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## Gender, social capital and political participation in the barrio

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**Abstract:** American barrios and ghettos have been overlooked because of their low capacity for mobilization. In particular, barrio residents have been considered to be either culturally or structurally unable to participate. The use of such concepts as the culture of poverty, the underclass or the internal colony has maintained a vision of these segregated spaces as non-political. Indeed, low voter registration and turnout, the lack of party campaigning, and a large proportion of disenfranchised Latino origin individuals may characterize the barrio (high proportion of undocumented migrants, low rate of naturalization, low socioeconomic attainment). However, extensive qualitative fieldwork in the San Diego's inner-city barrio (California) shows that although the barrio is not at the core of conventional politics, unorthodox forms of participation are present. In fact, Mexican origin residents use symbolic resources such as territorial identity and gender solidarity to build social capital and help politicize a marginal and socially isolated urban space. Not only are forms of participation and informal mobilization present within the Barrio, but they emerge without external leaders or resources. The barrio is a political space per se, which provides the conditions for claiming citizenship rights and for articulating a self-definition of the common good.

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## Broadening the notion of the political

The 'political' is widely defined as a broad set of social practices through which individuals negotiate power relations. Political practices thus integrate the production and activation of social relations as well as the cultural construction of social meanings that reinforce or weaken these relations. Nevertheless, the distinction between non conventional forms of political and non-political participation constitutes a permanent debate. How is it possible to delimit the sphere of political participation from the sphere of non-political participation ? For instance, are benevolent local civic activities considered as political ? Is an action political only when it is lead by a conscious political purpose ? Is an activity political because it is directed to solve a collective problem ? Is an action political because it serves to create a form of socialization or solidarity networks ? The vagueness of boundaries between social participation and political participation is at the chore of this article, while trying to define active citizenship in a U.S. Mexican barrio, a *locus* where individuals are usually portrayed as apathetic and politically passive.

In order to explore the central question of active citizenship, it is necessary to expand the concept of the political. Political sociologists have suggested the exploration of the private social sphere as a basis for political behaviors. For instance, concepts such as 'pre-politics', 'para-politics', 'meta-politics', 'infra-politics', 'popular modes of political action' and 'politics from below' have intended to broaden the scope of the political, by showing that private and public activities are intertwined. It means that political participation is neither only measurable in terms of political results, e.g. whether they produce or not public policy reforms, nor in terms of its intention. James Scott defines 'infra-politics' as any individual practices that resist elite's domination on a material or symbolic level, by adopting low profile and using its weaknesses strategically. He notes (Scott, 1990 : 183) :

"For a social science attuned to the relatively open politics of liberal democracies, and to loud, headline-grabbing protests, demonstrations, and rebellions, the circumspect struggle waged daily by subordinate groups is, like infrared rays, beyond the visible end of the spectrum. That it should be invisible, as we have

seen, is in large part by design – a tactical choice born of a prudent awareness of the balance of power”

The most difficult aspect of this broad definition of the political, is that it requires interpretation to make it visible because it is often an unwritten, hidden, anonymous and popular mode of participation. In the same perspective, Michel de Certeau (1990) emphasizes that daily-life individuals’ social practices may restate power relations and contest dominant models, and therefore are forms of political participation. There are obvious limits to broadening the notion of the political. First, the concept of ‘infra-politics’ might suggest that poor people should follow a linear process that would lead them from pre-politics to conventional political participation. That is not always the case, as the case study presented below will demonstrate. Second, there is a risk of ‘politicizing’ all types of social participation. The boundaries of the political are blurred and vague enough to allow for subjective interpretation. Third, it might induce that some sort of external intervention is needed to help poor people to go from pre-politics to formal politics. Again, the case study shows the contrary. Finally, the concept poses that excluded people participate politically not only to a minor degree but also in a different qualitative way.

Nevertheless, as long as the political will only design a conscious and proclaimed activity (such as electoral behavior, political parties, unions, formal organizations etc.), it will be almost impossible to consider excluded people’s participation. It is thus important to expand the notion of the political to daily-life experiences, as far as they define or defend a certain type of social organization (the barrio) and a collective identity (*la comunidad*). This statement allows to analyze less visible forms of political participation and to refine what is active citizenship in secluded and marginalized area such as the U.S. Mexican barrios.

