

FOTOS Y PLÁTICAS: UTILIZING MUJERISTA-LED PHOTOVOICE TO CAPTURE THE IMMIGRATION EXPERIENCES OF MUJERES FROM THE NORTHERN TRIANGLE OF CENTRAL AMERICA

by

ANA CARINA ORDAZ

(Under the Direction of Linda Campbell and Edward A. Delgado-Romero)

ABSTRACT

Since 2014 an estimated two million people have left El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras as they flee poverty violence, and other hardships. *Mujeres inmigrantes* from the Northern Triangle of Central America (i.e., Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras; NTCA) are faced with some of the highest rates of gender-based violence in their home countries. The experiences of oppression and marginalization throughout the immigration journey (e.g., pre-migration, in-transit, and post-migration) of *mujeres* from the Northern Triangle of Central America are disproportionately represented within the literature. Coupled with *Mujerista* Psychology, the researcher utilized photovoice, which allowed the community researchers (n=6) to take a leading role in the direction of *su proyecto*, their study (Mejia et al., 2013; Rhodes et al., 2015; Wang & Buries, 1997). *Mujerista*-led Photovoice (Mejia et al., 2013) sessions take a multilevel approach, focusing on the individual, while acknowledging the importance of community to impact policy and social change (Bryant-Davis, & Comas-Díaz, 2016; Wang & Buries, 1997). The researcher focuses on resiliency and strength factors specific to the experiences of Latinx immigrant *mujeres* that have settled in Georgia, the New Latino South.

INDEX WORDS: Latinas, Immigration, Photovoice, Participatory Action Research,
Mujerista, Central America, The Northern Triangle, El Salvador,
Honduras, Guatemala, *Testimonios*

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DEDICATION

Este proyecto de amor está dedicado a las mujeres que continúan inspirándome, empoderándome y curándome todos los días a través de sus enseñanzas, consejos y amor. Para las mujeres, pensadoras y empoderadas, líderes de este proyecto, me siento honrada de haber crecido en este proceso con ustedes. Ser testigo de sus historias y verlas crecer continúa inspirándome. Gracias por confiar en mí y por el regalo de sus testimonios. Su proyecto recién comienza y me alegra ver lo lejos que llegarán. En especial a mi madre, Angélica María, gracias por creer siempre en mí y por acompañarme en este viaje que a veces parecía un laberinto. Me enseñaste el significado de luchar, resistir y existir en espacios que no fueron creados para nosotras. Siempre te voy admirar por tu forma de amar tan puramente sin esperar nada a cambio.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Women face distinct challenges pre-immigration, in-transit, and post-immigration which have resulted in several reports of traumatic exposure such as weeks to months of marked violence, deprivation, and fear usually involving gangs, thieves, or coyotes (Kaltman et al., 2011). Pre-immigration is influenced by a variety of factors such as poverty, political violence, exposure to war, limited education, etc., (Perreira & Ornelas, 2013). The encounter with traumatic exposure does not end at the pre-immigration and in-transit phases, it continues upon arrival to the United States through discrimination, poverty, additional violent experiences, etc., (Chavez-Duñas et al., 2019; Perreira & Ornelas, 2013).

According to the Pew Research Center (2011), the Latinx population has been growing significantly in the Southeastern region of the U.S. compared to other parts of the nation. The phrase, a New Latino South was coined after a significant number of immigrants settled in a subset of 6 Southeast (Arkansas, Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee) during the 1990s and 2000s, as opposed to the traditional settlement states (California, Texas, and Florida).

Latinx immigrants to the New Latino South were drawn (often encouraged to come) by ample agricultural, agricultural, and industrial employment opportunities (Arredondo et al., 2014) coupled with a warm climate, cheap housing, and low crime rates. For example, in Georgia, the 1996 Olympic games were an economic driver in encouraging Latinx immigrants to relocate to the state. Latinx families brought about a demographic transformation in some

regions of the state, where school-aged children of predominantly Spanish-speaking households were entering systems that were not prepared to meet the needs of their parents (Delgado-Romero et al., 2007). This rapid growth created challenges as there needs to be more infrastructure to meet the needs of this growing community. What is more, anti-immigrant legislation became increasingly hostile, and this trend was exacerbated by the 2008 recession leading to increased immigration enforcement and the criminalization of immigrant behaviors (e.g., driving without a license). These laws across the New Latino South led to a pattern of circular migration within the states that were disruptive to families that often consisted of mixed-status family members regarding immigration. For instance, although children born in the U.S. were citizens, they still dealt with the challenges of living in the U.S. while undocumented due to their parents and older siblings not having U.S citizenship status their parents and older siblings may or may not have citizenship status depending on how they entered the U.S.

Statement of the Problem

In the United States, the topic of immigration represents a never-ending source of conflict and debate. Scholars often investigate the immigration experiences of Mexicans because they have the longest history in the U.S. and represent the largest group of Latinx people in the US. However, by either only focusing on Mexican and Mexican Americans or by using the pan-ethnic terms (Latino/a, Latinx, Hispanic) to study immigration, the unique immigration experiences of specific national/ethnic groups are lost (Arredondo et al., 2014; Comas-Díaz, 2006). The research, however, has largely neglected the immigration experiences of Latina women.

More specifically, research that explores the immigration experiences of women from the Northern Triangle of Central America (Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras; NTCA) is needed

to further understand their motivations to migrate, their experiences during the immigration journey, and their experiences upon arriving to the United States and specifically the New Latino South (Becker Herbst et al., 2018; Human Rights Watch, 2019; Shifter, 2012). Women and children in El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala civilians have a history of being terrorized by police and gangs (Hallock, 2018). In 2015, Honduras and El Salvador ranked in the top five highest-rated for violent deaths of women in the world making it the driving force for people deciding to migrate. For Guatemala, the decisions to migrate have been linked to general violence, poverty, and rights violations among indigenous people (Hallock, 2018).

Central Americans encounter increased traumatic experiences upon immigration compared to other Latinx countries. Historical systemic political and socioeconomic problems have been the driving force along with the civil wars that resulted in the proliferation of criminal groups. The instability of government institutions has resulted in corruption; unstable economies; indigenous people routinely forced off their land; and citizens' rights are regularly violated (Hallock, 2018; Perreira & Ornelas, 2013).

Purpose of Study

This study aims to explore the immigration experiences of *mujeres inmigrantes* from the NTCA to further understand their motivations to migrate, their experiences during the immigration journey, and their experiences upon arriving to Georgia through the practice of *testimonios* as it relates to their migration journey. Effective treatment is needed to address the vast trauma and intergenerational trauma experiences encountered at all levels of the immigration journey (pre-immigration, in-transit, and post-immigration). Additionally, the *testimonios* will be specific to Latinas who made Georgia their home upon arriving in the U.S. As part of the New Latino South, Georgia has become a new settlement for immigrants, but

is not structurally equipped to meet the linguistic, cultural, and mental health needs of new arrivals. The hostile political climate has increased racism and xenophobia, which creates challenges for immigrants across multiple levels. Overall, the researcher examined their immigration experiences from NTCA to Georgia with a focus on their sources of strength and resiliency.

Research Questions

1. What are the lived experiences of *Mujeres* from the Northern Triangle of Central America (Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras; NTCA) across the varying phases (pre-migration, in-transit, and post-migration) who migrate to Georgia?
2. What roles do they enact and desire in their communities as a result of their experiences?
3. What are sources of strength and resilience for Guatemalan, Salvadoran, and Honduran *Mujeres* in Georgia?

Definitions and Operational Terms

Asylum- According to The UN Refugee Agency, asylum is “a form of protection which allows an individual to remain in the United States instead of being removed (deported) to a country where he or she fears persecution or harm. Under U.S. law, people who flee their countries because they fear persecution can apply for asylum. If they are granted asylum, this gives them protection and the right to stay in the United States. Those who are granted asylum are called asylees” (pg.1).

Coyote- Is defined as “a smuggler who is hired to help migrants cross the US border. Current prices range between \$6,000 and \$10,000 per person. In the past few years, it has become nearly impossible to cross the border without a *coyote* since *Los 'Zetas*, a Mexican drug smuggling organization, requires payments to pass and will only accept them from the *coyotes*. Estimates

say that *coyotes* transport as many as one million migrants per year, with annual revenues of as much as \$7 billion a year” (Mayers & Freedman, 2019, pg. 283).

Hielera- Is defined as “the term used colloquially by Spanish-speaking Customs and Border Protection (CBP) detainees to refer to the frigid detention facilities. Many migrants have reported the extraordinarily cold temperatures and the lack of bedding or chairs. Many also tell of being fed frozen ham sandwiches once a day. Many migrants, and especially minors, have reported multiple abuses at the hands of CBP agents, including sexual and physical assaults as well as inhumane living conditions” (Mayers & Freedman, 2019, pg. 285).

ICE- Is defined as “Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the enforcement branch of the DHS, responsible for Homeland Security Investigations and Enforcement and Removal Operations. In the first weeks of the Trump presidency, arrests of immigrants increased by over 30 percent. While the Obama administration directed ICE to arrest only immigrants with criminal records, arrests of immigrants with no criminal records have more than doubled since Trump's election” (Mayers & Freedman, 2019, pg. 285).

Immigrant- The Migration Policy institute defines an immigrant as “a person living in a country other than that of his or her birth. No matter if that person has taken the citizenship of the destination country, served in its military, married a native, or has another status—he or she will forever be an international migrant” (Bolter, 2019, pg.1).

Immigration- The International Organization for Migration (IOM) defines immigration as “the act of moving into a country other than one’s country of nationality or usual residence so that the country of destination effectively becomes his or her new country of usual residence” (2021, pg.1).

La Bestia- Is defined as "*the Beast*, a colloquial term referring to the cargo trains in Mexico on which migrants travel to the United States" (Mayers & Freedman, 2019, pg. 282).

Latina- A pan-ethnic term that is used to reference someone who identifies as a woman in the Latino community (Cardemil, et al., 2019)

Latinx- The term Latinx was brought forth as a movement towards social justice in making language inclusive of a gender-diverse community. "Latinx represents an all-inclusive identification that is not grounded in a gender binary model." This is also a term that is more commonly used in academic settings (Cardemil, et al., 2019, pg.3).

Mixed-Status- The National Immigration Forum defines mixed-status families as "families in which one or more family members are U.S. citizens or lawful permanent residents (green card holders) and some are undocumented without legal immigration status. Approximately 16.2 million people in the United States live in a mixed-status family. These families house an estimated 6.1 million U.S. citizen children" (Bowman, 2020, pg.1)

Mojados- Is defined as "the pejorative slang term sometimes used by Spanish speakers to refer to undocumented immigrants, whose backs become wet while swimming or wading across the Rio Grande to reach the United States. The term may have evolved as a response to the racist term wetback" (Mayers & Freedman, 2019, pg.287).

Perrera- Is defined as "the trucks and vans that the CBP uses to transport detained migrants" (Mayers & Freedman, 2019, pg.288).

Temporary Protective Status (TPS) - The American Immigration Council defines TPS as temporary immigration status. "Congress created TPS in the Immigration Act of 1990. It is a temporary immigration status provided to nationals of specifically designated countries that are confronting an ongoing armed conflict, environmental disaster, or extraordinary and temporary

conditions. It provides a work permit and stay of deportation to foreign nationals from those countries who are in the United States at the time the U.S. government makes the designation. There were approximately 320,000 TPS recipients residing in the United States as of May 2021” (2021, pg.1).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Since 2014 an estimated two million *mujeres* from the NTCA have immigrated to the U.S., with most turning themselves in to authorities to apply for asylum instead of entering the United States unlawfully (Hallock et al., 2018). Several factors impel migrants to leave their home countries, such as poverty, political corruption, increased femicide, limited access to education, gang violence, and family reunification (Beker Herbst et al., 2018; Perreira & Ornelas, 2013; Martín-Baró, 1994). The drive to migrate may differ depending on their country of origin (Sawyer & Márquez, 2017). However, the experiences of oppression and marginalization throughout the immigration journey (e.g., pre-migration, in-transit, and post-migration) of *mujeres* from the NTCA are disproportionately represented within the literature and, to a greater extent, the experiences of immigrant *mujeres* that have settled in Georgia, the New Latino South.

Pre-Immigration

The Migration Policy Institute (2018) states that individuals from El Salvador and Honduras usually flee through targeted violence, murder, kidnapping, extortion, and forced gang recruitment. While individuals from Guatemala are migrating due to widespread violence and poverty rights violations, especially among indigenous people. The Migration Policy Institute highlights the lack of focus on the gendered experiences of women and girls immigrating from Central America. *Machismo* is heavily ingrained in the culture in Central America, and as a result, gendered-based crimes often go unpunished in their countries. It allows

many of these heinous acts against women to go unpunished, leaving them vulnerable to abuse and unsafe in their homes (Arredondo et al., 2014; Hallock, 2018). It is important to consider pivotal historical events that have influenced pre-immigration deciding factors. While gendered violence, increased levels of poverty, food insecurities, natural disasters, family reunification and political violence are the most documented reasons for women to immigrate to the United States, these factors are rooted in historical events where women's voices and needs are rarely considered and often dismissed. Additionally, understanding the United States role in these historical and oppressive events is also important.

In-Transit

In the last couple of years, instead of crossing the border without documentation, migrants from the NTCA are surrendering to U.S. border patrol agents to claim asylum (Human Rights Watch, 2019; International Crisis Group, 2017; Migration Policy Institute, 2019). Surrendering does not guarantee asylum, and immigrants must provide proper documentation to prove they have been impacted by violence in their countries of origin. Some are held in detention centers too often isolated in all forms from being with or communicating with family members. Central Americans cross the Mexican border to reach the United States, where they are also faced with military personnel who apprehend and deport Central Americans back to their countries of origin (Human Rights Watch, 2019; International Crisis Group, 2017). In 2014, of Central Americans from Mexico were at an all-time high (107,814), this came as a result of *Programa Frontera Sur* (Southern Border Plan, SBP) which worked in the favor of the United States, as they no longer had to process the asylum request of women and unaccompanied children (Mayers & Freedman, 2019).

Women face extreme hardship on their immigration journey. This trek may involve weeks to months of marked violence, deprivation, and fear, usually involving gangs, thieves, or coyotes (Beker Herbst et al., 2018; Kaltman et al., 2011). It has been reported that women experience higher rates of sexual violence, also vividly depicted in the film *La Bestia* (The Beast), a documentary that highlights women's traumatic experiences and the reality of some of them disappearing (Sayre, 2014; Ultreras, 2010). *La Bestia* is a network of freight trains that run throughout Mexico which acquired its name due to all the lives it has taken; some refer to it as the death train. Sayre (2014) reports that half-million migrants ride *La Bestia* each year. The fact that people are willing to risk their lives on this train to come to the U.S. for a better future says more about the heinous situations that they are experiencing in their countries of origin.

In addition to the increased deportations and arrests in Mexico, there is a high probability that Central Americans may encounter criminal groups in Mexico that engage in kidnapping, human trafficking, and sexual violence (Beker Herbst et al., 2018; Human Rights Watch, 2019; International Crisis Group, 2017; Perreira & Ornelas, 2013). Women and girls who have shared their testimonios have come to see “rape as a terrible rite of passage on the journey” (Mayers & Freedman, 2019, Pg. 298), and in some cases have been advised to have a contraceptive injection prior to immigrating to protect from unwanted pregnancy due to rape. The abuse does not end here and continues to take place within detention centers in the form of sexual abuse, isolation, discrimination, and xenophobia (Mayers & Freedman, 2019; Minero et al., 2021; Riva, 2017).

