

Mexican immigrants in the United States: A review of the literature on integration, segregation and discrimination

Migrantes mexicanos en los Estados Unidos: Una revisión de la literatura sobre integración, segregación y discriminación

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Abstract

This article reviews the literature on integration, segregation and discrimination against Mexican immigrants in the United States. It is an assessment of the different theoretical approaches and empirical research results published from the first decades of the twentieth century until present days. Our review suggests that the assimilation model is the dominant theoretical approach, while empirical findings in the field reveal the permanence of patterns of occupational and residential segregation among Mexican-born population and their offspring. Results reported by studies on discrimination vary broadly, as a result of the different methodological perspectives adopted in each study. We conclude with a note encouraging the use of new approaches and complementary methodologies in the study about segregation and discrimination against Mexican immigrants in the United State.

Keywords: Mexican immigrants, United States, integration, segregation, discrimination.

Resumen

Este artículo tiene como objetivo analizar la literatura sobre integración, segregación y discriminación de migrantes mexicanos que radican en los Estados Unidos, por lo tanto, se revisan diferentes estudios realizados desde las primeras décadas del siglo xx y hasta la actualidad, para mostrar los enfoques teóricos predominantes y los principales hallazgos empíricos. Los resultados muestran que el principal enfoque teórico utilizado es el modelo de la asimilación en sus diferentes vertientes, mientras que los resultados empíricos dan cuenta de la permanencia de patrones de segregación residencial y laboral de la población inmigrante mexicana y de sus descendientes. En cuanto a la

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discriminación, los estudios son menos frecuentes y los hallazgos son divergentes dependiendo del método que se utilice. Las conclusiones señalan la urgente necesidad de realizar estudios, desde otros enfoques teóricos y con metodologías complementarias, sobre segregación y discriminación de la población mexicana que vive en los Estados Unidos.

Palabras clave: inmigrantes mexicanos, Estados Unidos, integración, segregación, discriminación.

Introduction

Mexican immigration to the United States can be dated back to the annexation of the territories which comprised the north of Mexico, as a result of the Mexican-American war that took place between 1846 to 1848. From then on, the mobility of people in that region, reconfigured by the new border demarcation, became an issue of international immigration and was subject to the restrictions of the host government (in this case, the United States). However, the most significant migratory flow, as documented by different studies, is related to the job market generated by agriculture, the construction of railways, and infrastructure projects in the American southwest (Durand & Massey, 2003; Loyo, 1969).

Considering the history of the annexation of the Mexican border states to the United States, Mexican immigration is as old as the European migrations at the end of the XIXth and beginning of the XXth centuries. However, the history and processes of the subsequent generations of immigrants are completely different. This situation sparks the controversy surrounding the diversity of relationships between immigrant populations and the majority native population, and justifies the in-depth review of what has happened with the population of Mexican descent that resides in the United States.

The studies that address the processes of the immigrants in the American society have been carried out using the assimilation theory in its different modalities. In this sense, the main theoretical body has been articulating the discussions surrounding integration. In the *linear* or *classical* assimilation model, mobility is considered to be ascending insofar as immigrants begin to appropriate a set of important characteristics from the middle-class American society. The following is proposed in the most recent reviews of this approach: the possibility of cultural changes without socioeconomic ascend (Portes & Zhou, 1993), the permanence of sociocultural elements and economic upward mobility (Alarcón, Escala & Odgers, 2016; Portes & Zhou, 1993), or mutual cultural changes (between immigrant groups and native groups) that build a new shared cultural repertoire (Alba & Nee, 2003).

These different models that explain assimilation have a strong dimension focused on culture (Ochoa, 2004; Omi & Winant, 2015), and it is in this same dimension that different theoretical predictions can be found. On the one hand, the linear assimilation theory predicts that cultural differences of the immigrants will tend to decrease as upward social mobility increases. On the other hand, more recent approaches on assimilation argue that sociocultural changes between immigrants are not a precondition of social mobility. Besides, they claim, social mobility is not always ascending.

