcomed the changes in food practices that they experienced, and considered them a *fortunate* consequence of food availability and their improved economic position in NYC. I suggest that the heterogeneous perceptions and meanings associated with food cost in NYC were shaped by prior experiences in Mexico as well as economic and occupational class. It is not, however, that informants who made a relatively low-income and worked in the service sector did not feel constrained by their economic situation, in fact they were vocal about the burdensome expense of rent and other costs in NYC, but they still remained generally optimistic about the affordability of food in NYC and the opportunities that migration would afford them now and in the future.

Engendered Perceptions of Affordability & Entitlement

Just as class seemed to shape perceptions of food affordability in NYC, so too did gender. One day I was sitting at the Aztec Cafe with Elvira. Elvira had slipped away from the kitchen on this late afternoon because her boss was out and the restaurant was slow. She had been working as a cook at the restaurant for a few weeks when I met her. The Atzec Cafe opened in the late afternoon for food and drinks and turned into a dance club and bar in the evening. I tried to get a sense from Elvira of what she usually cooked for her customers. Elvira stated that 'the men want shrimp, whatever is most expensive, but the women get cheaper dishes: *tacos*, soups or salads'.

My fieldwork suggested that there were differences in how women—particularly housewives and mothers—and men described their eating practices, particularly the extent to which they ate out of the house. It was often quite difficult to talk about 'eating out' or eating pre-prepared food with housewives until I developed substantial rapport with them. In fact, it seemed to be a rather contentious issue. They would explain with detail the dishes that they liked to prepare, or their hints for making *salsa verde* or *tamales* but when the discussion turned to eating out they would get sheepish. Some would talk about eating out on a Sunday when the whole family got together or going to a diner to celebrate a birthday in the family, but the idea that women ate outside the house or ate prepared foods on a regular basis [rather than for a special social occasion], was hardly acknowledged, and seemed to take place less frequently among housewives, than among men.

Laura helped me to understand this disparity. It was rare that Laura ate out and when she did it was after church on a Sunday or after a long day of grocery shopping with her children, in which case she would allow them to choose where they wanted to go. She was always cooking, often in large quantities, for friends and neighbours and her family and friends were always stopping by to give her food, to drop off their children while they ran an errand, or to check Facebook on her computer.

One day she started talking about what her husband used to eat before she arrived in the US to join him. She explained that he did not want to eat healthy foods but that slowly she won the fight [*gané la lucha]* and led him to eat a healthier diet and to eat at home more. Laura explained that he worked at a deli and he arrived early to prepare the sandwiches for the customers. Meanwhile he ate whatever he wanted from the deli counter: bagels, egg, cheese and bacon sandwiches and egg salad. He ate out and drank with his friends after work. She

spoke quite critically about the unequal responsibilities she thought were placed on Mexican men and women regarding food provisioning in the US.

> Women come here and are expected to conserve traditional Mexican food for the family but men don't have to, they don't have to do any of that work, they come and they don't have much time, they just work, work, work and eat out and never do they worry about cooking.

A few months after Laura explained this to me, we were eating in her kitchen. In a very small pot on the stove, Laura was heating *pozole* [a type of corn soup] next to sweet *tamales* that her cousin brought over and a chicken soup that she had made. She told me that her children's father brought the *pozole* over but she did not know who had made it, probably his girlfriend, definitely not him, she thought. She served me a tiny bowl of it and remarked that it was too spicy, and that her kids would not like it. I asked what meat was in it, and she said pork. Then she said, 'that is the traditional, but I don't make my *pozole* with pork, I make it with chicken because it's healthier'.

Laura suggested that the burden of conserving traditional Mexican food, or cooking, fell unfairly on the woman. I suggest that this burden to cook food, which Laura seemed to be referring to, yet resisting, helps to explain why housewives and mothers, seemed to be less frequent consumers of prepared food and fast food than men, and also less willing to talk about 'eating out' than men. Eating out, and eating fast food were viewed as a sign of laziness or that a woman was not fulfilling her role in preparing Mexican food and maintaining cultural traditions. Harbottle (2000) illustrates in her ethnographic work with Iranian families in Britain that cooking practices enabled female Iranian migrants to reproduce the cultural identity of their families. These practices are seen as the women's responsibility and through these practices they derived respect and status (ibid: 12-3). Adapon (2008) demonstrates in her work in the Milpa Alta that Mexican women, particularly married women, are supposed to know how

to cook and are respected for having culinary skills. Purchasing food for one's family is seen as shameful and is playfully derided. Conversely, men are not expected to have cooking skills since it is assumed that their mothers or wives would carry out these tasks (ibid). Laura similarly pointed out that Mexican women in NYC were expected to cook traditional food for their families whereas Mexican men in the US had no such demands placed on them and it was more acceptable for them to eat out. Chapter 3 demonstrates, however, that not only single men but also single and working women tended to eat a lot of prepared and convenience foods.

The extent to which housewives and mothers felt entitled to access prepared food in West Queens could also be analysed in light of Malkin's (2004) ethnography with Mexican migrants in an East Coast suburb. Malkin argues that the enduring narrative of migration is that of men leaving Mexico to work and endure hardship for their family. Contrary to this narrative, when women migrate they go to help: 'it is helping rather than their (waged) labour that is the focus of their migration' (Malkin 2004: 85). There is great emphasis placed on the migrant woman's role as a caretaker. My fieldwork suggests that Laura and other women felt this emphasis and it resulted in women feeling less entitled to spend money on prepared food and more responsible for cooking at home. Furthermore, the fact that unemployed women did not have access to cash in the same way that working migrants did, also shaped their limited entitlement to eat prepared food.

In contrast to the lack of entitlement to prepared and convenience foods that many married women and mothers felt, male informants had different opinions towards 'eating out' and sometimes boasted about it, especially among younger men. Notable exceptions, however, were Jorge and Andrés who had more negative opinions about eating out. Generally, male informants would talk about the fast food that they ate and the money that they would spend in bars at

night. They often, though not always, rationalized it by saying that they did not have time to cook because they were working too much, or that they *had* to eat out because their wives were in Mexico and could not cook for them. Men often suggested that they felt entitled to eat out because of the hardships they endured to get to the US. For younger, single men, there was also the sense that men should enjoy themselves in the US and take advantage of the experience. Juan Pablo, in his early twenties came to NYC to work at his uncle's barbershop. When I met him he had recently arrived in the US. He told me that he really enjoyed the food in NYC and wanted to try a little of everything. He explained that when he talked to his mother on the phone he would tell her about the food that he was eating. His mother said that this was *his* experience and he should feel entitled to try new things and to eat pizza, hamburgers and Chinese food. Juan Pablo said, 'My mother told me, 'this is your time, your adventure'. These examples provide insight into how feelings of entitlement as compared to feelings of duty to cook inside the home shaped gendered negotiations of the food environment. Life-stage also have also accounted for Laura and Juan Pablo's different practices with regard to eating-out. Laura was the primary guardian for her children and she had the responsibility to feed and clothe them. She was living in NYC to give her children an education that she felt was superior to the one that they would receive in Mexico despite the fact that she sincerely wanted to return. In contrast, Juan Pablo, did not have a family to support and was in NYC to have his own 'adventure'. These different objectives may have also shaped their interest and ability to spend money on prepared food or eating out. The fact that many working and single women in NYC ate out (see Chapter 3, pp. 87-96) further suggests that both gender and life course shaped perceptions of entitlement.

Subsidized Food

Government supports may have also shaped consumption practices among Mexican migrants by shaping entitlement and access. The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants & Children [WIC] and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program [SNAP] are two nutritional programs administered by the US Department of Agriculture and New York State. The WIC program provides nutritional supplementation to pregnant, breastfeeding and postpartum women, as well as their children up to the age of five. SNAP[25] provides benefits to individuals or families that can be redeemed at local food stores and supermarkets. WIC is available for documented and undocumented women, if they are pregnant or have a child under five years old. Undocumented migrants are only eligible to apply for SNAP if they have US-born children. The Mexican Consulate as well as many organizations, hospitals and clinics in Queens have individuals trained to inform and enroll Mexicans into these supplemental programs. SNAP supplements the purchase of foods, with the exception of hot foods and foods that are consumed in the store, whereas WIC is more restrictive as it provides for the purchase of very specific grains, dairy, fruits and vegetables.

There were a few ways in which enrolment in these programs influenced the food practices of my informants. Individuals often mentioned that they had cereal as a snack or as a light meal at the end of the day. Honey Bunches of Oats and Cheerios were the two most commonly mentioned cereal brand names, both of which were among the few national brand cereals that were approved for purchase with WIC. Furthermore, only a few types of cheese could be purchased on WIC coupons, such as mozzarella, cheddar and American cheese. No

[25] SNAP was formerly known as the Food Stamp Program.

imported or organic cheeses could be purchased with these coupons. As a result, individuals often supplemented *queso fresco* [a crumbly white cheese] or *queso Oaxaca* [cheese typical of Oaxaca state] with mozzarella or cheddar produced in the US.

Juice was an aspect of the fruit and vegetable allowance. A mother with a child was eligible to receive two 64-ounce bottles of juice a month. The only requirement was that the juice was high in Vitamin-C. Nestle Juicy Juice was a popular option that satisfied the WIC requirements. The label said '100% Juice', however, such juice is from concentrate and high in natural sugars. The refrigerators of my informants almost always had a carton of juice on-hand. Although many recognized that fruit juice consumption should be limited, informants often reasoned that it was better than drinking a soft drink. Furthermore, juice could not be supplemented for another WIC food item so informants would essentially lose their benefit if they did not purchase the juice. The structure of these supplemental programs, which were biased towards the consumption of US-produced food, introduced migrants to certain products that otherwise they may not have been exposed to, or encouraged to consume.

Another important impact that WIC had on informant practices related to the consumption of milk and the perception that milk was healthy and nutritious for themselves and their children. Women that enrolled in WIC received a food package that contained an allotment of four to six gallons of milk a month, depending on the WIC package. Informants took advantage of the milk that they were entitled to, though it seemed that they often had a surplus of it in their refrigerator, while other fruit drinks and soft drinks were consumed more quickly. This was clear in my own observations, where I noticed that parents often encouraged their children to drink milk. For example, when I visited Julia at her house, her three kids were helping themselves to snacks while playing on computers and watching television. Every time her kids ran to the kitchen and

opened the refrigerator, Julia would remind them 'Grab the low-fat milk, don't drink the fruit punch!' She told me that her daughters were always drinking fruit punch. She tried to conserve it so that it lasted the whole week by encouraging her kids to drink milk. If she did not, it would be finished three days after she bought it. The perception that milk was a healthy alternative to fruit juice and soft drinks also encouraged consumption among informants. Milk producers and farmers in the US heavily promote the healthiness of dairy products, more recently with a specific attention to increasing milk consumption among Latinos. Celebrities on Spanish television programs as well as commercials funded by the dairy industry promote the healthiness of milk, even chocolate milk, and suggest its importance for growing healthy bones, teeth and losing weight.

WIC and SNAP provided supplemental income each month to informants, but these programs primarily benefited individuals with documentation, or those who had US-born children. Undocumented women were eligible for WIC if they were pregnant or had a small child. Thus, the right to these nutritional benefits was biased towards women and mothers. One key requirement of the SNAP and WIC coupons is that prepared food cannot be purchased with them. Thus, the bias towards eating-in among housewives and mothers may not only have been shaped by gendered perceptions of entitlement and responsibility but also reiterated by the gendered nature of nutritional benefits.

The micro-environment of the workplace also shaped entitlement to food. For example, an Ecuadorean restaurant in the area that employed primarily Ecuadoreans and Mexicans provided a daily special that employees were allowed to eat for free. Tomás, a bartender in his late-twenties, explained that he ate the special, independent of what it was, because it was free, whereas if he ordered something off of the menu he would have to pay for it. Tomás usually ate his meal at four o'clock in the evening before the restaurant became crowded

with customers. One afternoon when there were no customers around, Tomás and another waiter brought out their meals from the kitchen and sat in a booth near the bar. The special that day was *sancocho de carne*, which is an Ecuadorean stew made with corn, pork and potatoes, followed by a plate of ribs, white rice and beans. They ate their meal and then went back to work until eleven o'clock in the evening when Tomás finished work. He explained that the previous night he went out with friends and as the night was ending he and his friends returned to the Ecuadorean restaurant to order a grilled steak. His housemate had texted him that evening to tell him that she had made chicken soup and had left it in the kitchen. Tomás explained why he decided to eat out:

> When we finished it was four in the morning and we were hungry again. I didn't want to go home to eat. We know this place [Ecuadorean restaurant] is good, I know what they serve and it is cheap, we get a discount, and I know the people, so we all came here.

For Tomás, the ability to purchase free as well as discounted food and drinks at the restaurant, encouraged him to eat there even when he wasn't working. It also constrained his lunch options because there was a strong incentive to eat the daily special and hardly any incentive to bring food from home.

Other food establishments did not provide free food for clients. Paco who had lived in NYC for just under five years worked at a salad bar in Manhattan. He told me that he did not eat at the restaurant, but rather he purchased food nearby to his workplace for a quick afternoon snack and then ate a larger meal when he returned home in the evening. When I asked him why he did not eat at work, he replied that the food was not free. He said that maybe he could take some crisps or a drink from the shelf but he usually did not. His wife, Elu interjected to say that he did not want to take items from the bar because the manager at the restaurant was Mexican and Paco did not want to get him into trouble with the American owner. Thus, Elu cooked a large meal for him in the evening and in the

early morning he reheated the meal from the night before and ate it before heading to work.

Many restaurants and cafes hired cleaners to come in during the late evening or the early morning to wash the kitchen floors. These cleaners acknowledged that they accessed food, juices and soft drinks in the kitchen during their shift. The majority of those who were employed in food services noted that they ate where they worked. This is important because it suggests the affordability of food was not a result of food price only but the micro-environment in which one was embedded. Entitlements to food in workspaces as well as employer-employee relationships mediated affordability and access to certain foods. Indeed many restaurants offered free or discounted food to their employers but this came at the expense of having a choice of what one ate, it also discouraged informants from bringing food from home. Since restaurants were primarily male spaces where women, particularly mothers and married women, were less likely to work, it was more common for migrant men than women to talk about receiving subsidized and free food in the workplace.

Mexico: Parallel Changes in Food Affordability and Accessibility

It is important to recognize that patterns of food affordability and accessibility did not just change for migrants in the US, but return-migration, transnational relations, remittances, and globalized food markets, also shaped changing affordability and access to food in Mexico. For example, Clementina explained that since she moved to the US, the conditions for her family had changed, they had a real house and a telephone and some comforts that her family had not had before. She said:

> Before, I was able to help my mom. Before I came here [NYC] and got set up, my mom just worked and didn't rest, working all of the time but now, well now [laughing a bit] she eats whatever she wants, 'lo que sea antojito' [whatever she desires], that is the

> difference. Now, where my mom lives there are more *supermercados* [supermarkets], more *tiendas*, more plazas [public squares]'. The food did not change but there is just much more of it. More of everything. When I lived there, my mom just couldn't afford it. We ate, but not very well. We ate fruit but it was the cheap fruit, oranges, bananas, cucumber. But now they eat whatever their *antojito* is.

Mireya's sister also discussed that her family's ability to purchase food in Mexico changed since she moved to the US. She said:

> Half the village has left and they just send money back and they have started stores and supermarkets and they even have a Walmart and a Sears. They [my kids] always have milk and cereal, I know that, because with the money I send back for them, they can afford to have that all of the time. My mom can purchase it for them for good prices at Walmart.

Mireya's sister noted that the majority of the village population had left for Chicago and with the money they sent home her village had transformed. She explained:

> They have fixed up their houses so they are not like before—they are huge and big. Everyone destroyed their houses and made big ones. They got rid of the whole house. Before they had floors made of dirt but now they are cement and there are more schools and there are better schools and bigger schools and there are more clinics and the clinics have gotten larger all due to the money that was sent back.

Alejandro, a man in his mid-forties who moved to West Queens twenty-five years ago described the way in which food practices in Mexico have been continually transformed through interaction with the US. He discussed the changes that he observed during his last visit to his hometown in 2006. He could not believe how his *pueblo*, [village] had changed since he first arrived in the US. Alejandro remarked:

> We get accustomed to the rhythm of life and the food of this city so when we go back to the *pueblo* we try to bring it back a little. If you are hungry at midnight, if you are hungry at four o'clock in the morning, well, that's okay because for twenty-four hours you can ask for delivery over there! They have pizza, Chinese food, *tacos*, they have everything. They have adapted to the system of life here [in NYC] and they have begun to implement it a bit there. Mexicans who go back have brought money to the *pueblo*, and those who don't return are sending money. With this, they have torn down their houses of palm and adobe and constructed bigger and prettier ones and they have started businesses. Here [in NYC] you cannot do anything because you don't have documents or a social security number to buy something or put up a business. So you come here, you learn something and then you bring it back to Mexico. Restaurants, construction, what else, factories, *niñeras* [nannies], all of these are jobs that the Americans don't want to do and so this is what the people who come [from Mexico] have to do. They work in a pizzeria here and they learn how to do pizzas, they return there and put up a pizzeria.

He suggests that return migration and the sending of remittances fostered changes in Mexico that resembled those occurring in the US. The fact that migrants often learned trades and skills in NYC but did not have the resources or documentation to start their own businesses encouraged the return to Mexico where there was the possibility to start a business. Julia described her own experience when she travelled to Mexico one summer to visit her family. She illustrates how her hometown had changed.

> In Mexico they sell many hot dogs and burgers on the street and there are many Burger Kings, McDonalds, Pizza Hut, things that, before, were not there…My mom likes Burger King because well there is no McDonalds close to my mom. To her we say 'we think that you would like McDonalds more'. I like McDonalds more than Burger King. There '*hasta mi abuela prefiere un burger que un taco*' [even my grandma prefers a burger to a taco]. I mean, I can't believe it…Well, the Burger King is sort of far, I think about half an hour. They go one time every two or three weeks. For them, yes, for them it is a 'lujo' [luxury] Burger King, it is not something that you can do all the time. You know, whatever is new for

> them, they like. My mom, she loves pizza. When I go sometimes they get a [pizza] pie, my brother he works in a pizzeria where they make pizza and sometimes he brings it home but she loves cheese pizza. There is Pizza Hut and other places where you can get a pizza but she likes the one from where my brother works the best…Marisa, honestly, you know, I have never tried the pizza there, because when I go I don't want a pizza I want—*queso Oaxaca*. I love *queso Oaxaca*, I can eat it alone just with a *tortilla*… actually, now when we go to Mexico we get fatter because we want to eat everything, like *elotes*, here too they sell them but they are corn and they boil them and put cheese, *chile* and mayo [mayonnaise]. Here, yes, they sell it as a soup but there they sell it in the street like a soup with the same ingredients but with pieces of corn but when I eat it there I put just lemon and *chile* [on it], I don't like the mayo. Here they have it but I have not eaten it.

Julia's comment illustrates the sheer availability of food, typically associated with the US, in Mexico. Importantly, unlike in NYC where these foods were generally affordable, they were still cost prohibitive and regarded as a luxury in Mexico. Julia notes that she gained weight when she visited Mexico because there were many foods that she wanted to enjoy that she was not able to find in the US. This suggests that the experience of being overwhelmed by new foods and wanting to try everything—that a few informants described upon their arrival in the US—was mirrored when migrants returned to Mexico due to their eagerness to enjoy all of the foods that they could not access, and those that did not taste the same in NYC. Whether it is arriving to NYC or returning to Mexico, migration to a different food environment, may encourage over-eating because of the way it exposes individuals to novel foods. Of course, the extent to which this occurs and whether it is sustained over time is shaped by a variety of other factors and contexts related to the micro-contexts that individuals engage in (i.e. workplace, household), economic constraints and perceptions.