Post-Immigration in Georgia

The encounter with traumatic exposure often continues upon arrival to the United States through exposure to discrimination, criminalization, xenophobia, poverty, deportation, family separation, racial trauma, and hate crimes (Chavez-Dueñas et al., 2019; Comas-Díaz et al., 2019;

Perreira & Ornelas, 2013; Torres et al., 2018). Historically, Georgia is considered an anti-immigrant state. Through an in-depth analysis, the Immigration Legal Resource Center, scored states a 1-5 with 1 being the most harmful and 5 being the most protective state in terms of sanctuary policies and practices. They determined that Georgia was a 2.53 with strong anti-sanctuary policies. The four general areas that were analyzed included: (1) Information and Resource Sharing with DHS; (2) Jail to ICE Transfers; (3) Patrol Officer Collusion with ICE/CBP; and (4) Contracts with ICE or CBP. Georgia has a history of engaging in efforts with DHS and ICE through the 287 (g) and Secure Communities Program where law enforcement may engage in immigration status checks, info sharing with ICE about people in custody, and broad restrictions on sanctuary policies (De la Cruz, 2023). In their National Map of Local Entanglement with ICE, the ILRC sheds light on most counties in Georgia being highly involved with ICE and sharing information to assist ICE (De la Cruz, 2019).

Transnational Mothering and Mental Health

Women and children are particularly vulnerable in this journey, whether on this journey together or separately (Cheatham, 2019; International Crisis Group, 2017). When discussing the in-transit journey, researchers reported that minors run the risk of being smuggled, sold to engage in sex work, and in some cases, being left behind by their *coyote* (Beker Herbst et al., 2018). The minors in the study described their transportation routes, from walking to taking buses or riding on the train (*La Bestia*). In their findings, the researchers found (from the journal entries) that upon arrival to the United States, minors were treated like "animals" being dehumanized and ripped off all their belongings (Beker Herbst et al., 2018). Children's experiences during the immigration journey are not that much different from that of women. It is vital that consider the heightened exposure to trauma that children endure on their immigration

journey prior to discussing mothers' decisions to leave their children in their country of origin with other family members. Miranda and colleagues (2005) further explore the mental health implications of Latina women separated from their children during immigration. They used a cross-sectional survey to look at women who immigrated, mothers who immigrated with their children, and mothers who immigrated without their children. Of the Latinas screened who reported information about their children, 4,405 had all their children younger than 18 years living with them, 485 did not have any children, and 232 reported that they had children younger than 18 years living with relatives in another country. The women were all screened for major depressive disorders, and the findings show that those women who immigrated without their children and, as a result, remained in their country of origin had an increased risk of depression. The authors concluded that healthcare providers should pay close attention to signs of depression, especially among women with children in their country of origin (Miranda et al., 2005).

Racism and Discrimination

Considering the sociopolitical climate and the rise of hate crimes and immigration raids within the Latinx community, Chavez-Dueñas and colleagues (2019) research comes at the perfect time to inform psychotherapists about the HEART framework, which is informed by liberation psychology, intersectionality, and trauma-informed interventions (Chavez-Dueñas et al., 2019; Martín-Baró, 1994; Comas-Díaz, 2006; Comas-Díaz et al., 2019). This framework ensures that intersectionality, mobility via liberation, and trauma-informed care are considered when working with immigrant communities (Martín-Baró, 1994 Comas-Díaz, 2012). Latinos are an "ethnic rainbow" (Comas-Díaz, 2006), and Chavez-Dueñas and colleagues note the importance of uniquely looking at everyone's experiences. The authors push not to equate race

with ethnicity and consider within-group differences that make Latinos unique, along with their experiences of discrimination, nativism, and racism (Chavez-Dueñas et al., 2019).

Additionally, while some may believe that once immigrants reconnect with their ethnic community, they will receive the support they need, Beker Herbst and colleagues (2018) highlight the racism and discrimination within the context of undocumented communities and may not support each other.

Women and Violence

Kaltman and colleagues (2011) seek to understand further the immigration experiences of Latina immigrants from Central America, South America, and Mexico. The sample consisted of 28 women seeking care in primary care or social service settings. Most of them have reported exposure to trauma in their countries of origin, during their immigration journey, or upon their arrival to the United States. The authors seek to understand further how the assessments used to identify exposure to trauma are either supportive or likely to amplify the impact of trauma exposure (Kaltman et al., 2011).

The authors reported that domestic violence, witnessing violence, or community violence was highly reported among these women. Political violence was a significant theme that instilled much fear in women while they lived in their country of origin. The authors discuss the implications for therapists and clinicians as they work with women who are immigrants from Central America, South America, and Mexico. They recommend that modifications be made when surveying the trauma history of these women with assessments that have solely been used with U.S. populations. They discussed the importance of capturing complete stories of potential exposures to trauma. They encouraged clinicians to consider cultural values, especially when discussing the trauma experienced by women in violent domestic relationships as they decided to

access services they otherwise did not have full access to in their country of origin (Kaltman et al., 2011).

Additionally, the authors broke down the experiences of trauma that the women encountered at the different stages of immigration. The authors share the importance of understanding the different levels of trauma and why these need to be considered when conducting assessments with immigrant women from Central America, South America, and Mexico (Kaltman et al., 2011).

Family Reunification

Reuniting with families is also a factor of immigration, as some families immigrate separately to establish stability in the United States (Beker Herbst et al., 2018; Perreira & Ornelas, 2013). Hurtado de-Mendoza and colleagues (2014) highlight the impact of social capital, family reunification, and trauma on mujeres from Mexico, Central America, and South America. "Me Mando a Traer" translates to "they sent for me" or "I was brought in". Generally, and not in all cases, family or friends send for their relatives in other parts of the country to come to the United States (Hurtado de-Mendoza et al., 2014). Hurtado de-Mendoza et al. (2014) looks for themes of high social capital or support from family and friends that may potentially decrease acculturation challenges or stress upon arrival to the United States.

It was thought that because *familismo* (Arredondo et al., 2014) was an essential value in the Latinx community, women that were immigrating to the United States would have additional support. During the interviews with these women, other factors arose that would affect social capital with family and friends. For example, many of the women had already endured some trauma or had other mental health problems that may hinder their ability to maintain supportive networks with friends and now their family, which may have already been living in a financially

strained home. In some cases, the women explained being in debt and feeling pressured to begin working to pay back the money to their host family. They described this as not being any different than being back in their country of origin (Hurtado de-Mendoza et al., 2014). The woman felt grateful for the opportunity to be helped to arrive in this country. At the same time, it was stressful to think about how they were going to repay all the money that they had borrowed to pay for the *coyote* or smuggler that brought them to the U.S. Woman who had also brought with them their children discussed the difficulties of their children being viewed as burdens by the host families (Hurtado de-Mendoza et al., 2014). Lastly, some of the women explained that they were abused upon arriving in the U.S. by the family of their friends that decided to bring them to this new country (Hurtado de-Mendoza et al., 2014).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The researcher utilized a qualitative research design in this study to further understand the migration experiences of mujeres from the Northern Triangle of Central America within varying phases (i.e., pre, in-transit, and post-immigration) to the United States. Qualitative research has evolved in its definition and praxis through the years. The use of qualitative methodologies guided the researcher through multiple interpretive practices that allowed for engagement in transformative practices that centered the voices of community researchers (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The qualitative research process begins with understanding one's philosophical assumptions and interpretive frameworks that will be a guiding source in the research process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, as cited in Creswell & Poth, 2018, p.49-50).

In phase one, the researcher engaged in a reflexivity process, where they further explore the varying perspectives that they bring to the research that is being guided. During this phase the researchers explored her personal history, views of herself and others, and ethical and political issues (Creswell & Miller, 2000). During phase two of the qualitative research process, the researcher engaged with the philosophical assumptions to further understand their stance on the research project as it relates to their ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology. In phase three the researcher identified the research strategies and approaches that best guided the ideas and beliefs that informed the research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, as cited in Creswell & Poth, 2018, p.49-50).

Concerning validity in Qualitative research, Creswell and Miller (2000) posit the importance of allowing your theoretical framework to guide the procedure that will assess the validity of a study. The authors indicate three lenses used to establish validity when working from a critical paradigm: (1) Lens of the researcher in which they will engage in researcher reflexivity; (2) Lens of study participants in which participants take a collaborative stance in the development of the research questions or the analysis; and (3) Lens of people external to the study through peer debriefing.

Qualitative methods paired with multicultural research center the voices of marginalized and often oppressed communities as this approach is rooted in social justice traditions. While traditional forms of qualitative research are the most appropriate for working with Latinx populations, gaps remain as they do not adequately address Latinx research (Delgado-Romero et al., 2018; Hall et al., 2016). Recommendations for Latinx Qualitative Research have been developed that fully consider the dynamics of Latinx culture and values (i.e., *personalismo*, *platicando*, *testimonios*, *dichos*, *refranes*, and *cuentos*) along with the diversity that exists within groups (Arredondo et al., 2014).

Delgado-Romero and colleagues (2018) provide an array of recommendations to guide research as they use qualitative designs to understand Latinx communities. First, they recommend that the researcher engages with critical paradigms that center the voices of Latinx people. Additionally, they recommend that the researcher engages in a positionality process which is an ongoing and reflective process that allows the amplification and empowerment of participants' voices without imposing one's beliefs, perspectives, worldviews, and feelings. The authors also recommend embracing intersectionality to fully understand and welcome all the identities of Latinx people as it relates to the immigration, language, country of origin, and

acculturation. Moving forward, the role of language as it relates to translation, interviews, and reading levels is another recommendation. Arredondo and colleagues (2012) note the regional differences that may exist within groups. Diverse research teams and community inclusion is another recommendation, focusing on the richness and multidisciplinary aspect that will be added throughout this approach. Next, speaking Spanish is not enough. The authors highlight the importance of understanding one's power as the researcher. They also highlight the use of qualitative methods that are culturally responsive such as narrative inquiry which will be used for this study.

Building trust was another recommendation as it relates to the entire process even after the research process, especially for marginalized and oppressed populations. Lastly, the author suggests that the reader thinks about the best way to present these results which will add to the field of psychology (Delgado-Romero et al., 2018). Overall, the authors bring to light the importance of qualitative research among Latinx populations and its tenets in multicultural psychology. This methodology allows the voices of marginalized communities to engage in storytelling processes that create a movement towards awareness and action for the readers and listeners of these narratives (Delgado-Romero et al., 2018). These recommendations will be further discussed in the procedures section as they relate to this specific research.

By using qualitative research with this population of Latinx people it will help to shed light on the narratives of these communities as well as the within-group diversity of Latinx populations. In the literature, Latinx communities and their stories are often clustered into one pan-ethnic category, and it is vital to highlight the differences especially when looking at immigration experiences and exposure to trauma (Delgado-Romero et al., 2018).

In their recommendations for effective qualitative research with Latinx communities, Delgado-Romero and colleagues (2018) highlight the importance of building trust with participants and the community. They also bring forth the importance of considering intersectionality especially for individuals with multiple marginalized identities, and that regardless of having some shared identities with participants this does not guarantee trust (Singh & McKleroy, 2011). This gives insight into why it is so important that the research engages in a reflexivity process especially as power in these situations is considered.

Hays and Singh (2012) suggest numerous strategies that can be utilized by the researcher to ensure trustworthiness, the researcher selected those that are relevant for the process of this study. First, the researcher engaged in *reflexive journaling*, which aided the researcher in reflecting on numerous processes throughout the study (e.g., participants, data collection, data analysis) that were impacting her both personally and professionally. Reflexive journaling allowed the research to ask for support as needed from her committee. The researcher identifies closely with the struggles, strengths, joy, and resiliency of the Latinx immigrant communities in Georgia both personally and professionally, the reflexivity journals were extremely helpful throughout this process. The researcher noticed early on in her research process that emotions were high as she noticed parallels in the *testimonios* that she was engaging with through the literature and those of her family, friends, clients, and colleagues who were immigrants. The researcher also engaged in informal *member checking* by providing brief summaries at the end of each photovoice session and in a formal *member checking* to ensure that the findings are aligned with the participants' *testimonios* (Hays & Singh, 2012).

Mujerista Tenants

Despite qualitative methods being the best fit for research within Latinx populations, when engaging with *mujeres* it is best practice to integrate critical theoretical frameworks or methodology of the oppressed (Sandoval, 2000) such as, womanist/*mujerista* research. In this study, the researcher used *Mujerista* Psychology also known as Latina Womanism (Bryant-Davis & Comas-Díaz, 2016) which centers the voices of women through the creation of liberatory, inclusive, and safe spaces where they can engage in eclectic forms of storytelling such as, *testimonios autohistoria*, photovoice, and activism (Bryant-Davis, & Comas-Díaz, 2016). *Mujerismo* theoretical framework guided the researcher in centering the experiences, knowledge, and survival strategies of *mujeres* as they continue to make attempts to cultivate liberating spaces in their communities. *Mujerismo* allowed for a closer look at *lo cotidiano* (Comas-Díaz & Torres Rivera, 2020) with a goal to mobilize *mujeres* as they navigate communal issues.

More specifically *mujerismo* guided the researcher in further understanding the interlocking systems of oppression and how they impact the multiple identities of *mujeres inmigrantes* (e.g., gender, race, sexual orientation, class, country of origin, documentation status). Torres and colleagues (2018) posit that intersectionality research exploring the experiences of Latinx groups remains scarce. Anzaldúa (2012) introduces us to the term *mestiza*, which is representative of the multiple realities of Latinx women, taking into account historical accounts of oppression as well as the daily resistance that comes with living in the U.S. Silva-Martinez (2017), highlights the importance of uplifting the narratives of Latinx women through concepts such as *la lucha* and *permíteme hablar*, foundational in *mujerista* psychology.

The values of *mujerismo* (i.e., resiliency, strength, activism, self-expression, creativity, spirituality/connection, self-definition, and liberation of all oppressed people) are aligned with

liberation psychology (Bryant-Davis, & Comas-Díaz, 2016; Martín-Baró, 1994). Additionally, *Mujerismo* takes a bottom-up approach to learn about their needs and healing practices from the community at hand and centers them as the experts of their lived experiences. *Mujerismo* cultivates safe spaces for *pensadoras* (Mejia et al., 2013), and highlights that there are “(a) multiple ways of knowing; (b) knowledge is socially constructed, socially located, and contested; (c) social positionality shapes what and how people know; and (d) knowledge is produced, held, and accessed through one's bodies, emotions, spiritualities, and relationships (Bryant-Davis, & Comas-Díaz, 2016, pg. 45). The researcher used the values of *mujerista* psychology to guide her in the selection of methodologies that would honor the narratives and daily experiences of *mujeres inmigrantes* from NTCA. The researcher aimed to also move towards creative forms of storytelling that adopted a bottoms-up, trauma informed approach given what is already know about the treacherous immigration journeys that *mujeres inmigrantes* from NTCA encounter.

Testimonios

Testimonios also known as “resistance text” (Smith, 2010, pg. 10) were utilized for this study. As the researcher engaged in critical narrative inquiry using *testimonios* the theoretical paradigms permitted for the centering of the voices of *mujeres* from the NTCA while also taking into account their intersecting identities. In their recommendations for Latinx Qualitative Research, Delgado-Romero and colleagues (2018) suggest using *testimonios*, an oral tradition involving storytelling (Arredondo et al., 2014). *Testimonios* are meant to bring light to experiences of oppression and resilience. According to Reyes and Rodriguez (2012), a *testimonio* is a first-person account that allows the individual to “speak about the importance that knowledge and oppression play in empowering oppressed people” (p. 527), it differs from other qualitative methods (e.g., in-depth interviewing, oral history narration) in that it is a political,

intentional, and conscientized reflection (Comas-Díaz & Torres Rivera; Reyes & Rodriguez, 2012).