## Barrios and political participation

Residential segregation refers to the degree to which groups of people live separately from one another. To the extent that segregation constrains social, educational, political, and economic advancement for ethnic groups such as Latinos in the U.S., it is a salient public policy issue. Ghettos and barrios are radical examples of the multi-faceted urban marginalization of minorities in American metropolises (Wilson, 1987 ; Mollenkopf and Castells, 1991 ; Massey, 1993). Barrios are ethnic neighborhoods where at least 40% of the population is of Latino origin and where at least 40% of the residents live in high poverty rates (Logan *et al.*, 2002). Poverty in American barrios is increasing : from 1970 to 1990, the number of Latinos living in barrios rose from 730.000 up to more than two millions. In particular, when the Mexican origin population represented 5,4% of the total U.S. population in 1990, 14,3% lived in Barrios (Jargowsky, 1997).

Barrios are also characterized by physical deterioration (vacant units, bad state of repair, abandoned housing, low rate of ownership) ; economic depression (low employment and labor force participation, sectorized occupation, low household income) ; and social marginalization (prevalence of single-parent families – especially female-headed families –, poor educational attainment, high teenage pregnancy rate). The phenomenon of residential segregation raises concerns not only of social justice but also of political incorporation, because barrio residents have been simultaneously defined as apolitical or politically deficient. Many believe that neighborhood poverty leads to political passivity and the few existing empirical studies certainly point out the lack of participation in these areas (Moore, 1993).

In fact, as a result of an ongoing comparison with Black ghettos, barrios have been described according to two distinct sociological models : the culture of poverty model and the underclass model, which both imply that barrio residents form an apathetic population that is politically passive and socially dysfunctional. On the one hand, Lewis (1963, 1968) elaborated the concept of culture of poverty to emphasize the pathological expressions of a particular subculture among the poor of Mexico City. He then applied the definition to Mexican immigrants in U.S. Barrios to explain the passivity of the population and the self-reproduction of poverty. On the other hand, Wilson (1987) focused on the structural determinants of spatial segregation and forms of counterculture in Black ghettos. Economic restructuring, desindustrialization, and the Black middle-class exodus from inner city to suburb areas were highlighted as the root causes of poverty concentration and destruction of socialization institutions. Challenged by Massey (1993) who argued that the underclass phenomenon was linked not to a social mobility by Black middle-class but rather to an institutionalized pattern of residential segregation, the concept was still used to describe Black minority groups as dysfunctional. Based on these two concepts, the widespread perception of a culture of dependence was then a defining criterion to critically assess the welfare and assistance programs planned in marginalized urban areas (Katz, 1989). Academic insiders shifted the perspective in the 1970s and elaborated the concept of barrio as "internal colonies". They suggested that barrios were the result of a history of class, ethnic and cultural oppression. But they also pointed out barrio residents' structural incapacity to participate in the political process (Barrera *et al.*, 1971).

Nevertheless, a shift in perspective may lead one to question the idea that barrio residents are not politically involved. I argue that previous models are not completely accurate, because literature on political participation mainly focused on conventional forms of participation (such as electoral behavior, membership in unions, political parties or formal institutions, campaigning activities etc.) and ignores gender specificity. Instead of asking why Barrio residents do not participate and what conditions lead to political incapacity, I propose to widen the definition of political participation to any "activity that has the intent or effect of influencing government action

– either directly, by affecting the making or implementation of public policy, or indirectly, by influencing the selection of people who make those policies” (Verba *et al.*, 2001 : 4). This broader definition enables one to focus on a diversity of unorthodox forms of participation that are not often taken into account but also to measure outcomes differently. I ask the following question : Which resources make the emergence of collective action possible in the barrio ? What forms might it take ?

