

This book provides ample evidence of why and how immigrants, both national and international, provide key inputs that make prosperous city life possible. Things are not easy for many immigrants; cities are not bastions of economic equality, and longtime residents observe changes to their neighborhoods. But the mobility of people coming in and out of a city from near and far away is what makes cities so attractive, and where people can find a place for themselves, a community of like-minded people, and conviviality with people who are very different. Snowstorms, pandemics, blackouts, and other crises make city residents realize how interdependent they are with each other. This book discusses the history of urban success and provides detailed examples of these dynamics in New York City, Washington, DC, Paris, and Mexico City, among others.



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Immigration and Urban Vitality Ernesto Castañeda

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Hardcover ISBN 979-8246263051
Paperback ISBN 979-8246216729
Kindle edition also available
First edition.
March 7, 2026

DEDICATION

I dedicate this book to my coauthors, students, colleagues, and members of The Center for Latin American and Latino Studies and The Immigration Lab at American University, for creating knowledge, imagining better immigration policies, and informing the public together.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank Diana Garay Flores for preparing the versions of these chapters for the Center for Latin American and Latino Studies (CLALS) working paper series; Katheryn Olmos for providing key logistical and research support; and Maggie McMahon for preparing the book for publication. All three contributed to administrative efforts that accelerated the process and assisted with formatting.

Avery Hyra helped with copy-editing. I also wish to thank the coauthors and editors who provided feedback on earlier and alternate versions of some chapters. I am the author or coauthor of all the chapters, and I thought of creating this book as a collection of related texts to make it easier for instructors to use in classes or for people to read on the road. The list of coauthors and their brief biographies is provided, as is customary, at the end of the book.



Introduction

by Ernesto Castañeda

In this book, you will be presented with ample types of evidence on why and how national and international immigrants provide key inputs that make prosperous city life possible. Things are not easy for many immigrants; cities are not bastions of economic equality, and longtime residents will always complain about changes to their neighborhoods, especially when they stop moving and live on a particular street for a while. But the mobility of people coming in and out of a city from near and far away is what makes cities so attractive, and where people can find a place for themselves, a community of like-minded people, and conviviality with people who are very different in many dimensions. Snowstorms, pandemics, blackouts, and other crises make city residents realize how interdependent they are with other city residents, known and unknown, and with food producers.

There cannot be sufficient city growth without people coming from other parts of the state, country, and world. This is so obvious and common that it often goes unobserved, the exception being when many people from other parts of the world come around the same time to the same set of city blocks and are visibly different because of the color of their skin, the way they must dress for religious reasons, or the language they speak. But we forget that this is not unique to U.S. cities. That this is not new; this is as old as cities. Also, these newcomers become old-timers over time, who then may comment negatively about new visible transplants and interlopers. But contemporary cities do not have walls, nor gates; there is no lord who has to accept a new urban resident or *citizen*. This book goes into detail, in an engaging way, about this history and provides examples of these dynamics in the metro areas of New York City, Washington, DC, Paris, and Mexico City.

1 Migration, Urbanization, and Inclusion

by Ernesto Castañeda, Ricardo Zapata, and Kevin Beck

Cities and migration are deeply intertwined. In this chapter, we provide a *longue-durée* global overview of the connection between the social processes of migration and urbanization. It draws on publications from multiple disciplines. It puts contemporary discussions about migrants arriving in cities into a wide perspective and historical context. Despite panicking statements in the media, immigration is a process as old as cities themselves. The takeaway is that one cannot have healthy cities without continuous immigration. We touch upon the relationship between migration and urbanization throughout history and provide some case studies from around the world. We discuss cities as creators of a common culture and identity while acting as factories of race/ethnicity markers by creating social boundaries that exclude certain newcomers and established dwellers while including most others.

The Rise of Cities, Ethnicity, and Categorical Exclusion

In some ecosystems, hunter-gathering required regional nomadism. In others, it required long-distance migration, as food resources would decline because of seasonal changes. Movement was also necessary because of pressure from population growth or competition with other species and human groups. The invention of agriculture and its spread led to a large-scale process of sedentarization and, therefore, urbanization. Agriculture—understood as the intentional planting of food sources—along with

raising cattle and other game husbandry, allowed for a surplus in food production. Local populations grew because it was easier to feed more people, and fewer people would die from starvation or exhaustion while looking for food sources. This growth led to additional labor for activities other than food production and preparation. In most places, this led to the construction of huts next to private or collective parcels and then to more elaborate structures adjacent to agricultural fields, motivating the creation of the first towns. In areas close to rivers, seas, oceans, and other environments rich in food and transportation, cities would grow at some distance from the fields and farms that fed their populations. Besides nomads, long-distance traders, and those working in agriculture, humans have since increasingly concentrated in towns and cities. Impressive cities appeared in many civilizations around the world in Mesopotamia, China, India, and among the Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans, and independently among the Mayans, Aztecs, and Incas, to name a few (Castles and Davidson 2000; Hanagan and Tilly 2011; Portes and Armony 2022).

Before cities could survive and then flourish, they had first to secure enough food supplies, and then they had to grow relatively fast. The main ways to grow demographically were through local births and the immigration of outsiders. The way to attract people was through varied economic activity and growth itself. Cities are, by nature, creators and concentrators of wealth. According to Monica L. Smith (2020), cities have always been centers of consumption and thus producers of waste. They have always been the places that create middle classes and knowledge workers. This is not unique to modernity or contemporary times. People in cities underpay for their food supplies and allow for productive activities that generate profits because they can be sold locally or traded far away for more than they cost to produce. Cities are wealth-concentrators because they allow a sector of the population to live by providing services to other city dwellers through inn-keeping, restoration, etc. They are also wealth concentrators and multipliers because locals are often forced to pay tribute to local lords or convinced to give at least a tithe (10%

of their income) to religious authorities, who can then build sophisticated bureaucracies and temples. Guilds may extract free labor and fees in exchange for training and protection of technical trades. Local leaders encourage or force city residents to pay tributes, fees, or taxes in cash or goods. These processes allow for the creation of local elites and governments, and for the payment of mercenaries, militias, or armies, which in turn can extract more tributes from further away lands. Creating pressure to finance war and defensive measures, taxing would increase in exchange for the promise of protection and certain rights for city dwellers (Tilly 1992; Castañeda 2023). Luxury buildings and infrastructure are common in rich cities, which tend to be or have been the bases of empires, trade hubs, or national capitals. In turn, these commercial, cultural, religious, and political hubs attract people from near and far. These cities have large populations, and even a larger number of people outside of them depend on or are subservient to them.

Once food supplies were secured, city dwellers could turn to other trades and the collective production of baked, prepared, and manufactured goods. Masons constructed structures to protect city dwellers from the elements and to honor the Gods and the rulers of the time. They also built city walls (M. L. Smith 2020). Safe from hunger, the elements, and wild beasts, towns and cities were still vulnerable to other groups of humans that could loot, conquer, slave, or destroy their dwellings and take their food, game, people, and other valuables. While violence between humans preceded agriculture and urbanization, as towns grew so did the potential for war and the need for protection from outsiders. Soon after cities appeared, also appeared the need to secure them through towers, forts, walls, moats, and gates. For these reasons, many cities were built atop hills or with one side facing a mountain or body of water to offer protection on some fronts and make it easier to visualize groups of attackers. Therefore, cities became very weary of large groups of strangers, especially men, arriving unannounced and at the same time. (We still seem to carry that collective trauma in our psyches, although the context and threats are very different today.)

Historically, cities were born because of rural-urban migration. A standard story about the formation of cities in Medieval Europe paints them as places dependent on a diversity of people: craftspeople, liberal professionals, traveling merchants, free agents, fugitive slaves, soldiers and serfs, criminals, and dispossessed peasants, at one point or another all immigrated into the city from elsewhere whether temporarily or permanently. That was not unique to Europe. Some of these medieval cities and thus their dwellers lived outside of the control of feudal lords, kings, and religious authorities. The German phrase *Stadtluft macht frei nach Jahr und Tag*, “city air makes you free after a year and a day,” recognized a legal principle in the network of Hanseatic cities, where if a person lived in one of these cities for more than a year and one day without a lord or employer claiming his return to his previous place of residence, that person was free of their previous bond (Sennett 1994, 151). Think of run-a-way slaves from the U.S. South going North but without police or bounty hunters being able to chase them after a year of living in northern cities. Burger or citizen was the word used in Western Europe to designate the residents of a city, those who, with their dwellings and daily economic activity, established local residences de facto without the necessary permission of any external authority (Weber 1958). They became residents and equal to others in rights and wealth in potential (see section on urban citizenship and belonging below).

Public areas in cities are places where strangers meet to trade without necessarily sharing kinship, religion, or language (Simmel 1971). Always but, especially since the industrial era, cities have needed a constant infusion of new inhabitants to function, prosper, repopulate, and compete with other cities economically and militarily (Tilly 1978). However, the constant need for migrants has often created tensions between immigrants and other city dwellers. There is often a “love-hate” relationship between cities and immigrants. While the textile, manufacturing, construction, and service industries always need new labor, some people already living in the city may see migrants as a threat to their employment, economic stability, and

culture. This is a recurrent process that has been present since people founded cities. Time erases most of these differences because most of the grandchildren of each group are indistinguishable as they grow up —except in caste and racist social systems that create durable inequalities along categorical lines (Tilly 1998; Massey 2007; Castañeda 2018b; Golash-Boza 2016).

Migrants have contributed to the rise of contemporary cities throughout the world. In the 16th century, waves of migrants from Western Europe moved to the Americas to take part in empire-building projects, and cities were the places from which these projects were administered. For example, the Spanish conquest of the Americas resulted in significant settler migration to Mexico City/Tenochtitlan, from where Spain would manage resource extraction and control local populations. As Alejandro Portes (2023) writes, changes in geopolitical relationships and the spread of capitalism were often responsible for stopping and starting new migrations. For example, from the 17th until the 19th centuries, the transatlantic slave trade forced millions of West Africans into the Americas, and cities were the centers where this trade was conducted. Cities like London, New York, and São Paulo were hubs for exchanging sugar, coffee, and people. In the 19th and 20th centuries, industrialized cities demanded labor, and employers recruited labor from abroad, often resulting in new immigration. For instance, Chinese were recruited to work in Los Angeles, and Southern Europeans were recruited to work in the factories of New York City. By the late 20th century, new migrants were less often recruited and more often driven by social networks, by the vital need to escape persecution and persistent violence, or the seeking of opportunities and better lives in global cities abroad.

Tilly (1976) claims that capitalism sped up this process because, through the expansion of wage labor in the 19th century, there was a separation of the household as the site of economic production, while large expanding commercial agriculture created a land scarcity it made long-distance migration a tempting choice for many in Europe (Tilly 1990). Religious persecution or relatively high wages

may encourage migrants to leave their place of birth. Most often, such migrations are not the movements of individuals but the partial relocations of families, townships, and trust networks. This corrects the popular but limited understanding of international migration simply as an issue of labor supply and demand (Todaro 1969; Castañeda 2013). The people who move to a specific place are from particular towns and localities (Tilly 1990, 83).

Upon arrival, many migrants are seen as part of groups and categorized along racial, ethnic, religious, or national lines. The categorical labels others use to describe them are often not the ones migrants had before they arrived. For example, in the U.S., Sicilians became “Italians” in New York, Galician Polish peasants became “Slavs” in Cleveland, Maya subgroups became “Latino” in Washington, DC, or Albanians pass as Italians in the Bronx’ Little Italy (Cornelius, FitzGerald, and Lewin Fischer 2007; Hammack, Grabowski, and Grabowski 2002; Kosta 2014; Thomas and Znaniecki 1918). This reminds us that integration into one mainstream culture is not fully the result of individual migrant actions or desires. Integration is influenced by social relations between and within existing hierarchies in the places of destination (Portes and Zhou 2003). The experience of Italians arriving in New York and Buenos Aires between 1860 and 1914 varied not because of who emigrated where but because of different contexts in each place (Tilly 1968, 87). Likewise, rather than assuming a cultural essentialism, how Chinese immigrants are perceived in the twenty-first century differs from how they were in the late 1800s and how Chinese migrants are perceived in the U.S., Canada, or Spain.

Migration is not purely an individual decision, “It is not very useful to classify migrants by intentions to stay or to return home, because intentions and possibilities are always more complex than that - and the migrants themselves often cannot see the possibilities that are shaped by their networks”(Tilly 1990, 87–88). The importance of networks to propel migration (Massey et al. 1987; Massey 1990; Massey and Arango 1993; Menjívar 2000) and transnational connections between receiving and sending

communities is widely examined and appreciated today (Castañeda, Morales, and Ochoa 2014; Levitt 2001; Mouw et al. 2014; Snel, T Hart, and Van Bochove 2016).

However, the relationship between chain migration and cities as “factories of ethnicity” remains underappreciated. Chain migration makes it easier for newcomers to find themselves among people from the same area and culture (Tilly and Brown 1967). Strong bonds form between people who have already settled in a city and the migrants coming from the same area. They often cluster spatially or socially in categorical networks (Tilly 1984), concrete social groups that share belonging in the same social category. The networks, opportunities, and comfort zones that the migrants create may produce further segregation. They may be excluded from jobs, opportunities, and certain neighborhoods.

Furthermore, working-class migrants often have limited time and opportunity to socialize beyond their community. Thus, cities are where ethnicities, races, and categorical groups are socially constructed. Some think that racial and ethnic labels precede migration, but that is a common misunderstanding based on racist frameworks. While White supremacy and anti-Black racism are global projects, who is perceived as Black depends on the context. Race and ethnicity are constructed through perception, interactions, practices, and laws. Besides colonial, slave, and caste systems, global cities are where practical stereotypes about these groups are created.

Cities and migrants have a “love-hate” relationship because demographic and economic forces send people out of rural areas into cities, where labor is more in demand and where immigrants are necessary for economic growth. Yet, established city residents –the result of previous migrations– begrudge the newcomers as interlopers (Heyman 2018). Once spatial segregation and concentration into certain jobs occur, ethnicity is born through outside perception. This manufacturing of ethnicity or ethnicization can be also detected by the construction of institutions formed around that community, such as mutual aid societies, clubs, drinking halls, and churches (Castañeda 2012; 2020; Moya 2005). Those who

are not members of these categorical networks in destination cities name these new groups with derogatory terms or religious, geographical, or national markers (Catholics, Sicilians, Irish, Muslims). Native-born individuals assign stereotypical attributes to whole groups. These processes create new, increasingly visible new categorical groups in a city. This manufactured ethnicity is reinforced by the way that migrant groups settle in different parts of the city and move within it as jobs and opportunities change. Cities are "ethnic factories" because they encourage visible concentration and stratification into groups along ethnic, racial, and religious lines (Tilly 1976).

Los Angeles provides a contemporary example of how ethnic categories develop in the city. Los Angeles grew through White migration west for decades after its annexation from Mexico and the gold rush to California. Los Angeles has become increasingly diverse since 1970 due to new migration from Latin America, Asia, and the Middle East. Ethno-racial boundaries have changed over time. For example, since the 1920s, South LA had been a largely Black, socioeconomically diverse community. By the 1970s, migrants from Latin America started moving into South LA, and by the 1990s, South LA's socioeconomic status had declined. Although conflict between Black and Latino residents occurs, daily interactions in the same neighborhood spaces have also led to the formation of a shared place-based identity, softening lines between these two groups (Zhou and DiRago 2023).

The rise of new migrant groups and ethnic categories has often been accompanied by exclusion. For example, São Paulo's development as a globalizing city has occurred in lockstep with various forms of international and internal migration. During Brazil's colonial period, migration was largely tailored to support sugar, mining, and later coffee industries. These industries brought merchants from Portugal and enslaved workers from Africa. By the mid to late 19th century, much of the economy's demand for labor was being fulfilled by European and Japanese migrants. Industrialization in the twentieth century further increased European

migration to São Paulo and brought many Brazilians from the countryside into the city (Hassan De Ferrari et al. 2023). Since the colonial period, migration has been central to São Paulo's growth, and most waves of migrants have been met with various forms of exclusion and discrimination. Poor migrants of color in São Paulo have often lived in segregated neighborhoods, have been relegated to substandard housing, and have been excluded from many of the rights and privileges enjoyed by Brazilian citizens. This illustrates a particular duality of globalizing cities: migrants are vital to urban growth yet often excluded from full participation in urban life. Today, São Paulo is similar to other globalizing cities in that it experiences immigration from around the world, with the most numerous groups being Bolivians, Portuguese, and Chinese (Hassan De Ferrari et al. 2023).

The processes described above are common for large groups of displaced farmers and industrial and low-skilled workers. The less skilled or educated migrants are, the more they depend on their friends, family, and co-ethnics. "Unskilled" laborers who become labeled as ethnic or racial are under the threat of being seen as perpetually different, are given fewer opportunities, and are more likely to be stuck in undesirable jobs. In contrast, career migration describes the mobility of professionals seeking job opportunities in their fields of knowledge far from where they currently reside (Tilly 1978). Professionals are relatively less dependent on co-ethnic networks. Professional immigrants are more likely to work with members of the majority group and are more likely to be seen as individuals rather than as "ethnic" –as exceptions to the group's stereotypes.

The public has internalized decades of dehumanizing discourse against immigrants from developing countries. Many politicians have framed the issue as a zero-sum game, or the division of a pie of the same size into smaller pieces, but immigrants generate economic growth, urban vitality, and relative affordability. They make the pie larger and tastier. Immigrants are also key to the continuation of local culture. Who plays for the Boston Red Sox's? Who cleans the

stadium and works at the concession stands? Many people whose parents were not born in Boston. Who works in the Irish bars in Boston? It is recent immigrants including those from Ireland.

Xenophobia is a constant in history. It is a general predisposition to be weary of strangers. It is applied more rigidly to certain categories of others. This is often overcome when individuals meet specific members of the outgroup, befriend them, and stop being afraid of their differences. The danger arises when xenophobic and racist prejudices affect how people behave with members of a certain group on a daily basis—even when they know people like them or think that a particular individual is an exception to the rule—with impunity. And when this impacts the opportunities and outcomes of members of targeted minority groups.

II. Internal and International Migration, Urbanization, and Cosmopolitanism

Although the arrival of migrants to cities has often resulted in the rise of categorical inequalities, migration has also fostered a practice of cosmopolitanism. For instance, New York City has been a destination for migrants since the city was founded by the Dutch in the 1600s. According to Kasinitz (2023), each migrant group has contributed to the city's economy in particular ways, and they have collectively fostered a culture of cosmopolitanism, which may be stronger in New York City than elsewhere in the United States. Migrants have moved to New York for different reasons. In the mid-1800s, the Irish migrated to New York to escape famine, and Germans migrated to New York to escape political unrest. In the 1880s, it was Jews from Eastern Europe and Southern Italians. Today, some of the largest groups are from the Dominican Republic, Mexico, and Puerto Rico, but there are immigrants from all over the world. The common theme throughout New York's history is that internal and international migrants arrive, leave an impact on the city as they are incorporated into the city's social and economic fabric, and then either leave or are joined by the latest group of newcomers

(Foner 2022; Kasinitz 2023). Though diversity has often been embraced in New York, ethnic tensions and inequalities have existed parallel to its history of tolerance. For example, New York played a key role in the slave trade, and even today, New York's schools and neighborhoods remain among the most highly segregated. Often overlooked, internal migration plays a large role in the population composition at a given time. Overall levels stay relatively stable but the individuals in the city change constantly, like in Heraclitus maxim, "No man ever steps in the same river twice, for it's not the same river," same with the population of New York City which always in flux even in the percentage of people born in the U.S. and those born abroad stays around the same. Individuals and families are constantly moving in and out.

Miami is a relatively new city. Originally conceived and created as a vacation site during the early 20th century. Early on, Jewish people were not allowed to legally own property there, but decades later they became an important proportion of internal immigrants from the northeast, living there not only during the winter but yearlong (Portes and Armony 2018). Immigrants play a significant role in Miami's economic, cultural, and physical development. Miami would become a global city, largely due to extensive migration from Cuba and the industries established by Cubans upon arrival, including businesses that draw on the material and symbolic cultures of both the city of origin and the city of destination (Cure and Penabad 2023).

Latin America has the greatest share of its population living in megacities (cities with over ten million inhabitants). Since 1950, urbanization in Latin America has been continuous, with megacities experiencing constant growth. While urban and overall population growth has slowed, their urban territory – and accompanying urban sprawl – continues to expand, often outstripping the capacity of infrastructure planning and service provision to keep pace. The relative economic growth rate of megacities in the region has slowed over the last decades. The reason is primarily that these cities have been unable to address problems such as traffic gridlock, pollution, housing shortages, lack of sustainable resources like fresh water, lack

of reliable services like sanitation, and other failures of urban planning, management, and infrastructure (McKinsey 2011, 15). Today, across the region, internal migration is less rural-to-urban, as has been the trend historically, and more urban-to-urban. The greater economic dynamism and rising importance of secondary and intermediate cities as new laboratories for technology innovation, smart growth planning, municipal governance, and sustainable development have accompanied this shift. The accelerating growth and development of Latin America's secondary cities represent a historic opportunity to investigate new conceptions of sustainable urban growth and to consider the relationship of Latin America's urban present to its social, political, and economic future.