The modality of *testimonios* leads individuals and communities towards liberation. It is a liberating practice for the individual telling their story, which also welcomes a process of conscientization (i.e., developing, strengthening, and changing consciousness). Gloria Anzaldúa (2007) describes this process as removing the mask used for survival (as cited in Reyes & Rodriguez, 2012). The interviewer or audience engaging with the first-person narrative also benefits from this liberating process through a political lens as awareness and insight are heightened through a first-person narrative instead of a second or third-person source (Reyes & Rodriguez, 2012; Martín-Baró, 1994). Lastly, the power of *testimonios* goes beyond the individuals and touches the collective that is also experiencing political, social, and structural events. This is also a process in which communities can learn from one another while also fostering sources of healing (Reyes & Rodriguez, 2012).

Photovoice

The researcher utilized Photovoice a social justice centered methodology closely aligned with PAR, which allowed community researchers to take a leading role in the direction of this project (Comas-Díaz & Torres Rivera, 2020; Rhodes et al., 2015; Wang & Burris, 1997). Unlike traditional methods, the power was in the hands of the community researchers. Photovoice embraces the shift away from conventional interviews and instead engages creatively with their *testimonios*, which the community researchers often referred to as *pláticas* in a group setting with other community researchers who share similar experiences (Bryant-Davis, & Comas-Díaz, 2016; Comas-Díaz & Torres Rivera, 2020; Delgado-Romero et al., 2018; Mejia et al., 2013).

Photovoice takes a multilevel approach, focusing on the individual and moving towards the group and community to impact policy and social change (Comas-Díaz & Torres Rivera, 2020).

Participatory Action Research (PAR)

Through photovoice, the researcher had the opportunity to engage in praxis of *acompañamiento* aligned with participatory action research (PAR) (Comas-Díaz & Torres Rivera, 2020, pg. 91) which moves from participants towards community researchers actively leading *su proyecto*. The same voices and *testimonios* that were being amplified and gathered were of the same mujeres leading this study through dialogue that was vulnerable and that created opportunities for collective healing (Bryant-Davis, & Comas-Díaz, 2016; Comas-Díaz & Torres Rivera, 2020; Mejia et al., 2013; Wang & Burris, 1997).

The integration of PAR in this study allowed for a process that reduces structures of power in spaces that often center the researchers as the leader and owner of their *testimonios*. PAR gives autonomy and spaces of *empoderamiento* for *mujeres* to decide how, when, and to whom they'd like to share their findings with the aim of transformative change (Comas-Díaz & Torres Rivera, 2020; Mejia et al., 2013).

Fine (2007) highlights the six principles rooted in the PAR experience as: practicing ongoing self-examination sharing power, giving voice, facilitating consciousness raising, building on strengths, and giving people tools for social change (as cited in Bryant-Davis, & Comas-Díaz, 2016). All through the photovoice sessions the researcher engaged in deep ongoing self-examination, which took the form of journaling, talking to colleagues and friends about my [the research] new self-discoveries as a researcher and practitioner. Self-examination also took place through conversations with my Mexican immigrant mother. As community researchers unveiled and gathers insight on their strengths, the researcher engaged in a similar

process. The principle of giving voice was enacted throughout the process and one that will continue as community researchers prepare for a community forum. Through the use of photovoice the researcher encouraged multiple modalities of presenting their *testimonios*. Consciousness raising happened on an individual and collective level on topics related to racism and discrimination and on their perceived weaknesses (Comas-Díaz & Torres Rivera, 2020) as they discussed the fear that's been imposed on them by oppressive systems. Building strengths was woven in throughout the entire process on an individual and collective level.

Procedures

Recruitment and Sampling

Participants were recruited using purposeful snowball sampling in Georgia. Word of mouth was found to be a helpful strategy and one that can either build trust or mistrust among participants (Delgado-Romero et al., 2018). The researchers past involvement with mental health agencies that predominantly serve Spanish monolingual and bilingual Latinx communities, was also a helpful source in recruitment efforts as trust was already established.

In order to participate in this study, the community researchers met the following criteria: (1) identified as Salvadoran, Guatemalan, or Honduran, (2) identified as woman/*mujer* (cis- and trans-inclusive), (3) be at least 18 years or older, and (4) immigrated to Georgia from El Salvador, Honduras, or Guatemala and have been living in Georgia for at least one month prior to the beginning of this study, this also included women who had lived in other states prior to settling in Georgia.

Community researchers reviewed the study information on social media, recruitment flyers or by word of mouth and then contacted the number provided to indicate their interest in participating. The researcher invited *mujeres* who fit the above criteria through her personal

network. I shared my recruitment flyers with professional colleagues and community agencies from various institutions. With the permission of mental health agency directors/coordinators, I asked mental health professionals to assist with the recruitment of this population. The researcher provided an in-depth description of the study including the time commitment and compensation per hour of their participation (\$10/hour). Once the community researchers expressed interest, the researcher moved forward by asking the screener questions and identified if the community researchers met the participation requirements. Those who did not meet the requirements to participate in the study were thanked for their time, and those who agreed to participate were routed to complete a schedule of their available times for the next couple of weeks.

Study Ethics

Prior to the first session, the researcher met with community researchers as needed to practice the use of zoom via their phone or computers. The researcher provided community researchers with individual polaroid cameras and journals to be used during their photovoice assignments. During the first session with community researchers, the researcher held a 2-hour group orientation and training. First the researcher and one other compañera introduced themselves to the *mujeres*. The researcher revisited confidentiality especially in a group setting. The researcher posed the question: “*Que cosas les gustaria tener en este espacio para que cada una se sienta mas segura?*” to explore and establish group norms. The researcher introduced community researchers to the photovoice process. The researcher answered questions and reviewed ethical concerns that may arise during the photovoice process. During this time, the community researchers also participated in a mock photovoice assignment where they practiced using UGA’s Qualtrics to effectively upload their photos prior to each photovoice session. The community researchers also determined their first photovoice assignment as a group. The

researcher guided a conversation prompting the participants to create a list of themes related to their experience's pre-immigration as *mujeres* from the NTCA; from this activity, the participants developed their first photovoice assignment. The community researchers decided that they needed more than one theme for their first photovoice assignment, this collaborative recursive process set the tone for future photovoice assignments. The researcher instructed the participants to take 5-8 photos connected to the photovoice assignment which was discussed two weeks later.

Member Checking

Member checking with community researchers was done informally throughout the process. The researcher summarized emerging vital topics at the end of each photovoice session, allowing for informal checking. Once all interviews were transcribed and analyzed, a group member checking was completed with five out of six community researchers. The researcher shared emerging themes and descriptions with community researchers. There was also a *testimonio* accuracy check conducted with individual community researchers in which the researcher shared the themes that emerged as they connected to their *testimonio*. Lastly, the researcher revisited the use of the community researchers' pictures and identified images that they still felt safe to use for research purposes.

Research Team

The research team consisted of the primary researcher, two doctoral students in counseling psychology, one masters student, and one faculty member. All members of the team identified as Latinx and were bilingual. Members of the team worked together in clinical and applied settings with Latinx clients. The Latinx ethnicities of the research team were Mexican (3), Nicaraguan and Colombian.

Once the photovoice sessions were conducted the researchers transcribed and coded each photovoice session. The research team met as needed to discuss themes, observed patterns, and interpretations that emerged within the testimonios. Aligned with trustworthiness strategies, the research team engaged in peer debriefing to consider all perspectives that may arise during the data analysis process (Hays & Singh, 2012). The debriefing process encouraged all *compañeras* to engage in reflection. The researcher met with *compañeras* across 3-4 months. As knowledge producers with varying world views from my own these *compañeras* were able to provide insight on areas that I had not considered. The development of the codebook did not serve a purpose of predefining the codes. In many ways it helped to give language in a structured ways to the complexities of community researchers journeys. Codes were organized around commonalities, which informed the birthing of themes and subthemes.

Data Collection

Mujerista-led photovoice (Mejia et al., 2013) sessions were conducted in Spanish by the researcher and one other one other *compañera* whose primary role was to observe and take notes. The photovoice sessions were conducted February 2023-May 2023 on Saturday mornings. Community researchers decided on a time and day of the week that worked best for them. Some of the community researchers worked on the weekends, participated in community advocacy, and ran their food business so they decided that 8am would be the best time to meet. All photovoice sessions were conducted via Zoom since the researcher was in California during the time of data collection.

The researcher facilitated three Mujerista-led Photovoice sessions using the photovoice process VENCER, which is an adaptation in Spanish of the SHOWED process rooted in Freire's questioning strategies in empowerment education (Baquero et al., 2014; Hergenrather et al.,

2009; Wang & Burris, 1997). The VENCER process guided the discussions by leading the group to identify the images in the photograph, analyze the implications of the situation portrayed, and develop a plan of action to address the identified factors (Baquero et al., 2014).

VENCER/SHOWED

See	What do you <u>see</u> in the photo?	Ves	¿Qué es lo que <u> vemos </u> en la foto?
Happening	What is <u>happening</u> ?	Explica	Explica qué <u>sucede</u> ?
Our	How does this relate to <u>our</u> lives?	Nuestras	¿En qué se relaciona a <u>nuestras</u> vidas? y ¿Cómo nos sentimos al respecto?
Why	<u>Why</u> does this situation, concern, or strength exist?	Causa(s)	¿Cuál o cuáles son las <u>causas</u> por las que esto sucede? (a nivel individual, familiar y social)
Empower/ Educate	How can we <u>empower</u> the community and ourselves to address this? How can we <u>educate</u> others about the problem?	Empoderar/ Educar	¿Cómo podemos <u>empoderar</u> a la comunidad o a nosotros/as mismos/as? ¿Cómo podemos <u>educar</u> a otros sobre el problema?
Do	What can we <u>do</u> to improve the situation or enhance these strengths?	Resolver	¿Qué podemos hacer y cómo podemos <u>resolver</u> esto en nuestras vidas?

Acompañamiento, alongside photovoice allowed for disruptions in power inequities. For example, community researchers decided on the photovoice assignments based on the needs and experiences in their community and throughout their immigration journey. The process of *acompañamiento* was also made possible as the researcher engaged in mutual vulnerability and reflexivity outside of the structured photovoice sessions. To illustrate, there were a couple of occasions when the researchers stood alongside the community researchers as they navigated their roles as community advocates and their transnational lives when we were no longer in session.

Photovoice sessions were 90-120 minutes and consisted of storytelling (*testimonios*) and sharing their photovoice assignment (triggers), more explicitly exploring what they connected to as they shared their photos. Each community researcher was encouraged to have a journal to keep their pictures and written reflections. The photovoice process VENCER, took place after the participants had an opportunity to *show and tell* to move away from the personal and more towards the social analysis and action level (Baquero et al., 2014; Hergenrather et al., 2009; Mejia et al., 2013; Wang & Burris, 1997).

There were times when the community researchers initiated pláticas by focusing on their own photos and at times pictures that were provided by other *mujeres*. All the photos provided by community researchers were used, and they were only asked to provide one picture per assignment. On some occasions community researchers would provide more than one picture. Contrasting to what other researchers may see as a threat, the creativity via photovoice allowed for a filtering of such of community researchers narratives as well as a sense of *acompañamiento*. By having photos to illicit responses *mujeres* were able to enter the pláticas at their own pace, the power was diminishing as this was not a one-on-one interview where they were “required” to answer the question.

Photovoice Assignments

Immigration Phase	Photovoice Assignment	Community Researchers Present
Pre-Immigration	Esperanza Superación	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basilia Esperanza • Deborah • Xiomara <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marcela • Vilma • Violeta
In-transit Immigration	Resistencia Perseverancia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basilia Esperanza • Xiomara • Vilma <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marcela • Deborah
Post-Immigration	Fortalezas Areas de Crecimiento	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basilia Esperanza • Xiomara • Violeta

There were 2-3-week gaps between each photovoice discussion or *pláticas*, as the community researcher called them. During the 2-3 week period community researchers engaged in taking pictures that were representative of the themes that they identified at the end of each photovoice session. The researcher sent a text to each community researcher with the identified themes (a reminder) and the Qualtrics link where they could upload their photos for the next photovoice session. After each photovoice session, the research team transcribed the recordings and begin identifying codes representing patterns of meaning. The researcher sent reminder texts with the information for the next photovoice session 1-2 days prior.

Data Analysis

Data for this study was generated and analyzed utilizing Reflective Thematic Analysis (RTA) (Braun & Clarke, 2022) following a non-positivist framework that centers knowledge production (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Byrne, 2022). The theoretical assumptions of *Mujerista*

psychology (Bryant-Davis, & Comas-Díaz, 2016) inform this study as they focus on cultural and gendered realities of Latinas and their intersection with SES and historical legacies of resistance and oppression (Latina Feminist Group, 2001). First, the researcher and *compañeras* (research team members) reflected and interrogate how their positionalities lived experiences, values, and assumptions – all inform the knowledge production process (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Following, the researcher and team engaged in the recursive phases of RTA, including familiarization; coding; and generating initial themes. The primary researcher reviewed and developed themes; refined, defined, and named themes; and wrote up the emerging themes (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Familiarization of the data occurred through immersion with the data found within the photovoice sessions. The researcher engaged with the entire data in multiple modalities and documented thoughts and feelings that developed during the process. This also included reflections at the beginning of weekly research meetings. The generation of initial codes was facilitated by utilizing Nvivo, a qualitative data analysis software. Due to the recursive coding process, the researcher kept track of the code development which aided in data transparency. Themes were generated by interpreting the aggregated codes. Relevant codes were combined as needed to provide an overarching picture of the data. A thematic map was created to map initial themes. The researcher made connection amongst major themes and subthemes through this process. Through a recursive review of themes the researcher identified the way that research questions were answered through the emerging themes.

Subjectivity

The reflexivity process is critical in qualitative research and allows the researcher to fully reflect on what has motivated them to follow this line of research (Hays & Singh, 2012). Before beginning with the early stages of this study, I have reflected on the events in my own life that

have brought me into this research and the ways in which my positionality will influence the participants.

My labor of love is threefold. First, I am the daughter and sister of Mexican immigrants and the only member of my family to have citizenship status for 28 years in my family. Thus, I identify as a Latina and a Mexican American. In the 7th grade, I discovered Chicano Rap music. I also began to feel connected to the identity of a Chicana. I grew up speaking Spanish, and as I grew older and my parents acquired the English language, our household became a primarily *Spanglish* speaking household.

In the fall of 1995, I experienced my mother's detainment by Immigration and Customs Enforcement. I was four years old. Once the courts decided to deport my mother to Mexico, my brother and I could leave with her while my father remained in Georgia, hoping we would soon be reunited. In a blink of an eye, my family's stability and original dream of a better future were threatened. Although I am lucky to say that my family was reunited again, this is not always the case for families navigating detainment and deportation; my mother continues to live in the shadows of her own family.

I am a lover of stories, and this also explains my role within my family; my cousins always tell me that I am the one that talks to everyone in the family. I don't think they understand that this is also a way of me putting together the pieces of the stories I hope to pass on to my family someday. Through this connection to my parents and their families, I have been able to gather the pieces of my family's immigration narratives which have been central to how I view the world and my privilege. For 28 years, I was the only person in my family of four (mother, father, and brother) with protected status, meaning that I could vote, make mistakes without threatening my legal status, and spend more than six months outside of the U.S.