Moreover, the availability of high-energy foods in Mexico observed by informants reflects processes of nutritional change that have been identified in the literature. Economic and social changes linked to trade, globalization and

tourism have ushered in a nutrition transition in Latin America, with Mexico experiencing it at a particularly fast pace (Popkin & Gordon-Larsen 2004). The changes experienced by migrants in NYC may be shared to some extent by their relatives in Mexico, therefore suggesting that nutritional change after migration is not an isolated phenomenon but a local manifestation of nutrition transitions occurring on a global scale. This is important as it highlights that dynamic processes of food change are occurring in Mexico and suggests that recently-arrived Mexican migrants will not necessarily arrive to NYC with the same food practices and body sizes as those who migrated many years ago. Importantly, nutritional changes experienced by migrants in NYC and the nutrition transitions taking place in Mexico should not be assumed to be identical but rather shaped by local contexts and social conditions. Furthermore, just as nutritional change after migration to NYC is heterogeneous, multidirectional and multidimensional, so too should the global nutrition transition be conceptualized.

Discussion

While food may have been cheaper in Mexico, the vast majority of informants considered most foods to be more affordable and physically accessible in NYC because their income had improved after migration. They generally felt able to purchase more meat, milk, cream, processed and prepared foods in NYC than in their hometown, although they acknowledged that some foods were still out of their reach or could be afforded only in moderation. Increased food affordability was valued as a sign of upward mobility, even though it was recognized that the foods that could be purchased did not necessarily have high nutritional quality or have the same taste as those purchased in Mexico. Although the public health literature shows that reliance on energy-dense, refined and low-quality foods is a mark of low income because these are the most affordable dietary options in the US (Drewnowski & Darmon 2005), from the majority of informants' perspectives

the reliance on these foods was due to their improved economic conditions in NYC vis-à-vis Mexico rather than a result of economic constraint. These narratives indicate the need to explore perceptions of the food environment and affordability from migrants' perspectives. Improved affordability, coupled with the fact that many available foods were desired and had high-status shaped consumption. Since most of my informants made relatively little compared to the general population, although they could afford a large quantity of food (especially prepared food) in NYC they could not afford food of high quality.

In contrast, the few of my informants who were from middle or upper class backgrounds and who came to the US on work or student visas felt that food was less affordable in the US than in Mexico. Among these migrants, changing food practices after migration were seen negatively as a result of food *unaffordability*, and perhaps downward mobility. These contrasting views illustrate how economic and educational class shaped perceptions of food change after migration. Independent of whether food practices were seen as a sign of upward or downward mobility, however, these different socioeconomic groups generally experienced a convergence towards eating foods of lower nutritional quality in NYC.

With regard to fruit affordability and availability, perceptions were diverse, depending on what region or town in Mexico informants were from, as well as their socioeconomic status. Research among Latinos in the Boston metropolitan area and Mexican migrants in New Brunswick, New Jersey, suggests that fruit is less affordable and accessible after migration than before (Sussner et al. 2008; Guarnaccia et al. 2012). My fieldwork, however, indicates that informants perceived fruit to be more affordable in the US than in Mexico, even if its quality was perceived to be poorer. This is perhaps a result of the fact that many affordable grocery stores and fruit and vegetable carts were densely lined along the main thoroughfares in West Queens, which may not have been the case in

these other studies. Low-income urban neighbourhoods in the US have been found to offer limited access to healthy foods, such as fruits and vegetables (Horowitz et al. 2004). Thus, it has been suggested that migrants settling in low-income areas have limited availability to fruits and vegetables (Yeh et al. 2009). This relationship, however, has recently been found to be more complex. Gordon et al. (2011) have demonstrated that low-income neighbourhoods in NYC that have high proportions of African-Americans have low access to healthy foods, however, low-income areas with high proportions of Latinos have much greater access to healthy foods, primarily due to the presence of 'healthy bodegas'. These observations suggest that it should not be assumed that migrants living in low-income neighbourhoods have limited access to healthy foods. Furthermore, the availability of high-energy, convenience foods in an environment does not imply a lack of access to healthy foods. In West Queens, these characteristics were not mutually exclusive. Moreover, in addition to the opportunity to purchase a variety of foods in West Queens, the food environment presented great opportunity to purchase weight loss products (see Chapter 7).

Among informants, food accessibility and affordability was also shaped by gender and occupation. Gendered notions of entitlement created a situation where Mexican migrant women, particularly, housewives and mothers, were less likely to eat out or to eat prepared food than men. Furthermore, because government food programs only assisted undocumented migrants if they had US-born children or were new mothers, more undocumented women than undocumented men accessed these benefits. These programs encouraged cooking at home rather than eating out, because prepared food and restaurant food was not subsidized. Occupation also shaped food availability and affordability and gave food service workers, most of whom were men, easy access to prepared meals, free drinks and alcohol. Thus, the environment did not

uniformly shape migrant food practices but class, gender, documentation status and occupation modified a migrant's ability to access and afford food.

Beyond West Queens, this chapter illustrates that changes in food affordability and accessibility are occurring in Mexico among the families and neighbours of migrants due to return-migration, transnational ties and globalized trade and as supermarkets and fast food restaurants spring up. As migrants change their practices in NYC, so too, do their relatives back home, thus challenging the concept of acculturation that views nutritional change as an isolated phenomenon experienced by migrants only, while their family and friends in Mexico continue their 'traditional' food practices, without interruption. This chapter suggests that nutritional change experienced by Mexicans after migration is a local expression of the nutrition transition happening across the globe.

Chapters 3-5 illustrate the contexts, constraints and relationships shaping everyday food practices after migration and how they were lived and perceived by informants. These chapters suggest that the acculturation concept is limited in its ability to understand nutritional change while pointing out the value of exploring social structures and vulnerabilities to better understand food practices and nutritional change. Migration patterns, household gender dynamics and membership, work schedules, time constraints and the food environment were important contexts influencing change. These chapters demonstrate how migrants understood their food practices in relation to these structural contexts and constraints. Sometimes, however, informants used culture-based explanations to understand their food practices and nutritional changes. The next chapter will explore informants' use of these culture-based models, some of which resembled the concept of acculturation.

PART III
THE PERSISTENCE OF CULTURE-BASED MODELS FOR UNDERSTANDING FOOD PRACTICES, BODY SIZE & DIETING

6. CULTURE-BASED UNDERSTANDINGS OF NUTRITIONAL CHANGE

> There are problems of under and over nutrition in Mexico. There is obesity, but less obesity in Mexico than here. They come fat and get fatter [in US]. They don't put attention to their figure. It is not the most important. They don't mind it [*no les importa*]. They live in the moment and they don't think about tomorrow. It doesn't matter to them. Many don't go to school and they don't know this information. My parents, for example, do not know what to eat. If you want, you can take care of yourself but I imagine that people that do not have an education have more obesity. They get fat [*engordan*] because they do not give attention to what they eat.
>
> *-Maribel, early-thirties, manicurist and mother of two*

Informants explained and rationalized food practices, body sizes and weight differences using two types of discourses. The first discourse acknowledged the way in which food practices, body size and weight trajectories were shaped by structural factors such as time, money, migration and the food environment, as described in the previous chapters. The second discourse acknowledged food practices, weight and body size to be a reflection of one's culture, whether it be the culture associated with a particular socioeconomic or educational class, ethnicity or gender. In this way, food practices, body size differences, and weight disparities were sometimes perceived as natural traits of particular ethnic, cultural, class or educational groups. This type of culture-based discourse views cultural characteristics to play a determining role in shaping nutritional outcomes. These two discourses coexisted among informants and assumed varying importance depending on the context. Individuals combined these two discourses to explain food practices and body size, often emphasizing the first narrative when discussing food practices and turning to culture-based models when the discussion turned to obesity and weight change. Also, when the interest was to explain 'others' nutritional practices rather than one's own, there seemed to be more of a reliance on these culture-based models. This chapter

examines the second discourse and explores how it overlaps and diverges from the concept of acculturation in the public health literature. In this chapter, I will also discuss body size preferences and perceptions. I show how slenderness was valued because it marked prudence, self-care and self-discipline, but it was also judged, to some extent, to be a sign of vanity and selfishness.

Explaining Body Size and Nutritional Change

Education & Culture

Noé, who worked at a family-run grocery store, was single, in his early thirties and lived with his sister and her family. He articulated why Mexicans gained weight when they arrived to the US. He said:

> Noé: Are you with me, in this area, there are people who *cuida* [take care of] their nutrition but the majority, are you with me? Ninety or 80%, what they want is to eat well and it does not matter to them if they are heavy or not.
>
> Marisa: Why?
>
> Noé: Maybe for the, well it is a habit that we have, the Hispanics, the culture of us, that they only want to eat well and *ya* [that's it] they want to forget if they are fat or thin.

He went further to suggest that particular cuisines were not to blame for one's weight gain but rather weight gain was a result of how an individual prepared food. He said:

> Mexican or American food I think that they are equal, but it is simply the way in which one prepares the food...[otherwise] they are the same. The food that is American, there are things that are very fast and, they call it *comida rapida* [fast food] but it makes you gain a bit of weight. *Comida Mexicana* [Mexican food] it is equal, it is just about the form of preparation, more than anything.

Noé did not value the nutritional quality of one cuisine over another but rather he placed the responsibility on the individual and the individual's role in preparing the food. Noé provided an example to clarify why he thought Mexicans gained weight over their time in the US.

> Kids have more snacks in the US than in Mexico. Women, they grab a snack and they say, 'come here, eat this' so that their kids don't cry, you know, so they [the children] are more *tranquilos* [calm] and not upset and relaxed a little more.
>
> Women in Mexico are very dedicated to their children and they are here also but maybe a bit less, it is not because they don't want to but because they are not permitted to, they have to run to work, they are cooking for the family, they are bringing the kids to the babysitter, so they want to get the kids calm before they go to the babysitter so they will 'grab a snack' [for the kids]. And you can afford it as well here, so this is how it is…there is more opportunity to snack.

Although Noé suggested that weight gain and large body sizes were consequences of Hispanic 'habits' and 'culture' he also recognized how increased availability and affordability of snacks, the need for women to work, and the time constraints of a working mother shaped food practices and weight gain in the US.

Alma also discussed the role played by social and structural contexts and individual habits in shaping body size and obesity. Alma lived with her immediate family and her sister, Mireya. When I first visited Mireya we had a formal discussion in a makeshift room on the first floor of her house, but we soon joined her sister, Alma, who was in the kitchen making a drink with fresh barley and sugar, which aids with digestion and weight loss. Alma explained the contexts shaping body size among Mexicans:

> People in Mexico, they don't have a *dieta* [weight loss regimen]...Not all of us have bad habits but the majority of

> people—some people they have good diets, for example when we were little we ate healthily…we did not suffer the way our older brothers suffered…but the economy does not permit a diet; you have to eat what you can eat. To the point where there is *ansiedad* [anxiety] about food. People get anxious about food. You don't care what you are going to do. Because you could not eat before [migration] you do not worry about what you eat. Oh, if it has lots of fat in it? 'Is it fried? Oh, I don't care'. We just don't have a diet. I have been trying to diet but my sister, well she is—*robusta* [robust].
>
> [Then her sister, Mireya, chimes in to correct her]
>
> Mireya: *gordita* [fat]!
>
> Alma: You just have to be sure to look after yourself and to eat in equilibrium but people in Mexico they don't have the opportunity to do that because they just don't have the money. They can't create a balanced diet because they don't have the money to do it. They don't have money to go on a diet or to eat in equilibrium. But also—you have to know! To *know* [my emphasis] what is healthy to eat and what is good for you and bad for you. Mexicans eat a lot of bread and we eat a lot of flour and we are eating two to three times a day. We are eating bread and tortillas that is why we are getting fat because we eat oil and *pan mexicano* and flour and *tortillas* and the people, the people don't care they don't have a diet and they don't want to even know about it.
>
> Mireya: Mexicans don't want to change. We Mexicans we like to eat certain things and we like our food and we don't really care what we eat even if it is not that healthy.

Alma argued that the economy in Mexico created a situation were individuals did not have the opportunity to care about what they ate, such that in the US they were happy to be able to access food and they did not worry about its nutritional content. In this way, she acknowledged the severe influence of poverty in shaping food practices, however, she and Mireya also highlighted migrants' lack of care and lack of knowledge about nutrition. Their comments suggest the roles played by structural contexts, individual knowledge and self-discipline in shaping nutritional change after migration. Alma, in particular, saw

these factors to be intrinsically connected. Alma also provided an instance where the term *dieta* is used to signify a weight loss regimen rather than referring to diet more generically as habitual food practice (see p. 233).

At the beginning of this chapter (see p. 205), a comment from Maribel discusses the contexts shaping body size and obesity in Mexico. I was introduced to Maribel through her friend and coworker Julia. I met her and her children for lunch during the summer after which we went back to her apartment so that her youngest was able to nap. Maribel was a manicurist in her early thirties; she had two children and lived with her partner in a one-bedroom apartment that was decorated meticulously with her five-year-old daughter's drawings and school awards. She recognized how the systemic problem of education shaped obesity and weight gain, but she seemed to see weight gain predominantly as a result of Mexicans' preference for eating in the moment without considering the long-term consequences and she attributed this to a lack of knowledge about nutrition and a lack of interest to watch what one ate. Similarly, Jose Luis, a young man in his twenties, working as a chef in the back of a restaurant, perceived weight gain to be a result of one's inability to think about the future and lack of care or concern. He said:

> I think that when Mexican men are young, they don't think about their health. They go out to a restaurant and they buy *elotes* [corn on the cob] with mayonnaise. They like *pan dulce* that has a lot of sugar. They do not take *precaución* [care or caution]. They want to eat it but they don't want to think about it. Hamburgers aren't good, but all Latinos they come and eat their hamburgers at McDonalds and it comes with a lot of oil. They eat it because it is cheap but also because it tastes good.

Jose Luis suggested that young men were more interested in the taste or pleasure of foods than they were in their nutritional value, although he also acknowledged that their food choices were partially based on price. Alejandro, who was in his mid-forties, and worked in restaurants for most of his time in the

US, also felt that Mexicans, and more generally, Hispanics did not pay attention to, or take care of what they eat. He said:

> They don't go on diets. Those who just arrived to the US do not have this mentality to do a diet…for me, I like water, I have water everyday and many times each day. But everyone does not do the same. Many, they love soda and they say, 'oh, I am paying attention to my diet, I am on a diet', so they take a diet soda and what is bad is that they take a diet soda or a beer and then they eat the same. They don't look after what comes in through our mouth. *Agua ni de relajo* [Water, what are you joking?]. [I might say] 'Do you want water?' [They would respond] 'Ya wey' [C'mon]! The people think it is a joke! It is always soda and juices and things that are sweetened…and they forget exercise and that is how they grow.
>
> For example, sometimes I do the same. I like food. I can eat until I am full [emphasis] but I know also that it can be bad so sometimes if I eat ten *tortillas*, I know it is a lot so I try to change it to four or five so this helps my diet but I don't feel full, full, full. The majority of us, we Hispanics, we eat until we are *llenos* [full] until we *llenamos el estómago* [fill our stomachs]. And after we eat in the evening, we don't do exercise, no, we go to bed. In Mexico, we do the same…We don't have the *mentalidad de cuidado* [mindset to care for ourselves]. The women say, 'nah, I am married. I have my husband and it is not important to me'. Men too, they say 'dah, it does not bother me' and they drink too and so after food and after a lot of *cerveza* [beer] that is when they start to develop *panzas* [bellies].

He demonstrated that he too ate until he was full, occasionally, although he made efforts to change and to eat less. Alejandro tried to create distance between his food practices (i.e. choosing water instead of soft drinks and not eating to the point of fullness) and the non-nutritious practices that he associated with the majority of Hispanics. He also suggested a difference between the practices and mentality of recently-arrived Hispanics and longer term migrants. In this way, he indicated a narrative similar to that of acculturation in that 'the mindset' or mentality of Hispanics changed over duration of time. Interestingly, he sees the

interest to go on a diet to be something that develops over time in the US, this contrasts with the narrative present in the public health literature that views migrants as becoming less conscious about their food choices over time in the US. Alejandro suggests that this 'mindset' and lack of self-care is prevalent among Mexicans in Mexico as well as among those living in the US, but he suggests that his own mentality is slightly different and more informed, perhaps because he has lived in the US for over two decades.

Juan Daniel, a bus boy working in a restaurant in his late-thirties, also blamed Latino practices and a lack of education for obesity. He said:

> The Hispanic community—we have more obesity because we eat more fat. Koreans, Americans, Chinese they have less obesity because, well, it is our food. We have more fat in our food than in this country. But for us we are simple we are not oriented to this…We don't have an orientation for why we gain weight. The US has always been a rich country but we are *campesinos* [farmers] we haven't studied.

Juan Daniel sees food practices and obesity to be shaped by ethnicity/nationality, education and poverty. He understands disparities in obesity prevalence to be a result of the distinct food practices of different ethnic and national groups. He also views it as a result of the lack of interest and attention paid to obesity among the 'Hispanic community'. Juan Daniel suggests that the 'Hispanic community' has the 'mentality' of un-schooled farmers or peasants, and contrasts this mentality with that of Americans.

These examples demonstrate how informants attributed non-nutritious food practices and weight gain to culture, education, personal habits and ethnicity. Mexicans and Hispanics were perceived as short-sighted and focused on eating in the present rather than thinking about the long-term consequences of consumption. Their perceptions and practices were partially viewed as evidence of their lack of attention to their weight and body size, their inability to look after

themselves and their failure to be cautious about what they eat. These practices were associated with the culture of the uneducated classes and the culture of Hispanics, Latinos and Mexicans. Mexicans were depicted as eating what they wanted not what was good for them and Mexican food was sometimes stigmatized as unhealthy. Their eating was framed as more emotional than rational. In a way, these discourses had similarities to the notion of acculturation, which blamed weight gain and large body sizes on cultural beliefs and a lack of education. Interestingly, when informants suggested a cultural norm or described a behaviour as cultural, they often distanced themself from this norm to suggest that their own practices were healthier and more nutritious or progressive than the practices of others. However, informants were also aware of the economic and temporal constraints shaping food practices and they had nuanced understandings as to how these conditions influenced food practices. These examples suggest that informants used discourses that focused on culture and individual beliefs, alongside discourses that emphasized social, economic and political contexts in order to explain food practices and body size.

Class

Individuals also used class distinctions to explain differences in food practices and body sizes. Arnoldo, a single man in his early forties, had lived in the US for approximately five years when I met him. He said that he left his hometown in rural Guerrero partially to get away from his partner with whom he had separated. He worked as an independent vendor of nutritional supplements, selling for both VitaVida and another direct-selling company, WellSpring.[26] Arnoldo stressed the importance of the culture of the 'lower' and uneducated classes in shaping food practices and body sizes.

[26] WellSpring is a pseudonym.

Arnoldo: Here [US] there are different classes of people. The rich people, the middle class and the poor people. People eat in accordance with their class. A person...white person, you get me?...is not going to go into a *cuchifritos* [laugh].[27]

Marisa: Why, where do they eat?

Arnoldo: They [lower class] eat in *fonditas* [small restaurant, popular for lunch, where they often serve a set menu] where the food is cheaper—this is Dominican food. Here the cheapest food is Dominican. It is cheaper than Mexican food. The poorest classes eat here. The middle class Mexicans they eat, well there are Mexican restaurants that are good—they eat in restaurants that are more or less, maybe like this place, a bit different,[28] so here people enter who are more or less of middle class, the people who are lower down [laughing], no, no, no, those lower down, they go to the *Chinitos* [little Chinese restaurants] to eat *alitas y arroz* [spicy chicken wings and rice], very cheap, or to the Dominicans to eat *cuchifritos.*

Marisa: how about Burger King or McDonalds, who eats there?

Arnoldo: Oh, also, a lot of Mexicans eat there, the lower class, I think that it is these three types of businesses, the Chinese, Dominicans and McDonalds all of this that is where the people who are *mas abajo* [more poor], that is where they eat. Also *tacos* in the street. Yes, those too, are for the *gente mas abajo* [lower down].

Marisa: Where do the other classes eat?

---

[27] *Cuchifritos* refer to fried pig parts and the restaurants or *puestos* that sell them. Typically *cuchifritos* are fried pigskin snacks but the term is used to refer to fried snacks, balls and sausages more generally. For example, many *cuchifritos* sell deep-fried dough-balls filled with pork and other fillings. *Cuchifritos* are usually considered to be Dominican or Puerto Rican but they resemble Mexican *chicharrones.*

[28] Arnoldo was referring to the restaurant at which we were eating as 'a bit different'. It was very popular with my informants for sit-in and for take-out. The restaurant had table service and served food that was more expensive than Chinese food, street food and *cuchifritos*. He also pointed out that the restaurant placed a free basket of tortilla chips on the table to eat with the meal. I think it was in this way that he referred to this venue as middle class.

