María Mercedes Ruiz Muñoz

AN INTERVIEW WITH ANGELO CABRERA

A LIFE TRAJECTORY IN MIGRATORY CONTEXTS AND THE STRUGGLE FOR THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION

UNIVERSIDAD IBEROAMERICANA

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Translation: Trina Brown

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Hecho en México

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PROLOGUE

To migrate is to disappear, and then to be reborn.
To migrate is to be reborn, never again to disappear.
Sami Nair and Juan Goytisolo

An Interview with Angelo Cabrera. A life trajectory in migratory contexts and the struggle for the right to education, by María Mercedes Ruiz Muñoz, narrates the life of Angelo Cabrera, a Mexican citizen from the state of Puebla, who migrated in 1990 at the age of 15. He eventually earned a master's degree and became involved as an activist to help other young, undocumented Mexican migrants to access university studies in the United States.

The book contains a series of in-depth interviews that Ruiz Muñoz conducted in New York City, September-November, 2018, to document the life story and schooling of Angelo Cabrera: the ways he has lived those experiences in the past, and today interprets them, attaches meaning to them, and expresses them.

Migration is, without doubt, a complex process that has existed at all times in world history. As a constant between Mexico and the United States, migration has changed the policies, actions, and migration laws in both countries. Mercedes Ruiz addresses this situation in the book's introduction, contributing a review of recent studies of migratory processes related to the

political, social, and educational rights of migrants, with an emphasis on studies that incorporate life stories in these contexts.

From a pedagogical perspective and a social and political position, the author asks Angelo about his family and progress through school, the implications of living in Mexico and the United States, the difficulties of crossing the border without documents, his work and studies, community knowledge and solidarity, the knowledge he acquired in Mexico, and the knowledge he has built and shared throughout his life. An expert in the art of interviewing, Mercedes Ruiz activates Angelo's memory as he, in a mixed discourse of English and Spanish, narrates his daily life, festivities, fears, economic survival, feelings, and emotions, infusing meaning in his life and his relationships.

Like millions of migrants, Angelo left his native country, Mexico, as a life choice for dealing with his family's poverty, to find work to help them and help himself as well. He faced adverse conditions and ultimately became established in New York City, which he says, "became home, yet I was still Mexican."

In Angelo's account, education occupies a fundamental place as a struggle and as a personal dream: a conviction that education is a human right and a "passport to go other places." Thanks to networks of solidarity, Angelo received assistance from another person, as he explains, to stay in school as an undocumented worker, going on to graduate from high school, complete a technical course in computer science, and earn an undergraduate degree in political science, followed by a master's in public policy. His current hopes are to earn a doctoral degree.

Mercedes Ruiz, with great skill and sensitivity as an interviewer, presents Angelo's voice to share with us not only how he was able to attend school, but also how he began to encourage other young Mexicans to enroll in college. He became a leading activist in helping and struggling on behalf of others and defending their political, social, and educational rights in an unfavorable, discriminatory setting for young undocumented migrants in

the United States. His own experience in fighting for education, even with hunger strikes, led him to develop community leadership skills and the legal knowledge to defend his rights and those of others who arrived illegally, as he did, in the United States. Angelo learned that demands can be made, changes can occur through activism, and dreams can come true.

The main theme of the narrative is highly valuable and the book makes multiple contributions not only because of its object of study –migration and the struggle for the right to education– but also due to the potential of a life story to give a voice to a migrant who came out of the shadows as an undocumented worker to tell his story and make it public. Along with Mercedes Ruiz and Angelo Cabrera, the text takes us to the most profound level of the account of an activist who has lived his narrative and who adds to our understanding of the processes of migration, struggle, and solidarity, as well as the objective value and the social perception still attached to education.

Martha Corenstein Z., September 2019

INTRODUCTION

During the past decade, research on migratory processes in the United States has been influenced by the political, social, and economic situations at the destination and the place of origin of Mexico's migrant population, one of our northern neighbor's largest Spanish-speaking sectors. Recent literature on the topic is not limited to a purely academic debate but is substantially political since immigration policy affects the configuration of the objectives and scope of research. Variations in the United States' political agenda and fluctuations in its federal and state legislation regarding immigrants, along with changes in the White House, have drawn an emerging map of social organizations and basic groups in migrant communities, a map that requires political positioning by academia.

This need is visible at political moments of inflection, such as the bipartisan legislative proposal known as the DREAM Act (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors) in 2006, the DREAMers social movement, the program of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) approved in 2012, the immigration program of Deferred Action for Parents of Americans (DAPA), and the presidential inauguration of the Republican Donald Trump, in 2017.

Recent studies of DACA (Gonzáles, Terriquez & Ruszczyk, 2013, 2014; Escobedo, 2016; Barros, 2017; Enríquez Cabral &

Valdez, 2018), cover the most recent five years since the program's implementation and have the unique characteristic of contributing to the configuration of the field of immigration from various trigger points. Such research attempts to articulate and record the migrant experience in specific socioeconomic and political contexts, which are marked by constant transformations in the public policy agenda as well as popular initiatives.

The role of researchers thus assumes a purely political nature. Most have done fieldwork during long stays in migrant communities and organizations as active participants, such is the case of Escobedo (2016), who articulated fieldwork with volunteer activities in a nongovernmental organization at the United States-Mexico border. Some of the study's respondents were previous applicants to the DACA program. The researcher's proximity to these respondents was a consequence of the daily interactions and collective efforts of the organizations in which they participated.

Therefore, a cross-section of the compiled work reveals the defense of the civil, political, and educational rights of the migrant population, which underlies the narrative of most of the research studies.

Representations of the phenomenon of migration are not homogeneous, however, even when they are viewed from a perspective of rights. One of the most significant points of conflict refers to the theoretical construction of the migrant identity in childhood. A polarization of visions appeared during the process of implementing the DACA program in the United States, with the resulting political and academic debate on defining apt candidates. In this sense, Diaz-Strong and Meiners (2007) refer to division within the family group and define migrant childhood and youth as "innocent" while the parents are "guilty" of having decided to migrate without legal documentation. Implementation of the DACA program would thus imply a form of justice for migrant youth who were forced to migrate during their child-

hood because of decisions made by the head of the household; the result would be that the young people would avoid "breaking the law."

Meanwhile, other researchers prefer to emphasize the socio-cultural, economic, and political conflicts of Mexican families upon migrating to the United States, and assume that all of the family members are "Americans in waiting." This is the term employed by Motomura (mentioned in Lee, 2015), whose socio-political representation of the migrant population is disconnected from the stigma of "undocumented" that is historically assigned to the sector. In this context, the implementation of DACA would form part of a political narrative of accessibility to the right to education by vulnerable sectors, which are understood to be subject to the rule of law, although the heads of the household should also be the recipients of protective policies that would allow them to apply for conditions of pertinence in the country of destination, through access to basic unalienable rights. The support and disclosure of the needs of a program destined exclusively for parents, like the DAPA policy, reveals the broken chain of stigmatization of adult migrants, as addressed in various studies, ranging from the condition of "breaking the law" to an empty, meaningless condition that is circumstantial in the migrant trajectory. Also applicable in this case is the configuration of political discourse regarding access to rights.

In most of the research that studies and analyzes the DACA program, the approach begins with a perspective of impact. The narrative of such work centers primarily on contextualizing the program and defining the benefits of its implementation, since it is understood to be a step toward the mechanisms of social mobility. Although the program does not grant direct access to the legalization of migratory status, it has implications at the level of "legal presence" since it offers temporary authorizations that enable access to basic rights. In this framework, two clearly defined moments can be identified in most of the studies.

The first moment defines the sociopolitical, economic, and cultural conditions of production that led to the program's creation; the project's specific elements and scope are explained, along with the application requirements, and the sociodemographic characteristics of the benefiting sector. Second, an analysis is made of the program's impact on the life of young migrants, in which education operates as a trigger for rethinking and analyzing the scope of government programs created for migrants. Such research, whose central theme is the study of the impact of the DACA program on migrant children and youth, is pierced by struggles between state and federal legislation and the public policy programs that emerge in each case. The implementation of DACA has not been homogeneous throughout the nation.

While some states implement the program effectively and have increased considerably the number of beneficiaries, other states lack the political consensus and regulation to do so. The result is the articulation of political sectors with an anti-immigrant discourse that generates strategies to hinder access to the program. Such power struggles are visible in the scientific narratives that explain political discourse in conflict. Defending the right of migrant children and youth to access education is addressed by state governments in various and sometimes contradictory forms, even at the expense of federal legislation.

Such political and ideological positions and the conditions of access to DACA, as part of the study of the program's impact and conflicting political forces, have been studied mainly through the techniques of interviews and observation. Research has been directed to the perceptions and feelings of the respondents, who were primarily young people in the program, as well as past and present DACA applicants. Areas of interest were the program and the respondents' applications to school and meaningful work, as well as the benefits for social mobility in the family when a family member applies to DACA or is accepted. This factor allows rethinking political/pedagogical practices beyond the

individuality of those who are accepted in the program; it is positioned holistically and configured according to all of the actors who participate in family life and influence the diverse forms of appropriation and feelings assigned to transit through the program.

The construction of life stories based on the biographical method represents a clear possibility for researching such times of passage, as well as the fluctuations, obstacles, representations, and challenges that the respondents experience upon accessing the formal United States educational system through DACA. In addition, it is "based on a description of the assembly of mobilities ordered by the story of lived experience" (Adey, 2010; Savage, 2009, quoted in Rivera Sánchez, 2015, p. 186).

Access to education operates more as a point of arrival in most narratives. In this sense, the life story begins much earlier, guided, in most cases by the delimitation of geographical spaces. The story is configured as a path that starts in the place of origin, continues to cross the border between Mexico and the United States, then to the migrants' settling in cities and states until putting down roots in a specific destination, where the respondents decide to apply to the program. This choice, as we have affirmed, is not random or personal, but is influenced by specific political/pedagogical conditions. Therefore, migrants' educational trajectories are determined by the availability of educational institutions and accessibility based on each state's implementation of the program. This is the basis of the relevance, according to Hernández-Hernández (2015), of the construction of narratives of experience; the objective is to analyze the structural referents and meanings that affect and configure the material and objective conditions of the existence of the migrant sector.

In this scenario, New York appears in various life stories as a point of arrival and shelter for Mexican migrant families, a place considered to be a "sanctuary." In some studies, such as that of Santillanes (2017), the state of New York constitutes the back-

ground, the context where the migrant experience occurs; in other studies, New York acquires an analytical dimension and emerges as an additional category of research, to address the specific content of state migrant policy and the implications on the itineraries of young migrants. This is the case of the research by Oliveira (2017), which portrays the experience of settling in New York City, with emotional and financial implications for migrants and as a result, for the possibility of continuing on their educational trajectories.

In most studies, the constructed life story is similar to a travel log, in which each geographical space is clearly defined and has sociopolitical meaning for the narrative. The journey does not always end, however, in a "sanctuary"; diverse migrant itineraries are based primarily on the possibility of crossing the border and on the socio-economic conditions that make the journey viable. For example, in various cases, the trip begins in a state of Mexico and culminates in a United States border state; in other cases, a pendular trajectory is traced, which begins in Mexico, continues to the border, and ends close to the place of origin, due to deportation from the destination country or the impossibility of crossing the border. A migrant's expulsion by the United States government starts a process of return migration, studied by most Spanish-speaking researchers because of their geographic proximity to the deportee. In contrast with studies of migration to "sanctuary cities," which are abundantly described in narrated work in English, research on return migration is carried out in the context of visits and projects with the United States and Mexican subsidies. Such is the case of the master's thesis of Escobedo (2016), which focused on the border region of Tijuana.

Another recurring event in the construction of life stories is the travel experience of those who decide to migrate to the United States and at some point are deported, yet are unable to return to their place of origin. In this scenario, the border is the sole geographical space available for becoming established, given the

scarcity of socioeconomic conditions that would permit a return journey. In some studies, this space is identified as a "legal limbo" on the migrant's journey, since the respondents have neither United States nor Mexican documentation that would allow them to remain legally in one of the two countries. The border is thus a vacuum, where the DACA program is not regulated or implemented; at the border, the deported migrant population unable to return to their place of origin is denied and marginalized, without access to basic, unalienable rights, including acceptable housing and education.

In this manner, a life story is constructed from the narrative of the set of obstacles and facilitators that formed part of the migrant's life from the place of origin until the destination, and the process of returning or settling in the border region. The personal and collective decisions that provide continuity and gestate the trip operate as discursive agents for configuring the life story, simultaneously articulated with the narrative of passing through various geographical spaces. The respondents' strategies develop to adapt to the place of arrival; similarly, their account of the experience and the cases of marginalization and triumph constitute a narrative of resistance to immigration policies. Through the life story, a contra-hegemonic identity is constructed: another form of making the migrant population visible, starting with the daily practices necessary for dealing with immigration policies that are restrictive and removed from the sector's demands and needs. Biographical experience transforms into a political text, translated from the daily events of the account of the migrant's journey.

It is not an accident that Donald Trump's insertion into the United States context; from the moment of his triumph at the polls, he became the center of attention of recent research (Aupetit, 2017; Valle & Zepeda, 2017; Marín, 2018; Uribe, 2018). The Republican candidate's electoral victory is a common element in these studies, since it reveals the restrictive, xenophobic

nature of immigrant policy, in light of the political manifesto that Trump spread during his campaign. As a result, these studies project their concern about the continuity, availability, and accessibility of programs for the migrant population, like DACA, as well as the deportation of large portions of the migrant sector. Trump's administration is presented as a crucial, unavoidable element in scientific narratives; they express the necessary articulation between research and the sociopolitical context, which is understood as a key horizon of the intellect for comprehending the historical moment of life stories.

Recent research returns to such concerns, not only through discursive journeys and interweaving identities made manifest in these studies, but also through methodological/epistemic decisions. In this sense, a clear rupture is seen from the research of a quantitative nature that was centered, during the 1990s, on the sociodemographic characterization of the migrant population. The necessary link between research and political/historical events and an understanding of the daily experience of migrants led to a new consideration of the praxis of research, anchored in the view of the migrant population. This reflection is translated into the design of research instruments, assuming in many cases a positioning from the biographical method and an analysis of social representations and perceptions.

Added to this is the elaboration, in the section of conclusions, of a set of legislative proposals and suggestions; it is the result of a scientific project based on the needs and demands of the migrant sector, considering their unique experience. Escobedo (2016), for example, proposes the design of strategies of audiovisual diffusion in the area of educational innovation and communication, in the form of a documentary video that presents the characteristics of the DACA program and verbatims collected during research.

On the other hand, Aupetit (2017) recommends addressing internalization in educational institutions as a catalyst of change

from pedagogical micro-experience, "creating friendly settings of induction to include the 'excluded' from the process, through motivational devices" (p. 330). Along that same line, Torre Cantalapiedra (2017) recommends that future studies focus on respondents who no longer have DACA, to shift the core of research from the impact and benefits of applying to government programs, toward the experiences of the migrant respondents, regardless of their continuity in the program.

In this manner, the academic field has revealed an incipient need to influence public policy and the configuration of genuine research rooted in social reality. The result is the direct involvement of researchers in respondents' daily experiences, and the proposal of exiting a policy of stigmatization, marginalization, and exclusion.

STORY OF MY COMPADRE AND COLLEAGUE, ANGELO CABRERA, AND HIS DEVOTION TO EDUCATION, AND THE MEXICAN COMMUNITY

By Robert Courtney Smith, Ph.D. Professor, Marxe School of Public and International Affairs, Baruch College, and Sociology Department, and Program in Social Welfare, Graduate Center, CUNY.

How to reflect on a life as important as that of my compadre Angelo Cabrera? After more than 20 years of working closely together in and for the Mexican community, after 20 years of friendship, how can one neatly capture what matters in and about Angelo's life? This is the *tarea gigantesca*[1] that Mercedes has set for me, so I will humbly offer my best, knowing it will not fully capture the story.

My strategy for telling this story will adapt from Marshall Ganz's prescription for effective narrative storytelling for public policy goals. Ganz tells organizers to tell three stories: the story of *self* –why they feel compelled to act– of *us* –why the larger community feels compelled to act on specific issues– and of *now* –what the current context calls for to make meaningful change. I evoke Ganz to tell a story of Angelo as I have known him (the story of *Angelo*, instead of *self*), the story of Mexicans in New York when we met and since, and the story of the current historical juncture. Telling Angelo's story is also a way to tell part of

[1] Mammoth task (translator's note).

the story of how the Mexican community in New York came to where it is today. (You can see Ganz discuss this technique at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g7CW_10C7lQ).

I first met Angelo at a conference at CCNY, in my first teaching job in the mid-1990s, where the topic was how to promote higher education in the Mexican community. The first thing I noticed about this skinny young man was that he did not just ask how he could go to college –he asked how we could help other Mexicans or undocumented people to learn about their right to go to college and to help them go. From our first meeting, Angelo was focused on helping others. Angelo was also willing to upset people and challenge institutions, which he did in that meeting by telling the Consular representatives that they were not doing enough, and demanding the Consulate do more, to promote college attendance for Mexican youth in New York. When Angelo offered to help the Consulate, or CUNY, or any other organization to do more, I remember believing him, because *fue claro que su compromiso fue profundo, y* él *estaba buscando manera de manifestarlo en acción*.[2]

To appreciate how forward-thinking Angelo's vision was, we have to appreciate how different the Mexican world of the early-mid-1990s was from today. There were few Mexican nonprofit or civic organizations, and these were mainly either sports-oriented organizations (like the Liga Mexicana de Futbol), or religious organizations (such as Guadalupano organizations, and later, Asociación Tepeyac). But there was not a Mexican-led or started nonprofit organization focused on education and its promotion, and no organization helping high school students launch into college. This was also a time when Mexicans in New York did not attend college at high rates and did not go to CUNY at high rates, either. Indeed, even in 2000, a higher percentage of Mexican

[2] It was clear that his commitment ran deep, and he was looking for ways to manifest it in action (TN).

origin students in New York went to private colleges over public colleges, despite their much larger cost. How few Mexican origin students were enrolled in CUNY became clear to me in a meeting with CUNY administrators. My recollection from a meeting in the early 2000s was that CUNY's institutional data only identified 770 students of Mexican origin students, out of what I estimated was a potential college-age population of about 50,000 at the time. Research (over 700 surveys) my team and I did in 2005-06 also revealed three sets of beliefs Mexicans had at the time about higher education that were inhibiting college attendance: 1) that one had to attend full time to go to college, while CUNY has many part-time and flexible options; 2) that it cost $10,000-20,000/year to go to CUNY when it cost less than $5000 to go full time to a 4-year college, and about $2500 to go to a community college; and 3) that one could not attend college if one was undocumented, even though CUNY had had a policy of offering in-state tuition to undocumented students since 1989. CUNY worked hard in the next decade and after to change that, to make sure that Mexicans felt that CUNY was their home. Notable successes in this include the formation of the Commission on the Educational Status of Mexicans and Mexican Americans (led for its duration by Jesus Perez of Brooklyn College, CUNY), and the formation of CUNY's Mexican Institute (led first and ably by Prof Alyshia Galvez at Lehman College, CUNY, and continuing under the able leadership of Jose Higuera), which has implemented many successful programs, especially the *becarios*[3] program that has helped hundreds of Mexican and/or undocumented students finish college.

Here again, Angelo's work and CUNY's work went hand in hand. Through Baruch College, my main home in CUNY, with the Mexican Consulate and the support of CUNY's Vice-Chancellor, Jay Hershenson, I ran Leadership Programs for the Mexican

[3] Scholarships (TN).

Community that sought to promote individual and organizational capacity, with the explicit goal that Mexican leaders and students would see CUNY as their educational home. Angelo, despite not being employed at CUNY, was my right hand in identifying participants and convoking the meetings for this program for several years. He was a key partner in this work.

But all that was in the future when Angelo and I met at that conference at City College in the mid-1990s. Angelo then worked with Gerry Dominguez and Casa Mexico, which was emerging as a strong organization offering educational support to Mexicans in East Harlem. Angelo and others (including Alan Wernick, who also started Citizenship Now at CUNY, *y su servidor*[4]) worked with the Mexican Consulate to do the first college outreach workshop on how undocumented immigrants could go to college. The goal was to inform potential college students that, yes, they could go to college, even if they were undocumented, and then to give them the *quehacer*[5], to show them the steps of how to apply. The event was advertised on the radio, and through Casa Mexico's and the Consulate's networks. It was also promoted by the *Angelo effect* – e.g. the effect of Angelo's tireless calling and networking and disseminating of information about the event. We expected to get maybe 40 or 50 people, but there were well over 300, and some estimated up to 500 people. The room at the Consulate was packed, and we had standing room crowds outside, we had to bring sound speakers outside of the consulate for the people standing outside waiting to hear the information session. We were all excited and pleased. I also noticed that a lot of attendees said hi to Angelo personally, showing how his pre-event work had paid off. He was a prime mover in organizing that event.

[4] And myself (TN).
[5] Endeavor (TN).

This event set a pattern for collaboration between CUNY, the Mexican Consulate, and Mexican leaders or civic organizations in promoting education or other positive outcomes. Angelo intrinsically understood how to both get key stakeholders to collaborate and to *mover gente*[6] to attend the event and help promote the work. Angelo was able to effectively talk both to the potential student he met anywhere, and to high ranking CUNY officials, including those like former Vice Chancellor Jay Hershenson, who knew that Mexicans were not being served well by our system, and wanted to work with leaders who could help make CUNY Mexicans' educational home took. Angelo's enthusiasm and efficacy in organizing this and other events helped lay the groundwork for efforts CUNY would make in the next 15 years.

The next phase in Angelo's story of promoting education in the Mexican community is the work of Masa, which was started as the Mexican American Students Alliance (MASA) to protest CUNY's errant policy of rescinding in-state tuition for undocumented students. CUNY's decision to charge in-state tuition policy for undocumented students was driven by the fear that the federal government would withhold federal funds after 9-11, because a new federal law had, arguably, made CUNY's policy inconsistent with the new federal law[I]. Angelo was a key organizer of a weeklong picket in front of CUNY's central offices to protest the new policy, and to demand that New York State pass a new law giving undocumented students the right to get in-state tuition. (Due to peculiarities of American federalism, CUNY's policy to offer in-state tuition could arguably be prohibited by federal law, but the state of New York had the constitutional power to pass its law but had not yet done so.) He and several others did a 3-day hunger strike to draw attention to the need for a law. (I walked the picket line but drank hot coffee. It was February.) With strong support from CUNY, then Governor Pataki signed into law the

[6] Move people (TN).

right of undocumented students who graduated from New York State high schools (with certain conditions) to attend CUNY and SUNY schools at in-state tuition rates. It was a huge political victory. We were all thrilled at this relatively quick success –less than a year had passed from the policy change to protests, to changes in the law.

Angelo's work at Masa was an exercise in making something out of nothing. With a small handful of zealous volunteers, Masa started as a volunteer after-school program promoting education. A key focus was on homework help, an underappreciated need in the early 2000s. Because many of the parents of Mexican elementary and middle school children in New York did not speak English fluently, and many had not gone beyond 6th grade (the average number of years of education in our surveys was 6 years), many parents could not help their children with their homework. Homework is a critical way that the things a child learns in school get reinforced and further mastered by the child in re-using them at home. But most middle-class children have parents who can help them, and explain things the child did not understand at school. When the parents cannot do this, the reinforcement of the day's learning does not get done as effectively. If the child gets stuck, they cannot ask their parents for help, and their understanding does not deepen. This was the problem parents confronted when they asked Masa for homework help.

Masa was able to help because of the parents' deep commitment to their children's learning. So, while they were unable to directly help with some kinds of homework, they were innovative and *comprometido*[7] in looking for the right help for their children. Moreover, parents' actions in a very real way also created Masa as a living, ongoing organization. We have parents who have brought their children to Masa for 5 or even 10 years (e.g.

[7] Committed (TN).

more than one child), and their children have done better in school because of this. This contribution continues today in other forms, including Masa Parents en Acción, who have both oriented the work the organization does and participated in public debates on educational policy. After identifying bullying as a key problem facing their children, Masa Parents en Acción recently lobbied New York City's Department of Education successfully for anti-bias training for teachers and other staff.

Another example can illustrate both the parents' commitment to their children's education and Masa making something out of nothing. For most of its history, Masa has been able to get free or cheap (by NY standards) space at religious institutions. In most cases, we used the church basement in return for the service Masa provided –always free to the families– and for painting or fixing up the church basement itself. But the downside of being perpetual guests was that we only had space for quite limited times. This meant parents had to faithfully bring their children to Masa's programs and wait in the cold, in January and February –when temperatures can be 15-20 degrees Fahrenheit (15-20 degrees below 0 Centigrade)– for Masa's doors to open. The parents brought their children year after year, always fighting for their children's educational futures. This depth of parental commitment and the creation of a community organization is a great strength of the Mexican community, and Angelo has been key to *fomentarlo*[8].

Angelo founded Masa with others twenty years ago (early volunteers included Michelle Bialeck and, now, Professor Steve Alvarez), and has remained an active and valuable board member during that time. He has never wavered in his commitment to helping promote education for Masa families and the larger Mexican community in New York. His commitment is as uncommonly deep as it is long –he often spent his own money to

[8] Fostering it (TN).

buy supplies for Masa in its early days, when he worked in a deli in NY and did not have a lot of extra income to spare. But he saw Masa kids as his kids, and the parents as his family, and did whatever was necessary.

Angelo's educational story is unlikely and wonderful in many respects. As he has discussed in his interviews, an acquaintance, an immigrant from Korea, helped him apply for college, and paid for his GED course and application fee of $280 at La Guardia Community College, she only requested that he "pay it forward" and help other students in similar situations. I have seen him cry telling this story because he was a very young man, alone in New York, and wanted to go to college more than anything, but did not know how. This woman's simple kindness still moves him over two decades later. And her investment in Angelo has been returned in kind many, many, times, with all the students and families he has since helped. Angelo's commitment to his education also impressed his boss in the deli he worked in for over a decade. In Angelo's telling, his boss supported his educational goals and set the work schedule so that Angelo could make all his college classes. Indeed, the boss often good-naturedly harangued the other workers, telling them to be more like Angelo and go to college. After getting his Bachelor's degree, Angelo got his Masters in Public Affairs, learning skills in organizing, researching, budgeting, asset mapping, and other key nonprofit and leadership skills. Angelo also represented a somewhat different kind of student, and valuable addition to Baruch's Masters in Public Affairs student body –an immigrant leader. Angelo's Master's thesis was an important contribution to analyzing how and why after-school programs and parental civic engagement in schools are more or less effective. He proposed best practices for schools and government institutions to follow to promote civic engagement among the Mexican, recent immigrant community, based on three principles: "Trust", "Support," and "Cultural Diversity". While Baruch had traditionally brought in many people

who worked in the City government or teachers in the NYC public schools, it had less experience in bringing in immigrant leaders with nontraditional educational careers. Angelo had taken 7 years to get through his Bachelor's degree, because he was working full time, and had started Masa. (Who starts a nonprofit under such circumstances? Someone crazy, or very committed to their cause, or both.) I lobbied inside Baruch to admit and fund Angelo, as I have done for other immigrant student leaders too. Baruch's Marxe School of Public and International Affairs (MPSIA), under the leadership of Dean David Birdsell, has responded with full support both for programs promoting the full integration of the Mexican community into New York's educational institutions and in promoting the enrollment of leaders like Angelo at Baruch, making it a key place for young, immigrant leaders to get their Master's degrees. The theory I pitched, which worked, was this rather than training people who might go do work in the community, why not identify the people *already* doing that work, and fund them to do Master's degrees, and then send them back out into the world to do that work, with new tools? Angelo was a pioneer in this initiative at Baruch and helped open the way for other student leaders.

Angelo's personal story of migration, education, and challenges of legal status, is evocative of the struggles and the aspirations of many, if not most, Mexican families in New York. Angelo came to New York without having finished high school and then got his GED, BA, and Master's Degree. But as his graduation date approached, he was still undocumented, and would not be able to get a job commensurate with his educational level. This, understandably, *le preocupaba mucho*[9]. It also worried me, and I spent 6 years supporting attempts to get him a visa. But we had a major glitch. After Baruch offered Angelo a job, he had to return to Mexico to await his visa. Due to his prior undocumented

[9] Concerned him a lot (TN).

entry, he had to ask for a waiver to re-enter the US with his visa, which was denied the first time. This resulted in a two-year odyssey during which Angelo had to wait in Mexico. There was a huge campaign to Bring Angelo Home to New York. Two years and 25,000 signatures later, his waiver was approved, and he came back home to work at Baruch, where he has been since. Much has been said in this book by Angelo on this dark period, so I will leave it to him to assign it meaning. True to form, while Angelo was in Mexico awaiting his visa, he helped to create educational programs in his hometown. He also built a library with the support of high school students from the Baden Powell Institute in Mexico City, a project resulting from a talk he gave there. That Institute's Social Change Project class now has opened many other libraries in Mexico. He eventually got involved with Los Otros Dreamers through his work as a consultant on higher education of *retornados*[10] and migrants at La Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla.

Angelo has been a critically important member and leader on my research teams at Baruch, most especially in the projects on DACA. Here, his work again exemplifies the combination of research, community-oriented action, and service. Angelo initially came onto the MIDA project (Mexican Initiative on Deferred Action)[11] which had three goals –to promote applications for DACA, to promote organizational and individual leader capacity building, and to conduct basic and evaluation research on those getting or not getting DACA. The initial puzzle orienting MIDA came from immigrant organization leaders, and was borne out by the data –why did the numbers of DACA applications fall so dramatically, from over 228,000 in the first quarter of 2013 to just under 27,000 in the last quarter of 2014 (Krogstad & Gonzalez-Barrera, 2014), and why did there seem to be so many potential DACA applicants who were not applying? Indeed,

[10] Returnees (TN).

demographers had estimated that initially, over 1.3 million people would qualify for DACA (a number which increased each year as younger undocumented persons "aged into" DACA), but the program peaked at about 824,000 applicants. The numbers were worse in New York State. Moreover, Mexicans accounted for the largest number of immediately DACA eligibles (27% o 115, 000 youth in New York state; the next highest was the Chinese, with 6%). Mexicans were also the largest group who could have become eligible if they had enrolled in Adult Education. Indeed, 43% of over 16,000 persons who could have become DACA eligible in New York City were Mexican, with the next largest community, Dominicans, with 18%; statistics courtesy of Sociologist James Bachmeier of Temple University, and the New York Immigration Coalition's DACA Working Group[III]) (*Immediately* DACA eligible meant that one met the age and time of arrival, and education –having done high school or a GED– requirements. Those who could *become* eligible met age and time of arrival requirements but had not finished high school or gotten a GED. To become eligible, they had to get a GED or enroll in Adult Education.) The MIDA project was across New York State, involved 15 organizations in all, and helped people from Long Island to New York City, to the US-Canadian border.

Angelo jumped into this project towards the end of its first phase and has been a strong leader in the project since then, moving our work forward. He combines an impressive set of skills, in being able to effectively interview people, write up case narratives, and discuss these findings with our research team; and a special skill set in developing relationships with immigrant organizations, school districts, and other institutions, to enable us to both do our research and help build the capacity of local civic organizations. He has, for example, been a leader in the project helping with the work of the Long Island Immigrant Students Association (LIISA), whose organizational biography is a lot like Masa's; and he has worked very closely with Centro Cora-

zon de Maria, a Catholic organization serving the large Mexican and Central American population in Long Island's agricultural regions and Latino populations. And the work Angelo is doing is getting into public debates in the US. Our team's work was one empirical anchor of an *amicus* (friend of the Court) brief to the US Supreme Court's DACA cases in November 2019[IV].

Angelo is regularly asked to speak at school districts, and in civic and organizational meetings, and he is always effective and inspirational. I had Angelo speak in my sociology classes at Barnard College in the early 2000s, and the students told me his talk had changed their thinking about what to do with their lives. When I see Angelo speak to parents about the opportunities for their children to go to college, I see that they believe him, and are inspired by him –he embodies their aspirations for their children, he is their own story– an undocumented teenage migrant who came to the US pursued his education through his Master's degree, and is now working to serve the community. His words help them believe more is possible for their children.

So returning to Ganz's framing of self, us, and now, adapted as Angelo, the Mexican community, and now, we have moved from a story of a young, undocumented teen who wants more than anything to go to college, and to help others go, to a grown man with a Master's Degree who has founded an organization doing that work, continued to serve in it and other ways, and is doing work using both his research and his organizing skills to promote more education in the Mexican community. We have gone from a Mexican community that had only a few, small, organizations even discussing education, and working alone, to having several organizations that have grown doing such work, and been working closely with major New York institutions, including CUNY and the NYC Department of Education. And we have gone from a time when organizing and mobilizing the Mexican and other immigrant communities were work that was just beginning, to a place where such organizational capacity is

greatly enhanced, and, sadly, ever more important, given how anti-immigrant and especially anti-Mexican immigrants, so much American political leadership has become in recent years. Angelo has been a key part of the Mexican community's New York story. (In over 30 years working in and with immigrants, I have never seen as dark a time as this. There is a lot of work to do.) I am glad to have been his friend all this time and to have been able to work with him on this important story.

Any biography of Angelo would be incomplete if it did not talk about his marriage to Lorena Kourousias. Having known Angelo for twenty years, I can trace not only the arc of his work on education and for the Mexican community but also his arc of personal happiness. The easiest way to describe it is pre-Lorena –pretty good life, doing work he loves; post-Lorena, still doing work he loves, but so much more awesome sharing it with her! I was happy and humbled when Angelo asked me to speak at their wedding. It would be no exaggeration to say that Angelo now beams when he comes to work (*que brilla cuando viene a trabajar*) and beams when he leaves to pick his wife up at her job (as Executive Director of Mixteca, in Brooklyn, also helping the Mexican community). His devotion to her is clear, and their happiness together is contagious –I always leave smiling after hanging out with them. If Angelo's happiness meter was a 75 before, it seems to be always stuck on 100 now. On our research team, we call it the *Lorena Effect*. They have a truly lovely partnership, and it makes me (and all of us on the research team) happy to see Angelo's and Lorena's happiness. I wish them many years more of such happiness, and I wish Angelo many more years of such important and successful work promoting education in the Mexican community.

September 21, 2018
Right Now, I'm Working as a Researcher

PART 1.
RIGHT NOW, I'M WORKING AS A RESEARCHER

Today is September 21, 2018. I'm with Angelo Cabrera, a Mexican community leader in New York City and a key figure in demanding basic, unalienable rights, such as the right to education, for Mexicans living in the United States.

–Angelo, we're starting this conversation at a very exciting moment, at least for me, as I see you here at CUNY, the City University of New York. After reading about your life and your work, I'm curious about what you're doing now on this battleground for our fellow Mexican citizens, who have seen US immigration policies gradually become more rigid. What are your current activities, in this part of your long struggle since arriving at age fifteen?

–Well, right now I'm working as a researcher. I'm managing a CUNY study about DACA. We're trying to analyze the benefits that DACA has given to many thousands of undocumented students. I manage all the research, I do cases, and I design projects for building skills, for leadership, to help young people have access to university education. At the same time, I promote access for students from the migrant community so that they enroll at CUNY schools.

–You're here and you've finished your degree. But what was your educational path? How much education did you have when you

came here from Mexico? How did you make a place for yourself? Did you have relatives here? How did you get here?