Scholars have rarely addressed poor people's political actions, except in the negative context of urban riots. When confronted with the Chicano movement involving barrio residents in the late 1960s or to the civil rights movement, they opted to analyze collective action as a psychological disruption that serves to alleviate grievances (Gurr, 1970). Other authors have stipulated that violent protest was the only and most beneficial form of political participation accessible to marginalized population (Piven and Cloward, 1979). I develop another approach to the study of poor people's political participation by referring to the cognitive theory that stresses the role of representations, symbols, collective identities as determinants for collective action (Gamson, 1992 ; Melucci, 1996 ; Meyer *et al.*, 2002). This emphasis will allow one to better understand why poor people are not involved in conventional politics, even though they are fully able to express strong political views and to develop functional social networks. Scholars have emphasized the essential role of social networks through which people mobilize into social movements (Oberschall, 1973). Although networks have been used primarily to explain who is recruited, the very existence of social ties among potential recruits is seen as a prerequisite for the emergence of collective action. It is not my intent to minimize the importance of different determinants for mobilization absent in the barrio. There is a lack of material resources for collective action ; a closure of the political opportunity structure, i.e. the availability and relative attractiveness of different options for collective action that challenger groups face ; a difficulty to transmit former collective action's repertoires inherited from the Chicano movement ; and a predominance of negative socioeconomic determinants for political participation, such as low education level, low income, and low human capital (Nie and Verba, 1993). But I rely on Putnam's definition of 'social capital' (1993), that is “networks, norms and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefits” to formulate two new hypotheses regarding participation in the barrio.

On the one hand, political deficiency is certainly a complex phenomenon. One cannot ignore the fact that other forms of participation, less traditional or less studied, might take place in marginalized areas. On the other hand, collective action can emerge in the barrio through social networks activated into social capital, without the intervention of exterior elements, resources or leaders. But contrary to poor people's mobilization theory that addressed the nature of psychosocial conditions and emphasized the necessity of some outsiders' intervention for collective action by a marginalized population, I argue that excluded groups get involved in different ways

relying on oppositional forms of social capital. Their involvement extends the definition of social capital, participation and citizenship. I test this hypothesis with the case of San Diego's inner city barrio. Respondents express resistance to the on-going process of gentrification in the barrio. Interestingly enough, these voices are mainly women's voices. First I will demonstrate the extent to which gentrification has become a mobilizing agenda for barrio residents, and especially for women : how does gender matter for political participation in the barrio ? Second, I will emphasize that the constitution of certain forms of resources, such as social networks based on gender solidarity, extend the definition and role of social capital in determining participation.

## Case Study

The City of San Diego has recently become one of the wealthiest areas in the United States. It is home to approximately 1,2 million people. However, its economic growth has not been distributed evenly. The local Latino population has not benefited from it as much as the population at large. For instance, racial residential segregation in San Diego has deepened in the last decade, both at the city and the suburb level. In 1990, Latinos in suburbs lived in census tracts that were 58 % white, whereas in 2000, they live in census tracts that were 45% white. Segregation rates are even higher for Latino children than for the adult population. The San Diego's inner city barrio, located southeast of downtown is composed by three neighborhoods : Barrio Logan, Logan Heights and Sherman Heights. They are home to approximately 40,000 inhabitants, with 68 % of the population made up of Latinos (primarily of Mexican origin) and about 40 % living below poverty level. Furthermore, 2000 Census data report a set of negative predicaments for political participation in the area. The heterogeneity of migratory experiences within the barrio population accounts for much of the political disenfranchisement. Two-thirds of the residents are native-born, whereas one third are foreign-born. Among the foreign-born population, only 22 % are naturalized citizens. Access to the electoral process is thus limited to a fraction of the residents. Both at the local and state level, voter registration and turnout are indeed extremely low. For instance, turnout for City Council District 8 elections ranged from 7 % to 30 % of the registered voters between 1983 and 2001. In addition, another large segment of the barrio population does not have legal immigration status. Not only is access to voting thus extremely limited, but the costs for visible participation extremely high.