From the linear assimilation approach, integration is defined as the process of social and economic ascend of immigrants and their descendants; oftentimes it is also considered as the positive side of assimilation (Wrigley, 2012). However, if upward mobility does not occur, and instead immigrants and their descendants remain in a low position within the structure of the host society, we speak of a “descending” assimilation (Portes & Zhou, 1993). Therefore, segregation, in the discussions on migrant populations, is related to the marginal incorporation of immigrants to the host society,¹ due to a set of limitations that stop the upward social mobility, maintaining for the subsequent generations the same disadvantaged conditions characteristic of the mode in which the first generation (of immigrants) was integrated.

The studies on segregation and discrimination in the United States focus on the African-American population (Dickter, 2005; Goldman, Gutek, Stein & Lewis, 2006; Omi & Winant, 2015), despite the fact that the civil right movements of the 1950s and 1960s increased the academic interest in the processes of the population of Mexican descent² (Almaguer, 1994; Corwin, 1973; Ochoa, 2004).

Actual pioneering studies on the segregation and discrimination of Mexican immigrants were carried out in the 1930s. Nevertheless, those researches do not comprise a consolidated and independent body from the studies on Mexican-Americans, nor are they comparable with the progress made in the understanding of the African-American population.

Therefore, the purpose of this article is to show the current state of the studies on segregation and discrimination that acknowledge, either directly or indirectly, the immigrant population of Mexican descent. It is worth mentioning that though this review focuses on the researches concerning Mexican immigrants, due to it being a topic addressed from the perspective of the assimilation model, it also includes the Mexican-American population.³ In some cases the studies refer to not only the population of Mexican descent, but also the Latino or Hispanic population in general; these works have been considered because the population being analyzed is primordially of Mexican descent, given the composition of the Latino population in the United States.⁴

As it is likely to find differences between the first generation of Mexican immigrants and their descendants, as well as among the population of Latino descent, the type of population analyzed will be noted in order to avoid making a closed generalization and to clarify the empirical results. However, living conditions of the immigrant population (first generation) are expected to be more pressing than those for the second generation (and onward), given two traits that distinguish the former from the later: their migratory condition and having English as a second language.

¹ This is not the case for the studies regarding the segregation of the population of African descent in the United States, given that, since pioneering studies, it is related to racism; see Du Bois (1899).

² This population, also known as Mexican-American, is frequently considered in studies to be part of the immigrant population, however, this is not the case because they are people born in the United States.

³ Given that the integration and segregation processes are analyzed in the subsequent generations of the immigrant population.

⁴ Of the total Latino or Hispanic population counted in the United States, 63% is of Mexican descent (United States Census Bureau, 2010).

The Debates on Immigration and Assimilation

Assimilation as a theoretical approach, with its respective body of empirical studies, explains the incorporation processes of the immigrant population into mainstream society. This discussion became salient at the beginning of the xxth century with the studies done by the Chicago School (Alba & Nee, 2003; Omi & Winant, 2015). It is there that the first theory on assimilation emerges, known today as the linear assimilation theory, which attempts to explain the stages and mid- and long-term consequences of the arrival of immigrants to the United States.

This theory has been criticized from different approaches for assuming a homogenous incorporation process—based on the European immigration—for all immigrant populations, without considering the effect of racism in the law, work and, generally, in the treatment of the different “non-white” immigrant groups; as well as for proposing the necessary cultural surrender of the immigrants to reduce the differences with the native majority population. Although this theory proposes a gradual incorporation process into American society with competition and conflict, it assumes that those social tensions are of a cultural order and tend to be solved in the long-term (Almaguer, 1994; Omi & Winant, 2015; Portes & Zhou, 1993).

The linear assimilation approach began to decline in the mid-1960s, when social mobilization for civil rights and against racial discrimination questioned the mode in which the minorities were being integrated and spotted the lack of recognition of diversity. From then on, different approaches emerged in order to understand inequality between groups, such as the theory of conflict (neo-Marxist approaches focused on class), theories on the new racial prejudice, as well as approaches based on the nation and on the internal colonialism (Almaguer, 1994; Quillian, 2006; Omi & Winant, 2015). However, the discussions surrounding assimilation gained relevance once more in the 1980s, generating new interpretations. These revisions to the linear assimilation model have offered alternatives to understand the diversity of processes that occur in American society and that are well-removed from the initial theoretical prediction: a society with minimal differences (cultural, financial and social) between immigrants and natives.