–Well, I finished middle school in Mexico. I finished my third year of middle school there. I immigrated when I was 15 years old. Almost 15 because I immigrated in September of 1990. My path was somewhat drastic. We were so enthusiastic about coming to the United States but I didn't know much about the context. My cousin had told me that a friend would bring us, so two other young people and I came together. I was the youngest. The others were over 20; one was about 30, or between 25 and 27, so I was the only minor. When we got to the border, we discovered that unfortunately no agreement had been made with the person who was supposed to bring us here.

We were stuck for almost a year in Tijuana. I left home at age 14 and was able to cross at age 15, and… during that whole time, we were sort of undocumented in the city of Tijuana; homeless, I should say. We had a place to stay, a place to live, but our job was to make handcrafted figurines in Tijuana, and our home was an ice cream food truck; we slept there at night. To bathe, we wrapped up in a blanket and washed off. We were living on the streets and the truck was next to the dump. I think that... our relatives didn't know how we were doing, and they sent an older cousin to look for us. He never made it to Tijuana, where we were, because he got his money stolen. Then, another cousin was able to cross and by then we had a little bit of money and we called our village. In fact, we went back there, but only for a few days… Our cousin was already in the US, and he paid for us to cross at Tijuana and bring us here. And that's where the story began, when I got here at a very young age, 15 years old. It was hard because my only relatives were cousins. I went to live with them, but when you first get here, it doesn't matter if you're a cousin. You're... You're alone, even though you're a relative. You're alone because you have to work, you have to pay rent, you have to pay back the money they spent to bring you.

–How much did they pay to bring you?

–Mmmm… I don't remember. I think about 1,000 or 1,500 dollars. But that was the context... You had to come and work, rain or shine, whether you were sick or whatever. You have to work to pay the rent because nobody here is going to give you anything for free. In that context it was difficult. Since I was 15, no one wanted to give me work by the day because it's against the law. You're supposed to be in school. There was a time… I remember that the first job they helped me to get was in construction and they told me to break up this... stone. Yes… concrete. With a hammer, one of those electric ones. It was terrible for me; I was super tired. I didn't last a week; it was like two days. First, I helped by carrying things but then they made me do drilling… I got sick and the next day I hurt all over. I didn't go back to construction. I never went back to construction.

Then I worked at various places, supermarkets, fruit stands... I got a cleaning job at the cinema because it was at night and there was no problem. Then I worked at a fruit stand, where I think… They had me living in a basement and I couldn't… go out. I couldn't be outside in the daytime so… Obviously, it seemed normal. But when you analyze it, it's like… abuse of your rights as a worker.

So I left and I went to Manhattan to look for work. And then… I started working at restaurants, at Korean delis. That's where I met a girl from South Korea and she gave me 280 dollars to get my GED, which is the equivalent of high school here. I had never been to high school. So, I started studying to get the certificate. The program is called GED and... Then I got interested in going to college after I finished the GED, and I applied to the university... It was hard because as an undocumented worker, you don't know much about the possible benefits. You don't know if you can enroll or not and it's all about... figuring it out along the way, asking.

I applied, and went and said, "I want to go to school." And they asked me if I had docu… if I had a social security number

and I said no, that I wanted to go to school and that was when… I enrolled in the university and they gave me an ID number and I discovered that an undocumented worker could go to school.

–How was that possible?

–Everything happened like that. So, I started telling people that they could go to school, that they could go to college. I helped students, one by one; the organization didn't exist yet, and I helped people. Eventually, around 1997, I met Robert Smith. There was a community event and a senator came from Mexico to attend. I was there at the conference and they were talking about the community's needs. But in the end, the meeting got off track and they started talking about the image of Mexicans, and the reason the Mexican soap operas always did typecast… those light-skinned people played a very important role in Mexican soap operas. I got frustrated and I stood up in the middle of the meeting and I thanked them for coming to New York to learn a little about the migrant community, but I said that it was a waste of time for me and offensive for me to be discussing the role of soap operas at such an important meeting and that they should talk about topics that involved community progress. I introduced myself as a university student. I told them I didn't know many students and that it was important to keep... promoting their education and I said that I helped students individually, one by one, to enroll in college, but that I didn't know very many. That I had met one in college, but he was an American citizen and I was undocumented, and I had been able to enroll. That's when Professor Robert Smith approached me, and Jerry Domínguez, from my place… Casas México. Jesús Pérez also approached me; he was working for CUNY and the consulate, and everything started happening. So well, we decided to do workshops. So around 1997, we did the first university workshop in the Mexican consulate and even... people working in the consulate had told me... outside of the event, "Don't take out many chairs. People aren't going to come. People don't want to go to school. Don't take out chairs." We had already promoted the event for undocumented students who could attend college. It was

announced in the media, in the paper, and to our surprise, a lot of people showed up, more than 500 people. They had to put loudspeakers out on the sidewalk. Speakers outside because there were so many people. I even met people from Poland who were there waiting... waiting for information.

–There were kids from other countries there?

–Yes, because it was the first time anyone had talked openly about undocumented students being able to go to college. Everyone was there, the workshop was given, and a series of projects began because it was the first... the first time the community's interest and its interest in college were seen. Work started on creating a university support group, a task force… We started… Robert Smith and... Jesús Pérez and Alan Warren, from immigration, and the vice-chancellor, Jay Hershenson. I don't remember if the consul was there too. But work started within the university, with a series of educational fairs for the Mexican community. The promotion started everywhere and it got results, didn't it? And eventually, the in-state tuition event happened, after the Twin Towers. Some university policies changed, and students were required to pay as "out-of-state" students.

–What kind of students?

–Out-of-state. There's a program –well, there used to be a policy called in-state tuition– but when the Twin Towers attack happened, the university attorney sent out a notification, letters to undocumented students, because the law of 1990… *1996 IIRIRA* (*Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act*) prohibited universities that were receiving government funds to give any sort of benefit to undocumented people. So... since we were undocumented students, they notified us… They sent us those letters over Thanksgiving, that we had to pay as if we were foreign students or out-of-state students, who pay the highest tuition. Out-of-state students paid the same as foreign students. So, for many undocumented students, and friends of mine, it was like a… a shock, something that was very hard. Heartbreaking, as we

call it here, because they had to pay two or three times more than what they had been paying. But for some reason, I don't know why, they overlooked me and I never received the notification.

–You stayed at the university?

–I stayed the same as always. But all my friends got the notification, and we decided we had to organize as students. We went to see Jerry Domínguez at Mi Casa México, we got organized and we started a series of campaigns to be able to eradicate... well to pass a law, some legislation, that would give undocumented students in New York the benefit of paying university tuition as if they were US residents. We call this in-state tuition, the tuition for the state. At the same time, the movement started in Texas. We were in the middle of the protest. Support was generated faster in Texas and they were the first ones to pass the law. Then it was in New York and then 18 more states passed in-state tuition laws that allowed undocumented students to go to college and pay as if they were US citizens residing in the state. New Jersey just barely passed it two months ago, but it has been a very long process.

By the end of the in-state tuition campaign, we had formed a group of students to continue with an open spirit, and we decided… to get more involved in education. It was then that... we decided... well, we organized... MASA as a student club in the fall of 2001, through protests... through activism. In about 2004, we started working with the community, getting... the Act School Program in 2004, also in the Bronx, in St. Jerome, in the Church CUNY of St. Jerome. We started to promote it there, and to work with students. We started with mentors in high school and worked backward; I led the organization from 2004 to 2005, until 2011-2012.

It has been ongoing work to continue supporting education. During that period, I got involved in various projects, like giving support to do a campaign, to designing a campaign for Tweet Gate with Robert Smith and the Department of Education. Then we did a census project and I collaborated with the immigration af-

fairs office in the mayor's office to create a program of rights. I worked in many areas, with the government, always as a volunteer, and eventually, I helped... I'm part of a group of people who created a bilingual charter school. The goal has always been to create changes in the community... to know that we have the right to get an education. I think the most important thing is to give that information to people, so that they know that they have a right and they can continue their education.

–You said you "got interested in going to school." How did you combine work and school? How did that idea persist if you had already started working, as many have? Was it because the girl helped you to get your high school certificate? Did you meet someone who was in college who helped you or was it simply a personal desire? How did you make the leap?

–Well, I always wanted to go to school, even in Mexico. Education was very important for me, because living in poverty… Education was the most important thing for me. I remember that since I didn't have the money to buy a uniform, I used the same uniform for three years in a row. They just let out the hems on the pants until they ended up almost above my ankle. Even so, I always dreamed about going to college. My uncles on my mother's side had gone to college and I always wanted that. Unfortunately, the economic situation in Mexico forced me to leave my country, to look for a better future, and to offer my parents a better life. I came to look for work to help them out, and when I was working without papers, I would watch the students go to school… I always wanted to do the same. It was my dream, my goal. But it wasn't possible. Until finally I met this girl and she showed me how. She inspired me, too. Besides, I met a lot of people at my jobs, people like customers... I would see them where I worked and they always told me I should go to school, that school was the best way to have a future here. So, they motivated me. They motivated me and I was also very interested.

The girl I met went to school... She was an international student who had immigrated here… She went to a college called FIT, the Fashion Institute of Technology. I met her when I decided to escape from the place where I was working, where they had me locked up in a basement. I left the Bronx to go to New York City, to Manhattan, to look for work and I got lost. I saw her there… With my limited English, I knew I explained my situation and said I was in search of work. Then she took me to the place where she worked and she helped me find a job there... She worked on Saturdays and Sundays... We became friends and, well… I always asked her about what she was studying in college. I was always interested... One day she came with a folder, an envelope with money inside, and the enrollment form for school, and she told me, "Go next Saturday for the first day of class. I've already signed you up. Just show up and take your identification…". My passport. "Just take it," the girl told me. "Get started." That was obviously very moving for me, very emotional because… I didn't know what to say. I started crying and I told her I didn't have money to pay her back and I asked how I could do it and she said, "You don't have to pay me back. Just work hard in school. The only way you're going to pay me is by helping other people. When you get to college, open the door for others." That has been my inspiration. Someone who helped me go to school and now it's my turn or it's always been my duty to open up those spaces for other people. I'm no saint, but I try to do what I can.

So, I started studying English. I was dedicated, 100% concentrated on school and I went to class at night after work. I went on Saturdays, my only day off, to get my high school certificate… my GED. It was about… 1996, 1995, I'm not sure... from 1995 to.… I don't remember but I think it was 1996… I went to school…. I worked six days a week from 6 AM to 6 PM and from 6:30 to 9 PM I took an English class. Then I would go home and work on my GED until midnight or 1 AM or 2 AM. I would get up at 4:45 to go to work. On my day off, I had to get up at 6 AM

to wash my clothes and then go to class all day. That was my routine for three, four, and five years until I was able to get into college. Once there, I had to pay my tuition, so it was always 12 hours of work, five or six days a week, then night school. To give you an idea, what should have taken me four years to finish in college, took me eight years. And to finish my master's, a total of 15 years. But I was enthusiastic about it. That was my routine. Besides going to school and working, and paying for my school, I had to help my family in Mexico with the basics. The basics of food and necessary things. I dedicated myself to do that... Then my mentality changed. I don't know. Maybe I could have given my parents a better future, a better house, but for me, material things are not indispensable. I didn't want to enter the immigrant competition of "I have to do it; I have to give them things." Although that's why I came here, I changed my ideas to "I don't have to." You see, everyone makes a choice. My parents chose to live their life like that and I'm choosing to have a different life. That's something that I've been analyzing more recently: the immigrant mentality of having to improve life for the ones who stayed in Mexico. But we forget about ourselves. We work to benefit other people, to offer them a better future, a better house, which we may not enjoy. We forget about ourselves. We forget to give ourselves self-care, a good life, travel, or give ourselves what we deserve because of the work we do. I think that's one of my… struggles because although you want to change to a different life, you start to analyze yourself about having to do it, as a duty. Even though we all choose a different life. I don't know. Maybe if I had stayed there, things would have been different. So, it was a little…

–Why do you think you're reflecting on this now?

–Well, I've always been like that. I've never... My family somehow has been more reserved. I've never given them... They've never insisted that I have to give them things. They've never forced me. But lately, with their sicknesses and all that… You have to do it, it's like… You have to do it. But sometimes I wonder what

would have happened if I weren't here. At the end of the day, they're going to take care of their health. They would find a different way to solve their problems and that is something all immigrants fall into. They fall into the context that they have to take care of all the consequences, of everything that happens. But their family is far away. Meanwhile, they neglect themselves here and just go back to their country to die, a place where they didn't enjoy the benefits of their work.

–There's a whole field of psychology that says that people have to be in good condition to be able to give to others. But here it's the other way around: I have to give things to others even if things go badly for me. Right?

–Yes, that's what I'm dealing with right now. I'm going to have access to a better life, but it's the life I'm building, the life I'm working for. There was a time when –and I think this is true for every immigrant– before buying a three-dollar beverage, I would think, "It's very expensive. With three dollars, my family can eat in Mexico." Today I say, "I deserve it." I deserve it and although I can't buy it, I deserve it because I worked for it. Those three dollars aren't going to change the life of the person far away, but they're going to change my life because they're going to give me satisfaction in my work. Like self-care. This has to do with the guilt we feel sometimes: guilt about having to do something.

–Yes, although you're no longer an immigrant, you have always believed that you have to give things to your family. I live in Mexico and have felt that: that I always have to give things to others and as you say, very little for myself. I don't think it's exclusive to the immigrant condition.

–Or a condition of society. But here it's very different. You figure it out. Here it's like that. You have children, and when they turn 18, they're on their own. They turn 18 and here you say, "I gave you your education up to college. Here are your suitcases. It's time for you to build your future." But it's different in Mexico.

I think I questioned it more recently, after having spent almost two years in Mexico in my parents' home. People were expecting… from a context of "a professional is coming… he's going to bring… ideas." I changed things… I changed that concept because I began to analyze and question things. Why this and why that... I wonder if my parents are at an age –they're 65, I think– but... I think that's the hardest part, when illness comes and you're the only one who has resources. Everything is going to depend on you. That's when you say people have their responsibilities, people… build their future. They're different topics…

–Yes, but if you're reflecting on that it's because it's necessary right now. Sometimes I think I tend to give too much to others, and very little to myself, and I ask myself, "What's going on?" I have seen studies by sociologists and psychologists that have made me realize that those attitudes are mandates that are built over time. A family mandate. Your family mandate was: "Go to the United States to work and..." If not, your brother would have come...

–He came, but he went back.

–Notice the difference there. He came and then went back. Why did you stay? Why do you think you stayed?

–Because I wanted to... Because I was in school and wanted to stay on that path and... I came here very young... at age 14. By that time, when I was in school, I was 21 or 22 and I had built a future. I was always afraid to go back to Mexico. I was afraid of the political structure, and of not being able to find work. I always heard the stories that after age 30, you can't find a job. So, I said, "Why should I go back?" I was afraid of... not being able to...How should I say it? Assimilate, because there were new... I was in another social context. Going back there was a shock… It was a cultural, linguistic, and social shock. The family. It took me six months to be able to tell my mother that I loved her, to feel part of the family. It took me six months and then they said I couldn't come back to the US. In the beginning it was "I'm just here for a

vacation and then I'll leave." After a few weeks, I wanted to leave. Everything asphyxiated me because it was going from a city to a little town... You lose the context... and it was hard.

When they told me I couldn't come back to the US, I said, "I have to look for options. I have to find work." Things fell into place and I got work at BUAP (Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla), but it was a bit different because I had an income and the context began to change... to be different. But it was a linguistic and cultural shock. "Aren't you Mexican?" You're always going to be Mexican but your concepts of interaction change. That's what's happening to the returning Dreamers, right? The *Pochos*, who don't want to talk Spanish. It's not that they don't want to talk Spanish. It's that they feel more comfortable speaking English, the language that they have grown up in. For some Dreamers, English has been their first language. Their dominant language. Their first language is always Spanish because they were born into a Spanish-speaking home and grew up speaking Spanish, but their dominant language was English. So, I believe I had a very… big cultural shock.

Everything worked out at BUAP because I worked with a group of people who understood those trajectories, those transnational trajectories. They understood I was a returnee and that I had limitations. They helped me a lot. The director, Rosa Montes, was someone who... helped me to feel welcome in the university, as well as in Puebla. And... although we had most of our conversations, normally in English... I felt more comfortable.

Even so, it was wonderful when they said I could come back to the US, although I was working in Mexico. A movement was starting here in the United States and I would eventually... be able... to return. It was the activism that got me back.

–Who got it started? Robert Smith?

–There were several factors... A friend of mine, a colleague, who has worked on political campaigns for Obama, Nancy Pelosi, and many other politicians of the highest levels… of very high

standing. After she saw the article in *The New York Times,* people began asking, "What can we do?" Community leaders, universities, student groups like "United We Dream"... the directors of the page. The directors of change.org also heard the news and they started the campaign to collect signatures… The directors of… Also, the directors of *Daily Kos*, which is another platform. They started the campaigns to get signatures, to call their Congressmen. It wasn't just someone who filled out a form and said, "Let's do a campaign." No, it was the directors of these platforms and it was at the national and even international level. People, directors, professors: they were all helping. Organizations did events to collect signatures, even MASA, Instituto Mixteca, the university judicial board, and "United We Dream" at the national level. The media also began to write editorials, because many of them were familiar with my story from the context; they had published my story already. So, the media began to write editorials asking people, asking Dreamers, to sign. A movement was formed around the issue... like the perfect picture of "How are you going to eliminate this benefit for a person who has offered... who has created community programs that... like the perfect example of a citizen...". It's because I contribute. I didn't come here to take advantage. I'm a person who paid for his education, who did everything he had to do in the legal framework... and now doesn't receive the benefit of being able to return. First, they denied my entry. I was prohibited from reentering until 2024. It's complicated, but it happens. That's the penalty. I had the penalty of not being able to apply in any other... if I left the US… It's complicated, all very complicated. It's a legal matter. In the end, I came back, and they pardoned me, but there's still a penalty. If I leave the country, I always have to ask for a waiver to be able to reenter. It's a case that is still under study because there isn't much evidence about how to get a waiver for a person who isn't married to a US citizen, who doesn't have children, or as they say here, close ties. Right now, I'm in the process of renewing my visa and

I also started the legal process to adjust my immigrant status through marriage. More than 20 lawyers had to meet about it. They had to ask, through calls and conferences, and they all had to get together to decide how to proceed in my case since there's no evidence of similar cases. This case is always with a waiver, a legal entry that is stamped, but there is a penalty because it is an immigrant waiver, as if I were in Mexico. Legal issues... But we're starting to see the way. I have found out about universities that have helped young people, similar to my case, to be able to offer them a work visa. A way to open doors.

For the time being, I have a work visa... as a specialist. I didn't have a visa. It opened doors. So right now, if I leave the country, there's a termination. Maybe in the future, more people can benefit from this. Some lawyers have referred to my case in their discussions about what can be done, as a study. Maybe it should be a case for a dissertation or for legal experts because it is very complicated. I think there are only two cases like this, but the other one has to do with a sex worker. My case is different but it provides more evidence for others to use. That's a bit of the context.

–That's amazing! Congratulations! If you'd like, we can stop here.

–Yes.

–We'll stop. It's 2:15. We talked for exactly an hour. Thank you, Angelo.

October 1, 2018
Migration to the United States and passage through Tijuana: "We were stuck in Tijuana"

PART 2.

MIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES AND PASSAGE THROUGH TIJUANA: "WE WERE STUCK IN TIJUANA"

Shortly before my second meeting with Angelo Cabrera, I wonder about how to approach him on this occasion. I decide to contact an academic colleague to share my inferences from the first part of the conversation, as I hope to collect not only data but also insight into the formation of Angelo's current profile and career. I arrive at the designated location and greet Angelo warmly. After chatting a bit about my stay in New York, I turn on my recorder. We start recording.

–Today is … the first day of October 2018. I am with Angelo Cabrera. It is 4:15 PM, 4:23 according to my cellphone, so we are going to start a second conversation based on his remarks from the first session. The five topics that appear in the first interview are family, school, social networks, support for other Mexicans, and the life of a migrant … what migration implies, living in Mexico and then in the United States, and the topic of working. So, Angelo, which one of these topics would you like to start with?

–You tell me. Which one would you like to start with?

–Well, I'd like to start with your journey to the United States, because we've organized the story by stages, and a very clear stage I see that we need to cover in your story is your trip to the United States. Correct? That implies that you would need to try to remember not only your arrival in Tijuana but also all of those adventures or … No, not adventures. Rather, the incidents that you experienced on getting here. The way you had to live. And

the second thing is that if you are from a small town, or a place that… let's say, a place that most people migrate out of... then it will be very important to discover the elements that make your situation unique.

–Yes, of course. In the 1980s and the 1990s, although a community was starting to migrate to the United States from the town… from my town... it wasn't a very large number of people. In other words, just a few people, and usually it was the young adults who migrated. People under 35 or at the most, 40. But there wasn't so much migration from the older community, and only about three families had migrated from that community. So, there weren't many. Not even 40 people had migrated. When I went back to my town, the population was about 1,300, and more than 1,600 or 1,700 people had migrated to places in both Mexico and the United States. But 90% of them migrated to the United States. So today, people from my town are in New York, California, Indianapolis, Minnesota … ah… and many other states, right? The Carolinas, Virginia. You see, they're spread out... there are a lot of them.

At that time, the main destination for migration was New York. Ah… and I think there were about 40 people, 50 at the most, nowhere near 100. It was a very small number and as I said, about three or four families that had migrated, the young ones. A very small number.

So, in the context of… deciding why to go, at age 14 deciding why to go to the United States, I think you have to… well… I grew up in a family, let's say, that had very few resources. My mother had to work by selling food on the weekends, or sometimes she sold food outside of schools. I remember when I was in the first or second year of middle school, I think she made fried pork rind, sweets, and gelatins, and took them to a woman who had a permanent stand at the middle school. She would let my mother sell her products if she helped her on the stand. The other woman was in charge of the main dishes and my mother only

did the snacks. That's how she tried to make money to… ah… to help us get ahead.

In the case of my father, well, he was … he was… he gave us very little support. Sometimes it's hard to accept, but at that time my father was an alcoholic. Ah… I don't know if it's very common in Mexican communities or low-income communities, since the consumption of alcohol is very high. You see, but my father was… well, maybe he didn't believe he was an alcoholic, but I saw that he started drinking on Friday or Saturday, and didn't stop until Tuesday or Wednesday of the next week and… sometimes he spent everything he made. So, my mother was the one who had to support the family, right? The one who looked for ways for us to get ahead. It was very hard. I also remember when I was a boy and my mother used to go to the market to sell tortillas: homemade wheat and corn tortillas in sacks… in bags… I would help her go to the market, and many times it was like bartering. She would get there and tell a woman, "How much are your tomatoes worth? Do you want to trade a few for tortillas?" Or, "I'll give you some tortillas for that bunch of coriander." "I'll give you tortillas for that red snapper." She bartered. She would get home without a cent, but she had all the groceries. She would do that a lot, two or three times a week, and I would help her. I was little because I remember I was about five or six. I would go with her and I was very mischievous, more like... active... and I would look for a way to help. I would go to the women's stands when my mother left me with them, as they sold their vegetables or whatever in their little stands, and I would shout out, "Tomatoes, ma'am, tomatoes!" Well, … there was a woman who sold tacos in the market and I was her favorite. I would sit there with her and she would ask me to help by calling out to the customers… things like that… I also helped the woman who sold *tempesquistle* fruit, who had known us for a long time... So, I learned to go to the market by myself at a very young age. It's about 15 minutes away… It's in a town called Texcala,

Puebla, and there I started to get to know the bus drivers. I was the one who would stand in the little space between the windshield and the steps, next to the railing… I would stand there and watch the people who got on through the rear door, to help the drivers, and many times they had me collect fares. I was very young. And the women in my town would ask my mother if I could go buy tortillas for them at the market. I was like the errand boy, the boy who knew how to get downtown. That's what I would do… I saw that my mother was the one who had to work… We had a little house made of… of reeds with pressed cardboard sheets and it was just… it's only … a shack that had a kitchen, and we sat on the woven straw floor mats to eat… That was… well that was… It was a burden for my mother because she was not only supporting us –my brother, me, and my father. She also had to feed her mother-in-law.

So, it was a lot of work and I think that's what pushed me somehow to come to the United States. Feeling… How could I say it? Contempt because you don't have the same income as other people. And we're talking about a poor, impoverished community. When I talk about income, I'm referring to communal lands where the owners have access to all the wealth and natural resources… A lot of onyx comes from the quarries there, so only the communal landowners have access to the onyx, and other people don't. Even though my father's mother was a communal landowner, she always favored her youngest son and not my father… Even if my father wanted a small lot, he had to buy it from his brother. So, I think the economic differences were highly marked in my town. And I also saw it in my family. I saw my grandmother on my father's side. I saw how my grandmother or my aunts brought things from the city. They would do their shopping on Saturday, and would buy everything they needed… My grandmother's son had a quarry and on Saturday there was money, and on that day, they went to the city and bought everything: groceries, fruit. And my brother, the oldest, older than

I am... I think by about four or six years, I'm not sure... had special needs. I mean, he had a special situation. I would see that my grandmother and aunts would sometimes show him preference over the other grandchildren. They would give him fruit, and bread, and sometimes single him out while the rest of us were watching. I would feel sorry for my brother because I felt like he had special needs, although he's not handicapped… He was sickly. He was born prematurely… so he always got sick. There was a time when he had epileptic fits. So… I felt bad about it. And it was the same thing on my mother's side. Sometimes I would see that difference with my brother. My grandmother would give things to the other grandchildren and not to us. So, I was the most rebellious... I would talk back to my grandparents because I didn't want them to tell me what to do. I would protest, as a way of saying, "Why don't you ask your other grandchildren to do it, the ones you give things to? Not me." Or it was, "Leave me alone," and I was the rebellious one. One time... I think I was sick, but there was an argument. I got mad at them. I was young, maybe ten or eleven years old, and my parents had gone to take care of a relative. They went away for a long time, maybe two or three months, to stay in the relative's house. I stayed by myself in our house, on the straw mat, while my parents were taking care of the relative. I was not bitter but annoyed because I didn't like how my grandparents treated me. One day they yelled at me and I told them, "I'm not going to do it. Get your other grandchildren to do the errands because you don't give me anything." They didn't tell me anything, they just went and hit me. I walked out the door and told them, "I'm never coming back to your house!" I would go to the place where my mother was staying and ask her for food. I would knock on the door, and say, "Mom, I'm hungry. Could you make me something to eat?" She would make me something and I would take it home to eat. I was a bit rebellious like that. So, when my father's mother died, I went out dancing. I don't remember how old I was. I went to a party to dance, and they went

to get me and scold me. I didn't care. I didn't have to mourn her if I wasn't… her favorite.

So, all of those contexts, those economic differences, well … The way they treated my brother was hurtful to me. Watching my mother wear herself out with work, watching my father... It was a very difficult time... So, when they asked me if I wanted to come to the United States, I said, "Why not?" The first time, which was my first attempt, I said, "I'm leaving," and we left. I never met the person who made the offer. It was a friend of a cousin who had called her, who said he was able to bring three people. So, we came. I told my father, "You know what? I want to go." And I had a little bit of money saved because I also worked, manual labor. Sometimes my father worked cutting granite tiles, and I would help him smooth the granite. But there I would see other people, and after I finished helping my father, I would ask other people for work, and they would pay me. There was a time when my father was not working. We argued, and I didn't want to help him. So, I would work for other people. We're talking about a boy about nine years old... between seven and twelve... and I was helping people. I remember we were once working on some onyx sculptures, some figurines... of some type... I don't remember how old I was, but I think I was about ten... I was polishing some jewelry boxes. You polish it with diamond dust that makes the stone smooth, so you can imagine what it does to your skin. It was a machine with more than seven horsepower, a seven-horsepower motor. So... I had an accident and got caught in the machine and it almost strangled me… They took me... Well, the woman who owned the place came down with alcohol to disinfect the wound and stop the bleeding and they took me to the hos… well ... to the local health center, I'm not sure where... yes, the local clinic... I was always looking to make my way in life. I always wanted to work and I wanted to go to school too. I went to elementary school and middle school... I never stopped, and I would go to the workshops to look for work.

In the mornings, I would work... I mean, I would go to school, to elementary school. I would go to school and after school, I would go home to eat and do my homework. Then I would go out to work with other people for two or three hours in the afternoon. Sometimes I did very simple things like staying with someone or doing a small chore... to be helpful. I had some uncles –one uncle– who was fearful. So sometimes I had to work as his night watchman, and they paid me to go and sleep in a bed there. I would just sleep there so that he wouldn't be afraid. That was when I was in middle school. It was the same then. I would go to school in the morning and in the afternoon, I would help my father… Even so, I did well in school. I wasn't a student with a high… high "performance", but I got grades in the 80s or 90s.[1] In middle school as well. I remember when my brother started school and I was very little, about three years old. My mother took me with her when she enrolled him in elementary school and he stayed in the classroom for his first day at school. I wanted to stay too. I didn't want to go home with my mother, so they said, "Let him stay. Tomorrow he won't want to. But let him stay today." And I stayed. I think I was about three, I'm not sure. I stayed at school... That's why I finished elementary school so young, a year or two before the normal age. Because I remember that they took me to school, supposedly as a visitor... And the next day, when my brother didn't even want to go to school, I was ready with my backpack, waiting for my mother to take me. I got to third grade as a visitor because they couldn't enroll me. I was too young to enroll, but I could write, I could read and I had good grades. I did well on the tests, better than the others. So, I think, in the end, they had to make an exception. They enrolled me and they made me repeat only one grade because I was very young. Then, well, I finished elementary school... younger than the normal age. I was about ten or eleven years old... And I think I finished middle school when I was fourteen.

[1] Equivalent to B+ or A- (n. t.).

I was interested in going to school; obviously, it was my way of doing things, because in middle school... well, I had to go to the city to enroll, and my mother saw that…

–In other words, there wasn't a middle school in your town?

–There was a "tele-secondary" school in my town, but I wanted to go to a regular middle school in the city, to get a better education. And... I did well, but... I had to work to pay for my bus fare. Sometimes my mother would give me money, but usually, I had to pay for my bus fares. And my uniforms. All of those hardships, I think that's what made me... My parents helped me a bit with the cost of getting here, and I came.

–And how was... the trip from your hometown to Tijuana? How long were you on the road?

–Well, the first time… from my town to... It was about September 19, maybe September 15 or 16 when we left town. I think we left after the Independence Day celebrations. Ah… because by… Yes, I think I was here by early October. Yes, anyway. It's... four hours from my town, four or five hours. Well, four and one-half hours from my town to the city of Tehuacán, and then from the city of Tehuacán to Mexico City, it's four hours. Obviously, we went by bus... From my town, I took the local bus from Zapotitlán to Tehuacán… When we got to Tehuacán, we went to the ADO bus station and bought a ticket to go to Mexico City. When we got to Mexico City, obviously the San Lázaro terminal, we had to transfer to the Estrella del Norte bus line. But when we got there... there were no seats to go to Tijuana that day. Someone came up to us and said, "You know, if you want to go, I'll let you on the bus, but there are no empty seats. You'll have to sit on some pails... some buckets."

We didn't have anywhere to stay, and waiting another day was... meant spending money, which we didn't have... They took us... to the back door of the bus and let us on there, but it was with a purpose, because... Oh, and they told us, "This bus has

only Central Americans. We need Mexicans to go with them so you can teach them how to sound Mexican."

They said, "We'll share seats with you. We won't charge you the whole ticket, just half, but we need something." They were... unknown people but they put us on the bus and that's how it happened…

I think we were a bit scared... The bus left from the station, and then they put us on at the corner. We were on our way... We knew it was a bus line, but the man who let us on was from the same... company. I think he worked for them but, well, he worked... well he obviously had his own business on the side. So, then we... traveled from Mexico City for about three days and three nights. I remember that they would loan us seats. A guy would say, "Are you getting tired?"... We only had enough sandwiches for the first two days, and then... I think we had tortilla chips, something that wouldn't spoil, and we had rolls, and then... when... at night, to sleep... I remember on the bus, on the rack above your head where you put your luggage, I would climb on a seat and get up there and lie very still... in the middle, so that I wouldn't fall. I would hold on. That's how we slept, lengthwise... So that was the way we got to Tijuana. Once there, we went to look for a person from my town who was living or lives in Tijuana... in the Los Reyes area of Tijuana, near La Presa. So, we got there and you're obviously from the same town, but...they're not family...that's the problem. So, we got there, and... we tried to contact the people and that's when they told us, "We didn't send for anybody. We don't know anything about it." We had to talk to the man, we didn't have money to go back home, so... He also had a workshop for making onyx figurines. He said, "If you want to work here, go ahead, but you have to find a place to stay." But there was nowhere, so he had... an ice cream truck... where they transport ice or ice cream. He had... What do you call it? A trailer… A trailer, outside, on a lot, outside… well, outside his house, on an empty lot.

So, the first day he was nice. He welcomed us and fed us. But later, when it wasn't possible, well, he said we had to work and we slept there in that trailer and... we started doing the same thing... We knew how to make figurines. We were making figurines with them, saving money either to go back home or continue. He paid us, we were there for a while, and then, eventually, we were able to... We did go back home for a short time. Just to visit and say goodbye, to tell them we were OK, but we already had the money. We had the money to pay for our... well, to pay for our return. By then, a cousin of mine had been able to cross the border and he sent for us. But I was there a year, almost a year... I went home for a visit, but I was there in Tijuana.

–Working for that family? Or did you have other jobs? Because there are a lot of things to do in Tijuana. Well, I know that's true now but I don't know about the 1990s.

–I was working with that family and making... I worked only there, making onyx figurines during that time. I always say that my journey started from the first time I left my town. We were in Tijuana for a time, we saved money, and we were able to cross into the United States. Then they had us brought here.

–But, tell me something. Living in Tijuana, being 14 years old, and trying to survive with a group of two or three friends can't be easy. How was it to live in Tijuana? Besides working, what things did you do? You were young.

–I was a kid. I was 14. I even missed my mother, a whole lot, at night, or when I had to work or cook for myself. We... we had to cook "rough," you see. Outside, on a little gas burner. We cooked beans –only boiled beans because we couldn't even season them. Simple cooking. And... sometimes, to save money, we had to walk from the house to the workshop. It was a bit far, about half an hour walking. And then we would go to the... It was dangerous then... Those neighborhoods at that time were the most... They were known as land invasions. People went there to live with nothing... It wasn't a planned neighborhood. There were

no utilities, there was no bathroom, and no sewer. And it was dangerous: people using drugs, a lot of prostitution, and since I was young, they would tell me, "Come over here, let's do this or that, take this or eat this." It was different and I always looked for a way to help people.

I remember... I think next door to where we worked, where the workshop was located, there was a nightclub. Sometimes we would stay in the workshop, and the girls would look at me... the girls who worked at the nightclub. I was a kid out there, and sometimes... when they bought things or brought food, they would give me some and ask me what I was doing there. I think there was someone... one of the women... who wanted to take me to her house to live... adopt me, we could say. So that was very sad. But sometimes we went to the border to watch the people cross over, and to see if we could cross over. Once we were there at the San Diego crossing, right at the entry point. Where the bridge is. The bridge is there, and you cross. There it was. We would go there and stand around and watch. But it was also... There were a lot of gangs and a lot of drugs there. They grabbed us... they were poking at me with the point of a knife... They destroyed my shirt, but... They didn't make me bleed a lot, but there were... little cuts...