Arnoldo: Oh, no, the middle class, no they eat differently, they eat more vegetables, they eat things that are more healthy…The rich, they enter in luxury restaurants where they serve desserts and different little things [points to table and makes gesture of a tablecloth] and wine. The rich Mexicans that come here [to the US] they come in their cars and when they want to eat out they go to these luxury restaurants. I don't know—they go to whatever restaurant that they want…*gente de billete* [literally people with bills] or they eat in their house but they eat *very well* [said with emphasis]. They eat, well the rich people [in Mexico], they live in the capital and they live in the city, *gente de billete,* well, for them, they get their juice in a big glass, their dessert and nutritious things.

Marisa: Why do you think they eat more nutritiously?

Arnoldo: I say that they eat more nutritiously because for example a poor person who does not know…they want to see their meat and their rice and their beans *y eso* [and that's it] [pretending to look at a plate of food]. Why? Because this is what they are in the habit of doing, this is what their parents ate.

Marisa: Why don't you think they eat vegetables?

Arnoldo: I think it is because these people, this class of people, whose parents have money, and they grow up with money and with the mindset that they can make money, so they start a business and they actually make money and because of this same mindset they eat well and they know how to eat well and to eat their fruits and vegetables, because they grew up like this. But these [other classes] they don't know, they get full on rice and beans and that's it with that they are full. Poor people in Mexico, they do not eat fruits as well because they are not accustomed to them.

Marisa: Do you think it is hard to afford them?

Arnoldo: No, there are vegetables and fruit—there are—but the people no! They have their rice, beans and tortillas and that it is. Carrots they don't care about, this or that, they don't care. This is secondary. They don't care about it.

Arnoldo suggested how class distinctions marked food practices. Although he mentioned the affordability of food as being one reason why the wealthy classes ate differently than the lower classes his emphasis was on how the 'mindset' or 'habits' of the lower classes shaped their food practices. When I asked why the lower classes do not eat fruits and vegetables he said that it was because they did not care about eating them. Arnoldo's discussion about the role of class in shaping food practices differed in important ways from the discussion of income and socioeconomic class discussed in Chapter 5. Informant narratives in the previous chapter discussed the role of income and affordability in shaping food practices, but when Arnoldo used class to explain food practices he referred more to the shared habits, mindsets and customs that he associated with class rather than their shared economic position. Arnoldo's reference to class placed emphasis on how class-based cultures shaped food practices rather than solely socioeconomic constraints. In this way, he viewed the mindsets of the lower classes as the cause of their food practices.

He draws an interesting comparison between making money and eating healthy, suggesting that individuals of lower socioeconomic status grew up in a house where their parents did not make money or eat healthy and they passed on this mentality to their children. He therefore supposes that poverty and non-nutritional eating practices are 'habits' passed from one generation to the next. He is not accusatory in his statements and he explains that he too comes from a lower-class background but he notes that he was able to move beyond the limitations of this culture through education. Thus, he sees the culture of the lower classes to be limiting but not without possibility for change. Parallels can be drawn between Arnoldo's conception of class and the 'culture of poverty' notion developed by Oscar Lewis (1966) in his ethnographic work with Mexican families in poverty. Lewis suggests that poverty is cyclical because poor parents pass on certain ideologies and behaviours to their children such that they become

socialized into this culture and unable to see the possibilities to move out of it (Lewis 1966). Although the notion has been heavily critiqued in the social sciences because it tends to blame the victim for their own poverty (Gmelch & Zenner 2002: 265) it remains salient in popular culture and is reflected in Arnoldo's narrative. Arnoldo's emphasis on class-based culture serves to naturalize nutritional differences across the classes, such that the food practices and body sizes of the lower classes are seen as a result of their own deficiencies with respect to habit, mentality and culture.

Arnoldo's perspective can also be better understood through the lens of symbolic violence, which explains how social inequalities come to be blamed on group attributes (i.e. class, race/ethnicity, nationality, educational) rather than seen as a result of structural constraints (Bourdieu 2004). Ethnographic work carried out by Holmes (2005, 2011) uses the concept of symbolic violence to explain how ill-health was understood among migrant fruit pickers at a farm in Washington State. Holmes shows that apple picking was the most well paid field job and berry picking was the most strenuous, dangerous and humiliating one. Indigenous, undocumented Mexican migrants were generally working as berry pickers but very few picked apples. When asked why few indigenous migrants picked apples, farm workers argued that it was because indigenous Mexicans were too short to reach the apples and that because they were closer to the ground it made sense for them to pick berries. Holmes (2006) shows that berry-pickers had the most difficult work conditions and suffered the most occupational health problems. Their poor work conditions and ill-health, however, was seen as a natural and deserved consequence of their indigenous bodies and ethnic traits rather than a result of exploitative racial and labour relations, poverty, racism and a lack of documentation (Holmes 2005, 2006, 2007).

Not only does Arnoldo suggest that different socioeconomic classes have distinct food practices but he indicates that they eat different ethnic cuisines and

consume in different spaces. Essentially the foods he considered to be cheapest and least healthy were associated with the lower socioeconomic *[mas abajo]* classes. In this way, Dominican food, Chinese food and fast food, came to be stigmatized as 'low class' cuisines and similarly, certain spaces, such as the restaurant and the street came to be associated with certain classes. Moreover, Arnoldo naturalizes connections between socioeconomic class and race. He says that only 'low class' individuals eat at a *cuchifritos* and furthers this by saying that a 'white' person would not eat there. In this way, he contrasts 'whiteness' with low-class, suggesting that they are oppositions and therefore reifying connections between upper socioeconomic class, whiteness and nutritious food practices.

Although many of my informants acknowledged the structural or economic reasons shaping their food practices, Arnoldo placed emphasis on culture-based explanations. I think this is because he had strong views about how low-class individuals could improve their situation, make money and eat healthier by educating themselves and changing belief systems. His perceptions were influenced by his involvement with the nutrition and wellbeing companies of VitaVida and WellSpring. He explains his own transformation, whereby he educated himself through reading and by his involvement with these companies so that he was able to move beyond the culture of his upbringing.

> In school, more or less…okay when you go to school you realize, you start seeing things and analysing things and you read books and you read and read and little by little, for example, when I was studying, I am indigenous, we speak a dialect. You know in Mexico there are many [indigenous languages] but we are very few. And we have a lot of difficulty learning Spanish because our mother language is to speak like this [dialect], you know, but when we enter school little by little we have to learn a bit more of Spanish. And I realized, I had to learn by reading books and little by little if I did not know a word I would have to look it up in a dictionary. But I improved and my knowledge of life too. I began

> working in this new of job. Here [at WellSpring] the people are advanced. [He asks rhetorically] 'Why are you where you are? Why do you say you can't [do it], *because* you say this you can't – you can't achieve it, [you think] this [success] is for someone else or you say 'oh, I can't speak with this person or that person', but why do you say this? Only because your father, when you were little, said 'no you, you can't do it, [or] you don't do that. So, once you realize that if you focus you can achieve it, achieve big things.

Arnoldo explained how education afforded him a new perspective. In this way, although Arnoldo was still having difficulty economically he felt he had a more enlightened perspective than others of the same socioeconomic level. He did not want his low socioeconomic class to determine *his* practices so he suggested that although he was of low socioeconomic class his education allowed him to move beyond the limits of the 'culture of poverty'. In his articulation, it was culture that defined the non-nutritious eating practices of the low class. Through education, Arnoldo suggested that cultural views could be transformed.

Blaming Women & Life Stages

Blame for low-quality diets and large body sizes was also gendered as women were often perceived as being less responsible than men when it came to maintaining body weight and size. Julia, a single mother of three who worked as a manicurist said:

> Mexican women have a very different mentality…because if they are married with kids they don't look after their appearance. They do not have—for example, my daughter will say to me, 'why do you wear that dress' and I say 'because I like it' but, you know, she thinks that I look old. For me I don't think that this [mentality] is a good thing. For me, I don't have the possibility to go to a gym but I would like to. I think that is a good thing [to exercise]. I don't know how I would start but I would like to do exercise and to be thinner.

Julia suggests that Mexican women do not take care of themselves. She believed that taking care of appearance was important, but she also felt that her situation did not give her the possibility to take care of herself or to lose weight even though she wanted to. Her reason for not exercising was not that she shared the 'mentality' of other Mexican women, but rather that she lacked time and money. This example shows how Julia distanced herself from the cultural stereotypes that she associated with other Mexican women. Julia blamed the mentality of Mexican women for their large body sizes but saw her own body size as a result of the lack of opportunity she had to exercise.

Her friend, Maribel also saw large body size to be as a result of life stages such as marriage and pregnancy. 'Mexicans gain weight after marriage here [US] and there [Mexico] and they also gain weight because of having kids. They have a bad diet because they do not take care of their health and they don't think that it is necessary to be thin after marriage'. Alejandro agreed:

> No one takes care. The men [or women]. The women take care more but the women do not take care when they have a baby. I think that after the baby, they don't do a diet and they don't do exercise and they eat the same. This is why I think the majority of the women here are *gorditas* [chubby women].

Emma, who worked at her family's restaurant, also felt that stay-at-home mothers and housewives were those most prone to weight gain because of their unhealthy practices and the fact that they did not do much during the day.

> Emma: We can say, a woman that is not doing anything, if a woman stays at home and cooks then definitely she eats a lot, definitely more than a man because they don't do anything…Well what I mean is that, I know that they do their chores, and they just clean the house and sometimes they go out with the kids and they go pick them up from the school and they come back and…but they don't do anything. Well they stay at home and prepare everything, the food for the men to come home. If they have two or three kids, they definitely do not work but if they have one kid,

> they definitely do work. So the women that work only and who don't have kids are the ones that are less—that don't have a big fat body or a big shape, we could say.
>
> M: What do you think women who don't work are doing during the day?
>
> E: Well, they see the *novelas*, [short for *telenovelas*, Spanish-language television soap operas] they will have to stay home [they say] 'oh the show is going to come on' and they will watch the kids and do breakfast and lunch for the kids, and the dinner for the kids, so she eats three times but big plates. But if she stays at home, with this cold, especially, she will get overweight because she is not doing anything. She is just staying on the sofa watching the TV.

For Emma, *amas de casas* stayed in the house, watched television and ate big plates of food. In this way, she stereotyped stay-at home mothers as un-active and somewhat lazy and suggested that they were most likely to have large body sizes.

In these examples, informants blamed gender and life stages, such as marriage, pregnancy and child rearing for large body sizes and obesity. Responsibility was placed on the woman for not taking care of herself or looking after her diet during these life stages. Women seemed to be blamed more for their inability to maintain weight than were men. My informants often blamed men for their non-nutritious food practices, but men were blamed less for their body size and weight gain.

Elu and her younger sister, Paula, suggested that men actually placed more attention on maintaining their weight and body size than did women. Elu said:

> Americans take care of themselves by running. Mexicans go to the gym, but more the men to conquer the girls. The women cook so they don't have time. The men, they have a lot of creams for the their faces, they tweeze their eyebrows. The women no! Look! [pointing to the elliptical exercise machine in her kitchen] I have

> three machines and I don't use them. The men, they are very vain. [Whether it is] to conquer the girls or for their *salud* [health] but they take care of themselves. They are very vain, they have their vests, their boots, their hats. The majority of men they take care of themselves and they are cautious but their houses are very dirty. Mothers who are alone they just watch their children but a single man he goes out with his friends and is not responsible, even a married man.
>
> Paula: We [women] are more stressed. I don't cook much, she cooks [looking at sister] and has to think of what to eat. It is an everyday stress. We don't have time for vanity.

While we were talking, Paula and Elu were finding photographs on their phone and on Facebook. They pulled up photographs of male friends whose houses they cleaned and they showed me how meticulously dressed and clean-shaven these men were to show me what they were talking about. Elu and Paula felt that although Mexican men did not eat healthily, they paid more attention to their shape and their appearance than did women. However, they did not judge women for failing to attend to their body, instead they judged the men for being vain and selfish. They felt that the reason that men paid a lot of attention to their bodies was due to the fact that they did not have any other responsibilities, like cooking, cleaning and taking care of children. Elu and Paula both acknowledged that they wanted to lose weight, but suggested that they did not have time because they had too many other duties to attend to. By viewing men who cared too much about their body as being irresponsible, selfish and vain, they helped to justify their own situation, where they had to cook and care for children before they could put attention to losing lose weight. Rather than blaming women for having large body sizes, they criticized men for caring too much about their bodies.

Fat is Healthy: Debunking 'Folk' Knowledge

Informants not only argued that Mexicans and Latinos were not educated about healthy dietary practices but they also suggested that Mexicans, and Latinos more generally, had poor understandings of what constituted a healthy body size. Arnoldo argued:

> Well again it depends on the level of the person. You know those that have not studied and those who have no education they eat a lot of saturated fat and not many vegetables and they say, 'oh yes my kids are so healthy—look how fat they are' [laughs]. But the rest of the world eats more vegetables and they understand a bit more about what is healthy but the Central Americans, the Hispanics they don't really know, or they know, but they don't care to eat healthily.

Arnoldo criticized Central Americans for their perception that a large body size reflected a healthy body. He blamed this on the 'level' and education of Central Americans. For Julia, perceptions about healthy body sizes differed across generations. She explained the differences she noticed within her own family over the years.

> I think that when I lived there [Mexico] no one took care/paid attention and no one thought about their weight but, now, yes, now my sisters take care, they do exercise, my sister has a machine in her house to do abdominals and watches a video of Pilates. My mom, no. I don't have an idea as to why there was this change. When I was little we had these neighbours and when I came back I saw them and did not recognize them. He was enormous, huge, fat. Fat, so that you say 'oh my god, what happened?' There are lots of people who are like this who don't look after themselves. Probably when I was little I heard my mom saying that someone who was fat, it was because they had a good life, because they had health, because they were healthy. She said that they were fat because they were full of life and I think that they thought that when you were fat you had good health because you ate, but I don't believe that it is so. My sisters are small and thin but my mom does not say anything. She now knows that

> when you are thin it does not mean you don't have a full life or anything. Since my sister became a doctor, they know now. For example, my littlest sister is twenty-four and she is the size of my daughter. The clothes of her [referring to daughter] fit my sister, because she is small and thin.

Julia emphasized that she did not agree with the mother's perceptions about body size and that she did not think that a large body size was healthy. She demonstrated her positive valuation of slender bodies and her negative valuation of her obese neighbour in Mexico. However, as I will describe in the following section, Julia also had some scepticism about the relationship between slenderness and health.

How the 'Other Half' Eats: Food Practices and the Upper Classes

Understandings of nutritional practices, body sizes and weight trajectories seemed to be heavily influenced by informants' perceptions of native-born New Yorkers and their interactions with them. Often, the practices and body sizes of non-Latino whites were posited as oppositional to those of Mexicans. Since many informants worked in the service sector, their perspectives of food practices in NYC were shaped by their rarefied interactions with wealthy clients and employers. Elu explained her own experience cleaning the house of an American woman living in the suburbs of Queens. She said:

> You know what? There was a home that I worked in. I worked for an American and it is rare that Americans eat bad, you know, Taco Bell, hamburgers. Americans who live in the country they eat healthily but the Mexicans who live here [West Queens] they don't go to American restaurants they eat Cuban, Ecuadorean and Colombian. The majority eat Hispanic food. Rice with chicken and salsas every day!

Elu compares the healthy eating practices of 'Americans' who lived in the suburbs with the practices of Mexicans living in West Queens, suggesting that Mexicans do not eat as healthily. Julia also had interactions with US-born

women at the manicurist salon where she worked. She spent most of her days listening to and talking with her clients whom she referred to as *'mujeres di dinero'* [women of money]. It was through these conversations that she formed many of her opinions related to what was nutritious and what constituted 'American' eating practices. She believed that there was a big difference in the way in which Mexican and American women cared for their bodies and maintained their weight. She said:

> For example in the area where I work [Upper East Side] there are women of money and they are always concerned with their figure. They do exercise and nothing else. 'Oh you are doing exercise' [she pretends to ask, while nodding her head as if checking out someone's toned body]. Always you see them with their salads or their bottles of water or a coffee. For this reason I think that coffee makes you full. I don't know why but I always see them having a coffee or iced coffee. They have kids but they always have a babysitter or a housekeeper, they don't do anything in their house. They are interested in doing their exercise or doing their shopping…I think that Americans are also very sick. I have many clients that die of cancer or have cancer, or breast cancer. I comment to my colleagues I wonder if it is because the environment is not that good...because in my family, for example, I don't know of anyone of my family or friends that have breast cancer so but yes there are many people that are sick with or who died of cancer [where I work].

Julia seemed to be critical of the lifestyle of *'mujeres di dinero'* because they hired women to watch their children and clean their house and spent the majority of their time on self-care activities. Although Julia mentioned that she wanted to be thinner, she also criticized *'mujeres di dinero'* for spending too much time maintaining their bodies and not enough time taking care of their family. Elu, had a similar criticism of the upper classes:

> Some Mexicans live their life without complexity, they do not worry about their figure, their nails, their hair. It [their life] is pure work *[puro trabajo]*. We are talking about classes. The lower

> *[abajo]* classes only work, the middle classes, well, they do less work and have a little vanity and the high classes they are pure vanity.

She suggested the way in which body care practices were patterned by class, but rather than praising the upper classes for their self care and for taking care of their bodies, she criticized their vanity. These narratives suggest that various discourses about body size operated at the same time, slimness was desired yet it was also seen as a sign of selfishness and vanity. Since Julia's slender American clients seemed to suffer from cancer more often than her Mexican friends and family, it demonstrated to her that a slim body size did not necessarily equal a healthy body. In this way, it becomes clear that divergent body size ideals co-existed among informants. In many respects, slender bodies were preferred and desired but individuals were also skeptical of them and not convinced that slim meant healthy.

Wilk (1998) also observed coexisting body size ideals in his examination of beauty pageants in Belize. He identified different beauty ideals operating at the national and international pageants. Belizean notions of beauty, which emphasize shape, hips and busts, dominated in the local Belizean pageants but for the international pageants, Belizeans are chosen based on slimness, height and attributes that appealed to beauty ideals dominant in white, Euro-American contexts. In this way, Wilk (1998) suggests the coexistence of multiple beauty ideals and preferences depending on context. This is similar to how some of my informants fluctuated between valuing slim bodies and more shapely bodies. The work of Viladrich, Yeh, Bruning & Weiss (2009) also illustrates that Latinas in NYC had competing body size paradigms, although all their participants preferred a slimmer body size than their own, they were also skeptical of the idealization of thin bodies in the mainstream American media and were accepting of the alternative cultural paradigm of the 'curvy Latina'.

Informants' narratives did not assume that all Americans had healthy eating practices or were slim. They also acknowledged that Americans of different socioeconomic classes and racial/ethnic groups had different nutritional practices. One month after discussing class and food practices with Arnoldo I met him again and he further specified his opinion about the differences between the food practices of Americans and Mexicans. He said that not all Americans ate differently than Mexicans, it depended on whether or not they shared the same socioeconomic class. He argues:

> I think it depends on their economic level. Black Americans, I have seen them and they eat the same as Mexicans, they eat a lotof McDonalds and fast food and you know they don't care as much. They are waiting in line at a *cuchifritos,* you know? I do too! Do you know where I ate today? I ate at a *cuchifritos*. *Que sabrosos,* [how tasty] no? I mean but not everyday. I don't eat a whole leg [fried pig leg] every day but some people do. You have to do it in moderation. But the rich, they have a little meat, they eat well, and they may eat meat but they eat the good meat like fish. They eat good, good, nice [said in English] and they eat their vegetables. And their dishes are well decorated but the poor they just want their meat—and maybe a little lettuce.
>
> Marisa: You seem to have a lot of experience with this, where have you observed what people eat?
>
> Arnoldo: I observed these things in restaurants. I have worked at restaurants, the best restaurants in NY and the poor don't enter through their doors, it is only the people with money. The poor, no they are waiting in a line that goes around the corner at the *cuchifritos* stand. I worked in a lot of restaurants— Italian and Greek—and the Americans, they eat healthily, they are slim with a good body, well not all of them but maybe 30% of people in the US care and they eat well, but the others don't. Sixty to seventy percent don't really care.