It is increasingly from those megacities in Latin America that Latino immigrants in the U.S. have come from in recent years. At the same time, Latin American cities have seen a relative growth of immigrants from other parts of the Western hemisphere. Many of the challenges facing Latin American immigrants and Latinos living in U.S. cities are comparable to those faced by underprivileged populations, including immigrants and asylum-seekers in cities in Latin America. International immigrants will become increasingly important for the continued dynamism of Latin American cities. Those cities would do well to support the cultural and social institutions that helped Spanish, Jewish, Lebanese, and Palestinian immigrants to successfully incorporate in the recent past.

Urbanization in the United States of America accelerated between 1830 and 1930, going from being 9% to 56% urbanized. After more rapid growth from 1940 to 1970, urbanization slowed over the next four decades, stabilizing at 81% urban as of 2010 (Boustan and Shertzer 2013). The U.S., long viewed as a land of mobile fortune seekers, has seen a steady decline in the rate at which its population relocates. Since the 1980s, most moves have been short-distance, with people moving out of cities into nearby suburbs (Boustan and Shertzer 2013). In 2022, the urbanization rate was around 83% (CSS 2022). With little room and desire for further large rural-to-urban

migration, the U.S. needs international migration (Dietz, Li, and Castañeda 2023).

The biggest change has been in the offshoring of manufacturing to places where U.S. companies can pay less for labor, but this has made the U.S. more unequal by removing many good-paying jobs (Castañeda and Shemesh 2020; Portes and Armony 2022). The neoliberal policies that started with Reagan resulted in greater margins for Wall Street but less industrial jobs in the U.S., less internal migration in the United States, and much larger internal migration in China (Green 2024).

An impressive 27% of the population has moved over long distances within China in recent decades. Urbanization rates grew from 19.39% in 1980 to 65.22% in 2022. The percentage of the Chinese labor force working in agriculture fell from around 33.5% in 2012 to 24.1% in 2022, with around 30% working in manufacturing, with the largest growth in the Chinese economy overall happening in the service sector. With over 376 million internal migrants as of 2020, the most in any country in absolute numbers, China had more than the combined 281 million international migrants, 26.4 million refugees, and 55 million internally displaced persons due to violence in the rest of the world in 2020. More people migrated within China than across international borders globally, highlighting the importance of studying internal and international migration simultaneously (Dietz, Li, and Castañeda 2023). Nonetheless, as of 2024, the effects of the lockdowns stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic, new Washington policies (placing tariffs in some imports from China and favoring increase manufacturing in the U.S.), and “nearshoring” and “friendshoring” (resulting in the relocation of some manufacturing to closer countries such as Mexico and Central America or to allied countries), have resulted in less economic growth in China, lower human mobility, and lower increases in urbanization rates.

III. City Residents = Citizens

City-states or city leagues were common in history. While contemporary global cities are part of larger countries, global cities sometimes put their capital accumulation and growth needs first, even when at odds with the national interest (Sassen 2001). After the American and French revolutions and the rise of the nation-state model and its global spread (Wimmer and Feinstein 2010), cities became part of larger national units in much of the world. Urban residents had to increasingly plead to the national government for permission to be legal residents, and foreign-born residents had to request to be naturalized as citizens of the state in question (Ngai 2004; Weil 2008). This arrangement between the state and its citizens has become naturalized in recent decades. Thus, international migrants, who are often by definition non-citizens, must fight in many arenas: abstract political theory, imagined homogeneous communities, public opinion, police, and other state agents, in order to exercise their right to inhabit the city as equals. By living their daily lives in the city and interacting with family, employers, service providers, education and government bureaucrats, immigrants and their offspring are de facto citizens, but the reification of the nation-state often denies them this reality de jure (Castañeda 2012).

Recent changes have occurred to this linear relation between citizens and state. Cities in the European Union (Schengen area) must accept other European citizens, and some cities even accept some "extra-communitarian" inhabitants as legal residents as soon as they register with the local police station (e.g., Barcelona). Cities also have the power to grant practical citizenship (e.g., New York, Barcelona) or not to (e.g., Phoenix, Paris). The extent of immigrant sanctuary cities is exaggerated by proponents and critics, yet the idea holds water comparatively and could potentially be fully realized, as it had been historically. These truly democratic policies of inclusion of all citizens could be enacted top-down by enlightened technocrats or be demanded bottom-up by grassroots self-organizing, mobilization, and immigrant organizations. The right to the city means the ability to be in a city and enjoy public spaces and services, as well as the potential to shape their city by their collective actions

(Lefebvre 1968; Mitchell 2003; Harvey 2008). This may sound utopian, but historically, it has often been the case.

Discussions about immigration in academia and the public sphere tend to be of two types: 1) immigrants, especially undocumented ones, are constructed as illegal, antithetic to the nation-state, a threat to national security and cultural integrity; they are framed as foreign bodies to a national society, eccentricities to the nation-state; people that one would wish would go back to their "natural" homes (Sayad 2004; Weil 2008; Castañeda 2019). 2) On the other side, immigrants are often seen as helpless victims trapped between an economic demand for cheap labor and a political system that denies their rights. While the origins of these polar views are understandable sociologically, they hide the complexities of real immigrants' everyday lives.

The legally and socially constructed label of "illegal" cloaks important forms of de facto or everyday citizenship and urban belonging (Castañeda 2018a). Even when keeping transnational links with their communities of origin, after some time in their new places of residence, immigrants become embedded in local jobs, commuting routes, kin and friendship networks, local institutions, and transnational commitments (Michael P. Smith and Guarnizo 1998; Michael Peter Smith 2003). They are active consumers who patronize local restaurants and businesses and pay for rent, groceries, transportation, and utilities, stimulating the economy. They may participate in immigrant enclaves and start businesses (Castañeda 2021). Thus, immigrants often participate in formal or informal chambers of commerce where they contact local politicians and bureaucrats and thereby exercise some political power. For example, candidates running for public office in New York often meet with immigrant business groups and community organizations to look for their support even though some of the members and constituents of these groups cannot vote (Jones-Correa 1998). This is also increasingly the case in Barcelona, where many political candidates look to gain the support of new immigrants, even when sometimes their public rhetoric is against illegal immigration. The Parisian case

is the opposite, even though most people of foreign origin can vote. Politicians are reluctant to address immigrants and their children as a group since the media and opponents would negatively portray this as going against the nation.

Some traditional political theories and legalistic approaches overemphasize legal national citizenship, yet an analytical view shows that citizenship may appear *de facto* even when lacking *de jure*. This does not mean that legal citizenship is unimportant, nor does it deny that those without citizenship are potentially more prone to abuses and deportation. Nevertheless, immigrants may act as practical citizens by participating in the labor market, raising families, paying taxes, participating in religious communities, volunteering, doing civil or social work, working for government agencies, acting as labor representatives or community organizers, forming community and neighborhood associations, speaking at public events and in the media in their language and that of their new country. Immigrant rights movements and organizations have an explicit political agenda. While they rarely see all their claims addressed, they still act as political interest groups and can influence policy making, thereby acting as citizen groups, even when many of their members may be undocumented or legal residents without the right to vote. The point here is that political activity includes much more than voting.

Who can participate in political and communal activities also varies across time and space. In New York, residents and parents of school children need not be citizens or legal residents to vote in school board elections or to serve on community boards (Jones-Correa 1998; Board of Elections 2011). There have also been city council resolutions to introduce resolutions to allow non-citizens to vote in mayoral and local elections. In the same way, Jordi Hereu, former Mayor of Barcelona, called for Moroccan immigrants to be allowed to vote in municipal elections (if the Moroccan government reciprocated), "In the citizenship-building process, as well as all the social aspects, it is also necessary to work on political rights, so everyone can express themselves in the municipal elections," said the Mayor in an official visit to Morocco (Ajuntament de Barcelona

2009). On the contrary, Paris requires citizenship or residency papers even for private sector transactions such as renting an apartment or signing a cell phone contract.

In New York, some landlords prefer to rent to undocumented Mexican renters because they pay the rent on time, and due to their immigration status, they do not want to cause any trouble or demand too much. Furthermore, they often show a "do-it-yourself" attitude regarding apartment repairs and emergencies (Fuentes 2007; Thompson 2007). Through their formal and informal economic activity and contributing their labor to fix up housing in bad condition, immigrant groups have revitalized whole neighborhoods in economic decline, which are often subsequently gentrified by urban planners and the middle classes. This has been the case in El Raval and downtown Barcelona (Serra del Pozo 2006; 2018; Qu and Spaans 2009), neighborhoods throughout New York like the Lower East Side (Zukin 2010), and Eastern Paris (Pinçon and Pinçon-Charlot 2004; 2009). Immigrants move to dangerous and decaying neighborhoods because of their affordability, and they change these neighborhoods. Immigrants are often precursors to neighborhood revitalization by making neighborhoods safer. Immigrants make these areas more appealing to middle-class people by opening restaurants and stores. The paradox is that by improving the living conditions and cultural and economic offerings of urban areas, immigrants are often displaced involuntarily because of increasing prices and pressures brought about by gentrification. So, while greatly shaping the city and making areas more livable, the ultimate benefits are often enjoyed by someone else, with a legal right to the city, access to highly paid jobs, and some leisure time to consume the new and increasingly expensive and exclusive services around. Migrants often move again willingly within their new countries or even to third ones, but their children may benefit from living in those or other gentrifying neighborhoods in their youth, especially those who become or stay middle class.

Dense associational fields can be seen as indicators of the degree of immigrants' integration. While not all immigrants are part of

immigrant associations due to fear, a lack of time, interest, or resources, the health and profile of immigrant rights organizations can serve as a proxy for the tolerance of cities towards immigrants. The existence of certified and tolerated immigrant and pro-immigrant human rights organizations creates discursive fields and forums to propose a right to the city for minorities and immigrants, despite national citizenship, and thus for everyone. Inclusive institutional discourses, including those around interculturalism, reflect the de facto immigrant urban citizenship in the cities where they live, work, and conduct family and economic activities. Thus, they contribute to and constitute an integral part of their communities.

In the future, climate change may result in much larger population movements than we have experienced in the last decades, with the need for some whole towns and city populations to relocate. The most practical, fair, and easy way to keep the political rights of those facing displacement would be to tie citizenship to the place of residence once more and not to the place of birth. People would pay taxes and must follow the laws of the places they relocate to.

Different state-society relationships, citizenship ideological models, civil society, and institutional arrangements have different effects on the larger minority groups in these different cities (Castañeda 2018a). Sanctuary and welcoming cities exist because of national policies and borders. These cities are defined as sanctuary cities proactively in order to reduce national policies that are toxic to cities, such as decreasing international migration. Each city has something to learn from other cities, things to improve, and things to celebrate. Mediterranean cities have a long history of interdependence through trade and migration. In the next section, we look at their contemporary actions.

IV. Urbanization Processes and Migration Governance

The Mediterranean is a good space to analyze how the strong interface between urbanization and migration shapes urban

governance capacity (Zapata-Barrero 2020). Mediterranean cities such as Barcelona, Marseille, and Tunis have experienced spectacular population growth (European Commission, Joint Research Centre 2019; Zapata-Barrero 2023). Many northern Mediterranean cities have grown with migrants from the global south, and southern Mediterranean cities are also experiencing an inflow of migrants from sub-Saharan Africa. Urban populations around the Mediterranean increased from 152 million in 1970 to 315 million in 2010 and will continue to grow. The total population of Mediterranean countries grew from 281 million in 1970 to 419 million in 2000 and to 472 million in 2010 (UNEP 2017). Four countries account for around 60% of the Mediterranean's total population: Egypt (82 million), Turkey (72 million), France (63 million) and Italy (60 million). The population of coastal regions grew from approximately 100 million in 1980 to 150 million in 2005 (ECOSOC 2015). Population concentration in the coastal zones is highest in the western Mediterranean, the western coast of the Adriatic Sea, the east coast of the eastern region of the Aegean, and the Nile Delta. Nonetheless, the Mediterranean only has two megacities (cities with over ten million inhabitants): Cairo, with 20 million (expected to be 25 million in 2030), and Istanbul, with 14.7 million (expected to be 17 million in 2030) (ECOSOC 2018).

In the upcoming years, Mediterranean cities will face at least four common challenges. The first is relatively low economic and human resources, poor or unreliable data collection (not disaggregated enough at the local level), and poor policy-making capacities. Most often, cities find themselves isolated from upper levels of government. Governance capacity deficits are also caused internally by rigid legislative frameworks, lack of enforcement, and political deadlocks.

The second structural challenge is how to address current racist practices by learning from a long history of coexistence. Past trade and knowledge exchanges have nurtured Mediterranean cities. Therefore, a historical perspective can shed light on how to overcome challenges wrongly perceived as “unprecedented.”

Monuments, street names, and historical narratives can improve the public understanding of immigrant contributions. Mediterranean cities are made up of different migratory layers. There are dominant narratives on immigration that reflect current and past power hierarchies. Post-colonial history has not yet been fully recognized in the city narratives of most northern Mediterranean cities, which are plagued by colonial iconography structuring socioeconomic inequalities and mindsets. Furthermore, in most cities, tourism is a subliminal colonial force.

A third challenge Mediterranean cities face is managing the reception and assistance of migrants and refugees. Mediterranean cities are departure, transit, and destination hubs constantly shaped by current geopolitical, national, and environmental factors (i.e., the pandemic, climate change, natural disasters, wars). Given Euro-Mediterranean politics, policies externalizing immigration control, and conditional national strategies, most southern Mediterranean cities are becoming immigrant cities, experiencing a fast urbanization sprawl that cannot be fully addressed in terms of proactive urban planning due to a lack of governance capacities. Many northern cities have been promoting migrant rights and raising awareness about the barriers and discrimination immigrants face. There are various partnerships with civil society organizations to tackle immigrant integration challenges, including desks informing immigrants about available services such as legal advice, access to healthcare and psychological support, housing, education, and empowerment to enter the job market. Nonetheless, governance infrastructures are often deficient in dealing with migration challenges, lack financial resources for networking and promoting multi-directional dialogue, and collect insufficient data to inform policymaking.

A fourth challenge is increased inequality. Cities face these challenges with limited financial resources, capacities, and competencies. The most visible ones are related to climate change, urbanization, and financial crisis resilience, together with more political and social instabilities, most prominently in the Southern rim of the Mediterranean. Many urbanization issues are related to rigid

housing regulations. Housing availability is a source of competition. These challenges exacerbate social inequalities and polarization through gentrification and the segregation of poverty in certain neighborhoods. As a result, racism, xenophobia, stigmatization of vulnerability, and the normalization of exclusionary practices continue to be an urban challenge. Some North African countries have opted to build cities from scratch; for instance, Egypt plans to build 30 new fourth-generation cities in the coming years to house the country's growing population and reduce pressure on existing cities.

Cities are at the frontline of refugee and migration integration, as most refugees and migrants move to urban centers hoping to find a sense of community, safety, and economic independence. Considering the shortages in governmental responses to the new challenges posed by migration, the NGOs and associations seek to position themselves as legitimate stakeholders through humanitarian activities, providing services, awareness-raising against illegal migration, advocacy, supporting diversity and interculturality within cities for an inclusive approach to refugee and migrant's welcome and hosting yet the majority do not have sufficient financial and human resources to do so to the scale and duration that would be preferable.

V. Conclusion

Cities have been places of immigration since birth and cannot stop being so unless they decline. Cities are the space of arrival and interaction with old-timers (Tshitshi Ndouba 2020). In order to succeed internally and externally, cities have to have large populations fed reliably by agricultural workers connected to them politically or through stable trade. Historically, they needed city dwellers with different professions, which formed the tax base and the ability to attract and conscript soldiers for local protection, expansion, colonization, and national defense.

Where people move to has much to do with economic systems and capital flows, which are not contained by state borders. Likewise, the literature on global cities shows how cities sometimes have goals that may differ from those of the state in which they are located (Sassen 2001). New York, London, and Tokyo are wealthy because they can attract substantial national and international human and economic capital. Other cities jockeying to become global cities and regional hubs need the right combination of location, policy environment, safety, rule of law, and attractiveness to become one. Miami, Dubai, and Singapore have gone to long lengths to become new global cities (Portes and Armony 2022). Climate change and political stability will tell whether those cities can become and remain globalized. Geopolitical changes can also weaken long-powerful cities such as London after Brexit and Hong Kong recently. The future prominence of Sao Paulo, Mexico City, Nairobi, Lagos, or Manila will depend on whether local governance can provide employment, basic services, water, energy, and security to its residents and attract large numbers of immigrants. Conceiving a world where cities have no new internal or international migrants (or people moving out) is ahistorical and unrealistic. Rather than creating policies and paranoia about groups of newcomers, cities should realize that they are in domestic and international competition for new residents and should behave accordingly, welcoming and integrating them for mutual gain.

*A version of this chapter will appear as “Migration, Urbanization, and Inclusion” by Ernesto Castañeda, Ricard Zapata, and Kevin Beck in *The Oxford Handbook of Urban Sociology* Edited by Leonard Nevarez and Ryan Centner.

Thanks to Avery Hyra for final copyediting of this version of the chapter.

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2 A Life infusion: Migrants, Cities, and Economic Activity

By Marshall Plane, Ernesto Castañeda, and Daniel Jenks

I. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we argue the case that immigrants are an important part of any urban area's vitality by providing economic and demographic buffering (providing a larger workforce and keeping population steady or growing when the natural birth rate is declining), they also bring dynamic capacities that can strengthen a region's ability to absorb, adapt, and transform in response to various challenges.

The only constant in cities is perpetual change; through the decades, buildings come up and down, and people move in and out. Cities are good at adapting to changing conditions; their infrastructure and landscape provide a built record of population and economic booms and lulls. Migrants are uniquely important in helping cities grow, stay healthy, and respond and recover to environmental, economic, and external shocks.

II. MIGRANTS AS RECIPIENTS OF SHOCKS

Urban residents' vulnerability to shocks varies within cities depending on factors such as economic status, their social and political capital, and the built environment they inhabit. On all these counts, migrants are more likely to be more vulnerable—more likely

to lose their jobs amid an economic downturn, to come under attack amid a political crisis, and to be left homeless by a natural disaster. This is, of course, only true in the aggregate. There are many native-born residents who occupy a marginal social position within cities, and there are plenty of migrants who do not. Migrants' marginalization can be greatly reduced by factors such as length of residence, participation in organizations, acceptance by the local population, starting businesses, or having higher incomes. Indeed, in most global cities, the professional class is increasingly composed of migrants themselves.

Nonetheless, migrants are overall more likely to reside on the periphery of urban life. While migrant labor is crucial for the economic vitality of cities worldwide, migrant laborers themselves are sometimes treated as disposable during times of hardship. Migrants are more likely to be informally, temporarily, or self-employed. They also tend to work in industries where the demand for labor fluctuates greatly.

In post-industrial cities dominated by the information economy, white-collar workers, whether foreign or U.S.-born, often use their disposable income to consume luxuries or outsource labor-intensive tasks, creating niches for "low-skilled" migrant workers to fill. Under Sassen's global city model, the urban managerial-professional class relies on migrant labor for both essential and luxury services. The livelihood of migrant service workers and small business owners, in turn, depends partly on the spending power of those professionals. This arrangement is an uneven one. Yet, for decades, a consistent supply of domestic and international migrant labor has been virtually guaranteed by the ever-increasing labor needs of global cities. Immigrants with relatively little education or no locally validated credentials often work in food production, care work, services, delivery, small-scale industrial production, and other labor-intensive tasks. Their low wages subsidize other residents, generate profits for their employers, and produce local economic growth.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, Silicon Valley lost thousands of tech jobs to Austin, Texas, which enjoyed a major boom before seeing significant job losses itself as the tech sector slowed down from 2022 onwards (Bosquette 2025). When an economic downturn leads to affluent residents either leaving a city or reducing their spending, the industries that cater to them suffer. This can mean fewer customers for restaurants and reduced hours for their employees, fewer appointments for beauty salon workers, and fewer rides for taxi and rideshare drivers--all of whom are disproportionately migrants. At the same time, immigrants working on these sectors being deported impacts city residents who use these services.

Many migrants work in construction, where the availability of jobs depends on the economic climate under which investors are willing to undertake major capital projects. Economic downturns, whether local or national, can lead to construction activity grinding to a halt. This disproportionately affects migrant construction workers, many of whom already face unstable employment as day laborers or temporary contract hires. Native-born construction workers are more insulated from these shocks. State and local governments in the United States often use public works projects with union labor requirements to generate stable employment for working-class constituents. Migrant workers, whose employment is more often informal and whose communities have less political capital, are less likely to benefit from such projects. Their employment thus tends to skew towards private-sector construction, where job protections are weaker and economic activity is more volatile (Aysa-Lastra and Cachón 2015). When private construction slows, migrant workers have less disposable income to spend at businesses in their communities, whose employees and owners are often migrants themselves. The harm from economic downturns can thus concentrate in migrant communities, creating miniature recessions at the neighborhood and community levels (Villarreal 2014).

By diminishing cities' economic attractiveness to migrants, economic deceleration can reverse long-term trends of both internal and international migration. Less migration further cools the economy, creating a negative feedback loop. For example, after decades of steady rural-to-urban migration in the United States, the Great Depression led to millions of laid-off urban workers returning to their families' farms (Boyd 2022). Likewise, a net inflow of 3.4 million Mexican immigrants to the United States from 2000 to 2007 was followed by a net outflow of 1.1 million from 2008 to 2014 as the Great Recession destroyed many migrants' ability to earn steady incomes and send remittances (Villarreal 2014).