Sometimes we would go to Rosarito with some families, or if not, we would figure it out and go later... to eat lunch. When we got more familiar with the place, we would go to Rosarito, or Tecate with some of the people who lived in the neighborhood. We adapted. Yes, I'm very adaptable, and also in that context.

–What difference do you see between your original context, the most immediate context, and the place where you lived in Tijuana? Because you worked in both places. In one place, you had your family, and in the other, only friends, right?

–I think that the family is the most important thing, and also the society, the population. You see, in that place in Tijuana, there were a lot... In that neighborhood, there were a lot of people from

Sinaloa, Oaxaca, and Puebla. It was the most marginalized area of Tijuana. In my hometown, it was different because it was my town. We could walk around freely. Not in Tijuana. You couldn't walk around freely. They would grab you and steal from you. Bad things rarely happened to me. Well, we learned to adapt to it. So... as we would say, we made them our friends. The ones who were the dealers, the ones who did illegal things.

–Did you ever take anything? You were young. What would you say? Did they ever invite you by saying, "Try this"?

–No. They invited me, they invited us to try things. But no, not even a cigarette. I think the most I tried was a beer because once they took us to a... to that same club, they took us there... The girls knew me because I was the kid who was always out there, playing... Oh... I think I just drank a beer. I don't know. I don't remember. But taking... drugs, no. It was sad. It was sad in the context of... not having your family... not being able to buy clothes or anything, and having to walk to work.

I remember that it would get cold. We also had to deal with the cold. So, little by little. We all worked, but I was obviously the youngest. The others were older, the ones who did the most work. They would pay me a little for what I helped them with. I also had to work, you see. I had to work, I had to do certain jobs, and they would pay me a little. So, I could save money to get to...

When we went back to my hometown for just a few days, I was able to go and tell my mother, "Look. Take this." We went shopping, to the clothing sales and I bring them clothes and was so happy. Ah… but it was... it was painful and it was sad, to experience it. Because it's not the same to live with your parents at that age, as it is to have to depend on yourself when you're so young. It was also an advantage because they protected me. They weren't going to let anyone... have anything happen to me. But even so, you're by yourself. I was a little kid. If someone was eating, they would share with me. But I also had a job. I wasn't going to be asking everyone for things. I had to work. The truth is I had to

work to feed myself. So, there was a time when the other guy, the oldest, moved out. So, my cousin and I –the other guy was our friend and he was the oldest one– my cousin and I had to work on our own. We had to get up early in the cold and cut the onyx. Only onyx. Then, in the end, I think he also moved out and I was on my own. So, the only thing I could do was make the little pieces, those little hanging things... cut the figurines, only that. Either that or help other people do their job, because I didn't know how to do everything. Just certain things, because I was a kid. But each one brought 500 pesos, something like that, and it was a lot of money.

I didn't tell my family I was going back. We surprised them. My father, and my mother, began to cry because... they thought we were lost. They didn't know where we were. We just showed up. We were there a few days, and since the other guy thought we were still in Tijuana, he told us, "Come back. In a few days, we'll be going." We went back to Tijuana again but... we crossed the border very soon. One or two days after we got there, the "coyote" sent for us. They told us to go to a certain hotel, I don't remember where. We went there and they met us. We crossed on the bridge, by the canal.

There at the border was a canal. After the canal, was a... McDonald's. After that, they put us in a car, in the trunk, I think. That was it. And from there they took us to San Diego. We were in San Diego about three days, I think, and they took us through California... in a van and there were more of us. After Tijuana… in California, they put us on a PanAm flight, I remember. PanAm doesn't exist anymore... On PanAm, we flew from Los Angeles, California, to New York, to the JFK Airport. Once we got there... supposedly they were going to be waiting for us, but we got scared... And I told the other guy, "Let's get out of here." And we left... the airport. From the airport, we took a taxi. I think we only had about 60 dimes. "Take us to the Bronx." We had memorized the address. "Take us to 12, 1221 Avenue", I think it was 1248. We

had memorized it and they took us there. My cousins were expecting us. No one saw us arrive. They were all worried and we got there, but we didn't know which building. We only knew it was 1248, I think. I don't know if we gave the taxi driver the number or just the street, but we finally got there and we didn't know anyone. The taxi dropped us off. I don't even think we had the money to pay him. We bluffed, and that's it. We saw a Mexican guy from another town in the same municipality that we're from, Zapotitlán Salinas. He came out and said, "Oh, yes." We asked him if he knew Fernando, my cousin Fernando, and he said, "Are you the ones who were coming?" "You didn't show up and we left." "Your cousin went to look for you." I think he helped us pay part of the cab fare. A few dimes that we needed to pay the fare, and he paid part, and then... Then my cousins showed up and I think we enjoyed about a week of rest. But then they took us to work. I was 15 when they took me to work in construction.

–You were...You had turned 15?

–Yes, in October.

–Well, if you want, we can stop here.

–It's five o'clock.

–We stopped at a very interesting part. Angelo is in New York, in the Bronx. At what address? Do you remember the address?

–1248 Hering Avenue. It was Hone, Hone Avenue.

–So, we'll stop there. The next time, we'll continue with your time in New York and your first job in the city. Thank you, Angelo.

–Let me save it.

October 5, 2018
The Life of a Migrant in New York: Work

PART 3.
THE LIFE OF A MIGRANT IN NY: WORK

I'm going to a different place to have the third interview with Angelo Cabrera: the office of Robert Smith, a professor at CUNY and founder of the MexEd organization, the Mexican Educational Foundation of New York. He later co-founded the Mexican American Students' Alliance, MASA, along with Angelo.

I start the conversation with a summary of what I learned in the previous session, not forgetting for a moment that I am with a researcher from CUNY, a teacher, and a leader of the Mexican community who is highly respected for his work in furthering his fellow citizens' right to education in the United States. In addition to that, we are in the office of one of Angelo's primary mentors, and it is my job to highlight the academic validity of the work we are doing.

–Well, let's continue with the interview. It's two o'clock in the afternoon, 2:07 PM. We are having lunch here, in Robert Smith's office. In the last session, we talked about Angelo's arrival in the United States. We covered several topics: the part about his childhood, his family, his father, his brother, his one-year stay in Tijuana, his job making handicrafts, his return to the family's home for a few days, and finally, his definitive crossing into the United States. Once in the States, he boarded an airplane. And although people were waiting for him at the airport, he and his traveling companion preferred the risk of taking a taxi, unsure if they would be able to pay the fare. But they found their destination. Without knowing the exact address, they found the neighborhood where Angelo's relatives lived, and there he paused to

recover his physical and mental strength, following the vicissitudes of his journey. So, Angelo, let's return to your story. You're now in the United States, in New York. You have found your relatives. So, tell me: How long did you live with them?

–Ah… I think about four or five years. Yes, because… or almost seven years, because when I finished my GED, I was… When I started college, I was already living with some other people from Mixquiahuala, Hidalgo.

It was about five years. They were very welcoming at first, but I had to start working because I had to pay back between 1,000 and 1,500 dollars.

–So, how did you cover your basic needs, your food, and send money to your parents or relatives during those five years? We're talking about when you were between 15 and 20 years old. A teenager and a young man of 20. It was about moving from one stage to another in your life. What do you remember about that process? You mentioned that your first job was very difficult because it was in construction.

–Yes. During that time, I worked in construction for one week at the most. Then I worked at fruit stands in Queens. I would start working around noon and finish at midnight. I would get home around one or two o'clock in the morning since there was less traffic at that hour… transportation and…

I also worked at a fruit stand in the Bronx. Later, eventually, I worked at a supermarket, where they would lock me in the basement during the daytime… because I couldn't be outside during school hours. Then, eventually, I left that job and went into the city. I met an immigrant from South Korea and she helped me to get into the GED program. I started working in Manhattan and I think I was about 19 or 20 when I started to do the GED. That was the beginning of my schooling.

–But, how was that, Angelo? Tell me how you felt about being locked in or working at night. What was it like to live as an undocumented worker, without papers? Or did it seem normal to

you? Because your relatives had been through the same thing. What I would like to know is if you saw it as normal, or if you had a critical opinion. Were you anxious or afraid of being recognized, of being pursued?

–Well, you begin to see it as normal. And well, if you were afraid when you were walking down the street, well… Mexicans were being mugged a lot then… leaving work because they always carried cash. At that time, and even earlier, there was a lot of talk about a game called... Mexican Hunting, or “Let’s go hunt Mexicans.” And they usually found them… People would wait at the train stations for the Mexicans to get off and then steal their money. Sometimes the Mexicans would get off the train a bit tipsy and they would steal everything from them. I was more adaptable. I want to point that out. Ah… There was a time when I tried to assimilate. When I say assimilate, I mean being like them, acting, dressing like them, to be unnoticed. Double platform shoes, bell-bottomed trousers. There were fashions… But I tried to assimilate in general with my way of dressing, to go unnoticed. I was the youngest person who lived there. They were all older, and I was the youngest. They didn’t tell me anything, since it was each to his own. They all lived their own life, anyway, they pleased. But it was hard to interact with people... if you’re always worried that you’re going to get mugged. Ah… if I had to leave work very late, I would usually divide up my cash. And… I would always carry a few dollars in my pocket. I was also trying to learn some words in English, so if I saw them on the street, I would usually say hello to them in slang, like... Easygoing, like… Easygoing things like: “What’s up, whatcha doin’?” or, “What’s cooking?”… Things like that, ordinary things. And I would try to go unnoticed. Ah… I think I never… I never got mugged. So, I was always… fine in that sense.

Regarding my relatives here –my cousin– we had a community in that context. We all lived in the same building, which had nine… five, or seven stories, I don’t remember. There were about

14 or 10 departments… and most of the people there were Mexicans. So, if anything happened, if anyone was in danger of getting mugged outside, we'd all go out to defend him. We had created our nucleus. No one bothered the Mexicans on that street.

In terms of interacting, it was a community because we had a schedule. We all had… certain people… A certain group of people had to cook, clean, or run errands and go shopping. We all had to collaborate. We all had to cooperate in every apartment. There were routines for sleeping, routines for going to work, routines for going out… for bathing. We all had a schedule. That's how we supported each other. If someone lost their job… well, we all had to help out. You had your expenses, your rent… and you had to pay.

You slept in your place. Eh… we slept on bunks. Some people just slept on the floor, in the hall, in the living room. In other words, there was no living room. It was just a sleeping space. I think there were about 30 of us. I don't remember. But there were a lot of relatives. They all, in different ways, took care of me. I was the youngest in the house.

Sometimes they would drink but to each his own… They would drink outside, or inside, but it was however they wanted. There was never violence inside the house. But it was a little… somewhat… let's say… Something we didn't have on the bunks was privacy, right?… It wasn't about what you wanted to eat. It was about whatever was available… Whatever people knew how to cook that day, that's what they made. Sometimes some people didn't know how to cook, and could only cook eggs with chili. So, it was eggs with chili for everyone. I used to make them beans, with mole sauce. I would buy pasta or spaghetti, rice, uncomplicated things… pork chops. We had to make food for everyone.

We usually bought groceries two or three times a week and we had two or three grocery carts… at the supermarket, and we filled them up. If we bought pork, it would be four or five

packages for everyone, so that there would be enough for everyone. If… it was going to be chicken, we would buy five packs of chicken or five whole chickens. It was a lot of food, and well… the supermarkets also realized that there were more Mexicans, and they began to order Mexican products that they hadn't sold before. At first, there was just a van that would go by to sell products to people, and we would buy tortillas, cheese, and mole sauce.

Yes, it was a little bit hard, but I was a kid, right? I was young. Even when they would lock me in the basement at one of my jobs, I would see it as part of my life, as something normal. And especially if you don't know. Today I see it in a different context. When I analyze it, I say, "what a terrible situation." But when I was there, at that time… at that age, it was normal for me. Because I would try to invent excuses for not being able to go upstairs: because I was a minor and the only option was to go out at about seven in the evening, just to clean the supermarket. So downstairs, passing things to people, was normal. Yes, totally normal. In other words, I didn't see anything… anything bad about it. But obviously, over time, I began to understand a bit more about what I didn't like, and I decided to move on. I think I worked there… I'm not sure, but maybe it was about four years. When I was 15 and until I was 20, I lived in that building with 30 Mexicans, or maybe longer. I don't remember exactly… I think that when I was in the university, around 1997, my brother came… or in 1998, I think… I was already living with some people from Mixquiahuala, Hidalgo. It was constant movement, always. Sometimes we'd stay for a year in an apartment, and always at the beginning with a large number of renters.

When I moved in with my friends from Mixquiahuala, Hidalgo, the situation changed because… ah… I was renting a very small room from them. My expenses increased, but I had a small space of my own, to study, and it was in the same area, in the Bronx, well… almost the same area, Soundview. You see, I was in

Simpson and then I moved to Parkchester and I ended up in Soundview. I was there for about 14 years, living with those guys. Studying as a university student. It took a while. Ah… in a way, the area was very peaceful for us because we got along well with the people who lived there… even with the drug dealer. So, well… in a way, we were protected because… as long as we didn't say anything, they didn't bother us. And no one from outside of that area would come to steal from us or mug us. So, we were fine.

I can say that in all those years, I never got robbed and I never got mugged. I could move about unworried; I felt confident about going out… Sometimes I would get home at one in the morning, or three in the morning, I don't know. I had to wait for the bus because there's not much public transportation. There is transportation, but it doesn't go by very often. Every hour… half hour, or hour.

At that time, when I would come from… from Queens, well it was obviously very far, right? So sometimes it took me, on public transportation… one hour, or an hour and a half to get home, or two hours and a half. Yes, because I had to… well, that was when I worked in Queens. I didn't work there long, but I had to commute from Junction Boulevard to 42nd Street. At 42nd Street I had to take the local or express, until the last stop in the Bronx. It was very complicated. Yes, there was public transportation. There was, but in the middle of the night, it was very hard. I would be tired, and sleepy, and having to commute for two hours, was very…

But I learned to do it. I always tried to ride next to the conductor, the one who opens the doors. If anything happened, I could knock on the window. But nothing ever happened.

When I would get home at 3:00 AM, my schedule… That was for a very short time. I would start in the afternoon, and I would have time to sleep. But when I started college and was working in the city, I would get up at 4:30 or 4:45 in the morning to catch the

train at 5:15 or 5:25 and be at work at 6:00 AM. I would work until 6:00 PM, and then go study for my GED, with English classes from 6:00 to 9:00 PM. I would get home at 10:00 PM and do my homework until 11:00 PM, 12:00, or 1:00 or 2:00 AM, maybe 2:30 AM, and then get up at 4:00 AM… I was sleeping only three hours a night for a long time. That lasted a long time. How long? About ten years or more. From about ages 25 to 35. My life was always like that. Never… always, work, school, and… well… community service, yes… I slept very little.

I was about 20 when I got my GED… because, in 1990, I was 15, or almost 15. I think it was in 1995 or 1996 that I got my GED when I was 20 or 21. I had to study a lot. They made me take a course about how to take the test, with the basics: mathematics, Spanish, science, history, and at the end, an English test to determine your level… Those are the basics in high school. Trigonometry, algebra… That was just to take the test. The basics in that context. But I had to take a course that took me about… I think about six months. A course about all the areas, in general, because I had been out of school for more than five, or four years, and there were subjects or topics that I didn't know. You see, in Mexico, they don't teach you algebra or trigonometry until high school, so there were gaps in my learning… from three years of schooling. Ah… and I think that it took me six months. I'm not sure. It took me from six to nine months to finish my GED. In 1995 or 1996, I began to study both –English and the GED– maybe later… I was about 20… I wanted to learn English so badly, that in my circle, my circle of friends and acquaintances, I spoke only English. You see, I would get home and speak Spanish, but I was immersed in English. I was very involved in that and when I began to learn English, I started the program at the American Language Center, where the English teacher spoke only English. We couldn't translate; we weren't allowed to translate. So, I learned English in a monolingual setting, in context. And… I wanted to learn. I spoke English as much as I could and with

anyone I could, ah… even at work, at the deli where I worked, and with my co-workers. I usually spoke to them in English, even when I was the… How could you say it? The odd man out… Ah… but I always explained it to them. I explained that it was very important for me to speak the dominant language because it was costing me money to learn it. I was paying about 2,000 or 3,000 dollars each semester, I think. And I would explain to them that if I kept practicing, I would learn more, and I would be able to go to college. And that if I also practiced with them, at least they would learn a word, or two or three words, or a lot of words. So, I agreed with my friends not to speak Spanish with them.

In the end, they also worked at speaking English. Maybe it was a bit weird for people to see us away from the counter, two Mexicans trying to speak English to each other. But it helped us.

I don't remember the first words I learned in English, but it was basic. Saying hello, using English at work. You learn how to make the sandwiches, the names. You learn how to ask, "What else would you like?" It was basic, and concentrated on the things around us. At college, my expectations were different, because I began to learn more academic English. I probably encountered a lot of problems because my grammar in Spanish was not very structured. If you ask me what an adverb or an adjective is, ah… I know how to write, but don't ask me about grammar because I still, even today, have gaps in my learning. I'm starting to learn it and sometimes I give English classes, and I explain what a subject and verb are, all of that, but… I learned by writing because that's how I learned and… and I was in an academic context. I would read the newspaper; *The New York Times* was my treasure. Every day I would get up and read *The New York Times.* I had it delivered to my house and I would take it with me to read it. If I didn't understand a word, I would underline it. When I got home, I would look it up. I had a dictionary at home. I would randomly put my finger on a page and learn a word. I was so motivated… I remember when I started college, English was one of my weaknesses because I didn't understand anything. I had to

advance, in one year, almost a year and a half, from the lowest level to the highest level, to finish the remedial English courses.

I was able to survive those courses by asking and asking. I always asked the teachers for permission and I recorded the classes. I would be on the train repeating; repeating at work and becoming familiar with the concepts. I would look up what I didn't understand in dictionaries. It was difficult but when I decided to talk only in the dominant language, I leaped. I needed to practice because I saw it as a necessity for school. Even in my school, when I started my master's, I had classmates who didn't discover that I spoke Spanish for almost a year and a half, not until they heard me talking on the telephone. They told me, "Hey, you speak Spanish perfectly." They thought I was Japanese or Filipino, and I told them I was Mexican. That's when they found out. I didn't hide my identity but I was trying to learn a language as fast as possible and… it was always like that. I would even get together with Mexican friends and speak English. And if they said something about it, I would tell them, "Well, I'm trying to learn a language and I need to practice it everywhere possible." Sometimes they make fun of you, but that's what I did.

That's why in a way I was very solitary, but I also had friends at the university, basically university friends and that's where we saw each other. I didn't go to parties, but we saw each other at school and since English was the dominant language, that's what we all spoke. Ah… at work, I spoke English with my co-workers as much as possible. Sometimes we ended up speaking Spanish. At home, I spoke Spanish, but I always had that need. I would say that I always carried a tape recorder. I would record my conversations and then listen to them. I tried to compare them with newscasts to decide if they sounded good… I searched for the sound, ah… I was very "immersed" in learning. I had to be… Later, when I started working more with the Mexican community, more with the MASA program, well… I spoke more Spanish with… with the families.

–But by then you had mastered English. Do you think that English made it possible, for example, for MASA to be successful? In searching for funds, did you do everything in English? Did using English help you to become empowered?

–Well, if you're going to ask for funds, you're not going to ask for them in Spanish, because the documents are in English. Yes… English helped me a whole lot. Yes, because it's the language… the language of institutions. It helped me a lot to get where I am today. I got an associate degree in computer programming at CUNY, and then a bachelor's degree in political science and a master's in public policy, in the administration of nonprofits. By then, I knew Robert Smith. I had met him when I was studying for my associate degree, but we began to work more together starting in 2001. We knew each other, but after the September 11 attacks, we started working more together.

–So, you got an associate degree in programming at CUNY? At this campus or another campus?

–No, at a different campus. There are various campuses here. There are eleven, maybe twelve community colleges and 17 or 18 senior colleges. I studied at one of the eleven or twelve community colleges, called BMCC. It is on Chambers Street, by the Manhattan Community College. That's where I studied for the associate degree, the technical degree.

Supposedly an associate degree takes two years, but since I was taking only one or two courses at a time, it took me four years to get an associate degree: four years to do two years' coursework… Plus four or five years to finish the bachelor's degree, which could have taken only two years, but I went for four or five years because I was taking only one class at a time. Doing the associate degree up through my master's took me about 15 years to finish because I was taking one or two classes at a time, although I never took a semester off. I paid for everything myself… about 10,000 dollars a year, more or less.

–And how was that possible?... Because look, you were working, studying. You supported yourself and I suppose that you were sending money to your family. How much of your salary were you sending to your family?

–I never, I never established a percentage. Whatever I had. And if I didn't have anything, that was the way it was… When I didn't have anything, I didn't send them anything. Here they pay you every week. Sometimes… there were times that it was impossible… As we say, "It is what it is."… That's the way it is. Ah… What I've always worked on with my family is not creating dependency. If there's an emergency, there's nothing to do but help. But without creating a dependency. You see, I'll help them when I can, but it's not my responsibility to help them.

–Yes, of course. It's about a very analytical reflection that you've reached, but when you got here at age 15, you had that need…

–Well, I had the mission to help them… but it was always… I'll help them when I can. Obviously with "when I can" I always ended up helping them. I always sent them money for their sicknesses, for their food.

–Do you remember your first weekly wage? If you compare it with your current salary…

–Different, it was different. I think I was earning 100 or 120 dollars per week.

–In construction, how much did you earn? Did you work for two days?

–I worked only for about a week there. I don't even remember how much, but… at the most 200… 200 dollars, 250…

–And at the supermarkets and fruit stands?

–About 200… 250 dollars, I think…

–And how much of that did you invest in yourself? I mean, "I have to pay the rent, I have to buy food… ".

–Well, almost all of it. You see, I didn't send my parents much:

100, 200 dollars a month. Because my university expenses were high. And… although I had a goal at the beginning, I think that my goals changed when I started college, in 1995, 1997, five years later, or seven. Because my motivation for building a big house for them changed. I did build a house for them, a simple house… brick walls, a metal roof… My decision changed in that context because I started thinking… and reflecting… that I needed something for myself. Well, in that context, I said that if I went to school, maybe I could help them differently in the future. But since then, no… the mentality of having a big house… a showy house… was not one of my objectives. Just a little house, sufficient for them to sleep in, to have a roof over their head. Because… I think that after starting college, I knew that going back to Mexico was going to be… almost impossible and so, why do it? At that time, I said, “I’m going to help them put a roof on their house and that’s it.” For infrastructure, I don’t need a big house. I don’t need to build a room for myself because when I go there, who knows if I’ll be able to stay. Those options changed. They still haven’t put on the new roof, but… I want to do it. I want to put on their roof and… fix it up for them because well, I think about what they need… The three of them sleep in one room. They use two rooms, a living room where they don’t… They sit in the living room, but the three of them sleep in the same room. So, I think, why to build them more rooms?… But I’m going to build them a poured concrete roof when things improve. Things are hard right now, with their illnesses and all of that, ah… It’s a… lot of investment. I think that depending a lot on a single person is another context of…

–It was also about combining your studying and working with the dream of many migrants, that they’re going to be able to help their families, and this so-called American dream, of receiving the benefits of living in cities like New York. How did you do it? How about the people who came with you? Did they follow the same path? Did they want to go to school or are they still working in construction or at fruit stands or another type of job?

Did they follow different paths from the ones you followed, from what you're doing?

–Yes, well, none of them came… No one came with the motivation to study. I didn't either. If I had, I would have started school the first day I got here. I think that we all came with the motivation to work, to help our families, and to give them a better future, a house, we could say. My experience changed and I took a radical path. From my town –all of my friends– they are all still working. Eh… They're still working here. You see, many of them are here. One or two went back and opened a business, a pizza place, eh… a little restaurant, but most have not gone back. They're still working. Most of them are still undocumented.

–Because in a way, that was going to be your destiny, Angelo.

How did you change it? That change is what I would like to define because you came with people who were older than you. You were a minor and you entered the workforce. You say that at first, "No… I didn't have the idea of going to school." That your idea was to help your family with their house and so on. So, when did you change your life project?

–It's that… things happen in life. There was no planning. It just happened in 1995, 1996, simply… Well, although I wanted to go to school in Mexico, it happened here, and… well, I just started rebuilding that space, that new path, rebuilding it. And… maybe for many and especially in my town, people would sometimes tell my mother that I was taking drugs. They asked her why I didn't send her much money or why I didn't build her that house, that big house… But… well I was so involved in my studies, that the rest didn't matter. I wanted the satisfaction of going to school, and I didn't care about having a house or not.

I think that what made all of that a reality was the possibility of going to school. You see, when… a person gave me 280 dollars to get my GED, that instant changed my life. That instant… opened my eyes, and changed my future, because for the first time… I began to see myself on a new path, a new road, that I had not

dreamed of. You see, I had dreamed about it in Mexico because I wanted to go to school, but I had lost those interests. So, when I returned to them, I think it was in 1995, that changed my life… knowing that I could go to school. From there I made a 360-degree turn and I focused only on going to school. Things happened step by step, but… well, yes, knowing that I could get my GED, that I could go to college, that changed everything. And it was all random. It was all random. I went to the BMCC school and I said, "I want to enroll. Here is my GED." I had about a 98% grade on my GED, something like that, but a low grade in English, at least on the GED. I don't remember very well. Anyway, I went there and said, "I want to enroll. What are the requirements?" I took my GED, my birth certificate, and my passport. "Do you have a social security number as a resident, as a citizen? Do you have… ?" "No, I don't have anything but I want to enroll." "How are you going to pay?" "Well, I don't know, but I want to enroll." I was so insistent with that lady that she said, "Well, OK. Bring me…" I don't know if I didn't have a passport, but I was missing something then. "Bring me that document and we'll start doing the process and we'll make you an ID." "OK." I went, I took her the document, and I think I didn't translate anything, nothing at all. That person was there at the right time and she helped me. "It's OK. Bring me everything you have…" That lady, I don't remember her name, said, "It's OK." "Bring me everything you have from your school in your country." I gave her my report cards, my birth certificate, my letter of good conduct from… the school there, my passport, and that was all. And I enrolled, she gave me the ID number, and that was it. After that, every time they asked me for my social security number at school, I would give my school ID number. So, it happened. You see, a person was there at the right time and yes… she helped me fill out the application. So… I enrolled and started going to school.

–I'm remembering the interview from last week and I'm thinking about your ability to solve problems or provide timely

service, to make yourself useful in diverse situations. You always pulled something out of your sleeve.

–Right. Yes, I felt entitled, as if I had a right, and even today… it's my right. So, I went to that university and once I was in the system when I applied for the bachelor's degree program, they asked me for my social security number. I wrote down the numbers from my previous ID and… off it went. The people I lived with admired me. They admired me because I was the only one from our town who had… who was at the university. I helped them, when I could, to translate documents. My family, well my mother has always been very proud of my achievements, and since stories have come out in the newspaper, all of that context, it has made her… it has made her happy. Obviously, she doesn't understand the system. She hasn't completely understood it yet. Sometimes she asks why I don't go to visit. It's because I'm in a process and I cannot go. Just simply to make her smile, I say, "I don't want to go to Mexico anymore. I already told you. It was enough. We had enough time together. There's no need for us to spend more years together." I joke with her like that. I explain to her that "it takes time." I tell her, "There's no need for me to explain something very complex. It simply takes time. As soon as I can, I'll go visit you. If it's not possible, we'll accept it. There's nothing to do about it." I had never been back... Out of 26 years, for 24 I had never gone back until I spent two years there… A lot of people went back to Mexico and then returned to the United States without documents. And I couldn't do that because it was an enormous expense: not just going, but also the things you have to take to your family, the time that you're going to be there, and then paying for the ticket back. It's an enormous expense. And, besides, it's seeing if you're able to come back… I said, "No, not even taking into account how much I love my mother." I think that what made me feel better was thinking about… I think that in her youth, my mother had to do the same thing. We're from a small town in the state of Puebla, but my

mother lived in Mexico City as a maid for about nine or ten years, and without going back to see her parents. I think the people who took her to their house when she was 13, I think they never sent her back until she was 19… ten years, she was away. So… I assimilated a lot. I couldn't risk returning. And although I always said, yes, I wanted to be together with all of the family, I had built a family here. When I say "family" I mean people, my friends, people who are close to me here. With them, I had created a new family. A family for having parties, celebrating Christmas, and New Year's, and organizing your entertainment. Sometimes, you feel homesick, but you learn to deal with it. When you don't… when you don't see other solutions, the only solution is to assimilate. And that is what I did, assimilate everything. You can't do anything about it. I couldn't travel and I couldn't bring them here. And always –maybe because I was in school– I always felt like they saw me with a dollar sign. I spent everything on my education. I never… I never calculated exactly what it cost. First,
I would cover my needs here: rent, food, tuition, and whatever was left, I would send to my parents. If a dollar was left over, I would send them a dollar. I never put a dollar amount on my education. Because… if you give it a dollar amount, it's not only the financial cost but also the opportunity cost. I think per year I was investing about... in cash... about 10,000 dollars. Plus the opportunity cost, because sometimes I would stop working. Especially during my master's, when I only worked part-time… I sacrificed 1,000 dollars in earnings so that I could go to college since I couldn't work full time. But… I think it was about 10,000 dollars or 15,000 dollars per year, for 15 years.

So, let's say I have invested about 60,000 dollars… or more. And I was paying the price of a resident. A foreign student has a visa and rights. A foreign student can work legally, well… for a certain number of hours, and can travel. An undocumented student has no rights and cannot do that. But if you went to high

school or finished a GED program and you have a GED certification from the state of New York, and you have lived in New York for five years, you have the right to go to college and pay the same as a resident American citizen, what they call in-state tuition. It's the tuition for the state. But if I am from New York and I go… Let's say that if a person goes to high school in the state of California and then wants to go to college in New York, then he will pay "out-of-state" tuition. In-state tuition applies only to students from the state. I got my high school diploma from the state, so I have the right to pay in-state tuition. International students pay more than in-state tuition. In-state tuition is about half of out-of-state tuition and a foreign student pays two or three times more… out-of-state is two times more than in-state tuition, and foreign students pay three times more.

–Tell me, is there a specific law about what you are explaining?

–Yes, it's called in-state tuition. You can find it on the Internet. In-state tuition. New York in-state tuition. I don't remember the exact name of the law, of the… SV code, the numbers on the file, but look for it as in-state tuition and you will see what it means and how many states use it… The most recent one is New Jersey, just last year.

–Well, I'll look for it, and if you want, we'll stop the conversation for now. Thank you very much, Angelo.

October 12, 2018
The Foundation of My Educational Dreams: My Family

PART 4.
THE FOUNDATION OF MY EDUCATIONAL DREAMS: MY FAMILY

I'm on my way to another meeting with Angelo Cabrera, thinking about the coincidence that it is taking place on a day like today, October 12, which celebrates mixed races. It is 11:12 AM, and I am prepared to continue with the interview. As I approach the designated location, I remember the narrative, the part about Angelo's migration and arrival in the United States, the hard work he had to do, and all of the factors and conditions that facilitated his enrollment in school, along with his genuine, legitimate, and powerful interest in getting an education.

–Tell me a bit more about your schooling, Angelo. Let's try to talk more about your progress in school as linked to your daily life. You commented that you were very interested in going to school but that the conditions weren't right for you to do so. Then you mentioned that you hadn't considered enrolling in school when you reached the United States, but that the opportunity arose. What can you say about what happened between your childhood, in your hometown, and your arrival here in the United States?

–Ah… well, as I mentioned before, getting an education was always something I had wanted to do. Even in Mexico, where I started school at a very young age… I think that motivated me to search continually for new alternatives for going to school. Eh… unfortunately, in Mexico, it couldn't happen since my family didn't have the resources. I had to commute to secondary

school. I went to elementary school in my town, but to go to secondary school, I had to commute to the city. So, eh… that took us about half an hour or 45 minutes in the morning. We had to get up at 4:30 or 5:00 AM because the bus that took us to the city passed by at exactly 6:00 AM… At that time of the day, the buses were usually full of students. So, the bus traveled that route every day. When we got to the city, we had to change buses to get to the school. At first, we went on the bus. Then, ah… there were changes. I remember that at first, the school hours were in the evening. Later, when the school got its building, we would go to school in the morning. That's when my parents sent me. That was all in secondary school. When I got here, I was still enthusiastic about school. Obviously, when you come here, you want to work to help your family. That was our goal: to come here and work to send money to the family, to support them and… Well, that's what happened… And when I was about 20 or 21 years old–I'm not sure, maybe 19 or 20 years old–I started working on my GED, to revalidate high school, and the process here was also a bit difficult, because… my parents weren't here. In other words, I didn't have any support, any monetary support in this case, ah… I had to do everything on my own… and well, it was very hard, very hard because at the same time I had to work and I had to send money to my family. So, in the beginning, it was illogical in that context. Many people around me, when I would tell them that I was going to school or that I wanted to go to college, would treat me as if I were crazy. They would say, "Why do you want to go to school? You're undocumented." They would laugh and make fun of me. Co-workers, friends. People at work would see what I wanted to do as something illogical. But I started. And… another concept was how to handle the context of… going to college because it was very hard for an undocumented student to go to college. There wasn't much information and it was hard for me because I had to look for ways to have access to education, to look within a context of… to learn about my rights as a stu-

dent and I think that made it more difficult. Eh… because it wasn't very common for undocumented students to go to college. Even so… I had the fortune of finding people in the university who helped me, or who simply weren't sticklers and told me, "Go ahead and start. We don't know how you're going to do it, but as long as you pay your tuition, you can come." And that was the process of learning to "navigate the system," which was very hard. Eh… something that I focused on in that context was learning about how to "navigate the system" by helping other students. I remember I even helped some students to pay for their college registration. Eh… I would try to help any student by mentoring him one-on-one, once in a while, by talking about the possibility of going to college, since the concept was opening up for undocumented students. I did that on an individual basis for a time until finally, we began to create a network of various people. In this case, the Mexican Consulate was a great ally, along with the great support of Professor Robert Smith and a colleague, Jesús Pérez, who is the director of admissions at the Center of Academic Advisement at Brooklyn College and also a great promotor of university education. Since he was already working for CUNY, this network was created within the Mexican community, with the Consulate and CUNY, and… various workshops were given. I think we did the first one in the 1990s, in 1997 or 1998, in the Mexican Consulate, and… we were expecting only a few people, at the most 20 or 40. But the event raised a lot of interest because it was announced in the Hispanic media and it was the first time that anyone had openly said, "Educational Fair for Undocumented Students." I remember we had to take the speakers outside on the sidewalk because there were a lot of people. That's how the educational movement started, by forming alliances. And eventually, once I was in college, the most difficult thing was the language. When I started college, I barely knew… anything… At the same time that I started my GED, I started studying English. I enrolled in an English program. My English was very

limited. So, when I started college, I was at the lowest level of English and since I was an undocumented student, I had to pay for the classes. It was a class that had no credit, but it was equivalent, in the number of hours. I think they were… they were called noncredit hours. So, I had to pay for the class as if it were six credit hours, and my two classes were equivalent to full-time: English and mathematics. The way things were, I had to take math. I took English and math as remedial courses. Math, obviously, took me less than two… or one semester to catch up, or two semesters… In English, it took me a bit longer, but I think it was about a year and a half and basically, I had to skip a lot of levels of English because it was very expensive. So, I got on the ball, as they say in Mexico. I studied a whole lot and I was able to pass the exams, jumping from 65 to 75 to 92 and then to a regular class. I had to take English classes for almost a year and a half

… and I think that was the hardest part, the language, trying to find my way around the university because, in a way, your migratory status makes you… makes you feel excluded. No one would ask you about your migratory status at school, and no one would ask you if you had papers because… well, in my case, I had no type of financial aid. No type of scholarship applied to my situation, so basically at no time was there a need for anyone to ask about my migratory status in the country… When they asked for my social security number or my ID, I would put the university ID number, which had the same number of digits. And since I was already in the system, if they asked me for my social security number at school, I would give them my student number and my picture would appear. So, there were no questions and… Well, that's how it was… Eventually, I got an associate degree in computer programming and I transferred to this university from Baruch College. I think it was in 2007, something like that. I transferred to work toward a bachelor's degree in computer science, and well… up until that time, there had been no questions. I think it was in 2000, yes, my first semester.