The most recent theoretical approaches on assimilation reformulate some of the dimensions of the linear model to understand the way in which immigrants are integrated into the host society. Thus, the assimilation process is no longer explained in terms of the individual abilities of the immigrants to adapt to the American mainstream, adopting as their own its fundamental features. On the contrary, it is claimed, they are inserted as a disadvantaged minority (Ebert & Ovink, 2014; Portes & Zhou, 1993). One of these proposals, called *segmented assimilation*, studies the second generation of non-European immigrants and reports that the incorporation into the middle class of American society is limited by resources and vulnerability. Therefore, from this perspective, assimilation is not an issue of whether immigrants assimilate in the long-term. It is a question of the sector of society they become assimilated into, given that some groups have limited resources for upward mobility regardless of the cultural traits they share with the American mainstream (Portes & Zhou, 1993).

In this sense, Portes and Zhou (1993) propose three possible ways of adaptation: 1) increase of acculturation and integration parallel to the white middle-class; 2) increase of acculturation, permanent poverty conditions, and assimilation into the

underclass (downward assimilation), and 3) economic advancement with deliberated preservation of the immigrant community's values and solidarity (minimal acculturation).⁵

In this manner, assimilation is proposed as a selective process where some groups manage an upward social mobility and others integrate marginally into the underclass (downward mobility). The groups that assimilate into the lower classes of American society remain as a subordinate and disadvantaged minority, whose members reproduce the cultural models of urban poverty (Portes & Zhou, 1993).

A second proposal on assimilation is presented by Alba and Nee (2003), who, building on contributions by the linear assimilation model of the Chicago School and Galindo (2009), propose that assimilation as a form of ethnic change between groups (not a law for immigrants). Thus, assimilation is understood as a process in which individual's ethnic origins become less relevant in relation to the members of another ethnic group. The individuals see themselves more and more alike, assuming they are similar in some other critical factors such as social class (Alba & Nee, 2003, p. 212).

In contrast with the linear assimilation model that expected immigrants to change to become "Americans", this perspective does not suggest the abdication of the immigrants' culture, but rather the mutual adaptation between groups: changes in the culture of the immigrants and changes in the culture of the native groups of the host society. The constant between different assimilation models is the possibility for the socioeconomic (upward or downward) mobility of the immigrants and their descendants.

Although the revisions to the linear assimilation model were done after some immigrant groups (non-European) showed—in the long-term—sustained conditions of socioeconomic disadvantage in comparison with the natives, the experiences of some groups of immigrants in the United States, since the xxth century, were diverse. The problem was that the diversity of these groups was not considered in the linear assimilation model, which takes European migration as the unique case of reference (Omi & Winant, 2015); whereas, for example, Mexican immigrants were already arriving in the United States, but as Telles (2010) confirms, Mexican immigration was not (and is oftentimes not) considered part of the classical period of American immigration.

Based on the revision of the theoretical approaches that explain the relation between immigrant groups and the American mainstream society, it can be confirmed that: 1) assimilation is the predominant theoretical corpus in the discussion on the immigrant population in the United States, with highs and lows at different historical moments,⁶ 2) the explanatory models have advanced in the discussion of cultural dimension, due to it not being considered a prerequisite for upward social mobility or structural integration, and 3) integration selectiveness has been proposed, so that upward and downward mobility are possible scenarios that require explaining beyond cultural differences.

⁵ The last way will be studied as transnationalism, see Portes (2003); Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt (2003); Levitt, DeWind and Vertovec (2003), and Ariza and Portes (2007).

⁶ For a complete historical revision of the assimilation model see Omi and Winant (2015).

In addition to the differences in the assimilation processes of immigrant groups, there are also differences in the dimensions that measure assimilation⁷ in a single social group, as shown in the study by Telles (2010) for Mexican-Americans and the study by Alarcón et al. (2016) for Mexican immigrants. In the case of the population of Mexican descent born in the United States, the variation of the different dimensions of assimilation at the end of the xxth century show varied: for example, in language acquisition, Mexican-Americans have a quick and complete assimilation for the second generation; whereas in religion, mixed marriage, and residential patterns, they have a low assimilation; and an incomplete assimilation regarding education and economy. This means that the gap in school grades and socioeconomic status remains in disadvantage for Mexican-Americans when compared with the rest of the American population (Telles, 2010).