Although I was documented, I experienced first-hand the effects of living in a mixed-status family household, and this experience fueled my desire to speak up, advocate and be a change agent for my community. I was unaware of the term undocumented, but I knew my mother could not leave this country to visit her family and return. In addition to being unable to leave the country, she often had to live in a shadow bigger than my younger self failed to understand. At a young age, I learned to "be good" to protect my family. This meant being quiet and not bringing attention to myself, which would then impact my family and jeopardize their safety.

As a young child, I also became part of the early post-migration experiences of my aunts, uncles, and cousins from Mexico. With my mom and dad having a stable home in Georgia, family immigrating from Mexico always arrived at our home. Before their arrival, I witnessed the frightening and tense process that my parents engaged in as they received calls from *coyotes* informing them of my family members' whereabouts in their migration journey. Wondering about the safety and whereabouts of family on the migration journey became part of daily normal conversations where my questions as a child were always answered. It was only sometimes a success story. There were times when the *coyote* calls were scams to extort thousands of dollars.

Aside from the experience of my Mexican migrant family, I also grew to understand the Honduran immigration experience. The Honduran culture is not mine directly, but I have been able to experience it through my sister-in-law (mi cuñada) and her family, who has also become my family. The narratives I grew up listening to changed drastically when I met my sister-in-law. I began to notice differences in her immigration journey from Honduras and more so in her migration decisions. Through the years I have learned more about the unique struggles of Central

Americans from the Northern Triangle because of the stories she and her family have shared with me. I remember the first time she told me about her immigration journey through Mexico, which was extremely hostile and violent. I felt embarrassed and angry and soon realized that my country was perpetuating the same levels of discrimination and violence, just like the U.S.

Listening to her narrative of the events in her daily life while she was living in Honduras sparked other interests, and it came with feelings of privilege to hear her share her story with me. This relationship is when I began to develop interests not only regarding the experiences of individuals in the United States as immigrants but also in the trauma exposure before deciding to migrate and the in-transit traumatic experiences that are encountered.

As I think about the NTCA communities that I want to do research with, I consider the challenges that may come about. I am an outsider to the NTCA community, which may cause some mistrust. I do not know beforehand the *testimonios* that will be shared, but I am aware that trauma is bound to be part of their narratives, and this trauma may have roots in Mexico. My knowledge of the Honduran culture through my sister-in-law and her family may be helpful. Another challenge that could arise is language. Even though Spanish is my first language, the language is diverse, and certain words and expressions are unique to each country or region.

My third labor of love is rooted in the *testimonios* of the children and adolescents that I had the privilege of working with at a mental health agency in Georgia who fled their countries to reunite with their parents and, in some cases, to flee the violence that they witnessed/experienced daily. There were times when I wondered why their parents "left them" without considering their narratives about their exposure to trauma during their journey to the U.S. and then finally to settle in Georgia. I am in love with the process of the work that I get to

do, and I am glad that I get to continue doing this work with adults, which provides a different perspective.

I identify closely with the struggles, strengths, joy, and resiliency of the Latinx immigrant communities in Georgia, both personally and professionally. The reflexivity journals will be something that will be extremely helpful throughout this process. While engaging in this earlier process with the literature, I have noticed that emotions are already arising as I see my family, friends, clients, and colleagues represented through the testimonios I have been reading.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The experiences of oppression and marginalization throughout the immigration journey (e.g., pre-migration, in-transit, and post-migration) of *mujeres* from NTCA are under-represented within the literature. Cultural understanding and empathy are needed to address the vast trauma and intergenerational trauma experiences encountered at all levels of the immigration journey (pre-immigration, in-transit, and post-immigration). The purpose of this qualitative, *mujerista*-led photovoice, PAR study was to explore the immigration experiences of *mujeres* from NTCA to further understand their motivations to migrate, their experiences during the immigration journey, and their experiences upon arriving in Georgia through the practice of testimonios as it relates to their migration journey.

The researcher initially planned to collect data during the photovoice sessions in a linear way that addressed the community researchers' experiences during all levels of their immigration journey; However, their continuous exposure to multiple forms of trauma during all levels of their immigration journey made it challenging to engage in sequential narratives which called for an adjustment in the approach to analysis. Presented first are the photovoice assignments and accompanying photos that were submitted by the community researchers. The second part of this chapter includes a reflective thematic analysis of three photovoice sessions and other data collected (i.e., demographic interview, introduction to photovoice and ethics session, and member-check session). The researcher will discuss central themes that were interwoven into all other major and sub-themes.

Community-Researcher Characteristics

All six community researchers in this study identified as *mujeres* and spoke Spanish. The community researchers are referred to by pseudonyms. Refer to Table 1 for co-researcher demographic information.

Community Researcher Demographic Profile (n = 6)

Name	Age	Years/Months in the U.S.	Years/Months Living in Georgia	Ethnicity	Marital Status
Basilía Esperanza	29	11 months	11 months	Salvadoran	Single
Deborah	42	13 years	13 years	Salvadoran	Single
Marcela	37	13 years	13 years	Guatemalan	Married
Vilma	20	12 years	12 years	Salvadoran	Single
Violeta	32	6 years	5 months	Guatemalan	Married
Xiomara	36	11 years	11 Years	Salvadoran	Divorced

Basilía Esperanza is a 29 year old, single woman, raised in El Salvador, whom immigrated to Athens, Georgia 11 months ago, as of the start of this study, from El Salvador. Basilía Esperanza is high school educated, with Spanish as her primary language. Prior to immigrating, Basilía Esperanza worked in agriculture and cared for her parents. Basilía Esperanza expressed her primary reason for leaving El Salvador was due to the violence she and her family were facing. Basilía Esperanza recalled the multiple methods of transportation throughout her immigration journey to the United States, which took a total of 5 months. She made this journey alone; however, Basilía Esperanza had the support of her brother during her

immigration. Basilia Esperanza currently resides in a small town in central Georgia, where she works alongside her boyfriend, painting houses to support herself and her family back home in El Salvador.

Deborah is a 42-year-old, single woman, raised in El Salvador, whom immigrated to Georgia 13 years ago, as of the start of this study, from El Salvador. Deborah is a mother to two sons and one daughter, ages 17,11, and 5, respectively. Her eldest son currently resides in El Salvador, with his paternal grandparents. Deborah has not seen her eldest son in 13 years, since she immigrated. Deborah is high school educated, with Spanish as her primary language. She is also a practicing Evangelica-Pentecoste. Prior to immigrating, Deborah supported herself and her family by selling food, such as *pupusas*. Deborah described that her primary reason for leaving El Salvador was to leave the gang violence that she had encountered. Deborah's immigration journey came through the utilization of a *coyote* that guided her and a group of immigrants, over land, for a total of 12 days. Deborah did not have the support of any family or friends throughout her immigration journey. Deborah shared that although she has siblings in the Southwestern United States, she does not maintain any relationship with them. Deborah currently resides in Georgia, where she sells food to support herself and her extended family in the US and in El Salvador.

Marcela is a 37-year-old, married woman, raised in Guatemala, whom immigrated to Georgia 13 years ago, as of the start of this study, from Guatemala. Marcela is a Christian, mother to two sons, ages 17 and 4. Her eldest son currently resides in Guatemala, with his maternal grandmother. Marcela frequently sees her son through video calls. Marcela completed 2 years of college. While in Guatemala, Marcela looked after the house to help her mother who owned and ran a local store. Marcela expressed that her primary reasons for leaving Guatemala

was to help her family and provide a better life for her eldest son who was four at the time. Marcela traveled by both bus and train with two cousins, whom were her support throughout their month-long journey. Marcela has family in the Southeast and West Coast and they come together mostly for birthday celebrations. Marcela currently resides in Georgia, where she sells food to support herself and her family, both in the US and Guatemala.

Vilma is a 20-year-old, single woman, raised in El Salvador, whom immigrated to Georgia 12 years ago, as of the start of this study, from El Salvador. Vilma is a Christian, mother to a 5-month-old daughter. Vilma immigrated to the US at the age of 8, while in the third grade, and then completed some of the 12th grade after immigrating to Georgia. Vilma recounted an incident her mother had with the gangs (MARAs) in El Salvador where her boyfriend was shot and killed. Their family had to flee and with the help of Vilma's grandparents, whom were already living in the United States, Vilma, her mother and younger brother immigrated to the US. Most of Vilma and her family's week-long journey was on foot, with the rare use of a car. Vilma currently lives with her mother and her siblings, as a stay-at-home mom to her daughter who has a heart condition. Her grandparents also live close by and they see each other often.

Violeta is a 32-year-old, single woman, raised in Guatemala, whom immigrated to United States 6 years ago from Guatemala. Violeta moved to Georgia 4 to 5 months ago from North Carolina, as of the start of this study. Violeta is an Evangelical Christian, mother to two sons, ages 4 and 2. Violeta is bilingual and high school educated. Prior to immigrating, Violeta supported herself as a secretary for a lawyer. Violeta explained her reasons for leaving Guatemala was to overcome poverty and help her family. Violeta's immigration journey was routed through the Rio Grande and lasted almost a month. She traveled with a group of friends.

Violeta currently resides in Georgia, as a stay-at-home mother. She has family in Georgia that she sees once or twice a month.

Xiomara is a 36-year-old, divorced woman, raised in El Salvador, whom immigrated to Georgia 11 years ago, as of the start of this study, from El Salvador. Xiomara is a mother to two sons and one daughter, ages 2, 15, and 20, respectively. All of her children live with her in the United States. Xiomara is bilingual and high school educated. Xiomara had immigrated to the United States as a child, age 5, and lived in the US for 6 years before returning to the US at the age of 24. Xiomara explained her decision to immigrate to Georgia came because of being kidnapped with her daughter, shot, and extorted. Xiomara immigrated with her two eldest children and stated they traveled as *mojados*, through the river. Their journey lasted 9-10 days, Xiomara's parents supported her and her children through their immigration journey. Xiomara currently resides in Georgia, with her children and works in a beauty salon to support herself and her family. She is also studying to get a master's degree in cosmetology. Xiomara's parents and siblings live close by in Georgia and see each other often.

Mujerista-led Photovoice Themes

1. Fe en Dios: Donde Hay Esperanza Hay Vida [Faith in God: Where there is hope there is life]

This was a central theme woven into the community researchers *testimonios* throughout this entire process. This theme represents faith in God as a source of support, coping, and strength throughout each part of the immigration journey. It is important to note that not all of the *mujeres* identified as religious or spiritual, yet the Spanish language and culture is embedded with Catholic related language. The community researchers wove in phrases such as “*con la esperanza en que dios le va a permitir seguir adelante,*” “*que Dios nos ayude,*” “*si Dios quiere,*” “*gracias a dios,*” “*si dios lo permite,*” and “*con la ayuda de Dios*” to express that they did not hold all of the power

in their experiences. A community researcher also used the phrase “*Si dios no lo quiere asi*” when discussing childbirth. Aligned with *mujerista* psychology, psychospirituality was present throughout, as a source of strength, *esperanza* and a force bigger than themselves to push them forward. In moments when systems and the people that are supposed to protect you fail you, a greater source of strength becomes God. This theme is a notable protective factor along all the phases of immigration. When discussing the photovoice assignment of *superación* and how the photos presented relate to their lives, Marcela shared:

Si como dijo la compañera que todavía cada mañana primeramente ahí que encomendarnos a dios. Para que nuestro día sea bendecido sea mejor por cada día...Es una forma mía de superación porque hay varias formas en la vida de superarnos.

Marcela was one of the only community researchers that had a son in her country of origin, Guatemala. She spoke about the challenges of being a single mother and the need to provide a better future for her son. Marcela also discussed the need to pay off debt connected to her family back home. She often discussed the need to work to provide a better life for her mother and her son who are still living in Guatemala. Marcela has shared about the sacrifices that she had to make to make the necessary money to take care of herself and her family. Marcela also brings light to the various forms of knowledge as she explains that everyone may have their unique version of what it looks like to *superarnos*. Community researchers also discussed coping and strength through prayer and talking to God during traumatic events during their immigration journey. Deborah shared:

Bueno, ya mi cuerpo ya estaba como es de un “cagazo” no sentí solo en la mente. Yo le dije a Dios, fue cuando yo empecé a decirle a Dios este que me ayudara, que me diera la vida, no por mi le decía sino por mi hijo.... Y recuerdo que en ese momento yo le pedí a

Dios, fuerza, fortaleza y que me ayudará en aquel momento. Este a mi no me importó tenerle miedo a migración en aquel momento o a los a las personas que estaban en el hospital.

During the *pláticas* regarding *resistencia*, Deborah shared about her experience with immigration agents who found her in the desert. She explained that they picked her up, and they thought that she was dead due to the conditions that they found her in. Deborah vividly described the conditions of her clothing and her skin due to having to drag her body in the desert and having *espinas de nopales* on her body. Throughout this entire process, Deborah kept her faith in God, spoke to God, asked for strength during some of her most difficult moments at the hospital. The utilization of spiritual and religious coping continued to surface as community researchers discussed their experiences post-immigration in Georgia. To illustrate, Violeta describes her experiences of needing to drive without a driver's license:

Aquí en el estado de Georgia se me hace un poco complicado. Como conducir, más cuando no tienes licencia. Entonces incluso me he atrevido a manejar hasta dos horas. Y yo digo Dios mío, guárdame, porque estoy en un estado donde yo tengo que respetar todo, especialmente a la velocidad. El límite de velocidad. Todas las señales, los stop, todo.

Here Violeta brings light to the obstacles and the diverse experiences regarding driving in while undocumented in Georgia. For Violeta a *mujer* that was involved in her community and always wanted to support others, driving was a need and during some of the she discussed the guilt of not being able to support other community members in need due to the long commute and having to risk driving without a driver's license. Violeta also sheds light on the realities of having to be hypervigilant while driving to make sure that mistakes are not made.

2. *Discriminación y Racismo* [Discrimination and Racism]

This theme touches on the experiences *Discriminación y Racismo* [Discrimination and Racism] across all levels of their immigration journey. Throughout the pláticas community researchers discussed what was said to them and how these situations made them feel. During the plática Basilia Esperanza shared:

Ese americano racista de ICE me dijo cosas tan desagradables. “Firma”, me dijo. “No, yo no voy a firmar nada”, le dije. “No”, me dijo “Si, aunque yo quiera, por mi te deporto ahorita mismo, pero yo no voy a hacer eso, esa palabra la tiene un juez, yo no sé qué vienen a ser aquí”, me dijo. “Disque huyéndole a su violencia. ... Ósea, me presente a una persona hiriente, humillante. Él me dijo cosas desagradables. Me hizo sentir mal.

Basilia Esperanza brings attention to the treatment that she received from ICE agents upon her arrival to a detention center. She expressed the doubt and threats that were expressed by the ICE agent as she shared her reasons for immigrating with them as a way to try to show that she qualifies for asylum. This type of treatment is not uncommon, and Basilia Esperanza shares the feelings of humiliation and pain that she experienced in those moments. While Basilia Esperanza shares about her experiences upon entering the United States, Violeta shares about her experiences with *racismo* once in Georgia:

Yo viví mucho tiempo en Norte Carolina y en comparación con el estado de Georgia. Dios mío! ¡Que Dios nos ayude! Porque continuamente, día tras día, hay racismo. No en todas las personas, pero podría decir que la mayoría siempre te discriminan. Primero que nada porque sos ilegal. Así nos dicen hoy eres un ilegal, no tienes voz ni voto.

Prior to moving to Georgia, Violeta lived in North Carolina. She was able to make comparisons about her experiences in both states and expressed *continuamente, día tras día, hay racismo* when sharing about her experiences in Georgia to illustrate that this is an ongoing process, the racism does not stop and greatly differs from her lived experiences from North Carolina.