I think when I started… Well, I don't remember. It was in 2013 or 2015 when I applied to this university, and it was the same question: What is your social security number? And I put down my student number and all of my information was there. It was all OK… and I continued on that way, but just after the September 11 attacks, the university lawyer decided to change the policies for undocumented students. Instate tuition had existed since previous administrations, I think, since before 1995. But it was a university policy, based on university criteria. There was not a legal policy, simply an internal policy. In 2001, they eliminated that benefit, ah… many of my friendships were affected. People couldn't pay for their education. They sent out a letter around Thanksgiving, a letter saying that they had to pay like foreign students or out-of-state students unless they proved their legal US residence to qualify for in-state tuition. Obviously, many of my friends began to drop their classes. Yes, they… they dropped out, as they say here. They withdrew from the university and many of them, friends of mine, ah… they left. They couldn't stay in school, ah… and that's when we decided to create the student organization, the Mexican American Students' Alliance, MASA. It is known as MASA, and we decided to create it. The movement collaborated with other student groups, nonprofit organizations, employees' and teachers' unions, and we were able to pass the instate tuition law on August 19, 2002. Since then, the law has benefitted thousands of students because it is no longer only a university policy or university criteria; it is a law in the state of New York. It was passed with activism… Protests were held. I was there. I organized a three-day congressional trial with other students and a lot of lobbying was done with politicians. There were mass protests, and the university system was sued. Various actions were aimed at the New York State Senate. And under the leadership of Governor Pataki, it was announced at a Latino forum in Albany, the city where… the Senate meets. And finally, they opted to pass the law. But we worked from November 1,

2001, until July of the following year: the work of lobbying, protests, and activism. And the law was passed. At that same time, many other states were considering it. For example, Texas passed the law first, before we did. But in Texas, there was less movement because it was an agreement. You see, it was… the same legislation moved forward with support from the governor of that time. In other words, there was not so much, shall we say, resistance. There they passed it in less than three months, once the dialogue started. Here it took us longer because there was a bit of resistance to the law. It passed first in Texas, then in New York, followed by 18 states, including New Jersey most recently. And in the same way, the Dreamers' movement for the Dream Act arose, in 2001, out of in-state tuition. That was where they started. Before that, in 1997 or 1998, I believe DACA began. Ah… not DACA. Well, DACA because the Dreamers point to the act of dreaming. All of that had been discussed for a long time. And finally, we were able to pass the law here in New York. My role in the movement had more to do with leadership. You see, one of the things that happened was that I became the spokesperson… In other words, I was one of the leaders within the movement and I organized within the Mexican community. I also became the spokesperson of the movement because… I was one of the students who came out of the shadows for the first time during that period, which was unusual. Afterward, I continued with my studies. Ah… after the movement was over, I devoted my energy to my studies.

My case was of interest because although I was an undocumented student, the university did not penalize me. I never got that letter. You see, I went by unnoticed in the system. So, I was like the voice of the program, asking the system why they treated me differently from the other undocumented students. But I ran the risk of also being penalized and expelled. But we continued ahead, and at that point, my life became more public. And finally, after the student movement, I focused on the organization. I was present in many other Dream Act events, fighting in Washing-

ton, DC with our student group from the New York State Leadership Council, with Cristina Jiménez and Walter Barrientos, who are leaders of Sim León, at the head of the Dream Act movement. I focused more on the Mexican community, which I believe… Well, I felt there was a great need and that we had to work along those lines. I distanced myself a bit from the national movement to focus, in New York, only on the Mexican community. I was part of the Mexican task force at the university. It had been created to help the Mexican community and we started to create a movement within the community to expand the movement and the number of university students, with the support of the Consulate and CUNY. We were able to sign a memorandum of understanding, a letter of mutual support, of mutual work with the Consulate or the Mexican government in this case, and CUNY. Talks also began about the creation of an institute, which later resulted in the creation of the Mexican Studies Institute led by Dr. Alish López, in the Bronx.

Later, I focused more on MASA. I began to create a school action program. My routine was going to my college classes, going to work, and then hurrying to MASA, for more than a decade, up until 2011. Ah… and well, I was studying computer science, but the in-state tuition movement made me change my ideology, and I started focusing more on studying political science. I graduated with a bachelor's degree in political science. I applied, took some courses, and wrote a paper in the last semester when you have to write essays about political science. I worked on some research and I think that… I focused on what was then the problem of the mass murders of women in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico. The research was not on the entire context, on finding the guilty parties, but on studying how the problem was handled. For my master's degree in public policy, I wrote a thesis, which consisted of creating a leadership program with parental leadership in public schools. And, well, it was good. I was proud of it. I was able to graduate. That has been my work in the community, always supporting

projects that promoted education. I think that, well, something had happened. Earlier, many of those educational programs had been concentrated on the adult community. Everything was focused on culture, English classes for adults, and labor rights. But it was all aimed at the community of adult migrants… It was more inclined toward culture and adults and I believe that in some way… I mean, I don't want to take credit, not for myself, but I believe that one of the things that I always insisted on a lot at the meetings of Mexican leaders at the Consulate, and always in my public discourse as well, was that we had to promote education in the young community, in the community of the second generation. That we had to create leaders, we had to teach them how to lead movements, how to lead organizations. That we had to open up spaces, we had to give young people the opportunity to approach organizations, and we had to be their mentors. And I think that I emphasized that a whole lot, a whole lot, a whole lot, until eventually organizations began to create programs within their organizations. MASA used to exercise and has always exercised leadership in education with the first generation because we included the parents. It was always MASA leading the student movement. And yes, a huge change was seen between the 1990s and 2005, when organizations were led by adults, by migrants, by the first generation that had come from Mexico. And it was a bit sad, at times, to see it because… Well, it was sad in its context because, eh… it used the same politics as in Mexico. Within those first generations, it was the politics of division, the politics of disagreement, the politics of party divisions, machismo, eh… there were occasions when even within the Consulate there was aggression against women who were trying to lead, and some were even slapped.

Previously, a meeting at the Consulate meant resorting to blows. It was almost like going for a fistfight, eh…, and all of that changed. Those politics have been left behind. It still exists, but since the new leaders are young, ah… And I think that is good.

I think that –and I say, I don't take credit– but I insisted for a long time that we had to change the leadership of the Mexican community.

–Angelo, where are those people you prepared? Are they the leaders of an organization–those people you felt you had a duty to help, the ones who participated in activities? Do you believe you have heirs from your days as a student leader?

–Yes, there are many of them. You see, they are there because many came while I was working in MASA. Many people came to help and many became leaders, although they're not in the MASA, organization. They're in different leadership programs. Eh… yes, an example would be Ana Celia, who came as a volunteer to MASA and was part of the multiple project team and is now at the top. She is in charge of the organization. Now, as students, we could say Erika Flores. I supported her when she was very young and now, she is a professional with two master's degrees, a program evaluator in California and New York, and traveling constantly. There are many more cases like those.

Now, personal heirs, not really. No heirs, only people who experienced the process and now… But the leadership question is very broad, isn't it? I have problems calling myself a leader because we are not leaders. We are simply tools, eh… We serve so that others can attain their dreams and goals. In other words, leaders do not exist. Ah… many people have gone through the program I have coordinated and today they have reached, we could say, a dream. They have been able to reach those achievements they wanted in their life. Professor Steven Álvarez, a wonderful colleague, I met in the subway. I invited him. He was studying classical literature. I invited him to join the MASA program. He came, we worked together, and eventually, he took… He was a young man who grew up in Arizona… where they taught him that speaking Spanish was bad. He was totally monolingual, very Anglo, we could say. But when he came to MASA –I invited him and he was reluctant– he came to MASA and began

to discover a different world. Something he had not been in contact with since he was born and which would eventually change the course of his research. From studying only classical literature, he would move to study the phenomenon of migration from the context of bilingualism and the power of language. He began studying children who were born in the United States and how their parents interacted with them. Today he is a well-known professor who is promoting literature, language, migration within the literature, and linguistics. So, he discovered that, through this. Ah… Anaís Solís, another teacher, Rebeca Madrigal, ah… Well, many students have been involved, but if we put it in the context of leaders who are in the community movement, maybe not so many. They are in the context of their movements, of continuing to support the community from their trenches. If you put it in the context of how many students benefited from in-state tuition, well some young leaders are now leaders of Mexican organizations and who at some point qualified for in-state tuition. That movement had a foundation and it was when we decided to go and protest. You see, there may be… thousands of those people. Eh… and numerous people were at my side, at my side all of the time; my attention was divided among them. I stay in contact with them and we talk, but… they all have their own life, in this context, and more leadership in their professions. I stay in contact with them. And there are a lot of them.

–Angelo, tell me something. Could we go back to your town? What would you think about returning, taking a tour of the whole process, your trajectory up to your joining the movement? I remember that in the second interview, you mentioned that when your brother started school, you wanted to go too. And that they let you. We would be going back to elementary school, to when you started school, and to the school's culture.

–I was about four or five years old. How old are children when they start elementary school in Mexico?

–Six years old.

–Six. So, I was four.

–Was there a preschool?

–No, there was no preschool. Only elementary school. My brother was six years old when he started first grade. Since he's two years older than I am, I would have been four. I did the work like the rest of the class. I learned how to read when I was very young. About four years old. You see, he was in one classroom and I was in the other, as a visitor. I was the smallest. So, when I was four, I started school along with him. He was in first grade and I started as a visitor. I passed the grades until I got to third grade, and I think they had to make me repeat, and hold me back because I was too little to be there. At age six, I was already in third grade. So, they kept me in third grade another year. But I passed the tests. Then they decided to enroll me.

–Yes, because enrollment happens at age six.

–At age six. But they put me in third grade, or second grade, I don't remember. In second grade, they put me back a year. Yes, I repeated the second grade. But I could already read and I could add and subtract… Yes, I remember so many teachers. I was the youngest at all the festivities. I think it was my interest in school… ah… I remember that I was always curious. The subjects they talked about attracted my attention. I even think that… Once they were talking about a physiological topic of being human and I asked a classmate some questions, and… they suspended me from school because they thought I was making fun, and… well, there I was in a corner, crying and crying because they had suspended me from school.

I remember there were teachers, one man who would always hit the children if they didn't know how to read or were being disruptive. Well, I was the one they never hit because I was always doing better than the others, and I was very active. In the town, there were groups… let's say, I think that… they were groups of young people from the parish of the church who would get together to do events, fundraising, all of that, and in the end,

I was their leader. When I was 12 or 13, there were young people aged 18, 20, or 25, and I was the one leading the projects. I would go with them and I was the one who would ask for the prizes for the raffles. I think I always liked that context.

I would always question things. It didn't matter who the person was. I even questioned my grandfather's authority. If he said, "Don't do it," I would ask, "Why? Give me a reason why." "Because I'm your grandfather." "No, that doesn't give you the authority just because you want to. Why the different treatment? Why do you ask me to do your cleaning?" I even told him… That's when I would argue, because he would tell me, "Clean it." But I would say, "Why do you tell me to do it if you have other nephews and other grandchildren and you treat them differently? I can't do it for you if you treat your other grandchildren differently." Right. I was like him in a way because he also liked to question things. Eh… ah… I was, I was very… I always liked the concept of participating in everything, even at the festivities, or at school. I always had to be participating in everything. Later, ah… I graduated from sixth grade when I was very young.

–In elementary school, how many students were in each classroom? Was it a small school?

–It's very hard to remember, but… there were about 20 in each grade because there was a classroom for each grade. Maybe 40 per grade.

I especially remember my teacher, Adriana. I was always the most protected: the one they took care of so that he wouldn't get hit because I was the one who was going to get ahead. I did all the homework and would even get mad at my mother if she couldn't buy me the notebook I needed. I would always look for a solution. I started working because I wanted to have my things. If I needed a notebook, I would work so that I could buy it.

–How did you feel about changing from your town's elementary school to a secondary school in the city?

–I had already started to go to the city. In fact, I learned how to travel by myself to the city when I was seven. Before that, I would go with my mother; when I was four, we would go to the market to barter tortillas. By the time I was seven or eight, I could go by myself on the bus. Sometimes I would just get on, or I would help the driver collect fares, or I would tell him, "They're coming in the back door." So that they wouldn't get ripped off so much… When I changed schools, I was already familiar with the city, I knew how to get around, and where to go, and I didn't resent the change. What was hard was starting secondary school. It was hard. And in my case, sometimes I didn't have access to all the resources, scholarships, or supplies to do homework, a computer; so, I had to do the homework by hand… Everything was typed. I would borrow my uncle's typewriters to do my homework. My uncle gave me a guitar that belonged to my great-grandfather and that guitar is still in my house; it was in the Mexican Revolution and that's why I still have it… I used it for music class… And if I had to do a school project, I would stay in the city and go back home a bit later. I would go back to work, to help my father. Sometimes I would get home, eat, and start working. I would work from 4 PM to 10 PM and then do homework. Or I would start working at 4 PM, for about four hours. I helped my father do jobs around the house. Although I was always the smallest at school, I was closer to the normal age in secondary school. There were younger ones, maybe with one or two years of difference. I think I stopped going to school for about a year or half a year, but I'm not sure. I think that… I was about… I was about one year younger than the rest and… ah… Yes, but it was different, obviously because of the financial help. Not many students were going on the bus. They had better incomes. I was the student with high-water trousers because one pair had to last the whole year. The uniform was red: red trousers and a white shirt. But I always went to school with a briefcase. I always liked that personality type. I wanted to be a professional

–Who bought you the briefcase?

–I did.

–You mean, you were working, you had to pay my school expenses, and from a young age, you were going to school and working with your parents?

–That's right.

–How did you do it?

–You get used to it. It's part of your life.

–If all of the children in your town did the same thing, was it part of their life as well?

–Yes, usually, but there were other children, the children of communal landowners who, well, no. Their parents had an income. The ones who didn't have an income had to … but it was normal. There were some, I don't remember how many, who had some financial support. But we had to work, to help our parents. Some children had to watch cattle, children who had to go get things, and firewood. It's a rural area, so the children had to work. Even though there was a little group who didn't need to.

–It's noon. Let's stop our conversation for today. We'll continue with the part about education because we've started it. Perhaps Angelo will remember a bit more. Thank you, Angelo.

October 19, 2018
Navigating the System

PART 5.
NAVIGATING THE SYSTEM

I'm on my way to my next meeting with Angelo, visualizing the consecutive scenes from his story: his parents' house in that small town in the state of Puebla, his bus rides to the closest city, his diligence in providing simple services to earn money, and on the other extreme, his activism and agency in accessing higher education in one of the most important cities in the world. I greet him with the certainty that we have continued to collect elements to reach the objective of this project.

–Hello. Good morning. Today is the 19th: October 19, 2018. I am with Angelo Cabrera, and we are going to move forward with the interview. During the last session, Angelo, we were talking about your educational trajectory from elementary and secondary school up to your political participation to defend the right to education, when undocumented students were asked to pay out-of-state tuition, after the September 11 attacks. So, Angelo, several things attracted my attention and I would like to talk more about them. One question is, how did you learn to navigate the system? When you say, "I learned to navigate the system," are you referring to actions like giving your student ID number when they would ask for your social security number? Did all of that teach you how to navigate the system? What is navigating the system? But besides that, how did you come out of the shadows? How did you attain a public presence and become the movement's spokesperson?

–Well, you learn some about navigating the system from a clandestine position. You know you're undocumented and that

barriers exist from the beginning. You see, since you're a migrant, you already have a lot of barriers. But when you know you're undocumented, the barriers multiply and you learn to navigate the system from a clandestine context. You go to different offices, like health departments, to ask for information, always on behalf of another person, if he can… if he can have access if he can apply if he can be the recipient or can obtain those services. If you do it in the context of asking for information for another person, you avoid revealing your migratory status from the beginning. So, if they tell you, "Yes, there's a possibility," then you take advantage of it yourself. In that case, you're not the person asking for the information. The other option is that you simply apply or ask for access to the service while knowing that you are going to be rejected. From the context of knowing that you will be rejected, you adopt the opinion that "it doesn't matter, I'm going to see… to see what can be done, what's going on, what happens." And from that point, in that context, if you can obtain the benefit, you can say that you did it. The other option is to do the research, to look for the right people in different sectors so that they can help you. In other words, knowing a teacher who can help you, knowing someone… a university advisor, a person who has already completed the process. You start to look for the information to navigate the system. You have to know how to recognize the places where you can enter and those where you cannot. I'm referring to learning to navigate the system. One option is that you… have the erroneous assumption or.… the erroneous belief that you don't have access because you're undocumented. If you believe in that context that you cannot do things because you are undocumented, you start to create a series of barriers. But when you say, "I'm going to try, and if it works, it works," the key is always to look for the right people: people who have the power to make a decision. I met several people that way: advisors, teachers, ah… people who have an area of authority… of decision making. Various people

–their names are not important right now– in the system have done this. Once you meet them and explain your story and your life, they always look for the solution. They may not do it publicly, but they'll do it personally.

Once I didn't have the money to pay for a semester. I went to talk to a teacher, and a college advisor and they helped me to get a scholarship. I don't know how he did it. He looked for private funds, and he made sure that he wasn't breaking any law in the context that it wasn't government money; rather, it was private funds. They look for a way to help you. So… or if not, they will tell you, "There's another program; apply and see what happens." Or I would go and tell them, "I found this program, I want to apply, but I think they have these requirements." And they would help me with the applications and tell me, "Try it." In other words, you already know they're going to tell you no, but if they tell you yes, you're ahead. I got a scholarship that paid for my expenses. I got a fellowship at Harvard. Ah… scholarships at times that helped me pay for books, helped me to… have money for food, because at one time I didn't have that money. I was in a crisis and they helped me.… It wasn't much –200, 300, or 500 dollars– but it covered my food for a time. Everything depended on need. And it wasn't just that. It was the person with personal criteria who would look for options. So, obviously, when I mention navigating the system, it is because from that context, eh… I would help another student by putting him into contact with that same person and he would help us one by one, maybe not publicly, but according to his criteria. That's how I finished my master's degree, even at Harvard. But there is no strategy. We would look for the opportunity, based on the day and the moment. We cannot develop a strategy. After all, as an undocumented person, a strategy is invalid because anything can happen. In other words, if you have a five-year strategy to go to school, at any time the immigration officers can pick you up and return you to Mexico, and your strategy is destroyed. It is more day by

day, planning the day, what you are going to do that day, and the opportunities that you are going to look for that day. I didn't have a strategy as such. In other words, if A took me to C and C took me to D, I would have to adapt my plans. They are simply options. But yes, if I needed money for a book and I didn't have money for a book, I would go and talk to the teacher and explain my situation. "I don't have the money to buy the books. I'm a student with limited resources, I'm undocumented, and I wanted to ask you if you have a copy in the library." Sometimes they would tell me, "No, but I can ask for an extra book; in the meantime, take my book and photocopy it. Copy a chapter." That way, I also helped other students. Because if I asked for the book, the teachers would sometimes ask their assistants to photocopy the first three chapters and upload them to the course's Blackboard site. So, I could help other students that way. In other words, I would look for my objective, my opportunity. There was no strategy. It was just whatever I had and knowing how to use the moment to create an opportunity.

–Well, I agree that it wasn't exactly a strategy for undocumented students. But what is true is that you, from a young age, developed many capabilities for survival, many strategies. Although perhaps you didn't do it in a conscious form, you did it simply because it was necessary. That is what I mean by a strategy or mechanism.

–Yes, as a mechanism or strategy, it's like coming out of the shadows, eh… making your own story known while sharing your desire to get ahead. You will find people who will help you and people who will criticize you. My situation led me to many people who helped me, and also because of my activism. I think I used different strategies. Sometimes, I would work here or volunteer to help Robert Smith, since I had access to… photocopying and printing. It's an advantage in a way, but not all students do it or have it.

–Yes, it is your capacity of agency, which is what I would like to work on here. The concept of agency is what makes you act in a certain manner to achieve an objective. That is the topic. And you, throughout your trajectory, have shown a lot of agency, the "capacity" to talk with the teacher, to come out of the shadows, and to make known your story, your educational trajectory, and your desire to stay in school.

–Right. Yes, I think that helped me a lot. Besides, coming out of the shadows is… talking about yourself, talking about your story, making it known, and not being afraid. Eh… I think that the student movement helped me because before that we didn't come out of the shadows much as undocumented students. It was a strategy that we started in 2007, that made us pick up the pace with DACA. But I was one of the first students to tell his story as an undocumented student when we were involved in the instate tuition movement. It was even linked to the Dreamers movement, where I was the spokesperson, or in a way, I was the face of the movement. It was idealism when confronted with the US bureaucracy, with its limitations in providing services to undocumented young people. As an undocumented student, I was penalized in some areas but not in others. In other words, it was like the key example of… "Why didn't I get the letter?" In other words, it was like… What are your tools for deciding which student gets benefits and which student doesn't? It was obviously a risk because I could have been one of those students who got the letter. I also could have been forced to withdraw. And well, not being afraid of telling my story helped me because I got an associate degree in computer science and then a bachelor's degree in social science, and I think that was… Yes, it was because of the movement. It was the first time I had access to learning, to the knowledge of how the policy worked. Eh… I discovered that having access to legal knowledge meant that you could use the laws not only to help yourself but also to help other people. And

of that fascinated me. I was always fascinated by law, but this… eh… I didn't see many options, maybe, but when I saw that we, as undocumented students, could bring change to New York, and implement a law, eh… I discovered that it was my passion. So, I decided to change my major to political science or public policy and I think it was one of my best decisions. Because I was not studying for myself, for what I wanted to do –systems engineering–, which was going to give me only a personal benefit, because I was aiming at the salaries paid in that area. When changed to social science, public policy, eh… I realized that… my knowledge or my opportunity to work with people or to learn about law offered a massive change for other people. I moved away a bit from an individualistic context to more of a community context. And it was there that I began to become closer to my community. Before that, I was… I was isolated. Let's say, during the process of wanting to learn the language, focusing only on the Anglo lifestyle, eh… I had also… ah… I had lost contact with my community. And by changing to social science, creating MASA, and working for minors, I began to have a new approach to the Mexican community and I began to gain… momentum in speaking the Spanish language more. Then, another change began to take shape.

–Another important change. You are associating this with learning to navigate: changing from a technical major to one that was more social and human, being in contact with MASA, with the Dreamers movement when it first began, when you were one of the main leaders. Were you a student then?

–Yes.

–That was before the September 11 attacks, correct?

–Yes, it was before. I started going to school in about 1997. I started by doing the high school equivalency.

–But the in-state tuition law had not been passed yet.

–Those policies had previously depended on university criteria. The benefit had been put in place about ten years earlier, but

it depended on the institution's criteria, on the criteria of the person in front of you. So, in other words, there was no established law. But due to the September 11 attacks, eh… a legal barrier was created. In 1996, undocumented individuals were prevented from receiving federal benefits. After the attacks, they used the argument that universities received federal funds. In other words, but more than… Since the 1980s or 1990s, there had already been… This type of benefit already existed, but according to their criteria. In other words, there was no policy, since they simply decided on their own. You might get the benefit or you might not, depending on the person on the other side of the desk.

–Do you know anyone who enrolled in the university before you did? Or do you believe that you were the first one of that group who openly and publicly enrolled? Can you identify anyone in the same undocumented situation who got into the university?

–Well, earlier… before me, some had come at a younger age and were able to go to elementary school, secondary school, and high school, and they had a person who helped them apply to college. I don't know them personally, but I have heard about some who were able to go to college or were able to finish a few semesters before dropping out. But due to… when I was in college, eh… due to the September 11 attacks, I met more people who were enrolled in the university, and who had received the letter and couldn't stay. So, along with many of them, I started organizing. That's where the whole movement started because they got the letter but I didn't, which is an example of a policy applied… according to individuals and not to established criteria. Yes, we started saying openly that undocumented students could go to college in about 1997. We said it publicly in 1997.

Later, a federal movement was generated; it was the Dream Act. A lot of work was done at the national level to pass legislation to give them access to residency, to citizenship. I think the law was almost passed in 2007 but it failed by about two votes.

So, that was the constant struggle at the national level for many young people, and organizations of young leaders, which led Obama to sign DACA, although as an executive order. It was a bit… it was based a lot on the previous Dream Act. So yes, it had already been started… It had been lobbied in the Senate and Congress in about 2001, I think. In other words, because of what we started with instate tuition, the Dream Act movement was also started. In 1997, I was barely starting college. In 1997, I was getting my GED. I think I got my GED in 1997 or 1998. I think it was about 1997 when I started college. I got my associate degree in about 2001. From 2001 to about 2006 or 2007, I did my bachelor's degree and from 2007, I think, to 2013, my master's. In other words, if I had… if I had gone full-time, I would have finished on time, but I would take one class at a time. That's why it took me almost 15 years to get to the point where I am now.

–And during those 15 years, how did you navigate the system? Now I understand what it means to navigate, but being in the system is not easy, is it? In other words, not many students are there for 15 years. Or are there?

–I don't have the figures, because there was never a count. There was never a count of undocumented students. Ah, but yes, there were thousands. The numbers increased, and obviously, the number is much higher today, but CUNY, well, cannot reveal those numbers. It has never been made public how many students have enrolled without documents. It's like a university policy.

–There's something else we left pending from the previous interview, and that is leadership as a tool. In other words, when you said that you came out of the shadows, and talked about your life, did you already have that conception of leadership? In other words, the idea of a leader as a tool and not a leader who mobilizes?

–Well, yes. Sometimes… ah… sometimes we overuse the concept of a leader. And sometimes the concept of a leader… is used more in an "egotistical" context, such as, "I'm the one who leads

all of these people." We don't lead; we are simply tools as we support other people to attain their objectives. Because if we say, "I lead," we are talking from a context in which the person we are supporting does not have self-leadership. And everyone does. They simply haven't developed it. So, through the movement, well, I simply learned tools from other people who had done work in activism. That's where my concept is from, that I'm simply a tool so that other people achieve the same thing. My knowledge has no barriers. My acquired knowledge has no patent. I simply aim at having other people use the same techniques or different techniques so that together we can attain change. I see it from that context, and I'll always continue being a tool for others. In other words, I know that you can often be categorized as a leader, but it is a very broad kind of leader in a very broad context. In academia, in many contexts, they talk about leadership and different kinds of leaders. But it's about knowledge, right? They are tools. From that point, in that context, I see… I see myself as "part of" a movement, but not as "I am the movement." Because we join forces. Even someone who goes out.… only to distribute flyers is already part of the movement. In other words, leadership comes in different contexts. From that context, I see… the way we're only tools.

–When you say that you learned various techniques and in turn, you taught the techniques of struggle, what techniques or what knowledge are you referring to? What do you mean by constructing knowledge about the work of leadership, community leadership if you wish, that is more equal?

–Well, the way that I constructed my knowledge –even while at the university or workshops, or fellowships that I applied for– always had to do with my need to create a program or direct a program. For example, MASA, right? An example in MASA was when we had to find a uniform. And since we were a small organization, we didn't have the money to pay a person to make flyers and do fundraising. So, I had to take a course about how to apply

for funds. During the census campaign of 2010, and because of the fear of participating in our undocumented community, I also took a class that helped me to write programs while doing a bit of mapping. So, I helped create a… we could say, a strategy for reaching the undocumented community… using techniques ranging… from trust and support for the diversity of our community to reaching them and then to being able to count them. Using places where they congregate –churches, basketball courts, and stores– and creating a map of the area where I was in the Bronx. Marking where the stores are, where to go, who to talk to, and all of that sort of thing. All of that meant that the census recognized me and gave me an award for that work. And so on. Eh… since I wanted to learn how to organize the community, I took workshops about community organization. Eh…I wanted to make things known to the public … or speak… learn how to speak with the media, so I took classes about how… I constructed that knowledge. One of the strategies that we use or that is used a lot with the Dreamers… and it was used a lot with Barack Obama, eh… is storytelling. How to tell a story. Eh… that strategy was designed by Marshall Hanks, a Harvard professor who taught me a class in leadership one semester. It was part of my fellowship and we learned how to talk from that context; in other words, from the story of… yes, from the story of I, we, and action. In other words, the… well, Obama was a… What did they say? That he mastered liberal speech in the way he would talk to everyone and say that we all have something in common. Then, he would relate it to his story, about what made him take action, and then he would appeal to everyone to take action to create a change. That dynamic is what has also been used with the Dreamers, the technique of storytelling. And… well, other techniques. From… learning how to write press releases… how to work with the media. We could say, eh… that the media will always be present. There is a reporter, and when he is called, he'll go to the event. I learned to work with them because when they were in-

vited to an event, they would go. In other words, first, learning how to do a press release to send it in and get it published… or to invite them. Then, after the event, write a narrative of the event in the form of an article so that, eh… if they couldn't go to your event, they'll accept your article. As if the media had written it, so that they publish it, and in that way, we can multiply MASA accessibility to the media. In other words, I did a marketing strategy. I learned that at various Harvard programs and also at the university, in various workshops. I developed a close friendship with many journalists, and if they couldn't come, I would write the article, I would send it to them, and it was a copy/paste for them to include it. It was good for them, right? And… it was a form of self-promotion for the organization.

–The media play an important role in social movements and public policy. What else, besides the media, do you think is important so that a leader can truly promote change?

–Well, I think it is very important to know how to listen to people. Knowing how to listen to them so that when you are going to create a program or create a change, you don't do it because you want a change, but because you want them to create a change. You cannot implement something that you think they need. You must promote something based on what they need. You have to make them believe, develop the program, develop the skills to talk to the media and to write a grant, to, ah… talk to other people and motivate them. In other words, that is the way to work with the community and work as a leader. At the end of the day, you are a tool. You are a person like them. In other words, being well known does not put you at a higher level than others. And above else, respect. Respect for them, for their different educational levels, culture, religion, ah… to support them and lead them by the hand and tell them that they are not alone and that it's OK to make mistakes. And that if something happens, we'll work together to fix it. But that, in the end, eh… they assume, ah… ownership… of what they are doing. I think that this has

helped me. In other words, there are many other things, obviously, numerous strategies that can be used. But in my opinion, it is about mutual respect, knowing that you're not creating a change but helping them to create their change and that you are only a tool to transmit your knowledge. And that by working together, they can create… a program or a change based on their own needs. Eh… I think that has helped me a whole lot. Trusting people. Being transparent.

–Angelo, eh… I have been listening to you talk about being a leader or learning to be a leader at the university. You learned how to write an article, how to send it, and how to speak in public. But some things developed within you, from your life experience. For example, it could be respect and transparency. Not things that you learned at school, but from life itself. What taught you to increase the learning that you constructed and emulated?

–Life has taught me everything. In other words, taking a class at the university doesn't mean that it is going to change me, that it is going to… How could I say it? That is going to be all the tools that I need. In other words, life and experience have been my teachers. Necessity has led me to learn, use it, and apply it. That's what life has shown me. Eh… if I needed to write a grant, I learned how. If I needed to write an essay or an article, I learned how to do it. In other words, academia is there to help you with knowledge, but it is… the experience of life itself that helps you to acquire that knowledge, based on necessity. Something that I always keep in mind is that, in my opinion, pain, tragedy, or need has always been the source of my inspiration and my life changes. That is what has led me to take action in everything. In other words, I am I, I am the person I am, because at certain times… like any other person, I have lived through something tragic. Being young and undocumented, a migrant, what I experienced in the streets or being locked in a basement: I used all of that as a source of energy… In other words, there were times

when I didn't have enough money for food… I remember once when I was in Tijuana and I asked a man for work so that I could eat or buy something to eat… and I remember that he said that the only thing he had was some mangos that they were about to throw away because no one was going to buy them. Those little mangos were almost rotten and I sat down, and the ground was the table where I sat down to eat. It was spectacular because I had a beautiful view of the surroundings, ah… Mangos became a delicacy of survival for me for a long time, for a long time… And usually, I don't eat mangos. When I do, it's because I need to believe once again, to become inspired again by the worst moments. I already lived through them, and what I am living now is heaven and I am struggling for something better. I use those tragic moments to feel inspired about being able to change the course of my life if I have a vision if I have ambition –not just personal ambition, but the ambition to want to create a change. That's where it comes from my context. That I have lived the worst and that the best is yet to come. I use it as a metaphor. In other words, if today I don't have anything to eat, and later I have three dollars to buy food, I see that moment to enjoy what I am eating, to say, "I'll eat half now and the other half later." In other words, that is the incentive that life gives you because sometimes we forget about value. Being able today to eat some potato chips no having something in my hands today has meaningful value. In other words, I don't need to go to Gap to buy clothes if I can go to the Salvation Army or a Goodwill store and buy used clothes because, for me, that pair of pants has a use and a value. So, it is… from that context that I see life.

–Yes, this idea that you constructed from a young age is very important. For example, you mentioned going to secondary school and buying your briefcase. It is a meaning of life, but it is also something that was generated within you when you were very young and it is similar to the metaphor of the mango. If the

mango is there, well… you have to enjoy it and live each day and be thankful that we have something to eat. That metaphor of the briefcase, when you mentioned liking it, and feeling…

–I felt like a professional. I felt… I felt like a person… who was academically intellectual. I felt like a person who could dream, who could come out of a place where I was discriminated against. When I say, "discriminated against," I mean I was viewed as less or undervalued because I was the son of a poor family, I didn't have a house, and many other things. For me, that briefcase was my way of dreaming that one day I would go somewhere where I could be a professional. Today I don't use or care about a briefcase, but it was a metaphor. That was what it meant for me. In the beginning, when I started school, I remember taking my things in a plastic bag or a sack, but I'm not sure. And I saw the faces of the students and the way they made fun of me. At that moment, I started saving to buy a briefcase. I got it at the end of my first year. I worked for two or three weeks and I saved everything so that I could buy it.

–Do you think that the briefcase, that dream, the metaphor of the briefcase, has come true?

–Yes. Because there was even a time here when I used a briefcase. When I was in college, I would carry a briefcase to class. First, I would go to work, and then… In other words, I always used… I always carried a briefcase.

–So, you don't have a briefcase at home anymore?

–No. Not anymore.

–Not anymore. Angelo, you also mentioned that you had to work to buy the briefcase, and here you've also had to work to pay for your education, in addition to possible scholarships. In other words, you've always searched for alternatives.

–Yes, I believe that in the end, life gives you the satisfaction that you create for yourself. It started when I no longer needed my parents for economic support since I had more economic possibilities than they did. In a moral context, at times I…

I needed them, but you learn to live alone. You begin to see the situation as normal.