In the case of the Mexican immigrant population that resides in Los Angeles, California, Alarcón et al. (2016) find that there is no simple path towards integration, but rather a multiplicity of strategies that produce different results. The differences in objectives and obstacles faced by the different immigrant groups studied impact on the different areas of integration, for example, economic integration is ambiguous for most of the interviewees, because entering the job market has not led to upward economic mobility. The same happens with political integration, given that laws often limit access to residency and citizenship.

Immigrants from the Mexican states of Zacatecas, Oaxaca and Veracruz show high participation rates in the job market, with some concentrating in work niches with low salaries and deplorable working conditions. Therefore, despite the great efforts by the immigrants to incorporate themselves, and considering some public policies in favor of this process, most of them only manage a limited integration, especially in the case of undocumented migrants. Furthermore, the authors give account of the implications of the categorization of Mexican migrants as Hispanics or Latinos. On the one hand, this is a resource that could facilitate the adaptation process, during the first years after arrival, due to the shared cultural codes. But is also an obstacle, because it channels immigrants towards previously defined spaces by the logic of social segregation (Alarcón et al., 2016).

Studies on the Segregation of Mexican Migrants and Their Descendants

The patterns of ethnic and racial settlement in the United States became part of public debate at the end of the XIX century, due to the precarious conditions of the locations in which immigrant groups lived, and the cultural differences inherent to them. The nativist reaction was of alarm, and efforts were made to dissolve the ethnic enclaves; this reaction would translate in 1920 into anti-immigrant opinions and restrictionist laws (Ellis, Wright & Parks, 2004).

⁷ The indicators used to measure immigrants' degree of integration, with some variations, are: their ability to speak English, civic participation and citizenship, financial success, political participation, mixed marriages (between people from different social groups), residence patterns and interaction with the host community (exposure).

Furthermore, settlement pattern of the immigrant groups brought along the academic interest to explain urban geography and its effect on the assimilation of the immigrants. The first theoretical explanations proposed the temporary establishment in ethnic enclaves that, subsequently, dissolved insofar as the immigrants became part of the majority society, achieving in this manner social and spatial integration. Therefore, since the studies of the Chicago School, and Park's race relations cycle theory, particular emphasis was placed on the geography of the immigrant settlements. This importance is reflected on the research works regarding Latinos, in general, and Mexicans in particular,⁸ given that there is a set of studies directed to analyzing the effect of living in ethnic enclaves, a result of the permanence of segregated settlement patterns (Bogardus, 1930; Crowder, Hall & Tolnay, 2011; Ebert & Ovink, 2014; Ellis et al., 2004; Gamio, 1930; Harner, 2000; Lavine, 2005; Pearson-Merkowitz, 2012).⁹

In the research on segregation there is greater emphasis on spatial dimension (denominated residential segregation), perhaps due to the strong correlation that the studies show between place of residence and workplace in the case of immigrants, not only in the United States, but in other countries with immigration; or it could also be due to the permanence of the segregated residential patterns in American society, given that while segregation in the workplace has decreased in the last fifty years, residential segregation remains (Ellis et al., 2004).

Some of the works concerning Mexican immigrants in the 1930s in the United States give account of the segregation conditions of this population (Bogardus, 1930; Gamio 1930, 1969, 2002). It should be noted that the research by Gamio (1930, 1969, 2002) does not focus exclusively on the spatial dimension. His studies cover a set of broader topics, and present some experiences of segregation in public places such as hotels, restaurants and schools, as well as the null upward mobility of the immigrants and their descendants.

The study by Bogardus (1930), carried out in localities in southern California, describes the settlements of the Mexican immigrant population, located on the cities' outskirts, separated from the "white" neighborhoods, with deficient infrastructure and a lack of services. Furthermore, it reports the efforts of the second and third generation, especially young marriages, to change the neighborhood and improve their living conditions, as well as the responses of the "white" people to impede the arrival of Mexicans to their neighborhoods.

The author notes (as does Gamio, 1930, 1969, 2002) the problem of segregation in school spaces, and the educational gap, given that in some localities Mexican children were deliberately sent to attend special schools to prevent them from intermingling with "white" children, whereas in schools that allowed the intermingling of students, regardless of the color of their skin, Mexican children were at a disadvantage due to their low or null understanding of the English language.

⁸ Although most of the studies on segregation and discrimination focus on the African-American population. For a review on education see Baker (2005), on the theoretical discussion see Powers and Ellison (1995), Lincoln (2006), Unnever, Cullen and Barnes (2016).