Moreover socioeconomic criteria also negatively influence political participation. Unemployment rates in San Diego's barrio are more than triple those for the entire city (21,7 % versus 6,1 %) and the median household income is 57 % less than the median income for the city of San Diego (\$ 19,968 versus \$ 45,733). Education levels are extremely low, which also adversely affect involvement in politics. Finally, the barrio is not a place invested in by many formal organizations

and institutions. The community organizations inherited from the Chicano Movement that are still operating in the barrio have been incorporated into social services provider-agencies (namely San Diego County Chicano Federation, Barrio Station, Logan Heights Family Health Center, formerly known as the Chicano Clinic, and outside of the Barrio, the Centro Cultural de la Raza). Several others are not yet incorporated (Chicano Park Steering Committee). Recent organizations born at the end of the 1980s are either mainly state-funded (Environmental Health Coalition and Metropolitan Area Advisory Committee) or voluntary grassroots organizations (Unión del Barrio, Raza Rights Coalition) that have all encountered obstacles finding constituents in the barrio. In that respect, the San Diego barrio is similar to other Mexican barrios in the southwest.

References to the barrio in San Diego City official documents as well as in the city's daily newspaper (San Diego Union Tribune) demonstrate a highly stereotyped and culturalist vision of the barrio. They describe the barrio as a dangerous space inhabited by apathetic people. For instance, the 2002-2004 Community and Economic Development Strategy Plan for revitalization of the City of San Diego states that :

"low-income households are concentrated in the oldest and least expensive parts of the City. A concentration of poverty leads to what sociologists refer to as "culture of poverty", in which social interactions are governed by short term survival, including success in high risk, high-reward, illegal activities, while the values of the broader culture, such as workforce responsibility and success at school are avoided".

The use of Lewis highly debated concept of 'culture of poverty' is not a matter of controversy for policy-makers dealing with the barrio community in San Diego. In addition, the Union Tribune draws an almost exclusively negative portrait of the barrio. A review of articles from 2000 to 2003 shows that in the 230 references to the barrio, 65 % are constituted by short headlines relating violence, crimes, gang and drug related activities. The remaining 35 % are long articles that describe the multiple dangers of that space, along predominantly negative lines and different topics : environmental hazards, homeless issues, education drop off, and health problems. The barrio is : 'a crime-ridden area', the city 'poorest neighborhood', 'plagued by gang-related activities and drive-by-shootings', in brief a 'ghetto'. The only positive images are cultural references, especially Mexican traditional celebrations (*Cinco de Mayo*, *Virgen de Guadalupe*), food traditions, and the Chicano Park murals. Representations of the barrio are of importance because the struggle over the meaning and the boundaries of the barrio is also a struggle for power.

## Methodology

I conducted an ethnographic study in the San Diego barrio from August 2002 to December 2003. I observed community meetings, cultural events, political demonstrations, and marches. I participated in community daily life at different stages and levels (voluntary work, citizenship classes). I designed a photographic database in order to present the diversity and complexity of the barrio. In addition to participatory observation, I completed 98 semi-structured interviews with community leaders, members of organizations, elected officials and governmental agencies' representatives involved in the barrio and 18 life-stories interviews with non-mobilized residents. More than a hundred informal discussions took place during the fieldwork. Furthermore, I observed citizenship classes in barrio schools during a period of four months. During the classes, I distributed and collected a questionnaire to a sample of a hundred residents (with a 75% rate of return) composed by first-generation Mexican immigrants applying for citizenship. The questions concerned participatory issues, dual nationality, socialization, citizenship practices and representations. Finally, I examined local newspapers and archives from the San Diego City Redevelopment Agency for a twelve-year period, from 1991 to 2003. I used the triangulation of sources and methods to provide a picture of the barrio as complex and comprehensive as possible (Bourdieu *et al.*, 1991 ; Becker, 1986). From a theoretical perspective, the specific literature dedicated to San Diego and to the barrio is extremely scarce and dates back to the War on Poverty programs. In fact, the City has always been portrayed and considered as a place where nothing much happens or where everything is "under the perfect sun" (Davis *et al.*, 2003).