Arnoldo drew a contrast between 'Black Americans' who ate *cuchifritos*, and the 'rich' Americans who ate fish and vegetables and who had slim bodies. Thereby he acknowledged that not all Americans had healthy eating practices and he

again constructed the eating practices of 'Black Americans' and 'rich Americans' as oppositional. Mireya also acknowledged that not all Americans had nutritious eating practices and slender body sizes. She said:

> I think the Americans—do they eat healthy? Well I think they have the possibility to eat healthy I think because of the economy they have the possibility to eat healthy but I don't think that they do. I know, some of the Americans that I worked for, and they are *delgaditas* [skinnies] but others they are *gorditas* [chubbies]. They are very big and they don't diet or eat right even though they can…the Americans they don't eat correctly and they don't take an equilibrium. They don't know how to combine foods….even if they can. But Mexicans *comemos lo que tenemos* [we eat what we have]. Americans don't do this. They are a little more cautious but they still don't eat healthy. For Mexicans it does not matter for them if they get fat the only thing that matters is that they have food. There are *gorditas, robustas* [people with robust shapes], *panzoncitos* [people with large-bellies] and that is just the way we are and we just don't care that much.

Mireya suggested that Americans were more cautious than Mexicans were about what they ate, but not always. She faulted those Americans who did not eat healthily because she believed that because they had money they did not have a good excuse for not having non-nutritious practices.

Through these rarefied encounters with American employers, informants developed the perception that educated, upper class Americans mostly ate nutritiously and had slim body sizes. They often contrasted the practices of their American employers to their own or those that they associated with Mexicans. Informants noted that although Americans were more concerned with body size they were not necessarily healthier and informants were often sceptical that the upper classes spent too much time caring for themselves and their body.

Discussion

This chapter illustrates that informants sometimes categorized and made sense of food practices, body size and nutritional change by placing emphasis on the determining role played by culture and/or the individual. Informants generally valued good self-care practices and self-discipline and perceived these traits to be protective against weight gain, though too much attention to one's body and nutritional practices was also judged to some extent. Often the habit of caring for, and watching what one ate became confounded with other labels. Individuals with low levels of formal education and limited economic means were often assumed to not take care of themselves and, thus, to have large body sizes. Their habits were often contrasted with those of the educated and upper socioeconomic classes, who were perceived to be more self-disciplined with their dietary practices and bodies. Informants understood food practices and body sizes also through the oppositions of Mexican/American (non-Latino), and male/female. Overweight women were blamed for not taking care of their bodies and for not maintaining their weight, especially after marriage and childbirth, whereas the body sizes of men seemed to be less censured. Many informants tried to distance themselves (though not always) from the people they were criticizing by referencing their superior self-care, body maintenance activities and food practices. In this way, informants created boundaries between their own practices and those that they ascribed to 'others'—often 'others' were characterized as poor, uneducated and Mexican. At times, informants' discussion of food practices and body sizes reflected the ideologies undergirding public health approaches and health education in the US, focusing on the cultural traits, habits and beliefs of individuals, and downplaying the role played by structural constraints and social contexts in shaping practices, weight gain and body size.

Bourdieu's notion of symbolic violence is helpful to explain how informants naturalized and normalized body size disparities and blamed them on individual traits and culture. Thus, informants often 'explained away' weight disparities, viewing them as natural consequences of educational, cultural, class, gender and ethnic differences (Bourdieu 2004; Holmes 2006). In so doing, they reproduced understandings of nutritional change and obesity inherent in the public health literature. Migrant interactions with affluent Americans reinforced these understandings, they were also reproduced at VitaVida clubs and events in West Queens, as will be described in the following chapter.

However, these narratives existed alongside other discourses which emphasized the important roles that time, money, work, and education played in shaping individuals' ability (or lack thereof) to engage in nutritious food practices and maintain their weight and body size. Thus, informants utilized different discourses to explain weight and body size. One discourse emphasized culture, individual beliefs, habits and self-care, while the other emphasized structural barriers shaping food and weight experiences. In this way, migrants utilized narratives 'on the ground' that shared similarities with the concepts of both acculturation and structural vulnerability.

There was, however, one important difference between the way in which public health models, such as acculturation, conceptualized nutritional change and obesity, and the way in which informants understood these phenomena. Informants tended to view American food practices and body sizes as more nutritious and healthier than Mexican food practices and body sizes. They often stigmatized Mexican food, practices and mentalities as unhealthy and non-nutritional, whereas the public health literature on migrant nutrition characterizes Mexican practices as healthy and nutritious and views American culture as the cause of the rise of obesity after migration.

To explain this mismatch, the work done by Galvez (2011) on prenatal and birthing practices is useful. Galvez (2011) argues that through Mexicans' encounters with the US healthcare system, Mexican practices related to health and nutrition become socialized as backwards and traditional while American practices become praised as modern. I suggest that informant interactions with affluent Americans in the workplace led informants similarly to view their own practices as backwards and non-nutritious while viewing those of the upper socioeconomic and educational classes as more informed and enlightened. There was a limit to this, however, since upper class individuals were sometimes blamed for being vain and caring too much about their food practices and body size. Furthermore, slim body sizes were not always viewed as a sign of health, illustrating that competing body size preferences coexisted. Although informants sometimes met slim bodies with scepticism, positive valuations of, and general desires for slender bodies and nutritious food habits were dominant. Chapter 7 explores the dieting practices that informants carried out to achieve a slender body. It further examines how food practices and body sizes were explained on the ground with an emphasis on how the presence of dieting products and regimens in West Queens shaped these discourses.

7. BUYING AND SELLING WEIGHT LOSS

> How many of you don't speak English? How many of you don't have documents? How many of you don't have time? No experience? No youth? How many of you dream? [PowerPoint slide showing photographs] Houses? Cars? Vacations? This is what migrants do. We come here when we are twenty and we have no time or money. When we are forty-five we are still working without any time, taking orders, when you are 70 you are old and sick…I worked in a bakery. I have been here for eleven years, the first six I worked in a bakery, working twelve hours a day. I was tired and I was not making any money. Does that sound familiar? How many dream of something better, how many dream of not working all day long? But how many people do something about it? [She switches the PowerPoint slide and begins to explain the business opportunity that changed her life].
>
> *-Angela, Ecuadorean woman presenting at a VitaVida meeting*
>
> I got a dog for Christmas. I'm not going to get prizes [sic. presents] because I already got a dog. He has to stay in the house because he [landlord] told us we can't have a dog…Are you American? You're lucky. My parents are from Ecuador. My teacher said that if I cross to Ecuador and I cross back all I have to do is show my American passport and I'll get back. But for my parents I feel sad. They are from Ecuador and they can't do that...I feel like writing a letter to President Obama—is he the president of America only—or of Ecuador too? And asking if he could help.
>
> *-Angela's daughter, said to me before her mother's meeting started*

Dieting and weight loss practices were integral aspects of migrant food practices after migration. Informants not only actively bought weight loss products but they also sold them. Weight loss products comprise part of a $60 billion dieting industry that is prevalent across the US (Marketdata 2011). This chapter describes specifically how my informants encountered and experienced the dieting and weight loss industry in West Queens and how it shaped their practices and perceptions about body size and nutritional change.

The excerpt at the beginning of this chapter was taken from a presentation given by Angela, a vendor of the nutrition and weight management company, VitaVida. In a second-story apartment that had been converted into a VitaVida nutritional club, Angela presented the opportunity of becoming an independent vendor of VitaVida products to a small group of eager Latinos. Although, she stressed how VitaVida changed her life, her daughter's narrative hinted at the continued difficulties that Angela and her husband faced as undocumented migrants in the US. By juxtaposing these accounts a better understanding as to how the VitaVida brand appealed to migrants facing economic and occupational difficulties in West Queens is revealed. This chapter explores migrant dieting practices and how the promotion of weight loss products played a role in shaping migrant understandings of body size and nutrition. It also highlights the overlap between the everyday contexts shaping the dieting practices of my informants (i.e. lack of time, money, documentation) and those shaping food consumption more generally.

The public health literature on migrant nutrition has not focused extensively on migrant dieting or weight loss practices. Since the public health literature often quantifies the intake of foods, categorizing food items into macronutrients, micronutrients, or food groups, it does not explore whether the foods that migrants eat are part of weight loss strategies, plans or techniques. The qualitative public health literature on migrant nutrition also fails to ask questions about migrant dieting practices. Implicit in the lack of attention to migrant dieting practices in the literature is the assumption that migrants do not express desires, or develop strategies, for losing weight (Sussner et al. 2008; Lindsay et al. 2009; Guarnaccia et al. 2012). There is also a lack of emphasis on dieting practices in the literature that discusses 'obesogenic' environments and the influence of the built environment on food practices. This literature explores physical accessibility to high-density foods and the lack of availability to fruits and

vegetables but it does not consider the role played by the presence of weight loss products, shops and advertisements in shaping food practices and perceptions of body size (Swinburn, Egger & Raza 1999; Black & Macinko 2008; Yeh et al. 2009).

I began my own research with a bias towards exploring food practices without recognizing that dieting practices would be a salient aspect of food consumption. Once I entered the field, however, I realized that many informants had engaged with dieting in the US and described dieting practices, weight reduction strategies and periods of weight loss alongside their narratives of food and weight change. This chapter helps to elucidate the role of dieting among migrants that has not been fully explored in the literature.

Diets: Discourses and Practices

When discussing food practices with informants I realized that I had to be careful how I used the word *diet.* For example, when I first arrived to the field I used the term *dieta* to inquire about food practices and how they changed. When I used the word, however, I often received the response, 'no, I don't follow a diet' and twice people pulled out diet pills from their purse or their dresser drawers to tell me exactly what diet pills they were using. I realized two things from this experience. First, there was a good degree of experimentation with weight loss and dieting among informants, and secondly, my use of the term *dieta* was heavily influenced by its use in the public health and nutritional literature, but often distinct from how my informants used the term colloquially. I had intended to use the word to refer to habitual ways of eating, or rather, as a way to refer to food practices or eating habits. Among informants, however, the use of this word was associated with weight loss regimens. Invoking the term *dieta* was not neutral and seemed to be shorthand for identifying whether or not one engaged in 'healthy' practices and watched their weight. Whenever the term slipped out, I immediately regretted it because it seemed to create this sense that I was judging their food practices. I learned to avoid the term, unless I was

talking specifically about weight loss. Instead of using this term, I used words and phrases such as *comida* [food], *habitos de comida* [eating habits], *comer* [to eat], *alimentar* [to feed]. These were words that informants used to describe their own food practices.

Many informants attempted weight loss through processes of supplementation. A variety of dietary products were experimented with in order to supplement or replace food practices and to bring about weight loss. Furthermore, diet products were often used to combat or undo the negative effects of a non-nutritious diet. Rather than changing daily food practices, dietary products were often used to complement or accompany existing practices and neutralize their effects. In this way, there seemed to be a commodification of healthy eating practices such that adoption of healthful and nutritious practices were seen to result not from changing food preparation and consumption practices, but from supplementing these practices with foods, teas, pills, beverages and vitamins specifically designed for weight loss. The use of dieting products was encouraged by the promising claims on their packages. Moreover, the use of weight loss products fit more easily into migrants' busy schedules than could dramatic changes in food preparation or consumption.

Gabriela, who worked at the *abarrotería*, told me that she was not on a diet but she did take an herbal tea sold to induce weight loss on many days. On the days that she took it she felt that she had more energy and was less hungry. But she also drank the tea because she felt it helped to counteract the effect of certain foods in her diet. She said, 'It is supposed to eliminate the greasy things that I eat from my stomach. If I eat something fatty, I take it and it helps my body to eliminate it'.

Claudia, in her early thirties, who came to the US when she was sixteen, also used supplementation rather than an overhaul of her daily food practices to lose

weight. She worked at a sandwich chain restaurant and hardly ever ate in the house. Her husband, who worked in construction, cooked for her son at the house while she ate where she worked. For a period, she was going to the gym and exercising but she could not keep up her routine because of her work schedule. She highlighted that in the last three weeks she only had three days off from work. Over the last few months, she tried to change her diet by eating salads and a lot of water but she could not keep her weight off. Her friend recommended pills that reduce hunger and she began to take them two times a day. She said that she lost ten pounds in one month.

The products sold at VitaVida were expressly promoted as solutions for circumnavigating the difficult constraints that migrants faced everyday. Vendors selling VitaVida worked to convince me that it was the cheapest meal option. I was frequently shown a leaflet featuring three photographs. One image was of a hamburger which had a price tag of just over seven dollars, the other was a photograph of tacos which had a price just under five dollars and the third was a photograph of the VitaVida healthy shake and tea which had a cost of just under two dollars. In this way, it was suggested that VitaVida products allowed one to eat for less. VitaVida also sold a vitamin that was argued to have all of the antioxidants of seven fruits and vegetables. At a VitaVida workshop the presenter told the audience, 'How many consume seven fruits and vegetables every day? How many have time to consume them? We don't like these vegetables, right?'. She suggested the benefits of taking the VitaVida vitamin instead. She went on to ask the small audience if we had stress in our lives and she asked how many of us had insomnia and had trouble sleeping. She then offered a VitaVida pill for each of these ailments, which promised sleep and relaxation. In this way, VitaVida products were promoted as purchasable solutions that could ameliorate the conditions of migrants' everyday lives, including stress, lack of time, sleep and money.

When informants talked about diets they most often talked about supplementing their existing eating practices with a weight loss product. Often, this supplementation stood in for more dramatic dietary overhauls. In the case of Claudia, lack of time was used as the reason why she chose pills rather than a more extensive exercise or dietary regimen. Diets did not seem to have a clear start and end. Rather, it often seemed that products were experimented with, abandoned, and then maybe another practice or product was taken up a few months later, or the same product was tried again, because of a recommendation from a friend or neighbour or because it was featured in the local shops.

Diet Products in West Queens

Weight loss products and supplements were available and strongly promoted across West Queens, making them a visible part of the food landscape. Pharmacies, *tiendas* and *botanicas* provided access to items promoting weight loss. Different pharmacies in the area displayed diet pills and teas just above the cash register. *Botanicas* advertised remedies for weight loss and body cleansers on signs outside of their shops and also displayed dietary products in their front window. Due to the assortment of religious and medicinal products sold in *botanicas*, their display windows made for interesting compositions. In one *botanica* in the area, boxed medicines, weight loss teas and syrups were surrounded by a porcelain statue of a saint whose hands were raised, with a rosary dangling from one palm, as if blessing the products (Figure 7.1). Even small *tiendas* had signs and posters outside of their shops advertising weight loss products, stomach and intestinal cleansers and fat removers. One shop in the area was dedicated to selling weight loss products and health foods. The shop window displayed neon green and yellow lights announcing '100% PRODUCTOS

Figure 7.1: Store selling banned weight loss pills

NATURALES PIERDA DE 8-16 LBS. EN 2 SEMANAS' [100% Natural Products Lose 8-16 lbs. in Two Weeks]. Flags and buntings were also displayed outside the shop, and for a few months a speaker loudly projected onto the street continuously 'Reductor de estomago' [Stomach Reducer] to announce that it sold stomach reducer products in the store.

Book vendors crowding the street had a whole range of publications concentrating on recipes, curative foods and weight loss. Street vendors sold a variety of titles, 'Comida Saludable' [Healthy Food], 'Comida sin Colesterol' [Food without Cholesterol], and many books advocating the healing qualities of different foods, for example 'The Healing Power of Garlic', 'The Healing Power of Aloe' or 'Healing with Papaya'. Just beside a large recipe book in the shape of

a hamburger entitled, 'Las mejores hamburguesas' [The best hamburgers] was the book 'Dieta South Beach', which illustrated the tenets of the South Beach Diet, popularized in the early 2000s as a way to lose weight by eliminating certain fats and carbohydrates.

Not only did advertisements and images lining the streets promote dietary products and treatments but men and women also crowded the street to promote them. One day, I was talking to Rey who worked at a small bookstand [this stand did not sell as many books about food but concentrated instead on books about Mexican archaeology, politics and crime]. While we were talking, a woman came right between us and took his small black stool that was tucked under the bookstand. She asked if she could sit down for a moment, he smiled and did not bother to answer. She sat down and took out a few piles of business cards she had in a little black apron and began arranging them. When I enquired about what she was selling, she told me that she was handing out *propaganda* [leaflets, advertisements]. She gave me one card, which referred me to a spa that does hair removal and another card that referred me to a weight loss club a few blocks down. She said, 'Ask for Carlito and tell him the *flaca* [skinny woman] sent you'. It was common to see people on the street promoting stores and products simultaneously in an effort to use their time most efficiently. This was perhaps most clearly exemplified by a man who often stood below the subway entrance, dressed in a clown suit with huge red shoes. He gave away business cards advertising clown services for children's parties but when women enquired further, he could also told of which bars in the area were looking for night waitresses and dancers. On many corners and major intersections in West Queens, people gave out leaflets and business cards advertising weight loss and nutritional products from the morning to the late evening. In areas where there was a VitaVida nutrition club, often a whole row of people were outside standing together handing out their cards to catch the attention of pedestrians.

The availability of products, books and stores that promoted weight loss in West Queens was unmistakable. Elu commented on it one day, 'There are more VitaVida places than churches around here. There are ten just here, I think. One on the corner, another down the street, another near the clinic and there are others…there is VitaVida and there are bars and between the two they fight for territory'. In West Queens, dieting products and regimens were easily accessible, heavily marketed and they circulated through social networks. Informants had to negotiate between aspects of the environment that promoted the consumption of weight loss products and aspects of the environment that encouraged the consumption of high-energy foods (see Chapter 5).

To understand the landscape of weight loss products and treatments in West Queens, it is important to illustrate the ways in which these products were marketed and perceived. One of the most prominent discourses surrounding weight loss products was that of naturalness. Product labels contained the words 'herbs', 'natural', 'ancient', 'no chemicals' and were decorated with images of herbs, fruits, berries, plants and vegetables. When informants showed me their shakes, teas and powders, their common refrain was 'it's natural'. When Andrea, the part-time cleaner and mother of two, told me where she purchased her intestinal cleanse she told me she bought it at the naturalist's shop, referring to a shop down the road that sold diet pills, supplements and health foods. When talking to vendors at different shops in West Queens I often asked what was in the products and they reiterated that the products were all natural.

Images of *sábila* [aloe] and *nopales*, both of which are used as natural remedies in Mexico, were emblazoned on product labels and were presented as the active ingredients in weight loss products in many *tiendas, botanicas* and also at VitaVida clubs. Adriana, a teenage girl who used and sold VitaVida products

talked about the popularity of the aloe concentrate drink, which is part of VitaVida's Digestive Cleanse Program:

> The sábila is the most popular because all Mexicans know that aloe is the best for drinking and to put on the face. My mom tells me that my grandma put aloe on cuts and used it when her throat was sore. People are accustomed to aloe, they trust it and so they will buy it.

Promotional materials suggested that the potency of weight loss products derived from the healing qualities of fruits, plants and herb-based ingredients, especially those associated with Mexico. Weight loss and dieting products were promoted with the interest to avoid the medicalization of these items. Sales people at shops in the area and at VitaVida clubs generally referred to tablets or capsules as vitamins, rather than *pastillas* [pills], the word that was used by informants. Products containing laxatives were considered to be natural cleansers for the body. Diet products were commonly presented in the form of teas, shakes [with flavors like cookies and cream, strawberry, vanilla] and as *ponche* [fruit punch]. VitaVida vendors and catalogs called their powdered shakes 'instant healthy meals', thus emphasizing that their products were foods. On the street, VitaVida vendors encouraged me to take their business cards by telling me that if I presented them at a VitaVida nutrition club I would receive a 'healthy meal'. The 'healthy meal' that they referred to was comprised of a shake, drink and tea, all made by combining a powdered ingredient with water.