–To close, Angelo, you have mentioned that at various times you were the youngest: the youngest in your family since you have a brother who is two years older than you. You were special, besides, because the teachers watched out for you; and you were obviously an intelligent child since you started school at a very young age. Not all children could do that. When you came to the United States, you came as the youngest person in a group of older people. You were the youngest in your living quarters. What is your interpretation of being the youngest? Or… do you like to be special? Because, as we were mentioning yesterday, you're always smiling, Angelo. That playfulness that I see in you is childlike, and surely you were like that as a child.

–Perhaps I'm trying to live the childhood I never had! Ah! I've never thought about that, but… but I believe that I always wanted to be first. I always wanted to be a model for other people. I always wanted… beyond being a model, I wanted to be… the person who can open doors for others. In other words, after me… I mean, at school, maybe other children could go to school after I did, right? I came to the United States at a young age, and after I was here other young people began to come, although I believe I still hold the record at age 14. I mean that while people used to come here at age 30 and up, they started coming at younger ages, as young as 18. In other words, they would come here to finish high school, at the age of 18 or 20. Ah… At school, I also cleared paths. Also by getting a waiver in my immigration status. You have to take risks to clear paths. I wouldn't like for others to have to go through the same things that I have. I always try to take the initiative. I know that by getting a waiver… I know that other people in the university benefitted from that by using the same legal argument, because… Well, I'm not sure if the same phrase exists in Spanish, but I like to have… I like to create legal precedents. Do you use the same phrase in Spanish? For a

time, there was a policy of Mexican organizations or leadership. Mexican policies were widely used. There was an incident in an organization and… a group of undocumented students called us and prohibited us from exercising our human rights, using the argument of our migratory status, and I took them to court, not caring what it meant for the Mexican community in terms of that organization. In other words, I didn't care what it meant for them in terms of funds, because, for us, it was very important to set a precedent for Mexico's political structure, which was trying to take control of nongovernmental institutions here… This isn't the place for that. In the end… that organization faded away. I did the legal part because it was important to have precedents that we cannot discriminate against anyone because of their migratory status.

–Angelo, you started by using legal value, the value of laws. You have studied the laws, you are familiar with them, and you even say that it is something that empowered you. Obviously, that has allowed you to bring suit against things that you know should not be done.

–You learn. For example, in this case, we were in an organization where the board of directors prohibited us from voting because we were undocumented. But according to New York statutes, nonprofits could not do that. Yes, I succeeded in having more than half a million dollars taken away from that organization. Because for me, the precedent was the most important thing… But for that reason, I don't like to include it in…

–Yes, but the idea of setting precedents was important. That allows you to clarify that people cannot do just anything they want. Things here are governed differently. Thank you, Angelo. We made a lot of progress

–Yes, a whole lot.

October 26, 2018
Knowledge as a Tool for Others

PART 6.
KNOWLEDGE AS A TOOL FOR OTHERS

I am on my way to CUNY for my sixth meeting with Angelo. It is lunchtime and I'll take advantage to return to our conversation. During the last session, we talked about some very important topics and I believe we progressed to a deeper level of qualitative research, especially regarding the way that Angelo has constructed his legal knowledge to deal with his case and the cases of other undocumented people with rights. I intend to explore this scenario today.

–Today is Friday, October 26, 2018. I am at the university with Angelo and we are going to continue with the interview. Angelo, we addressed several topics related to your life story: navigating the system, coming out of the shadows, viewing leaders as a tool, and working in various ways, based on respect, transparency, and listening; we also looked at tragedy and necessity as detonators of change and life's teachings. We evoked your metaphors… the metaphor of the briefcase and then your interpretation of making a meal of mangos in Tijuana. Now I would like to make progress on two topics, and we'll see which one we can finish. One topic has to do with your knowledge. The way that you approach legal knowledge because it has been a weapon, we could say a fundamental weapon for defending your rights and the rights of others. The other topic has more to do with the way you advanced in the organization's affairs. You became established as a political activist, and well, all of that coincides with your education. It is about your knowledge of laws, of how you addressed the problem of defending your rights and the rights of

other Mexicans, Hispanics, or Latinos; the other aspect has more to do with the organization and community life. We are going to center on those two aspects. Which one would you like to talk about first?

–Either one. Just tell me which.

–Your choice.

–Ah… I think the topic about being a leader. What did you say it was about?

–About laws, about how you approached learning about laws. In the last session, you said that the law has been a fundamental tool for defending your rights. When and how did you approach law, which laws have you used, and where have you seen a change when laws have been used? That would be considering the time from your enrollment in the university up to your current situation, as you have attempted to formalize your residency in New York.

–Well, I think that everything begins with the acquisition of knowledge, especially when you see the reality of inequality and inaccessibility to the society's resources: in other words, the services which by right… as an undocumented immigrant… In other words, seeing that people do not have access to services or the right to education simply because they are undocumented or a migrant, or simply the child of an undocumented immigrant. We're talking from the context of American citizens. I believe that all of those terms of inequality were what led me to discover that the only option was to learn a bit about law. You see, in my case, it was about being an undocumented student, studying… technology or computer science, but being able to have access or get involved in a campaign of activism and seeing the way to transform the system. In other words, we are a group of undocumented students who challenged the system and questioned the system. And when an event led us to have, eh… in this case, to achieve passage of a law in New York that gave a benefit to undocumented immigrants –to students– I realized that this

was achieved only because we started to study the laws: the way those laws can protect us as undocumented migrants. We discovered that there are numerous laws; we could start with the ID law. It would be very hard to talk about specific laws because, at that time, there were many of them. Knowing constitutional rights… How could I say it? Well, the Declaration of Independence, the various rights that followed the Civil Rights movement… No, I don't remember the specific laws I learned about. I simply liked to read. I would read books that had to do with immigrant rights, and focused on policy, above all. I believe that more than discovering laws, we discovered direct action, activism, and joint work with other people who have power in changing policy. In this case, it was working with the teachers' union at the university, or working with the workers' union, nonprofit organizations, and student movements. All of that involved discovering that we could make a change. You see, we're not talking about specific laws; we're talking about direct action through activism, about the ability to make changes through policy. Or lobbying, as it is called here. Working with politicians, working with professors, and humanizing the history of undocumented immigrants. All of this, obviously, led us to pass a law. But laws can also be variable. Laws can be used to sue the university system for treating undocumented students differently, such as when they sent out that letter. Everything happened over time.

When the movement began to take on strength, there was an organization of attorneys that contacted us and well, we proposed "suing the system." First, we had a lot of meetings to learn if we could do it, and then, finally, we decided to file suit. We didn't win, but we questioned the system, above all. And it had no repercussions on our studies. We were students, and as such, the law protects us. They can't touch you as long as you're in… In this case, I was not a party to the suit, because it was a group. But obviously, two or three people must file the suit, and in this case, we were able to convince two or three students, and through

them, we sued the system. They were university students, they were affected by the letter the university sent them, and they had to withdraw from school. They were… they were full-time students and when they received the letter, they were afraid. I think they failed all of their subjects because they weren't there anymore, and well, we decided… Well, they wanted to be part of filing suit against the system.

–What did that letter say, Angelo? When did they receive it? You… well, I know that you didn't receive it. But what were the terms of the letter?

–In general terms, the letter… the reason for the letter was that the university system was breaking federal laws, such as the 9096 Federal Law, which prohibits giving undocumented immigrants access to federal resources. They used that argument to tell students that the following semester they would have to pay international tuition or out-of-state tuition. It was more often out-of-state tuition because they didn't have the documents needed by foreign students. They couldn't be assigned to the category of foreign students because they didn't have a visa; so, the school opted to tell them that the following semester they would pay out-of-state tuition. This generated panic among students. It generated anxiety. It generated isolation and depression; in other words, everything negative you can imagine. Especially anxiety: knowing that they weren't going to be able to graduate, knowing that… that they didn't have the money to pay for their education, obviously. Some of them decided it would be better to… It wasn't fair because it was time for them to register. They were supposed to pay for the following semester. I don't remember very well, but they opted not to register, not to pay, not to pay the school.

–At that time, you weren't an activist. You were a student who was at school for a few hours. You were working, going home, and that was it. Is that what took you to activism?

–Well, I was involved in the community because, at that time, I was working or collaborating with the Mexican Consulate, and

with CUNY to promote access to the university, doing workshops and educational fairs. I had been doing that a long time before the letter was sent. I was already collaborating with them. But my objective was to study computer science. Because of the incident with the letter, we decided to coordinate to ensure that students would have access to the university. It was fate, nothing more. But that is when I got involved in the organizations. Well, I had been involved already, let's say, in individual support. But that event made us unite as students and begin to organize.

Specifically, I was at Baruch College and… I think, along with friends, I began to send letters… emails, make phone calls, and… We would get together at the university entrance and… maybe it was summertime… No, it was winter. About four of us would meet, I think. I'm not sure. We called up other friends and we held a meeting at the park for a few hours. Later, we organized a meeting with an organization there in East Harlem and we invited all of the students. That's where the movement began.

–How did that happen? How did you go from those small meetings to a larger movement? Is that when you began to use the resources that you mentioned earlier? How was it possible? You mentioned that to have a public presence and to struggle, it was necessary to use the media and other instruments. At that time, when the movement was barely beginning, what resources did you use?

–At that time, it was only a meeting. We discussed what would have to be done and we scheduled a march. When we announced the march, we did it obviously through the media and the whole process started. We invited… I think we did a bit of training with the student organization so that they wouldn't be afraid to go and protest; we did that in East Harlem. Well… we went there, and just walked for a block and turned around, so that they wouldn't get scared when there were more people. It was good.

–Do you have any pictures of it?

–They're somewhere I would need to go to pick them up.

–Ah, well, when can we go there, to start to look for them? It would be very nice to have images of the struggle… But, tell me. Who had the idea of that first training session so that the students wouldn't get scared? How did you overcome fear, Angelo?

–Well, in a way I had some experience, I think because previously I had been involved in that same organization with… eh… the workers from the markets, from the fruit stands. So, I had helped a little in organizing, like going to the… to the picket lines, as they are called here. But yes, sometimes we would stand in front of the market and walk around it, protesting. I think it was in 1997 or 1998. I was in the university; I think it was in 1999. It was with the organization where I was a board member, called Casa México. And there I was involved with the picket lines. Because of that, my colleague, Jerry Domínguez, and I decided to do a brief training session for people, so that the students wouldn't be afraid. It was local, right there where the meeting took place. There were about 60 people there, I think. We went and walked down the black and nothing happened. We stayed on the sidewalk so they couldn't do anything to us. We simply didn't block the traffic. Then we started to look for targets, eh… to look where there were events with politicians or events that had to do with university directors. We would show up and do protests out front, with signs. We did protests at the schools, at Hunter College, and Civic College, and… eventually, we decided to do a three-day hunger strike with three students: Jerry Domínguez, Liliana Díaz, and another person. We decided to set up in front of the university administration, called CUNY Trustees. We went there and stayed there for three days. When I say three days, we would get there at 7:00 AM, before the employees would arrive and we would stay there until midnight, without eating anything. Only water. Well, we withstood it because of our strength, I guess. I don't know. I don't know how we stood it, but people took us things. We could drink tea, so they'd take us tea. Since we also had contact with the media, a lot of

people came along with the media: the people who lived next door, people who would shout at us, people who would support us, and people who would make us tea. Some people yelled, “Go back to your country” and “Why do we have to pay for your education?” Other people went and supported us. So, there was a bit of everything. Well… But a lot of people showed up: religious leaders, politicians. Politicians showed up, workers’ unions, ah… in a way, it was gratifying for me… I was also afraid, but it was there that… A lot of information had come out in the media, even the international media, and we were starting on our third day when some reporters came… There was a Latino Summit in Albany and some reporters and leaders questioned the governor about the education policy and that was where the governor openly told the media and people that we didn’t have to be doing a hunger strike. He asked us please to stop the hunger strike and that he would pass the in-state tuition law. That was when a committee was formed at the university… in Albany and various bills were drafted… In the end, the most useful bill was passed. So, that same day, or maybe before, the politicians came to talk with us. They said they would… I think it was a day before, and the next day they were going to the Summit, the Latino Summit. That is where those same politicians questioned the governor’s leadership. And he promised that a committee would be created and that they would try to pass a law. Then they called us because we were going on to a fourth day of the hunger strike until they passed the law. We weren’t going to stop if the law wasn’t passed. So, they called us to tell us that we could stop the hunger strike since a committee was going to be formed to pass the law. They called us early, about 2:00 PM or 3:00 PM. We decided to finish at 8:00 PM or 9:00 PM. We finished that day as something symbolic. While we were doing the hunger strike, students would come to see us, community leaders. I couldn’t say how many people were there, but… I know there were a lot of people. I know we were never alone and at about… at about… usually,

a lot of people came at about 5:00 PM. Maybe about 150 or more people, a lot. In the morning, it would be only three or four people, but there they were. The hunger strike was in January or February, in the winter. And… beforehand we had done a training session with students, and after the hunger strike, a committee was created. And we continued with the activism. In other words, it never stopped. We kept doing protests in March, April, May, June, and July, until August. Then the law was passed and the students returned to the university. Many had stayed out for one semester. I don't know how many, but many stayed out of school for a semester. It was the winter semester of 2001, Thanksgiving of 2001, so… the students hadn't been able to continue during the spring semester of 2002. The cards began to fall on Thanksgiving. We organized in the first week of December and in January or February we did a hunger strike. And in March, April, May, June, and July… we did constant protests. How many? I don't remember, but there were a lot. In different places. And it wasn't my organization alone, since we joined forces with other organizations. It became more massive. There were thousands of students. I was still a… spokesperson for the Mexican community. Obviously, there were other communities and they all spoke. I represented the organization of the MASA students.

–Do you have a copy of your speeches?

–Not in writing.

–But do you remember what you said?

–No.

–What sorts of things did you suggest?

–Well, we talked about… that what we were doing was humanizing our clandestine condition. We talked about who we were. That as undocumented students, we were coming out of the shadows because we had a right to go to the university. Eh… Three or four times I wrote my story, well, that was when I publicly presented my story to the media, both newspapers, and television.

–Do you still have your story?

–I lost everything.

–Everything is in that box.

–Everything was there, but I also had a folder. I don't know where it went. It got lost and sometimes I think that's the best thing that could have happened. That way I can try to move beyond that stage because we shouldn't get stuck in memories. Yes, it was fundamental, but sometimes memories become objects. There's no room for them. There's no room. So, they just become objects over time. But I had a folder with all of the newspaper clippings.

–I'll find them and I'll look in *The New York Times* and other newspapers… because I did research before coming and the only thing I found was your current case when you came back to New York after being in Mexico, and a lot of people went to meet you.

–Sometimes in the media, after a certain amount of time, they remove the link for news articles.

–Well, we could say that's what made you start learning about your rights, using the ways of a protest, of a hunger strike to achieve a change in the legislation. After that event, was MASA started? Or was it when you got more involved?

–MASA grew out of the protests. MASA originated in a group of students who started the student movement to pass the instate tuition law; that's where MASA began as a student organization. In 2000… In other words, the campaign ended in 2001 or 2002. I was already a volunteer in the Casa México organization; I was a board member and we were still working as students. We held meetings and workshops about the university and it was in 2004 or 2005, I think when we created the organization… We were working as MASA, as students, but we focused more on children's education, on helping children go to school.

–How did that change happen? That concern for children rather than continuing with the movement? Because you could have gone ahead with the Dreamers…

–We were working. You see, the Dreamers movement started strong and there are still a lot of people working on it. But in the Mexican community, very few were working on the topic of education. In fact, we didn't start by working with children; we were working with high school students to help them go to college. But once we started working with high school students, we began to realize that there are other needs. So, basically, every year we started helping kids who were one grade younger in school, and now we're helping them at a very young age. But at the beginning, for about the first two years, there were only high school students. We weren't interested in helping the smaller children.

–What things did you work on with the high school students? What skills did you work on so that they could start college?

–Well, we didn't have a curriculum. We weren't thinking about specific skills to work on with them. We were simply mentors. We wanted to be mentors to talk to them about the university, talk about life and what I did to be able to go to college, eh… the steps to take. We simply wanted to be mentors, to talk to them about our experiences, about what we did to be able to go to college. Yes, sometimes, we just had a meeting and talked. Then, sometimes they would come by and say, "I need help with this essay. Can you help me?" And we would help them. It was like a support network. At that time, there were about 20 mentors at MASA. Some were in college. Later, it was more like giving classes to help students to write essays, take the SAT, and all that… By then, there were 60 or 80 students per year, in different groups. Eh… there was never a structure; simply a need that we addressed. There could be one, two, five, ten, or up to 15 mentors; never a set number. Everything depended on the semester, and on how many people could help. We worked like that, without coordinators, without directors, without anything. Without a curriculum or anything else. We would simply go to the table, and… see what was needed that day, and that's where we would start wor-

king. There was no structure. And we worked like that for a long time. Today, there is more structure, a curriculum, and all of that…

–That's what I was going to ask about if they now have more structure. When did that happen in MASA …? Weren't you at the head of MASA for quite a long time? Ten years, at least?

–Well, MASA changed in 2001, when we got a grant for 125,000 dollars. We won a contest for a grassroots project, called Iniciativa México. We got 1.5 million pesos. Because of that, we were able to hire a person who began to create the structure. They began to create a curriculum, structures, and policies for students. One thing led to another and now it is structured.

Unfortunately, sometimes, when you depend on… Once you start to have access to funds from foundations, from the government, and all of that, beyond supporting your community, you have to meet the specific requirements of those corporations, foundations, or whatever they may be. Many of them make it more bureaucratic, and more difficult for people. They make it more inaccessible because many times it does not depend on service, but on the numbers, you have to report to the various foundations. Eh… It's still a community context, we could say, but not like before when the parents would come and participate. We didn't have a heating system, so people would bring hot chocolate, sweet rolls, and food because sometimes both the younger kids and the college students would come to the center hungry. So, the parents would organize and bring tacos or something, a… hot beverage, because we didn't have anything to give them… yes, for the kids. Or to keep them warm in the winter, the parents would pitch in to buy fuel that we put in a small heater. It was a grassroots project. Today that can't be done because there's a structure. People are paid to do those things. In other words, if the parents used to come and organize the cleaning, today you have an employee who does it. Certain contexts are lost, but it still belongs to the community, right? You still offer support, but

the structures are lost when you begin to get grants and you have to… Well, you are responsible for delivering results to the foundations… to the founders.

When I was on the board, we were a nonprofit. Robert Smith had already established his organization, MexEd, the Mexican Educational Foundation of New York, but we were still working as students. It wasn't until 2007 or 2009, maybe 2010 –I'm not sure– that we started talking about a partnership. We started talking about it and doing the… What's it called? … the merger of the two organizations, and well, MASA simply adopted the statutes that MexEd had used to organize. However, we used the name MASA, MASA MexEd. We had to put both names, but we obviously didn't redo everything. It is MASA MexEd Inc., but ultimately MASA, because that brand already existed, we could say. Even now we're trying to irradicate the phrase Mexican Student Association so that the organization is called simply MASA. That is what people know: MASA. Although the second part of the name belonged to Robert Smith's organization, that allowed us to formalize our group because MexEd was already registered. Before, somehow, there was no need for grants; we did everything as volunteers. The parents cooperated, and the neighbors. Because of that, I wrote the proposal to compete in Mexico and we had the opportunity to begin to apply for and receive grants. The one from Mexico was from Televisa. It was called Iniciativa México. We received 1.5 million pesos. Previously, we had received other financing: about 5,000 dollars that they used to buy… I don't know, a photocopying machine, paper, things like that. Robert Smith's group did not give funds to the organization. They were separate, with their funds. When we joined together, we began to ask for money, but more for MASA. Yes, I believe that by that time, MexEd was no longer operating. When I say that it wasn't operating, I mean that it was no longer providing services in high school. But it was registered, so we used the name. That Televisa program had recently begun in Mexico. I think it lasted

only three or four years… not long; it didn't have a long life. Eliminating it was a bad idea because it gave organizations a way to work directly with the nonprofit sector.

–How do you interpret this process in MASA, which started when people volunteered and you didn't have to pay a cleaning person? And then it became MASA with a more formal structure.

–Well, there are stages in life that force us to change. That was the stage in MASA so that it could help more people. The volunteers sometimes got tired. Sometimes there were a lot of people, and sometimes there was no one. At other times there were four volunteers or 10 volunteers for each student, with 10 or 14 students. Today, all students have their mentor or tutor. Some values are lost… we could say that some things, values, are lost, but many other things are gained. Mentors still volunteer but you have the staff to coordinate them. It used to be like a… as they say here, a one-man show. A single person had to coordinate it, and I was the one. Today, there are paid employees for 12… eight hours per day to coordinate. So, the program is more sustainable.

Can it be done the previous way? It can be done, but it requires a lot of work. I put more than 20 or 30 thousand dollars from my pocket into the organization because if something was needed, I had to buy it. That's what makes it tiresome. Can it be done? It can be done because you only need… to trust in the community to make changes so that they make their change. That's what MASA was before, from a different context; it's the same thing, now, but better, because now there is personnel to do the work. Support from the parents was lost and the organization survives thanks to the foundations, especially for paying the salaries. It is a more established nonprofit now… You write grants for foundations, and the government, and it is different. Yes, it's different now. We have employees devoted exclusively to writing grants. In other words, MASA is in good shape economically. And do we want more? Yes. The goal is someday to have our building. But that will require a lot of work. The work MASA is doing is

formidable. It's different, but it's formidable. It's bureaucratic, but it's good. Perhaps many families did not like the change. But, in the end, eh… you have to make changes to keep improving. MASA is now positioned as one of the best Mexican organizations in New York, one of the most sustainable. The parents support it, but it is different now.

–Which part of MASA is closest to the community at present?

–How could I express it? I'm going to have to be a bit… We have to think about how MASA is going to follow a script that is different now, in the context of rules and standards. For example, before, the parents could decide to organize and bring in food, but now, you have to ask for administrative authorization because it implies a cost. Today everything is about cost. We cannot ask the parents to bring things; we have to give them money for them to bring things or we have to pay them to bring things. If we have access to funds, that is what is fair. Previously, it was fair because we didn't have funds. Everything was volunteered or everything was contributed by people. But things change. However, people are still involved. They are still involved in activism, in different contexts, but you can't make them, obligate them… We never obligated them and we never asked them, but now you simply have to be fair with them. At the time, we were fair because we didn't have funds. And they did it out of the goodness of their heart. Today we have funds, and although they have a heartfelt wish to do something, it would be unfair to agree if you can pay them for it. But you can't do that every day, right? You would end up without money. Contexts change and now you have to be sure to comply with the rules. Before, we could do whatever we wanted because we were not an institution that received funds. Once you start to be an organization that receives funds, you don't simply send results to the foundations. You also have to comply with the law. You need to create spaces. I cannot have a table here without an extinguisher nearby. If there are minors, you have to include what the law requires, be-

cause you are receiving government funds. So, it becomes very bureaucratic. You can't make food because you have to be sure you are complying with the law about the use of fire, and you are now susceptible to lawsuits. Before, who would sue?

How can I know if…? The Morena political party, we could say, began with a political movement to create a change, but as it grew, it reached another level… It doesn't matter what each politician did before. The expectations are higher now. There are new regulations within groups because they're the center of attention. MASA is now the center of attention.

That's why it's very important to know the law. I think I've used the law in all of those contexts. When I say this, I'm referring to my rights, because… knowing what they are… Rights are very complex because there are constitutional rights, human rights, and other rights if you qualify. I have them. I can qualify for many other resources if I obey the law. But according to human rights and other rights, I know that I have the right to be enrolled in the university because I am contributing by paying taxes. I'm a taxpayer because I am part of society. I'm a taxpayer because ah… because of many other things, which now escape me… But this is a topic for another conversation. What would you think about talking about it later?

–Yes, we'll continue next week. Thank you, Angelo.

–You're welcome.

November 7, 2018
My Right to Be Where I Want to Be

PART 7.
MY RIGHT TO BE WHERE I WANT TO BE

I'm on my way to today's meeting with Angelo, thinking about the difficult combination of laws and regulations that he had to organize to defend his unalienable rights and the rights of others in his situation. I also contemplate the road left to travel, knowing that he –the same as anyone else– has fundamental rights such as access to education and health. I also know that he contributes, perhaps more significantly than many, to the community's well-being, and that he is in a position that prevents him from legitimately validating his rights and enjoying all the benefits of being a citizen of the world. I am on my way to facing that paradox.

–Today is November 7, 2018, and it is 2:27 PM. We're going to resume the interview with Angelo. I'm going to try to summarize the last few points we were talking about. First was the use of the law, the importance of knowing the law to defend your rights. In our session two weeks ago, you were speaking, Angelo, about the various cases when you have used the law to defend and protect human rights. One of those cases was a great achievement, not only yours but also of others, in accessing education. When that law was passed, the situation changed and now you have that right. You also pointed to the importance of knowing about the law to govern MASA.

–Well… In 2003 and 2004, I believe, eh… I was on an organization's board. We were a group of undocumented people, a group of people with illegal status in the United States, and well, basically, within the organization's process of change, many

things had to be done to follow up in the institution and continue to work with the migrant community. But during that period, we migrants who didn't have documents were questioned about our status. Our vote was simply annulled in the organization, which was a nonprofit, although our vote was not prohibited by the statutes that govern or used to govern the organization, nor was it prohibited by the statutes that determine nonprofit status. Therefore, the only thing we did was to follow up, according to the law, by writing a letter to the attorney general. He verified the situation and sent an official letter to the organization, telling them that they could not deny our right to vote in the organization's business. This group of people, however, decided to ignore the official instructions of the attorney general of the State of New York and they decided to remove us by closing the doors and changing the organization's locks. We're talking about two different generations: the first Mexican generation, which has more knowledge about Mexican politics, and the rest of us, who knew more about life here. So, what we did… and we even came to blows. They had me in a neck hold because I was always demanding respect for my rights and the rights of others. The police came, and… eh… I didn't want to press charges. I didn't want to press charges against them. Later, we had to go to court because the attorneys had to decide. The legal matter lasted about one year because, in my opinion, it was important… to establish those precedents within the migrant Mexican community, so that they know that there are laws here and that Mexican politics of manipulation and extorsion cannot be used here. So, it was a legal problem that also involved distancing, and we could say, distancing and activism against the Mexican Consulate and some Mexican migrants in New York, due to their posture of not obeying legal instructions. It was a far-reaching matter because it involved not only the lawsuit but also protests against various Mexican events that supported this organization, and against the Mexican Consulate as well for supporting the organization.

And since they didn't make any correction in the matter, even with all of the evidence, eh… well, it was important, even in the context of foreign relations. In the end, well, other academics who worked with the Mexican community had to intervene to make peace between undocumented migrants who were… who were working and the Consul General who was eventually Mexico's ambassador to the United States. We had to do a… a handshake and a peace agreement so that everything could be solved, and obviously so that everything could be done in the framework of the law. We were simply fighting for a right. And in the end, we had more than one-half million dollars withdrawn from the organization and it had to close. Maybe that was bad because it provided a service to the Mexican community, but in the end, you also have to send the message that there are certain forms of obeying the law, that you can't ignore the principles that you are fighting for, and that you protect to provide a service to the undocumented migrant community.

At that time, I was in college studying political science, and I knew… in the context of a bit of… When I say laws, I am not talking about all laws. I'm talking about the laws that cover my rights as an undocumented migrant. Although they were not constitutional rights, they were human rights. And… a bit beyond the question of laws and rights, was the point of what transparency is and the… idealism we fight for as migrants. In other words, you cannot be an organization in favor of migrants and fight for migrants' rights if you are abusing rights on your terrain. But it was in another context, not just specifically about lawyers… about rights, but more in the context of… of knowing that your rights cannot be violated.

It's necessary to clarify that the first generation of Mexicans who came to New York was mostly adults, eh… They did a good job of opening up the field so that we could have access, but they used Mexican politics a bit more. It was when going to a meeting at the Mexican Consulate meant going to a fight, where women

were slapped and mistreated, where the atmosphere was hostile, predominantly macho. It was a context, we could say, eh… that was promoted by the party politics of the Mexican consuls and government representatives. Then a different kind of generation arrived –different because we have access to more transnational education. We began, somehow, to break through that structure of Mexico's political idealism, to be more inclusive. And the movement started to involve young people in Mexican organizations and empower them. Eh… and with the Dreamers, another vision came, because they have a form of interaction and access to education that is more… we could say, Anglo: more centralized, more open, less understanding of Mexican politics, because it is centered here, not in Mexico. In other words, we could say that we are the generation that is still linked to transnational politics. Now, a type of local or national politics is coming. It is involved with Mexico through the topic of migration, but it is more about local or national politics, more centered on what we have to do to empower youth and think about the new generation.

But we now have access to education. In other words, education will not be denied to any student of high school age or younger, even if the results of the mid-term elections are uncertain because it's a right. You could say it's even a constitutional right, and it's a policy. I'm not sure about the status of the law discussed in the Supreme Court to prevent denying education to anyone who wants to access it. From twelfth grade on… to the university. It all depends on each state and its policies. And although I say that students can continue with their education, they don't have access to federal financial support, which is prohibited by law. But they can have access to education and everything will depend on each state and its policies, if the state is more accessible for migrants. For example, although New York has in-state tuition, New Jersey just passed the law. But they also passed a law that gives financial support from the government to that group. What will happen in New York? Well, I think that

New York will somehow change. The Democrats just took control away from the Republicans in the New York legislature, so there are possibilities on the agenda for access to the state's Dream Act, including financial aid. Also, driver's licenses. So, issuing driver's licenses, supporting, or eliminating immigration contracts, making it more of a sanctuary. In other words, if there are going to be changes, state or… federal, well, it's still divided because it's the only thing we achieved, that was achieved, that the Democrats achieved was… winning the majority of Congress. But the Republicans kept the Senate, so pro-immigrant policies will be difficult to pass.

Bills become law by passing one version in the House and another version in the Senate. They are debated in the judicial committees and recommendations are made. Then they come back and a single version is passed. It is signed by the president. But in this case, a division already exists.

In this context, my situation is, let's say, complex because of the migratory process and the legal context. First, although I am an… what you call here, an aged-out Dreamer, I had the opportunity to regularize my situation by getting a work visa, but I had to go to Mexico to obtain a pardon and then reenter with a visa. But it's complicated because there is also a penalty. In other words, the… 1996 IIRIRA prohibits me from doing the process of regularization. I've been here for more than 365 days, so leaving the country to apply… or… for any migration process. I've been penalized for ten years, because during that time I didn't have any strong ties, we could say, with the United States. I mean that I wasn't married to an American citizen and I didn't have children who were American citizens –ties that would have made my case stronger. Eh… I needed the support of politicians and I had that, but even having the backing of a Congressman, eh… the case got difficult when I had to go to Mexico to ask for a pardon, although my visa had already been approved by the Department of Labor. I've had to apply for everything here in New York.

Although my visa had already been approved by the Department of Labor, I had to… to be able to receive the visa, I had to leave the United States. And I can't ask for support from the Consulate or the Embassy. No. In other words… if I had entered legally, I could have gotten the visa here, but since I didn't, I had to leave the country and ask for a pardon to be able to get a visa. It's an entry waiver. It was denied and… well that involved a massive local, national, and international movement in signing a petition, making phone calls, and attracting more political sectors, universities, and a legal team from the private sector and also from the university, so that they could build the case together. And, well, it was all in the context of dialogues and conversations about the law to be able to justify the reason I had to… the reason I deserved that pardon. I've been working on the legal case for two years. But there is a professional team behind this, working on it.

Originally, it was CUNY Citizenship Now at the university that was handling my case. When I went back to Mexico, it was denied, and any possibility of returning here was eliminated because there was no way to fight it. Because of that, my story was made public. The legal work was being done, but it was more silent, we could say, to avoid creating… conflicts. Eh… because of that, nothing was done the first time. Then the article was published in *The New York Times*. People I've worked with began a national movement and they were the ones who also contacted the university and the CUNY lawyers to create a massive reaction. Then another team of lawyers came from the private sector. I can't reveal their names… but a key person joined the team that manages my case for the university. This is, well… the attorney Andrés Lamont, with the coordinator, who is Alan Warning. They are the ones who are handling my case through the university. The other team from the private sector has joined them because they also have a broad knowledge of the law. People who have worked on national campaigns, who have directed political

campaigns for Obama and Nancy Pelosi –many of those winning campaigns– have also been in contact and they have a broad network in politics, which has helped.

As you can imagine, I was nervous and uncertain because I had already experienced rejection. I think that was the most painful part. Although they told me I had to adapt to Mexico, the process of adaptation had not been… In other words, it had been complicated. Because I had to learn all the processes that are done in Mexico, not being… completely emerged in… when I say culture, I am not denying my Mexican culture. Simply because of the years, I've lived here, it was a change of culture, politics, and social life. It's different. Going from a city to a small town is even more terrible. I mean terrible in the context of shock. It was a situation of nervousness, uncertainty, and distrust. I knew that the paperwork would be approved at that time because the team was more complete. In other words, it wasn't simply all of those people who were working on it, but also the director and founders of change.org, who started the platform. It wasn't simply a person who came in and said, "I'm going to make this platform at change.org to bring this person back." No, it was the organization itself that started it. I think that's what improved my possibilities. But, obviously, in the end, there was also the question: "When?" "When will it happen?" And during that process, when would they give me the visa or the pardon? Another uncertainty was that if you work for a university, you have funds that you have to use before a certain date. And if you don't use them, you have to return them… So, my salary had been approved for three years, but I was in Mexico for two years. They weren't going to wait three years… So, a change had been made. But there weren't sufficient funds to keep that show going, we could say. They tried to comply with the period, but it was still uncertain. If there were no funds for my position, it wouldn't be possible. On September 30, I had to come back. But then it was about "why go back if I'm doing OK here?" Yet at the same time,

you have to go back because there is a very broad structure and at the very least, you have to comply with it. And well, when things worked out, I came back. It was possible… to get more funds to stay here. I arrived in 2016, around the 20th of… of March, something like that. It was two or three days before Good Friday when I came back and everything changed. The pardon was issued so that I could reenter the country.

Although you might have an approved visa, you can't use it if you cannot prove, before starting a job, that you can enter the country. My case made it complicated. So, when the pardon was issued, I got the visa that had been approved since 2013. Two years of validity of that… of that visa were lost. It had already been approved by the Department of Labor, by Immigration, but I couldn't work until the pardon was issued.

Right now, I'm in the process of renewing my visa, but at the same time, I'm in the process of adjusting my legal status through my wife's application; she's an American citizen. It may take a little bit of time, but it's different. It could lead to residency or possibly citizenship for me. In other words, it's a different context, but perhaps a context that…

–With that, your dream would come true, Angelo. You came here very young –you were a kid– and obviously, you have grown and matured within the United States culture. Not in the Mexican culture. Although you have family memories from Mexico, most of your identity was formed here.

–Well, yes.

–If you attain citizenship through your marriage to a Mexican American, a Mexican who has United States citizenship, wouldn't it be a dream come true for you?

–My dream was just to get an education. We can say that my dream came true, but it was a dream based on my right to be where I want to be because I have forged and constructed a future. In this case, that place is New York. New York is my home. My dream coming true is being in my home. Where I have a new

identity. In other words, in the context of rights. It implies the possibility of having a right to obtain legal assistance, and citizenship is implied. But my dream is the right to be in the place I identify with, the place that is my home. But to get to that point, there is a barrier, which is the legal question. So, I am beginning to see… in some way, not immediately… but in some way, I am attaining the possibility of reaching my goal to be in that place – the place I call, make, or categorize, identify as my home– through a simple document. But now… it's not the dream of being in an American or Mexican context. Neither one. It's the dream of having the right to be in the place you identify as your home. That gives you a role.