People with experience of internal and international migration are more willing to seek greener pastures in other cities — after all, they have uprooted their lives in response to hardship or in search of opportunities at least once before. Paradoxically, this may put native-born residents at a long-term disadvantage when local economic downturns prove to be long-lasting, as they have in countless former manufacturing cities in deindustrializing nations. Those with generational roots in these struggling cities are kept in place by familial and emotional ties. Meanwhile, migrants are more likely to follow the jobs wherever they go. In their book *Streets of Gold*, economists Leah Boustan and Ran Abramitzky (2022) find that children of immigrants in the United States are more upwardly mobile than children of native-born parents. They attribute this, in part, to the fact that immigrants tend to concentrate in the most economically dynamic parts of the country. This economic activity attracts more immigrants, who in turn increase the economic and cultural vitality of these areas, creating a virtuous cycle.

III. CITIES EITHER GROW OR SHRINK

Key to urban vitality is a city's ability to adapt to ever-changing circumstances. It should be no surprise that migrants are frequently at the forefront of cities' explicit and implicit efforts to adapt; immigrants are, by definition, adapters themselves. Migration is an

adaptation mechanism that requires individuals to adapt to life in a new environment.

Throughout human history, urban growth has always been driven primarily by migration, particularly rural-to-urban migration. Whereas children are an economic asset for farm families, for urban families, they are more of an economic liability, given mandatory education and laws forbidding child labor. Natural population growth driven by high birth rates has consequently always taken place primarily in rural areas; cities historically grew by absorbing surplus rural population. The Industrial Revolution turned the steady trickle of rural-to-urban migration into a river, and globalization led to the large-scale international migration that enables today's cosmopolitan cities to thrive. But the fundamental importance of migration to continued urban growth remains unchanged. Nonetheless, not all cities receive immigrants, nor do they do it at a constant pace.

Perhaps the best-known example of a city successfully recovering from a crisis is New York City, which in the 1970s faced declining population, decaying housing, rising crime, and a bankrupt government. Industrial jobs and many White residents left New York in droves, depleting the city's tax base and leaving many Black and Puerto Rican residents neglected and underserved. Coincidentally, the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act had recently reopened America's doors to immigrants from outside Western Europe. New arrivals were willing to live and work in neighborhoods that native-born Whites increasingly considered unacceptable. Enterprising immigrants quickly found economic niches, providing services to both Manhattan's white-collar commuters and working-class communities in the outer boroughs. New York's iconic delis were revived and reinvented by Dominican and later Yemeni families pooling their hard-earned money. Albanians took over the city's pizzerias as Italian Americans decamped for the suburbs. Koreans turned shuttered storefronts in outer-borough food deserts into much-needed purveyors of fresh fruits and vegetables.

While New York's native-born population declined by 250,000 during the 1980s and 1990s, this was more than offset by the

arrival of 1.2 million immigrants (NYC Department of City Planning 2017). These new arrivals added billions of dollars to the city's tax base, started new businesses, fixed up abandoned buildings and homes, and added watchful eyes to once-desolate streets. Immigration added an estimated \$500 billion to the city's property tax base, helping revive city finances (Vigdor and Valvekhar 2014).

The city's murder rate fell by 82% between 1990 and 2012, and the decline was greatest in the police precincts that saw the largest increase in their immigrant populations (Vigdor and Valvekhar 2014). To a large degree, immigrants made New York City attractive to live in once again. By the 2000s, the city was again experiencing net-positive domestic migration, with transplants drawn not only by career opportunities but by the lifestyle the city offers — a lifestyle made possible by the immigrants who work the city's most essential jobs, run its small businesses, and lived there through its most dangerous years while their growing presence gradually improved safety. Ironically, as the exciting lifestyle and improved quality of life draw more affluent residents to New York's outer boroughs, many immigrant communities now face displacement from the neighborhoods they helped revive. This is part of the ever-changing city landscape.

From the 1950s through the 1970s, countless other American cities faced the simultaneous shocks of deindustrialization, White flight, and destructive urban planning. Nine of the ten largest cities in the United States in 1950 would experience population decline over the next three decades. Only New York has recovered from this decline and surpassed its 1950 population — a recovery driven, as mentioned, entirely by immigration (Salvo 2011). The population loss in cities like Boston, Philadelphia, and Chicago would have been far greater were it not for post-1965 immigrants (Salvo 2011).

In many smaller Rust Belt cities, refugee resettlement has provided an unexpected counterbalance to a population decline that would have been difficult to stem otherwise. Utica, New York, lost over 40,000 residents over the second half of the 20th century as manufacturing jobs disappeared. This trend was halted in the 1990s

by the arrival of refugees from Bosnia, Somalia, Iraq, and Myanmar, who now collectively make up a quarter of Utica's population (Hartman 2022). Refugees quickly began repairing dilapidated homes and opening new businesses. Regional manufacturing experienced a partial resurgence with the founding of Chobani Yogurt by local Kurdish immigrant Hamdi Ulukaya, who centered production in a previously abandoned factory near Utica (Hartman 2022).

Similar stories have taken place across the American Rust Belt. Schenectady, New York, saw its economy hollowed out after the closure of a General Electric plant. Homes across the city sat abandoned without willing buyers. In response, Mayor Albert Jurczynski undertook a concerted effort in the 1990s to recruit Guyanese immigrants to come upstate and purchase homes in Schenectady. Thousands took him up on the offer, reducing population decline and stabilizing home equity for longtime residents (Bellick, Barton, Friedman, and Douglas 2023). Likewise, in the long-struggling cities of eastern Pennsylvania — Reading, Lancaster, Allentown, Bethlehem, Wilkes-Barre — the arrival of Dominicans and other Latinos seeking a cheaper alternative to New York City has helped blunt sharp population decline (Pottie-Sherman 2020).

The importance of the demographic resilience enabled by migrants is hard to overstate. Under today's growth-dependent economic model, population decline is a catastrophic prospect for cities. As residents leave or fail to be replaced, municipal tax revenues fall, straining the capacity of local governments to maintain essential services such as public transit, education, sanitation, and emergency response. Commercial activity declines as customer bases shrink, leading to business closures and higher vacancy rates. With fewer city residents, physical infrastructure, from housing stock to transportation networks, is underutilized and gradually deteriorates; public spaces become less frequented, weakening informal social interactions and reducing perceptions of safety. Cities facing sustained population loss may find it increasingly difficult to attract new residents or investment, perpetuating a cycle of decline.

Looking to the future, population decline may present a challenge to cities in the developed world, where natural population growth is already near or below zero. Indeed, countries like Germany and Italy would have already experienced population decline over the past quarter-century were it not for international migration and the arrival of people displaced by armed conflict elsewhere. While the effects of depopulation have thus far been felt mainly in rural areas. The largest cities are still growing in rapidly aging, low-immigration countries like Japan and Poland. Nevertheless, internal migration to cities will eventually dry up, leaving those cities' growth entirely dependent on international migrants.

Many demographers, sociologists, and economists agree that the Global North needs migrants to prevent population decline. But declining natural growth is no longer restricted to wealthy nations. Middle-income countries in much of Asia and Latin America now have below-replacement fertility and will eventually need to attract migrants as their populations age. For now, their populations remain relatively young, and it will be several decades before outright decline begins to occur. Yet a future where the number of potential migrants is insufficient to offset cities' aging and declining populations does not seem at all distant or implausible. Sub-Saharan Africa will be the main source of human population growth throughout the 21st century, but it, too, is in the early stages of a demographic transition. The global population is projected to stagnate or decline by the end of the century. In the short run, migration is essential to sustaining urban growth; and in the long run, a new economic model less dependent on growth may be needed.

IV. LATIN AMERICA AND ASIA

Most of the Global South is more familiar with the opposite problem: rapid population growth driven primarily by rural-to-urban migration. The inability of city infrastructure to keep pace with this growth has resulted in harsh conditions in the informal settlements that surround cities from São Paulo to Kinshasa to Mumbai.

Displacement of the rural population — whether induced by conflict, weather, or market forces — can, in turn, create service and infrastructural pressures for cities with an accelerating pace of immigration.

Cities have attempted to deal with this rapid growth in various ways. Under Mao Zedong, China attempted to restrict internal migration the same way other nations restrict international migration; these restrictions largely stopped being enforced during the 1980s reforms as industrial growth created massive demand for labor in major cities (Dietz, Li and Castaneda 2023). Informal settlements were tolerated until Chinese cities were sufficiently well-resourced to demolish slums and move their residents to high-rise public housing developments—the same model followed by many American and European cities in the 20th century. Other cities like Cairo and Addis Ababa have similarly focused on relocation, but lacking China's vigorous economic growth, they have been unable to develop enough high-quality housing to offset the emergence of new slums (Fahmi and Sutton 2013).

Because of its disruptiveness and the often-poor quality and isolating design of new housing, international development groups now discourage the relocation approach, instead advocating for improvements to existing residences (Saha, Gupta, and Banerji 2024). But many cities remain too poor to provide such support. Some, like Kinshasa and Port-au-Prince, have made little effort to stop the spread of informal settlements. Others, such as Lagos, simply periodically demolish slums without providing new residences for their former inhabitants (Amakihe 2017). The newly displaced people are left with no choice but to repeat their months of hard work patching together their own homes. By the time the bulldozers return, the community they originally demolished may have multiplied in size as hundreds — in the case of Lagos, thousands — of rural migrants arrive on the city outskirts each day (Amakihe 2017).

In wealthy and increasingly middle-income countries, where urban infrastructure is more robust and where migration flows are

largely international and thus more regulated, migration does not pose the same challenge. Even so, there are cases where particularly large and rapid migrant influxes can create a short-term imbalance between the supply of jobs, housing, and public services and the needs of new arrivals. Once again, migrants are pivotal in cities' ability to absorb such shocks, as existing immigrant communities are usually at the forefront of efforts to assist newcomers. Cities with long traditions of immigration are therefore at an advantage in successfully receiving sudden migrant influxes, thanks to their past experience and the willingness of established immigrants to help their compatriots.

Beginning in 2022, New York City famously had to convert some hotels into improvised shelters to accommodate migrants and asylum seekers bused by governors from the US-Mexico border. The provision of city services to the 34,000 Venezuelan asylum seekers who settled in New York from 2022 to 2024 received nationwide attention. Yet few outsiders noticed the nearly 53,000 Ecuadorian or 32,000 Chinese asylum seekers who came to the city during the same period (TRAC 2025). They were quietly absorbed by New York's large Ecuadorian and Chinese communities. In the absence of similar Venezuelan communities, the city bureaucracy became responsible for providing new arrivals with a landing spot while they sought stable employment. Other new arrivals continued finding "shelter" in more traditional places: the couches of friends and relatives; the basements of churches, mosques, and gurdwaras; the cramped backrooms of hometown associations (Hu and Singer ditto). Such social networks and institutions quietly relieved tremendous amounts of pressure on New York City as it received roughly 322,000 asylum seekers over the course of three years.

V. MIGRATION AND CLIMATE RESILIENCE

Looming large over discussions of cities and migration is the impact of climate change on both. Increased frequency of extreme weather events has already begun to create changes in the feasibility of

agriculture, such as increasingly frequent floods and droughts that destroy farmers' livelihoods, the impact of natural disasters, and the livability of some places that could have a host of shocks that promise to accelerate migration, particularly from rural areas in the Global South.

While "climate refugees" are often portrayed as masses of people who will flee northward towards developed countries, the impact of this displacement may be felt most acutely in Global South cities as the arrival of migrants from the countryside accelerates. The inability of these cities to provide adequate living conditions may, in turn, push people to migrate northward. However, it is crucial to note that Global North nations will have the ability to shut the door on climate refugees, no matter how much death and suffering this decision might cause. Global South countries will not be similarly able to stop families from neighboring countries or their own people from fleeing to major cities.

These inequalities are fundamental to understanding the interplay between migration, climate, and urban resilience. Immigrants as well as ethnic and racial minorities tend to be partially excluded and have, on average, a lower socioeconomic position, inhabit neighborhoods with fewer services, and are often more exposed to pollution, flooding, and faltering services. Urban planning can greatly mitigate or exacerbate residents' vulnerability to disasters. This is particularly true in poor countries where many neighborhoods lack formal services altogether; it is also true in the United States, where urban design reflects a history of systemic racism. Residents of the "floating slums" built on the swamps surrounding Lagos, or the cheaply built neighborhoods on Houston's floodplains, are more likely to lose their homes amid hurricanes and floods. Both are disproportionately made up of migrants.

The relationship between two climatically vulnerable places—Honduras and New Orleans—is a case study in the interplay of climate, migration, inequality, and relations between rich and poor countries. The Honduran economy is dependent on agricultural exports, such as bananas, which, for much of the 20th century,

entered the United States primarily via the port of New Orleans. These economic ties turned into human ties, as New Orleans became a leading destination for Hondurans seeking a better life. Hurricane Mitch, which in 1998 killed 11,000 people in Central America and uprooted hundreds of thousands of lives, accelerated the pace of Honduran migration to New Orleans (Daser 2023). When Hurricane Katrina laid waste to that city seven years later, thousands of Honduran immigrants found themselves displaced once again (Daser 2023).

In the aftermath of Katrina, the plight of New Orleans' predominantly Black population drew nationwide attention to environmental racism. The city had been losing population for decades, but it lost over a quarter of its population in the five years following the hurricane. Yet the city's Latino population grew by over 57% during the same period as Latino migrants, many of them undocumented, headed in large numbers to the Gulf Coast to rebuild the damage from Hurricane Katrina (Daser 2023). In New Orleans, most of these workers were Honduran. Even after rebuilding jobs dried up, large numbers of Hondurans and other Latinos stayed and started families in New Orleans, helping mitigate the negative effects of population decline. Only thanks to their hard labor was one of America's most iconic and historic cities brought back from the thorough physical destruction it experienced, eventually recovering part of the population lost during Katrina.

Throughout the 2010s and 2020s, Honduras has been battered by several more hurricanes, pushing further migration to the United States. Though the U.S. federal government's response to hurricanes like Katrina and Maria has been deservedly criticized, it has the resources to accommodate displaced people and rebuild destroyed areas. In countries like Honduras, which lack such resources, the recovery process can take much longer, forcing people to seek a living abroad.

In the meantime, disasters in wealthier nations provide an economic opportunity for migrants. The increasing frequency of extreme weather events in the United States has led to the emergence

of disaster recovery firms that specialize in rebuilding. In need of a highly mobile labor force, these firms have come to primarily employ migrant workers, many of them undocumented (Stillman 2021). These workers have adopted a life of traversing the country in pursuit of the latest hurricane, tornado, or wildfire. Such strategies are likely to become increasingly common as the effects of climate change intensify. Migrant labor will be crucial in helping Global North cities prepare for and recover from extreme weather events. Poor nations, meanwhile, struggle to do the same, giving their people an even greater incentive to emigrate. Migration patterns already reflect the gaping global wealth inequality, and pressures from climate change may further increase or highlight these disparities.

VI. CONTRIBUTIONS TO NEW YORK CITY

Mayor Eric Adams claimed that new immigrants and asylum seekers would “destroy New York City” (Fitzsimmons 2023). In fact, our calculations in our recent working paper show New York City is just beginning to reap the benefits of this influx of hardworking people (Castañeda and Plane 2025). According to TRAC, have come to the city between 2022 and early 2025. We project that they will contribute \$8.6 billion annually to the local economy, assuming their wages and employment rates resemble those of New York's existing undocumented population. We came to this figure using existing estimates of the impact of low-education immigrant workers on business revenue and worker productivity.

Much of this revenue will flow to public coffers. Using previous studies of the fiscal impact of asylees and adjusting for differing wages and government spending in New York City, we estimate that the asylum-seeker population will pay \$962 million more in taxes than they receive in benefits per year. While New York bears most of the local costs of education, healthcare, and shelter, and this tax windfall will primarily go to the federal government, providing revenue for programs like Medicare and Social Security, most of the labor contributions and expenses stay in New York. If

ICE is allowed to wreak havoc on New York City through mass deportations, many of these benefits will be lost.

Previous waves of immigrants have similarly fled desperate situations, arrived with limited resources, faced nativist backlash, and yet still became vital contributors to the city's economy and culture. There's no reason to believe today's newcomers should be any different. With New York's U.S.-born population declining and demand for workers growing fastest in the industries most reliant on immigrant labor, they were arriving at an opportune time (Lisiecki 2024).

It is true that New York City spent substantial amounts on services for asylum seekers — a combined \$5.2 billion in fiscal years 2023 and 2024, with another \$4.5 billion budgeted for FY 2025 (NYC Comptroller's Office 2025). These costs were possibly inflated by Adams' "emergency" decision to suspend the competitive bidding requirements for contractors providing such services. The city comptroller's investigation found several egregious examples of overpayment (NYC Comptroller's Office 2024).

In total, budgeted spending on asylum seekers made up 4.2% of the FY 2025 budget (NYC Comptroller's Office 2024). Nonetheless, the majority stopped receiving emergency housing and became self-sufficient. Contributing over \$8.6 billion annually to the local economy once they are established, in purely economic terms, the money spent on their reception is an investment in the city's future.

Importantly, the upfront costs are not the product of an "open border" under the Biden administration. People coming to New York City from abroad is not a new phenomenon. In fact, the city's undocumented population was at its highest in 2012 at 611,000 and fell to 412,000 by 2022 (Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs 2022). Nor is the scale of the current influx unusual in recent times — during the 1990s, the city's foreign-born population grew at a higher annual rate than it has during the 2020s (NYC Department of City Planning 2013).

Rather, the recent difficulty housing asylum seekers is a unique case created by a confluence of factors: a political stunt that brought people in buses to cities where they lacked connections, a pre-existing housing shortage; an already-struggling shelter system unequipped to house new arrivals from humanitarian crises; lacking services for those experiencing homelessness; a lack of legal immigration pathways; and laws that prevent asylum seekers from working as soon as they apply for asylum.

In order to get a sense of how their economic integration is going, our research team at the Immigration Lab talked to asylum seekers outside shelters in Manhattan and in immigrant neighborhoods like Corona and Bushwick. We interviewed 50 people from eleven different countries over the course of December 2024 and January 2025, and then around 100 in the summer of 2025. These conversations suggest that migrants are steadily finding work and housing despite numerous obstacles.

Before claiming asylum, individuals must physically enter the U.S. For nearly everyone we spoke to, this involved taking on substantial debt to finance a deadly, months-long overland journey. This debt can be a major obstacle as people try to establish themselves in New York. For example, in 2023, John borrowed nearly \$30,000 to bring his family of five from Ecuador to the US-Mexico border. A mechanic by trade, he quickly found work repairing e-bikes at a workshop in Queens, earning \$1,200 a week. Yet over half of each paycheck goes to repaying his creditors back home (who have threatened to kill his parents should he miss a payment), leaving him unable to afford rent and trapping his family in the shelter system in the short term. He says he'll have paid off enough debt to move to an apartment in New Jersey in three months.

Lacking a sponsor in the U.S., crossing the border was John's only way to come. Had he been able to come directly from Quito to New York, his spending power would have been going to New York businesses instead of to human smugglers. After applying for asylum, people must wait 180 days before receiving a work permit (García 2024). Unless they have connections to support them, this effectively

forces people without family already in the U.S. or an off-the-books job offer to live off the state for six months.

In 2023, New York City began limiting stays in any one shelter to 60 days, forcing people to shuffle between different facilities (Sundaram 2024). Many migrants may not be informed that failing to report this change of address to USCIS within 10 days is a misdemeanor and can delay or derail their ability to get documents.

The experience of Carlos, who we spoke to outside a Manhattan shelter, exemplifies the bureaucratic absurdities that hold migrants back. Bused to New York City from Texas in late 2023 as part of Operation Lone Star, he immediately applied for asylum, citing political persecution in Venezuela. While waiting for his work permit, he bounced between different shelters and took on temporary construction and moving jobs. He says his lack of documentation allowed these employers to exploit him, frequently not paying him in full. Carlos told us that a relative in Oklahoma had found him a job in trucking, his original profession. “The moment my papers arrive, I’m going to Oklahoma,” he says. “They’re waiting for me.” He was supposed to get his work permit months ago, but had to restart the process when his address changed. He was most recently informed that his papers should arrive within 90 days.

People who are eager to work lingered in shelters at a financial cost, while crucial jobs across the country remain unfilled. The Independent Budget Office estimated that the cost of missed work authorizations for asylum seekers would reach up to \$1 billion in 2024 alone (IBO 2024). Even so, with U.S.-born workers rapidly aging, rising immigration did much to ease post-pandemic labor shortages, helping reduce inflation while maintaining economic growth (Cohen 2024). And asylum seekers are quietly integrating into the city’s economy. Of the 232,000 migrants who have passed through the shelter system, around 187,000 (81%) had moved out as of February 24, 2025 (Sundaram 2025).

Many interviewees had recently gotten their work permits and found employment. They expressed excitement about beginning to live independently and working towards the various dreams that

had kept them going through sweltering jungles and deserts. As asylum seekers increasingly fill the jobs that keep New York’s service-based economy moving, the investments made are paying off. It would be a human tragedy and an economic catastrophe for deportations to derail asylum seekers’ budding lives as New Yorkers.