Not only were plants native to Mexico associated with effective weight loss but so too were products linked to Asia, and particularly China. Products with images of slender Asian women and tea packages adorned with bamboo shoots or green tea leaves that had names like 'Té Chino' [Chinese Tea] purported that their ingredients were part of an 'ancient tradition' or based on the 'Chinese book of Medicine'. Although many of these products were made in California, the commercials, advertisements and images on the packages depicted Asian bodies,

characters, names and ingredients. Emma described her interest in and experience with Chinese dieting teas:

> For a while, I was losing weight, but not through VitaVida, my friend told me about 3 Ballerinas tea [3 Ballerina Tea Dieter's Drink]. It smelled so bad that you had to hold your nose but with that I took it for two months and lost twenty pounds and I kept it off and I was eating regular. Whatever I ate in the daytime [I continued to eat] but after six I ate just fruit, salad and then the tea. It was bad, it smelled bad, it was really terrible but it worked.

For Emma, the tea, recommended by her friend, was effective despite, or perhaps, partially because, it had a terrible smell. Emma explained:

> At that time, I paid five dollars for thirty packets so it was pretty cheap but then I stopped it because it made my stomach hurt in the night and made me feel worse—well my gastritis felt worse so I stopped it. Then I heard on TV that '3 ballerina' was unhealthy or bad for you and now you can't find it but now I see a new tea advertised, it is called '*Té Chino*' [Chinese Tea]. After I heard it advertised I went to buy it just in this drug store [pointing to the store adjacent to her] but I asked and they said it is $30 for 30 packets so I am not going to get it.

Emma noted the success that she had with the 3 Ballerinas tea until she learned that it was dangerous and she attempted to try another, newer tea. There seemed to be a constant renewal of weight loss products and a replacement of old products with new ones that were promised to be better and stronger, and sometimes more expensive. Although Emma said that she could not find 3 Ballerina's tea anymore, I did find it in a few grocery stores. Towards the end of my fieldwork, however, stores did not seem to be replenishing this tea on the shelves and another tea called '*Nuevo Extra Fuerte Dietistas* Nutra-Slim Tea' [New Extra Strong Dietitians Nutra-Slim Tea] was found just beside it, which had the same colour and shaped packaging but the label was written predominantly in Spanish, whereas 3 Ballerina Tea was written in English. Three Ballerina Tea was made by the 'Natural Green Leaf Brand' whereas Nutra-Slim Tea was made

by 'Triple Leaves Brand'. It was unclear from the packaging or from online searches whether or not these two teas were made by the same company. It seemed, however, that there was a constant rebranding and refreshing of the weight loss and dieting products on the shelves. Experimentation with different and new dieting products was common in West Queens. New products were often becoming available at *tiendas*, shops and at VitaVida clubs, and they were advertised on posters, leaflets and on television to generate a buzz.

As Emma's example suggests, Chinese teas were seen to have unfamiliar qualities (bad smells), 'exotic' ingredients and potent results. The full name of the new tea that Emma was referring to is 'Té Chino del Dr. Ming' [Dr. Ming's Chinese Tea]. It was promoted as a '*una mezcla de hierbas exoticas'* [a mix of exotic herbs] found in 'remote areas in China'. Chinese teas targeting the Spanish-speaking population were popular options for weight loss in West Queens, as were products that used ingredients like *sábila* and *nopales*, which were familiar to a Mexican clientele. A variety of devices were used to encourage the use of weight loss products, which emphasized that these products were natural and traditionally regarded as potent remedies.

There was, however, a parallel narrative operating in much of the publicity for weight loss products that emphasized the scientific credibility of the products. Even the insertion of 'Dr Ming' alongside 'Té Chino' suggests this fact. VitaVida vendors, in particular, emphasized the strong science backing their products. The first page of their brochure was entitled 'Ciencia' [Science] featuring thumbnail photographs of the PhDs and MDs that formed their scientific leadership as well as photographs of laboratory test tubes with plants growing out of them. When I met Juanito and Leo, two VitaVida vendors, their introductory sales pitches both referenced the fact that Lou Ignarro, a Nobel Prize winner backed VitaVida products. When Enrique decided to blend a pill into my shake to boost my

immunity, he did not fail to remind me that Lou Ignarro, who indeed shared the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine (1998), created the pill.

However, VitaVida's claim to Lou Ignarro was a claim to science but not to biomedicine. VitaVida vendors were careful not to equate VitaVida products with biomedicine, but pointed out that their products offered an alternative to medical knowledge. VitaVida vendors often emphasized that they came to VitaVida after visits to the doctor and the consumption of pharmaceuticals failed to work for them. VitaVida positioned itself as a nutrition club that utilized natural products that offered an alternative to the medical establishment. At one Wednesday workshop at VitaVida, a young Ecuadorean woman talked to a crowd of about thirty people, mostly women. During the workshop, she went through the VitaVida catalogue of products and described each item. She related stories to the audience that emphasized how these products worked for customers when medical advice and pills did not. Leo, the Ecuadorean, who co-owned the large VitaVida club in the area, also repeated a similar narrative. 'Doctors don't know anything about nutrition. If they did, the whole world would be thin, but they are not. You need a nutritionist to solve these problems'. In this way, these VitaVida vendors drew a distinction between the domain of doctors and the domain of VitaVida. As they saw it, the latter was more equipped to deal with nutritional matters and weight loss. VitaVida vendors repeatedly referred to this distinction. This idea resonated with many of my informants who had bad experiences with doctors, clinics and hospitals in the US. Emma and many others complained that they had to wait long hours waiting for a doctor in the hospital waiting room. Laura also had a very bad experience giving birth in NYC and felt that the doctors treated her as if she did not understand anything. Others argued that they had to return to their doctor many times and take many ineffective pills before their ailments were treated successfully. Domingo felt that his doctor did not read his file and did not know

anything about him. VitaVida vendors positioned themselves as separate from the medical establishment and this appealed to many informants.

It is important to recognize that many of the teas and other weight loss items that informants used contained laxatives, in particular, senna. Senna is a supplement approved by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) as a laxative. It is used successfully for constipation and to clean bowels but its effectiveness for weight loss has not been proven and, furthermore, long-time use or use while pregnant or nursing is warned against (National Library of Medicine 2011). A few informants including Emma commented that the tea she tried, which had senna in it, gave her gastritis. Many of the products used by informants and considered to be natural cleansers actually contained laxatives used for treating constipation not weight loss. This fact was obscured by careful marketing of the products as natural, added by a lack of Spanish-language directions on the packages.

Although senna is FDA approved, there was also evidence that non-FDA approved dietary supplements remained on the market in West Queens. During my fieldwork I saw one supplement, called Pai You Guo, featured at a popular weight loss shop where a few of my informants shopped. The box featured a slender woman in a yellow bikini. Written on the cover of the box was the name Pai You Guo. Chinese characters also covered the front of the package, along with an American flag under which it said 'American technique'. The supplement came in a tea or capsule form. While in the field, I considered it another example of the way in which Chinese pills and teas were marketed as having weight loss qualities. It was only after my fieldwork had completed that I came across an article in the Wall Street Journal (Hobson 2011). The article reported on a study demonstrating that the weight loss supplement, Pai You Guo, was being bought and used by Brazilian-born women in Massachusetts, despite it having been banned by the FDA in 2009 because it contained two

already banned substances sibutramine and phenolphthalein (Cohen, Brenner & McCormick 2012). Soon after, I returned to my field site and discovered that Pai You Guo was still being sold in West Queens in a popular nutrition shop as well as a *botanica.* Moreover, another weight loss product called Fruta Planta, which had also been banned by the FDA in December 2010 for containing sibutramine (Food and Drug Administration 2010), was also being promoted in West Queens. Elu and Paula said that they had purchased this product at *tiendas* but stopped taking it when they learned on the television news that it was dangerous. They acknowledged that a friend still used it, Elu said, 'It works but it has risks'. The availability of banned and potentially harmful products indicates how weight loss products in West Queens may not only have an influence on nutritional practices but also on health, more generally. The fact that some of these products have directions written in English and Spanish that are incomprehensible further suggests an intended lack of transparency among the suppliers of these products.[29]

Although public health and anthropological research has explored the aspects of low-income food environments that encourage the consumption of high-energy foods (Horowitz et al. 2004; Lofink 2010), little attention has been given to exploring the aspects of an environment that encourage the consumption of weight loss products. My informants' narratives suggest the need to examine the accessibility of weight loss products, even, or perhaps especially, in areas where obesity prevalence is high. Accessibility to products with incomprehensible indications and directions, marketing techniques that stress naturalness and exaggerate weight loss claims are important elements shaping weight

[29] One such sentence was on the side of a box of Pai You Guo Slim Capsule. It read: 'The vitamin C, vitamin E, the vitamin B2 is araw material,was have by the American gene biomedical science technique research center The professor of astsmany yearclinic researches, makinguse of the modern crest The sharp living creature [sic]…'

experiences among informants. The techniques and narratives used to market these products to Spanish-speaking groups, the presence of FDA-banned products in West Queens, as well as the fact that laxatives were marketed as natural teas point to a political-economy of weight loss in this migrant neighbourhood that has the potential to create great financial costs for individuals, false expectations for weight loss, and potentially harmful health consequences. In West Queens, migrants had to negotiate a food environment that presented opportunities to consume a diversity of high-energy foods and products promising weight loss. By examining both these aspects of the food environment, I acknowledge their shared role in shaping food practices among my informants.

'Yo ♥ VitaVida' [I Love VitaVida]

The weight loss products that were the most visible in West Queens were those of VitaVida, the weight management and nutrition company. My first experience with VitaVida was on the street. A tall thin Ecuadorean man stood on the corner of the sidewalk. He was asking walker-bys to join a VitaVida nutrition club. Intrigued, I began to ask him more questions. He took my number and told me he would call me to invite me to a meeting. The more interested I seemed in what he was telling me, the less interested he appeared to be in talking with me. I told him that I was a student doing a project on food and nutrition among Mexicans, and he quickly started asking me if I wanted to know the dangers of dieting and seemed to think that I was out to audit or investigate his club. Needless to say, I never received a call from him. Two weeks later, I passed him on the corner again, I noticed that he was handing out cards but I was not sure how he would respond to me. Luckily, there was a young Ecuadorean woman standing on the sidewalk with him. She was chatty which helped to diffuse her colleague's scepticism. She asked me a few questions about myself, gave me a card and told me when the meeting was.

I attended the nutrition club the following Saturday. It was located in an apartment building on one of the main thoroughfares of West Queens. The door to the space was unmarked, but there was a big sign that said *Bienvenido* [Welcome] with a large paper smiley face. I entered the room and there were about fifteen other adults and one child sitting around the perimeter of the room on plastic seats. The room had been painted lime green and there was a bar in the room behind which people were talking and making themselves drinks. The walls were covered with handmade posters outlining dreams and goals and there were many photographs demonstrating the weight loss results received with VitaVida. Eventually, everyone moved into the adjacent room and the presentation began.

The presenter, Angela, cued music and one by one people ran up from the audience. They screamed out their name, and flashed a 'before' photograph to the audience. The audience then celebrated the difference between the photograph and their current body shape (Figure 7.2). Angela then turned off the music and reported statistics on the prevalence of heart attacks, diabetes and obesity in the US. She then asked the audience how many of us were tired, had migraines, were sick, had gastritis or digestion problems. The crowd roared to indicate that they did indeed have these problems and they wanted to do something about it. She quickly launched into the opportunity that she was offering the audience, which was to sign up that night to become a certified vendor of VitaVida, while also receiving an initial packet of VitaVida products. She told the audience that they could sell the products to others and make a career out of it. She then brought up a PowerPoint slide that had different phrases and images on them, such as smiley faces and peace signs. She said if you wear a peace sign you do not make money for it. If you wear a button that says 'I ♥ New York' you don't make money either. Angela joked, 'I don't make money from New York if I wear that button, they just take my taxes. But if you

Figure 7.2: Presentation of Before/After Photographs at VitaVida Meeting

wear this button [points to button saying Yo ♥ VitaVida] and talk to people, you can make money and grow your own business'. There was hardly any discussion about what was to be sold, with the exception that they were nutritional, all-natural products. Her argument was persuasive and the room was electric. I soon realized that I was the only one in the audience who was entirely new to the scheme, everyone else was already a member. After much discussion with the presenter, I bought a 22-ounce carton of Instant Health Meal Shake Mix for $40 but I did not register to sell the product. The presenter pointed out many times that I had lost my opportunity.

Noé, who worked at the grocery store, suggested that I go to another VitaVida nutrition club if I wanted to learn about the products. This club was just beside

where he worked. I did so, and as I passed the entrance there were three guys standing outside, handing out cards that said 'VitaVida Independent Distributor'. The cards stated that VitaVida was '100% Natural' and offered '30 years of experience guaranteed'. Using bullet points, the card outlined the benefits of VitaVida:

> Lose Weight or Gain Weight; Lose Between 10 and 30 lbs. per month; Gain 5 to 15 lbs. per month; Digestive Health; Eliminate Fats and Cellulite; Work Opportunity; Maintain your Weight and Control your Appetite.

The storefront had a green awning and on it was written the words 'Vida Bella' [Beautiful Life]. The glass façade of the store was covered with green paper so that passers-by could not see in (Figure 7.3). One young man, Juanito, kindly told me go inside. I opened the door to find a large, open space with chairs lining the perimeter. The room was painted lime green and white. There was a steady but somewhat muffled sound of blenders coming from the back of the club. About a dozen people were sitting around the room, some were clustered in groups talking, while others were drinking VitaVida on their own or with their children. Everyone shook my hand to say hello and to welcome me while Juanito disappeared to the back of the room. Juanito quickly returned with a Styrofoam cup with a long straw and what looked like water. He told me to try the juice, an aloe drink that would clean out my intestines. He signed me up for a nutrition club membership and told me that I could come whenever I wanted. The club was open from six o'clock in the morning to ten o'clock in the evening, daily. Juan told me that he would do an evaluation on me next time I came. 'Little by little I will teach you', he said. He suggested that I come three times a day but then said that it would be fine if I came once a day if I just wanted to maintain my weight and learn more about the program, rather than lose weight.

Figure 7.3: VitaVida Storefront

The nutrition club was set up like a café. For the cost of four dollars I was entitled to three VitaVida drinks. This included the aloe drink, the nutritional meal shake and the herbal tea, which together served as a meal replacement. For a bit more money, the drinks could be tailored to certain specifications (i.e. energy boosters and vitamins could be added). The vendors brought them to clients while they waited in their seats, one drink after the other, and individuals were able to choose the flavors of the drinks but they had to be consumed in the shop. For an additional cost, the vendors brought out large clear plastic pillboxes, filled with over 20 different pills and vitamin varieties. With their assistance one could choose different pills to try. The Cell Activator, the Snack Defense and multivitamins were popular choices. Company leaders encouraged

vendors to each have their own pillbox so that their customers could try the pills and vitamins a-la-carte at the nutrition clubs. At one of the large meetings that I went to, the presenter asked the participants if they had filled their boxes. Everyone promptly shook their boxes in the air so that we could hear the loud sound of pills jiggling in their containers. By selling these drinks, vitamins and pills in small portions at the nutrition club, people were able to easily access and become acquainted with the VitaVida brand without the cost of purchasing containers of the products at the outset, which were expensive. The nutrition clubs gave vendors, like Juanito, a space to bring new clients to introduce them to VitaVida products and to encourage them into be vendors of the products themselves. By selling these products piecemeal throughout the day in the nutrition clubs, the vendors also made money that paid for the rent of the space.

An important aspect of the club was the energetic atmosphere and sociality of it. Juanito, was in his late twenties, he had left Mexico four years ago to move to NYC. He studied industrial engineering in Mexico and was working in a Chinese restaurant when he arrived. Someone on the street had introduced him to VitaVida and he started selling it and quit his job at the Chinese restaurant. He described why he joined, 'Well, I came here and I liked the atmosphere. Everyone works together. There is a sense of unity here because we help each other. I can use the computer here to check my email and to take my orders. I work long hours but I feel like I am working with friends'. Juanito explained that he sent VitaVida to his family in Mexico, so that they use it now as well. My informants acknowledged that VitaVida and similar products had a presence in Mexico, which is also evidenced by the literature (Cahn 2011) and some learned about the product before they arrived in NYC, but they were not involved with it in Mexico, partially because it was too expensive.

Rosa, a Mexican, who was in her early forties, expressed a similar sentiment about the sociality of the space when we were talking at the club. It was a

particularly cold, blustery day at the end of January and we were all happy to be inside. Rosa brought her friend with her that day; she travelled from Connecticut to sell VitaVida in Queens and the Bronx. When they came in, she looked exhausted. She sat down next to me and exclaimed 'I love this place! The music and look at the walls—they are beautiful. I love that colour. We can sit and talk…everyone is friendly'. She told me that she had been out selling all day and she was pleased to finally sit down. Her sentiments resonated with me as it was a very energetic place and the vibrancy of the club contrasted with other workspaces in West Queens as well as other health clinics and hospitals that were known for being unfriendly and drab. When people entered the room, they were acknowledged and hands were usually shaken. In fact, the first time I went to the club, I thought they had mistaken me for someone else because they greeted me with such enthusiasm and everyone stopped to shake my hand. The room was filled with posters about successful weight loss, VitaVida products, pins and slogans like 'Trabaje desde su casa' [Work from your home] and Yo ♥ VitaVida [I ♥ VitaVida]. Often Juanito and the other vendors danced as they made the drinks. There were a variety of events held at the club, workshops took place each Wednesday, and larger meetings and dances were held during the month. I became used to the musical interludes that took place during most meetings. At one of my first big meetings, the presenters turned on music and everyone in the audience stood up and cheered as the presenters danced to the song YMCA with the crowd grooving along.

People became involved with VitaVida through sisters, mothers, brothers and friends. Some had purchased VitaVida willingly because of their interest in the product, while others had felt obliged to buy from a friend, others received it as a gift. VitaVida vendors were independent, but each worked under the person, or sponsor, who had brought them into the club. From every sale that was made,

their sponsor took a cut.[30] Sponsors were often incredibly pushy to make those beneath them make sales. If the people below the sponsor failed to make their sales, the sponsor may fail to reach his/her quota and could end up losing their position in the hierarchy, or 'ladder'. Many vendors complained that their sponsors were always calling them up asking them if they had made their sales and if they had brought in enough clients that month. That was one of the reasons Arnoldo, who had started to work for another company, said he left VitaVida to sell another product, called WellSpring. Arnoldo admitted that in seven months he only managed to get four clients at VitaVida. He said:

> Well, yes, I do sell VitaVida but I am also selling something else which has the same kinds of products but provides more opportunities. VitaVida is saturated. The business is saturated.

He pulled out a shiny black brochure from his bag with the word 'WellSpring' written in blue block letters. With enthusiasm, he repeated more or less verbatim the phrase that is in small font at the bottom of his leaflet.

> WellSpring is an American company that has just opened up its doors to Latinos. We are the first to start in NY. Wellspring, I know it, well for 15 days [I have sold it]. Wellspring has 25 years in the business but with the Hispanics it is just starting, just. Because they [Wellspring] used to ask for your social security number and the majority of us we don't have one so for us no [we couldn't join] but now they are opening it slowly and for this we are entering.

Although Arnoldo expressed great disappointment with VitaVida he was enthusiastic about WellSpring and felt it would offer the opportunities that VitaVida had not. As Arnoldo noted, VitaVida and WellSpring appealed to undocumented migrants also because documentation was not needed to become

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[30] This marketing strategy is referred to as multi-level marketing in that each salesperson makes money for selling products and for recruiting new salespeople.

a vendor. Just as new dieting products were continuously showing up on the shelves in West Queens, so too were informants being presented with new products and business opportunities related to weight loss.[31] These companies continually emerged in West Queens and circulated among my informants and their families and social networks, one opportunity replacing the last.