–How do you see yourself in this situation, Angelo? If you attain citizenship –which I think you will– imagine! You came here when you were 15 and now you're 40-something years old –it's been a very long road. This part about rights that you have explained very well reminds me of a discussion I included in the article that I gave you, the article that talks about cosmopolitanism. That point of saying that regardless of the place where you were born –which was Mexico– you have the right to be where you want to be –which is valid from the perspective of human rights. But that also creates theoretical reflections on citizenship, cosmopolitanism, on being a citizen of the world.

–Well, yes. I'm a citizen of the universe, am I not? In my opinion, in an abstract sense, my nationality is not determined by the country where I was born. Ah… it is determined by the places where I live, which I call home. In other words, I am Mexican because I was born in Mexico. From the context of rights, we are people from the world. I am a person from the place where I am now, the place I call home. New York is my home. I know that my family is in Mexico, I am Mexican, but New York is my home.

–Angelo, if you're thinking about the future, if you attain citizenship, how do you see yourself? You have been a very important activist. What other dreams do you have? You have made

your dreams come true little by little: going to college, speaking English, and also, we suppose, getting citizenship. How do you see yourself in the future?

–I want to start a family and possibly, another scenario is enrolling in a doctorate. But although I would like to start right now, in economic terms I can't because… because I'm a foreigner. You see, there is… How could we say it?.. a major controversy there because I am undocumented and I possibly have rights. I can go to school as an undocumented student here, paying in-state tuition. I could apply to a doctoral program and pay in-state tuition. The moment I start a doctorate with a visa, I am no longer an undocumented student with those benefits, despite my background. So, if I were to apply to a university right now, I'd have to apply as a foreign student. Even though I have studied for many years here in the United States, I would be categorized as a foreign student. I would have to pay high tuition. So, to be able to apply for a doctoral program, I would need to wait until my status changes, to apply as a United States resident. In other words, the whole context of my identity has also changed. When I was undocumented, I had access. Now that I am regularizing my status, I have more limitations. It's complicated, isn't it? Sometimes, both the Dreamers and my generation say that it was better for us to be undocumented than documented because when you are undocumented, to have the right to access certain places and certain services. When you are documented, you are in a different category. You have requirements. There is a degree of regularization. For example, right now I don't qualify for health coverage like Medicaid, because certain barriers prevent me from doing so. I am here legally: I have a certain income and because of that income I cannot access services. So, all of those concepts change. In other words, starting with access to education, the whole dynamic has changed for me now. Before, I had access to various or specific services, for example, at the university because I was undocumented. That has changed. I no longer

have access. If I want to register at a university, I am categorized as a foreigner. It's more complicated. And if I were to continue using the same narrative as before, to apply for a doctorate as an undocumented student, I would be breaking the law and I would be involved in a problem. So, everything is complicated right now. Besides the idea of a doctorate, of course, I want to continue working with the migrant community, developing programs… eh… to continue helping in the political context, but in the area of analysis. I don't see myself as a Congressman, as a politician. Not right now. I might love it, but I like working directly with the community more. Perhaps. Why not? But there is also a new group of young people, and they're doing marvelous work. Right now, I've paused my activities. Going to a protest might be counterproductive for me. I'm not undocumented anymore. I'm foreign, and that has transformed my political and community activity because there are certain things I can no longer do. For example, before I could openly criticize the government to benefit the community, today I have to be less severe or even refrain from criticizing. So, although I am active in social media, it has nothing to do with politics, only education. Protests and that sort of thing, I cannot get involved in because it would be interpreted differently.

In the end, you are regularized, but with other norms. When I say other norms, it's because there are different legal criteria and different contexts of rights. As an undocumented person, you have a series of rights. As a traveler and a foreign worker, you have certain rights. As a resident, other rights; and as a citizen, others. So, there has been a change. I am in a process of change. I'm resting from many activities and in a way, I'm inactive. Right now, I have an academic focus, for the moment. As soon as my migratory status changes, I'll return to activism, to everything that I love to do. But for the moment, I'm restricted.

–You have had to overcome several barriers to reach a documented situation, but other events violated your rights, such as

the case of the organization that annulled your vote. That is discrimination. It is not because of color, but simply because you do not have documents.

–Yes. You're excluded. Your knowledge doesn't matter, nor what you have or do. If you don't have that document, you're excluded from many things. From the employment sector, from the political sector, and interaction with many other objectives of daily life. Today there are many, ah… even cell phones. There was a high demand for cell phones by people who didn't have a social security number, and who needed the prepaid phones. Before the prepaid phones came out, even if I had the money, I couldn't have the luxury of a cell phone. You needed a social security number because you could get a cell phone only with a contract or a credit card. You see, you could pay only with a credit card, but to have a credit card you had to have a social security number. So, at the end of the day, you couldn't have a cell phone, the most basic thing. You couldn't have one –you were excluded. In certain university programs, you were excluded because there's a requirement, a migratory status, or a scholarship. An example is when I applied to the leadership program at Harvard. Even though the OAS, the Organization of American States, was giving scholarships, and even though I applied as a Mexican citizen since Mexico was part of the OAS, the OAS rejected me. Harvard had accepted me but OAS denied me the scholarship because I was a Mexican migrant living without documents in the United States. At no time did I apply as a United States citizen. I applied as a Mexican citizen to do a project with the Mexican migrant community in the United States. They didn't need to ask… Well, in the context of ideologies, OAS didn't need to ask about my migratory status in the United States, when there were Mexican students who applied as Mexicans in Mexico and received the scholarship. The program was more… off-campus. It was online, with videoconferences. We weren't present on campus. No one had to travel to Harvard. It was a leadership program

where we all sat for hours in a computer classroom. It was very intense. But no one was present at Harvard.

In the end, it was Harvard that decided to give me 50% of the scholarship, after I sent my resignation letter; yet I had already been accepted. At that point, they gave me half the scholarship. The other half was paid for by colleagues, friends, and professors who were my friends. I asked for an appointment with a professor because the opportunity was for them to help me with the other half. Among the professors. So, your legal status limits you in every way. To go to the doctor… Even though I have a social security number now, I am restricted because I can't do everything that I used to do. There are stages in the process. I have a social security number but I am in a category of… Having been included or excluded for being undocumented, now I'm excluded for being a documented foreigner. There are exemptions and I know many people will organize protests, but my case is not like everyone else's. I'm in the spotlight, so I have to be more careful. They don't prohibit me, but it's prohibited. At this stage, where I used to be included… included because I was undocumented, I'm now excluded for being a documented foreigner and until my status is regularized, I won't be able to return to total inclusion. I estimate it will be about a year or a year and a half, due to their slowness.

As an undocumented person, you can have full inclusion in social life and many other contexts. When I was undocumented, I could have access to meetings with residents and politicians, and I could give conferences. I was included. But when I refer to exclusion, it was voluntary and altruistic. In other words, you are in this context because you are a volunteer, you are… When I say a volunteer, I mean that you are doing all of this and they can't pay you. "We're going to invite you to this conference and we're not going to pay you because you're a volunteer and because we can't pay you." Many times, they would ask me, "What are your fees? We would like to cover them." But no, I don't have fees, be-

cause I can't collect fees. I could do programs for many people, collaborate with many government institutions, and help to create programs, but I couldn't collect. Inclusion was at the same time exclusion because they included me as a volunteer, but they excluded me because I couldn't receive a wage for survival. So, I ended up working at a deli to allow myself to continue working. When I say working, I mean volunteering in my profession. Out of the many undocumented students who graduated in my class, I was one of the few who had the opportunity to work in his area of study, but it was all volunteer. I could direct the organization and work with government institutions as a volunteer. It was the same for many other people. The person who studied to be a teacher couldn't teach. The one who studied nursing couldn't work as a nurse. The one who studied accounting couldn't find a job in the private sector as an accountant. They all had to go outside of their area of knowledge to work in service jobs. So, if they now have DACA or a migratory readjustment, after so many years, they have to reconstruct their skills to be able to start their career as professionals. But time has passed, there has been lost time, and many have had to go back to school to study something else. In my case… the construction process is ongoing to acquire knowledge about everything. Many never had the opportunity to start a professional career because of their legal status. But I stayed involved. So, if I now have an opportunity, because of my visa, I can work only here. Not anywhere else. But once my status is regularized, I can enter the nonprofit sector and work without having to do an internship, because I already have the knowledge to do it.

–When you were directing MASA, didn't you receive a wage or a donation? You had to buy groceries.

–You can't, they can't… You can't do it. Because as a nonprofit institution, you have to obey certain legal statutes. As a nonprofit institution that receives government funds, you have to justify every expense. You can't do it legally. They could per-

haps buy you a prepaid card, so they would buy a prepaid card and give it to you. They cannot give you the money in cash. There are many restrictions.

–Now that you have formal employment here in the university, what is your social status, your economic status? Are you earning the most you have ever earned? Your highest salary?

–No, because I'm in a process. I'm still in a process. I'm working only a few hours because that is the only thing the grant covers. But… possibly, once my status changes, I'll be able to get a full-time job. You need from 65 to 75 thousand dollars per year, as they say. I'm not at that level yet. Do I survive? Yes, I survive. Do I cover my basic needs? I do. But I'm in a process.

–Yes, but it's not the same as when you worked in a supermarket or another job. Now you're in a privileged situation.

–Ah… it depends on how you look at it. It's more secure, but it's more complicated.

–Would you earn more in construction than you do here?

–Yes.

–How much would you earn in construction?

–I could earn from 500 to 700 dollars, up to 1,000 dollars per week tax-free. But now… if I make 1,000 dollars, my check is for about 400 or 500 dollars.

–The taxes are that high?

–Yes. Because I don't have children. So…

–How complicated! Because those processes of inclusion/exclusion are based on whether you're documented or not, whether you're married or not, whether you're a naturalized citizen or not, whether you have children or not…

–Yes, well, I see it as very normal. But yes, sometimes… from a very analytical, abstract context, sometimes it's better to be poor and have access to certain services, to have… as I was telling you, the programs. If you don't have an income, you have access to certain services. You can get help from social services. But once you reach a certain income level, even if it's a matter of

one dollar or a few cents, they take those services away from you. So, what's better? Being poor and having access to those services or having a job with a low wage, and having to pay other expenses? If a person with children receives 500 dollars in aid but then finds a job and receives a wage of 600 dollars, well, the 500 dollars in aid are taken away, and those 600 dollars will be used to pay rent. But if that person has children, there will be other expenses. If a babysitter has to be hired so that the person can go to work, that's 150 dollars. So, it's more expensive to get a job than to receive social services. That's the way poverty works here.

–That's what you were questioning, wasn't it? That people prefer to be poor.

–It's not what they can do or what they prefer. It's the way the system is designed. If you ask people what they prefer, they prefer to be in a system where they have things. Because the other way is not secure. No one prefers to live in public housing where there are cockroaches, dangerous liquids, hazards, many bad things, or death. If someone has the opportunity to go to a better place to live, a better apartment, well, he'll prefer it. But to do that, he would need to earn four times more.

–Let's leave that for our next meeting. Thank you again, Angelo.

November 9, 2018
My Childhood

PART 8.
MY CHILDHOOD

As I enter the final stretch of my meetings with Angelo, I review the complex situation he described in the last interview: his undocumented condition, and as a consequence, his exclusion from even minor privileges like using a cell phone or having a driver's license. But it was not only this. It was also the impossibility of accessing health services or obtaining a scholarship to continue his studies and reach his dream of getting an education, or of being free, of feeling at home. I go on to evoke the situation of his childhood, anchored in its circumstances, and I concentrate on researching the origin of the personal agency that has allowed him to overcome the obstacles in his path.

–Today is November 9. It is 1:20 and we are going to start the eighth interview with Angelo. I was commenting that I had been reviewing all of the interviews and that I made several annotations. We already had quite a bit of information about his trajectory, which has been published in the media, but the aim of this research is his life and scholastic trajectory based on the right to education. I am going to emphasize that part more and return to his experience at school.

When I read the interview, Angelo, I saw that you mentioned that during your childhood, as well as during your adolescent and adult years, you have had to work and study at the same time. In elementary and secondary school, you had to work to buy your supplies or to help your mother, and you were always participating in some sort of economic activity. What else could you say about that, about your experience in school and at work?

Throughout your trajectory, the two areas have always been joined, inseparable; when you were a child, you helped your mother in the afternoon, or when you went to secondary school, you helped your father with his work…

–Well, if you look at it from the perspective of constitutional law and rights, education must be free. The constitutional right to free education is obviously for people with limited resources. Yet more than anything, it is a privilege. If you are poor, although you have access to free education, other factors determine that free access. We see that in Mexico, don't we? Where people have to donate to the school to receive the books. Or organize events at school. This has been debated, and it has been proven that children have often been denied the opportunity to stay in school if their parents cannot pay those fees. I mention it because I had a similar experience in my town. A person we knew was serving as the president of the parents' association, and whenever fees needed to be paid for any service or item for the school, there was a kind of threat: "If you don't bring me the tuition fee…", yet it was a public school, part of the Secretariat of Public Education. "If you don't pay the fee next month, we'll be forced to report your case to the 'Prosper' program because it is assumed that you receive aid from 'Prosper' so that you pay the fees." So, where is the constitutional right to free education? In verbal statements. How is the constitution related to my life? Over the years, ever since I was very small, education was a privilege because there were students with families who had more economic access, with a bit more stability in the town. When I say stability, it was because they had a workshop or a steady job, with an income to pay. But those of us without a stable income, as in my case, had to work. I had to work to buy my school supplies, and my uniform, because although my mother supported us, her money was used more to buy food. My father was an alcoholic, so our income depended on my mother. My situation of working and paying my expenses, decreased my family's burden to provide

me with the right to an education. And that is very common. Many children have to drop out of school because they have to start working at a very young age. Or if they go to school, after school they have to do certain activities to help their parents cover the family's expenses. That often implies having to drop out of school. So, education becomes a need, a privilege. Only people who have a way to pay school fees can have access to education. In my town, there was only an elementary school and a tele-secondary school. Many people sent their children to school in the city, and even today they send them to school as undocumented immigrants. It's a privilege that we don't all have. So, throughout my life, I have been forced to work, but never forced by my mother or my family. I've been forced in a personal sense, on my own, of wanting to contribute to covering my family's needs. For that reason, when they asked me if I wanted to go to the United States, I said yes, with the idea of helping my family. I was 14 years old. Because… I think that after secondary school, I saw fewer options for me to go to high school. And after that, I wanted to go to college in Mexico City. We didn't have those resources. I wanted to get an education. I wanted to go to college, but from a financial context, there weren't many options for me. In other words, options to keep working and going to school. At the same time, my family's needs were growing. The need to have a house. The need to treat illness. I think that leaving, well, was the best option. I may have also thought about the possibility of going for only two years, for two to three years, of saving enough money, and funds, and then going back to Mexico to go to school. That was an option. The other option was to leave. In a certain way, my life was also in danger. Because of the party politics in my town, if I at age 14 had a girlfriend from another party, my life would be in danger. I had already been subjected to… They had even put a pistol to my head. I had been beaten up a lot of times when I had a girlfriend in secondary school. So, there were two options. The option of leaving came available, of fleeing from

danger. I didn't want to come… Well, in one context I did, but not in another. I think that was when my parents decided it was the best option. The problem in my town was that almost everyone was from the same party, the PRI, but with an imbalance of power. So, leaving was the best thing that could happen to me. The confrontations were very obvious, very common… and, not obvious. Obvious because they would beat me up, but… it was a group conflict that began to intensify because of the relationship between two kids who challenged everything. When they put a pistol to my head, almost the whole town gathered behind me, and behind the girl, the other part of the town. If someone did something… it was going to turn into something major. Well, that was an option, somewhat dramatic, but it also influenced me to decide that it was best to leave, to look for a better future, and then come back in a different context. That after being a poor boy, the victim of classism, I would come back someday in a different context. When I left, that context was to leave, come back, and marry the girl who was my girlfriend. Obviously, I had to migrate. And well, at the end of that time, since I was interested in going back to school, I got the opportunity to do so here. I wanted to get an education, but I had no possibilities in Mexico.

I didn't want to go to secondary school in my town because it involved sitting in front of the television all day. It was a tele-secondary school. Most of the curriculum–I think it was one teacher for all of the groups or two teachers. I'm not sure. I never attended one of those classes, but I knew how they worked because I had observed them. I went to observe them. Some of my cousins went to tele-secondary school. They were in the first classes in tele-secondary school. I don't know how many of them went to college. I don't think any of them did. The whole curriculum was watching television. So, obviously, most students went to secondary school in the city, because at least they had one teacher for each subject there.

I liked history a lot and politics. I liked social science a lot. I remember that I was very enthusiastic about subjects that had to do with research, with surveys, which I did in secondary school. I did one about my town, about how many people lived there, about how they made their living… I think I also looked at the subject of migration once, about how many people had left, and a little bit about patriarchy and classism. I always questioned them in the context of why one group had the right to own all of the lands in a place and the rest had to live in misery or be their employees. It's because if you didn't own land or have a quarry for extracting onyx, you had to work for the people who did. That's an imbalance of wealth, right? A communal landowner in Mexico or the son of a communal landowner will have a house, cars, and access, and their children can go to college. That's what I thought even as a child. This first altar on the Day of the Dead was a way of making peace with my grandparents. In Mexico, I would question them. "Why do you mistreat me, but treat others differently?" The same thing with my father's mother. "Why should I do it, if others are enjoying the profits?" When I was 14 and started organizing a student group to do events, it was the same thing. I would question people and question communal landowners, and I even went to give them a presentation about social responsibility, that they should be giving more money to build a church or something like that. I went to ask, to talk with them and with their children, to the committee, but the children of the communal landowners didn't want to talk or say anything. And someone 14 years old, with young people 20 to 24 years old, who were supposedly the leaders of the student movement there, the youth movement in the parish… I was the one who had to stand there and talk to them. I think I always had the characteristic of questioning things.

–Would you say that you were questioning a kind of… not exclusion… but classism, as you have called it?

–It's because there are different problems of that type; you see, it's a different context. Racism comes from a context of power and privilege. If I'm from Mexico… I'm brown, and if there is another person who is more of a native than I am, I cannot be a racist even if I say something against that person. I cannot be a racist because I don't have power. We're at the same level. From the context of political power, economic power, right? I would be what is called here… What would it be? There's another word. Prejudiced. Prejudiced and narrow-minded because… because I don't have power. But if a White person comes and says something, it's a racist context because White people have power based on the privilege of the color of their skin. They have the privilege. Since dark-skinned people do not have privilege, they have prejudices. Well, that's how many people view it in the context of… I don't know… in the context of activism. I don't think it's theory. It hasn't been proven by a theorist…

–Well, a lot has been written about racism, race, class, and gender here in the United States, precisely because of the relationship between Whites and Blacks, which is a very significant relationship, a relationship of power. But, for example, if you as a child said, "My grandmother prefers my cousins and my grandfather wants to give me orders,"… we could say that is another form of marking a difference, which I do not want to call discrimination or racism.

–Privilege, privilege, privileges, favorites. I don't know. I refer to classism because we are at the bottom of the same social scale. But, for example, when I would see my grandmother, my grandparents… possibly I saw the division of my uncles–the ones who were closer to economic power, through my father's parents. But in the context of the power of the "privileged"–inheritances and property deeds… the communal landowners had more access to a good education. To a better life. On my grandfather's side, almost all of them were teachers, nurses, and accountants, al-

though they may not have worked in their profession. That was my mother's father. On my father's side, it was more obvious. His mother–my grandmother–was more aware of it. Aware in terms of the way she treated her children. But… in her context, it was more obvious because she had given all the power to her youngest son: "You manage the quarries. You're the one who will have access." I saw how my father's parents and sisters would come back from the city with their groceries, fruit, and everything, and although we lived in the same house, we were excluded. Other cousins lived there, but they were included more. Ah… There's always a favorite in the family, but… in a certain context, people can be very damaged by power, by the property deeds of a communal landowner. Families tend to be fractured because of that. Only one person can inherit the deed. If there are more children, you may be able to divide the properties, and the land, but the deed will always be in the name of only one. And that's the one who has the power to plunder. My father was the oldest and should have been the one, supposedly… But everything that has to do with communal ownership makes the property deed worthless because there is no more land. It was all exploited. But the ones who had access to it… At that time, an ordinary working family might be able to earn 500, 600, or at the most, 1,000 pesos a week. A communal landowner or a quarry owner would have access to possibly 5,000 or 10,000, 15,000, or even 50,000 pesos in a week. While a working person would make 1,000, 1,200, or 1,500 pesos, the other person if he worked 10 or 15 tons of stone… A working person who earned 1,000 pesos was very poorly paid if the other person had 15 times more. The social difference was marked because the person who had quarries, had vehicles, and his children went to school in vehicles. They dressed better in the context of a small town. They dressed better and interacted less with other communities; they had more exclusive celebrations… When I say exclusive, I mean that they in-

vited outsiders. If the president visited… well, they had political connections. In the context of economic access, their ability to spend was noticeable.

At school, there was a group of kids with very little income. We could only… although we went to school at Tehuacán, we could only go to the school that we called the workers' school. First, it was night school and then they changed it to afternoon school. Because it was the one that was the cheapest… I don't remember how much it cost, but I think they also charged tuition in the federal school. There are regular public secondary schools, but they charge you. So, we could go only to the workers' school. I went to the workers' secondary school for three years. There was also federal school number two, which was a bit more accessible… federal school number two, and the technical school, which was… They're more expensive because they require a lot. There was another federal school called the Tamayo school, but it was more exclusive, and the parents took their children there in cars. The school where I went was a regular school, ordinary, but it was outside of town. The level of the students, well, I saw them as having lower incomes. Some were gang members, and there were a lot of fights outside of school. They were the ones who couldn't go to federal school number one or federal school number two, or the technical school. They went to schools that were more… we could say inferior, in the educational context. For example, at the school, I attended we never took typing or workshops. It was simply classes and music. It was a normal school, I suppose. I really don't remember… I couldn't describe the context. It was simply of a lower category, with fewer educational programs. I paid attention to those things because I would have liked to have gone to federal school number two, at least. After all, they had more educational resources, more classes… various workshops… In the Tamayo school, there were only four or six students from my town. I'm not sure. About three families sent their children to the Tamayo school; the ones

with economic resources. About 20 or 30 students went to federal school number two; they were the children of the communal landowners who had resources. The rest of us went to the workers' school; a few of us, not many. And those who didn't have the money to pay the bus fare to go to the workers' school, stayed in the tele-secondary school. The students at the tele-secondary school were from families who came to my town from more marginalized areas… I mean they were from the countryside, and they sent their children to the tele-secondary school.

In a way, I liked to analyze those things, to observe them. Even in my school, although some people had money, some of us didn't: those of us who took our sandwich and the others, who took money to buy one. In the workers' school, there was a group of girls from an orphanage. I think that's where I got the idea of the briefcase. It somehow gave me an escape from reality and status in the workers' school. It took me a long time to be able to buy it. I think I bought my briefcase in my second year. Well… when I asked for things for school, for an event, for mothers' day, obviously… some students would take a little gift, and those of us who didn't have money, well… nothing. Some wore tennis shoes or shoes… I had to wear rubber sandals… sandals. Never barefooted, but sandals. Even some that were made out of old tires and leather. But they used to say it didn't matter because you're not buried with your shoes on… As your foot grew, you could peel off the front and make room for your toes. They got us used to that. I got used to it. I remember that my mother would buy me a size too big so that they would last longer.

In terms of difference, of access to learning, to resources, I don't think there was a difference. It was the same education for everyone. Except you were treated differently. If you didn't have the money to buy the supplies that the school asked for… they fined you. But what I mean is that the teacher would hit you with a rod. If you had to write about… I don't know, Benito Juárez, you could use some prepared materials. If your family had mon-

ey, your parents would go to Tehuacán to buy the materials and you could turn in work that looked very good. If you didn't have money, you didn't do the work, and I remember once they hit me for that. I think that sometimes I did the work, but I had to make my drawing… and try to make it look like Benito Juárez… but I tried to do it… And if I couldn't, my mother would tell another lady, "If you go to the city, bring the materials back to me." But yes, there was a difference in that context. Because sometimes I couldn't turn in the work. Or my mother would send me to the stationery shop: "Tell the man to give you credit for the illustration and I'll pay him later." My mother always used to get mad when… Well, students who had a bit more money were always the ones who participated in the dances, in the school events. They were the flag bearers because they had to have an impeccable uniform, with gloves and everything. For the parties, you had to buy different things. My mother used to get mad at me because I would always raise my hand to participate. She would get upset and tell me, "We don't have the money to buy your outfit." It was a problem for me to take food. But I would always say, "I want to participate." So, my mother would borrow money, and sometimes I would participate and sometimes I wouldn't.

Once the teacher hit me, I think in my second year. It had to do with some work I hadn't done… I don't know what it was about, but I complained to the teacher and… I think that in the first year they hit me… I don't know… I don't remember what I did. I do remember that once the school inspectors were there to inspect something. Someone from the department of education was there and I think that in front of the teacher I asked him why he talked only to the inspectors. I think I questioned him because I told him, "Why are you asking only the ones who prepared the meeting and you're not asking anyone else?" That's when they hit me. It was something like that. But that's how it was… In elementary school, you couldn't see the difference so much. It was simply who participated in the parties, who went

on the outings… Sometimes they took excursions, but it was the same as participating in events. And… the graduation events, the festivals were obviously very noticeable. Even for church, when I was helping with the youth group. The way people… their clothes, in those days. And where they sat. People who had… simple clothes, always sat in the back, and people who had more money always sat in the front. Maybe those were small-town things.

Poor people lived in my town. We had enough to eat. Basic food needs were met, but when you didn't have money, you ate a tortilla dipped in beans or chili sauce or an egg, or you had four eggs and divided them among the family. When I say poor, it's a level of poverty that marks you… Not everyone had access. When I talk about social class, for example, it's what my wife says. She was the rich girl in the poor neighborhood because her dad earned a little bit more. They had a television in every room to make poverty less noticeable. In other words, within that poor community, some poor people were less poor. The one who has a quarry or has a workshop with an employee. Most people are going to be employees, but the owner will have a much better income. There were about 1,500 or 1,700 families in the two. Out of that number, only 60 communal landowners–60 families–had a high income. A high income in a poor neighborhood: 60 families who didn't have to go to bed hungry. Because they had people working for them. We were employees. Most of the time, my parents had to work for someone else, for someone who owned cars, had machinery, and had an income. When I came to the United States, or one or two years before I came–I can't remember–an uncle of mine, a teacher who got a teaching job, give my father his machinery, his workshop; so, my father had a table to cut stone and a place to make figurines, which changed our life a little. I was still living at home. It was a couple of years before I came here, I think. When I was in secondary school, we had that little workshop. I was in my first or second year of secondary

school. Before that, my father worked in other places. When I was in secondary school, my uncle gave him the workshop–just a motor, the pulleys, a disc–and that's where my father had his little business. So, we had a better income, but I had to work for my father. I had to help him with activities and if he had money, I could ask him for things. But besides working with my father, I think that is when…I'm not sure, I think it was in my first year of secondary school…sometimes I would help other people in my spare time. My father would give us money for food, but he didn't give me money for myself. So, I would sometimes go to help someone polish pieces, so that they would pay me and I would have money to buy a sandwich at school. In short, there was money for food, but there wasn't anything extra–to pay for an education, to build a house, for example. We covered our expenses. And although my father had a small workshop, even today he has to sell his merchandise to someone else in the town who has a larger store–a communal landowner because the communal landowners have large stores where they sell handicrafts, where they have the contacts to sell wholesale. Even though our life was a bit better, the monopolies continued to exist, we could say. They were rich people in poor neighborhoods.

Unfortunately, my family depends on me now. My mother is sick, blinded by diabetes. My father is sick. My brother takes care of them. Over time, one of the epidemics in my town–and which most of the older people have–has become diabetes. It is the greatest cause of death in that small town: diabetes, along with blindness. Sometimes they sell homemade food and earn a bit for themselves. Obviously, I cover their basic needs: food, electricity, telephone, and cable. And medicine. I cover the expenses. But when they can, they prepare food to sell, to have extra cash. It's a bit hard for me. Before, everything that I earned or had everything was for helping them. At the same time, I obviously had to buy other things. Now… I still help them, but I think about questioning that… not being… Well, it's a Mexican cus-

tom because we all help our parents, but sometimes I think that it doesn't have to be my responsibility. They chose that life. I'm choosing another life, and I'm trying to make… to put everything in a retirement account so that when I reach that age, I won't experience the same thing. But, obviously, I'm not going to stop helping them.

I talk to them and despite their age, sometimes we talk about that right now… I'm not in the best situation to be able to help them or give them more money. And even if I had the money, I wouldn't do it, because I cover only their basic expenses. The other options aren't my responsibility. But they also work and that is the context. My brother also has diabetes. That worries me because it's something that's always going to exist. I'm always going to have to be watching out for all of them. The question is how long. Because… I have thought about setting up a small business for them so that they earn their own money. Because I also have the right to enjoy what I'm achieving, don't I? To go on a trip if I want. I have the right to go to a restaurant, to eat the food that I want without feeling guilty. I don't know if this is true for everyone in Mexico, but I know that it is a very common feeling among migrants. "I'm not going to buy this food because it costs me 25 or 50 dollars and maybe I could use that money to help my parents. I'm not going to buy these shoes because they're expensive. I'll buy some cheaper ones and send a bit more to my parents." In other words, it's a bit controversial because you have the right to enjoy something without feeling guilty. In fact, up until now, I have bought very little for myself. Up until now, because I'm now in a relationship with someone. Because as a married man, I think about both of us. That was one of the reasons I didn't get married earlier. Because I knew I couldn't afford it and because I knew that on top of that, I had a responsibility that… wasn't going to disappear… isn't going to disappear until all of them die… and it sounds illogical. I had relationships that I even broke off out of fear, fear of that responsibility because…

as I was telling you if you have children… For a long time, I told myself, if I have children, a family, I won't be able to help my family in Mexico and I didn't want to be in the position of taking food away from my children to give it to my parents. It sounds horrible, but what I want to say is that… maybe because I am very involved in the right to education, in a context of wanting and liking, if I had children, I would want them to go to a better university or access a better education than what I have had, without having to restrict them. Seeing and working with the migrant community and all of their needs has affected me. Sometimes you go to a house and four children are sleeping under the table: four children who can't go to college because they don't have the money. I started to register all of that. I would think about getting married or having children, and expect it to be very difficult because I wouldn't… I wouldn't take that opportunity away from my children, of offering them a better future because I also have the responsibility of supporting my parents. I decided to get married because, in the end, I realized that my parents are not my responsibility. I can help them, but I changed my idea about being responsible for them. I decided to help them because I want to, or because I can. If I have 50 dollars and I can give them 25 or 10 dollars, I give it to them because I can. But not in the context of… having to give them 25 dollars because it's my responsibility. In other words, it was a change of context. Before, I even had to do a budget with my family: "How much is the telephone, and how much does this cost?" I had to cover certain categories. Today, if I have an amount, that is what I send them. If I have less, I send them what I can. I'm a bit more stable now, somewhat. But my case is very complicated. I have… well, I have only 18 hours of work. My salary is much lower. But it's the only way. Otherwise, I would have to go back to Mexico, and… although they see me as a professional who is working at a university and possibly earning a lot of money, I work only 18 hours. A check for 800 dollars every two weeks is not much. It helps me

to cover my needs, but my needs have also increased. When I was single, I could… eat half a sandwich and save the other half for the next day, or rent a room for 250 or 400 pesos and not spend on other things, but now it's different. I can't say, "We're not going to that restaurant because it's expensive." I think that was the hardest part for me, and the reason I didn't have a relationship. I wasn't stingy: I simply didn't have the money to spend. Today, I say, "Why not?" We're careful but even though I might have the image of being a professional who earns a lot of money, it's not that way. I earn the minimum wage–not really because about 30 dollars an hour is good in the labor market–but obviously, it's not enough for my skills. But it's the only thing available, until my migratory status changes.

As for my brother, he never finished school. I think he dropped out after fourth or fifth grade. He never liked school. He had difficulties learning, many difficulties. I think he was about 14 or 15 years old in the fourth of fifth grade. He was the kid who caused problems at school, who didn't want to sit down. He had a lot of learning difficulties. He didn't finish. I think he recently got an elementary and secondary school diploma through independent study. I sometimes worry about his situation, because… he's almost 50 years old. He's about 48, but… I know he's had a hard life because he has spent his time taking care of my mother, my parents… He doesn't have an income or a wife… I worry sometimes because I know that my wife is conscientious and that we understand the situation and when my parents die, well… I'll continue supporting him. But how long? Forever? He learned to do things in the workshop, but those objects are no longer made…

Well, I think it's time to finish. They're on their way back now.

–If you want, we can stop.

–Yes, our time is up.

–Thank you very much.

November 16, 2018
The Generation of Community and Political Leadership

PART 9.
THE GENERATION OF COMMUNITY AND POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

Only a considerably strong dose of rebelliousness can persist in achieving a transformation in the status of things. A quiet subversion that is nonetheless proactive and resistant to any differentiation. This, I believe, is what Angelo personifies and what has distinguished him in conclusive activism –in his hunger strike, for example– and in the thoughtful, systematic defense of his human rights.

I am heading to my ninth encounter with Angelo, with determination. But I am thinking about that fearful path he mentioned during our last visit, given the possible questioning by our northern neighbor's immigration authorities. I am also thinking about the prudence of his ongoing efforts to defend the rights of others. I believe that the topics of the day will be in this direction.

–We're going to start the interview in Starbucks. It is 12:14 PM. Hello, Angelo. I've been analyzing all of the interviews and I noticed that you've touched on a topic that I would like to return to your trajectory in defending the right to education and especially, human rights. In one of the interviews, you mentioned three generations of Mexicans, and you said that the ones who came here first have practices that are rooted in Mexico's culture. The next generation –the generation you belong to– fights for individual rights, and has fought to enter the university. And now we have the generation of Dreamers, young people who have publicly protested, and who believe like you that access to education is a right. Thus, I would like for you to talk a bit more

about the right to education –your right and now the Dreamers' right, in contrast with the previous generation that did not have access to education. They didn't even consider that right because they came here to work, to earn money, and send it back to Mexico, and they most surely continue to do just that.