In addition, it is often stated that poverty provokes a deficit in forms of trust and is strongly associated with fatalism. In particular, civic culture theorists linked this distrust to the development of a passive political culture specific to Mexican origin people (Gamio, 1930 ; Almond and Verba, 1963 ; Grebler *et al.*, 1970). Indeed, people in barrios have little confidence in the system and/or in other persons. The *desconfianza* (distrust) is expressed both at the horizontal level, following statutory and class lines, between legal and illegal immigrants, residents and citizens, first and later generations, renters and owners ; and at the vertical level between residents and public authority, leaders and local representatives, developers and renters, etc. The *desconfianza* factor affected the entry of the author in the community. Multiple outsider factors (French nationality, racial background, and gender) delayed the process of gaining contact with residents. Simultaneously, they helped differentiate the researcher from both community members and institutional representatives. They provided a source of curiosity and trust, openness and comfort. This fieldwork leads me to argue that the main outcome of barrio residents' resistance to gentrification is indeed the framing of the barrio image and of its territorial and symbolic boundaries.



## Gentrification in San Diego

Gentrification is the process "by which poor and working-class neighborhoods in the inner city [neighborhoods that have previously experienced disinvestment and a middle class exodus] are refurbished via an influx of private capital and middle-class homebuyers and renters" (Smith, 1986 : 32). Gentrification usually happens in three phases : the deterioration of life and housing conditions ; a transition characterized by renovation of housing and 'beautification' ; and a final phase where all the original population but the former homeowners are displaced by Anglos. Indeed, it is not a phenomenon specific to San Diego. Paradoxically, after a period of state retreat in deprived areas, a new form of interventionism is taking place in American cities (Jones-Correa, 2001). Newly policies aim at accompanying the state disinvestment through a policy of preferential taxation to favor free *enterprise zones* in certain urban areas and the promotion of inner-city revitalization with community involvement or *empowerment zones*. San Diego's local government initiated the process of urban renewal in the late 1980s. The 'redevelopment', 'revitalization' and 'beautification' programs started with large investments in the downtown area. These programs transformed the downtown area into an entertainment and commercial area (cafés, restaurants, shopping malls, movie theatres). The construction of the Padres Ball Park accelerated the gentrification. The City adopted the so-called *City of Villages* urban plan to promote a 'smart growth' approach and focuses on redeveloping 'historically or culturally distinct communities' (Gale, 1984 ; Smith and Williams, 1996). Notably, part of the barrio was then turned into a redevelopment project area. As soon as 1998, residents started suffering from a sharp increase in rents, eviction and displacement. As a resident stated :

"They (the elected officials) have to be aware that here, two or three families live in one house because they cannot afford the rent, there is no privacy for anyone, some of them live in garage rooms, that's true, we need low-income affordable housing for people".

In fact, data show that 80 % of San Diego's inner-city barrio residents are renters. More than half of the barrio population spends over a third of their household income in gross rent ; with over a quarter of the population paying for housing with more than half of their income.

The complexity of gentrification is reflected in the changing discourses by media and public officials about the San Diego 'poor inner-city area'. The metaphors have shifted from the barrio as a 'gang-plagued neighborhood' to a 'vibrant residential community'. An optimistic vision stresses the revitalization of neighborhoods through ethnic mixing and private investments. But a pessimistic approach would rather link beautification projects with a form of 'cleaning up' (also labeled 'strategy of containment') that pushes away minorities from a historically Mexican-origin

space. I argue that because recent urban changes threaten Barrio residents both individually by displacement and collectively by the disappearance of the community, gentrification constitutes a mobilizing agenda. It activates social networks to resist displacement.

## Gentrification and Participation

To demonstrate my argument, I take the example of an organization named DURO – Developing Unity through Resident Organizing (in Spanish, *Desarrollando Unidad a Través de Residentes Organizados*). Barrio residents created DURO, an almost exclusively female grassroots group, in the fall of 2000. A loose voluntary association of first and second-generation Mexican origin women and students composes DURO. It is dedicated, among other things, to the defense of barrio renters against forced and unlawful evictions. The association also asks for low-income and affordable housing units, and promotes community inputs for the use of vacant lots in the Barrio. As a flyer states, members “who work or were born and raised in the communities of Logan Heights and Sherman Heights (gathered) to dialogue about signs of gentrification that seemed to have gained momentum with the Ballpark development and the downtown redevelopment efforts”. The community meetings were held either in private homes or in the local Sherman Community Center. The first ‘victory’ of the movement happened when a DURO member won an eviction court hearing in May 2001.