3. *Pre-migración: Partir Para Sobrevivir* [Pre-immigration: Leaving to survive]

Pre-immigration: leaving to survive portrays the diverse experiences of community researchers as they search for new life opportunities for themselves and their family. Every community researcher has unique life circumstances that precipitated their decision to immigrate. Most of the community researchers shared that their decision to immigrate was rooted in finding safety from the extensive violence in their countries and in some cases to help their family financially. When discussing the photovoice assignment for *resistencia* Xiomara shared:

Yo personalmente yo digo que este país es una bendición para cada uno de nosotros que logramos llegar verdad, y mi mente es de que estar aquí en este país me obliga a querer ser una mejor persona. Poder lograr objetivos, crecer lo que es económicamente, crecer en familia, y darle un futuro mejor a nuestros hijos, a nuestra familia, y a uno mismo.

Xiomara is a hair stylist, a profession that she acquired while living in El Salvador. Prior to starting the photovoice *pláticas*, Xiomara shared that she left her county due to extortion. Xiomara shared that she had been shot and having a business placed her in more danger. Xiomara described her decision to leave her country as an emergency. When Xiomara spoke about her immigration experiences across all levels she often focused on wanting something better for her family and the importance of reaching her goals and objectives. In the case of Xiomara she was able to immigrate to the US the first time with her mother and the second time

she was able to meet family who are already here in the US. When discussing the photovoice assignment for *esperanza* Basilia Esperanza shared:

Sencillamente yo me vine huyéndole a la soledad, la tristeza, y pues lamentablemente fueron cinco meses en los que sufrí demasiado acoso, abuso, pero aca estoy.

Basilia Esperanza often spoke about her experiences with grief. The grief that came with the death and illness of loved ones as well as the hardships that came with family interpersonal relationships. Basilia Esperanza also shared that two reasons for deciding to immigrate, such as the violence that her and her family faced in my family and the desire to help her parents. She emphasized the need to escape violence as the strongest deciding factor. Amongst Salvadoran women the most salient deciding factor for immigrating came down to the violence that they were facing. Their decision to leave was also focused on them, but violence surpassed the desire to support their family. Deborah speaks to the need to leave in order to survive. Her decision to come to the US was not the need to look for something better for her family, it was pure survival.

En lo personal yo me viene de mi país huyendo la violencia porque quería superarme y quería dejar atrás todo después de un secuestro... Yo me pongo a pensar si yo me hubiese quedado, me secuestraron, me golpearon, me quede en la calle , no hubiera inmigrado a este país y no se donde estuviera... Unos pues tenemos que salir de la violencia y sobrevivir, otros por un sueño diferente, pero cada ser humano que emigra a este país tiene metas y tiene ese espíritu de salir adelante y bueno ya es todo.

Deborah shared the difficulty of having to leave her country. During this *plática* she shared that she never had that desire to leave and come to the United States, it never crossed her mind. Deborah shed light on the realities of these women and their hard work and feelings of empowerment back home. Deborah also discussed that she used to have a business back home,

and with joy she shared that she also has a food business in Georgia. She shared that she has been in Georgia for 13 years and does not regret it. Lastly, she shared about life challenges and in the spirit of wanting to also motivate other *mujeres* she expressed with strong emotion that there are no limits for those that want to *salir adelante*.

3a. *Para Ayudar a la Familia: Mejores Oportunidades* [To Help the Family: Better Opportunities]

The need to help their families as a factor for immigrating is one that was salient throughout the *pláticas*. In the case of the community researchers, they shared their experiences with wanting to provide a better life for their families transnationally. Some of them still work to send money back home to their loved ones while also taking care of their families in Georgia. Marcela, is from Guatemala and she centers the challenges of paying off debt in a country with limited paid opportunities. She shares that through help from God and her job she has managed to get out of debt. During the *superación* photovoice assignment, Marcela shared:

No era mi deuda, era de mis padres pero me dio el deseo de ayudarlos de esa forma. Con la ayuda de dios lo pude hacer y hasta la fecha ayudo a mi mamá porque mi papa ya descansa en paz. Siempre he ayudado a mi familia y para mi prioridad es mi familia si ellos están bien como lo vuelvo a repetir. Yo estoy bien como siempre si algún familiar está enfermo siempre quiera o no uno se siente incómodo, y gracias a dios le doy nuevamente porque con mi trabajito eh visto en varias partes de mi vida salir adelante a veces tristezas lastimosamente el dinero, sin dinero uno no puede hacer nada por eso luchamos cada día para poder resolver o alguna deuda o algo y yo lo eh visto. Con la ayuda de dios en mi trabajo he logrado salir adelante y tener unas cositas en mi país que eso fue el pensamiento mío cuando me vine de poder superarme y poder ser mejor cada

día.

During initial conversations prior to the *pláticas*, Marcela shared that she decided to immigrate to help her father with his house. She also shared that she was a single mother and had a 4-year-old back home in Guatemala. Marcela brought in the perspective of transnational mothering Marcela is a major support system for her family back home. Marcela speaks to the reality of collective liberation and secondary access. Marcela's main purpose for immigrating was to provide a better life for others in her life. Marcela discusses the impact that lack of access to money causes. Violeta, also a *mujer* from Guatemala shared:

La pobreza, la necesidad de superarse y ayudar a la familia.

Throughout the photovoice *pláticas* Violeta almost always focused on the desire to give back to the community. Violeta shared less about leaving her country to escape violence and more about the need for a better life and opportunities.

4. *Injusticias y Adversidades Durante el Cruce: Hemos Sobrevivido y Resistido* [**Injustices and Adversities During the Crossing: We have survived and resisted**]

The theme *Injusticias y Adversidades Durante el Cruce: Hemos Sobrevivido y Resistido* [Injustices and Adversities During the Cruce: We have survived and resisted] highlights the injustices that have been endured by the community researchers on their immigration in-between. They no longer belong to their home country where even the most unstable and unpredictable states of living are still familiar. This theme represents an in-between state of not knowing if they will arrive [what does arriving even mean]. This theme also speaks to the injustices that they survived and resisted at the hands of people (e.g., coyotes, ICE) who abused their power. During the initial *pláticas* for *resistencia* while community researchers are speaking to what they see on the collage of pictures, Xiomara shares:

El que alguien diga una persona se vino mojado suena feo, pero la verdad es que, muchos sufrimos más que otros. Solo nosotros sabemos lo que pasamos y lo que nos cuesta para poder llegar acá. En la palabra mojados, pues somos todas esas personas que no podemos cruzar a llegar a este país como muchos llegan en avión y todo eso. Nosotros somos los que más sufrimos!

Xiomara's quote, “, *el que alguien diga una persona se vino mojado. Es, suena feo porque la palabra suena feo, pero la verdad es que, muchos sufrimos más que otros*” sheds light on the diverse immigration experiences and the labels that are placed on people depending on their method of immigration. These labels carry stories. Depending on financial and social access *mujeres* may have varying options when deciding on the method to immigrate. Xiomara vaguely makes the differentiation between crossing rivers to immigrating with a visa by plane. Xiomara adds to this *plática* by sharing her personal understanding about resistance, such as enduring difficult situations no matter what and not giving up until the goal of arriving is met. The duration of their immigration journeys also speaks to the complexity of arriving. *Mujeres* that are immigrating from the NTC are crossing multiple borders and often coming across different *coyotes* or *mafias* that have different motives and if they wish can extend their journey. As the researcher, hearing about their journeys reminds me of my 8-year-old self, listening in on the calls that *coyotes* would make to my father and mother when one of their siblings was making their way to Georgia. I can still remember feeling worried and scared as my parents talked about the length of my family's immigration journey which was usually not more than two weeks.

During the *pláticas* on *resistencia* Marcela shared:

Por ejemplo, cuando me vine, lo que me costó más resistir fue este de que me daban unos calambres en los pies. Y por el frío, porque me vine un mes de noviembre, entre

diciembre es cuando sopla más el viento del desierto. Nos tuvimos que tapar con unas bolsas de nailon este y grandes pero, el viento que soplaba era fuerte que se me congelaban todos los pies y cuando nos tocaba este caminar me daban unos calambres y de veras que entre todo el grupo yo era la la que me quedaba así, bien lejos del grupo, pero ahí iba, ahí con ese dolor en la pierna.

Marcela and other community researchers shared about their diverse experiences once they were in-transit. On several occasions, Marcela discusses the hardship that she endured and not being aware of how this was going to impact her along her journey. When Marcela shared, “*Nos tuvimos que tapar con unas bolsas de nailon,*” she shed light on how *mujeres* leave with little to nothing not because they are unprepared, but because at times they will need to run, jump, swim, hide, and traveling lite is the best strategy. I am not sure if I dreamt it, heard it, or witnessed it, but I remember my grandmother sewing one of my family members pants pockets so that nobody stole his money on his journey to the United States. Deborah shares the word *resistencia* is the ability to have determination during situations where she had to endure challenging events. Deborah engages in plática as she remembers her experiences in the desert by stating that she will never forget those experiences:

Me quedé perdida en el desierto durante siete días. Yo pensé que no iba a vivir y yo recuerdo que mientras yo estaba agonizando, ya muriendo porque no comía, era una situación bien difícil. Yo sólo me decía en mi mente porque ya mi boca ya no, o sea, ya no abría los labios de la sed de todo, le decía en mi cerebro mi mente me hablaba y decía resiste, resiste, Deborah, resiste. Y gracias a Dios que Dios me dio la oportunidad de resistir ese momento tan difícil que quedó quizás plasmado en mi mente, en mi, en mi, en mi cerebro, porque yo venía huyendo de la violencia. Yo había sido secuestrada en mi

país, maltratada, incluso venía con una cortadura, recuerdo todavía del maltrato de huir, pero todavía me faltaba, como dicen, sobrevivir y resistir más. ... Yo recuerdo todavía en mi mente tengo el olor, el polvo, el frío, el hambre de aquel momento.

Deborah speaks about the vivid experiences of her getting lost in the desert and directs attention to the levels of resistance that *mujeres* must endure on these immigration journeys to reach their dreams and improve their lives in a host country. Deborah speaks about the continuous traumatic events that occurred to her even after having left her country as she fled violence. After 13 years of these events Deborah shared still remembering the events of that day. Basilia Esperanza also speaks about the realities of having to escape violence, yet still having to endure so much on her journey. During the *pláticas* on *perseverancia*, Basilia Esperanza shared:

Nos venimos huyéndole a la violencia otros huyéndole a la soledad que no tenemos nada y venimos con pie firme de avanzar como lo que somos como inmigrantes, pasando hambre sed malos tratos intentos de violación porque el camino del migrante para llegar aquí es de perseverar segundo a segundo minuto a minuto día tras día noche tras noche porque nosotros como mujeres estamos expuestas a uno y 1000 peligros porque yo recuerdo de las 3 veces yo nunca había logrado llegar a McAllen nunca había logrado cruzar pero yo recuerdo cuando yo crucé por fin y a mí me tuvieron un mes en un lado otro mes en el otro pero mi peor mes fue cuando me entregaron a la persona que supuestamente me iba a cruzar y ahí empezó repetidas ocasiones eh yo ya venía enferma deshidratada ya no quería ni seguir el camino..

Basilia Esperanza illuminates the gendered experiences that *mujeres* are exposed to along their immigration journey. During this *plática* Basilia Esperanza shared the details of the manipulation and psychological abuse that she endured while in the waiting houses before

crossing. She makes note of her immigration journey being longer since she did not want to have sexual encounters with one of the *coyotes*.

4a. *Cruzamos Con Gente Peligrosa: Para Ellos Somos Mercancia* [**We cross paths with dangerous people: For them we are merchandise**]

In the theme *Cruzamos Con Gente Peligrosa: Para Ellos Somos Mercancia* [We cross paths with dangerous people: For them we are merchandise], Xiomara and Basilia Esperanza give insight into the differences and parallels between their experiences with *mafias* and *coyotes* that “assisted” them with crossing. Xiomara and Basilia Esperanza shed light on the ineffectual role of law enforcement in protecting them from the violent acts of *mafias* or *coyotes* who were at the border. During the *pláticas* for *resistencia*, Xiomara shares:

Yo crucé la frontera dos veces cuando estaba pequeña. Cuando estaba pequeña creo que mi mamá tardó como un mes y hace como 12 años que lo hice de nuevo. Yo venía con mis dos hijos y nada más tardé como 28 días, pero pagamos, pagamos y cruzamos con gente peligrosa. Gente que dominaba, gente que dominaba los ríos. La policía no podía entrar. Yo vi cosas horribles cuando yo venía donde la policía se quedaba parada y no hacían nada.

Xiomara speaks about the decision to place herself and children in the hands of extremely dangerous people in order to survive. Let this sink, in order to survive. Sometimes women have decided to leave their children due to the treacherous journey, for Xiomara, due to the violence that her and her children were exposed to in their countries, they had to immigrate together. There are cases in which *coyotes* and *mafias* want to separate children from their parents. On occasions I have heard how difficult this process is, the way in which mothers are questioned for having allowed themselves to be separated from their children, although the reality is that

perhaps they did not even have the option to decide that. It is also important to highlight the social capital available upon arrival and how this is either a form of support or not. During the *pláticas* for *perseverancia*, Basilia Esperanza shares:

Desde el momento que nosotros cruzamos, ósea desde el momento que nosotros nos entregan a esos coyotes, nosotros para ellos somos mercancía, producto. Ósea, nosotros somos dinero. Entonces por eso, ya no nos ven como seres humanos, si no que nos ven como mercadería, que les va a producir dinero. ... Y cuando llegamos ya a la frontera, ya no somos para nosotros. Nosotros somos de las mafias. ... nos exponemos a vivir o morir. ...Y ya nosotros nos mueven ellos por claves. Y no podemos estar con el contrario porque si el otro se da cuenta, nos matan. ...Porque nos entregamos a manos de mafias, donde muchos han muerto. Miles, millones de hermanos. Creo que eso es imposible de definir.

Filled with emotion, as if she was back in that moment, Basilia Esperanza talks about the ways that they are ripped of their humanity and value once they are in the hands of these *coyotes*. *Mujeres* crossing are at even higher stakes for being abused. Basilia Esperanza unveils the shifts of power that take place amongst the *coyotes* and the *mafias* upon her arrival to the US border.

4b. *Proteccion y Compañerismo Durante el Cruze* [**Protection and Companionship During the Crossing**]

Proteccion y Compañerismo Durante el Cruze [Protection and Companionship During the Cruze] is a subtheme of community researchers in-transit journey that illuminates concepts of *compañerismo* and *acompañamiento* during their immigration journey. There are times when community researchers shared about wanting to give up, and someone that they were traveling with held their water, gave them *animos*, or reminded them of how far they had come on their

journey. During the resistencia *pláticas* Marcela shared more about the cramps that she vividly remembers, and dives more into the support that she received from others that she was traveling with, often strangers:

Yo decía a veces, es que ya no puedo, ya no puedo, pero me decían mis compañeros no, vamos, vamos, y me ayudaban a veces con el galón de agua o con la mochila, y total, que ellos me ayudaron y me daban esas palabras de aliento. Yo crucé dos veces el desierto.