⁹ The studies by Bogardus (1930), Gamio (1930, 1969), Harner (2000), Lavine (2005), and Ebert and Ovink (2014) are works concerning Mexican immigrants and their descendants (Mexican-Americans); the studies by Ellis et al. (2014), Crowder et al. (2011), and Pearson-Merkowitz (2012) refer to the Latino population, including Latinos of Mexican descent.

Bogardus (1930) explains the low percentages of Mexicans in the United States that obtain full citizenship through segregation (social and spatial), because Mexicans who obtained citizenship continued to be derogatorily called *greasers*¹⁰ and when they tried to improve their situation, they were threatened. Whereas Gamio (1930, 1969, 2002) explains the same phenomenon through the null upward mobility, given that Mexican immigrants remained in low social strata, even having obtained American citizenship, therefore, naturalization was not perceived as advantage.

These studies are the exception, given that the Great Depression ended with the first Mexican exodus to the United States, due to the deportations of Mexican immigrants and Mexican-Americans, causing a sudden lack of interest in migration studies by the academic community. Interest in the issue returned until after World War II, but was directed towards the Bracero Program both in Mexico and in the United States. A considerable number of studies between 1950 and 1960 were written on the organizational aspects of the international agreements to import workers, as well as the economic causes and the economic impact of the Bracero Program. The monographs regarding the attitudes of Americans towards Mexican migration and the settlement of Mexican migrants were few. Subsequently, in 1970, the interest was redirected towards the Mexican-American social movements, also known as the Chicano movement (Corwin, 1973).

Therefore, the studies on the conditions of the Mexican immigrant settlements and the relation to the population of the host localities do not represent a topic of continuous interest. The topic is addressed once more after the considerable increase of immigrants in the United States after 1990; these works are few and with temporal discontinuity. Recent research on residential and job segregation of Mexican immigrants, Mexican-Americans or Latinos, describes the housing and employment patterns (Ellis et al., 2004; Lavine, 2005), analyzes the causes for residential segregation (Crowder et al., 2011; Harner, 2000) and the effects on political and social dimensions (Ebert & Ovink, 2014; Pearson-Merkowitz, 2012).

Ellis et al. (2004) compare the residential and job segregation patterns in Los Angeles, California, finding that Mexican immigrants, unlike other immigrant groups, concentrate in eastern and southern Los Angeles and work in a large area that includes the East of Los Angeles, Santa Ana, San Fernando Valley, and Ventura County. In this manner, the percentage of job concentration is of 36%; the lowest percentage of all the studied groups,¹¹ and of residential concentration it is of 58%. With this data, the authors confirm that Mexican immigrants are more prone to mingle with other ethnic or racial groups in Los Angeles, due to employment in low-skill services.

On the other hand, Lavine (2005) examines, through a survey to Mexican immigrants in the metropolitan area of Los Angeles, the overcrowding of housing and the separation of Mexican neighborhoods with regard to the American population. Regarding

¹⁰ Derogatory term used by the white population in various places in the United States to refer to non-white (and non-African-American) people, generally employed in low-skill jobs. In California specifically, the term refers to the population of Mexican descent as shown by the vagrancy Law, enacted in 1855, and known as the Greaser Act that prohibited a set of Mexican cultural activities (Menchaca, 1995).

¹¹ These are Mexicans, Salvadorians, Filipinos, Guatemalans, Koreans, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Iranians. Furthermore, they analyze four population groups classified by ethnicity, but born in the United States: Latinos, Caucasians, African-Americans, and Asians.

employment, the author finds that 78% of the respondents obtained their first job through a relative or friend, so that networks are a factor fed by themselves, which in turn feeds the segregation of the American job market, forming niches. Despite these conditions, the Mexican immigrants surveyed tended to compare their wellbeing with the conditions of their places of origin; therefore, the new environment is acceptable even when it is below the standards of the United States.

Regarding the factors that explain the residential segregation of Mexican immigrants, Harner (2000)—in the study he carried out in Scottsdale, Arizona—finds three reasons that cause the residential enclaves and that maintain the social distance with other groups, despite the increase of the Mexican immigrant population in recent decades, these are: the lack of efficient public transportation that forces people to move closer to their workplace, the lack of accessible housing, and the need for social support networks. Furthermore, the city faces conflicts inherent to an industry that provides an elite clientele with a low-income workforce.