Contrary to his early statements, Mayor Adams seems to better understand the situation today. Mayor Adams correctly said under oath in his opening statement during the congressional hearing on sanctuary cities on March 5, 2025, that crime in the city has declined, and “to be clear, a sanctuary city classification does not mean our city will ever be a safe haven for violent criminals. It also does not give New York City the authority to violate federal immigration laws... Immigrant New Yorkers, including those who are undocumented, pay billions of dollars in taxes and contribute billions more in spending power to our economy. Immigrants also play a vital role in the functioning of our city. This was on full display during the COVID-19 pandemic... various immigrant residents of our city worked to keep the city moving... many other businesses were able to function because of the commitment of our immigrant population” (Associated Press 2024). These asylum seekers are the newest New Yorkers and are key to the future of New York City. The same dynamic applies to other cities around the country and the world: whether politicians and civil society welcome newcomers or deport them or make things unlivable to force many to leave.

*A much shorter version of this chapter focusing on resilience will appear in the *Handbook on Migration and Cities* edited by Els de Graauw, Jan Rath, and Ceren Kulkul.

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3 Latinos in New York: New Immigrants Maintaining the City

By Ernesto Castañeda

This chapter concerns both immigrants to New York City from Latin America and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean, Latinos born in the city who move away, as well as those born in other parts of the country who move into the city. It describes the role of Latino migrants in New York's local culture, with a particular emphasis on the contributions of Latinos to the city's population and economic growth. Despite their significant role in New York City's metropolitan area, popular discussions of New York rarely take Latinos into account. New York's Latin population is comprised of diverse national origins, with major populations from Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Central America, and South America. The city has played a crucial role in creating, defining, redefining, and broadcasting Latinidad to the East Coast and the broader United States. How second-generation and third-generation Latinos fare in the city will deeply shape the future of both the city and the country. Along with Asians and Africans, people with origins in Latin America and the Caribbean have taken a similar role to that played in the past by Irish, Italian, and Eastern European Jewish immigrants. These newer immigrants from Latin America and elsewhere are simultaneously remaking and reproducing the culture and social fabric of New York. Maintaining the city as a hub for business and innovation and a magnet for people (including other Latinos) from across the country and around the world.

I. Introduction

This chapter makes a few points that are often overlooked: 1) Despite being a city of immigrants, many New Yorkers buy the anti-immigrant rhetoric they hear in the traditional and social media; 2) New York is an important Latino city. Latinos in the area are predominantly U.S.-born, and regardless of their origin, they identify as New Yorkers; 3) The unit of analysis should be the larger New York metropolitan area where many Latinos and immigrants live and commute from and not just the city proper; 4) For the city to maintain its paramount commercial standing, it needs to be remade and maintained by continued flows of capital, professionals, and highly exploitable labor; forgetting this is both a sign of success and a cause of xenophobia; 5) Thinking of Latinos as living in “ethnic enclaves” is not an accurate social-scientific approach when thinking about Latinos in the New York metropolitan area. It is essential to consider heterogeneity. National origin, whether internal or international migration, immigrant generation, education levels, and social class, are important axes of difference. I discuss these issues in turn, while providing general geographic and demographic descriptions.

1) Why are some New Yorkers Anti-Immigrant?

There is the question of whether Latinos and other recent immigrants represent a remaking or a continuation of New York City. My argument is that this represents a return to normal. Historically, New York used to have a larger proportion of immigrants than it does today, with a decrease following World War II, as I explain below.

New York has not been immune to national anti-immigrant moral panics and to holding its own nativist groups. From 1820 to 1860, a visible number of European immigrants, some escaping famine in Ireland and elsewhere, landed in New York Harbor. In 1855, around half of New York City’s population was foreign-born, and over 1 in

4 was Irish Catholic. Protestant New Yorker Samuel F. Morse co-founded the Native American Democratic Association in 1835; thereafter, “nativist” clubs targeted Irish and German Catholics for their religion. The American Party was quietly founded in 1853, also known as the “Know-Nothing” party because members would deny knowledge or membership if interrogated. These views became law through restrictive federal immigration legislation, such as the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act and the 1924 National Origins Act, which remained in place until 1965. The Red Scare of the 1920s resulted in the arrests and deportation of labor leaders (MCNY 2025).

A hundred years later, the 2024 elections show a slight shift to the right, including in traditionally immigrant neighborhoods, putatively because of nativism (Jean 2025). The public response to the visible presence of new groups of immigrants after the COVID pandemic is a return to previous waves of nativism and xenophobia. For example, 9/11 brought a rise in nationalism, along with widespread islamophobia, the war on terror, and a general moral panic towards immigration, some of which is still mainstream and thriving. The growing nationalism following 9/11 created a certain unification of the country and especially bipartisanship in Congress, which decreased following Obama’s election in 2008. Immigrant numbers also decreased slightly following the 2007-2008 financial crisis, and with the deportation of approximately 3 million people by the Obama administration.

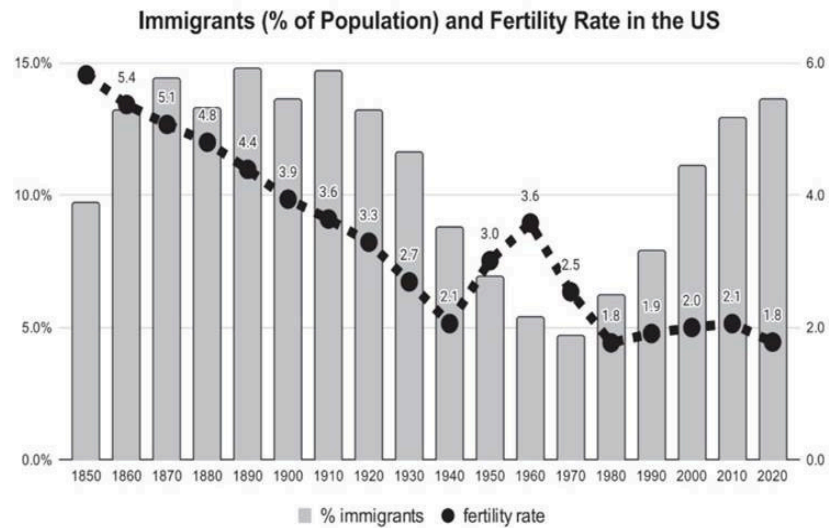


Figure 1. Immigrants as a percentage of the population (bars) and fertility rates (dotted line). **Source:** Zeke Hernandez 2024. Used with permission.

Immigration to New York is not new (Foner 1987; 2000; Kasinitz 2023). Nonetheless, there was a lull in immigration created by the Immigration Act of 1924 (also known as the Johnson-Reed Act), the Asian Exclusion Act, and the National Origins Act. These so-called “Klan federal laws” prevented immigration from Asia and set quotas on immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe. Those quotas ended with the 1965 change in immigration laws through the Immigration and Naturalization Act (INA), which allowed for more legal immigration through family reunification provisions. This, unintendedly, created an increase in immigration from Latin America and Asia. INA, family reunification, the Bracero Program, the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1968 (IRCA), along with undocumented immigration, created a return to the previous proportions of foreign-born people, to around 14% today. Coincidentally, population and economic growth continued during this lull, thanks to the baby boom (Hernandez 2024). Nonetheless, for the baby boomer generation of old-time New Yorkers and Americans, immigration from Latin America and Asia became a

novelty or even an aberration. People of Trump’s generation who have been in influential positions, while having lived through the change, see foreign-born people from outside Europe as exotic or even un-American. Younger generations are used to diversity in large cities and towns. Nonetheless, they may be vulnerable to anti-immigrant conspiracy theories.

As Philip Kasinitz commented regarding the immigration profiles provided by Alba for this volume, about two-thirds of the Caribbean New Yorkers he, Foner, and others studied in the late 1980-early 1990’s have now been in New York City for more than 20 years, and the majority of individuals in these groups are over 50 years old. The proportion of newcomers from those areas of the world has gone down relative to other groups. Demographically, English-speaking Caribbeans are increasingly like the “old” (mostly European) groups. It is also noteworthy that over 40% of Mexicans (whom some New Yorkers still think of as a “new” group), and that I researched in the 2000s have been in the city for more than 30 years, and only around 20% of them have been in the city for less than 10 years. Indeed, today Mexican New Yorkers form a well-established community; their arrival rates have slowed, the community has grown older, and some have already moved out of the city (see more discussion about stage migrations below).

As Kasinitz and colleagues have written, New York City is largely a second-generation immigrant city (Kasinitz et al. 2008; Kasinitz, Mollenkopf, and Waters 2004). New York City is a magnet for internal migration as well as a college town where domestic and international students go to study and conduct research. New York City is widely recognized as a compelling - yet somewhat elusive - beacon of opportunity for professional growth. This narrative is a powerful draw for individuals from all over the country and the world. For example, many Latinos in New York were born, raised, and educated in other states, bringing their own contributions and profiles. Latino internal migrants tend to be college-educated professionals; many of them are politically active, some even running for office in New York City (such as former council member Carlos

Menchaca, who grew up in El Paso, Texas). While what New York City promises is not always realized, its appeal remains undeniable, especially in light of the challenges faced in other cities, states, and countries. New York City will continue to draw a diverse array of migrants, building the next generation of city heirs.

2) New York Latinos: General Demographics and Population Profile

New York would not be what it is without outsiders settling in the city over hundreds of years (Foner 2013). According to the U.S. Census Bureau, as of 2018 (or, pre-pandemic), 37.2% of New Yorkers were foreign-born (US Census 2019). Only 32% of New York's total population was non-Hispanic white, which includes Jewish and Middle Eastern people who may or may not self-identify as White. In other words, over 68% of New York City's population is Latin, Black, Asian, etc. In 2023, following the end of and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, approximately 40% of New York City residents were immigrants (Adams and Castro 2024). As in the rest of the United States, most Hispanics in the New York City metro are U.S.-born, and most of those who are foreign-born are in the country with permission. Hispanics are similar in age and labor force participation to others in New York City. According to the 2023 American Community Survey, 51.8% of Hispanics in NYC were born in the mainland United States, 8.3% in Puerto Rico, and 39.8% abroad (U.S. Census 2023).

There are 963,000 foreign-born Hispanics in NYC (U.S. Census 2023). There are around 412,000 undocumented people overall, but around half of them are not Hispanic (Adams and Castro 2024). So, Donald Trump, Thomas Homans, Mayor Eric Adams, and others interested in deporting massive numbers of immigrants will probably target around 200,000, as they do not prioritize women and children, but young working-class men of color, mainly without a criminal record.

Hispanics have a slightly younger median age at 35.9 years compared to 37.0 for the total population (U.S. Census 2023). The share of working-age adults is slightly lower among Hispanics (62.7%) compared to the total population (63.5%), primarily due to a higher percentage of children among Hispanics (U.S. Census 2023). In 2018, the labor force participation rate among individuals aged 18-64 was essentially identical for Hispanics (63.8%) and the total population (63.7%) (ACS 2018). However, since the 65 and older population is lower among Hispanics (U.S. Census 2023), one could say that Hispanic adults are more likely to be young, of working age, and in the labor force.

Like other immigrants, Latinos in New York have played a pivotal role in reshaping the local mainstream culture and exporting their culture to the rest of the world (Foner 2022). A prime example is salsa, a mix of Puerto Rican, African American jazz, and Afro-Caribbean rhythms. This is, of course, due to the nature of the city and its demography, which is a mix of cultures based on economic and policy decisions dating back centuries. People from Spain and Spanish-speaking Americas have settled in the city for centuries (Remeseira 2010). A significant number of Puerto Ricans arrived after World War II to fulfill labor demands. They were later followed by people from the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and other Caribbean countries. For decades, being Latin in New York meant being Spanish-speaking and born in Puerto Rico; this then evolved to being Boricua, referring to U.S.-born individuals of Puerto Rican descent. The relative geographical concentration of Puerto Ricans in East Harlem led to significant political influence and a notable cultural impact. Later, Dominicans concentrated in Washington Heights in northern Manhattan have gained increasing political influence. In recent decades, established Puerto Ricans and Dominicans have been moving out of the city, resulting in overall declines in the number of residents of that origin.

Mexican Migration to New York occurred later than in other parts of the United States, with pioneers from Puebla arriving in the 1980s and the population growing since then to reach around 1 million in

2007. However, the population declined due to the financial crisis and subsequent relocation to other areas. Important numbers of Ecuadorians, Colombians, Peruvians, and Argentinians arrived in the 1990s, especially to neighborhoods in Queens (Jones-Correa 1998), and new waves continue to arrive. Communities continue to practice their culture through language, food, restaurants, and organizations (Castañeda 2020). However, they and their children also gradually integrate into the mainstream culture and become part of the general metropolitan trade and labor market.

The New Profile of Latinos in the City in 2025

The largest percentage of the under-18 population in the city is Latino, at about 34% of residents (NYC Mayor's Office 2021). Approximately 41% of the Latino population in New York City is Dominican. Following this group, immigrants from Guatemala and Venezuela are the next fastest-growing groups. Notably, although the total Latinx population in NYC has increased over the past decade, the foreign-born Latinx population has actually decreased, indicating that the second generation of Latin NYC residents is on the rise. The median age for the Latin population in NYC is approximately 4 years lower than that of all immigrants, at 44 and 48, respectively, with females comprising the majority at 52%. The Latin population of NYC predominantly resides in Queens (33%) and the Bronx (30%), with Dominican immigrants comprising more than half of the foreign-born in the Bronx (64%) (NYC Mayor's Office 2021).

The population holds various occupations, including service, sales, construction, production, transportation, and self-employed business ownership. In 2020, the Latinx population in NYC also had the largest workforce participation compared to other ethno-racial groups, with 67% of all immigrants working and 73% of the Latinx foreign-born workforce being essential workers (NYC Mayor's Office 2021).

Among the NYC Latino population, Spaniards, Argentinians, and Venezuelans have the highest levels of education, with more than

half holding college degrees. Roughly 15% of all Latino immigrants in New York City hold a college degree or higher. Similarly, like other groups, the CUNY system has served as a significant ladder for social mobility, with over 40% of U.S.-born youth of Mexican origin completing college (Smith 2024, 12–13), with CUNY playing a crucial role in this success.

Post-pandemic, the most recent arrivals are Venezuelans, along with Ecuadorians, Colombians, and people from Afghanistan, Ukraine, India, and parts of Africa. Immigrants who already have family and networks in the New York metro area can rely on them for temporary housing, food, and information about work opportunities. In contrast, Venezuelans and a few others bused into the city from Texas and Arizona did not have established communities to receive them, and they overwhelmed the humble existing service infrastructure and new systems set up to welcome immigrants (Castañeda and Plane 2025).

New York City has spent substantial amounts receiving asylum seekers, totaling a combined \$5.2 billion in fiscal years 2023 and 2024, with an additional \$4.5 billion budgeted for FY2025. Notably, however, this represents only 4.2% of total city spending. Both the Comptroller's Office (Lander 2024) and the Independent Budget Office (IBO 2024) have found Mayor Eric Adam's cost estimates to be significantly overblown. Costs were high because there was no open bidding process for these services. Nonetheless, after crunching the numbers at the Immigration Lab, we find that New York City is just beginning to reap the benefits of this influx of hardworking people (Plane and Castañeda 2025). We conservatively estimate that, if their earnings and employment rates are similar to the current undocumented population, the 316,000 asylum seekers who have arrived in New York City between 2022 and 2024 will contribute \$8.62 billion annually to the city's economy, a figure greater than the GDP of forty countries (IMF 2025). Much of this economic activity will flow to public coffers: the asylum seeker population is projected to pay \$942 million more in taxes than they receive in benefits each year.

This is not particularly surprising. Previous groups of immigrants have similarly fled desperate situations, arrived with limited resources, faced nativist backlash, and still become vital contributors to the city's economy and culture (AS/COA 2014). There's no reason to believe today's newcomers should be any different. They are arriving at an opportune time, given New York's US-born population decrease (Xi Wong and Yadavalli 2024) and demand for workers is growing fastest in the industries that are most reliant on immigrant labor (Lisiecki 2024). If ICE is allowed to wreak havoc on New York City, all these benefits will be lost.

With US-born workers rapidly aging, rising immigration has done much to ease post-pandemic labor shortages, helping reduce inflation while maintaining economic growth. Asylum seekers are quietly integrating into the city's economy. Of the 225,000 migrants who have passed through the shelter system as of late 2024, over 170,000 (77%) have moved out, and the number remaining in city care continues to dwindle (Ferré-Sadurní and Heisler 2024).

Many newcomers to New York City from Ecuador have arrived escaping growing violence and extortion from organized crime. Anthony, a 43-year-old father of three from Guayaquil, told my team at the Immigration Lab that extortion had ruined his growing business as a self-employed truck driver. "When we said that we didn't have any more to give, they said they were going to bring reprisals. They were going to kidnap my son, kill him," he recalled. "Unfortunately, the politicians are corrupt up to the police themselves, so we couldn't make a report."

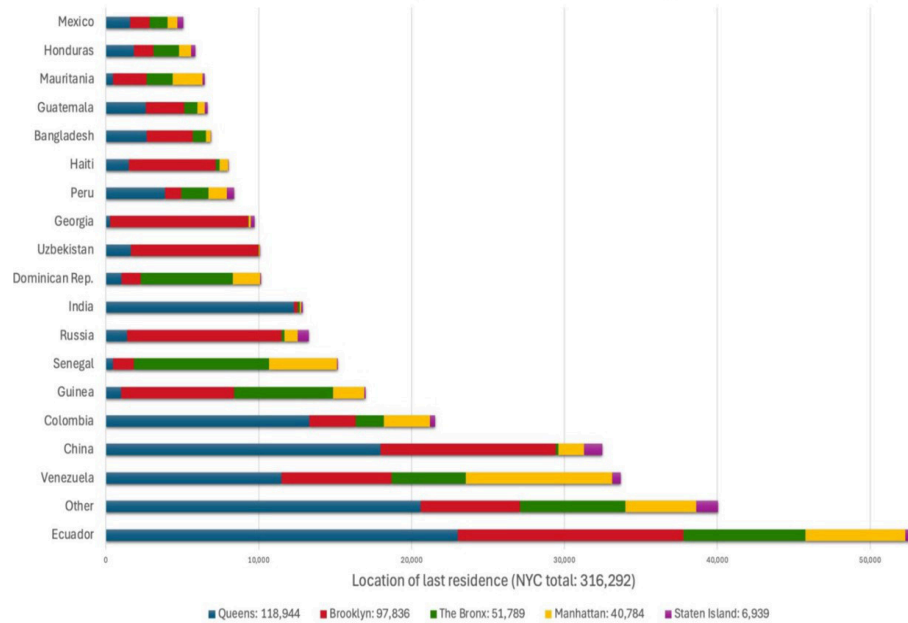
Even Ecuadorian police officers who try to challenge gangs' power have been assassinated. This fate nearly befell Marcelo, 29, a police officer and restaurant owner in the city of Machala. In late 2022, gang hitmen arrived and committed the first murder in what Marcelo says had been a very peaceful city. "We arrested them the next day," he said. "Because of that arrest, I received multiple death threats. They knew my address, my restaurant, my children." Marcelo now lives in Ridgewood, Queens, selling bread and delivering for Grubhub to make ends meet.

When asked why she came to America, Katy, 29, immediately responded, "My son. With my love as a mother, I wanted my son to have more opportunities, learn another language, and go to college. I want him to have what I didn't have." Others, especially those who came alone, were focused on improving their family's situation back in Ecuador. "I come from a poor family, we don't have many resources, that's why we came," says David, 33. "I want to buy a house [in Ecuador] for my daughter, because right now we don't have a home."

Some indigenous Ecuadorians felt constrained by both poverty and discrimination. Pedro, 38, from the Shuar people of the Ecuadorian Amazon, said his departure was motivated by a feeling that racism in Ecuador would prevent his daughters from succeeding. "Just for being indigenous, for being Shuar, people assume you're ignorant," he said. In addition, the candy vendors on New York City's subways are largely Quechua women from the Andean highlands, many of whom were also vendors back home (Salama 2023). These women, like many recent arrivals, are currently struggling to find a reliable niche in New York City's labor market as they seek to rebuild their lives.

Figure 1b. New arrivals by nationality with pending immigration court cases. Map by Marshall Plane for the Immigration Lab.

People with pending immigration court cases who settled in New York City during fiscal years 2022-24, by nationality



3) A Global City and Its Metropolitan Area

According to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2020 estimates, New York City had a population of approximately 8.8 million people (see Alba in this volume). This makes New York the largest U.S. city by far. While not the primary experience for tourists visiting the city or for the millions of New Yorkers who conduct their daily lives by walking, taking the subway, or riding the bus, economic and family life is not limited to Manhattan and Brooklyn—nor even by the political borders of the five boroughs that make up the city: the Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan, Queens, and Staten Island. Millions of people commute to work, visit family members, and go shopping or for entertainment to and from New Jersey, Long Island, and nearby counties in Connecticut and Pennsylvania. The United States Office of Management and Budget (OMB) has designated a statistical area (CSA) for the New York Metro area, which it calls New York–Newark, NY-NJ-CT-PA, with a population exceeding 20 million people (Statistical Atlas 2025).

When examining the metropolitan area, the relative concentrations of Latinos are illustrated in Figure 2. All these numbers are an undercount because many Latinos do not answer the Census and because it excludes people who identify as both Hispanic and Black or Hispanic and Asian or those who identify as mixed-race. Therefore, these numbers work as approximations. The Bronx is the area with the highest percentage of Hispanics, at around 52%. This is followed by places in New Jersey, such as Passaic and Union County, which have a higher percentage than the super-diverse Queens.