Different activities started, such as door-to-door contacts, bilingual flyers’ distribution on tenants rights and responsibilities, petitions for rent stabilization, and community meetings and marches. As a resident noticed :

“In San Diego, everything is more expensive, homes, rents. Before, we paid \$500 for a two-bedroom apartment, now it is almost double price. They renovate houses, they send the Migra (Border Patrol) to people, and then rents skyrocket. I am lucky because I bought my house ten years ago. But people cannot afford to live here anymore”.

For instance, on June 30, 2001, over a hundred residents participated in a march to address displacement. Another march entitled a Trail of Tears March (*Caminata de Lágrimas*) took place and bilingual slogans stated : “We are organizing to claim our human right to housing. Our inherent dignity is being violated” ; “Make your Voices heard” ; “Here we are, and we will not move”, “Uniting is strength” ; “Unite to our community effort”. The association attempted to raise consciousness about the housing problem during city council meetings but received only limited media coverage, mostly from local Spanish-language channels and newspapers. In 2002, the organization tried to build up coalitions and networks with other groups, but the mobilization

began to decrease due to the lack of results and organizational skills. In 2003, DURO started to meet on a more regular basis, addressing the specific issue of the use of vacant lots in the barrio, as well as low-income/affordable housing projects. It is worth noting that women predominantly compose the association, which might seem a paradox.

Gender difference in participation has been overlooked in the literature, especially because theory used to focus on certain forms of conventional participation (turn-out in the electoral process, access to elected official positions, participation through financial investment). Certainly, three main determinants affect the degree of women's participation : a differentiated access to resources, in particular to education ; a lower integration in workforce and other social networks that decreases the chance to be recruited into political activities ; finally a differentiation in political orientations : access to information, interest into politics, and feeling of political efficacy being lower than for men (Conway *et al.*, 1997 ; Thayer, 2000). Classic literature focuses on women's political deficiency, in particular Mexican origin women of low-income background (Blea, 1992 ; Ruiz, 1998 ; Pardo, 1999). Melville (1980) labeled them 'twice a minority'. But barrio women are more likely to be four times a minority : as women, as Latinas in a predominantly Latino environment, as Mexican-origin individuals in a racialized society, and as low-income barrio residents. It is thus even more striking to show that barrio women lead the resistance to gentrification. By this finding, my purpose is to extend the definition of political participation (Ackelsberg, 2002). Why do women mobilize against gentrification ? How is gentrification a gendered agenda that channels participation ?

## Public and private sphere

I suggest that barrio women's participation is essentially linked to the gentrification issue for two main reasons : the barrio space is highly invested with social meanings of the community ; and domestic and community space are intertwined in women's representations and actions. By questioning the traditional dichotomy established between private and public spheres, women's civic involvement in grassroots associations might provide more benefits than the entry into conventional politics.

First, DURO members and residents' narratives constantly illustrate two conflicting visions of space, that is social versus abstract representations (Lefebvre, 1974). In fact, elected officials, developers, institutional representatives, and media discourses present the barrio as a materialized space, a product of costs and benefits. The terms revitalization, beautification, revival, clean up and redevelopment are metaphors of the reification of the barrio territory. A District representative expresses her perception of gentrification :

“In terms of issues, I think housing is what my constituents are worried about, the first issue they are concerned about, to beautify the areas, such as Barrio Logan and Sherman Heights”.

Redevelopment projects are conceived of as privatization of the space, carried out through rhetoric of progress and security, the stigmatization of the homeless population, and claims for ethnic and economic diversity. On the contrary, representations of DURO members and barrio residents recall that the neighborhood space is a product of common history whose memory has to be shared among generations. Living in the barrio means a collective desire to preserve the community's cultural specificity. One activist stated :

“The rent is increasing a lot. Then there is no home anymore for low-income people. (...) This is not fair. This is a very old community, a Latino community, for Latino people, and it is not good that Americans come here. Because every community has its own thing, right ?”

DURO members feel attachment to this territory, because – simply stated – living in a Mexican barrio means something important to them (Hardy-Fanta, 1993 ; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994). Therefore, contrary types of representations show how some individuals seek to maximize the exchange value of the space whereas others privilege its intrinsic value. This is why the struggle against gentrification is not only a struggle for the defense of the physical space but also for the definition of symbolic boundaries (Barth, 1969) and collective identities.