Another factor of residential segregation is the rejection for the physical closeness of people who belong to social groups different to their own. In this sense, Crowder et al. (2011) shows the reaction of the natives (“whites” and “blacks”) before the presence or increase of Latino or Asian immigrants in the United States since 1960 and until 2005.

The authors find a positive relation between the size of the immigrant population and the exiting of the natives from the neighborhood. This relation has practically not changed since the 1960s; there is no evidence that shows a decrease in residential segregation despite the heterogeneity of the cities due to immigration.

Natives tend to move away from the neighborhoods when the concentration of the population born abroad increases in the same, but this is not the case if the surrounding neighborhoods also have high concentrations of foreigners. The increase of immigrants generates more dissatisfaction between the “white” owners or perhaps, suggest the authors, “black” owners have less opportunities to act. The association between the mobility of natives and the ratio of immigrants has important implications in the change processes of the neighborhoods, so that the mobility of the natives (“whites” or “blacks”) contributes to maintaining the segregation of Asians and Latinos (Crowder et al., 2011).

In this sense, the settlement patterns of the groups are not only explained by the cultural differences and communal bonds that influence the preferences of the members of the groups, but rather by the rejection from the natives, discrimination, and the unequal position in the occupational hierarchy that affects housing and socioeconomic mobility opportunities (Kandyliis, Maloutas & Sayas, 2012).

Other researches discuss the effect of living in segregated neighborhoods regarding civic and political participation, both for the minorities as well as the for the larger society. Putman (2007) states that the homogeneity of the neighborhoods favors trust between people and increases civic participation, therefore, the increase in diversity due to immigration causes the opposite effect. Pearson-Merkowitz (2012), debating the Putnam’s stance (2007), explores the effect of residential segregation in civic and political participation for the case of Latinos, and finds like other autores that: “concentration is an advantage only in areas that are politically competitive, and then only when there are leaders and resources that can sustain a long-term mobilization strategy” (Pearson-Merkowitz, 2012, p. 706).

Conversely, the residential segregation of Latinos negatively affects the participation in community and political activities. Therefore, the more segregated the environment the less probable it is for people to trust their neighbors. For Latinos who live in segregated neighborhoods, civic and political participation is explained by the limited access to community resources and to civic institutions, and not by the homogeneity of the neighborhood (Pearson-Merkowitz, 2012).

For their part, Ebert and Ovink (2014) examine the type of counties¹² in the discrimination experiences of Mexican-Americans, finding that people who lives in counties with a higher co-ethnic population (high share of Mexican-Americans) report less discrimination experiences. The interaction between share Mexicans and the presence of exclusionary rules is positive, so that the approval of anti-immigrant laws between 2004 and 2006 in old gateway counties has a positive effect on discrimination, whereas in counties of recent immigrant arrival the effect is negative, this means that low levels of discrimination are reported in the latter counties.

This suggests that the strength of the co-ethnic contexts (population size of the same ethnicity) provides benefits in terms of protection against discrimination experiences, but this effect is more evident between people born in the United States, or between those who prefer to speak English, than between those who were born outside of the country and prefer to speak Spanish (Ebert & Ovink, 2014). Therefore, the protection effect is produced above all for the population of Mexican descent born in the United States rather than for Mexican immigrants.

The relation between these two groups (Mexican immigrants and Mexican-Americans) is complex and polemic as shown in the studies by Gutiérrez (1995), Ochoa (2004), and Jiménez (2008). The everyday interaction in places with a high ratio of Mexican immigrants and Mexican-Americans produces relations that go from solidarity to conflict. On the one hand, some Mexican-Americans identify themselves with Mexican immigrants, establish relationships of solidarity in everyday life and stand against anti-immigrant policies in the public sphere. On the other hand, some Mexican-Americans express an open rejection towards immigrants and towards the shared identity elements, given that they consider that the constant arrival of immigrants (Spanish speakers) reduces their efforts to assimilate and, therefore, make an effort through different activities, both in everyday and public life, to differentiate themselves from Mexican immigrants.