Marcela started this journey with her cousin who she mentioned throughout all levels of her immigration journey. Even though Marcela embarked on her immigration journey with her cousin, the hardships of this journey still required her to join others for survival. Not all immigrants have the experience of traveling with at least one other person that they know and trust. For some *mujeres* their *compañerismo* and *proteccion* came about in the form of people in power within the detention centers. During the *pláticas* on *perseverancia* Basilia Esperanza shared:

Yo estaba llorando en la celda y ahí me dijo el que porque lloraba. ... “Quería hablarles, porque no saben nada de donde estoy, ya vamos por cuarenta y ocho horas que no nos comunicamos. “No te preocupes, deme el número, ven ahorita”, me dijo. Esa persona para mí fue un ángel y me dijo “No te preocupes, hija, tú te quedas aquí, con tu estatus ya es posible”, me dijo, “dame tu número, ahorita se lo marcó.” Y esa persona fue un chicano, si nos atendió muy bien. Ahí fue cuando me sentí, quizás el perseverar a alcanzar el sueño, lo había logrado. Porque esa persona sí me dio los ánimos que necesitaba. Y me dijo, “no tú te quedas, aquí”, me dijo, “tú vas para Atlanta, y tú te quedas en Atlanta.”

Basilia Esperanza discusses the support that she received once she was inside the detention center. She also discusses the oppressive and racist treatment that she received from other people in power within the detention center. Basilia Esperanza refers to a Chicano within the detention center as her angel for allowing her to make a call to her family. *El Chicano* became a symbol of faith and encouragement.

4c. *Me Dijeron Vas Para Un Lugar Mejor: Liberacion Ficticia* [**They Told Me You're Going to A Better Place: Fictional Liberation**]

Me Dijeron Vas Para Un Lugar Mejor: Liberacion Ficticia [They Told Me You're Going To A Better Place: Fictional Liberation] is a subtheme of in-transit immigration journey, directing attention to community researchers experiences within the detention centers. Deborah and Basilia Esperanza bring to the fore experiences of humiliation, survivor mentality, and duration. *Liberacion Ficticia* or Fictional Liberation was birthed because of community researchers escaping the violence, humiliations, and trauma, only to enter other inhumane spaces. During the *pláticas* on *resistencia*, Deborah shared:

Cuando estaba en la cárcel yo duré 5 meses nadie pagaba mis finanzas, empecé a servir porque algo de lo que yo nací mi identidad es servir a los demás y yo creo que eso fue que diosito me clasificó y entonces yo me recuerdo que cuando yo empecé en la cárcel después de tanto proceso que yo pasé empecé a buscar trabajo y en la cocina porque yo tenía cuatro meses ya yo no sabía si iba a salir porque ya había firmado la deportación 6 veces no salía en el sistema nadie pagaba mis finanzas cuando el juez me dice no tengo otra opción no hay refugio disponible así que tienes que estar aquí.

During the *pláticas* on *perseverancia*, Deborah continued to share about her experiences in the detention center regarding unwarranted sexual advances. She places emphasis on the tools

that she accessed to survive inside, such as taking on jobs inside of the detention center to remove herself from danger. Deborah brings light to the length of time that she had to spend in the detention center due to the logistics of deportation and her not qualifying for an asylum status. The paperwork that is needed to qualify for an asylum status is extensive. The odds are against women who decide to flee violence. It is also important to take into account the barriers and fear that exist when *mujeres* have to file reports on violence that they've endured. Basilia Esperanza illuminates the extreme hardships in the detention centers that made her want to go back to El Salvador, even after having endured so much during the in-transit immigration process. During the *pláticas* on *resistencia*, Basilia Esperanza shared:

A mi me dijeron vas para un lugar mejor, me dijeron cuando me tenían en la hielera. ... Y me llevaron para una cárcel a guardarme ahí... Las hieleras son unos contenedores donde tienen mucha gente y ahí está súper frío, y lo único que te dan para que te tapen son como unas sábanas de papel aluminio... Fue fatal, igual caminé un desierto, y pues al final de una cárcel estoy donde estoy.

5. *Posmigración: La Lucha es Permitida* [**Post-Immigration: The Fight is Allowed**]

This theme *Posmigración: La Lucha es Permitida* [Post-Immigration: The Fight is Allowed] discusses the ability to continue moving forward despite the challenges and the enthusiasm to get ahead. Places an emphasis on the effort and sacrifice needed to achieve your goals. During the *pláticas* about *superación*, Debora discusses:

Cada foto significa el proceso de que nos vamos superando y que vamos saliendo de una etapa diferente a otra etapa que es un comienzo parala palabra superarse no es estar en lo mismo... es cada día superarse y salir de un nivel a otro nivel. Ese es el significado de la foto para mi.

Deborah makes sense of the term *superarse*, by sharing that it is the process of going from one level to the next. This meaning was elicited through the pictures that were provided by community researchers which showed a sunrise, bags with food, and books. During the plática regarding *resistencia*, Basilia Esperanza brings attention to willpower and strength that *mujeres* possess as she describes what she sees through the pictures provided for that photovoice assignment:

Para mí los hombres son resistentes porque ellos tienen fuerza, músculo, pero nosotros tenemos voluntad y corazón para seguir adelante.

Basilia Esperanza reflects on *mujeres* ability to get ahead. She describes the strength of men as merely physical strength while *mujeres* have willpower and the ability to be resistant.

During the pláticas about *superación*, Xiomara shared:

Para mí cuando veo las imágenes um la manera de superación para mí es levantarse cada día en la mañana con la mente en grande creyendo y sabiendo que cada día que nos levantamos puede ser mejor que el día de ayer. Eh lo que podemos ver lo que yo puedo ver en las imágenes de mi manera personal es de que todos podemos lograr superarnos eh ya sea económicamente, nuestro nivel de estudio, eh en nuestra vida personal, en la manera en como pensamos, con solo que no nos dejemos derrotar verdad a veces por las circunstancias que sigamos insistiendo en no darnos por vencido y en tratar de lograr algo, un objetivo al cual .. porque todos tenemos un objetivo en la vida verdad, que nos lleve a una superación. Y esa última foto donde está esa manita eh no se eso si me conmueve mi corazón eh para se me reflexiona enfrentar una adversidad y ponerse por encima de ella es una forma de superación cuando pasamos momentos difíciles.

Xiomara reflects on the photovoice images and shares that she sees all that can be accomplished when one does not allow themselves to be defeated. Xiomara shared that moving forward economically, academically, and personally is possible if one carries on.

5a. No nos Tenemos que Quedar Estancados [We Don't Have to Stay Stuck]

The theme *No nos Tenemos que Quedar Estancados* [We don't have to stay stuck] gives prominence to the daily realities of *mujeres inmigrantes* living in Georgia. The daily choice of living in the shadows or to risk their freedom by making the decision to drive or simply market their skills. During the *pláticas* examining the strengths and growth areas of their experiences post-immigration Basilia Esperanza shared:

Pues yo prácticamente. Yo desde que vine yo llegué a Georgia aquí en Athens. Y pues yo veo que o sea que es bien complicado lo de las licencias y yo no puedo manejar. O sea, yo nunca he agarrado un carro, yo dependo absolutamente de mi esposo, porque yo nunca he agarrado un carro por miedo, por miedo a la policía, porque yo tengo mi proceso migratorio, no quiero tener problemas, pues hace poco nos pasó que nos paró un policía, se los voy a comentar. ...Bendito sea Dios en esa corte. A mi esposo le dieron la oportunidad de tramitar una licencia de otro estado.

Basilia Esperanza speaks to the chains and the continued lack of opportunities to freedom that she is still tied to even when she is no longer in jail. She still must live in the shadows with limited access, which keeps her in a dependent state on others in order to not disrupt her immigration process as an asylee. While Basilia Esperanza is being grateful for the opportunity that the judge has given her husband, she is also unveiling the reality that Georgia, an immigrant hostile state makes it impossible to obtain a driver's license. This is only one of the many risks of

living without documentation in Georgia. As is illustrated during the *pláticas* examining the strengths and growth areas of their experiences post-immigration Violeta shared:

Es un poquito complicado tramitar licencia con respecto a otros estados, porque yo tengo familiares en Maryland y pues la mayoría tiene licencia. Tengo familia en California e incluso ya tienen hasta papeles, tienen permiso y todo yo digo como le harán y no es cosa de que no podría decir que sea suerte. Podrá ser que es una bendición de Dios, que ellos tienen eso, ellos viajen. Y lo bueno cuando hay personas que lo usan para poder ayudar a otros. Que ayudan, que es en muchas áreas. Pero si me enfoco aquí en el estado de Georgia. No sé, creo que es muy complicado poder tramitar una licencia acá.

In earlier *pláticas*, Violeta expressed the ways in which she had attributed the fear of driving without a driver's license as a reflection of her weakness. Here she adds to Basilia Esperanzas experiences in having to look elsewhere, outside of Georgia to obtain a driver's license. Violeta goes beyond the driver's license and discusses access to documentation for family members outside of the state. This does not mean that individuals cannot obtain a status of residency in Georgia, and she draws attention to the quickness of this process.

5b. *Proceso de Adaptación Cultural: No Estoy Aya, Estoy Aca* [Cultural Adaptation: I'm Not There, I'm Here]

The major theme *Proceso de Adaptación Cultural: No Estoy Aya, Estoy Aca* [Cultural Adaptation: I'm not there, I'm here] focuses on retaining their cultural values and traditions while adjusting to a new country. Deborah shared:

A veces es muy difícil dejar nuestro país porque nacemos, y pues nuestra niñez, nuestra cultura y metas. Nunca tuve ese deseo de dejar y venir a estados unidos, nunca ni se me pasaba por la mente. Tenia mi negocio y una vez que uno quiere sobresalir, ciertas

circunstancias, entonces el deseo de superarse y el deseo de salir adelante y esos fueron los motivos por los cuales inmigre a este país.

Deborah brings attention to the difficulties of leaving the country you love, your culture, and goals. Deborah brings light to the reality that immigrant women have full lives before they make the decision to immigrate. Not every woman is coming to the US for a better financial life, for some its survival and they leave their entire successful lives behind. Violeta shared:

Yo estoy viviendo acá en el estado de Georgia, olvidando todo lo que es de mi país, porque ya no, estoy allá, estoy acá. Entonces todas las experiencias que les estoy contando yo las estoy viviendo aquí en Georgia y es totalmente diferente, pero es bueno cuando hay cosas nuevas por aprender y siempre vamos a estar aprendiendo día con día y es bueno que nuestros pequeños sean inculcados de la mejor manera, con buenos principios éticos, morales y sociales.

Violeta highlights the process of forgetting and adjusting to a new country because she is no longer there, she is here. She shares that while living in a new country is hard there are always new things that she is learning and that she can instill in her children.

5c. Estilo de Crianza y Educacion para los Niños [Parenting Style and Education for Children]

The theme *Estilo de Crianza y Educacion para los Niños* draws attention to community researchers expressed concerns about the future of children. There is a comparison to how children used to be and how they are now, and the need to connect children to their cultural roots. Xiomara shared:

Para mí la fortaleza de la comunidad del lugar donde vivimos, son los niños. ...Entonces yo pienso de que la manera en cómo criamos a nuestros hijos es algo que influye hacia la

comunidad, porque ellos son el futuro de mañana... Hay modo de inculcar todas esas raíces que se están perdiendo hoy en día.

Xiomara brings to light some of her observations regarding children's behaviors and the shifts in parenting. Xiomara expresses that children will be the future and the importance of reconnecting children back to cultural practices that are being lost due to the use of video games. Violeta adds to the conversation by sharing:

Si lo que mi compañera, expuso, es algo aceptable... La educación no está en una escuela, no está en una iglesia, sino que está en un hogar... Entonces yo digo bueno, y no, no como padre, no, no dejemos la carga que a nosotros nos corresponda llevar a otras personas, sino que enfocados aquí en Georgia tenemos que trabajar nosotros desde el hogar, porque nuestros hijos ya tienen algo, por decirlo así. Ellos han nacido aquí, ellos son el futuro lo tienen aquí entonces. Tenemos que irlos educando para que mañana, pues uno no vaya a sufrir y no decir bueno, yo no lo corregí. Yo no le enseñé. No, no podíamos decir eso, sino que enfocarnos en educarlos bien, prepararlos bien.

Violeta adds to the plática by centering the need to take responsibility for children's education and not only leaving it to the schools. She brings to light that for some their children were born here and they are the future.

6. Mujeristas: La Union Comunitaria Hace la Fuerza [**Mujeristas: Community Union Makes Strength**]

The major theme *Mujeristas: La Union Comunitaria Hace la Fuerza* [Mujeristas: Community union makes strength] capture the act of empowering yourself and others long term. It comes with inspiration, inner growth and investment in self and community. It is the collective education, advocacy, celebration, and representation with a focus on providing support to the

community. Some of the community researchers are highly involved in their communities. Given their experiences throughout their immigration journey and other parts of their lives, they have rooted thoughts in giving back to the community. They give because they know what it is like to now have certain access due to their status, and in some cases some of the community researchers go out of their way to provide to those in need. The *espíritu of union comunitaria* reminds me of *el dicho, has bien y no mires a quien*. Marcela reflected on a time when *le hecho la mano*:

Gracias a dios, que dios me da la oportunidad de por medio de mi trabajo ayudar a otras personas cuando lo necesitan o comida, o algo. Yo siempre les comparto, por ejemplo, llevo una muchacha de Colombia buscando trabajito y yo dije, no pues vente, te voy a dar. Aquí, te voy a pagar, ayúdame. Y así es mi forma de ayudar, porque yo sé que llegar a este país cuesta... Así es mi forma de empoderar, llegué y así fui yo resolviendo mis problemas, trabajando duro. Y entonces es mi forma de decirle, no te desespere. Vas a ver vas a salir adelante, ahorita estas pasando por esta situación, pero después vas a estar bien bendecida.

Marcela illuminates the ways that *hechar la mano* does not necessarily mean that you yourself do not need the support, but that she understands what it feels like to arrive to a host country. As is illustrated, Marcela supported a *mujer* from Colombia by giving her a job, even if that meant taking away from her profits for that time. For some of the community researchers they did not have access to social capital upon their arrival and had to find a community to call their own. Marcela reflects on the ways that she likes to engage in *empoderamiento*. She shares some of the *palabras de alientos* that she gives others whenever they doubt if they will make it. Marcela talks about lifting others' spirits. This is a common practice; she is using her own

experiences to share with others that they too can make it. Deborah shares more about her own self-empowerment journey:

Yo dije si voy a quedar aquí yo desde aquí puedo cumplir mis objetivos y mis sueños y empecé a soñar y empecé a dar clases de hilo o sea de manualidades de bordados y las oficiales me traían las telas o lo que íbamos a ocupar y empecé a soñar tanto que soñé que yo le diga adiós uno de mis grandes objetivos si yo salgo de este lugar es crecer al otro lado bueno eso dicen que el otro lado cuando uno ya está dentro y uno de mis grandes objetivos fue ayudar a la comunidad a las mujeres a los niños incluso a las mujeres que no es representada y yo aprendí todo lo que valore en la cárcel miraba todas las mujeres porque allá uno conoce muchas mujeres con diferentes problemas con diferentes circunstancias y una de las objetivos.

Deborah continues to discuss the ways that she survived in the jail. For example, Deborah started a skills class where she taught other women embroidery. This is a good example of the ways that Deborah as well as other community researchers have used their skills to continue to empower themselves and others around them even during some of their most difficult moments.

Xiomara added:

Yo siempre aconsejo a las personas y les digo de que como decía la otra señora o sea todo lo podemos lograr el estar acá todos nuestros sueños nuestras metas aún gente que es inmigrante aún no cumple verdad y otros que tenemos la oportunidad de tener papeles pues esta se nos hace un poquito más fácil pero este yo creo de que no hay nada que nos pueda detener sin de cumplir nuestros sueños al al estar en este país.