According to the 2020 decennial Census, more than 21% of New Jersey's population identifies as ethnically Hispanic, encompassing all racial identifications, with numbers increasing from 2010 to 2020 (Arias 2023). This population consists of, for example, Mexicans in Monmouth County, Cubans in Hudson County, Puerto Ricans in Camden, and Guatemalans in Trenton. About 850,000 of the NJ population is foreign-born, claiming a Latinx background, and about 1.2 million US-born people are of Latino descent (MPI 2024). Multiple counties in New Jersey host high Latino populations, including Passaic (42.7%), Hudson (40.4%), Cumberland (34.4%), Union (34%), Essex (24.4%), Middlesex (22.4%), Mercer (21.7%), and Bergen (21.4%) (Azzi and Lahr 2022).

Though not mentioned in this list above, the town of Dover in Morris County is home to a vibrant Latin community. About half of the Hispanic population of Dover is descended from or is an immigrant from Aguada, a small town in western Puerto Rico, who settled in the town beginning in the mid-20th century after the federal government led recruitment efforts to work on farms in rural Morris and Warren Counties. These immigrants, despite embodying typical 'American values' like a strong work ethic, consistent church attendance, and deep familial ties, faced discrimination by the non-Hispanic majority conservatives and their commonly held stereotypes against Latin-Americans.

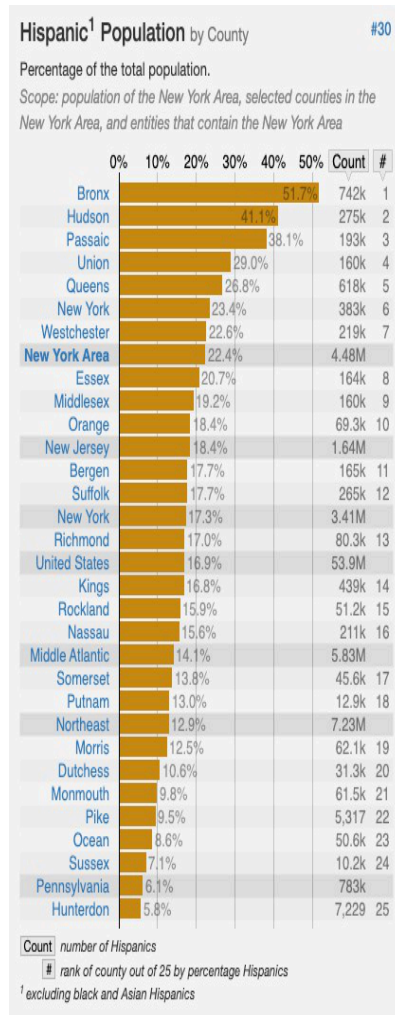


Figure 2. Hispanics in the New York Metro Area Source (Statistical Atlas 2025)

4) Why the Geographic Spread?

New York City serves as a landing ground for many immigrants due to the significant labor demand from its dynamic economy. Yet the city's high cost of living poses an obstacle for both new arrivals

and long-standing residents alike. Many working-class people, including immigrant families, cannot afford to live in Manhattan or New York City proper, so they eventually move outside the city but commute to work there. This is also the case for many Latinos.

In her seminal work, sociologist Saskia Sassen describes cities such as New York City, London, and Tokyo as global cities (Sassen 2001). She argues that while much production in neoliberal economic systems occurs across countries and abroad, these global cities act as administrative coordination hubs, hosting physical headquarters in neighborhoods with high concentrations of offices, where managers, knowledge workers, professionals, lawyers, accountants, consultants, and contractors are employed. A characteristic of global cities is their semi-hourglass class structure (see Figure 3) with a relatively small middle class, a large base of underpaid workers, and a relatively large upper class with high incomes that consume entertainment and other services, including taxis, ride-shares, restaurants, and other food preparation and delivery services.

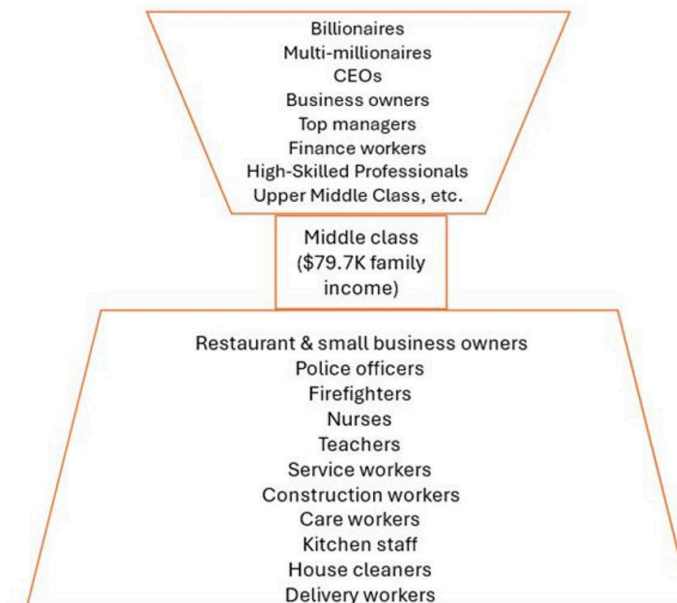


Figure 3. Heuristic graph by the author.

Many of the services and amenities in Manhattan are tailored for the very rich, tourists, and young professionals without children. Very high wages are needed for young families to afford the cost of living in New York City. Living in the prime areas of the city requires a certain income or making relative compromises and sacrifices. Young U.S.-born individuals may do so while attending college or graduate school in New York City, participating in internships, or launching their careers. They may later move out of New York City in search of more affordable and comfortable places to raise a family. Thus, New York City is like a river: although its population size has remained relatively stable in recent decades, thousands of people move in and out on a constant basis. I.e., the actual individuals living in the area at a given moment are a vastly different set from one point in time to another. There is a core and sediment of long-term New Yorkers, but millions of people pass through after visiting or living there for a few months, years, or even decades. These economic dynamics impact the demographic distribution with a bias towards young people, the very wealthy, the relatively wealthy, and recently arrived immigrants. Indeed, another important factor in making global cities work is the existence of plentiful immigrant labor.

Relatively speaking, it is very difficult for the middle class to afford living in New York City, given the census median income of \$79,000, which results from many people earning low wages and some earning very high wages. So, many people, including recent arrivals, working-class internal and international migrants, as well as asylum seekers, may need to double up by sharing apartments, even taking turns occupying the same bed while working different shifts. I have interviewed immigrants in Harlem who wake up to go to work in the morning, and those who just worked the night shift take over the opening beds to rest. Sharing high rents among many makes sense. So does living in apartments that are not fully renovated or in the best condition, but that are safe and from which they can commute to work using public transportation.

Many landlords mention that Mexican immigrants, particularly the undocumented, are good tenants because they pay their rent on

time, they do not demand much, and they put sweat equity into the apartments for free by fixing broken-down things and making repairs with their own money; therefore, they work for the landlords for free (Thompson 2007; Fuentes 2007). In this way, they also rehabilitate full buildings that are falling into disrepair. As they aggregate, they can revitalize neighborhoods that have become underpopulated and overlooked by investors and city planners, while also making those neighborhoods safer. This, in turn, paves the way for gentrification, as upper-income and White individuals move into the neighborhood.

As years pass, many immigrants who arrived young and single start their own families. Then, they may want to move to their own apartments or houses, often further and further from the places where they work. The economic epicenter of New York is Manhattan, where many immigrants reside and work. However, most live in more affordable areas, such as the Bronx, Queens, and Brooklyn. As Brooklyn and Queens gentrify and become more expensive, migrants may need to move further out, expanding the metropolitan area and diversifying the suburbs.

Many people, including Hispanics and middle-class families, move to nearby areas, such as New Jersey, but they continue to commute and work in the city. They may relocate to parts of upstate New York and Connecticut that are accessible by Metro-North, driving, or carpooling. This makes the everyday life of breadwinners less convenient, but it also allows them to have a larger suburban home, perhaps with a garden and a backyard. All this to say is that the culture of New York, its labor force, diversity, and dynamism, cannot be limited to the discussion of those with postal addresses in New York City. This is important in understanding the economic dimensions of New York City because it represents another key element formed by early immigrants and the communities they created in New York. This is clear in the general process of suburbanization that dates back to the 1950s, and is highly relevant in regional studies, while originally constituting a “White flight,” suburbs and small towns have increasingly become more diverse (Flippen and Farrell-Bryan 2021; Lara-García 2022; Alba et al. 1999).

The academic literature on international migration uses the term ‘pioneer’ to nominate the first individual, family, or group that arrives at a place without a tradition of migration from their places of origin and is key in establishing a larger presence of people from that place of the world. This happens through a process we call family-propelled migration (Castañeda and Jenks 2024), where a working-age parent with young children may migrate in order to send money to their family and live divided as part of a transnational family for years (Dreby 2010; Castañeda and Buck 2011).

Around half of immigrant workers return to their places of origin to visit, for long-term stays, or permanently to work, start businesses, or spend time with their families. Family members may instead make a one-way trip to join those who stay working in the United States, which has grown more common because of increasingly expensive and dangerous trips for those without immigration permits (Massey, Durand, and Malone 2002). So, after a decade or more of separation, many family members reunite either in the place of origin or the place of arrival.

The employers of these workers, often in construction, restaurants, and small businesses, frequently encourage them to bring in workers like themselves. The immigrant workers often turn to extended family, friends, and neighbors of a similar age to join them. This recruitment through transnational social networks results in what Massey calls the cumulative causation of immigration (Massey 1990). Newly recruited immigrants are drawn to the promises of high-dollar salaries, which seem attractive when compared to their income in Mexico, and the allure of living in the United States, particularly in New York, among the skyscrapers.

The reality is much harder once they arrive. One is the cost of living. Right after arrival, they can sleep on the couches of the people who invited them. Later, the pioneer and his recruits may share rent for rooms or apartments. The recruits may soon have their own international recruits, who will sleep on the couches or in the guest rooms of countrymen and women already established in New York City while they find employment, establish their footing, and are able

to afford rent on their own or with others. Once they have a job and secure a place to rent, they will focus on sending a stable amount of money to their family members abroad, which is referred to as remittances (Castañeda 2013).

Then the cycle continues, and nuclear family members abroad may also move to New York. This often begins with the spouse and later extends to the children, whether they are documented or not. As soon as they can afford it, after arriving in New York City, migrants and their families will do what any family in such a situation would do: move into their own housing units. Often, this requires them to move further away from their workplace. For example, many Latino immigrants have moved to places like Passaic, as shown in Figure 2, which illustrates the concentration of Hispanics in certain areas.

During my research among the Mexican diaspora in New York (2003-2010), most of them were of working age. In the 2020s, there is a larger proportion of Mexican families and students in basic education. At its height in the 2000s, the Mexican consulate and Mexican immigrant organizations calculated the Mexican-origin population to be between 1 and 1.4 million people. In 2025, their calculation is around 800,000. Many Mexican families have had to move out of neighborhoods like Bushwick and Park Slope in Brooklyn, which have become highly coveted and pricey neighborhoods, and many have subsequently moved to New Jersey and Pennsylvania. Due to the recruitment and sharing of information through personal networks, many families from Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, or Ecuador will ultimately reside in specific areas of New York City. However, this does not mean that people from certain nationalities limit themselves only to a few neighborhoods in the short or long term.

5) Immigrants Are Not Exclusively Living in Certain Neighborhoods

The model of a Chinatown or the ethnic enclave, as coined by Portes et. al to understand Cubans in Florida, is useful for understanding the economic integration of some immigrant communities, along with making their visibility and political organization easier (Portes and Shafer 2007), but it is not very useful for understanding long-term immigration residential dynamics, including in New York City (Espinoza-Kulick et al. 2021).

Manhattan’s Chinatown may appear to be a stable community, given the characters in the business signs. However, research shows that people who come in and out of Chinatown to shop and patronize businesses are not all residents of the neighborhood. Furthermore, today’s residents are not the same as those from a few years back, and many of those currently there will probably move out in a few years. The actual residents of Chinatown vary a lot (Wong 1987). Again, as in the phrase from Heraclitus, which states that one does not swim in the same river twice, Chinatown is like a river, where the actual water changes constantly. Even the regions in China from which residents may be coming change every decade or so.

Another important fact is that most Chinese-origin people in New York do not live in any of the area Chinatowns. Similarly, East Harlem, often referred to as El Barrio, was a predominantly Puerto Rican neighborhood by the end of the 20th century. It then gradually changed into “a little Mexico,” according to some tourist guides. Between 2003 and 2025, many storefronts along 16th Street featured Mexican flag colors in their designs. Nonetheless, most of the people living in East Harlem have never been Hispanic or Mexican, even if a lot of storefronts had Mexican flags. In the early 2000s and 2010s, research that I conducted shows that most residents of East Harlem have never been a majority, either Puerto Rican or Mexican or pan-Latino, but a mixture of different races, ethnicities, and origins (Castañeda 2012; Castañeda, Beck, and Lachica 2015) in the early 2020s (Statistical Atlas 2025).

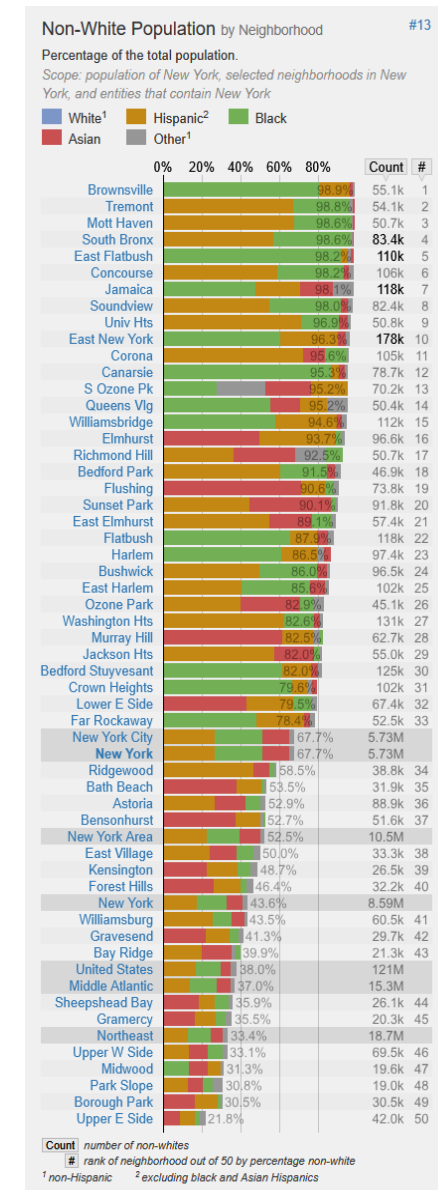


Figure 4. Neighborhoods with the highest Hispanic percentages

For many, East Harlem is the heart of the Latino community in metropolitan New York; nevertheless, as Figure 4 shows, East Harlem is located around the middle of neighborhoods in New York City with the highest percentage of Hispanics. Some contemporary tourist guides and websites advertise East Harlem/El Barrio as

Manhattan’s Little Mexico. While there is a growing number of Mexican businesses in the area, it is wrong to assume that most Mexicans in the New York metropolitan area live in that neighborhood or that most residents in the neighborhood are Mexican or Puerto Rican. Both claims are wrong empirically (Castañeda 2019, 165–183). Mexicans live and work throughout the New York City metropolitan area (Castañeda, Beck, and Lachica 2015). El Barrio is a diverse community, with most residents being neither Puerto Rican nor Mexican. According to the 2018 American Community Survey, 46% of East Harlem residents identify as Hispanic, 27% as Black, 16% as White, and 7% as Asian. Overall, 24.4% of El Barrio residents were born abroad, and 39% of households speak some Spanish. This means that the majority of residents are US-born and English-speaking (ACS 2018). Their impact is palpable in the community and immigrant organizations (Castañeda 2020; 2025).

	1990	2000	2005-2007	2009	2010	2018-2022
White (Non-Hispanic)	7.1	7.3	11.4	11.5	12	14.3
Black (Non-Hispanic)	38.9	35.7	34.7	31.6	31.2	30.4
Hispanic	51.9	52.1	51.5	49.8	49.2	43.3
Asian	1.4	2.7	5	5.5	5.6	8.5
Puerto Rican		>1.69	30.4	26.8	26.3	19.4
Mexican		>.84	9.3	9.5	9.27	5.7
Native American	.2	.2	.5		.2	.04
Other	.4	2			1.8	1.1
Total Population	110,508	117,743	123,813	122,920	120,511	123,097

Figure 4. Population of East Harlem by race, ethnicity, and nationality (% not mutually exclusive)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, ACS Demographic and Housing Estimates: 2005-2007 for District 11. U.S. Census Bureau, 2006-2010 American Community Survey (5-Year Estimates for Public Use Microdata Area 03804 in New York), as reported in “Profile of Manhattan Community District 11,” NYC Department of City Planning, 2012, labelled above as 2009. U.S. Census 2010. ACS 2018-2022.

The district boundaries changed slightly between censuses. But what we see is a decrease in Black and Hispanic Residents and an increase in White residents.

Hispanics concentrate in some neighborhoods, but they are mainly U.S.-born and from different national origins, and Hispanics are present in basically every neighborhood. The same applies to the other groups.

Ethnic Businesses

As discussed earlier, over 68% of the population in New York City is nonwhite. But are 68% of businesses minority-owned? No. According to the Census Bureau, in 2012, there were 1,050,911 firms in New York City, of which 539,447 were minority-owned and 483,136 were non-minority-owned firms. In other words, 51% of New York firms are minority-owned. There are important differences in business size, with central exceptions; minorities may be the proprietors of smaller-scale businesses. Immigrants contribute as entrepreneurs and investors in businesses and real estate, as well as a cheap labor force and a highly qualified workforce at the highest scientific and technical skill levels. Global cities are a magnet for outside migrants and capital (Sassen 2001; Portes and Armony 2018; 2022). Small corner stores, delis, and ethnic restaurants in New York City are often opened by immigrants from relatively humble backgrounds, who, according to my interviews with many of them, had little to no business experience before migrating to the United States. Some of them branch out and become successful businesspeople in New York City, while others become important players in the city's ethnic leadership, advocating for working-class immigrants and maintaining good relationships with mestizo elites in the New York professional sphere, as well as local politicians. Still, theorists and social scientists should not exaggerate the influence of immigrant organizations or the prevalence of immigrant concentrations in a few neighborhoods.

The Irish, Italian, and Jewish influence in New York is undeniable. There are areas in Brooklyn, Queens, and Washington Heights, as well as throughout New Jersey, that house Orthodox Jewish communities, including businesses catering to those inside and outside the community. There is no Irish neighborhood in New York that is currently identified as such. How about Italians? The “Little Italy” of Manhattan has been shrinking over the past few decades and is now primarily an Italian restaurant district, rather than a residential area with a concentration of Italian Americans. In the 1950s, landscaping companies in New Jersey were owned and staffed predominantly by Italians (Tilly 1998). Today, some companies are still owned by Italians, but many workers are from Latin America. Another example of entrepreneurial and urban succession is Arthur Avenue, known as the Little Italy of the Bronx, one of the largest Italian neighborhoods in New York. It still boasts many Italian restaurants, stores, and markets catering to all budgets. However, by the 2010s, most of the client-facing staff were Albanian (Krase 2006; Kosta 2014), while the majority of the kitchen and back-of-house staff were from Mexico or Central America. Most people from outside the area who visit for Italian food are often unaware of this reality and tend to differentiate these businesses, which feature Italian names and decor, from the restaurants and stores nearby that are openly advertised as Albanian or Mexican. This comment is not about businesspeople trying to be deceitful or about the “authenticity” of ethnic food, but rather that the outside appearance of an “ethnic enclave” is often deceiving and that new immigrants are quick to adapt and keep alive many of the traditions that existed in an area before they arrived.

Social networks, business cloning (Castañeda 2013), and niche crowding by an immigrant group, along with forced segregation, produce ethnic stereotypes about the economic role they play in a city (Castañeda 2018b; 2021). In New York, employers in the food, retail, and construction sectors see Mexican workers as reliable, hardworking, docile, and inexpensive. Because of this, they are the go-to population for kitchen staff and busboys, but not necessarily

as servers and hosts (Thompson 2007). Therefore, Mexican and Latin American immigrants arriving in New York City can get low-paying, “low-skilled” jobs quickly. In contrast, Koreans, Africans, and other immigrants have a much harder time getting hired. Due to this, researchers have found that Koreans are more likely to start small businesses (Min 2008). This pattern is not because Korean immigrants in New York are “naturally” more entrepreneurial than Mexicans or because they are better at running small grocery stores, but because the bottom of the labor market is largely closed to them due to social factors. Furthermore, Koreans often become business owners in neighborhoods with a small Korean population. At the same time, Mexican immigrants may be less likely to start businesses serving non-Mexican customers because it is easier for them to find employment, which allows them to send remittances home — a reason many came to New York in the first place (Castañeda 2013). Most immigrants do not migrate to start small businesses per se, but to make a living. If making a living requires entrepreneurship, they will give it a try (Oral History Project 2019).

Some twentieth-century theories of immigration posited that immigrants were like transplanted communities who, after being uprooted from specific places in Europe or Latin America, reconstituted themselves as urban villages in particular neighborhoods, such as those in segregated Chicago. In this theory, most Italians would live in a “Little Italy” neighborhood, while most Albanians would reside in a “Little Albania,” and Brazilians would live in a “Little Brazil.” As some tourist guides and street names still mark these urban spaces, this concept persists. Some of these formal and informal neighborhood names may be misleading in characterizing most of their residents. The impact of the Chicago School of Sociology's ideas, which posits that people would supposedly concentrate for cultural and almost genetic reasons, obscures what happens to new arrivals after a process of learning, adaptation, and settlement, through which they each find their place in the city, often outside of the enclave.