The vendors of VitaVida were constantly encouraging new clients to become vendors themselves. It was not generally enough for clients to use the product, vendors were eager to have people sign up to be distributors or vendors of the product. Once an individual did sign up to distribute VitaVida, they would be at the lowest rung in the 'ladder of success' by which the company was organized. In this position, they would not make much profit, but if they were able to reach a higher rung on the ladder they would make more profit from every sale. Members were always encouraged to 'buy' themselves into the higher position in the company. They did this by putting an order in to VitaVida of a few hundred dollars. Vendors thus self-funded a large order so that they could reach a higher, more profitable position in the ladder that would give them more profits from every sale. After putting money up front for VitaVida products, they then tried to sell the merchandise to regain their investment. Often by the time they sold their merchandise, they were due to put in another order, lest they lose their positioning on the ladder. Vendors often ended up trapped trying to sell off the merchandise that they purchased with their own funds. The difficulty of doing so was further complicated by the fact that VitaVida was always promoting new products and thus merchandise had a short shelf life and few people wanted to buy the older merchandise.

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[31] Business opportunities that my informants engaged in were not limited only to weight loss. Other products, such as makeup products, household cleaning supplies, coffee, body shaping garments, instructional DVDs and other items were sold through direct selling.

I had heard Laura, Arnoldo and Emma talk about this issue with the VitaVida system but it became clearer to me when I went to one of the large meetings. Again, while music was playing (one popular song often played at these gatherings was 'I Gotta Feeling' by the Black Eyed Peas), Santos, the presenter, who was a vendor of VitaVida at the President's Level, asked for members of the audience who had reached the third rung in the 'ladder' to come to the stage and share their experiences. One by one, people came up and explained to the audience how they achieved this position. He put the microphone up to everyone and asked them how they made enough sales to reach this position in the ladder. The first person said that she achieved the position by making one large order of 1000 points (approximately $650) and that she borrowed money from her husband to pay for the order. The second said she achieved it with two orders, which her family purchased together to use among themselves. The third person said that they did it in one large order and did not say how. The fourth person said she achieved it by buying it for herself and then sharing it with her sister. The final person said that she and her husband paid for it. I was a bit surprised that this was how people moved up the ladder, because none of them mentioned having steady clients.

Santos, however, had a different perspective. He was extremely enthusiastic about the responses of these individuals. They returned to their seats and Santos encouraged everyone in the audience to continue to climb the ladder. He explained that one may have to pay to reach a higher level on the ladder but it would be worth it. He made an analogy between climbing the ladder and migrating to the US. He said that paying for an order so that you can raise your position on the ladder is like crossing the Rio Grande. If you have no documentation you have to pay the *coyote* [migrant guide/smuggler] to migrate. Once you pay the *coyote*, however, you are able to get to the other side of the river, and to enter the US. Then you may have to pay more to pay for a van to

get you to NYC, or, he reasoned, to get to the next level of the ladder, but it would be worth it in the end. It became apparent at that point, why VitaVida vendors were ending up in situations where they had to pay off debts. Santos and other VitaVida vendors encouraged this practice as a necessary sacrifice to enable future success.

There was an interesting ethnic dimension to the selling of VitaVida. Many of the successful VitaVida vendors who were at the top of the ladder, those that co-owned the nutrition clubs, ran many of the workshops, and did the presentation circuit, were Ecuadorean. There were many Mexicans in the clubs and at the meetings, and, it seemed that often presentations were targeted for Mexican audiences, but Mexicans were usually (though not always) on the lower rungs of the VitaVida 'ladder'. In a sense, Ecuadoreans were selling the promise of the 'American dream' to Mexicans. The under-belly of this dream was the fact that it was very difficult to abandon because the initial investment was enough to make individuals want to stay to recoup their losses. Furthermore, individuals often felt pressured by their supervisors or mentors to continue trying to sell the product even if they were not gaining clients or making a liveable salary.

'Un taxista con una pancita' [A taxi-driver with a belly]: Stories of Transformation and the American Dream

A variety of narratives were used to encourage people to vend and consume VitaVida. These narratives emphasized a shared Latino ethnicity and the possibility to achieve slim bodies and wealth through personal perseverance, sacrifice and hard work.

A Shared Latino Identity

In this context, 'Latino' seemed to include both migrants and US-born Spanish-speakers. At VitaVida events, Latinos were collectively characterized as being open to opportunities. This trait was lauded and underscored continuously to

curry support for VitaVida and up-take among Latinos in the area. It served to reify differences between Latinos and non-Latinos, as non-Latino English speakers were seen as closed to new opportunities. VitaVida vendors utilized sentiments of shared ethnicity to encourage consumption. These narratives were taught and passed on at workshops, conventions and in informational booklets.

People continuously emphasized being Latino in VitaVida. At the beginning of most meetings the presenter asked if there was anyone in the audience from Mexico, Ecuador or Guatemala. There was a general understanding that everyone in the audience was Latino, even those born in the US were assumed to be of Latino ancestry. 'Openness' to try VitaVida and to be open to the opportunity of VitaVida was seen as a characteristic of Latinos. Rosa referred to this one day when she was talking about how much easier it was to sell products in Queens than it was in other places, such as Connecticut, where she currently lived. She commuted to Queens to sell VitaVida four times a week. She said:

> I was living on Long Island and then moved to Connecticut [CT] but no one there [in CT] wants to try these products. There are not enough Latinos. Latinos are open; they live in the day—they say, 'ok I'll try it'. They want to have fun and enjoy and they will come with you and try things but in CT, no! Once I brought my neighbour a book and a CD about VitaVida and I said, 'use it, just bring it back and let me know if you want to try it'. Can you believe it? She did not even bring it back. She did not even say hi again! That was it. Latinos are different they will try it, at least.

Rosa underscores the difference between Latinos and Americans, a distinction that was often referred to in VitaVida settings, and in West Queens more generally. During VitaVida events, a similar distinction was drawn. Santos, gave advice about how to sell the product successfully to the audience. He said:

> The most important thing is to talk with many people. VitaVida is about Latinos helping other Latinos. Knock on doors; enter *tiendas,* and more *tiendas*. Look at them, and say, 'Look at me. Give

> me 3 minutes. I have a family, help me'. [He asks the audience] What do you need? Do you need English? No! You have to knock on doors. But are there enough people in NY? Will you find enough people [he asks ironically to the audience]? I knock on doors and I say, 'Do you speak Spanish?' [Then, he puts on a very American English accent and says] 'What? VitaVida? What's that?' [audience laughs]. I don't even waste my time with them. [Pretends to knock on door again] 'You American? Yes? Nos vemos [See you later]'. Next door!

Santos' comment encouraged vendors to seek out Latinos and by doing so helped to reify the differences between Latinos and Americans. He also urged vendors to use their social network and their family and friends to find clients. He said:

> You have to talk to everyone and you have to make personal contact with people. You should use your family network and call and make appointments with friends and family. It is not about seeing a *gordita* [he makes the gesture of looking someone up-and-down]. No you need to approach everyone. Don't go alone to meetings, bring your friends.

The comments used by VitaVida presenters urged vendors to call on social networks, friends and family relations to encourage their sales of VitaVida. Many of the individuals using VitaVida asked their closest friends and family to become involved in the selling and using the product. Laura expressed her upset with some of her friends from church that started using and selling the product. She bought the product at first but eventually refused to go out with her friends who sold VitaVida because she felt that it was all they cared about. Emma also told me that it was her friend who encouraged her to use the products. When Emma began college (before she had to drop out), her friend cautioned her that she would need extra money for school and that VitaVida was a good way to earn more. Emma's friend told her that the product was great and that she would lose weight. Emma bought some products and did not like them. She said, 'How could I sell it? They tell you that you have to say 'this is good' but how can I do it

if I don't believe it? The people selling VitaVida say you will lose weight but I didn't'. A few informants were sceptical of VitaVida and their friends who sold it because they felt that they were 'selling lies', as Noé indicated one day when we were talking about the products.

Although VitaVida vendors suggested calling on friends and family networks to make sales they also reiterated that friends' opinions about VitaVida should not be trusted. At two of the events that I attended, a very similar idea was repeated. At one meeting, an Ecuadorean presenter, Josana, asked: 'Are there any questions or objections from the audience?' She continued by saying: 'Do you know that our perspectives are 90%--'. At which point the audience screamed out: 'Opinion'. She then said: 'And 10%', to which the audience screamed out, 'Fact' [a PowerPoint slide illustrated this idea as well]. She continued:

> We talk to our family and friends and they don't know [facts about VitaVida]…their perspectives are 90% opinions of what VitaVida is. But they don't know and they don't base their opinions on fact—they are just opinions. You have to accept that people are going to talk about VitaVida and have their views but what you have to do today is accept the product! You must accept the difference it will make. You may be *gordita* and in one month you will lose weight! Friends will say, 'What is she doing? She probably '*roba la plata*' [steals money]'! But you will start earning money and that is a fact—it is not opinion. You have to accept that the product works today and learn not to listen to other people's opinions.

Thus, VitaVida vendors took into account the scepticism that people had towards VitaVida and urged vendors not to listen to friends and families who doubted the product. Through these devices, individuals who did not want to try the product were seen to not know what was good for them and to not be tuned in to opportunities when they were presented. These narratives also suggested that those who did not want to try VitaVida were failing to live up to the openness that is characteristic of Latinos.

In addition to the emphasis on shared Latino identity, stories of shared struggle and of transformation circulated at VitaVida events in efforts to build community and to enable newcomers to visualize their success. These stories presented VitaVida as a migrant's only opportunity to achieve the American dream. Narratives emphasized the agency of the individual to transform suffering into success and fatness into slimness, through the use of VitaVida. At the first workshop I attended, Angela started very persuasively discussing how VitaVida enabled migrants to achieve their dreams (see p. 223). In this example, Angela drew relationships between her own experience and that of the audience. Subsequently she informed the audience that they could make a change today by registering and becoming distributors. At most VitaVida meetings similar techniques were used to motivate the audience. At a packed meeting at another location nearby, a visiting speaker said:

> Who comes to the US with this dream? Who else has been here for three years [yells from the audience]. 'We are going back in three years'—everyone says that. One day, my husband and I were going to go back, we had been here for nine years working in a factory and we were tired and we were ready to go back when VitaVida came into our life. This was our last opportunity—and it was beautiful and it changed everything. I started taking VitaVida and I lost 79 pounds. Who else came here looking for health and dreaming of a good life? Who came here looking for success but did not find it here? Who came here looking for health, for opportunities for business? Good for you for coming here. This is where you will find it.

The suggestion was made that they could achieve the American dream through VitaVida. One of the moderators at the large VitaVida convention, a middle-aged man, Francisco, said:

> I had been in the US for 16 years when I found VitaVida. I came to the US because I wanted the American dream but in fact I ended

> up living the American nightmare. After 6 years here I was working in construction. I was drinking, smoking and spending all that I made, but by 1999, I had started a new life with VitaVida. I was making over ten thousand a month five years after starting and now I have joined the president's club! My dreams have become a reality. Now I have been doing VitaVida for 10 years.
>
> You need to leave here [this convention] very clear about what you need to do. You need to take advantage of this opportunity. You don't need to be intelligent, you need to listen and come to events.
>
> We are *campesinos sencillos* [humble farmers]. We are not formal; we are not accustomed to the red carpet or to champagne or to eating like a king. But we can make money and have a success story too. How many have not completed more than primary school? Raise your hands. Many do not have a formal education—but you can make it. It does not matter. The question is what will you do to guarantee your success this year. You have to decide what you want for this year, what are your goals, your dreams; do you want vacations, cars, houses? You need a long-term plan! You cannot postpone anything. You have to write your dreams and goals down now.
>
> You may not have an education but you can go back to your country, you can return to your country and everyone will be excited to see you. They will greet you when you arrive. Don't you want to return and to be able to say that you achieved the American dream? Don't you want to return with pride?

With his powerful presentation, Francisco stressed the importance of taking advantage of this opportunity that the audience had before them. He sympathized with the experience of new migrants but argued that it was not necessary to have an education to succeed, even humble farmers had agency to make their dreams a reality. He urged that it does not matter what one's background or class is, but rather what was important was the effort that the individual puts in to achieve their dreams. The presenter suggested that individual perseverance and goal-setting ultimately guaranteed success.

Santos, also had a story that emphasized the need for migrants to take opportunities when they were presented to them. Santos was cheered onto stage. In fact, when his name was announced, dozens of people in the audience leaped out of their seats and took their black VitaVida notebooks and ran up to the stage to form a line. Santos began signing everyone's notebook to the sound of cheers and celebratory music. When he began his speech, he said:

> One day I came to the US and I was just like you. I was a *taxista con una pancita* [a taxi-driver with a belly] and I took an opportunity. I took the opportunity of VitaVida [PowerPoint slide of a side-profile of him when he was heavier and looking glum].
>
> Who crossed the river to get here? [PowerPoint slide of migrants crossing Rio Grande]. We have all crossed the river, we left the kids and the family and made two promises. We would return in a few years and we would return after having achieved something, after having taken opportunities and succeeded. Who has kept these promises?

Santos described his own transformation from a taxi driver with a belly to a wealthy business owner in VitaVida. He showed a series of photographs of him in loungewear looking overweight, living in a basement apartment and working out of a garage office. Then he began to show his transition in photographs. He showed pictures of him in a suit with top-earning VitaVida sales people and him on a vacation paid for by VitaVida. He even had a photograph of his hotel room at a VitaVida convention, which was strewn with rose petals to celebrate the fact that he reached the President's Level. Santos suggests that those who had not achieved success in the US had not fulfilled their promise. Thus, the emphasis is on the failure of the individual rather than acknowledging the difficulties that may have shaped one's lack of success after migration. Leticia, a petite and seemingly confident woman, wearing a suit and high heels, had her own story of transformation.

> You are in the right place. You are here and ready to make a change. You are ready to make more than minimum wage in fast food. I started VitaVida and lost two inches on my waist and I lost weight. Look at the difference [presents photograph of her on a couch in which she looks substantially larger].
>
> I was working, I was selling *helado* [ice cream] on the street making $150 a week working 20 hours and also working as a babysitter. I was struggling, but now, do you see me up here? I have energy, I have lost weight [she moves to show off her body a bit and the audience whistles and claps].
>
> Ok, who is excited to lose weight to earn money and to go on vacations [photograph of beach]?

Josana emphasized her own struggle working for low pay and how she has transformed her career, her energy and her waist size. She went on to say:

> If you don't want much, you are not going to get much. How much do you want to pay for electricity? Nothing? [Only very few people raise their hands], A little? [some hands raise], Or a lot? [more shouting, many hands] If you want to pay very little, you will live in a small apartment but it might have cockroaches [laugh]. Or you can pay nothing? [She shows a slide of someone sleeping in a cardboard box in the street]. Nothing? If you pay nothing you will live in the street. Or a lot? Do you want to pay a lot? Well then, you will live in a big house [she shows a photograph of a large estate]…You achieve what you search for. I used to be *bien gordita* [pretty fat] but I used the product and in one week I made $400 and lost 6 lbs. Do you want to have success? Do you want to be *flaca*? Do you eat *tacos* all day if you want to be *flaca*? No! You use VitaVida, wear the VitaVida button and tell your story. People will ask you how you did it. You will make money by telling your story.

Josana encouraged the audience to dream big and desire more if they wanted to achieve large goals. She suggested that individuals needed to crave both wealth and thinness and to work to achieve these goals. She emphasized that individuals who failed to set large enough goals for themselves or who failed to

think that they were capable of success with regard to body size and health could not achieve it. Their own mentality was what limited their chance of success.

Adriana was a young woman in her teens who was born in Mexico but moved to the US when she was less than one year old. She sold and used VitaVida products, which her mother introduced her to. Adriana really enjoyed selling it and was working to save up to put herself through college. She talked about her and her mother's transformation through VitaVida.

> When I was in 6th grade I was 160 lbs. and you know I was judged for being so big. Sometimes kids are not so nice and they made fun of me for being big. I decided that I wanted to do something about this…it was about this time that my mom found VitaVida. My goal was to feel healthy. You know my friends want to be [size] 0, it is just what the media puts out there but I just wanted to lose some pounds, just to feel healthy. I tried my mom's products for three to four months and I lost 40 lbs. I was using formula 1, which is the nutritional shake mix and then the multivitamins, the tea, the aloe drink and the cell activator. I felt so good about myself. You know I just wanted to be satisfied with myself.
>
> When I was a baby, my mom came here with my father. When my mom first arrived she worked in a factory where they made shirts. The factory paid $10 per shirt for each shirt that you sewed and if you needed more money you had to work as hard as you could so you can make more and more shirts. While my mom worked my aunt watched me at home. My mom did that for five years. But one day my mom found VitaVida and, you know, it was a product that made her feel good and it just makes you feel good.
>
> Mexicans eat the way they eat because they just work many hours. There is no time to cook and fast food is easy. It is there. They want to keep up their traditions of cooking and making *tamales* but sometimes traditions can't be followed for a time because people have to work. In Mexico women don't go to school–they don't have the opportunity so they take care of the family, they maintain traditions and make food and cook for the family but here they can't do that. But for my mom, using VitaVida and

> eating totally healthy is like moving forward from this. She is okay with us not being so traditional.
>
> My mom's boyfriend works in a restaurant and he drinks the product, the shake, but I don't think he believes in the product. He doesn't believe the products can bring health and much more and I think that's because he is so caught up with tradition and eating this and cooking that [traditional food]. He just doesn't want to believe that the answer is change. 'When will you cook this?' he says to my mom and he gets mad. My mom says that we eat healthy because it is about sustaining our family [rather] than making him [mom's boyfriend] happy. She went through so much and she puts up with a lot from him. She is so strong…my mom says, 'This is my opportunity to be someone' and [she] wants the rest of us to be better off. The [children in this generation] just take things for granted. It hurts! Why don't they see it through our parent's eyes? But I do. It is just—never give up on anything, always there are going to be struggles but they are just obstacles, things are not impossible and I don't want to forget it.

Adriana told a narrative of transformation of her mother, herself and her family. She admired her mother for working in VitaVida and saw her mother's struggle to change her career and her family's diet as a way of moving the family forward. Adriana was also critical of the traditional practices of her mother's boyfriend and his unwillingness to change them. She felt that through VitaVida they had the opportunity to move the family away from traditions towards a more modern life and she disliked that her mother's boyfriend was resisting this. She associated VitaVida with change rather than tradition and she saw her and her mother's foray into VitaVida as a way to sustain and improve their family.

Talking with VitaVida users and attending activities allowed me to hear a range of transformational stories and personal narratives. These narratives aimed to encourage future clients to envision their own wealth, health and slimness. American dream ideology, shared experiences of migration and notions of Latino identity were embraced in these narratives encouraging VitaVida use and consumption. They urged individuals to take opportunities, to set goals, to keep

promises and to dream big. These stories suggested that through hard work and dedication, one's goals could be realized. The narratives emphasized the need to prevail and to not give up even when faced with obstacles that seemed insurmountable. Discussions about slenderness, health and wealth become interchangeable in many of these narratives. Education, financial deprivation, English-language skills and lack of documentation were not considered adequate reasons for a lack of slenderness or economic success. Successful VitaVida vendors repeatedly emphasized that they succeeded despite their lack of education, documentation and money, and they strongly suggested that others should be able to do the same. VitaVida vendors argued that individuals needed to be responsible for their body size and their economic position. Individuals were told that they had agency in shaping their success and that structural constraints, lack of documentation, educational or socioeconomic class should not delimit them. They were told that VitaVida vending was their opportunity, and after facing so much hardship in the US they did not have much to lose.

Discussion

Informants encountered a heavily promoted dieting industry in West Queens that shaped everyday consumption practices and perceptions of body size. This chapter illustrates that dieting and weight loss practices were important aspects of everyday consumption practices. There was a great deal of energy, time and money devoted to weight loss practices and low-quality weight loss products, some of which had been banned by the FDA. Weight loss products were appealing to informants for a variety of reasons. Feeling that they did not have time to prepare healthy meals for themselves or to exercise, informants often turned to weight loss products because they were easily accessible and promised rapid results. The company of VitaVida further attracted migrants by suggesting that they could achieve economic success and weight loss by using and selling VitaVida products, even without documentation, a college degree or advanced

English-language skills. Many of these weight loss products, such as those sold by VitaVida, were marketed as having the ability to transform individuals' lives. Indeed, some informants achieved weight loss with VitaVida, while others felt they lost only money. By exploring the landscape of weight loss products in West Queens, it becomes clear that the same contexts that led informants to non-nutritious eating practices, such as time and economic constraints, lack of documentation, as well as the desire to eat certain foods because of the meanings they embodied, were those encouraging individuals to engage in particular weight loss practices and use certain dieting products. Dieting and weight loss practices should be seen as patterned by political-economics, time and documentation status, just as food practices are more generally. Many of the weight loss practices and products in West Queens, thus, should not be seen as antidotes to weight gain but instead as produced by the same web of vulnerability that encourages non-nutritious practices and weight gain.