Second, resistance to gentrification is indeed a defense of private homes against eviction and rent increases, but also a defense of the overall community. Barrio women see gentrification as a threat, because it implies a dramatic disappearance of domestic and community space. Not only are homes being destroyed and renters being evicted, but also vacant lots, public parks, community centers, and the character of the streets are being redefined by gentrification. As studies show, women share a common preoccupation for basic common rights, such as education, health and housing (Verba *et al.*, 2001). In this respect housing and living conditions affected by increasing household costs are a key issue for collective participation and politicization, as one DURO member stated in English :

“One of the main problem is affordable housing (...). I think that for a kid to do good at school, his family has to be in a good situation, because when a kid goes to school without food or without a home to sleep in, how do you think he is going to do at school ?”

As a consequence, barrio women link the private and the public spheres, and by doing so they reinvent forms of participation, dialogue, and political activism that extends beyond the family

space. As Pardo (1998 : 5) noticed on her study of Mexican American women activists in Los Angeles :

“The quality of life in a community reflects unrecorded social and political processes, often originating in grassroots activism. Different from electoral politics, grassroots activism happens at the juncture between larger institutional politics and people's daily experiences. Women play a central role in the often unrecorded politics at this level”.

If gentrification threatens the public space, it also overlaps the domestic place, and vice versa. An instance of this overlapping is materialized in the lack of material resources that transforms private homes into meeting places for the association. One DURO members remembers the struggle to get a public meeting room :

“We struggled for a long time because we did not have any fixed place to meet, many people missed the meetings, because we were always changing from one house to another”.

So, the mobilization against gentrification shows that collective action in the Barrio happens and that this political participation is gendered, in particular because of the issue at stake. It is then important to ask what kind of non-material resources barrio women use to build on this participation. I suggest that gendered solidarity and social capital form the essential symbolic resources present in the Barrio.

## Social Capital and Participation

Intimately associated people tend to construct similar views of the world and of the situation in which they are embedded. These social ties increase the likelihood for common ideas, values, interests and identities, which are at the basis for collective action. As a consequence, informal sociability builds up relations of trust and reciprocity. The concept of social capital is useful to understand how participation emerges in the barrio. It suggests mobilization can rely on qualitative resources specific to the barrio. In fact, social capital encompasses benefits from relations of mutual trust and collaboration. Bourdieu (1988) defines it as the aggregate of the actual or potential resources, which are linked to the possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition. Dekker & Uslaner (2001:3) defines it as follows :

“Social capital is all about the value of social networks, bonding similar people and bridging between diverse people, with norms of reciprocity. Social capital is fundamentally about how people interact with each other”.

Its development resides in the relations between the members of a group, not in the individuals who compose it. But in an impoverished area, social networks are often truncated not only because distrust is deeply present but also because contacts with external social networks are almost non-existent (Fernández-Kelly, 1995 ; Body-Gendrot and Gitell, 2003). This is why I suggest that the traditional definition of social capital is relevant but not complete enough to fully explain political participation in a marginalized enclave. Gendered solidarity in the barrio establishes bonding forms of social capital that overcome the distrust present within the barrio population. Starting with the following question : what kind of benefits do women get from membership in DURO ? I distinguish between three groups of women who have interests in linking together. Their promotion of reciprocal help generates trust, lowers the costs of participation in the barrio, and transforms social networks into political ones.

First, female-headed families or single mothers participate in collective action against gentrification because it provides them with resources to which they otherwise would not have access. Census data for family type by presence and age of related children show that in the barrio, female-headed families represent over 27 % of the total families. 70 % of those have children under 18, with an average of 4.5 kids per family. Single mothers share meals and information about jobs, prices, schooling. They exchange clothes, advice, or tips during meetings, potluck and fundraising events. A single mother affirms :

“The other women always tell me : go and study English at evening class. You can do it ! After work, sometimes they come for me to take me to school. It is difficult. I am alone, with my kid. But they say : you can do it ! And I go”.

As a consequence, they gain material and non-material advantages that help them cope with deprived living conditions.