The urban village model is impressionistic, empirically wrong, and politically problematic as it paints immigrants as exotic, culturally unchanging, “self-segregating,” and failing to integrate. It falls apart when confronted with empirical data – for instance, although Mexicans are the third-largest immigrant group in New York City, there is no census tract in the city where over 50% of the population is of Mexican origin. A better description of the process is what Tilly calls “transplanted networks” (Tilly 1990). The issue is not due to cultural affinity, unwillingness to integrate, or self-segregation, but rather the key role of social ties in spreading information and providing moral and material support as newcomers settle in a new area. This concentration is transitory at the individual and family levels, even if the neighborhood character lasts for a few decades due to the continued arrival of new immigrants.

Conclusion

So what is important to understand is that, like in other places, in New York City a number of factors that work in tandem: 1) length of stay in a gentrifying neighborhood may allow some people to garner more equity and/or stay in a community they could not afford to buy into today; 2) wages are limited by lack of immigration papers; 3) education levels tend to have a positive correlation with income levels (some exceptions are successful small business owners who may lack advanced degrees, people working in finance with high incomes despite a college or terminal master degree, and PhD holders who do not necessarily make more than people with fewer years of education); 4) position in the labor market determines income; 5) family composition family size and the number of people in the nuclear family in the labor force also determines household income; 6) the nuclear and extended family wealth a person or family can draw resources from is altogether going to determine their place of residence. In summary, social class largely determines the place of residence within the New York metropolitan area.

Most people live in places by chance, access, and opportunity. Networks and chance play a role in buying or renting places at the right time, but more than anything, this is determined by income, which impacts where affluent White New Yorkers throughout the metropolitan region live. Initially, where Latinos, Asians, and people of African and Caribbean origin live is determined by where they work. Regardless of birthplace, bankers, Wall Street traders, or doctors have their choice of neighborhoods. The level of education and profession determine the place of residence. New York City is not a city of ethnic neighborhoods. It is a diverse global city with a large number of internal and international immigrants.

All the neighborhoods are diverse, albeit to differing degrees. Most places are not segregated by place of birth or ethnicity, but rather by income and access to real estate, even in New York City. The Black-White racial line is still bright as Black Americans are segregated into particular neighborhoods and blocks within the city, including areas with public housing. Harlem is still majority-

Black, but the median income is increasing with more middle and upper-class African Americans, along with African immigrants, and middle-class non-Black people moving in. Social and spatial exclusion, observable in both objective and subjective measures of segregation for ethnic communities, including Latinos and immigrants, is widespread throughout the city. Belonging once again depends on class and occupation. However, Latinos and their children consistently identify as New Yorkers. The many Latinos I interviewed between 2003 to 2010 and follow-up revisits (Burawoy 2003), for my first book showed how even undocumented Latino immigrants identified as New Yorkers (Castañeda 2018a).

Latinos are an important part of the past, present, and future of New York – and their trajectories in the city are not that different from those of previous waves of foreign-born groups or the children of immigrants and locals. Latinos in New York are not in the city to be, first and foremost, Hispanic or Latino, Puerto Rican, Mexican, or Colombian. They are attracted by the labor demand, networks, the American dream, and the particular allure of making it in New York.

They are not as much remaking or reshaping New York as reproducing its culture and economy, allowing it to continue as a city with national and international impact.

Acknowledgments

Daniel Jenks helped with initial copy-editing. Sneha Thudi helped with research about Dover, New Jersey. Marshall Plane and Morgan Richardson helped update the table for East Harlem. Marshall Plane helped with data analysis on newcomers to New York City. A different version, coauthored with Nancy Foner, will appear in a book on immigration to New York, edited by Nancy Foner, for NYU Press.

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4 Family-Propelled Migration and the Appearance of Social Networks

By Ernesto Castañeda and Daniel Jenks

This chapter discusses several ideas about social networks and family-propelled migration. It engages the author's recent work on family separation and reunification of youth migrants, as well as new findings from a project about refugee resettlement. The chapter combines various literatures about the causes and consequences of migration to show how family-propelled migration operates as a useful and generative concept when attempting to understand the complex dynamics of migration today. It concludes with a multi-tiered explanation of how community integration is helped or hindered, and broad policy analysis with suggestions for how societies can help migrant families integrate into their communities.

Introduction

Family networks are a powerful reason for migration, with many individuals relocating to reunite with their partners, parents, children, or other family members, and supported by their family's resources. In our book "*Reunited: Family Separation and Central American Youth Migration*"¹, we propose the term *family-propelled migration* for such forms of migration, motivated by the desire to be reunited with family members and enabled by family ties. This term adopts notions of chain migration and cumulative causation, which we explain below, but restricts it to the context of family reunification¹. The results of these processes can vary by class, gender, and race, but

research shows that the process repeats itself across decades and throughout different parts of the world ^{2,3}.

This chapter discusses the role of family networks in continuing the immigration process started by one of its members, the process of family migration, and the implications for policy. We start with a real-life example to orient the reader about the processes that we will be discussing analytically in the following pages. Then we describe the process of family-propelled migration and its variations. Subsequently, we pay attention to unaccompanied minors who migrate to reunite with their families abroad. We then discuss the challenges of family migration and the implications of these processes for policy, as well as future research paths.

Rubi's Family History

Rubi (a pseudonym) is a graduate student, born in the U.S. to Ecuadorian parents. She told us the migration history of her mother's side. The story, like those of many other people with a migration background, leads back to family mobility a few generations into the past:

My maternal grandfather was the first of our family to work and live in the United States. He knew that supporting a family in Ecuador with low wages from agricultural work on his small farm was not enough for his family of eight and counting. He arrived in New York City in 1982, surviving the travel through the US-Mexico desert on foot. Despite not knowing anyone in New York, he was able to find work at a restaurant washing dishes when he was around 30 years old. He worked multiple jobs, sometimes in food delivery and other times in construction, until he began to work for a company packaging goods to be sent to supermarkets. In 1995, he then helped his nephews and his oldest son, at 14

years of age, to move to New York. My uncle finished high school and then worked alongside my grandfather as a mechanic. My uncle arrived at a younger age than his siblings. He learned English quickly but couldn't advance his education as his focus was to provide for his mom and sisters in Ecuador. He and his cousins work in the car repair shop owned by my grandfather.

In 1986, Ronald Reagan's Immigration Reform and Control Act called for tighter restrictions on migration coming into the United States but also offered legalization, which led to granting residency and prospective naturalization to undocumented migrants who entered the country prior to 1982. Due to this act, my grandfather was able to get a Green Card. He went back to Ecuador and spent time with his family before returning to New York to work. My mother made the trip to New York City with her sister and her brother-in-law (her sister's husband) 15 years after my grandfather migrated. In the late 1990s, they traveled by foot, facing horrible weather conditions through jungles, rivers, deserts, and cities led by a coyote.

My mother's first jobs were as a waitress working from 8 am to 4 pm as well as a factory worker making photo frames from 5 pm to 1 am. My mother worked as a waitress for several years but then decided to apply for a food vendor license in 2015 and began to cook Ecuadoran, Mexican, Italian, and French cuisine and sell it from the trunk of her car to construction workers during lunchtime, truck drivers on their way to the port of Brooklyn, families passing by, friends, and acquaintances. She opened her own restaurant in October 2017, and after three years, the business closed in the aftermath of the pandemic, but today we continue to be street vendors in Brooklyn, NY.

My oldest brother got sick and migrated in 2001 because of his need for medical attention in December. Finally, in the early 2000s, my aunts were the last to arrive. They did so by plane with residency status since their father applied for them through family reunification in 1999. They came in the 2020s and also got started waitressing. One of my aunts delivers food to elderly residents in Queens; my other two are stay-at-home wives, and their spouses, who were from the same town and started dating in New York City, are also mechanics or construction workers.

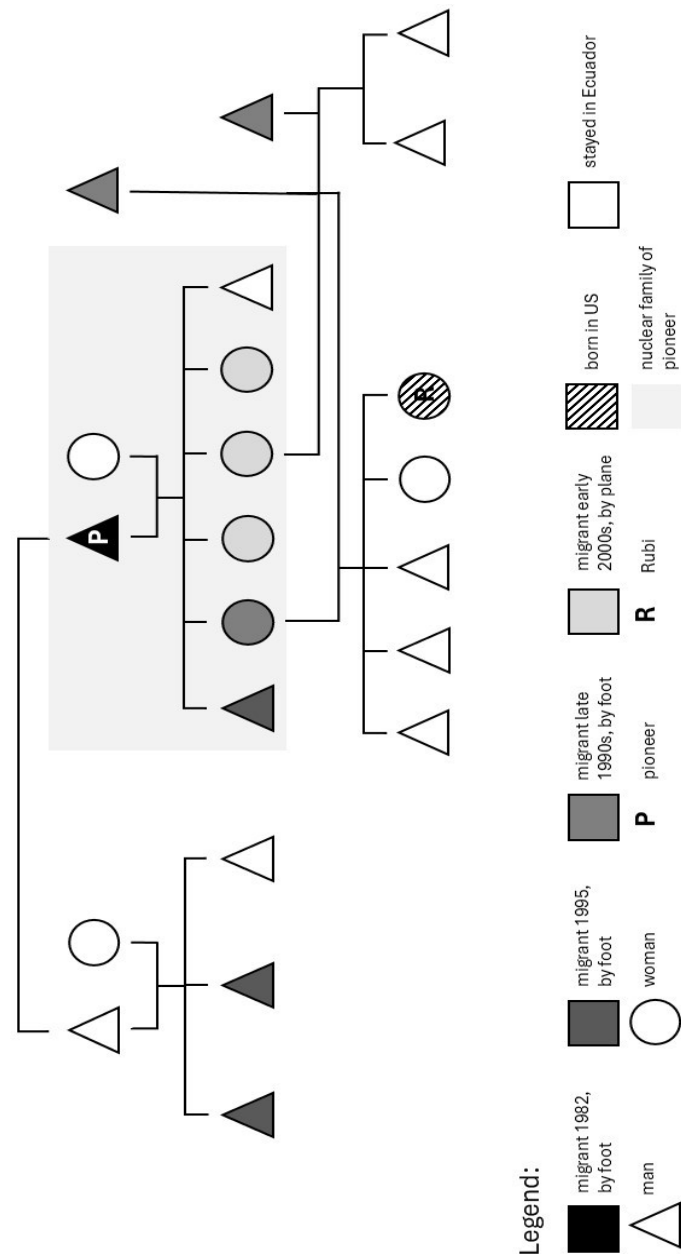
My grandmother stayed in Ecuador to care for my three older siblings and two cousins born there. My youngest uncle is in his 30s, and he is still living in Ecuador and receiving remittances. Everybody else in my family is now in the United States.”

Rubi, 23, a second-generation immigrant from Ecuador

Rubi’s story, visualized in the kinship diagram of Figure 1, shows how one family in Ecuador migrated incompletely to the U.S. over four iterations of migration, a family-propelled migration process that implicated nuclear (indicated in grey in Figure 1) and extended family members. Over the course of twenty years, three-quarters of the nuclear family and (at least) three members of the extended family ended up in the U.S., in addition to their children who were born in the U.S., while a part stayed behind. Her story highlights key elements surrounding the study of family migration – opportunities for wage labor draw one or more family members up, and once they find space, opportunities, or stability to share with family members, they are able to send for them.

Rubi’s story simultaneously shows the embeddedness of these histories in migration regimes, and the ways that migration is thereby structurally an unequal and often arbitrary process – while the Simpson–Mazzoli or Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 made restrictions tighter, her family was able to use that act’s amnesty as a route to legalization. If her grandfather had come to the United States just one year later, he would not have qualified, even though his qualifications, efforts, and contributions to the nation remained unchanged.

Figure 1. Kinship Diagram Representing Rubi’s Migration History (Partial)



Another circumstance that often discriminates in an arbitrary fashion is the mode of travel to the U.S. Rubi's mother had to travel on foot, through the desert – a very different experience than some

of her sisters, who were able to arrive on a plane with the sponsorship of her grandfather. With the risk and expense of land routes to the U.S., it is obviously a safer, more comfortable, and less traumatic journey to arrive on a plane. After Rubi's grandfather got his green card, he was able to go back to Ecuador to see family as well, which is a right truly only afforded to those with legal status. An immigration system that focuses on informal and individual-level immigration permits and contracts for low-wage workers is a cause of long-term long-distance family separation.

In the U.S. and around the world, the policy landscape toward migrants has, in many cases, become more restrictive since the 1980s, and has been informed by national origin, race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality.⁴⁻⁶ Additionally, recently, ideas that migrant groups comprise of violent people 'invading' the country have gained popularity, while the idea that they are neighbors and part of local communities has at times fallen to the wayside in popular discourse. The effect of this arbitrary restrictiveness is discrimination and structural inequality – some families can be together, others cannot. As we will illustrate in this chapter, processes of family migration and subsequent structural integration are heavily influenced by arbitrary policies and procedures. In turn, different groups have different experiences and outcomes, and indeed, the composition of the migrant community in a given nation-state can vary widely due to these⁷⁻⁹. Migrants of these varying groups may face different levels of discrimination, racism, xenophobia, and hate. In short, the decision to separate families across borders is an administrative one that has real-life consequences for those who live it.

The Process of Family-Propelled Migration

Family-propelled migration leads to a form of *chain migration*, a term that McDonald invented and that Tilly and Brown, and others used decades ago used to describe how social ties are key to migration. Individuals' strongest ties are family members, followed by friends,

classmates, and neighbors of around similar ages¹⁰⁻¹³. Chain migration is an early theorization about how organic migration happens through social ties and emphasizes the central role that family and relationships play in this process. It is probably important to reiterate that social network theory in the social sciences predates the so-called social network websites and apps. Sociologists, anthropologists, geographers, and others have written about these processes, but historians have also documented them. For example, historian Larisa Veloz writes about “how family networks sustained bidirectional migration”¹⁴, p15).

Network migration happens through the exchange of information, the financing of transportation and temporal lodging, and discovering available work positions through personal contacts. It becomes a self-driven process, which Massey and colleagues call *the theory of cumulative migration*¹⁵. So-called *pioneers*, such as Rubi’s grandfather, have to struggle to navigate a new society, labor market, and culture. Established social networks abroad can help subsequent waves of immigrants find their initial way to their destination and then help them find a job, making subsequent migrants’ paths easier. The cumulative causation of migration through social networks simply means that once a few people from point A move to B, it is more likely that more people will do so – which, in turn, will make more people more likely to migrate¹⁶. This does not mean that a town or country will empty out and everyone will leave. Chain migration is a delayed and controlled chain reaction — not one that is explosive, but a chain that travels through personal contacts, and that encourages some to move away either temporarily or permanently.

Information about the process of migration spreads through networks of family and close interpersonal ties and often provides a reason to move and place to arrive. Here, we focus specifically on family migration when it is key to understanding the choice of migration destination: social network migration often starts with family migration.

The process of family-propelled migration can vary by class, gender, and race. Among professionals and those seen as highly skilled, nuclear and even extended families often can legally migrate altogether. However, among the improperly called “unskilled” immigrants, including guest workers and the undocumented, it is much more difficult to get visas for workers in their prime working age to travel with their children, elderly family members, and even spouses¹⁴. Therefore, migration frequently occurs in different stages. First, a young man from Ecuador, Western Mexico, or Guatemala with parents or children who need economic support goes abroad to work and send money home with the idea of coming back after a few years¹⁷. A single mom may do the same – for instance, a young mother from the Philippines may enroll in one of the many programs her government sponsors to employ women abroad, while her parents take care of her children.

Once abroad, employers may be happy with their work, and in the context of labor scarcity, they may ask workers directly if they have any recommendations for other workers. Given that informal job opening, the migrant worker may tell a sibling or a cousin in their town if they want to join them. They often do so, then so do other extended family members, friends, and former neighbors. Recruitment through word of mouth is a common way people find jobs¹⁸ but, in this case, it results in a long-distance relocation.

The original workers making the recommendations may get promoted to start supervising and translating for the new workers and to train them for their jobs. They make more money and become even more needed. They start to establish a community in the places where they work and become more enmeshed in the local economy, churches, civic organizations, local restaurants, bars, and coffee shops. They may also grow in social visibility among their coethnics or other groups and gain social esteem. All this makes them less likely to return permanently. Those without documents also face both monetary and opportunity costs returning to their home country. Doing so temporarily would mean thousands of dollars and high

risks of not being able to return to the country where they already work and live. On the other hand, often the people they recruited find out for themselves that while they are earning in dollars, euros, or pounds, the cost of living is much higher than in their places of origin. Therefore, it may be harder for them to save or even to pay the debt they incurred to migrate. Their families get used to remittances, but more often than not, remittances are not enough to kickstart a business or another stable source of income. So, low-earning workers must extend their stay. As the years pass, families remain physically separated, children grow, and marriages weaken.

The current U.S. immigration system is organized in such a way that one of the few ways to immigrate legally into the U.S. is through family applications. In 2022, 78% of new green card holders coming directly from abroad were immediate family members of U.S. citizens and lawful permanent residents (those holding the so-called Green Cards)¹⁹. Once a sibling or a parent establishes residence, they can, in turn, sponsor other family members.

A common strategy is for those married to bring their spouses so that they can gain a dual income abroad, while grandparents or other family members take care of childrearing in their place of birth so that parents can focus on work²⁰. Not only is raising their children cheaper in their countries of birth, but also the lack of preschool, childcare, and after school options in the United States makes it hard for two working parents on low paying jobs, and often multiple shifts, to make ends meet and raise a family²¹. As the children grow older, they, heir grandparents, or other caretakers may face new challenges and be unable to take care of the younger generation anymore. The children may also resent their parents for leaving them, especially if it happened when they were young and did not fully understand why their parents left. At the same time, those feelings coexist with a longing to know one's parents. Or other situations such as gang recruitment, quality of schooling, ability to work, or experiences of abuse may contribute to a young person's desire or need to reunify with a parent who lives in another country.

This brings us to the topic of the migration of minors unaccompanied by their parents.

Unaccompanied Minors

In the mid-2010s, an increasingly common phenomenon covered by the American media was that of so-called “unaccompanied” youth arriving in the

U.S. without parents or guardians. While many of them traveled with siblings or others from their villages, they were shown in the media as uniquely alone. It left for many a puzzle – why were they coming across the border in this way, and without parents? While the focus was on the fact that these children and young adults were alone, much of the coverage did not ask why it was normal for Salvadoran, but not French, or German, or Australian youth to cross borders without papers or parents – nor did it answer what would happen to the children and young adults after they got to the U.S. At least part of the answer to that question lies in the legal violence of family separation, global capitalism and labor demands, and histories of violence, war, and interventionism that can explain youth migration alongside theories such as cumulative causation.

In *Reunited*, we specifically apply the concept of family-propelled migration to explain how and why minors from Central America (and other regions) decide to migrate on their own – this is typically a family-driven decision, often made possible by, or because of family members in both formal and informal immigration settings. In other words, the ability for youth to migrate to the United States usually relies on the presence of family – to fund the trip and to have somewhere to stay once one arrives. Although some do come truly alone and without anyone on the other side of the border, in our interviews for the book, family ties were cited as a main reason why one would come to the United States and more specifically the Washington, DC area. While the media framed the movement of youth as unprecedented and unexpected, we argue that this was to be expected given that these teenagers were the children of parents

who had left Central America, sometimes as long as 14 years earlier, joining communities often established by the prior generation. Many of these teenagers grew up without their parents and as they grow older, they face new challenges. In our book, we found three primary challenges that led to the decision to migrate to their parents: they may be recruited by gangs, they may have their own ambitions for education or life that they cannot fulfill in their country, or they long for being with their parents on a daily basis. In addition, maybe the grandparents or other family who were taking care of them become unable to continue doing so given their advancing age, illness, passing, or struggling with the challenges of raising adolescents. We explain in *Reunited* that the ability for youth to migrate to the United States usually relies on the presence of family – to fund the trip and to have somewhere to stay once one arrives. While some do come truly alone and without anyone on the other side of the border, in our interviews, family ties were cited as a main reason why one would come to the United States and the Washington, DC area.

A key reason that migrant youth come to the U.S. is their parents: so, why are their parents here? Since 2008, Central American workers increasingly filled many of the jobs previously held by Mexicans in the United States. If minor migrants had been less visible before, it was because the southern U.S. border had never been as heavily patrolled as it was then compared to the early 2000s and before. Additionally, arrangements between Mexico and the U.S. allowed for minors caught at the border to be quickly returned to Mexico, and thus, few records of this phenomenon were kept. The same relative invisibility applied to the many minors from Europe and Asia who came alone in previous centuries.

Challenges of Family-Propelled Migration

Although family networks drive migration, family ties are not a golden ticket. It is important to keep in mind that, as Menjivar documents in her book *Fragmented Ties*, in many cases, what social

networks can provide is limited by their members' living conditions²². Ultimately, sustained poverty can constrain what any individual can do for any number of others. Ties sometimes weaken on arrival, and because of low-paying jobs and a precarious situation, the help from family that migrants counted on can sometimes no longer be provided or not provided for very long.