The promotion and use of VitaVida products not only influenced practices but also the way in which body sizes and weight change were explained and understood. VitaVida events and promotional materials emphasized the role of willpower, individualism, education and self-determinism in shaping one's (financial and weight loss) success. Therefore they ultimately reproduced ideas inherent in culture-based models of obesity, such as acculturation, that denied the role of structural forces in shaping migrant weight gain.

VitaVida discourses commodify weight loss by defining weight gain and obesity to be problems for which their products serve as the solution. In this way, VitaVida promotion and marketing depoliticize the problem of obesity, providing a market solution to a structural problem. Following this logic, weight loss becomes privatized and individualized and the state no longer is seen to be responsibility for addressing nutritional change. This phenomenon is characteristic of the weight loss industry in the US, more generally, which

commodifies dieting and weight loss, suggesting that healthy eating practices can be 'sold and bought' (Guthman & DuPuis 2006: 441). Dolan and Johnstone-Louis (2011) specifically encounter this phenomenon among individuals deemed by global corporations to be at 'the bottom of the pyramid'. In their study of Avon entrepreneurs in South Africa, they explore how poor women are made visible to the market and commodified through their involvement in the direct selling of Avon. Local practices are 'modernized' and desires are shaped by Avon selling in order to create demand for the goods that Avon has to offer. Avon lauds these entrepreneurial endeavours as opportunities for transformation, empowerment and financial improvement for impoverished individuals. Dolan and Johnstone-Louis (2011) argue, however, that marketing these products under the guise of social transformation also redefines poverty so that it becomes less a problem that the state is responsible for and more a problem of failed entrepreneurial enterprise and individual deficiency. In the same way, I suggest that VitaVida helps to commodify weight loss and construct it as an issue of personal irresponsibility, laziness and the failure of self-actualization, rather than one shaped by social structures and constraints.

In West Queens, migrants had to negotiate contexts that encouraged weight gain as well as a dieting industry that promoted weight loss. This chapter demonstrates that processes of weight loss and gain were interrelated and must be viewed conjointly to better grasp the experience of food and weight change after migration.

8. CONCLUSION

> My mom and dad want me to go back to school [college] but she knows that I help her more than my dad helps her. She wants to sell more [at the restaurant] so that I can go back to school but right now it is not possible. But I don't really feel the same [i.e. that she can go back]. I feel that I can't really move myself up. There is no chance for me to get a visa or a car license. For those of us who come at an early age we don't have these things. We don't feel comfortable doing a lot of things that others can do. Like when I finished high school a lot of my friends wanted to go to Philadelphia to do [study] dance but I couldn't because I could not go to school outside of the state and that makes me feel bad. I couldn't leave. I like to describe what I feel and to write poems. I chose a communications program [when I first enrolled in college] because I like relating to people. I really just had to choose a program that was something to help me … you know, to give me the possibility to go out [of this situation]… My life is very complicated.
>
> *-Emma, a new mother in her mid-twenties*

As Emma notes, life after migration *is* complicated and the pressures influencing nutritional change are equally so. The contexts that constrained Emma from returning to college, changing jobs, and getting a visa were tied to those shaping her food practices and body size. I began this thesis with the aim of exploring food practices after migration and the contexts that shaped them. I placed particular attention on how migrants perceived and explained the everyday contexts and nutritional changes that they experienced. The life stories presented in this ethnography illustrate the linkages between food practices and the precarious life conditions, contexts and constraints navigated by Mexicans in NYC. Household arrangements and dynamics; work schedules and time constraints; and food environments—that provided access to a variety of foods as well as weight loss products—all influenced food practices and processes of nutritional change after migration. Although the majority of informants suggested that the nutritional quality of their food practices diminished after

migration, processes of nutritional change were not homogenous or linear over time. Experiences of change were diverse and depended on the intersecting contexts that individuals experienced, how they perceived and negotiated these contexts, and the influence of gender, documentation status and class. Analytically, I have demonstrated the value of the concept of structural vulnerability in understanding nutritional change among Mexican migrants in West Queens, and have also provided empirical evidence to illustrate the limitations of the acculturation concept in this context. The remainder of this chapter engages further with the questions set out in the Introduction of this thesis. It briefly discusses the social, economic and temporal contexts and vulnerabilities shaping food practices that are elucidated in this thesis. It then reflects on why nutritional change is rationalized among Mexicans in West Queens, and in the public health literature in the way that it is. Finally, I illustrate how the ethnographic insights presented in this thesis can be used to inform understandings of nutritional change among non-migrants and global nutritional transitions more generally.

The Framing of Food and Nutritional Change

By examining the critical role that social contexts and relationships play in shaping nutritional change among Mexican migrants, the limitations of the notion of acculturation are shown. With its emphasis on culture and individual beliefs, acculturation fails to take into account how the wider contexts of migrants' lives shape nutritional outcomes. Whereas acculturation views food change as a result of the adoption of one culture and the abandonment of another, in this thesis I have argued against the idea of bounded cultures anchored to geographic locales and national identities. Through ethnography I have shown the hybridity of food practices and the dynamics by which they change. In West Queens, migrants are embedded in a constellation of relations with colleagues, housemates, employers and customers, while maintaining

connections with family and friends in Mexico. They navigate relations, constraints and inequalities everyday in their neighbourhood, workplace and home. This thesis demonstrates that by exploring these interactions, relations and contexts, migrant food practices can be understood. Thus, among Mexican migrants in West Queens, understanding food practices is not as simple as knowing one's ethnic identification, country-of-origin or the number of years a migrant has spent in the US. This thesis illustrates the pitfalls of using culture as a predictor of food practices and nutritional change. It has revealed such an approach to be apolitical and, as such, blind to the everyday realities that migrants face, and which have considerable influence over their practices.

In this thesis, I argue the value of the concept of structural vulnerability to understand food practices among Mexican migrants in West Queens. Just as ethnographic work has proved the importance of structural vulnerability and related concepts in demonstrating the pressures shaping under-nutrition in Brazil, infectious disease in Haiti, and occupational and mental health among Latino migrants in the US (Scheper-Hughes 1992; Holmes 2006; Duke 2011; Farmer 1999), so too is it helpful for understanding nutritional change among Mexican migrants in West Queens.

In this ethnography I have identified three particular contexts shaping everyday food practices and change among Mexican migrants in West Queens: household dynamics, time constraints, and the affordability and accessibility of food and dieting products. In so doing, I have responded to Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois's call (2004: 318) for 'the need to specify empirically and to theorize more broadly the way everyday life is shaped by the historical processes and contemporary politics of global political economy as well as by local discourse'. This thesis has demonstrated how individuals (with their own agency and aspirations, though constrained) negotiate these three contexts in different ways and how asymmetries in gender, class, and documentation status mediate the

effects of social structures on individuals. By exploring these contexts, I have described the dynamic and heterogeneous trajectories of nutritional change after migration and identified patterns of change.

The first of the three contexts explored in this thesis is that of household food work, described in Chapter 3. Since individuals did not always migrate to NYC with their families, household membership was often reconfigured after migration. For men and women who migrated to NYC without their spouses or families, and women who found work for the first time after migration, responsibilities for food work were renegotiated. Food work, or the procuring and preparing of food, often became the responsibility of married, non-working women in the home or was outsourced to a restaurant or food vendor. In some cases, creative strategies were used to procure homemade foods even if no one in the household cooked. Among males living alone in NYC, the logistics of sharing a kitchen with multiple people, coupled with the perception that food work was women's work, led many to eat prepared meals out of the house rather than cook at home, even if home-cooked food was often preferred. The reliance on food prepared outside of the home has nutritional implications; such food is generally served in larger portions and contains more fat and energy than that prepared at home (French, Story, Jeffery 2001). Patterns of migration and the gendered nature of employment in NYC reconfigured households and shaped responsibilities for food work in the home. These macro processes were mediated by gender ideologies, norms and micro-relations in the household to shape food practices. An analysis of household food work demonstrates how contextual dynamics and pressures rather than individual choice or preference alone shaped food practices.

The second critical context shaping food change after migration, and that described in Chapter 4, relates to work schedules and time constraints. Time constraints were shown to have complicated eating and sleeping routines and

caused stress and anxiety among informants. The unpredictability and precariousness of schedules limited an individual's ability to prepare food and encouraged the replacement of meals with snacks that could be eaten quickly. Daily schedules and time use were influenced by gender and documentation status, both of which placed further constraints on time. Since many informants worked in the food industry and/or spent much of their time making food for other household members, they expressed exhaustion towards preparing their own food and often left it as a last priority or abandoned it all together. Time constraints led to the consumption of snacks, convenience and fast foods, many of which were imported from Mexico or promoted as being 'Mexican'. The consumption of convenience foods is important because it is associated with a higher intake of energy and fat (French, Story, Jeffery 2001). Eating convenience and packaged foods may also increase exposure to additives and bisphenol A (BPA) all of which contain endocrine-disrupting chemicals thought to increase susceptibility to obesity (Guthman 2012).

That work days often finished after midnight or began before six o'clock meant that sleep patterns were also disrupted and unpredictable, and people ate just before going to bed. Such sleep routines may have nutritional implications as short sleep duration is thought to influence appetite regulation and obesity (Patel & Hu 2008). Furthermore, eating a large meal in the evening to compensate for skipping meals earlier in the day has metabolic effects that, if continued long term, could lead to diabetes (Carlson et al. 2007). Time constraints are rarely a focus of the migrant health literature, perhaps reflecting the lack of research on time in the anthropological and sociological research on migration more generally (Griffiths, Rogers & Anderson 2012). Similarly, the dimension of time is only peripherally mentioned in the literature on structural vulnerability, where the emphasis tends to be placed on how the economic constraints of low-income workers shape health outcomes. I here argue that the precarious and low-wage

jobs carried out by my informants were important in shaping nutritional outcomes because they created constraints on time use.

The final context explored was that of the food environment, which refers to the affordability and accessibility of food and dieting products in West Queens. Since weekly earnings were generally higher in NYC than in Mexico and because of the sheer abundance of affordable food on the streets and in the supermarkets, many informants felt that they had greater access to foods such as meat, dairy products, fruits and prepared foods in NYC as compared to Mexico. The majority of informants, however, felt that the nutritional quality, freshness, and the taste of foods were inferior in NYC than in Mexico, suggesting that even though they could afford a larger variety and quantity of food in NYC they still could not afford to purchase foods of high nutritional quality, especially when eating out. Food affordability and accessibility were not uniform but shaped by class, gender, documentation status, life course and perceptions. Women often felt less able to afford prepared foods than did men because of gendered understandings of entitlement and the fact that their earnings were generally lower than men's. Personal characteristics also mediated entitlements to government food support such as the WIC and SNAP initiatives. Undocumented migrants could only access these programs if they had US-born children or were pregnant. As a result, undocumented mothers, and fathers, to some extent, were more likely to have access to food support than undocumented individuals without children.

My fieldwork demonstrates that the food environment and the affordability and accessibility of high-energy and convenience foods shaped consumption practices, this is corroborated in existing literature on the food environment and nutrition (Swinburn et al. 1999; Darmon & Drewnowski 2008; Black & Macinko 2008). The environment, however, did not influence individual practices uniformly. Rather, socioeconomic class, gender relations, documentation status, occupation and perceptions mediated the way that the food environment shaped

food practices. This observation suggests the need to look beyond monolithic understandings of the food environment and to explore how environments are experienced differentially. Guthman (2011, 2012) has similarly suggested that more attention be paid to how individuals negotiate their environments rather than assuming that food environments have homogeneous effects on all individuals.

The notion of the food environment in this thesis refers not only to the accessibility and abundance of foods in West Queens but also to the availability of dieting and weight loss products. Dieting products such as teas, shakes and pills were easily accessible and widely promoted in the area. Informants were encouraged to experiment with weight loss products, despite their high cost, not only because they promised slenderness but also because many promised wealth. I have suggested that the same conditions that encouraged non-nutritious food practices, such as time constraints, economic circumstances, accessibility and documentation status, encouraged the use of low-quality weight loss and diet products, a few of which had been banned by the FDA. Among Mexican migrants the consumption of high-energy, convenience and prepared foods took place alongside dieting and other weight loss practices. Thus, the experience of nutritional change after migration was influenced by these coinciding practices, which were not mutually exclusive or contradictory, but rather part of the complex way in which everyday consumption was negotiated after migration. I argue that weight loss practices and dieting should not be seen necessarily as oppositional to weight gain or non-nutritious food practices, but rather shaped by similar contexts and constraints. In this way, I have suggested the importance of exploring not only the availability of food in an environment but also the presence of weight loss products to best understand food practices and nutritional change. The centrality of dieting in West Queens illustrates that migrants were conscious of, and reflexive about, their body size. The landscape

of dieting products in West Queens also illustrates the political economy, global trade and lack of governance of weight loss products in West Queens and the potential for such products to not only shape nutrition but also cause health risks, more generally.

Constraint Vs. Opportunity

One of the primary aims of this thesis is to understand the contexts and vulnerabilities shaping migrant nutritional change. Such an objective has required that I explore how migrants, themselves, perceived their everyday conditions and constraints in NYC. I have found that migrants did not always perceive their experiences and conditions to be constraining. For many migrants, the contexts in which they lived signaled improved economic wellbeing. Graciela did not complain about not having time to eat on weekends because for her it meant that she received a lot of business on those days. For Juan Pablo, living on his own and eating hamburgers and fast food marked his adventure and independence in NYC. For Domingo, his precarious work schedule enabled him to provide a better life for his children. For informants involved with VitaVida, the ability to feel responsible for their food practices offered them the sense of control and potential that they desired.

My thesis has demonstrated that lack of time and non-nutritious food practices were often perceived as the unavoidable consequences of improved economic wellbeing. In this way, lack of time became at once a constraint and an opportunity. Informants often endured their non-nutritious food practices because they felt they had to if they wanted to make a living, pay their rent and give opportunities to their children. I argue for the need to understand food practices by taking into account the broader context of everyday life and the priorities and aspirations of migrants. Quesada (2011) makes a similar observation in his study of HIV/AIDS among Latino migrant labourers in the US.

He found that concern for HIV/AIDS was of low priority among his informants. When they spoke about health issues they talked mostly about dental problems, wounds, burns and other occupational injuries. He advised that:

> Even these more immediate health concerns were frequently superseded by everyday life concerns like generating incomes, securing housing, and the like. How extraneous social, environmental and political-economic factors are perceived and experienced by labourers needed to be taken into account because this context shapes their practices and understandings of HIV (Quesada 2011: 391).

My informants' economic circumstances were often of greater concern to them than their nutritional wellbeing, and this ordering of priorities shaped whether they experienced long working hours and the availability of high-energy foods as 'constraints'. Most of them recognized that these contexts constrained their eating practices but they also offered economic and social benefits that were sometimes of greater import. Furthermore, memories of deprivation in Mexico led many informants to view their ability to secure a job, earn money and eat foods that they could not afford in Mexico as positive outcomes of migration. The fact that the jobs that they endured offered little security and income relative to other jobs available in the US was downplayed. Informants' mode of comparison vis-á-vis Mexico led them to view their economic and temporal contexts as opportunities rather than as constraints. It is necessary to account for migrants' subjective experiences of life conditions to understand why they engage in food practices that have negative nutritional consequences. The tension between constraint and opportunity identified here illustrates the importance of exploring everyday contexts from an –emic perspective. It indicates the need to analyse subjective understandings of social structures in studies of structural vulnerability. Such a focus allows for more nuanced explorations and ensures such research avoids the criticism that the concept

places too much emphasis on structural constraints without considering how they are mediated and perceived by individuals.

The Persistence of Culture-based Models and Acculturation

I argue that the notion of acculturation is analytically limited in its ability to conceptualize nutritional change among Mexican migrants in West Queens. However, despite its analytical limitations the concept cannot be forgotten altogether. In fact, culture-based models such as that of acculturation are important because informants used these explanatory models to explain their own food practices and change. Informants moved between two discourses for understanding food practices and body size. The first referenced structural constraints and contexts related to money, time, documentation status and division of labour within the home, while the second emphasized the role played by culture. Informants combined these two discourses to explain food practices and body size, often emphasizing the second narrative when rationalizing the practices of *others* or when talking more abstractly about weight change rather than everyday food practices.

Individual characteristics such as laziness, lack of discipline, care or foresight were seen to be the result of culture, whether it be the culture associated with a socioeconomic or educational class or the culture associated with an ethnic or national identification. Individuals that were more self-aware and cautious about their food practices and body size were seen to be more educated, upper class and often 'American' not Mexican.

To explain why informants may have employed these narratives, it is important to consider the influence of the discourses that circulated at VitaVida events and in their promotional materials. VitaVida reproduced culture-based models of obesity/weight gain, emphasizing that slim body sizes and financial success

could be attained through education, willpower and by changing one's belief system and mindset.

Beyond VitaVida, informants may have employed these understandings of nutritional change due to the health education to which they were exposed. Although not a focus of my research, informants did discuss the nutritional education they received as part of the WIC programs, I was privy to some interventions taking place through local organizations, and was familiar with a variety of nutritional brochures that my informants accessed. These well-intentioned efforts placed prime importance on educating individuals about nutrition and making healthy choices. Rather than emphasizing the harm that poor working conditions and long working hours had on one's nutrition, these educational materials emphasized the harm caused by sweetened beverages and foods high in sugar, salt and trans-fat. One series of advertisements produced by the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (NYC DOHMH) focused on the ills of drinking sugar-sweetened beverages. Advertisements showed a man at a restaurant ingesting a pile of sugar packets after which the question was asked, 'Why would you drink 16 packets of sugar?' Another commercial showed a man drinking a glass of fat, much of which was cascading down his chin, which asked 'Are you drinking yourself fat?' These advertisements suggested the irresponsibility, mindlessness and absurdity of these behaviours, stigmatizing food items and individual food choices rather than shedding light on the social conditions shaping those 'choices'.

More generally, the emphasis on acculturation and the role played by the individual in shaping health outcomes is symptomatic of neoliberal discourses present in the US and in Mexico (Guthman & DuPuis 2006; Galvez 2011: 148–9). These discourses posit that individuals have the freedom to choose what they eat and as a result they argue that individuals must be responsible for, and in control of, their eating practices. The neoliberal ideal, therefore, expects individuals to

regulate their own health and to manage their own risks in relation to ill health and obesity. These local, city, national and global forces demonstrate the ways in which culture-based discourses such as acculturation inform local understandings of body size and weight change.

The culture-based discourses circulating on the ground in West Queens and at VitaVida events, however, differed from the acculturation narrative present in the US public health literature in one very important way. Although they both de-politicized nutritional change and associated it with cultural beliefs, values and habits, the public health notion of acculturation emphasizes that the adoption of American culture and cuisines leads to obesity. On the ground, this narrative is reversed: abandoning 'Hispanic culture' and a 'Hispanic mentality' and eating like an 'American' was thought to lead to weight loss. Informants had the perception that the food practices of US-born New Yorkers were more nutritious than their own. Informants tended to cluster attributes together such as American, white, upper class, slim and educated. These characteristics were conflated so that one characteristic implied the others. In contrast, a large body size and non-nutritious eating practices were often associated with being 'Mexican', 'Hispanic' or 'low socioeconomic class'.

Scholars of structural vulnerability have observed similar phenomena (Quesada 2011). In Quesada's work with migrant Latino labourers, he describes how migrants blame themselves for their social exclusion in the US, stating:

> When undocumented Latino labourers reproduce dominant values and perceptions that are premised on the negative qualities and stereotypes attributed to them, they provide a stark example of structural and symbolic violence and structural vulnerability… Social forces beyond the control of individuals influence and constrain personal choices and decisions, which are often misperceived as willful behaviour and moral irresponsibility (Quesada 2011: 389).