Research design in these works is mainly quantitative,¹³ except for the works by Gamio and Bogardus. The results presented above provide evidence of the negative effect of segregation on the naturalization rates of Mexicans (Bogardus, 1930; Gamio, 1930, 1969, 2002), on political participation, on trust, and on the access to infrastructure in the case of Latinos (Pearson-Merkowitz, 2012). On the other hand, they show a positive effect on the protection against discrimination in the case of Mexican-Americans (Ebert & Ovink, 2014). In the case of Mexican immigrants, the social networks established between people of the same group are a product of the residential and job closeness of the Mexican population. Such geographical closeness acts as a safeguard against discrimination and

¹² Typology based on the number of people from the same ethnic group and the anti-immigrant decrees.

¹³ By this I mean that data is analyzed with descriptive and inferential statistics, but also the use of maps displaying the distribution of households and workplaces.

open hostility (Harner, 2000), but it also reproduces residential segregation and has a negative impact on their incomes (Harner, 2000; Lavine, 2005).

Studies on the Discrimination of Mexican Immigrants

Concerning discrimination, there are both quantitative studies (Ayers, Hofstetter, Schnakenberg & Kolody, 2009; Bittle, Rochkind, Gasbarra & Ott, 2009; Calleja, 2005; Raffaelli & Wiley, 2012) and qualitative studies (Casanova, 2012; Trueba, 2000). The former rely on measures of the frequency, types and places in which discrimination occur; for example, Calleja (2005) uses the results of Pew Hispanic Center, 2002, to conclude that 31% of Latinos reported having known cases of discrimination from a person close to them, with the main causes being the language and physical appearance; whereas the forms of discrimination are: disrespectful treatment (45%), low-quality services (41%), and insults and nicknames (30%). In the same vein, Raffaelli and Wiley (2012) also describe the challenges and strengths of Latino immigrant women in Central Illinois,¹⁴ reporting that the challenges faced by the families relate to the language (57.4%); their legal status and documentation (12%); employment and services—such as access to public transport and childcare— (10%), and discrimination (5.6%).

One out of five surveyed women experienced some form of discrimination in public places, such as at work or street, though no statistical differences were found, taking into consideration the time of residence in the United States, discrimination was reported by immigrant women of recent arrival and by immigrant women who had been living in Illinois for several years. Although discrimination was identified as a challenge, the women in this study reported low levels of direct experience of discrimination. These findings coincide with those by Bittle et al. (2009), who find that 75% of Mexican immigrants perceive discrimination; 18% above the rest of the immigrants, but only 24% confirm having personally been discriminated against (Bittle et al., 2009).

With regard to the resources needed to face the challenges reported by the immigrant women, the most recurrent is belonging to support networks, both in the established communities as well as in their places of origin. The informants describe these personal bonds as an important element that helps them stand up to their problems (Raffaelli & Wiley, 2012).

The study by Ayers et al. (2009) finds that the racial prejudices of the “Anglos” negatively influence the support for preferential migratory policies. In this manner, the aversion towards Latinos is strongly related to restrictionist attitudes towards legal immigration, and this rejection grows stronger when dealing with Mexican immigration. Therefore, the authors maintain that the attitudes against immigration (Mexican immigrants and legal immigration) are motivated by the racial resentment of “Anglos” and Latinos. Regarding the qualitative studies such as those by Trueba (2000) and Casanova (2012), they show the coping mechanisms against discrimination in the case of women who live in California. Trueba (2000) produces an ethnography focused on a family that lives in central California and gives account of the resistance mechanisms of a woman (mother)

¹⁴ The study analyzes data from 112 Latino immigrant mothers, 93% of which are Mexican.

to overcome the discriminatory practices due to “race”, ethnicity and gender. Despite the fact that the study is directed towards the analysis of coping processes and processes to overcome this issue, it has information on the discrimination experiences of the parents of the informant, of herself and her children, but these are not the main focus of the analysis.

Casanova (2012) studies the case of an indigenous immigrant woman from the state of Yucatán taking a psychological perspective. Casanova narrates the discrimination she experienced throughout her school years, and the means to overcome micro-aggressions. Due to it being a psychological study, the explanatory emphasis is on the self-esteem and ability of the individual to overcome discrimination or resilience. The testimony of the informant gives account of the difficulties faced in school for immigrant status, for not speaking English, and for not having people close to her (classmates or professors) who would explain her about the functioning of the school.