These challenges happen all around the world. For instance, colonial ties and social networks have created substantial North African resettlement in France. But the individualistic ideology that goes against ethnic and racial identification, in addition to marginal employment by many North African men results in Algerians, Moroccans, or Tunisians not being able to participate in the hosting and reciprocation that would have been culturally expected in North Africa. It also renders them isolated and detached from mainstream French society—which often rejects them—and also from co-nationals because they lack enough resources and standing to lubricate social chains²³.

Contexts surrounding the journey northward matter, too. For instance, while some migrants are able to arrive in their new country on a plane, paperwork in hand, others have to take long, arduous journeys through the desert, jungles, or over choppy seas, or harsh winter storms. These journeys often come with intense physical and emotional risk, which can manifest in different ways later on, depending on the age and position of the individual who experiences it²⁴.

Furthermore, interacting with co-nationals abroad may pose its own challenges. In cases following a civil war, ethnic tensions, or high polarization, migrants may avoid others from their own country because they may be afraid to find out that they are coming from different ends of a conflict²⁵. A victim of torture, for example, may run into a former police officer or soldier who later also had to escape persecution.

When a person joins the home of a family member residing in a new country, they may face any number of challenges – in

addition to new surroundings, culture, and language, integration within the family can be an overlooked subject. Children and adolescents who are the subject of our book “*Reunited*”¹ have often seen their parents last when they were small children. Given the high risk and cost of the undocumented journey to the United States and the restrictions placed on those not subject to legal permanent residency or citizenship, parents are seldom able to travel back to their home country to see their children, instead parenting from afar and providing as many remittances as possible. Sometimes, remitting and making ends meet in the U.S. becomes difficult, and so many people find new spouses who can help with financial stability but can also add new pressures²⁶. Youth then also have to get to know and understand new stepparents, step- or half-siblings. Understanding and interpreting rules and choosing to follow them can be a tenuous process. Some youth deal with new forms or intensity of religion that their parents have taken on and expect them to join in on. In sum, emotional ties can be tested after reunification, and new lives together must be negotiated.¹

Poverty also poses barriers and challenges to integration within families.²⁷ The realities of the cost of living and low wages for migrants in the U.S. can make it difficult not only for migrants to provide for their social networks, but in the context of reunification, it makes it difficult for parents to be fully present, to attend events like parent-teacher conferences or sports events, because they need to work long hours to provide for their families’ basic necessities²⁷. Canizales shows how processes similar to this manifest in the lives of unaccompanied youth as they come of age²⁸. Canizales shows how Mexican and Central American youth who live in the U.S. without parents or legal status struggle to make ends meet, conducting low-wage work in the Los Angeles area. They lose many opportunities for social mobility as they are not able to graduate high school, attend college, and therefore many could not apply for DACA.

In sum, various inequalities persist in the context of family migration, especially but not only related to socioeconomic status.

López notes that the processes of migration, family reunification, and citizenship through marriage are unequal processes in various ways, especially through class lines, both through the legal system itself and through the necessity to hire lawyers for the process²⁹. In another example of the state forcing family separation, mixed-status families face unique challenges and are directly affected by immigration policy. López tells the stories of people without any criminal records who entered the country with authorization and, despite marrying U.S. citizens, are undocumented. In order for many of them to regularize their status, they would have to leave the country and wait ten years before being able to apply to re-enter the country.

Situating Family Migration: Afghans after 2021

In studying migration, we can examine the complex ways in which families, individuals, and laws all coalesce to create durable inequalities. At times, family networks are highly relevant, as are laws, in determining who can migrate with their family, who can migrate legally as a worker, and who has to end up following an undocumented route, including how these laws separate children from families, and how law, culture, and public policy can create durable structural integration for adults, children, and families alike. In this section, we aim to show some of the ways in which race, ethnicity, work experience, and education interface with one another to affect the experiences of belonging as reported by Afghan migrants in the U.S. To this point in this chapter, we have primarily discussed the experiences of families who experience separations. However, even in contexts where family separations do not necessarily occur, societal and local contexts matter just as much, and the reasonings for migration, and individual’s central motivations after resettlement, are often situated around family needs.

In 2022, we began researching the experiences of Afghan immigrants and refugees in the U.S., mainly in the DC area, to better

understand their experiences and challenges¹. All interviewees were adults who described their experiences in work, family, and early life.

Afghan migrants after the rise of the Taliban represent a complex example of family migration. Since most migrants from a given country who leave during a crisis end up in bordering countries, most Afghans who were able to leave found themselves in Pakistan or Iran immediately after the Taliban's takeover of the country. However, due to the U.S. government's long tenure in the country, many people worked directly for the U.S. government or as contractors – service providers such as translators and drivers, area experts, and those engaged in building construction for the U.S., to name some such cases. They had relatively strong ties to U.S. citizens, soldiers, and officers. Some of these Afghan individuals opted and were able to eventually go to the

U.S. Prior to the Taliban's rise, Nauroz, a man in his late 30's, was employed in Afghanistan with a firm that worked with the U.S. government. He had a master's degree in law from a university in Afghanistan and was unemployed at the time of the interview. He

¹ This study used a wide ranging, structured interview protocol that asked questions about personal background and family/upbringing, identity, education from a young age to present day, migration journey, employment and job search skills from a young age to present day, income and financial or other public support, and health. The study was approved by the American University IRB (approval number IRB-2022-211). Each interview was aimed to take approximately 60 minutes. To date, dozens of interviews have been conducted with Afghan-origin respondents. Interviewers came from multiple backgrounds, many being immigrants themselves. The team had extensive training on interview skills, Afghanistan's history, how to conduct ethical research with immigrants, and more. Every interview has been completed in English, however, the interview team included interviewers who spoke Dari, Pashto, Urdu, and other languages. Interview materials including consent forms were translated into Dari and Pashto. *Sample demographics*

Average year of birth: 1988, ranging from 1979 to 2002 (ages 21-44). Median year of arrival in the US was 2021 – 10 arrived from 2008 through 2020, and 17 arrived in 2021 or 2022. Eight respondents were women, and twenty-one were men. Names have been changed and identifying characteristics have been omitted to protect the privacy of participants.

said that by the time the Taliban took over Kabul, people like him were considered spies and were sometimes being killed. He said of the period before the most recent takeover in 2021:

These past twenty years were the golden times of Afghanistan. For children, for students. There were so many opportunities, and we studied and enjoyed those opportunities. I worked, made money, and supported my family. I made a good reputation for myself and for my children. And now... I studied to... make a good career for me, for myself. By studying, I would be able to make a career, to find a way to have a good job, to find money, to live appropriately.

Nauroz, in explaining what he saw as a good life – held family central – hoping to support them and build a good reputation for himself and them. When that became impossible, he was able to relocate his family to the United States to continue to pursue those goals, despite the challenges that migrants face there. Still, he mentioned that his ethnic group – Hazarachs – felt like second-class citizens in Afghanistan, so though he identified as Afghan, he mentioned that he never felt a larger sense of belonging outside of the Hazaracha community. Where he and his family lived currently, he mentioned an abundance of other Afghans with whom they could celebrate Afghan holidays and festivals, Afghan stores, and, in general, a sense of community despite certain challenges.

He grew up with a father who was a farmer and a mother who was a housewife – and he had worked his way up into leadership roles in organizations that work with migrants. Additionally, he mentioned the challenges and discrimination that people of the Hazara ethnic group face in the Afghan job market, which he said he was able to overcome and make a good life for himself in Afghanistan. At the time of the interview, he and his children resettled on the West Coast of the United States, unemployed and receiving limited support from the Office of Refugee Resettlement.

He wanted to further his education but noted a few challenges to doing so:

Uh... Two things—I think, two obstacles that prevent me or will prevent me from studying. One thing is, of course, financial support because I'm paying a very high rent here... The next thing is that my wife doesn't know how to drive. She cannot drive, and I have to take care of the kids—take them to school, to the doctor, to appointments, to the park, to picnics.

One might assume that in Afghanistan, his wife would not have needed to know how to drive and be able to navigate the city by herself. Where Nauroz and his family were now living, it can be very difficult to complete daily tasks without driving. He spoke of the future he wanted for his children:

Well, we are sending them to school. They will start school in August. For their future, I will try, we will try always to... They will be... to make a good future for them, to encourage them to study and go to university and make their lives better. And we hope so, because of the situation that we had in Afghanistan in past years, they hopefully will not have to face such a situation. They will study and learn English in the United States, and we hope they will be living a good future.

Janji, a Hazarah man from Afghanistan and currently living in the midwestern United States, in his mid-30s, explained a situation which also exemplifies that of many others with large extended families. He found himself in a small city in the US, but his extended family lived all over the world. Janji also has seven siblings. When speaking about where they were, he said one was in the US, one in Canada, one in Germany, and the other four in Pakistan. His parents hoped to join his sibling in Canada. “My parents ... now they are in

Pakistan. They are trying to come to Canada. ... their case is under process. So, they don't do anything now. But, before that, my father was a shopkeeper. He had some businesses...” Janji's wife is with him in the U.S., but also temporarily unable to work:

My wife has applied for a job, and, uh, she is waiting for her work permit. And, uh, yeah. She might like the possibility of taking that job if we're hired now, but we don't know, and they have said that, bring the work permit first, then we will discuss it.”

Janji is in school, and currently unemployed, hoping to find work after completing his degree in two more semesters. He reported that in Afghanistan – in Kabul, specifically, where he lived for a decade – that he didn't feel a strong sense of belonging due to discrimination in society against his family's Hazarah ethnicity. He and his wife and children spoke Persian and ate Afghan food with each other at home, but he characterized the Afghan community where they lived as “just one family” – with a great amount of cohesion. While he felt belonging and included by those he went to school with, none of them were co-ethnics or co-linguists.

Nauroz and Janji's stories show how, in different ways, migrant families face unique challenges when dealing with resettlement and the state: differing abilities to travel, unite, work, or even more day-to-day things such as transportation, even within the confines of similar legal statuses. Even given the role of family and social networks in migration, reunification with family members takes time and can be difficult. Even when people can escape insecurity and violence and reunite abroad, there can be challenges adapting to a new life when faced with new spatial, legal, and linguistic constraints, such as needing to learn how to drive, learn a new language, or acquire a work permit.

Mina, a woman in her early 40s with a husband and two daughters, living in the same city as Janji, explained her family's current spread across the world:

One of my sisters is living in Iran nowadays. She's waiting for her visa to go to Germany. My other sister is also in Germany. Um... yeah. Just these. Four of us live in the United States. My father—parents and my brother are in [Afghanistan] right now.”

While she was able to come to the U.S. with her husband and children, her parents and siblings were spread throughout the world. Many migrants on either side of a given border find themselves waiting for a work or travel permit. Mina also had previously completed a master's degree in Australia, which she characterized as “very valuable” due to what she described as an equivalency with the same degree from the U.S.

Mina, Janji, and Narouz's experiences begin to illustrate some of the ways that structural integration for extended families of the forcibly displaced and refugees are connected to work, community, and sometimes overlooked aspects of migrants' lives, such as proximity to and usability of public transportation. Their cases also illustrate how extended families of migrants end up across the world – networks, while they can be a driver of migration, do not guarantee an ability to actually migrate.

Community Integration

In communities prepared to welcome migrant youth and families, there are nonprofit social services and school programs to support children and families and help aid in the process of reunification. Some of these programs take place in schools that have peer support groups to support just the adults, just the minors, or family units in a group setting to talk about common challenges, with facilitators

presenting strategies. They discuss problems and challenges, help youth navigate identity questions and build self-esteem, and help both groups understand what they want out of their family ties, which look very different from what they once did. Prepared schools hire multilingual counselors.

How can public policy be crafted to best support migrant families? We propose a multi-pronged approach, related to scales of jurisdictions/geography.

	National/Federal	Regional/State/Provincial
Roles/Sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immigration policy • Funding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional planning • Transportation agencies • School districts and funding priorities
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patchwork migration control regimes • Constrained funding • Work restrictions for large groups of residents • Low state capacity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clashing boundaries between jurisdictions • National/federal precedence in law
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DACA and DAPA (to completion) • Regularization of the undocumented population • Labor protections • Upholding asylum law 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designing state policies to support and welcome/integrate migrants
Examples of Successes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DACA (initially) • Language and vocational training in various European countries • Deliberate integration programs for migrants and refugees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public universities allowing undocumented students to attend for in-state tuition cost

Municipal/Local	Civil Society
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local planning • Schools • Community outreach social programming 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Macro and micro interaction • Organizational communications and logics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constrained funding • Resistance from upper levels (regional, national, etc.) • Place-specific challenges (e.g. migrant bussing to NY, Chicago) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Racist and xenophobic attitudes toward certain groups of migrants • Lower levels of democratization, even when the political will exists within the general public
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job and economic development work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community driven support and mutual aid
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prince George’s County, Maryland, USA school programming to support migrant youth from Central America (Reunited) • Sanctuary cities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free health clinics for migrants in Greece • Sanctuary cities

By-in-large, policies that support migrants support all. For instance, increased labor protections for migrants, will in turn benefit migrant families and native-born families alike. Similarly, greater investment at every level in the commons, often lead to better integratory trajectories for migrants and benefit native-born citizens alike.

Conclusion: The Future of Research in Family Migration

While we highlight ethnic enclaves and migrant destinations in larger cities such as New York and Paris, there are large communities of migrants in smaller communities throughout the U.S. and the world. Researchers have noted the importance of studying new and emerging migrant destinations, the role of context and the need to understand the experiences of migrants in suburban areas³⁰⁻³¹. We argue that future research should investigate the dynamics of international family migration into rural areas and in smaller communities where dynamics may exist that make immigrants less visible as they relocate because of increased labor competition and higher cost of living in more urbanized and traditional immigrant gateway cities³².

A point worth highlighting is that there are deep-set inequalities that prevent many families from reunifying abroad or from migrating together in the first place. Noticing and studying presence is a far easier undertaking than that of absence. Researchers have written on unaccompanied youth arriving in the United States and note that unaccompanied youth from the continent of Africa, a by-in-large minority of unaccompanied youth, spend the highest amount of time in custody out of all groups³³. Thus, research on family networks in Africa and migration decisions, as well as in-depth analysis of youth migration policy in such contexts, may be warranted³⁴⁻³⁶.

LGBTQIA+ people and their families also face unique challenges and inequities in migration. For instance, disclosure of sexual or gender minority status in migration proceedings for youth,

often disconnected from their biological families, can have unintended consequences during detention and legal proceedings³⁷.

Family reunification continues to be a relevant topic – Galli and Garip show comprehensively and systematically various explanations of youth migration, including those that engage family networks³⁸. Studies can also compare the experiences of families between different legal statuses and in different countries, and what factors fracture migrant networks and deeply cut physical ties as may be the case in North Korea³⁹.

Immigration policy is often thought of and framed at the individual level, focusing on a working-age adult moving alone. Yet, most people live in families. Scholars ought to also consider the ways in which families are supported after they arrive, reunify, or otherwise live in a host society. Structural conditions that affect everyone in different ways remain salient; wage and labor power of low-wage workers, ease of sending one's child to school, and community programs that aid integration are just as important as explaining why.

As we show here, after a person migrates, chances increase that they will later bring a family member with them a member of their nuclear or extended family, which may in turn do so, and those create the relocation of certain network groups into new places while they will keep ties and contacts in the previous place of residence. This is why networks and particularly social networks are key to understanding the micro-dynamics of internal and international migration, which may result in large social effects visible at the macro and discursive level.

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5 Immigration is Good for Cities: Expats in Mexico City

By Jaris Montserrath Hernandez, Sofia Guerra, Loretta Mariaud, Diana Garay, and Ernesto Castañeda

This chapter looks at how Mexico’s role in migration is shifting. Once known primarily as a country of emigration and transit, Mexico is increasingly becoming a destination for immigrants from North and South America, Europe, and beyond. Drawing on qualitative interviews with foreign residents, the study explores the motivations behind their relocation, including factors like lower costs of living, quality of life, and the rise of remote work opportunities. The chapter also reflects on the broader socio-economic implications of this migratory flow, particularly its effects on housing, local economies and patterns of urban development.

I. INTRODUCTION

Immigration is one of the most powerful engines of urban growth. Immigrants have historically fueled wealth creation, innovation, and cultural richness in countries like the United States. Once considered primarily a country of emigration, Mexico now draws a growing number of immigrants from North America, Europe, South America, and beyond. Nowhere is this dynamic more visible than in

the neighborhoods of Polanco, Roma, and Condesa, which have emerged as hubs for foreigners over the past decades.

To better understand this phenomenon, we conducted interviews with long-term foreign residents in Mexico City. Many of the interviewees self-identified as expats or digital nomads and had lived in multiple countries prior to settling in Mexico City. A common motivation for relocation was the city's relatively affordable cost of living compared to their countries of birth.

When asked why they chose Mexico City, most respondents highlighted the city's vibrancy, rich cultural offerings, and the warmth of its people. Some interviewees shared that they had formed communities mainly with fellow expats, while others said they had built friendships primarily with locals. Some said they were able to make friends through expat group pages on Facebook or by becoming regulars at local spots in the city. More than the average local, they sought third spaces to be in community while working on international projects online. A sense of belonging was an important factor in their decision to stay.

II. ADJUSTMENTS

Despite making connections, expats in Mexico City face language barriers and need to understand and adapt to local cultural norms quickly. One adjustment that was often mentioned was dress style. An interviewee described how women in Mexico City often dress up for daily activities. She shared how this influenced her to start wearing makeup to the gym, following the example of her local friends. She shared that back where she is from, people do not really pay attention to whether one is out in workout clothes or a suit. Another expat recounted feeling out of place at a meeting at her children's school because she was one of the only ones without styled hair or makeup.

Many foreigners also expressed a sense of longing for their home countries and immediate family, missing familiar routines and certain

conveniences, such as restaurant chains that have few or no locations in Mexico City, like Chick-fil-A or Chipotle.

Affordability was another recurring theme. Many interviewees noted that rent in Mexico City offered more space for less money than in their previous hometowns. Many also knew that the location affected the prices. People who lived closer to the city center paid lower rent compared to those who lived in the Polanco or Condesa neighborhoods. Either way, the rent was more affordable than in major U.S. or European cities. They also mentioned the price difference when dining out, noting that one could get more food at a lower price. During their initial outings, they were surprised at the substantial quantity and high quality of food in relation to the price charged. Similarly, groceries are much cheaper. However, they noted that imported goods and technology tend to be significantly more expensive, leading them to avoid purchasing such items in CDMX.

Expats frequently noted the warmth and hospitality of most local residents. Many cited the willingness of Mexicans to provide guidance and support as a key factor in their decision to remain in the city. While there are a few xenophobic articles and online discussions about the northern "invasion" and prices going up because of expats, these sentiments rarely translate into confrontations in daily life. Recent protests have become visible and garnered headlines, but they do not translate into xenophobic behaviors against foreigners, and this does not represent the everyday interactions of foreigners working in Mexico City, who sometimes feel even more at ease and safer than the locals.

To gain a fuller perspective, we also spoke with long-term residents of Mexico City about the increased presence of foreigners. Some felt that the expats had improved their neighborhood safety, walkability, and the number of outdoor tables and cafes. Others expressed frustration over cultural clashes, such as feeling that expats were not embracing the native language or cultural customs. One interviewee commented on how some foreigners often complained about the lively nightlife—an important feature of the city, particularly during the weekends—and disagreed with supposed

attempts to change these traditions. Another observation often made by locals was the influence of expats on the culinary scene, with international food options becoming increasingly prominent. A common claim on social media is that salsas in some taquerias are becoming less spicy to accommodate the new clientele. But there are so many eateries in Mexico City, and expats are so concentrated in a few neighborhoods that this is unlikely to change the spiciness levels or other features of the city's food, which is not new to absorbing new world cuisines and practices. It will also probably not negatively impact homemade foods.

Policy and structural factors also shape these experiences. Several expats noted that Mexico's immigration policies make settling in the city relatively straightforward. One expat, for instance, shared that she had overstayed her tourist visa but was unconcerned, as she knew she would only need to pay a fine to resolve the issue. Gentrification emerged as another theme, with some residents acknowledging that the influx of foreigners has contributed to rising housing prices (Umaña Reyes 2023).

Some Mexican columnists suggest it is important to strike a balance that allows locals and expats to coexist in the best of circumstances. On one hand, they say expats should embrace the country's culture and language, but as research shows (Castañeda and Cione 2024), expats want and do learn Spanish after being in the city for a few years. On the other hand, locals could benefit from the new customs and ideas foreigners bring from all over the world. These interactions can generate innovations and new cultural practices, mixing those of different origins.

As one local resident noted, In general, if you do it correctly, it can bring value to a society or a country, but if you just let it happen, like with no controls, no regulations, no attempts to step inside and regulate the process, you very easily create problems for your native population or you will create solutions for the expats at the expense of your own population. This view gives too much credence to the impact of the government's policies and official statements. In theory,

multicultural policies like those of Mexico City create a conducive context, which must be accompanied by education campaigns about the realities of immigration to reduce myths and xenophobia, and the challenges of sharing a city and public spaces are figured out little by little in shared public space, as is always the case with any neighbors.

III. INDIVIDUAL PERCEPTIONS VERSUS SYSTEMATIC REALITIES

In a useful cognitive shortcut, people naturally tend to generalize from their personal experience and extrapolate to imagine general trends. For example, when someone applies for a specific job or looks to rent or buy a particular housing unit they like, they indeed compete with other interested parties active in the market at the same time. But this does not mean that there is a maximum number of jobs or rooms. Cities often grow in population due to newcomers from within and beyond national borders. In the aggregate, immigration creates more cultural and economic opportunities for city residents.