Among my informants, large body sizes and non-nutritious food practices often came to be seen as outcomes of cultural habits, flaws, simplicity and lack of discipline and education.

If structural vulnerability helps to explain the use of culture-based models on the ground, what explains the continued use of acculturation by public health researchers and practitioners? Is it possible that public health practitioners are completely unaware of the structural vulnerabilities facing migrants? Is it that they choose to ignore them in an effort to surreptitiously blame migrants for their health problems? I suggest that it is not. Quesada et al. (2011: 344) assert that, despite the acknowledgement and analysis of structural forces in shaping health outcomes, 'the conventional biomedical paradigm largely fails to translate the documentation of social forces into everyday practice and epistemology. In the absence of clinically accessible effective alternative models, clinicians continue to treat individual patients primarily in a psychological, social, cultural, and class vacuum'. Holmes (2006) illustrates a similar lack of attention to social conditions in the clinic. He shows that physicians and clinicians, despite their good intentions, often fail to address the social inequalities shaping the health of their migrant patients. He sees this problem as resulting from the nature of medical training that focuses on the biological and pathophysiological aetiologies of disease, while placing little emphasis on social aetiologies. In this way, he notes the de-politicization of migrant health and the failure of the medical establishment to examine the social determinants of health outcomes.

Perhaps a similar insight could explain the continued use of acculturation in the public health literature on migrant nutrition and obesity. Public health researchers may place emphasis on individual culture and behaviour simply because it is this type of analysis that public health practitioners have the training and expertise to carry out. This emphasis is beginning to be challenged, however, March and Susser (2006) illustrate the continued difficulty of moving

beyond the existing paradigms in public health. They lament that, especially in the US, approaches focused on individual beliefs and behaviours still dominate epidemiological teaching and coursework. The boundaries of knowledge, the limitations of training and the difficulty of addressing social and structural vulnerabilities through public health efforts are thus likely to shape the continued use of the concept of acculturation despite its limitations. It would be valuable, thus, if ethnographic fieldwork were carried out in the places where public health research takes place, and where policy recommendations and interventions for migrant nutrition are developed, in order to understand the politics, assumptions, stereotypes and practicalities underlying the continued use of acculturation to understand the health and nutrition of migrants.

It is important to move beyond this emphasis on acculturation and culture-based thinking in the public health literature because its use translates into interventions and policy recommendations that fail to acknowledge the structural and contextual factors and inequalities shaping food practices. Given this literature's emphasis on culture as the problem, it also sees culture as the solution. As such, research on acculturation often proposes interventions and policies that focus on education as the primary method for maintaining and/or changing certain behaviours and beliefs among migrants. In particular, there is an emphasis on education that is culturally appropriate and tailored to the cultural needs and preferences of migrants. This approach for policy and programming is often referred to as 'cultural competency'. In a sense, forms of 'cultural competency' are deemed to be the solution to migrant acculturation. Born from culture-based thinking, cultural competency suffers from some of the same problems as acculturation. As Hirsch asserts,

> Culture, and its programmatic corollary cultural appropriateness, have been embraced because they are an easy pill for us to swallow in public health. They suggest that if we capture just the right culturally appropriate perspective, if we could just tell

> people how to be healthy in the right words, they would listen and all would be well (Hirsch 2003a: 274).

The policy and programming recommendations emerging from the literature on acculturation demonstrate a focus on education and cultural competency. One review article on acculturation and obesity among Latinas recommends that public health practitioners promote a modified version of acculturation—referred to as 'selective acculturation'. They suggest that if public health practitioners could encourage individuals to retain the healthy behaviours associated with their culture of origin while picking up the healthful behaviours attributed with their new (i.e. host) culture, they could reverse weight gain. The authors suggest that more research needs to be done to determine how to facilitate the retention of protective cultural practices among migrants and to induce 'selective acculturation'. To encourage healthful behaviours, they recommend the promotion of 'culturally appropriate physical activity, perhaps dancing in a community centre or walking in a neighbourhood park' (Yeh et al. 2009: 111). Their suggestion is that by making interventions culturally appropriate, they can encourage behaviour change. They place emphasis on the cultural appropriateness of the programming/intervention rather than considering the everyday constraints that may make it difficult , for example, for a migrant to attend a dance session at the community centre.

A similar emphasis on culture and education to prevent obesity or encourage weight loss is present in the most recent report on migrant health published by the NYC DOHMH (Kim et al. 2006). Although, structural constraints are mentioned vaguely in the body of the report as a potential contributor to ill-health and nutrition, they are hardly mentioned as part of the solution in the conclusion of the report. The authors' suggestions and recommendations for improving migrant health almost entirely hinge on education and culture. They suggest the need to have culturally appropriate health-materials and culturally

competent health providers and interpreters. They also discuss the need to educate undocumented migrants about their right to receive healthcare, and to educate migrants about how to 'interact with the local health care system in order to maximize their own healthcare' (Kim et al. 2006: 22). In this way, the report places the onus on the individual not the system. Although these suggestions are perhaps part of the solution, these recommendations primarily address the cultural-appropriateness of health care/public health services while the importance of other structural barriers to healthcare—such as affordability, accessibility, and efficiency—are diminished. The fact that policy and programming recommendations for health and nutrition place emphasis on culture and education rather than structural contexts and constraints is not limited to the US literature, it is also present in the literature from Canada (Sanou et al. 2013), Australia (Renzaho et al. 2008) and the UK (Lawton et al. 2006; 2008).

Research in the UK among diabetes patients of Pakistani and Indian-origin has a similar focus (Lawton et al. 2006). When addressing the lack of physical activity among this group, although practical barriers, like time constraints and physical health problems are mentioned, an emphasis is placed on how social rules and cultural perceptions create barriers to physical activity. The suggestion is made the health beliefs and disease perceptions are critical barriers that make carrying out physical activity more difficult and/or less appealing. When structural barriers and the physical activity environment are mentioned, it is the lack of culturally sensitive facilities that is stressed. Education is deemed important to inform these individuals of the importance of engaging in physical activity but the need to do so in a 'culturally sensitive' way is considered paramount. It is suggested that education efforts may fail, not because of the structural barriers that migrants encounter when trying to change their behaviour, but because migrants may reject educational messages if they are not aligned with their cultural norms and perceptions (Lawton et al. 2006).

Another study exploring food and eating practices among diabetes patients of Pakistani and Indian-origin focuses on the cultural and social contexts shaping food practices (Lawton et al. 2008). It is suggested that identity-making processes, food symbolism, food perceptions as well as efforts to maintain ties, build social networks and signal one's membership in a community shape food practices. Therefore, educational efforts are recommended that change perceptions and behaviours. It is suggested that public health practitioners promote the idea that it is acceptable to serve 'traditional' foods rather than sweets when hosting a gathering. They suggest that individuals must be educated so that their perception that 'healthy' foods are bland is changed. The authors place very little attention on how structural barriers such as food cost, transport, access and time constraints may shape food practices.

The assumption is that if migrants are educated, in culturally-appropriate ways, they will learn about nutrition and begin to engage in healthier food practices. Hirsch (2003b) acknowledges that, surely, it is better for education to be culturally appropriate than culturally inappropriate but she argues that when the focus is on cultural appropriateness and education, the social, temporal and economic conditions that make migrants vulnerable to certain non-nutritional practices fall out of view (Hirsch & Vazquez 2009). At a recent conference, the term 'structural competency' was introduced as a way to move beyond a focus on cultural competence and cultural sensitivity to improve the health of marginalized individuals (Schneider 2012). Structural competence encourages medical practitioners to acknowledge that structural inequalities lead to ill health and to develop competencies to recognize and deal with these factors, which are often invisible, or unremarked upon in the healthcare setting (ibid). This concept may prove to be an important counterpoint to cultural competence as it may encourage public health practitioners to develop programmes and policies that address the structural barriers shaping migrant nutrition and health.

Implications for Nutrition & Obesity Research in the US and Globally

The contexts shaping nutrition among migrants are not wholly different from those shaping the nutrition of non-migrant groups. The 'migrant' in 'migrant nutrition' must not be over-emphasized as there is nothing innate, universal or entirely exceptional about migrant health. Chavez (2003) explains how studies of migrant health can inform understandings of health in the general population. He notes, 'Their experiences, fears, and frustrations applied to them not just as immigrants but also as human beings suffering illness, injuries, and stresses in their lives. The formidable obstacles they faced in trying to alleviate these problems were not theirs alone but were extreme examples of obstacles also encountered by low-income and marginalized citizens' (ibid: 226). The constraints experienced by many migrants overlap with those endured by other low-income individuals who work for a low wage, have precarious work conditions and who cannot access adequate government support. It is important to acknowledge these synergies and overlaps and to utilize research on migrant nutrition to inform understandings of health in the general (non-migrant) population.

One such overlap can be found in the welfare regime hypothesis. This hypothesis is employed to understand nutrition and obesity in the non-migrant population. It suggests links among economic insecurity, inequality, and body size and posits that market-liberal economies and policies encourage flexible and precarious labour markets and enable the availability of cheap, processed food (Offer, Pechey & Ulijaszek 2012). A market-liberal economy, such as that of the US, thus creates conditions of economic uncertainty and inequality that trigger psychosocial stress, overeating, metabolic change and obesity. The effects of market-liberal economies on body sizes have been explored cross-nationally but investigation at the local level or with a migrant population has not been carried out. This ethnography offers insights into how precarious labour, economic

insecurity, inequality and the availability of cheap, processed foods—the characteristics of a market-liberal economy—shape the lives of migrants and low-income individuals at the local level. Therefore it provides insight into the possible micro-processes shaping the link between welfare regimes and body size at the national level. Furthermore, Mexico's growing income gap between the wealthy and the poor, its neoliberal policies, unequal north–south relations and violence suggest that the welfare regime hypothesis at the macro level and the concept of structural vulnerability at the micro level can work in tandem to inform processes of nutritional change in Mexico, as well as in the US.

This thesis also sheds light on processes of nutritional change occurring in Mexico among the families and neighbours of migrants. It has explored the ways in which food access and availability in people's hometowns have been transformed due to return-migration, remittances, transnationalism, global inequalities and cross-border trade. Nutrition transitions, such as those explored in Chapter 5, are characterized epidemiologically by shifts in diets and physical activity and increasing prevalence of obesity and chronic disease. These shifts have only begun to be explored qualitatively (Leatherman & Goodman 2005; Katz 2008). This ethnography has hinted at the nutrition transition occurring in Mexico and the forces that shape it. My findings suggest that there are clear parallels between the nutritional changes experienced after migration and those experienced by migrants' families back home, thus illustrating that nutritional change among Mexicans in NYC must not be seen as an isolated consequence of 'coming to America' but as a local manifestation of the nutrition transitions occurring globally. Although the literature emphasizes that nutrition transitions are shaped by the migration of capital, services, technology and goods across the globe, this ethnography illustrates specifically how human migration may play a role in shaping the nutrition transition in Mexico (Popkin 2006).

My ethnographic fieldwork has revealed the importance of viewing food change as an epiphenomenon of the social, political-economic and temporal contexts and constraints encountered by Mexicans after migration. In so doing, I have avoided a unidirectional narrative of nutritional change, and an overly deterministic view of social structures, though I acknowledge their force. To close this thesis, I return to the case of Emma whose experience articulates the mutability of life conditions, practices and trajectories. The last time I visited her was in August 2012, just over one and a half years since our discussion mentioned at the beginning of this chapter (see p. 269). I met her new baby daughter and saw the transformation of her family's restaurant into a sports bar. A few months before our meeting, her family finally received the liquor license that they were anxiously awaiting. Despite the license, Emma and her mother were still concerned that business was slow. Emma, however, had good news. Just that afternoon she had visited her family's lawyer to organize her papers so that she could apply for consideration for deferred action. This would finally provide her with authorization to work, a social security number and the ability to apply for a driver's license. She was planning to reapply to college in 2013 and to finally take advantage of the opportunities that she once lamented only her younger siblings could enjoy. For Emma, many of the contexts and constraints central to her daily life, as well as those she linked to her eating practices, were in flux. She had a new baby, she had moved in with her boyfriend, her work schedule had changed, and she was planning to return to college and to apply for deferred action. I mention Emma to illustrate the dynamic nature of my informants' lives and practices, and to suggest that the contexts shaping them are not static or hopeless. As aspects of the lives of my informants are given permanence in this thesis and their struggles are revealed, it is important to recognize that their circumstances continue to change in response to local and global pressures and priorities.

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GLOSSARY

abarrotería	corner shop, in this case a warehouse where they sold Mexican goods
al momento	on the spot, immediately
aguitas	water flavoured with fruit and sugar
alitas y arroz	spicy chicken wings, often called buffalo wings served with rice
ama de casa	housewife
ansiedad	anxiety
antojarse	to want, desire, crave
antojito	snack, craving, appetizer, tapas
el Árabe	Arab man
arroz con alas	rice with spicy chicken wings
arroz con leche	a sweet drink of rice, milk (often condensed milk, water, cinnamon and sugar
arroz Mexicano	Mexican rice dish containing tomatoes and rice
avena	drink prepared with oats, milk and sugar
bien cocinado	well cooked
botanica	shop selling candles, religious items, herbs and natural medicines
campesinos	farmers, peasants
carne cecina	a very thin, marinated and salted beef cutlet
carne de res	beef

carne enchilada	thinly sliced pork covered in chile
carnitas	braised, roasted or barbequed meat that has been sliced, usually pork
catarinas	ladybugs
cemita	sandwich served on sesame seed roll and filled with meat, avocado, refried beans, cheese chipotle chile and pápalo.
cerveza	beer
champurrado	a drink prepared with Mexican chocolate, maize flour, milk and cinnamon
chayote	variety of squash
cherimoya	soft, sweet, creamy white-fleshed fruit
chicharrones	fried pork skins
chile	chili pepper
chile chipotle	a smoked jalapeño chile pepper
chile jalapeño	variety of chile pepper
chile guajillo	variety of chile pepper
chile rellenos	dish of *chiles* stuffed with meat and cheese
Chinitos	little Chinese restaurants, take-away
chisme	gossip
chorizo	pork sausage with spices, most commonly with red pepper
churro	fried pastry covered in cinnamon and sugar
coctel de camarones	shrimp cocktail
comida	meal, food, often refers to lunch or mid-day meal

comida balanceada	balanced meal
comida chatarra	junk food
comida preparada	prepared food
comida rapida	fast food
cuchifritos	fried pork snack/meal, similar to *chicharrones*
cuidarse	to take care of, to look after
delgadita	skinny person
desordenado	messy, unorganized
despensa	basic food basket, basic provisions
Don Dinero	Mr Money
elotes	corn on the cob
emocionado/a	excited
empanada	filled pastry snack often filled with potato, meat, cheese and or vegetable filling
enchilada	rolled tortilla filled with meat and/or cheese bathed in salsa
engordar	to put weight on, to fatten up
envíos	shipments, packages
esencia	flavor, essence or extract
flaca/o	skinny person
floja	lazy
fondita	low-cost restaurant serving food
gelatina	Jello or gelatin snacks

gelatina de amor	Jello with two or more different flavoured layers stacked on top of each other, shaped using a decorative mold
gente de billete	literally people with bills
gomitas	gummy candies, gum drops
gordita	a thick corn tortilla stuffed, or partially sliced, and filled with meat, beans and cheese
gordita/o	chubby person
guayaba	guava
guisado	stew
guisar	to cook/to stew, specifically to cook by simmering
hangeando	this is slang for hanging out or hanging around, i.e. *estan hangeando* means they are hanging out/around.
hoja santa	Mexican herb, literally 'sacred leaf'
horchata	rice drink, usually made with cinnamon
interna	live-in babysitter or nanny
jalapeño	a type of *chile* pepper
jicama	root vegetable
jitomates	green tomatoes
levantacolas	bum-lifting jeans
licuado	smoothie or shake
lleno	full
llenar	to fill
longaniza	a spicy and long-shaped sausage

mamey	mamey sapote, sweet fruit native to Mexico
manteca	pork lard used for cooking
Maruchan noodles	instant microwavable noodles in a cup
Mary Kay	a line of mail-order beauty and makeup products that are sold by independent distributors out of their home, or at 'Mary Kay' house parties
masa	dough
matricula consular	Identity card issued at the Mexican consulate
molcajetes	mortars
mole	a dark, thick sauce made with chile, spices, nuts, herbs, fruits, chocolate and sesame seeds
mujeres di dinero	women of money
naturalista	naturalist
niñas de la noche	girls of the night
niñera	nanny or babysitter
niño de Dios	Baby Jesus
nopal	vegetable made from pads of a prickly pear cactus with the spines removed. It is a very popular ingredient in Mexico and is used in salads, tacos and eggs.
novelas	short for telenovelas, Spanish-language television soap operas
paquetería	shipping or parcel service
paisano	countrymen
panadería	bakery

panzas	large bellies
panzoncito	person with large-belly
pan de fiesta	holiday bread popular in Mexico from Christmas through February
pan dulce	Mexican sweet bread, usually with a sugar coating
pan mexicano	Mexican sweet bread, bread pastries
pápalo	Mexican herb that has similarities to coriander
pareja	partner
pastilla	pill, tablet
pedacitos	little pieces
picaditas	thick corn cakes with beans, cream, cheese and onions
picantes	spicy salsas or sauces
Poblanos	Mexicans from Puebla State, Mexico
pobre	poor people
pollo	chicken
Pollos Mario	Mario's Chicken, the name of a Colombian restaurant in West Queens
pompi	behind
ponche	punch, often used to describe festive drinks
pozole	corn soup with chile and pork or chicken
precaución	care or caution
preparatoria	equivalent of US high school, for ages 15-17 years old
propaganda	leaflets, advertisements

pueblo	village
puesto	stand
quesadilla	folded tortilla filled with cheese and grilled
queso fresco	a crumbly and creamy white cheese, used in many Mexican dishes
queso Oaxaca	cow's cheese, originally from Oaxaca state, used in *quesadillas*
refresco	soft drink
robusta	[adj.] robust
robusta	[n.] person with a robust shape
salsa roja	sauce made with red tomatoes and chile
salsa verde	sauce made with green tomatoes and chile
sancocho de carne	Ecuadorean stew made with corn, pork and potatoes
sapote	soft, sweet fruit
sazón	seasoning
señora	lady, madam
solo	alone, by oneself
sombreros	wide-brim hats
sorpresa	surprise
supermercados	supermarkets
taco	corn tortilla topped with meat and salsa, lettuce, cilantro and onion
Taco Veloz	Fast/Quick Taco

taco a canasta	basket taco, tacos that steam or 'sweat' in a warm, clothe-filled basket
taco de alambre	type of taco with combination of beef, pork, bacon, red and/or green peppers and cheese
tamal	corn dough with various fillings wrapped in a corn husk or banana leaf and steamed
tianguis	local market
tienda	shop
tienditas	little shops
tomatillos	green tomatoes
torta	sandwich either served on a white roll or a baguette and filled with meat, avocado, *chiles,* tomatoes and onions
torteria	sandwich shop
tortillas	thin, unleavened bread made usually with corn or maize
tortilleria	local shop where they make tortillas
tostada	fried crispy corn tortilla with toppings such as meat, cheese, avocados, onions and lettuce
tranquilo	calm
union libre	situation of living together as spouses with no written contract
Ventanilla de Salud	Health Window/Kiosk
Virgen de Guadalupe	Patron saint of Mexico
ya	that's is it
ya wey	whatever dude [slang]

Appendix A

Socio-demographic characteristics

	No.
Gender	
Men	35
Women	45
Age (yr)	
Less than 20	2
20 - <30	26
30 - <40	36
40 - <50	13
50+	3
Highest Educational Attainment	
Some or all of Primary School (ages 6-11)	27
Some or all of Secondary School (ages 12-14)	39
Some or all of High School (ages 15-17)	9
Some or all of College and/or Graduate School	5
Marital Status	
Married	32
Union Libre	15
Single	27
Separated/Divorced	6
Time in the US (yr)	
< 10	50
10 - <15	18
15+	12