The second group of women who establish horizontal solidarity networks in the barrio are undocumented women. The fear of deportation and the risks of immigration status control or 'Migra' arrests in a border city are high, as post-9/11 Border Patrol sweeps of the barrio, in the trolley or even in front of the Mexican consulate have previously shown. For instance, a barrio activist recalled :

“There is still a lot of people without documents here, one day the Migra came at the school entrance, outside of the school, and they arrested a father who was there waiting for his kids. The mother was supplicating to the Migra. They took him away, they arrested him, in front of his children”.

But despite the risk of acquiring visibility in the community, the costs of collective action are evaluated in comparison to valorized symbolic benefits. Undocumented women give value to this only way accessible for reaching an existence. Being part of a semi-formal group gains social status, recognition, and embodiment for the women involved. Involvement is perceived as part of a re-humanization process of an invisible minority, as a resident said :

“For lots of people without documents, they think they have no rights, but as human beings they have rights !”

Access to collective action provides acknowledgment of the contribution made by undocumented families to the community.

Finally, ties between generations – both between first and later generation Mexican origin women ; and between young and older women of the same generation cohort – are essential for two reasons. On the one hand, the transmission of knowledge, experiences and stories constitute a fundamental phase of the (political) socialization of young activists :

“What I like here is the presence of professional and community women (...). I can stay three hours in a meeting and I don't get bored, because I can hear them and their different points of view, and that's the way I learn about the situation”.

Meetings in private homes are particularly important as moments to share experiences, cultural practices, and memory of past history and collective identities. On the other hand, collective events are key for the transmittal of the repertoires of collective action inherited from past struggles or mobilization. For instance, the constant reference to the establishment of Chicano Park by a community takeover of the public land during the Chicano Movement, socializes women into specific references of successful community demands. As a participant stated during a discussion, grassroots mobilization has attained victories in the past :

“The reality is that we have to get people active in the process, like when they took over Chicano Park land, right ? The community took it over !”

Even if idealized, romanticized or reconstructed, the collective memory is passed through generations and groups due to the social networks established among the different segments of women. In summary, women build up community-based activities and solidarity networks that develop a sense of belonging and civic duty. This form of gendered social capital enhances individuals' capacity to join together in collective action to resolve common problems. It capitalizes political engagement (Lowndes, 2003 ; Norris and Inglehart, 2003). In that sense, they are active citizen as they express, through civic and social participation, their belonging to the *politeia*.

## Conclusion

DURO members and barrio residents' resistance to gentrification brings about a re-examination, first, of the meaning and value of active citizenship ; and, second, of the existence of different forms of political participation available for exercising a political voice in a disenfranchised community. Barrio residents are not politically passive or deficient. Barrios are political spaces *per se*, where mobilization happens without intervention from outside. This is not an idealized vision of segregated spaces where collective action can easily emerge, but an analysis of the existence and transformation of social networks into political ones. Women's community involvement against gentrification demonstrates the importance of pre-existing relationships of trust and mutuality among friends and neighbors. Shared concerns about housing and displacement, and community boundaries and collective identity, serve to mobilize residents. They reinforce the politicization of barrio residents and reduce the costs of participation. In turn, they can catalyze more formal political activities as competence and feeling of political efficacy grow. The barrio benefits from this gendered social capital because social ties are transformed into bonding social capital and political networks. Active citizenship can result from 'non-citizens' (undocumented individuals) and 'second class citizens' (excluded individuals). It builds on an autonomous political and social public space where original forms of participation take place. In other words, qualitative research and study of narratives not only make barrio residents visible in politics ; but they illustrate and they transform concepts of political participation. In this particular context, social capital is mobilized as a political resource to strengthen civic involvement. Nevertheless, resistance to gentrification by barrio women encounters obstacles. First, we need to establish how barrio bonding social capital has to be complemented by bridging social capital i.e. forms of vertical networks to reinforce the outcomes of collective action. Second, we need to explore different ways to measure the success of such a mobilization. Policy outcomes are not the only measure of success. The framing of the public agenda, the debate on imposed identities, and the struggle over representations represent outcomes for barrio residents' participation. A final research should also address the mobilization's effects on women's politicization and on the transformations of gender roles in the barrio.



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