–Well, in the beginning, when massive migration started, it was people from the rural areas. People started arriving… friends from the rural areas around towns, whose education spanned from three to six or seven years. Or sometimes no formal education at all. People who didn't even speak Spanish. Those were the first generations that started coming here. Later, the flow of people was different, as people from cities started arriving. They started to be interested in education. They started coming from Mexico City, cities in the state of Puebla, and urban areas. This led to a change in interests. As I mentioned, here, and especially in New York, migrants concentrated on promoting culture, promoting classes for learning English as a second language, on talking about rights –labor rights– while putting very little emphasis on education. The Torch movement –not the Torch of the Peasantry movement from Mexico, but the Torch of Our Lady of Guadalupe, was massive. It's a community group within the church. And it attracts thousands of people. But there were groups, and Mexican organizations that still exist, that focused on English classes, and labor rights. And they even fought a lot for rights… like in the laundries, so that the women who worked there would have rights, and the people who worked in the car washes, and the ones who sold fruit on the sidewalk. That was the context of our first generation when the massive festivities started. There were many festivities: Cinco de Mayo and many others. I think because of… 2000… there were a lot of INEA classes, from Mexico's national institute of adult education. Literacy classes. When I started getting involved in the community, it was 1997, and we started to create new discourse. Some other young people and I. Jesús Pérez was one of them. Robert

Smith was also one of them, as an academic. And we started to create discourse about the needs that existed in the Mexican community, in the community of Mexican young people, the community of the second generation, which was born here, or the generation 1.5 –those of us who came at an age when we wanted to go to school. The semi-Dreamers, you could say, or the aged out. So, in that context we began to create discourse within the community: that we needed to work on the topic of education, to work on young leadership. That was our job. I am always grateful for the community, for the first generation, and for those community leaders who came here and started promoting all of these programs for labor rights. Grateful for the culture, in other contexts. But a very Mexican policy was in effect. At the same time, they taught us, and they began to create a space. Places where Mexican people could gather. And we started to talk with them also about the need to create spaces, not only spaces where we could gather –since they had already constructed them– but also spaces of leadership, where they had to open the doors so that other young people would want to come in. MASA was one of the first attempts to do that. It was led by young people who were born here or children of Mexican migrants, and I believe that their discourse was different. And there was a memorandum of understanding signed in the universities, with Mexico. Various organizations created mentoring programs. MASA began with leadership more focused on childhood and youth. Other organizations began to take part in that leadership. They began to create programs to promote university education, programs to promote culture, but with an emphasis on the community… children, and young people. And that got started. So, different processes have been followed. In that context, I'm part of the group of young professionals in the first generation. Or I'm part of generation 1.5, those of us who started working on education. On promoting young business leaders who were already working on Wall Street. By that I mean young university students who

came from Mexico to study at Columbia, NYU, and began working with the community in the context of creating leadership and creating spaces. A movement started to form, and some young people who were born here saw those educational attempts within the community and they saw new leadership. So, they returned to the community. Now we have the Dreamers in the community, who are fighting for the right to obtain an education; many of those young people are now leading the movements. Antonio Alarcón, and many young people who are now in the field. There was another group of young people who used to be Dreamers, who were fighting for the Dream Act. They were fighting for in-state tuition here in New York. Today, it's seen more in the context of DACA, and the need for immigration reform. It's a movement more focused on the migratory context. They look for ways to legalize their parents' status or to take into consideration a possible executive order like DACA.

–In the interview, you mentioned these generations and the need for policy that is more local, more national, more transnational. For example, in the case of Mexico, people are becoming more interested in Mexican migrants. In the United States, you all need to position yourselves and fight for your rights. You spoke of this in light of public policy.

–Well, there are many ways that the community is interacting. I mean that we're starting to see a transnational movement as well, involvement in transnational policy. In the context of transnational policy, I think that the first generation that arrived still controls the leadership, but they have adapted to this new need. In other words, if policy used to be more Mexican, from the PRI and PAN political parties and all of that, when leadership was formed here in the United States, the voting rights of Mexicans living abroad began to be promoted. That was a long time ago. A strong link had been created in Mexican policy and transnational policy was starting to appear. Immigrants' rights. What has failed us –and I say "failed" because although we have talked

about it in the discourse, very few actions have been taken– is the joint work, the transnational work in the case of return migration. Some organizations have been talking about it in Mexico for a long time: IMUMI, citizen initiative, UpeTex, and well, Zacatecas and Michoacán. Those areas have been transnational because they were some of the first. Like Mis Casas Michoacanas, which opened in Chicago, Illinois. So that link already existed. Later, links were formed through IME, the Institute of Mexicans Abroad, which is trying to form a group of advisors outside of Mexico. I was in that group of advisors from 2009 to 2011, during Calderón's presidency. In the recent groups, one person is US-born. In the Mexican community here in New York, one is US-born. Two are from the early generations, but they were already part of the group of Mexicans abroad. And in Chicago, Illinois, their participation has always been very coordinated with transnational policies. The first and second generations have worked together. Their policy has existed for several years, but here it is new. So, as I was saying, that is what led to links in the transnational context. The topic of return migration, however, is an area where we haven't coordinated much because the organizations here have concentrated on the needs of Mexicans here. And although the organizations in Mexico work with return migration and have been making efforts, they haven't been very effective. Not because of the context of the work they are doing, but because of the lack of support: a lack of public policies in the Mexican government and a lack of support from the migrant community outside of Mexico. That's what would help. It's the topic of the other Dreamers. From the time they started talking about transferring credits, about recognizing the GED in Mexico, the Dream Act was about undocumented Mexican children, who had no access. It's a struggle that has been occurring for many years in Mexico, but no progress has been made in the policy. Until supposedly a policy change was made by Trump here. An anti-immigrant change that began to attract

interest. But even so, as the kids here, the Dreamers, were struggling to be included, the Mexican government excluded them. I remember the first group of Dreamers who were taken from the United States to Mexico. They were received with honors at Mexico's presidential residence and served dinner and all of that. At the same time, there was a group of Dreamers who had been returned to Mexico, and they weren't even invited. They would have paid no attention to them, if a group of student leaders in the invited group –who were members of United We Dream and involved in the political change for Dreamers here in the United States– hadn't intervened as political actors in Mexico and said, "If they don't attend, we don't attend." A link was created and that's when the returned Dreamers were invited. They attended the meeting scheduled at Mexico's Secretariat of Foreign Relations. Those are the young groups, the entities that are starting to create a transnational movement. In the context of the adult community, it was more political. "We want to vote. We want, in the future, for Mexicans abroad to have a representative in the Senate." For Mexicans abroad to have a representative in the Senate of the United States Congress is a policy that has been suggested and I think they want to move ahead with it. And well, young people are starting to get involved in the Mexican community because they are the children of Mexicans who have come to the United States and they visit Mexico on vacation. Their ties with Mexican politics are through their parents and what they hear. That is my opinion, obviously.

Something that helped me a lot during my two-year stay in Mexico was that I participated in several congresses. I also spoke at a lot of congresses. They would invite me to academic meetings or to political meetings to speak about return migration, and as a friend of mine used to tell me, a teacher at the Ibero University in Puebla, "Take advantage because right now you're a phenomenon. You've come from the United States. Because later, you'll be like us, and they won't listen to you. We've been re-

peating those topics for months, but they'll listen to you because you're here." So I started talking about the topic of return migration in Mexico: during my time at the university, at UAP, so that the topic could be discussed, as well as human rights. Also, at the Secretariat of Migrant Affairs, I talked about how to treat return migrants. What should be done. I might not have had anything to do with the decision, but for a long time, I suggested opening an office or putting a migrant representative in areas where most of the return migrants are. You see, there was only the institute in Puebla, but sometimes topics need to be discussed in the community. I think in the municipalities of Puebla they've put a representative for return migrants. I may not have had anything to do with it. Maybe they already had it in mind.

I also worked with the return migrants in Mexico, with ODA, and with Dreaming Mexico. I was part of the group that created programs. Since I was outside of the country, I worked more with the Secretariat of Public Education, RSI, to create public policies that could benefit return migrants and return Dreamers. In the end, changes were made in revalidating academic work for students.

I was on a team with Dr. Rosa Montes to create the Puentes program for returning young people. One of the ideas or topics we talked about was joining the council of universities. I was also working in a small way with ANUIES, with Julie Anderson. They would ask me questions or I would go to share my experiences. And that's the basic topic. In my town in Mexico, the only thing that I did was organize students so that they could request a library. It was a very limited role. When I say very limited, I mean I was not playing in the big leagues, in politics. Everything was behind the scenes.

When I came back to New York, after the pardon, my life started moving toward academia. To do research on the limitations our undocumented migrant community faces, especially under DACA. To learn about the long-term benefit, the short-

term benefit, and the reason why policies like the Dream Act, or policies like DACA or Deferred Action have been able to change not only the lives of children or young people in the context of education, but also many other things: drivers licenses, or jobs. And it also changes the family's ties in the community context. Because they begin to have access to participating in the political changes of their community. In other words, they begin to have permission to work or to become licensed as lawyers, teachers, and doctors. They begin to create changes. And the ones able to travel with advance parole are no longer undocumented. They become "DACAmented" and then documented, hopefully within three years, and then citizens. In general terms –since I can't talk about the research I'm doing, but I can talk about what is public information, what has been published in the media or other academic studies, but not the one I am doing– I can give a palpable example here in New York. That would be the lawyer, Damian Vargas. Or is his name Carlos Vargas or Cesar Vargas? It's Cesar Vargas. He grew up as an undocumented minor and became DACAmented with DACA, the first lawyer admitted to the bar through DACA, and he changed the laws of New York. He was the first case. He could have been a teacher, but people who work in health need a license. Some professions need a license and he couldn't get one. The first case of an undocumented lawyer was in California, but Cesar Vargas was the first in New York. Since he was unable to get a license from the state of New York, he couldn't practice law. The scenario began to change for other generations of migrants. In other words, for other "DACAmented" migrants. They started to apply to the department of education, health, to many other areas that they usually couldn't enter. It was one of the first cases. It was a personal achievement, and he was one of the first young people to work in national politics as a community liaison for Senator Bernie Sanders. He had the opportunity to travel with advance parole and he went back to Mexico. He was married, but when he went back,

his life changed because he had advance parole. Today, he has legal residency in the United States and in two or three years he will become a citizen. His life has changed. That's the public part. You can read about his life in *The New York Times*. He is the most specific example that I could give. You would also be a special case but in education.

I know that my case is also unique, and has established many precedents. In my case, although I am a Mexican migrant from generation 1.5 –halfway between the first and second generations. We didn't qualify for DACA. We had attended school but we didn't have licensed professions because we were outside of the DACA age limits. My case is unique because I would be the first migrant who has no ties with the United States. When I say "ties", in the context of immigration law, I mean that you have to be married to an American citizen, or you have to have American children to show the hardship, as they call it here. The migratory phenomenon. So, my case is unique because I'm undocumented, I'm a professional, and it's an opportunity for a permit. It's about work. I applied for a job and I got it, so I am guaranteed a work visa, an H1B visa. But to get the visa, I have to leave the country and that requires a pardon. But a pardon is hard to get because I have no ties. I have lived here for more than 24 or 25 years without documents. So that makes it more difficult. In other words, many legal contexts are involved and it's a topic to be debated. Finally –well, the first time–, they denied the pardon, they denied the visa, and they penalized me for 10 years without any possibility of applying for any US visa. And that meant I was in Mexico for two years, fighting my case. Later, when the national movement started about bringing Angelo back home, different contexts became involved, like politics and activism. To show that although I was not married to an American citizen and although I did not have American children, my strongest link was with young American students whose lives have changed because of my work in education. And because I was a person who

did not represent any –How could I say it?– any danger for society. I was someone who had contributed to many things, to changes here in this country. And well, my story of having arrived as an unaccompanied minor at age 14 or 15, and of having lived in the streets, worked in my favor. So, precedents have been created. Right now, the last I heard, the university is supporting three more students, and many more, I imagine, have applied. The article about me in *The New York Times,* well I have seen that many lawyers are using it to learn what can be done in similar cases.

–But, when you left the country, were you married? or did you get married later?

–I got married when I came back to the United States. I had met someone here –my wife– and we had planned to marry. I got back together with her when I returned from Mexico.

–And what generation is she from? Although she's a United States citizen.

–She's from the first generation. She came legally, we could say. She's a United States citizen. I'm not sure of the process, but she's a US citizen. She is part of the first generation or the generation of Mexican migrants who are professionals. She is from this generation of Mexicans who come for a profession.

–They were hired legally. Well, returning to the case of the lawyer and your case, I think they are two cases we can learn a lot from because they give us an idea of the dimensions of human rights. I remember when he was at the university, giving his speech. I remember the way that he referred to the young people and their new dream. What was the dream of the first Mexicans who came here? Do you and he have another kind of dream?

–Well, from the migrant context, the first group to arrive created stereotypes. They brought a context of a different dream if we generalize the first groups of Mexican migrants. The context was to come here and the migrant dream was to arrive, work, and help the family; in other words, massive changes occurred in

rural communities, where building houses showed the American dream. When you build a house, you create well-being for the family. Then came the next group, the generation 1.5, whose dream is not to create a change in Mexico. Well, in my case I'm like the first generation. I'm the first generation because I didn't have any relatives here before me, but I'm generation 1.5 because of my age. I identify more with generation 1.5. In other words, my original dream was to come here and do the same thing –the migrant dream of helping my family build a house in Mexico and give them a future. That's what I started to do, but the house was unfinished. Helping my family motivated my initial efforts, but along the way, my dream changed because I am generation 1.5, which was about "I want to go to school, I want a better culture, I want to get ahead." In other words, making gradual progress. But for this generation 1.5, since they come here as minors, their dream is less about Mexico, because many of them don't even remember Mexico. Many of them have lost all ties with Mexico. So, their dream is here, and it is professional. Where are we going to work? How far are we going to get? What is our culture in terms of politics, including local politics? There is less transnational policy, except for return migration, linked with Dreamers here and in Mexico. There is not much transnational policy that concerns this group. The next group is the children of Mexican migrants, children born here, and their ties with Mexico are obviously much more limited. I say more limited because when the generation 1.5 arrived here, they were undocumented; they haven't been able to return to Mexico and they don't know when they'll be able to return. In other words, their ties have been broken. But the ones who were born in the United States, despite the lack of interest in transnational policy, have ties because they can travel. They are spokespersons and communicators of transcultural experiences, we could say since they represent their parents in going back to Mexico and seeing the family. They are like transnational messengers for the family in that context. Their

viewpoint is focused here. Why should I get involved in politics if all of those changes are occurring in the leadership of the Mexican community, which is the second generation taking charge?

–Another thing you mentioned is that your dreams of a house are about a house here because you grew up here. It is not contempt for Mexico. It's just that you constructed your identity. Is New York your home?

–Yes. My home is having the opportunity and freedom to be the person I want to be. And I want to be a free man. Actually, as a man, I want to be a free person, because if I say "man", I am disqualifying many others. I want to be a free person, with the freedom to walk down the street without fear of being stopped, arrested, questioned, or deported. Although freedom can sometimes be abstract, the possibility of having a social security number gives you freedom. In other words, I am experiencing it right now because I am enjoying a different migratory status: I'm no longer undocumented. But I'm not documented here either. I've stopped being an undocumented worker and am now a Mexican citizen with a stay in the United States, with a limitation, because after six years… In other words, with a limitation, because if my employer decides, "You know what? I don't need you anymore," then that same day I have to buy my return ticket to Mexico. But I'm in the process of changing my migratory status through my wife, who is an American citizen. But if it weren't for that, I would have stopped being an undocumented worker to become a Mexican citizen, a foreigner. That gives me freedom, but it also imposes limitations on me. We say that abstract freedom is being able to walk freely down the street, yet anyone can walk freely. Obstacles to freedom come as a fear of what can happen. I'm doubly victimized by… by a number. I'm doubly victimized because of my brown skin. Obviously, if you are a tourist and are dark-skinned, you can also be victimized. Simply being supported by the freedom to travel, to leave the country, to exit and re-enter as you wish, erases from your mind the idea of being a

victim; in other words, the victimization of discrimination. your case, as a native of Mexico, you don't know the language, but you don't have the fear of another woman who may look like you, as she walks down the street. It is that abstract freedom of documentation.

–Have you ever been stopped? In other words, have you experienced that fear?

–Well, yes, when I first started doing the protests for in-state tuition. I jaywalked and a policeman stopped me, although many other people were jaywalking. But the policeman stopped me and wanted to give me a ticket. He asked for my identification. I wasn't carrying identification other than my college ID, which says Angelo Cabrera, and he told me, "I need your ID, your ID. I need your official identification." I told him that the college identification was the only one I had, and he insisted, "No, I need your state ID." I didn't have one, so I had to go to court. I had a passport and I think that was when I started to carry my passport. And well, those are the fears. Even though I have a legal status right now as a foreigner, I'm a documented foreigner in the United States. But those fears don't go away. I know that my wife –because of her privileges, starting with the way she acts, of how she grew up in Mexico– was, in her context, the little rich girl in the poor neighborhood. I'm not saying that they had money, but if you have a television in every room in a poor neighborhood, you're the one who has higher economic status. Her behaviors are those of an American citizen, of a legal resident. I have my rights too, and no one needs to question me, but sometimes we have had… I hadn't mentioned it, but about two weeks ago we went to a place in Brooklyn, and we had to go on the bus. We found out right as we were getting on the bus that we had to buy a special bus card that is more expensive. But there was a person there who was trying to monopolize the conversation and saying, "No, you have to buy the card because if you don't have the card, you don't have money. So why are you getting on

this bus, which isn't yours? It's only for the ones of us who can pay for it." My wife was getting a bit upset, and the driver told her, "Go ahead and get on." But the other woman asked, "Hey, can people get on if they don't have enough for the fare? Or can you accept the limited card?" She knew the answer, but she wanted to confirm that the driver shouldn't have let us on. For my wife, this was very normal, but I'm thinking, "If they make me get off, they'll get me off. And if they call the police, well, so be it." But once we were in the car, I told my wife, "I want to tell you something. It's cool that you can fight for your rights, but I feel a bit uncomfortable, and fearful because although I now have a stable immigration document, they can deport me. I'll have a problem, but you won't." So she understood that she had to bring it down a notch. In other words, it's not a situation that's incomprehensible. People may not be very familiar with the legal context or the situation, but it's like being in limbo. So, those fears happen. Do I sometimes feel afraid when I see a policeman? Maybe not because I feel secure. I carry a letter that says, if the police stop me, they don't have the right to search me because I'm covered by the university. They can't even look at my cell phone because I have contacts from school. I know they can't do anything to me. I know that they're not going to stop me unless I do something illegal. I used to be able to think positively, to go with the freedom of ignoring the problem. But I can't do that anymore. I try not to go to protests because that also puts me at risk. Before, I could go as an undocumented worker, but now I can't go because I'm a documented foreigner in this country. It goes against immigration policies. I can't participate in a protest. In other words, if I go to a protest and something happens to me, I'm a foreigner.

–Angelo, thinking about those fears: You mentioned that although you were afraid, you escaped from the place where you were locked in, you went to Manhattan without knowing your

way around, you got lost, and there you met an Asian girl. I would like to know how you felt. How old were you then?

–About 19. Not yet 20. I think I learned a lot then when I left that place. When I say that I escaped, it's metaphorical. I escaped from myself too, and many people have asked me about it. I escaped. What conditions did I live in? I could have gone home. That is what I have always explained. I could have gone home after the business closed. But when I say that I escaped, it was because I didn't know my rights. They shouldn't have shut me in the basement for so many hours. Because sometimes it was from early morning, from 6 AM until 4 PM, 5 PM, 6 PM, or even 7 PM. When I say that I escaped, it was strange because sometimes they locked the door and sometimes they didn't. But it was the sensation of having to be there and not being able to go out. Not knowing about working hours, because they didn't pay me as they should have, since I was a minor. I could have been in school instead of working. So, when I went to the city, my escape was metaphorical. I was escaping from my fears. I hadn't left that place. After all, I didn't have other options, because I didn't know my options. Because that was safe, my safety, that safe place where I could be. So, the metaphorical escape was when I decided to face my fears and go places where I knew that the language was a much greater limitation. From there, I started moving toward freedom, through my fears, to continue struggling. At that moment, I didn't get more possibilities, but I didn't get negative things either. A different context opened up. Everything was about applying for things, and what do if they said, "You can't apply."

–Yes, I understand what you escaped from. You were liberated. I understand the metaphor. It was a moment of liberation. Regardless of whether you were locked in or not. You decided to liberate yourself, you walked away and that is very important. Is it the same fear that you have now, or has your fear changed?

–Well, those fears have come back again because of the situation I'm in now. Because I'm in the eye of the hurricane. Whatever I say or do, they are looking at it under a magnifying glass because I am in a legal process. If you are in a legal process, you have to pay attention to it. I know that my process is going well, and I am positive that it is going well with my legal representation. But I still like my freedoms and taking risks. Even before I went to Mexico for my visa, many times I saw myself as stranded, fighting my case at the international level. I dreamed it. I lived it. I wanted to do it. Because I wanted to take that risk to free myself from my fears, and to create a benefit for students. Part of my liberation is self-harm, we could say. Taking risks. Now I know that things are going well, that my case is being reviewed under a magnifying glass, but I also know that it will turn out well. I have dreamed that day will come, but I must wait. Meanwhile, I have to decide about many things. I have to decide about being afraid to continue my education despite my work.

–But, why the darkness if you're free, Angelo? You're a free man.

–Free, but with many restrictions.

–Which ones? That is what I want to understand.

–Having a visa, going to pick up my visa, having a work visa that allows me to leave and enter the country at any time I wish. That is the context of a visa. You have a job, you can enter and leave the country.

–I can be here for six months and nobody can tell me anything.

–Not in my case. I have a work visa but I can't leave the country. In other words, I have that freedom, but with restrictions. That's what you're asking me. A lot of people ask me that, sometimes even my mother and it used to make her cry. People would tell her, "Why doesn't he come to see you if he has a visa?" Or, "Mexicans come to Mexico as tourists and go back to the United States, so why doesn't your son come to visit you? He's a professional, he works in a university, and he has a visa." They don't

understand it and I don't understand it either. Well, I understand that it's part of the limitation. In other words, if I leave the country, I'll have to request another pardon if I want to come back. So why take the risk? That's what freedom is: traveling, making the decision to do what you want. I can't do it yet. It's not an obstacle because I can do whatever I want. It's psychological. Those are the migratory traumas where I have encountered fear. There are places I can go, thanks to the privilege of being a community leader. A community leader in quotation marks is a person who is involved in the community. It has made various places accessible to me. Because of the work I was doing. Although I cannot do those things now because I feel a bit… Maybe it's because I'm in a legal process that my previous traumas have returned.

Once, I was working in Manhattan, close to the Mexican Consulate, when someone… Ah no, it wasn't there. It was on 47th Street when I was working with some Jews. Someone called the owner and said, "The immigration people are at the other store." Something like that. I don't know if it was true. I don't know if they really went there. Maybe it was true. The owner yelled, "ICE is two restaurants down the street. Everybody leave if you don't have papers." He didn't say how we should leave. He just said, "Get all your stuff. ICE is here. Get out fast." I think he shouted. I don't remember exactly but I remember that day. There were about four who had papers, so the place ended up with almost no workers. I spent about three hours –a group of us– in a cold room at work and they turned off all the lights in the basement and locked us in. It had been an extra apartment that they had converted into a place for doing catering work. So, we were locked in and no one knew where we were. Many workers had to jump from one building to another building. We were locked in for two or three hours. I don't know if it was true, but they came to get us out. Those are the fears. Of having to take off running.

–But not anymore. You no longer have to take off running.

–That's true. But those fears return….

–Even though someone yells, "ICE is on the way over!"

–Not anymore. But I know more about it now.

–And you also have your papers in order…

–And maybe I would react differently. Since I know about this, although I'm documented, I would tell them, "I have the right to remain silent. I do not authorize you to search my cell phone." I would ask, "Are you arresting me?" They would say, "No." "May I leave?" They would say, "No." Then, "What are you charging me with?"

–Because you have learned, I imagine…

–Well, I have a way to defend myself. But at the moment it happens, you never know…

–Did you have an experience like that when you were in Tijuana? When you felt vulnerable, for example?

–Not really. Well, I got mugged there and they ripped up my shirt with a knife, but I think that was the only traumatic moment. It was traumatic because it's not just the interaction with intimidation. Trauma can go from one day to the next, such as wanting to go to a health clinic to get medicine and not being able to, because you don't have papers. In other words, it doesn't have to involve interaction with the authorities. With education: wanting to go to school and not being able to because you're undocumented and you have to pay more.

–We could say that we all have traumas of different types, based on our own experience. But this issue of freedom…

–What time is it?

–1:21. If you want, we can stop here, Angelo. But tell me, to conclude: Those fears, traumas that appear although you don't want them to. You can't control that. It's more of a psychological issue.

–My freedom will be the day I have my US passport in my hand.

–Do you think your fears will disappear that day?

–Yes. Possibly yes, for sure. Freedom is how you feel. How you're prepared. Very possibly, no. Very possibly, yes.

–You, at this moment, are Mexican, foreign, with a work visa. You have to obey US laws and, in that sense, you can be free. Right?

–Yet, but… I don't know. I don't have the freedom to travel, to do many other things right now.

–Can you leave New York City or the state? Can you go to another city?

–Yes, I can go from one state to another. But, it's the freedom of going farther. I want to go to Europe. I want to visit my parents. I can't do that right now. In other words, when I say it's abstract, it's because freedom has different meanings. Once you have residency or citizenship, those barriers fade. But there are many other barriers. The barrier of being brown, the barrier of… but in different contexts. I will be able to defend my rights differently.

–But some people are darker than you are, Angelo.

–Well, yes.

–And they're doing fine, aren't they?

–Yes, I understand.

–I also understand. I understand what you're trying to say. That's the point for me, the part you're talking about, which is the dilemma of freedom. Not feeling any fear. You shouldn't be afraid anymore, Angelo. You must see that.

–Well, I know there will be fear. I know I'm going to make it. But not until I have the document in my hand will I be able to see that the fear is gone. My case is very special and different. I have to present many things that they don't ask other people for. I'm here legally with a pardon, but I still have to go to Mexico with a penalized visa, because I have a New York waiver.

–Yes, they can tell you "no" at any time. Well, thank you very much. Let's stop for today.

November 20, 2018
One Trajectory and Three Generations

PART 10.
ONE TRAJECTORY AND THREE GENERATIONS

When I began this project, based on the information I had found about Angelo, I was certain that at his young age, his most powerful motivation was his own strong desire to get ahead. And that is what he did, without allowing himself to be overcome by deprivation, abuse of power, or racial hatred. After having reviewed the statements in his interview, I am also very certain that he found renewed drive in helping migrants, younger Dreamers, and children, as he worked to consolidate a totally bilingual, academic, and professional Mexican American community: a community with sufficient force to change laws and claim inalienable rights, even as undocumented workers. I am concentrating today on delving deeper into this subject.

–Hello. Today is Tuesday, November 20. We're going to do our interview in New York on a holiday: Mexico's celebration of its Revolution Day of 1910. We're going to continue ahead with the interview we started last week. Angelo, I was looking carefully at your answers because you were directly addressing the topic of the right to education. In the project that we are doing, I am interested in reconstructing your trajectory as you defended that right. You mentioned three generations: the first generation that came to the United States with a dream, the idea of supporting their families; the second, the intermediate generation you belong to since you are generation 1.5, which has another type of aspirations, beyond simply financial support. This generation of…

–Well, just to clarify, this is not the first generation to come to the United States. They are the first generations to arrive in New York. We didn't cross the river –the river crossed us.

–Yes, we could say you're the first one since you're the first person in your family to come here. That's what I mean. And we also talked about the fear of not having the documents, which you now have. And the topic of freedom. So, starting at that point, I would like to address the topic of these generations. But I would like to start with your generation, which is generation 1.5. Although I know it refers to age, I would like for you to tell us the reason why it is called 1.5.

–These are new terms that many sociologists use to differentiate the types of migration: to differentiate between the first generation of migrants and migrants who are brought here by their parents. Those are the children, the young people. We could say that they brought them here when they were 15 years old. The DACA people are generation 1.5. They are part of generation 1.5 because they are in the middle. They grow up here. These are sociological terms that are used to differentiate among groups in terms of accessibility, resources, lifestyles, adaptation to customs, and all of that, and access to education. They use the term for those things. It also has to do with age. Age plays an important role.

–How old were the members of generation 1.5 when they came here?

–I think the cutoff is age 18.

–Well, why do you say you are generation 1.5?

–Since I came here before I was 18 –I was 15– I consider myself to be generation 1.5. I am the first generation because I'm the first person in my family to come here, the first generation; however, at the same time, I'm 1.5 because of my age. Because of my trajectory, my lifestyle is more here than in Mexico. I identify more with the United States. But that's a good question about what 1.5 means. I think that eventually, we're going to have to…

–Yes, I'll research it as well. That idea of 1.5 attracted my attention because you say that you are 1.5 but that you are also first-generation and also a Dreamer. You have all of them, although you're not in the DACA program. That's what I wanted to learn about today.

–So, we're talking about migrants in terms of who comes here as a teenager. It's people who came here as teenagers with their parents. In other words, the ones who arrived as adolescents. That's what generation 1.5 means: arriving here before age 18.

–OK. So, you're the first generation because you were the first person in your family to come. You're 1.5 because you came as a minor, very young. And even though you're not in the DACA program, or you couldn't enter the DACA program, you were a pioneer as one of the first to continue to access higher education. Is that the discovery that you made, the reason why you feel first-generation, generation 1.5, and a predecessor of DACA?

–Well, it has been a transformation in terms of identity. At first, I identified as a Mexican, first-generation, nationalistic, we could say. But it was an abstract context because you are from the place where you live. It's a personal matter. So, obviously, in the beginning, I identified as a Mexican, first-generation, but when I started that second stage after age 18, my world of friendships and access began to change. First, I was at the university, wanting to go to school and do total immersion in the Anglo world. It was during that period, from when I was 18 or 19 until I was 31 or 35 years old, that I did total immersion in English. It was a very Anglo life, we could say. During that time, my perspective and view of identity changed. Within the Mexican community, I was isolated. Not discriminated against, but isolated because I wanted to go to school, to continue my education. The guys at work would make fun of me, saying, "Here comes the gringo" or "Here comes the lawyer." It was in a derogatory sense because they would ask me why I was going to school if I didn't have documents. That's when I started to feel rejected.

I would wonder, "Why do I have to deal with that if they're not going to help me in terms of the language, in terms of the many things that I need?" I decided not to get bothered, not to waste my time on anyone who wasn't supporting me in my academic plans. Obviously, that changed later, around 2001, or in 2007 when I started working directly with the Mexican community. I started to be proud again of being a Mexican, of working with the migrant community; proud to speak Spanish, although it was difficult because I had focused on English since age 18… I remember when I was in the first year of college, and although I had Hispanic friends, I would never talk to them in Spanish. It wasn't until later when we were about to graduate. It took them about two years to figure out that I was Mexican because they never heard me speak Spanish. It wasn't so much that I wanted to isolate myself from that group. It was more about having a purpose. And that purpose was that I wanted to make progress. And as an undocumented immigrant, it was very expensive for me to go to college, to learn English, to learn to read and write in English because I didn't have the opportunity to practice. So, at that time, if I went to the Mexican Consulate, I would talk to them in English. I didn't care who it was, what their status was, or their political hierarchy. I would talk to them the way that I felt comfortable. Although on one hand I was criticized, on the other hand, I was accepted, because at that time, the young people who were most involved in student movements –student movements about identity in the Mexican Consulate– were more from the elites. Doctoral students at NYU, Columbia, and New York School. And I was this misfit because I didn't identify with them, because I talked to them, or because I talked only one language. In that context, no one mattered to me. It was like my total immersion. Sometimes I regret it because I moved away from learning more Spanish. I had only a middle school education when I got here. I don't know much about grammar in Spanish, but I think all of that helped me…

You don't forget your native language, but my vocabulary was very poor. When you come from a small town or an underprivileged community in Mexico, the language you know is more colloquial. At school, they taught us language, but it was more about reading. In my family, no one speaks any other language besides Spanish. I think some used to speak Popoloca, but it hasn't been passed down.

So, in that context, I think it was like culture shock when I arrived as a teenager; I identified more with generation 1.5 because I didn't fit in. I didn't fit in with the first generation, because the first generation came more for working, for helping their family in Mexico to build a good house. Their leaders were more involved in the community and it was more like Mexican politics and culture. I tried to get involved and imitate it. That is why I considered myself and identified more with generation 1.5 because we preferred speaking in English or Spanglish and that's how we grew up. I can have a long conversation while totally mixing up words and we can understand each other. It was like a subculture that we created. It was a game for us. We thought it was fine and we accepted it.

I started using only English when I was immersed in the university, with my Anglo friends, but at the same time, I spoke Spanglish with the other young people I knew.

–How did that happen? I see you as part of three generations, but you belong to none of them. Or do you? You're the first generation because you came here to work, and you're from generation 1.5 because you came as a teenager. You're pre-DACA or not DACA, but you have attained many of the DACA dreams. You were ahead of them. You marked their path.

–Yes. I'm an aged-out DACA, an aged-out Dreamer. I was part of that struggle. At that time, we had less access to educational programs and less access to resources. I think it was a constant struggle and it was very hard for us to pave the way for future generations to have the opportunity to go to college without hav-

ing to pay as foreign students and to have the possibility to get a work permit. Many people in the early generations –those in the community who are 30, 40, or 50 years old– were the Dreamers. In 2001, to qualify for the Dream Act, you couldn't be over 30. I was about 26 or 27. All of us who qualified between 2001 and 2007 were under 30. So many of them are now 40 or 45, possibly 50. I'm now 43. There are many of us, maybe 35 or 40, who were working toward the Dream Act then. In 2007, many of us would have benefited from the Dream Act, but we were able to open spaces so that today's young people will have a better future. We were constantly fighting for the right to be able to go to college, the right to have a job, the right to get a work permit, and a social security number so that they could have a better future. I took part in that struggle when we were working for in-state tuition. I was with the Dreamers movement for a short while, working to pass laws, the Dream Act. But when I saw the need in the Mexican community, I decided to focus more on the local level with the Mexican community and let other people continue with the work at the national level. The local level was more important for me, changing the statistics here in New York.

–Why was that more important for you? Due to your trajectory and the decisions you made in your life, in a way you separated from your identity. Although you never lose your Mexican-ness, you wanted total immersion in English, in the American culture; your friends had to speak the language. Why did you return to the Mexican community?

–More than returning to the Mexican community, it was returning to generation 1.5 or the second generation. The first generation was important for me –the adult community– but when it was about the vision of creating a political movement, of creating a highly qualified professional community, there were no guarantees in the first generation. Therefore, I decided to focus more on generation 1.5 and the second generation. Because they had possibilities of going to college, of making a change in the

Mexican community. It was also because I started studying political science and I was looking at it from that context. So, although I could have focused on adult education in the community centers, or I could have focused on Mexico's cultural programs, the future generations were more important to me. To promote education within the Mexican migrant community. To create a political movement in the local context, for political participation. For me, it was important to do so through education. Why focus on them? Today's results are that young Mexican Americans are starting to participate in politics. If they are from the East Coast. But Menchaca is from the West Coast. Other young people are participating in the local meetings; they're called community boards. There are a lot of people participating here. There are a lot of professional people, many of us who are creating this change. For me, it's a blessing to see that when I started MASA, no instant change was expected to fix the life of a recent Mexican migrant, so that that person could get a better job through English classes, through culture. For me, the vision was how to create a long-term change for the community in the following 10 or 15 years. That's was made me concentrate only on the first generation. The young people are bilingual and binational, which is not abstract. It does not refer to their birthplace. It refers to their identity. I'm Mexican because I was born in Mexico, and I'm from here because I grew up here. So, these young people are bilingual and binational, and understand binational politics because here we learn about it through education, at school. What we learn in Mexico is through our parents. We learned that Mexico had an oppressive system, a political system that was not beneficial for our people because they had to leave. With corrupt politics. Unfair politics and marginalization of communities of origin. That is what we perceived through our parents. When I refer to our parents, I mean that we listened to them. Well, I lived in a different context because I was there until age 15, but many others saw it as a reflection of their parents. Maybe it is

politics, but it should be evaluated as erroneous. We didn't have an education, but we saw it in that context. Children born here were able to come and go, and they were like carriers. I mean that they were the political messengers between the two communities. They would go to Mexico to see their grandparents, and they were messengers between the two generations. But the important part was that since they were born here, they have many more possibilities than the first generation to create political force. In the first generation, we still want to work and we still want to support our families. Generation 1.5 –the Dreamers, no longer have that interest. They think, "What family do I have in Mexico? A grandfather I don't know. My parents are here. I don't have to help anyone." In other words, there's a disconnect. That is what I focused on the most: having a vision beyond my current context.