Xiomara recalls the messages that she gives others. She makes the distinction of challenges that people without documentation may face when compared with people who are

documented. Xiomara makes it a point to share that regardless of documentation she likes to share that nothing is holding them back since this country is one where dreams can be attained. During the *pláticas* pertaining to *Fortalezas y áreas de crecimiento* Violeta recalls a time when she was able to help others in need in the community:

Pues voy a hablar. Lo que nos hace falta a veces aquí. Pues, muchas veces si hablamos en lo personal, muchas veces falta ética. Y a veces el compromiso a las necesidades de la comunidad. Y sobre todo el respeto. Pues. Ante todo. Y si analizamos, hay muchas áreas donde se necesita. Ser como dijera. Ayudar a las personas. Hacer que las personas pues obtengan beneficios quizás de una bolsa de alimentos. Nosotros estamos con mi familia. A veces colocamos comida o vamos a buscar en las iglesias donde las dan. Y luego vamos a ayudar a las personas que son, que necesitan, que necesitan alimentos, que los niños, que los padres de familia no tienen a veces que comer. Este domingo antepasado fuimos a una iglesia y nos donaron mucha comida, frutas. Entonces nosotros fuimos a la comunidad, a las áreas de aquí de Georgia, a repartir la comida y un padre de familia nos dijo. Estaba él muy triste. Nos dijo, si yo no tenía nada que comer. El transcurso de esta semana me dijo yo no tengo nada. Y estaba yo, mi esposo y otro muchacho que nos acompañó. No tengo nada que comer y luego no estoy trabajando porque no hay quien cuide de mi pequeño. Nadie cuida a mi hijo, nadie se quiere hacer cargo de cuidarlo. Pues yo te lo te podría decir que yo puedo cuidar a tu niño. El asunto es que yo vivo a una hora y media de acá y luego con el tráfico, a veces hasta dos horas, le dije yo pero si puedo yo voy a buscar a alguien donde tú puedes dejar a tu niño y luego tu trabajas. Sí, me dijo que recientemente llegué a la casa de Georgia, vive en él y me dice no sé cómo y no tengo comida y a veces las personas yo les pido y no me dan y lo que me dicen

trabaja. Eres hombre, tienes manos, tienes pies, trabaja y no conocen mi situación en la que yo estoy, me dijo. Y yo le digo por eso digo que a veces es falta de respeto, pues que nos respetemos y que, que comprendemos a las personas también. En el estado que están. Que, si no hay alimentos sino y una forma que en otros podemos colaborar haciendo un grupo de personas, ir a buscar a las iglesias o donde dan las comida y llevarle a esas personas, llevarle a esos niños que se alimenten. Y eso es hacer algo diferente por nuestra comunidad.

Violeta addresses an area of need in more support with food banks and support to families and reflects on the ways that her and her family give back to the community by obtaining food from food banks through churches and other community spaces to then share this with other families in need. Violeta goes beyond the need for food security and directs attention to childcare for caregivers to be able to go to work. In this section Violeta also brings attention to the gender roles that keep men from obtaining the support that they need. Violeta provides some actionable steps that are needed in the community. During the *plática* on *superación* Deborah touches on the need to come out of the shadows in the community and let it be known that they are present:

Me identifico con eso de empoderar a la comunidad, ayudar a la comunidad. Va conmigo, me encanta servir, me encanta ayudar. Este tema es tan importante porque pues a veces, ya estás en Estados Unidos, necesitamos pues, desarrollarnos, darnos conocer... Solamente es que nosotros debemos de educarnos primero para así poder educar a la comunidad.

Deborah elaborates on her calling in the community to engage in community events that not only uplift her and the Salvadoran community, but also other Latin American countries. She

recalls and event that she hosted to process passports for people in the community, to her surprise there was a great need. Lastly, she highlights the need to take advantage of the opportunities available in the United States.

6a. *Problemas de Liderazgo en la Comunidad* [**Leadership Issues in the Community**]

While there were multiple areas of strengths identified in the community, mostly related to the ways that community researchers and engaged in advocacy, they were able to identify some areas of growth, more specifically in community leadership. During the *fortalezas y áreas de crecimiento pláticas* Deborah elaborated on her experiences in the community and shed light on the shortcomings and absent promises of community leaders. Deborah shared:

Yo pienso que todos los países tenemos oportunidades de desarrollar miles de trabajos, tanto los gobiernos, pero el problema es que los objetivos no se cumplen, de desarrollo en las comunidades. Porque, si vamos a hablar de las personas que están arriba de nosotros, que nos representan a nosotros, no están preparados para lidiar con millones de problemas que tiene la comunidad. Uno, no están preparado para servir, en desarrollar, en tener habilidad de desarrollar miles de objetivos, o trabajos en nuestros países. Entonces, y cuando, llega eso, como dicen cuando alguien entra en poder “se olvidó de las promesas.” entonces ellos se meten en la cabeza a lo del dinero, lo de la finanza y se olvide de la gente de la gente que tienen que representar. Por ejemplo, yo puedo hablar de aquí de la ciudad porque yo vivió acá. Y yo, y si usted no sale a la calle, si usted no conoce la derecha, digamos la izquierda o diferentes organizaciones que nos representan a nosotros, si nosotros no salimos, nunca vamos a ver los problemas de la comunidad.

As Deborah reflects on the leadership challenges, she provides some action steps and encourages others during these *pláticas* to go out in their community and make it known that they are there. Deborah also highlights on the ways that this challenges in leadership exist everywhere and are not only particular to Georgia. Violeta adds:

Eso sería bien si hay organizaciones a veces que se enfocan en eso, pero lo que más se ve acá, bueno, lo que yo puedo observar, todo está enfocado en un negocio. Casi siempre es eso o haciendo publicidad a esto y lo otro, pero es poco a veces del interés.

Violeta discusses the challenges that develop when community leaders make the focus of the support that they are providing a business.

6b. *Necesidades en Nuestra Comunidad* [**Needs in our Community**]

In this subtheme the community researchers highlight their observations of the needs in their community. They also provide some action steps and suggest ways that these needs can be addressed. Deborah recalls a conversation with youth in the community and based on their expressed needs in the community she provides some suggestions on the ways that community members can be involved in these initiatives:

Yo recorrí, un par de días de esta semana, la ciudad. Conocí, hablé con niños, les pregunté ¿Y qué quieres hacer? “Mi hermano mayor anda en las drogas, pero yo quiero pintar, yo quiero arte.” Y hay deportes, entonces, yo pienso que todavía hay tiempo para hacer muchas cosas. Es de acercarlos a los lideres que representan a nuestra comunidad y abrir, y decir “mira, la comunidad necesita, la niñez necesita esto.” Que tú me puedes aportar para yo hacer un grupo de deporte, un grupo de arte, un grupo de pintura, y exponer a estos niños que están en manos de personas que los están llevando a las drogas, que los están llevando a las pandillas. Entonces yo sé que todavía se puede, par

así, evitamos de emigra a otro país digamos. Evitamos de miles de problemas. Ese es mi punto de vista, yo pienso que todavía se puede hacer algo por cambiar. Yo sé que es difícil, pero tampoco imposible, pero esa es mi manera de pensar, por lo que yo miro. Bueno, puedo hablar de donde es mi ciudad, de mi lugar de donde yo vivo. No soy ciudadana americana, pero yo sé que todos necesitamos proyectarlos y enseñarle a la niñez a lugar sus objetivos, limpios, sin droga, sin pandilla. Buscando a la gente que no puede representarte, buscando la que encuentre tratamiento psicológico para que ellos puedan ser el futuro de la nación. Esa es mi manera de pensar.

Deborah promotes the message that they have already immigrated to a different country to have a better experience and lifestyle and highlights the importance of doing the work here to keep from having to go elsewhere later for a better life. She suggests that community members are approached to share with them the needs in the community to see how they can support the needs of the community. Xiomara shared:

Cuando me refiero a que contaminan a personas que son indocumentadas, es porque esta es una de las raíces por las cuales sale mucha droga., por ejemplo a mi me ha pasado, yo que soy indocumentada, yo una vez trate de buscar ayuda para que me dieran food stamps para mis hijos cuando recién vinimos y no notan verdad? A pesar de que los niños están pequeños, a pesar que los niños están asistiendo a escuelas, no existe esos beneficios para un niño indocumentado, lo cual yo pienso que debería de ser una ayuda que deberían de dar a la comunidad y a todos estos niños. Este. A eso me refería yo con esa foto. Verdad que personas así tienen más beneficios que nosotros y que niños que entran al país indocumentados y a veces uno pues es cuando más necesitas ayuda.

Xiomara rises the concern of homelessness in her community and the presence of drugs in the community. She recalls a time when her and her children needed food stamps and were denied the support due to an undocumented status. Xiomara shares her difficulties with understanding why people that are using drugs are getting benefits over here and her children who needed food. Basilia Esperanza shared:

Repartamos un poquito de lo que tenemos en nuestra comunidad. Pero yo creo que si no muchas personas estamos ahorita enfocadas en solo nosotros, solo nosotros en el egoísmo. No es para poder ayudar a nuestra comunidad necesitamos dejar de ser egoístas y pensar en todos los demás, en todas las personas que nos necesitan. Porque hemos venido de un país. Pero el problema acá es que muchas veces hay personas que se aprovechan también de la situación. Entonces se aprovechan, pero para ayudar a una comunidad. Yo pienso, Que Fuera bueno. Amor propio, dejar el egoísmo, tener temor a Dios un poco, porque si no tenemos temor a Dios no hay nada. Solo así podemos ayudar a instituciones, organizaciones, lo que sea.

Basilia Esperanza focuses attention on what community members can do on an individual level. She expressed the need to help each other within the community instead of taking advantage of each other. It is not likely to have Latino based services such as dealerships increase the prices of cars or interest rates as they know that undocumented people in Georgia may not be able to access loans. Violeta expressed:

Tal vez a los inicios nadie nos va a querer escuchar, porque para romper el hielo cuesta. Pero cuando ya te ven todo, ya que te va bien y que está haciendo efecto lo que tú estás llevando hacia la comunidad, se te abren otras organizaciones, quieren apoyarte, quieren ayudarte. Seria bueno llevar a la comunidad a través de charlas, de

capacitaciones como padres. Llevando valores, como temas que se relacionan entre padres e hijos, la buena comunicación. Temas así para evitar que un joven, una niña, vaya a temprana edad, quizás a una, a una cárcel o a un hospital, o sea, evitar todo eso. ... Entonces sería bonito que uno trabajara en la comunidad enfocados en eso.

First Violeta shares the challenges that can come when proposing a new idea or project in the community, and hopefully suggests that eventually some doors open, and people are willing to listen. Violeta discusses the need to have more community support that focuses on parenting, more specifically related to communication.

6c. El Amor Propio [Self-Love]

The subtheme, *El Amor Propio* centers the need to take care of oneself prior to engaging in the care of others. Throughout all of the *pláticas* the drive to lend a helping hand to others has been prominent. As *mujeres*, they didn't only put the needs of their family and children at the forefront, but also the needs of their community. Basilia Esperanza shared:

Porque yo soy una mujer que vino de El Salvador, con fuerza logré llegar donde estoy. ... Gracias a Dios estamos en un país de oportunidades. Muchas personas las aprovechan. Aprovechan cada minuto, cada segundo con las personas que uno quiere. Eso para mí es muy importante. Para mí eso es muy importante porque venimos de otro país y estamos aquí. Hay que saber premiar el tiempo. Y apreciar el tiempo que Dios nos presta. Pero si para mí lo pienso, bueno, yo ahorita pienso que, si un cerebro piensa bien y un corazón es bueno, puede ayudar a muchas personas. Pero primero hay que ayudarse a uno mismo, porque si uno no se ayuda a uno mismo, no se ama a uno mismo, no le puede dar amor a otras personas. Tenemos que empezar por el amor propio y acordémonos que el tiempo no perdona, el tiempo va pasando. Ese es mi punto de vista.

Basilia Esperanza reflects on her strength as a *mujer* who came from El Salvador and expresses the need to take advantage of the time that God gives people. Basilia Esperanza makes the connection between the mind, body, spirit and stresses the need to love oneself to be able to give love to others. Deborah shares:

Debemos ser mujeres empoderadas, primero empoderar nuestra familia, nuestra salud, nuestros sentimientos, y nuestra manera de pensar. Que empoderemos nuestro territorio, nuestra ciudad, que nos demos a conocer.

Deborah draws attention to the need to empower women, engage in empowerment of her family, health, and feelings. Deborah goes beyond the empowerment and care of self and family and extends to the community.

Community Forum

The researcher will be hosting a community forum with community researchers where they have decided to present to a couple of community stakeholders that they have identified in the process. Community researchers have also shared that they would like to have their families present “*para que vean nuestro trabajo.*” The researcher also proposed the Social Justice Symposium as a potential space to present their needs for social change to the community while also learning from others and what they are doing to engage in transformative change. For the community forum, the researcher will follow the lead of the community researchers and explore and support them in presenting their photovoice project in a way that feels safe for them individually and as a collective.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Mujeres inmigrantes from the NTCA face some of the highest rates of gender-based violence in their home countries and oppression and marginalization throughout the immigration journey (e.g., pre-migration, in-transit, and post-migration). To address that gap in research and advance the knowledge of their layered needs in counseling psychology, I explored the lived experiences of *mujeres inmigrantes* from the NTCA. Using *testimonios*, a combination of Mujerista-led Photovoice, and reflective thematic analysis, I explored their immigration experiences, sources of strength, and acquired roles because of their immigration experiences. Counseling psychologists, healers, and community stakeholders have a unique role as those in power who can implement new programs and liberatory practices to support immigrant women. These sanctuary spaces can allow immigrants to develop social capital deemed necessary to participate fully in society. However, the voices and *testimonios* of women from the NTC are underrepresented within academic spaces and lesser so in Southeastern new immigrant settler states.

Familismo

As expected, connections to *familismo* were especially important for these *mujeres*. Family, especially their children, provide the community researchers with the strength to mitigate societal stressors and the will to *salir adelante*. Such *testimonios* illuminated the gendered transnational parenting expectations of *mujeres*, encompassing caregiving and being

breadwinners(Silva et al., 2022; Miranda, et al., 2005). During the pláticas community researchers shared the factors that impacted their decision to immigrate to the United States.

Partir para sobrevivir is an accurate description that represents these women's *testimonios*. For some of the women, the decision to immigrate was to be able to provide a better future for their children back home, while for others, it was the need to escape violent situations. Values of *familismo* continue to be present throughout the varying phases of immigration. The researcher found that pre-migration factors (e.g., family and escaping violence) served as sources of strength during the in-transit migration journey when community researchers experienced defeat that resulted in thoughts of discontinuing their immigrant journeys (Minero et al., 2021) due to the cumulative impacts of heinous circumstances that they experience along their journeys. Sometimes, they reminded themselves how close they were and how they could support their family if they made it to the host country. For others, it was a life-or-death situation, so while pre-immigration factors were not pleasant at times, they served as a source of strength to push forward for a better future for themselves, family, and their communities.

Discrimination and Racism

Nevertheless, in all cases, themes of discrimination and racism emerged, impacting the lived experiences of *mujeres* from the NTCA during their in-transit and post-immigration lived experiences. For some community researchers, these experiences happened while they were in the hands of ICE agents within detention centers, unveiling the inhumane experiences women and other immigrants lived through upon their arrival to the host country. Immigrant enforcement officials exert power within their roles and institutions despite witnessing first-hand the tumultuous journeys some women face pre-detainment. However, they offer limited empathy and continue to perpetuate and enact violent behaviors like the ones *mujeres* encountered along

their journey. For other community researchers, discrimination and racism were daily experiences they had to navigate, accompanied by feelings of weakness, guilt, confusion, and frustration. Although questions about discrimination and racism were not asked directly, community researchers varying levels of critical consciousness allowed them to reflect on the impacts of racism and discrimination. For some, this included having first-hand experiences living in states with the least restrictive immigration policies and having family members residing in more liberal states that provided more opportunities for legal citizenship, thus illuminating stark differences in racism and discrimination.