In short, the studies that directly address the topic of discrimination can be grouped according to the method they utilized, finding that the quantitative studies that directly address the Mexican immigrant population show: high percentages in the importance that discrimination has for this population (directly and indirectly) and low percentages with regard to personal experiences (Bittle et al., 2009; Raffaelli & Wiley, 2012). This does not mean that the acts of discrimination are not relevant, as suggested by Bittle et al. (2009), given that when the method changes, the qualitative studies document various forms of everyday discrimination and hostility.

Concluding Remarks

This article shows the progress of the research on the topics of integration, segregation, and discrimination of the Mexican immigrant population and of Mexican descent who reside in the United States. The research on integration mainly used the assimilation approach in its different modalities; an approach that since the beginning of the xxth century took relevance in the explanation of the immigrant groups in American society.

Revisions of the assimilation model have progressed in not assuming a homogeneous process for all immigrant groups (following the European case and not considering the effect of racism). They have also problematized the notion that of marginalised assimilation by some groups, as well as the possibility of sustaining cultural differences. In this sense, they show important considerations regarding the cultural dimension, but the economic and social dimension as a problem of inequality is not discussed. This means that it is not only an issue of preserving or changing the elements of culture, but rather a problem of unequal access to resources that limit the possibilities of upward mobility of certain groups. Some alternative theoretical proposals have explained the selectiveness of social advancement and the unequal distribution of resources among groups, such as the conflict theory, the theory of social classes, or the theory of internal colonialism. However, assimilation continues to be the most important paradigm in explaining the living conditions of immigrants in the United States.

The integration process varies according to the dimensions that comprise it, in the case presented here, the differences with the American mainstream society can be found in employment, wages, education and housing. Therefore, for the Mexican immigrant population and Mexican descent, integration is marginal due to the fact that inequality remains throughout time in the fundamental dimensions of people's lives.

This cannot continue to be explained by the resistance to cultural change or by the loyalty of the Mexicans towards their place of origin, as proposed in different works since the 1930s and up to present day, because as we have shown, in terms of language, integration is complete for the second generation, and still the population of Mexican descent continues to live in segregated neighborhoods (including schools), working in low-income jobs and experiencing discrimination.

Segregation is studied mainly from the settlement patterns, from the negative effect of which translates into the low levels of citizenship obtained by Mexicans in the United States, and from the civic and political participation of Mexican immigrants and their descendants; while the same settlement patterns generate protection against discrimination in the case of Mexican-Americans.

Although these studies propose a strong relation between housing and employment, in the case of Mexican immigrants in California, this association is not as strong, given that immigrants work throughout the entire metropolitan area and live in only some of the neighborhoods. This empirical finding is interpreted as low job segregation, but does not consider the type of work that is being performed by the immigrants and their position in the occupational hierarchy. In this case, the limits of the results come from the method, given that the settlement and employment patterns have been analyzed using urban geography techniques, specifically through maps. Despite the fact that the percentages of job concentration are low for the Mexican immigration population, the workplace is one of the spaces where high percentages of discrimination are reported, a topic on which there are few studies. However, the quantitative researches reviewed here show: high percentages of discrimination against Mexican immigrants in the United States, and low percentages in personal experiences. Whereas the qualitative studies document constant acts of discrimination and micro-aggressions in everyday life. Therefore, the results of the qualitative studies suggest that the research done through surveys tends to underestimate the frequency of everyday discrimination experiences. This represents a methodological challenge. Qualitative field research could prove useful to reassess the survey questions with which discrimination is measured in quantitative studies, as well as to supplement research methods with the means to capture the everyday expressions of discrimination.

Additionally, the limits of the qualitative studies lie on the emphasis placed on the resilience mechanisms, because it subtracts importance from the circumstances and the discriminatory acts. Given that the women studied have personal resources for coping, the problem of discrimination loses social relevance insofar as it can be solved in an individual and even psychological manner.

Based on these results, it has been made evident that there is a set of topics pending to be researched regarding Mexican immigrants in the United States that call for the interest of the Mexican academic community. There is a need to study the various forms of discrimination against the immigrant population—of both sexes and of different ages—in the places of settlement in order to understand how everyday segregation and discrimination are expressed in places where different social groups converge. Furthermore, it is necessary to develop or incorporate new theoretical approaches—different to the assimilation model—to explain the continued inequality of the Mexican community and of Mexican descent in the United States.

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