I learned a bit more about Mexican politics when I did an undergraduate research paper on women in Juarez. I was interested in the subject because I was taking a class about politics in the Third World, and I wanted to study more, learn more about human rights there, and about how Mexico was a country where women –well, at that time– had very few rights. Especially indigenous women. In Mexico's Chamber of Deputies, there were very few women at that time. When you start to notice their appearance, you can see that indigenous women were excluded, with almost null presence. I'm not talking about the mestizo community. I'm talking about the ones who speak an indigenous language. Even today, there are very few in Mexico's Congress. I was very interested in the topic of Juarez because of the way it had been handled within the politics of the Mexican government. At that time, NAFTA was being debated, so the situation in Juarez had to be handled to attract NAFTA. I think it was closely linked to Mexican politics.

I was not very focused on Mexican culture, nationalism, culturalization, or Mexican roots. My interest was more local. More

about creating a different community that was totally bilingual, academic, and professional. We interacted with the parents and we brought them in to work with the children, but our focus was the children. At that time, when I was coordinating the organization, when we were giving English classes to the parents, we weren't aimed at having the father find a better job to improve his life. The English classes were focused on the children's needs. What the parent needs to know to help the child with homework. At the end of the day, the entire focus was on the next generation.

At MASA, in the beginning, we were simply mentors. We just got together and talked about college, about how things were going, about what young people had to do: guidance and advice. Then we changed and we began to see other obstacles. We were mentors and helped them to fill out their college applications, more like role models. Academic models. Later, we started adding one program at a time, depending on the need. Some kids needed help taking the SAT, so we looked for someone who could help with the SAT. That's how the organization was constructed, by giving workshops or implementing programs that were based on need. It was more retroactive, and began working with high school kids and then even younger kids, as we do now.

We started to bring in programs that were more planned for the kids. How to go to a meeting at school and talk, and how to fight for your rights, like employment rights, and housing. Then we brought in massive English classes that were different. Programs were implemented for them, for their needs. But at the end of the day, the focus was always on the children. Teaching them how to fight for…how to ask for a program for their kids who were in school, with a focus on the children. We worked with the parents, but we were more focused on the children's development. In the end, that was also what the parents wanted. We didn't have many resources. At that time, it was an organization with workers, but no funds. Everyone was a volunteer. I could get volunteers to help the children or a volunteer to help the parents.

It was always a mutual decision between parents and coordinators. The children were first and programs were implemented for them, by the parents. Now, there are programs for parents. And many other organizations come and support the program with workshops and things. It's different now.

–I can see you there as generation 1.5, but what about the first generation? From age 15 to 18. When you were 15, 16, 17, and 18 years old.

–Well, I'll always be in the first generation because I was the first person from my family to come here. But when I refer to the dreams of that first generation, I say that they haven't changed. Because I want to help my parents. I want to continue helping them and I want to finish building the house that I promised them. It's just that now, I try to be more… It's no longer, "Here. Take ten thousand dollars and finish your house."

I have to think about my future. I would like… The dream is still there. The dream of wanting to give them the house that they want. I repeat… Sometimes I repeat the same thing, retroactive. They sleep in only one bedroom, so I'm not going to build them a three-story house. I'm not going to buy them a car because they don't drive. I'm not going to… What used to be a dream of giving them things to have a better life, is now about supporting them so that they can have access to better health care, which is very expensive. Dreaming about buying them a car is something I sometimes talk to them about. There are two options, I say. Do you want to celebrate your birthday or do you want money for medicine? It's terrible, but that's the way it has to be. So, the dynamics have changed. Maybe in the future, if I have a better profession, a better job, I'll be able to change the concept. Now, there are other needs. But as I said, that dream of the first generation is still there. It doesn't change.

–Tell me, Angelo. To close with a few minutes of reflection: What knowledge have you constructed and shared with other

young people or adults from your generation, from your group? The group you have interacted within recent years.

–Well, I think part of it is about advice: effort and perseverance. Resilience. Resilience is part of what identifies us. We have had a very hard time and we have reached an academic dream. My message is, as my teachers say, "My tragedies are my inspiration to reach my dreams." My tragedies –my pain and tragedies– are the source of my inspiration to reach my dreams. I always say that the worst is behind me. I grew up in a context of rejection. It's about the opportunity to open a door. As an undocumented migrant, there was a resolute "no" about being able to go to college. So, I saw that "no" as a possibility. I couldn't work legally, but I continued struggling. I knew I wouldn't have a professional future when I got my degree, but I wanted to get it. I always tell people that the best option is to stay in school, and at some point, an opportunity will appear. We have made progress. The best thing is to make progress. It doesn't matter if you take only one class. It doesn't matter if you take ten years. In ten years, when you finish, you will be that much closer to a profession or the job of your dreams. That's better than waiting ten years to start and then taking another four or six. So, I tell them, just one class. The important thing is to stay in school. Even though it's just one class. You never know until you finish.

–That would be your vision for them. But for example, for me, Mercedes, if I come here as an undocumented migrant, what would you tell me? What should I watch out for? You have the experience. What should I know about it? Imagine that I'm a young girl and I come here and I want to work and send money back to my family. That would be my dream. What would you recommend?

–Well, you have a lot of rights. That's what is important. People have to know about their rights. Today, I would do it differently. If you want to work, that's fine. Work. But try to save your

money in a bank account until you decide what you want to do. If you want to build a house, you can do it. But if you can't save because you have to send money to your family… Well, in that case, it's hard. But my advice would be that it's not your responsibility. You can help them as much as possible, but you don't have to sacrifice your own life and certain privileges. When I say privileges, I mean certain things that you like to do. Why should you want to help only your family? The most important person is you. You first, take care of yourself, and then others, even if the others are your family. You don't need to send your whole salary of 500 or 1,000 dollars to your family and keep nothing for yourself, not even for a medical emergency. If you do that, you have nothing when you go back to your country. That is another problem in the migrant community. You have to invest in your health, to be sure at least to get a checkup. Those are things that sometimes we neglect as migrants. You might get the flu that you try to cure with a cup of tea when that flu can be deadly. If you want to speak English or go to college, I know more about that! The first thing would be to look for organizations that offer free programs. You can visit the Mexican Consulate to research the organizations in your area, the public libraries, educational programs like the GED, and free English classes so that you can invest in your education. Now, to enter the university, I could help you in the application process. But for the other areas, you can visit the Mexican Consulate and go to the Education window on the third floor. You would talk to such-and-such a person and they would help you with the application process and everything you need. They would give you the information, guide you, and support you. Another option is to do the GED and when you finish your GED, we can sit down to talk about the next process. Today, there are resources. But you have to study English. You can learn English on the street, but you will learn colloquial English. You have to learn to read and write English. A lot of Mexicans can speak the English they learn in the streets or at their

jobs. But it's colloquial English, like "What's up, dude?" I help people in the university to study English and they learn to speak and read in a more grammatical context. That is very different. There are a lot of free programs.

–And if I dream of getting a degree and supporting my community, what would you tell me? What would you recommend?

–Well, specifically, you should approach community organizations and offer to be a volunteer. There is a lot of need in our community and many organizations want trained people. Some people want to learn academic or professional jobs and they need help. Another way to create spaces or find employment opportunities is through an internship. An internship is ideal in a community organization so that you can help your community and create a change.

–OK. Thank you very much, Angelo. We can stop for today.

–OK.

November 30, 2018,
Social Learning and Knowledge
My home is New York City.

PART 11.
SOCIAL LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE
MY HOME IS NEW YORK CITY.

I am in the final part of this fieldwork. I am about to start the last interview with Angelo, and I am hoping to propose a definitive way to organize his story of defending the right to education, based on his own experience. I remember some of the most intense moments of his story, including the impressionable stage of his childhood, when everything that permeated his incipient awareness was part of a difficult upbringing. I also recall his time in the basement and his total exclusion from the rights of a child, followed by the illuminating liberation of fleeing to the Bronx. Then, the battles with his fellow Mexicans from the first generation to aim "Mexican-style" politics at attaining political and educational reforms, like in-state tuition, through a highly persuasive civic act: a hunger strike. I am convinced that in the end, this will represent an inspiring force –as he gained from listening to others–so that others will follow his advice as a mentor and continue to fight for their rights, even if the discriminating policies against undocumented workers worsen. We shall see what Angelo has to say in this regard.

–Hello, Angelo. Today is November 30. We're going to start the eleventh interview and focus on closure, not only because I'm going back to Mexico, but also so that we can begin to organize the story and delve into each point. Today we're going to talk about the knowledge that Angelo has been able to construct throughout his trajectory. Our basis is going to be three central

concepts because I liked the way he expressed them. First, what it means to be from the first generation, and to come here to work. Having to work and having to send money to his parents to support them, while also supporting himself. As generation 1.5 –although I have researched this and you are generation 1.25, which we can comment on later. It's because you came to the United States when you were a teenager, after having finished secondary school. You were a Dreamer because a very important part of the story is that you reached your dream of starting and finishing college. Besides, you helped other students, particularly Mexican students, as well as students from other countries. So, Angelo, the idea is to address the topic of knowledge. It may be the most difficult topic because we never know what we know. I would like to know if you have been able to develop a series of possibilities since you came here. I liked your way of organizing your trajectory when you said that you came simply with the Mexican dream of finding work and sending money to your parents. The other part would be your inclusion in generation 1.5 since you arrived here as a young person; and your role as a Dreamer because, as we have discussed, you reached your dream of enrolling in college and constructing another narrative, another story.

–So, as the first generation. About knowledge, well, I think that economic reasons pushed me to come here. I wanted to give my parents a better future. I wanted to offer them a house, to help them with that, to help them to have that lifestyle, to cover their health expenses and everything. In other words, to support them: the migrant dream of coming here, building a house, buying a van, and then returning to Mexico to marry. That was the context. Because I had fallen in love before I came here from Mexico. So, my context was to come here, work, build the house, buy the van, go back to Mexico, and hopefully marry the same person I had been with before. But that didn't happen until the 1990s: from 1990 to 1995. It was about five years in the context of a

Mexican migrant. I think that my experience of needs, and my experience of not having access to education in Mexico, which was one of my aspirations, made me want to go back to school. Part of that plan of coming here and saving money was going back to school. I saw everything that hadn't happened in Mexico and I met people here in the United States. I remember that I met a man on the train and then found out that he was a neighbor. I remember that while we were on the train, he told me that the best investment of the American dream was not simply getting the documents, and getting an American passport; that the American dream was having access to services, and the possibility of going to school to reach your goals. He told me from his perspective as an American citizen, although we could say he was a second-class citizen because he was part of the migration of the Puerto Rican community to New York. Although he was an American citizen, he had the perspective of being treated as a migrant. He told me, he taught me, and he oriented me with his words because he couldn't reach that dream and his children could; he felt success through his children, and that always stayed in my mind. For me, the most important thing was my education, which I had put on hold in Mexico. So, when he told me those things, well, he was right. The American passport or the international passport that I might have would be my education. My education would take me to many places. And it was that same situation that began to reveal possibilities of what I could do, of what I could do for myself and my family, and how I could get it done. As a migrant, as the first generation, and having the migrant dream of coming here and doing things and then going back to Mexico –well, that dream was latent. How could I offer a better future to the people I loved, to my parents? For my family. When I began to research a bit more about how I could go to school, my context began to change. I was no longer the Mexican migrant who wants to go home, but part of the Mexican migrant generation 1.5. Since I'm here, I'm

going to start working to build a better future for myself, with the possibility of one day having a better opportunity, of reaching my dream to go to college. And at the same time, having the possibility to help my parents, and my family in a different context: a context where I can't sacrifice my dream.

I think that is what made me start. Doors began to open for me to talk with the right people, the ones who guided me to college. And there the migrant dream ended, the dream of just wanting to build a big house, going back, and getting married, because I started seeing it from a different context. Materialism came to have no meaning for me. When I say materialism, I'm referring to building a house. Because I started to think, "Well, I'm not going to be able to go back there. My parents are there, and they have a house that's not in the best condition. But they don't need a two-story house because they sleep in a single room. They don't need a van because no one knows how to drive and because they don't like to drive." So, in all of those contexts, that image created around the young Mexican migrant eliminated all of the preconceptions. From the moment I started going to school and started going to college, all expectations were eliminated. Because I was no longer the common Mexican. A new stage in my life started and I didn't fit in the context of what Mexican-ness is, within our migrant community. Today we talk about different contexts of Mexican-ness. Young people were born here, in search of indigenous Mexican identity. But at that time, we were a different community, young. In the case of the ones born here, they sometimes would say they weren't Mexicans. Like the ones who came here at a very young age, they would say that they weren't Mexicans so that they would fit in with other groups and not be discriminated against. It was more of a concept of spaces, of access to spaces. I don't how to say it, but it's when one group is distrustful and protects its space. That's why there is so much violence among young people who are Puerto Rican, Dominican, Black, and Mexican. That's when the ties with

Mexican-ness were broken. Even when I was working in restaurants and going to school, I needed to learn English faster, to get away from the context, the circle of Mexican-ness in all senses, even in the cultural sense. I wanted to emerge into a different world, which you could call an Anglo world. So, always talking in English at work was very usual for me because I wanted to practice. Not because I despised my native language, not because I felt superior to others, but because I needed to learn a new language to be able to go to college. I was at a disadvantage. I started college after taking a two-hour English course for less than six months, almost nothing. That's where the distancing started since I was the little Mexican who didn't fit in. In a way, I was isolated…

–You were even isolated by your co-workers when they saw you went down a different path, right?

–Yes, they isolated me because I didn't fit in. At work, they called me "fucker…" in Spanish. They would say, "Here comes the little Mexican who thinks he's a gringo." Or: "Why are you going to school if you're not going any farther?" Or: "Here comes the lawyer." They didn't say it with pride. They said it as something derogatory. Like, he thinks he's a lawyer but he's a wetback. So, that was a very common experience for me, being isolated simply because I wanted to go to school. I think that's what also distanced me more from the community. It was a mistake because in other communities… I met a lot of people from the Korean community because I worked with Koreans, managers and cashiers, and others. And even at school, I was accepted… motivated, and supported by other communities. But in the circle where I grew up, which was mostly at work, I was isolated. I wouldn't say "discriminated against" because we're from the same ethnic group, but I was excluded. There was a lot of prejudice. Against me, because I wanted to do the best thing. So, that felt bad. There were times that I would go home and cry. I would go downstairs and they would all be eating, and I would be the

other little Mexican there, sitting by myself, eating because… well, they said things. They would make fun of me. But eventually, when I started working with students and I got more involved in the Mexican community, around 1997 and 1998, when I began to give literacy classes with an organization called UBEA, around 1996 in the Metropolitan Hospital; and in 1997, when I began working with the Mexican Consulate to promote access to higher education, in 2000 and the event in 2001… It was activism, the creation of the MASA organization. We were a group that was different because some had been brought by their parents when they were from five to ten years old, and they identified more with life here. So, we could communicate in Spanish, English, and "Spanglish" but it was about identification with migratory traumas. About having been taken somewhere. Well, in my case, I decided to come here, but we were a small group. Eventually, I began to approach the community more. Because I saw a different group. Although the harassment continued at work, because I worked with the same people until 2014, I saw it from a different context. The criticism didn't… Well, the criticism or the mockery made me stronger because I wanted to prove that I was capable of reaching the American dream. During that entire time, because a different person was born, a person closer to the community's needs and actions were taken for the community. I think that becoming involved in the community was a way to rediscover myself, as motivation to stay in school, to keep doing things, because it was nice… From an egocentric perspective, we could say that it was nice to hear a mother or a child tell you, "Thank you for helping us" or "We saw you on television, we heard you on the radio, and that motivates us to keep coming to your program. That motivates us to do new, different things." So, I used that in my favor, because I always wanted to do more things.

–But… Angelo, in the context you're talking about, what did you learn? For example, when you said, "If I wanted to write a

press release, first I learned how to write a press release." That's what I'm referring to. I see it like this: In the case of Mexicans, the ones in the first generation are excellent workers. I feel extremely proud when I see them in the supermarket. Near the place where I live, there's a supermarket. A boy works there who works very hard; he does excellent work. He's paid, at least something, so it's a dignified life, right? But you, what did you learn between ages 15 and 20? When you were working at various places. How did you find jobs? Did you change jobs because you were unhappy?

–I didn't have many different jobs. At the most, I had three, or five jobs during my whole time as a migrant. As a Mexican migrant, you learn about survival. People in an undocumented community learn about work. We learn to ignore abuse because if you talk if you demand your rights, they fire you. And we learn that the highest compliment, although it also involves abuse, is the way we work. Mexicans are hard workers. We always try to give 100% and we always say "yes" to everything they ask us to do in a job because we need to. We need a job and that's what helps us to stand out. Many Mexicans, including myself, have held different positions at work. We get along with people because we are pleasant and we please everybody, as they say. So, we do everything they tell us to do, and we please everybody. We please people. At work, it is very common that we do so unconsciously. We work hard, we do everything they say. And sometimes, if there are workers from other ethnic groups, they give us the chance to have more responsibilities, although without more pay. If a guy starts working at a market, they might make him the manager's assistant. But he won't have more power. He will manage the others, but he'll have to work double, and his wage will stay the same. In that abstract, psychological context, they flatter us and tell us that we're the best. I learned about that and that happened to me. I worked hard and when I learned English, that helped me a lot. Even if they sometimes took advantage of the other workers, they would treat me differently because

I could defend myself. But also because if the owner or manager wasn't there, I was the one who could answer or solve the problems, especially if they involved customers. I remember in my last job, with some Jewish people, I made salads. That was my job, but if a customer didn't like a sandwich or got the wrong sandwich or whatever, the owner would tell me, "Between losing a sandwich and losing a customer, I'd rather lose a sandwich. Give him what he wants." Sometimes that made my co-workers uncomfortable because if it had to do with their work, I would intervene to solve the problem. That worked to my advantage. If I wanted, I was able to take days off or eat a better sandwich than the others. I think we learn how to survive by trying to please others. Trying to please others at work. And more than trying to please, we like to work. We don't have any other option. Or there is no other option. So, we learn to survive in different contexts.

I worked at fruit stands and then I was a cleaner at a supermarket, and then I went to make sandwiches. The cinema was temporary. And the construction job was my very first job. The cinema was also temporary, less than three months. I would help them if someone was absent. What I did the most was working at fruit stands, at delis, making sandwiches, and that's it. That is all of my experience. It wasn't really hard work. You had to stand up all day. At a fruit stand, you're always moving around, arranging the fruit, and staying there all the time. It's not so hard. You have to carry the boxes, but it's relative. At the deli, it's standing and moving around. When a lot of customers were there, for breakfast, we couldn't rest. The same for lunch: you can't rest. And after lunch, there's no rest. That's tiring. You move around, but it's not as tiring as working in construction. That was my most difficult job. That's the way you learn to survive: by pleasing others because you have no other option. And then, when I was in college and in my professional context, I followed that same methodology. I tried to learn something so that I could advance. Learning English helped me climb the ladder because I could work in

restaurants and get better treatment. In the professional area, for example, when they were doing the census in 2010, I took classes in mapping and grant writing so that I could write the proposals. And when I needed to send press releases, I studied how to do it. That's how I did it, by learning, setting goals, and constructing knowledge. I don't know if I was the only one, but here at college, I took university studies. I don't have a specialization because I wanted to learn as much as I could. I think that's what we have as migrants. We always look for an opportunity and that's where we start building. I think that is the typical migrant context. To work hard, to take on the maximum load. And sometimes we realize that we are also victims of our work. We are victimized, victims of abuse at work because of our desire to get ahead. Because we create the possibility for those events to occur. You don't have the chance to reflect on it. It all seemed normal to me. But if I start to analyze it now, it was obviously abuse. Starting with working all day at age 15. Until 9 PM. That's exploitation. They deprived me of my freedom for many hours because I was locked in a basement. That was exploitation. Exploitation because I was a minor, under 18, and they paid me less than the others and I did the same work as the others. Even though that was also a privilege because I was the youngest and a bit spoiled, the spoiled kid. But it's the exploitation of not having rights, and vacation time. If you got sick, you had to go to work. I remember that you had to go to work sick, with a cold. You had to work because if you didn't there were two options: one was not getting paid and the other was having to quit. I remember at the fruit stand, I was near having pneumonia and I had to go to work. Once I stayed home and they didn't pay me, obviously. Almost one week. There was another guy who broke his foot. It was at another place. After two or three weeks, obviously, of missing work, he no longer had a job. The boss would say, "You're not here, so send me someone else." We were replaceable, not recyclable. How do you say it? An object that you throw away because it has no value. Disposable.

That's what it was. We had no value for them. They think of you as showing up, doing your work, and that's it. If you don't come, it's not a problem because there are others. It's always in the context of 100 others standing in line behind you. The employer would waste no time with you. If you asked for a raise, they would answer, "No. I'm not going to give you a raise." In other words, "There are 100 others who will work for less."

–Is there no association to defend people from those conditions?

–Well, yes, there is.

–Is it that you cannot defend yourself because you have no documents?

–You can defend yourself. You can collect back wages if they don't pay you the minimum. You have rights as an undocumented immigrant. Because of the groups where we try to help or where we promote migrants' rights, we know that those rights exist. When you're a worker from Mexico, you know your rights, but you can't do anything about them. There is the option of workers who organize and fight for their rights, but if the employer doesn't want to give you those rights and you are the head of your household, you're not going to fight for a right when you have three children to feed. And if you don't earn the money to pay the rent, you're going to have serious problems. That's one of the worst problems for organizations that fight for rights in migrant communities. You can't do much because there's a lot of fear. Fear of losing a job and not finding another one. In my case, there was a moment when I was working in a deli, in 1994, I think. I was working in a deli with Koreans and we were prohibited from feeding them. We could give them only a bagel and coffee –bread and butter and coffee– but I could eat what I wanted. I had that privilege. They would ask me for food and I would give it to them, but I would say, "I'll give you food, but I don't know anything about it." It was a worker asking and they were treating them very badly. They wouldn't let them eat, so I helped

them to organize at that deli. I told them, "You have the right to a decent meal. They shouldn't exploit you like that." But I also told them, "You have to fight for that right because I have orders from the top not to give you food. I'll give you food, but go and eat it out of sight. Because if they see you, I'm not going to cover for you. If you organize as a group, things will change." I told them how to do it, and they all organized. It was a salad bar, so at 11 AM everything had to be ready. People would start coming for lunch at 11:30 or 12:00, and everything had to be out. I told them, "Get everything almost ready but don't take out the food. When they ask you something, tell them that you're hungry and want to eat a decent meal. All of you come upstairs and surround a manager. But all of you, together. Do it together." So, that's what they did and they were able to change things to get a decent meal. But in the end, I was the one who paid the price because they said I had done the organizing. That I had helped them to organize. So I was the one who ended up without a job. That is the fear that has always existed in our community. We know, but do we fight for things? No, because sometimes you have two options: you fight for your rights, but you might end up in the street, without a job. You survive that fear by trying not to do anything. If a kid or a boy was working at a deli, he would eat things out of sight. If he was going to deliver an order, I would ask for a sandwich and put it in the same order, and he would eat it outside. But in the general context, how do you learn to live with that fear? Well, you make the fear seem normal. You do that, and exploitation becomes part of your daily life, which is fine. Because at the end of the day, having a few dollars to pay the rent, to get your family ahead, and to send money to your family in Mexico, is more important than your exploitation. The problem right now is less about worker exploitation. It's that if you don't go to work, you earn one day less in wages. If you get a cold, a cough, or pneumonia, and you need to be in bed three days or a week, you're not going to choose to miss a week of work. The

situation now is that many people who came here as young people are now older, sick, undocumented, and without access to health care; many of them are returning to Mexico to die. What happened to their migrant dream? They're going back just to die, in the house that they helped to build, where they couldn't even enjoy the cars that they bought. And they very possibly may have to sell everything they acquired to save their own life. Meanwhile, however, another group had access to the fruits of their labor: their family. I see that differently because I have seen people who have returned to my hometown basically to die. So, it's very sad to make decisions and fight for rights. I do it because I'm in a different situation. After all, the school gave me the knowledge to do it, to fight for what is fair. Do I still fight for that? Maybe yes, and maybe no. I could be doing a different job in a different place, earning more, but I'm doing this because there are laws that prevent me from doing the other. There is a lot of exploitation even at the professional level.

–And here, how do you feel about Robert?

–I'm fine here. But if you analyze it, I could have been doing other things. I'm fine, I'm very happy, and I'm doing what I love, which is academic work, and research. I am treated well, they value my work, and the important thing is that I'll have the opportunity to change my life soon, to continue getting ahead. I think that is the good part. I do not feel exploited, although I know a lot of exploitation exists in the professional community. Precisely those who come with H1B visas, because they have rules and it is very hard at times. But in our undocumented community, there is no other option. You have to live with it. You learn to live with it. You learn to view it as normal. For me, being a kid and working in a supermarket, and being locked in a basement all morning was normal. Although I could leave at night to go home, it was normal for me to be locked in. But if the authorities had known that I was working in those conditions, they would have closed the place down. They may have sent me back

to Mexico, or they may have fixed my documents because I was the victim of exploitation. But when we don't have other options, we accept it as normal.

–Well, as a Mexican migrant from the first generation, you come here to work and you have to take the job and you don't have the right to get sick; and if you get sick, too bad. What knowledge and learning did you construct as generation 1.5? The generation that really started to find a different path.

–Well, what I learned as generation 1.5 was having the privilege to go to school here. I learned to value my rights. The school allowed me to learn that I have rights, that I can make demands as an undocumented migrant, that I can be an activist, and that I can learn about politics here. All of that reinforced the idea that my legal status does not matter here and that I can demand certain rights in the United States. The right to education because a high school student –even though I didn't go to high school– has the right to free education and must be given that education. A university cannot deny access either, and I think that is the point where we begin to differentiate ourselves from the members of the first generation. Because we started to fight for a change. We started to create our own identity within the Mexican migrant community. That we are migrants from generation 1.5 and that we have access to education and we can create a change through education for future generations, as well as for the adult generation. Because we were able to go to protests without fearing reprisals. Even though there was some fear.

–But here I see you in a picture holding a sign. You're at a protest. How many times have you participated in public protests?

–A lot of times. So have people from the first generation, but in a context of access to education, the possibility of a different mentality. When I say a different mentality, I am referring to a different way of seeing things. The other young people, like the DACAS, are more American than Mexican. They're more accustomed to the United States. They didn't grow up in that migrant

context, which is very Mexican. We began to have and create something –and I include myself in that group of young people although I'm part of the adult generation of Dreamers. Many of them began to create student movements of activists to fight for the Dream Act, starting in 1997. The Dream Act began in 2001. We joined the campaign to pass legislation so that they would have access to college with in-state tuition.

Many movements were created. I believe I made contributions when I started working with the Mexican community. The message I always gave to the predominant organizations, which were controlled by the first generation, was that we have to open up spaces for young people. When I talked to them, it was because I was part of that group of young people. I would always tell them that, since I was in contact with those organizations and I worked in the Consulate. At the meetings, I would always say that we could not continue working by simply focusing on the adult generation, and we could not focus only on the migrant generation. That we have to focus on future generations, on young people, and in this case, the Dreamers, I would say. Young people who are still in school, who are born here, because they have power. They can create a change that we, as migrants, cannot create. We have to open up these spaces so that they can direct the organizations that we are representing today. I think that almost all of the organizations that began with migrants from Mexico –migrants from our generation– are being directed by generation 1.5 or the second generation. It was a constant fight, and that is recognition for my efforts.

–You, as part of another generation, have set the example of organizing workers, by telling them, for example, that if they worked together, they could get a decent meal from their employer. What did you do in this case?

–I emphasized, at various levels, that we have to do things differently. That what I was doing within the MASA organization –the organization that I helped to found– was creating a prece-

dent for us, as young people, to be leaders. We began to promote education, and we created programs of activism and leadership. We approached young people who were working in the organization or collaborating as volunteers, but who was also in college, or in some cases working, at times as volunteers with politicians. In that context, we began to create a different precedent. How could we describe it? The political activism that used to occur in Mexican organizations was more of a cultural event, of inviting a certain politician to come. Tepeyac also did a lot of activism in migration, and there was another organization called Map that did a lot of activism in labor rights. But when the young people began to participate, it was activism that was more than inviting a politician to come to your event because the politician would attract the community. Now it was about young people working with politicians on political campaigns or campaigns for rights. They were in the political arena. That is what led us to create this change.

All of this happened with fear because fear was always present. I remember one day when we had just finished the hunger strike for in-state tuition. One day in the Bronx, when a lot of people were crossing the street before the light turned green –which is very common and a lot of people do it– a policeman stopped me and gave me a ticket for jaywalking. The ticket was for crossing the street without a green light. At that moment, I feared that I had just seen other people doing the same thing and the policeman didn't stop them. So, why me? I was afraid they had targeted me simply for having been at the protests. I've always had that fear, because of what would happen if at one of the protests… Always a fear that they could stop you at any time and send you back to Mexico. But I kept on participating because I wanted to…

–In this case, fear has another function, right? The other fear makes you work because you have to pay rent. How does this fear operate?

–In the second context, there is adrenaline in activism. Adrenaline in being present, in being able to raise your voice and question the government. And in being able to create change. In that context, the adrenaline makes your fears disappear. In the beginning, you are afraid when you go to the event. But later, I don't know how, it inspires you, it motivates you, it gives you adrenaline, you feel powerful, and you feel that you can make a change.

–Did you ever feel something like, "I have this power to change things. I have this power to transform things"? Can you give me an example of a situation that you felt you could handle? The most extreme situation was the hunger strike. Were there others?

–Many others, when I was leading them. Directing campaigns and activism. Because you feel, in a way, invisible. I don't think that was the most extreme situation. Knowing that I could do it and that it didn't matter if I was an undocumented student and that the police were standing there, made me feel powerful. I felt energetic and motivated. It's hard to describe, but you feel powerful. What does it mean to feel powerful? Well, you feel desire. What does it mean to feel desire? That you want to be there, that you want to create a change. It's very abstract, but you feel happiness, and undeniable energy, and you don't care about your immigration status because you can make a big change. The fear that you feel on your way to a protest becomes energy. It illuminates you and it fills you with satisfaction. It feels good.

–And now, as a Dreamer who had access to the right to education, and has also supported other students as they access that right, what have you learned while on that road, Angelo?

–Well, I believe that I learned. As a Dreamer, I learned that I can attain this, that I can attain major changes through activism. That I can reach my dream, although society may isolate me, although I may be criticized. I can do it in a personal context, without listening to what society dictates for me or what society wants to happen to me. In other words, the migrant, the migrant

dream that builds the house. As the Dreamer I have been since I decided that I wanted to go to school and be a professional, and get a Ph.D., I know that I'm going to reach my dream. Regardless of whether or not I have kept the promise of building a big house for my parents, or doing all the things they expected of me. It's more about me, but it has to do with the community. In my case, I want to stay in school, and I want to get another degree because I want to continue supporting the community from a different context. Each space is a challenge for me because I want to see what I can do for a community. Because, in some way, I see my experience as a challenge to open spaces so that other generations can benefit.

–To conclude, when did you go from Angel to Angelo? When did that happen and why?

–The day that the girl enrolled me in the GED program, she wrote Angelo Cabrera. When I went the first day, I said my name was Angelo, because that is what she had called me. So all of my diplomas and certificates at college came out with Angelo. It came like that on my application. And my name appeared on my ID as Angelo. It was handwritten. My GED diploma was sent with the name, Angelo, and when I wanted to change it to Angel Cabrera, I learned that I had to prove it. They would have required me to go to court and they would have asked me for my Social Security number, so I decided that it would stay as Angelo.

–But, do you know that your documents won't be valid in Mexico or anywhere else if they compare them with your identity? Did you consider that? How did you decide about all of that? Or did you not care about it?

–I decided that I would deal with it over time. When my awards and my diplomas from college and different places came, the name Angel Cabrera became a thing of the past. Not exactly a thing of the past. It was just that the person who is known here is Angelo Cabrera. I thought about it and I started to do the paperwork for Mexico, in case I went back, to certify that Angel

Cabrera Rodriguez and Angelo Cabrera are the same person before the Mexican courts. I started the procedure. Years ago. I don't remember the year, but years ago I did the procedure in Mexico so that Angel Cabrera Rodríguez and Angelo Cabrera are recognized as the same person. I have the court certificate that states that both names are the same person. It was a very long procedure that was very hard and it cost me a whole lot of money.

–Do you prefer to be called Angel or Angelo?

–I'm more accustomed to Angelo Cabrera.

–Does anyone call you Angel?

–Somewhat more now. I have to use Angel Cabrera Rodriguez now because of the legal aspect. Because my visa says Angel Cabrera Rodriguez, not Angelo Cabrera. Because of the legal aspect. Angelo Cabrera is more like my stage name, we could say. I like Angelo more. People know me as Angelo and I have gotten used to Angelo.

–Angelo Cabrera. OK. It was because the girl enrolled you as Angelo Cabrera.

–Yes, and then I couldn't change it.

–At that moment, when she enrolled you like that, what did you think?

–I liked it. I liked it and everyone else did too.

–You decided to keep the name.

–Yes, because when I introduce myself, sometimes people cannot pronounce Angel the right way, so Angelo is easier. Everyone can pronounce it.

–But wasn't Angel easily as well?

–Yes, it was easy, but I got more used to Angelo. It was good and it stayed that way. And both are legally recognized now in Mexico.

–What about here in the United States? How are you listed on all of your legal documents? On everything that you're doing to get citizenship.

–I'm listed as Angel Cabrera. But they also put Angel Cabrera Rodriguez. OK, Angelo Cabrera. They ask you if you have ever used another name. That's Angelo Cabrera. So, they put it on the record that both names are the same person.

–By the way, I started to read about generation 1.5 and I saw that they are the ones who came as children and went to elementary and secondary school here. Generation 1.75 are the ones who did elementary school here. Generation 1.25 are the young people who came here after doing their schooling in Mexico. It seems that what matters is the person's socialization. In other words, if you were socialized more in Mexico or the United States. That a person who is socialized here as a child is different. So that would mean you are generation 1.25.

–Where is that information from? Who did the study?

–It's a sociological study and what makes the difference is the question of socialization. If you obtained your socialization in Mexico or the United States. Children who arrived at age four or five with their migrant parents have socialization that is different from yours, because you arrived at age 15, after having gone to school in Mexico. Here you only did your GED. Do you think that is important? It doesn't really matter if you're generation 1.5 or 1.25. That is really not…

–It's not so important.

–It's not so important but the part about the socialization attracted my attention because you were socialized in the Mexican context, in the context of your town, in the context of the state of Puebla.

–It's different. I think that socialization is different because it's not the same experience for children who arrive here to go to elementary school. My experience was different. I didn't have the same experience as those who went to junior high school here. The ones of us who came here as young people came only to work.

–Thank you very much, Angelo. As I mentioned, I'm going back to Mexico City very soon, but we'll continue working together on the product of this research. If you wish, we can stop now because it's late. Let's not call this goodbye. Rather, until we met again.

–Yes, thank you.

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