Psychospirituality

Mujeres explained how their sources of strength and resilience also derived from their faith in God. Most community researchers expressed spiritual and religious affiliations that helped them forge through their immigrant journeys. Throughout the photovoice project, community researchers often mentioned their faith in God as a source of strength. *Fe en Dios* was woven into all the phases of their immigration journey. *Fe en Dios* was especially salient during their in-transit immigration journey amplifying the resilience within them. In seeking the support of God, it is evident how community researchers utilized and remained rooted in their psychospirituality to derive strength and fortitude. Reaching and abiding by their faith in God was necessary because without such support in their journey would be too detrimental to their well-being. The *testimonios* provided during the *pláticas* also illustrated the pain and agony community researchers experienced through their migration journeys. Amid the adversity, community researchers could still join forces with other people on this immigration journey to find and provide support. Their experiences during the in-transit immigration journey will later influence their desire to enact certain roles in their communities.

Upon completion of this study community researchers shared the following words of wisdom with potential community members and providers that would be reading their *testimonios*: "*Para todo ahí una reconpenza, debemos de luchar siempre y todo se puede,*" "*Todo lo que nos proponemos lo podemos lograr,*" "*Cada mujer es brillante y tiene su propia luz,*" and "*Todos pasamos por momentos difíciles pero poniendo nuestros esferzo, con ayuda professional podemos salir adelante.*"

Limitations and Future Directions

The findings of this study must be seen in light of some limitations. The first is related to the relationships already present among participants. Even though the researcher engaged in several recruitment efforts in areas outside of northeast Georgia, most community researchers were from the same town. Four of the women had pre-existing relationships. These pre-existing relationships sometimes create questions about safety. On two occasions, the researcher was contacted by two different community researchers concerning confidentiality. The researcher revisited the informed consent and reminded both community researchers of the limits of confidentiality, especially in a group. The women continued to participate in the group with an understanding that they could stop participating at any point and that they could also contact the researcher to discuss continued concerns about safety.

The *mujerista*-led photovoice sessions were conducted via Zoom. Traditionally, *testimonios* are gathered in person as this aligns with Latinx cultural values of cultivating *confianza* and *personalismo*. Engaging in the *mujerista*-led photovoice sessions via Zoom limited the observations of body language and emotionality as mujeres had the option of turning off their cameras and placing themselves on mute during certain *pláticas*. The community researchers shared that their cameras were turned off because they were taking care of their

children in the background, and in some cases, the *mujeres* were in and out of the session due to technology issues. Having the pláticas via Zoom did lead to some disruptions in the flow of the *testimonios*. It is important to know that, regardless of these disruptions, the woman shared and encouraged each other, which created a space for vulnerability.

Third, the study focused on recruiting from marginalized and oppressed populations, which required care and thoughtful consideration. The researcher collaborated with trusted women in the community to recruit community researchers from the NTC. The researcher engaged in recruitment via social media platforms; family friends attended swap meets to hand out recruitment flyers and placed flyers at Central American restaurants. The recruitment flyer was shared at a Spanish-speaking serving mental health institution. The initial goal of the study was to capture the testimonios of *mujeres* who immigrated to Georgia from Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador. Despite lengthy recruitment, three Honduran women could not participate in the photovoice sessions due to scheduling and conflict with their jobs.

As a result, the voices of Honduran *mujeres* were not captured in this study. Through the *testimonios* of other *mujeres* from Guatemala and El Salvador, it was evident that they were also *compañeras* on their treacherous immigration journey. In a recent report, Bermeo and Leblang (2021) bring attention to the rise of apprehensions of Honduran family units between 2012-2019, ranging from 513 to 188,368. The authors highlight the increased violence and food insecurity due to natural disasters as a driving force for the decision to immigrate. Honduran girls and women are also experiencing heightened levels of violence during their in-transit immigration journey. Martinez (2021) unveils the story of a teenage girl who cuts her hair to change her gender expression to fit that of a boy for protection.

There are high proportions of self-identifying Afro-Latinx and Indigenous Hondurans (5.5%), Salvadorans (1.9%), and Guatemalans (1.5%) (Galdámez et al., 2023). Afro-Latinx-identifying *mujeres* were not represented in this study. Experiences of racism and discrimination were brought to light by community researchers during their in-transit and post-immigration experiences. Centering Black Latinidad (2023) notes that Atlanta, GA falls in the top 15 cities with Afro-Latinx concentrations (Galdámez et al., 2023). As a field, we must understand the unique experiences of Afro-Latinx women in Georgia. As a field, we cannot disregard the colorism and racism within the Latinx community and are likely to be continuously present throughout other phases of their immigration journey. Afro-Latinx immigrant women's risk factors transcend beyond identifying as a woman. To illustrate, Gabriel Mendez a 15-year-old at the time of his immigration journey, shares the following experience:

"I was traveling with my good cousin and a dark-skinned young woman who was also trying to get to the United States. She kept getting stared at because there's a lot of racism against people who look different. She was afraid and the stares made her uncomfortable. It was hard to get across the border because of the checkpoints along the road and harder still for the dark-skinned girl to cross the checkpoints because she could not pass as Mexican. We crossed the river from Guatemala to Mexico, and there we had the same problems. A coyote told her, "You won't be able to cross because you are dark-skinned." He said she would get raped along the way and told her not to turn around to look- she could be kidnapped. I didn't like hearing all the stuff they said about her. My cousin told me not to believe him and to always stay together. When we entered Mexico, my cousin left to go back to Honduras." (Mayers & Freedman, 2019, pg. 67)

While Spanish is the most spoken language in the NTCA, other indigenous communities are present throughout NTCA. In some cases, they speak a language other than Spanish creating challenges in access and, to some degree, linguistic discrimination, and racism. Considering the challenges this may pose in transit and post-immigration is important. The internalized messages they have already received pre-immigration are also vital to consider in their daily experiences and access to treatment (Minero et al., 2021; Lykes et al., 2020).

The immigration experiences of transgender women from the NTCA were not captured in this study. Minero and colleagues (2021) explore the immigration experiences of Latinx trans immigrants and brings attention to the differences in treatment and experiences within detention centers. Although the researchers explored the narratives of Latinx trans immigrants in Los Angeles, understanding the experiences of trans immigrants' post-immigration in Georgia would help to inform the specific needs of Georgian immigrant communities. More specifically, we need to understand what spaces are needed and or exist to meet the needs of marginalized and oppressed communities. The researcher understands that connecting to community organizations is vital in gaining trust and that including indigenous, Afro-Latinx, and trans communities in the future will require more time and connection with community members who are already engaged with these communities. Minero and colleagues (2021) highlight the practices of connecting with community organizations where these trans individuals already felt safe.

Implications

Challenging Central American Invisibility

The testimonios of *mujeres* from the NTCA provide a contextualized and necessary understanding of the complex journeys they undergo that go beyond push and pull factors; this study brings to light the ways that *mujeres* from the NTCA need an approach that considers the

exposure to increased and prolonged trauma on their journeys while also centering their strengths and resiliency. Their collective voices challenge their erasure from our field as there are limited studies that explicitly capture *mujeres inmigrantes* from the NTCA journeys (Kaltman et al., 2011) due to the conflation with other ethnic groups (i.e., Mexican women) or under pan-ethnic terms like Latin/ao, Latinx, or Hispanic. The conflation of Central American experiences thus fails to note the distinct sociopolitical, cultural, and migration factors and different levels of trauma that these women have encountered.

The findings of this study suggest that the community researchers embody a *mujerista* spirit rooted in resiliency and post-immigration growth. Their everyday lives are selfless and transcend the needs of the individual, moving towards family and community. Before anything else, community researchers centered the needs of their families nationally and transnationally, such as financial stability, education, and parenting. During the *pláticas* community, researchers discussed their involvement in the community through their participation in food banks, spaces of worship, and events centered on highlighting the strengths of their culture. They stressed the need to come out of the shadows and let the community they live in know that they are there and that their culture is rich. For others, their labor of love centered on providing *apoyo* through spirit-lifting conversations and providing a sense of community and social capital to other women and their families who had just arrived in the United States, specifically in Georgia.

This study aligns with recent research rooted in capturing the experiences of *mujeres inmigrantes* from the NTCA, such as frameworks like VALOR (Values, Arrival in the United States, Losses, Obstacles to care, and Resource) (Silva et al., 2022), which provides key areas to assess and better understand the mental health experiences of *mujeres* from the NTCA and their immigrant realities. Through care and cultural sensitivity, the VALOR framework (Silva et al.,

2022) offers a necessary intervention that acknowledges intraethnic differences in immigration journeys and important factors to assess to offer thus opportunities for providing effective and culturally rooted behavioral care.

Additionally, frameworks like the HEART model (Chavez-Dueñas et al., 2019) are relevant resources that attend to the impacts of ethno-racial trauma within immigrant Latinx communities and emphasize the creation of sanctuary spaces, liberation, and trauma-informed practices. This is especially relevant to apply as the *mujeres' testimonios* illuminated various instances of racism and discrimination that occurred through their migratory journeys and their settlement experiences across various states. Their *testimonios* offer critical insights into how they navigate such realities and their efforts to *sobresalir* despite the continuous threats of their livelihood through systematic oppression via restrictive immigrant policies.

Expanding Liberatory Healing in Psychology

Within psychology, the *testimonios* of *mujeres* from the NTCA illuminate the necessity for the utilization of trauma-informed interventions that allow *mujeres* to transform traumatic experiences and promote liberation and hope. Such endeavors are rooted in our professional values as counseling psychologists (Singh, 2020; Suzuki et al., 2019) and our professional diligence to account for "social, political, and economic contexts" when understanding the challenges faced by immigrant communities (Ruiz et al., 2013). As such, social justice values guide our work as therapists and thus necessitate that we move towards intersectional womanista interventions (Chavez- Dueñas & Adames, 2021), uplift their voices, and overall promote spaces for empowerment. Incorporating transnational frameworks like *I am Womanista* (Chavez- Dueñas & Adames, 2021) is critical to support *mujeres* from the NTCA in understanding gender role socialization while actively promoting their critical womanista consciousness. The

testimonios of the community researchers very much illuminated their fortitude to resist oppressive migratory journeys for a better life rooted in their families and psychospirituality. To further augment the therapeutic benefits for *mujeres* from the NTCA, interventions that promote historical knowledge and critical consciousness can also greatly benefit the healing and resistance of *mujeres*, who may often feel that they are doing this with limited support systems or feel isolated within such processes.

Moreover, the centering of the intersectional identities of many of these *mujeres* is critical as these identities consist of being immigrants, survivors of interpersonal violence, undocumented, and holding varying degrees of status (i.e., refugee versus asylee) that bear different privileges of procedural immigrant protections. Understanding the multilayered and intersectional identities of *mujeres* from the NTCA is thus a necessity that cannot be dismissed as such impacts access to various services. Such was evident with a community researcher who highlighted being privy to family members who were able to live outside of the shadows through access to a work permit or even legal status depending on their settlement state's immigrant policies leading to their comparison of "legal liminality" or the in-between status (Menjivar, 2006) prominent in Georgia preventing *mujeres* from the NTCA from fully integrating into society due to strict anti-immigrant policies. Moreover, it is imperative that we understand the experiences of *mujeres* from the NTCA through a family system understanding as the community researchers illuminated the importance of family and children, navigating transnational mothering (Silva et al., 2022; Miranda et al., 2005) and contending with different parenting practices (Fuentes et al., 2022). Together, a transnational family systems approach that acknowledges the realities of mixed-status families will help us understand the various ways in which *mujeres* from the NTCA make sense of their new identities within the United States,

contend with parenting in a new context, and promote their wishes to retain cultural values amidst pressures to acculturate. Integrating such novel models will allow us to honor the complex and multilayered experiences of *mujeres* from the NTCA rooted in *Mujerista* psychology (Bryant-Davis, & Comas-Díaz, 2016) that attend to the cultural and gendered realities of Latinas and their intersection with documentation status and historical legacies of resistance and oppression (Latina Feminist Group, 2001). *Mujeres* from the NTCA will ultimately have different experiences based on their context of settlement and ongoing socio-political realities, thus impacting their mental health and their opportunities to access mental health services.

This study is rooted in the values of our APA Division 17 Counseling Psychology, which "considers context, systems, and intersecting social identities; center marginalized voices; and address systemic oppression" to center the voices of *mujeres inmigrantes* from the NTCA. Specifically, this study aligns with the counseling psychology values of diversity and social justice (DeBlare et al., 2019) and is grounded in PAR. Utilizing *mujerista*-led photovoice (Mejia et al., 2013), this study amplifies the voices of the community researchers, whom all self-identified as Salvadoran and Guatemalan women, thus challenging the invisibility of *mujeres* from the NTCA experiences. Their knowledge and wisdom were prioritized, and today their *testimonios* inform our profession on the necessity to understand their immigrant and settlement experiences within a context of pain and survival but also one filled with resistance, strength, and fortitude. Moreover, their testimonios will inform systems-level change as these *mujeres* are set to present their findings to identified stakeholders in the community. For safety purposes and continued centering of the voices and needs of these *mujeres*, they have identified trusted community members with whom they would like to share their findings. Through this study, it is

evident that when we use nontraditional methodologies, we make more space for optimal growth and process the realities of crimmigration (Menjívar et al., 2018) and the toll of such racist and discriminatory experiences. The community researchers also explained the vital resources they utilized to make such journeys; *acompañamiento*, community, and psychospiritual fortitude to resist instances of inhumanity. In doing so, community researchers gathered insight into their strengths and their roles in the community as one that makes an impact. Furthermore, with photovoice, the researcher was able to encourage a tool that could be used to tell their stories beyond words, as a result providing a more holistic perspective. Ultimately, their *testimonios* inform our profession on the necessity to understand their immigrant and settlement experiences within a context of pain and survival and one filled with resistance, strength, and fortitude.

Updated Subjectivity

The process of conducting this study alongside *mujeres pensadoras y empoderadas* has illuminated my understanding of the immigration journeys of *mujeres* from the NTCA. More specifically, their strengths and ability to *salir adelante* despite the multi-systemic obstacles. Their overall resiliency as they exist and resist constant uncertainty for themselves, their families, and their communities amazes me.

I was not expecting how connecting to these *mujeres testimonios* would push me to connect even closer to my story as a daughter of Mexican immigrants. I was unprepared to experience the joy, pain, and anger throughout this process. Before engaging in the photovoice process with community researchers, I was integrating into a new space and community in Los Angeles, CA. This was the first time that I had ever left home for a period longer than two months. This was not a vacation, and there were moments when I felt alone, even in having all of my privileges. I was also surprised as I saw my culture so heavily represented, unlike my

experience in Georgia. I had always heard friends and colleagues share their transition from California to Georgia and how difficult it was. There were times when they would ask me, "how do you do it, how do you live in a state that is so racist, how do you live in a state that is so hostile towards of immigrant communities?" My response always comes with, "this is home, Georgia is home." and at the same time, I did not have anywhere else to compare Georgia to. I am still constantly surprised at the access available in California compared to Georgia, which took the forefront as I conducted photovoice sessions with community researchers who were still in Georgia. It mainly came up when they would discuss the experiences of other family members who lived outside of Georgia, had access to a driver's license, or now had their status in the US resolved; they always compare Georgia to another state.

state.

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