

PART THREE

New Immigrants

Introduction to Part 3

Recent years have seen a new wave of immigration to the United States. After plummeting during and after World War II, the number of incoming immigrants began a dramatic rise in the 1960s. In 1985, the influx reached a million for the first time in nearly half a century. Only two decades earlier, in 1965, immigration was less than one-quarter of that magnitude.¹ These new immigrants can be distinguished from their predecessors not only by their numbers, but by their area of origin. Whereas earlier immigrants were overwhelmingly European, the new immigrants come primarily from Asia and Latin America. Despite the salience of this distinction,² both Shiori Ui and Leslie Salzinger emphasize in their essays that culture accounts for few of the ways in which their survival strategies differ from those of groups who preceded them. Instead, both authors insist that the element of new immigrants' experience in this country that most sharply distinguishes it from that of their predecessors is the distinctive structure of constraints and opportunities they encounter upon arrival.

The new wave of immigration can also be distinguished from previous waves by its gender ratio. Whereas men predominated in most earlier immigrations, women tend to predominate in this one.³ This is attributable in part to the fact that war takes a particularly steep toll on men, so that in many cases only women are left to immigrate with their children. However, it is also attributable to the structure of demand in the contemporary U.S. economy. Sassen emphasizes the fact that jobs in two of the most vital sectors of the economy, the state social services sector and the private service sector, are culturally defined as "women's jobs." Thus, she notes the "feminization" of the job supply, linking the predominantly female gender composition of new immigrant flows to

this new structure of demand. Both Ui and Salzinger analyze developments at this crucial nexus between growing numbers of immigrant women and the evolving service economy. Both analyses focus on the evolving structure of constraints and opportunities defined by the state and the private sector and on the impact of this structure on the occupational strategies of immigrant women.

Both authors identify economic and political developments since the mid-1960s, when immigration began to climb once again, as providing the relevant context within which the survival strategies of new immigrants can be understood. During this period, manufacturing jobs moved from the United States to the Third World in growing numbers, eroding opportunities in the sectors that traditionally provided immigrants with jobs. At the same time, some of the major North American cities became centers for new service sector industries, requiring large numbers of support services. Immigrants, who once flooded North American factories, are now feeding and cleaning up after multinational managers coordinating manufacturing in the developing world. Thus, new immigrants face a dramatically different labor market than did their predecessors, one dominated by service rather than by factory jobs.

During this same period, the North American state became directly involved in the provision of ongoing social services for the first time.⁴ The initiation of the War on Poverty signaled a new level of federal intervention and involvement in the lives of its citizens. Community Action and Model Cities Programs brought large numbers of federally funded professionals into the cities to work with, and on, the poor. Despite the erosion of funding for these programs in recent years, these developments have fundamentally shifted the relationship of the state to those in need, creating an apparatus designed and expected to develop services as well as distribute individual subsidies.

As a result of these developments, new immigrants encounter a fundamentally different state than did their predecessors. Today, American foreign policy determines not only who enters the country,⁵ but their access to welfare and social service programs after arrival. Thus, the relationship of new immigrant groups to the emerging service economy is fundamentally mediated by their relationship to the state and by their ability or inability to improve their market situation through the use of state services. In the following section, Ui focuses on a group that has been legally defined as a refugee population — Cambodians — whereas Salzinger discusses a group that has not been so defined — Central Americans. The impact of this designation is dramatically highlighted in the contrasting survival strategies of the two groups.

Ui looks at the emergence of female leaders in a Cambodian enclave in Northern California and identifies the conditions that allowed for this apparently unprecedented development. Because Cambodian refugee status provides them with access to state services, the structure of these services emerges as a crucial element in her account, explaining both the presence of an ethnic enclave in the first place and women's access to extrafamilial resources within it. Salzinger looks at two internally diverse Latina domestic worker cooperatives. She asks what accounts for the presence of even middle-class women in these jobs and what accounts for the divergent attitudes of women in the two groups toward domestic work. Because Latina women do not have refugee status, they are not shielded from the market by the presence of the state. As a result, in her analysis the growing service economy emerges as the relevant context within which the occupational strategies of immigrant domestic workers can be understood.

Although the two authors emphasize different contexts, both focus on the way in which the community configuration and survival strategies of new immigrants respond to possibilities and limits defined by the state and the economy in the United States today. However, both Ui and Salzinger are ultimately interested in immigrants as agents: in their capacity to use preexisting structures of constraint and opportunity to create lives they can live with. Thus, both authors highlight the way in which new immigrants shape the world around them, molding the limits of possibility in an increasingly familiar world.

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