As discussed in books such as "Immigration Realities: Challenging Common Misperceptions" (Castañeda and Cione 2024), social science offers valuable insights into immigration. Contrary to widespread beliefs, for example, finding that overall, the most recently arrived expats struggle more with speaking and understanding the local version of Spanish, but as years pass, they learn how to speak like people from Mexico City and unconsciously imitate the class accent of those locals with whom they speak most often.

Another common misconception is that immigrants are primarily responsible for increasing housing costs. In reality, the drivers of urban housing crises are far more complex and structural, as we discuss in the next section.

IV. URBAN POPULATION DYNAMICS AND REAL ESTATE PRICES

While their ability to pay more is real, expats have driven up rents in some buildings and neighborhoods, but not across the city. The foreign-born population is not large enough to make a significant impact in a metropolitan area with over 21 million people. There is a conflation between a visible but moderate increase in expats and inflation, but the rise in prices coincided with the overall inflation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Furthermore, high housing prices and the need for more housing in general across Mexico City predate increases in international migration and are largely driven by high density, a lack of land to build as much housing as needed for new local family formation, and migration from other parts of Mexico to the capital, as well as the financialization of housing that is investors buying buildings and house in large numbers to rent them for profit as a relatively safe way to invest and get higher returns than in other investments and stocks. The rapid expansion of Airbnb is a factor, but it is more about over-investment in short-term rentals for national and international visitors than for expats and immigrants planning to stay in Mexico for many years or possibly permanently. Furthermore, the neighborhoods where new immigrants with resources arrive are often the same as those where foreign-born individuals have previously lived. Polanco, for instance, became home to Jewish, Lebanese, U.S., and European immigrant families in the mid-20th century. The area evolved into a symbol of high social status and cosmopolitanism, characterized by a strong concentration of embassies, luxury brands, and international schools (Reyes 2010).

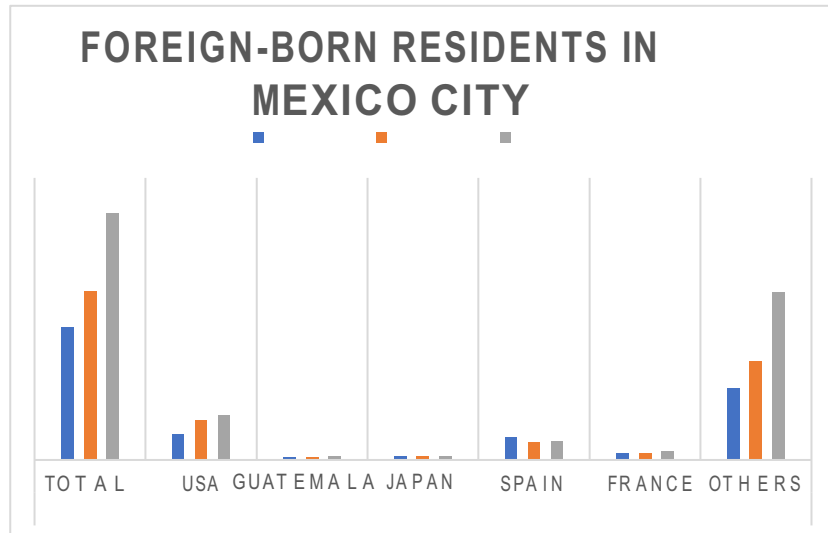
The neighborhoods of Condesa and Roma were originally developed for upper-middle-class residents in the early 20th century. These neighborhoods were partially abandoned after the 1985 earthquake, and remained partially uninhabited for years, with little investment or structural repair. Without the revitalization that began in the 2000s, many of their historic buildings would still be in ruins

(El Financiero 2021). However, beginning in the early 2000s, these areas attracted waves of returning residents, artists, and international minorities who revitalized local businesses and contributed to a cultural renaissance (IOM 2020).

These neighborhoods are not newly discovered by foreigners but rather have long been magnets for global communities. Their historical openness to migration has helped turn them into dynamic, economically resilient zones of the city (INEGI 2007). For decades, Roma and Condesa have housed people from diverse origins, including Spain, Argentina, and Chile, who were political refugees or economic migrants.

As new fancy neighborhoods have appeared further away, such as Santa Fe, La Herradura, or Las Lomas, many people with means have moved out, leaving vacant housing in central and attractive neighborhoods but with an aging housing stock and infrastructure that requires significant investments that only businesses and foreigners are willing to make in neighborhoods that are no longer attractive to live in for large families or the richest of Mexicans.

According to data from the Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (INEGI) Population and Housing Census, in 2020, foreigners residing in the capital represented 1.13 percent of the population, or a total of 104,629 inhabitants. Of these, 18 percent were from the USA; 7.7 percent from Spain; 3.4 percent from France; 1.4 percent from Guatemala; and 1.3 percent from Japan. The graph shows the estimated foreign-born population from 2000 to 2020.



**The United States, Guatemala, Japan, Spain, and France were the most frequently recorded countries of origin.*

**Source: INEGI, “Población total nacida en otro país residente en México por entidad federativa según sexo y países seleccionados, años censales de 2000, 2010 y 2020.”*

V. WHY DO IMMIGRANTS SETTLE IN ROMA, CONDESA, AND POLANCO?

Several factors explain the consistent preference among immigrants and foreigners for these three neighborhoods. One is that these zones feature a high density of cafes, parks, art galleries, libraries, and boutique stores that appeal to the highly educated international residents. Another is accessibility. The neighborhoods are in an overall good location, close to downtown and business centers, and well-connected by the metro system or large avenues and highways. Many businesses cater to English-speaking residents, and international schools and coworking spaces are common. Although expensive by Mexican national standards, Roma and Condesa are not

the most expensive neighborhoods in the city, and these neighborhoods remain attractive to immigrants earning in dollars or euros (DW Español 2025).

Between 2010 and 2025, the cost of living in these neighborhoods has increased significantly. Much of this is attributed to increased demand driven by both internal and international arrivals. While inflation explains part of the trend, real estate speculation and the short-term rental market have significantly accelerated the upward curve.

In Polanco, monthly housing and living expenses now regularly exceed MXN \$40,000, which is approximately USD \$2,200. Making it one of the most expensive areas in Latin America. In Polanco and Anzures, approximately 50 to 60 percent of the homes are rented by individuals from other nationalities (Riquelme 2017; Navarrete 2023). Condesa and Roma, once considered accessible alternatives, have followed suit, with rents rising by 80 to 120 percent since 2010 (Villafranco 2023).

Mexico City has also seen emerging interest in neighborhoods outside of the traditional expat hubs, such as the areas surrounding Tepito. This neighborhood, initially known for its informal commerce, evolved into a hub for drug distribution and other illicit activities, including extortion, kidnapping, and theft (Omastová 2017). Despite its reputation, Tepito has recently seen a growing presence of foreign visitors. Tepito has become a target for digital nomads partly due to real estate initiatives. The company Grupo UBK launched a remarketing campaign promoting the neighborhood as an affordable investment opportunity, which has contributed to rising rents. As part of this effort, the area is being rebranded as “Reforma Norte” to mitigate perceptions of insecurity. The promoted buildings are primarily located on the outskirts of Tepito rather than on its core. Some local residents remain unaware of the new name and are skeptical that it will affect prices in the neighborhood’s heart, even as they observe an increase in foreign visitors to the busiest market areas (Guerra 2024).

Despite these changes, Tepito continues to face longstanding challenges associated with delinquency, drug trafficking, and informal commerce. Tourists and digital nomads visiting the neighborhood typically stay for the day, often accompanied by locals who are familiar with the area. These dynamics highlight the contrast between the perceptions of safety created by marketing strategies and the lived realities experienced by long-term residents. Tepito serves as an example of how emerging neighborhoods are being transformed by broader urban and economic forces, illustrating trends in Mexico City's always-evolving urban landscape (Guerra 2024).

VI. HOUSING SHORTAGE

Housing costs have also increased in other parts of Mexico City, despite its relatively small foreign-born population.

The Mexican Housing Price Index from the Federal Mortgage Society (SHF) reported a national increase of 8.2% in the first quarter of 2025. In the Mexico City Metropolitan Area overall growth was slightly lower at 5% (SHF 2025).

The boroughs (*delegaciones*) with the highest average rental prices in August 2024 were Cuauhtémoc (MXN 24,473), Miguel Hidalgo (MXN 22,983), Cuajimalpa (MXN 17,625), Benito Juárez (MXN 17,487), and Álvaro Obregón (MXN 17,256). Conversely, Magdalena Contreras, Azcapotzalco, and Venustiano Carranza have shown growth of less than 15% over the last five years (Inmuebles24 2024).

Over 9.21 million people live in Mexico City proper (INEGI 2020), with approximately 46% living in rental housing. The average rent for a two-bedroom apartment is under a thousand dollars per month (MXN 17,470), but it represents 30% to 40% of the average household income (Expansion 2024; Sison 2024).

In the United States, the term gentrification is used to describe infrastructure and amenity investments, along with demographic changes that displace large numbers of ethnic and racial minority groups, as well as low-income residents. This is not technically the

case in Polanco, Roma, or Condesa, which are not majority indigenous, Afro-Mexican, or low-income areas. For decades, these have been middle- and upper-middle-class neighborhoods. They have experienced population shifts and even ethnic succession before.

The increase in recent immigrants working remotely or visiting for mid-term stays has mainly concentrated along a corridor stretching from Roma and Condesa to Juárez and the Historic Center along avenues Reforma and Insurgentes. Researchers have identified these areas as the most affected by rent increases, Airbnb proliferation, and the arrival of digital nomads (Correa Lara 2023; Tu Casa Express 2024).

High-growth real estate areas also show increased socio-spatial inequality. Average rents in central neighborhoods have risen more rapidly than in the rest of the city, pushing out long-time residents and shifting housing use toward short-term and tourism-oriented rentals. Additionally, the spread of platforms like Airbnb has decreased the availability of long-term housing for locals, further driving up prices.

Central areas (Roma, Condesa, Centro, Juárez, Polanco) show price increases far above the national average (8%) and Mexico City's (4–5%). Airbnb is a key factor in reducing long-term housing options. In Roma, there was 1 Airbnb listing for every 10 households in 2018. Gentrification, driven by digital nomads and new developments, benefits real estate firms while displacing traditional populations, altering commerce, and the social fabric. While international immigration has increased, Mexico City has always grown in population due to arrivals from other parts of Mexico. According to INEGI, over 1.2 million people moved to Mexico City from other federal entities between 2018 and 2023. The amount of foreign-born people in Mexico is very low in relation to a city of 10 million and a metropolitan area of over 20 million. Roma and Condesa are a microcosm about how newcomers revive and make areas vibrant, productive, safe, and attractive to cosmopolitan people.

VII. IMMIGRATION, GROWTH, AND URBAN CHANGE

The benefits of immigration, including economic stimulation, neighborhood revitalization, and cultural exchanges, contrast with growing local tensions surrounding displacement and affordability. The most visible result has been the gentrification of these neighborhoods. Residents without fixed incomes and homeowners in these neighborhoods have expressed concern about rising costs and exclusion from community spaces.

In July 2025, protests in Roma and Condesa targeted what residents perceive as unchecked foreign influence and government inaction. Signs and chants asked for government action. Policy attempts to regulate platforms like Airbnb, through caps on rental nights and zoning restrictions, have stalled in the courts. As of mid-2025, meaningful policy enforcement has yet to materialize. Other signs carried nationalist tones, like: "Mexico for Mexicans," "Pay taxes, learn Spanish, respect my culture" (San José and San Juan Flores 2025; DW Español 2025), and those similar to xenophobic marches in other countries, with most residents not participating or backing up the messages or how they were delivered.

Tourism plays a crucial role in bringing foreign income to Mexico. In 2024, tourism contributed around 8.6% of the GDP (Secretaría de Turismo 2024). Tourism is one of the country's principal economic engines. Immigration's impact is larger, more long-lasting, less transactional, and less superficial than tourism. Tourism is not evenly distributed among destinations around the world. People want to visit places that are described with adjectives such as trendy, popular, upcoming new destinations, or off-the-beaten-path gems that are attractive and recommendable. So, a tourism industry in a place either exists or does not, with all its pros and cons. Similarly, people can migrate to many places, where to move is not predetermined; immigrants or expats have to be attracted and retained.

Another important consideration is the counterfactuals or alternative scenarios. What would be the current status of neighborhoods like Condesa or Roma if it were not for the investment related to the arrival of younger, bohemian residents first, and then more foreign-born residents, as well as restaurant patrons from other parts of the city and the country? People who live in Mexico City may complain about foreigners moving into the city while enjoying a delicious dinner at a new restaurant in Condesa, which probably would not exist without those new residents eating next to them.

Given the aging infrastructure, the destruction brought by earthquakes, and the emergence of new residential neighborhoods attracting wealthy Mexicans, the Roma and Condesa neighborhoods would have probably experienced a decrease in density and many vacant units. Walking through the neighborhood today, one can still see evidence of how costly it is to renovate these Art Deco houses, and some are in ruins.



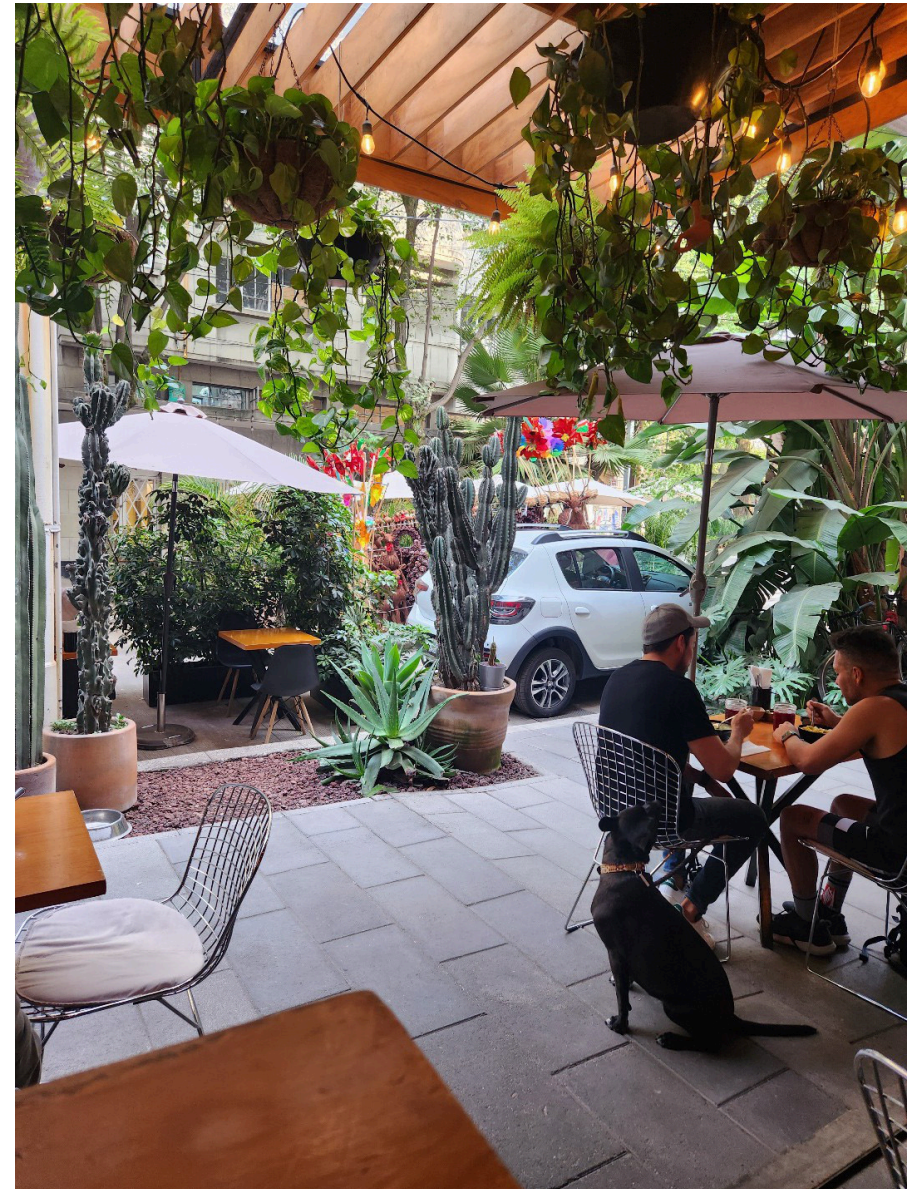
Abandoned structure in a central area in the Roma/Condesa area. Photos by Ernesto Castañeda. November 15, 2024.



Broken sign from a previous urban development era.



Public park targeted by the 2025 protests.



Café where Mexicans and foreigners eat and work.



The American presence in the area is not new. The scouts have been present in Mexico since 1920 and have had their headquarters in the Roma neighborhood for decades. Likewise, the American Legion, established in Mexico since the 1920s, has had a house in the Condesa since 1968, photographed above by Ernesto Castañeda.

VIII. IMMIGRATION IS A CAUSE OF DEVELOPMENT

Many Americans and other foreigners do not have valid or up-to-date immigration permits, but this rarely interferes with their daily lives or creates a sense of dread or fear. This does not mean that they are prone to breaking the law. Even if Americans living in Mexico work a remote job based in the United States, may vote in U.S. elections, and pay taxes there, they incur everyday expenses in Mexico City, increasing economic activity in Mexico, and they learn something new about the country every day. Becoming cultural brokers and ambassadors.

While expats may seem onerous to old-timers who share spaces with them, many could relocate to a third country in the near future or eventually return to their countries of origin. This would result in significant economic, cultural, social, and human losses for Mexico City.

Most wealthy countries today have populations that include over 15% of individuals born abroad. Mexico has less than 1%; we argue that if Mexico reached 15%, it would become one of the world's top ten economies. That is the only way Mexico can grow economically and technologically in the future, given the end of its population boom. We will also probably see a decrease in emigration, leading to lower remittances but to greater productivity at home and a larger GDP.

IX. CONCLUSION

The arrival in Mexico City of foreign-born residents – many of whom identify as expats or digital nomads – has generated new forms of economic activity, translational connectivity, and cultural exchange. While these individuals and families contribute to local consumption, entrepreneurship, and neighborhood revitalization, their presence also exposes enduring tensions around affordability, and inequality, which predate their arrival. The tendency to attribute rising costs or

displacement solely to immigration overlooks the deeper dynamics of urban development, financialization, and internal migration that have driven population and economic growth in Mexico City since its founding around 1325.

The experiences shared by interviewees underscore both the opportunities and challenges of settling in the city. Language barriers, cultural expectations, and the adaptation to local social norms shape their daily lives. Yet, these individual narratives intersect with broader structural forces: housing shortages, inflation, and patterns of gentrification that long predate the recent wave of international migration.

Mexico City and Mexico as a whole have long demonstrated the capacity to welcome people from diverse national, socioeconomic, and cultural backgrounds. The challenge now lies in translating this demographic dynamism into equitable and sustainable urban development, guided by policies that promote inclusive urban planning, protect affordable housing, and foster cross-cultural engagement.

Like any place, Mexico City and Mexico as a whole are more than able to absorb a large number of foreigners regardless of their class, national origin, religion, or race. Immigrants need jobs and housing, but they also increase demand and start businesses, thereby creating more jobs for locals. They also help build or invest in new housing. Mexico City could become the next global city, joining the ranks of New York, Paris, Tokyo, Barcelona, Abu Dhabi, and Hong Kong. Unchecked xenophobia, politicians, or anti-immigrant policies should not delay or thwart this opportunity, which only a few cities can enjoy. This applies to expats with professional jobs, as well as intellectuals from Latin America, and people looking for entry-level jobs from other parts of the world.

Mexico City has long been enriched by immigration. From the European communities that established roots in Polanco to the creative professionals who revived Roma and Condesa, immigrants have shaped the urban landscape. The current wave of settlement, fueled by remote work, offers new opportunities for economic and

cultural vitality. Yet these benefits are not immediate. Thoughtful regulation and community engagement can help to foster the attraction of talent and investment while also working to reduce exclusion and inequality.

Acknowledgement: We thank anonymous interviewees and Sarah Iverson for early feedback.

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6 Excluded at the Edges: Urban Peripheries and the Stigmatization of Space in France

by Ernesto Castañeda

This chapter is based on ten months of non-participant observation, in-depth interviews, and surveys with immigrants and natives in the Paris metropolitan area. Despite popular representations of spatial closure, Parisian banlieues are places where social and cultural boundaries are created and crossed by actual contact between different social groups. Although the chapter focuses on Paris, the issues discussed are relevant to all urban spaces where diverse populations come into contact. The chapter challenges the view that ghettos, barrios, or banlieues are self-contained spatial social units or closed-off systems. While these areas are indeed spatial containers of social stigma and exclusion, there is continuous interaction amongst immigrants, students, working-class people, middle-class professionals, and visible minorities. The social value that these interactions acquire depends on local historical precedents and the larger political context. This chapter argues that the notions of “the ghetto” or “the banlieue” can only be fully understood when explicitly seen in relation to the spaces that surround them, exemplifying the relational nature of the core/periphery relationship.

I. Introduction

In World Systems Theory, there are global cores and peripheries, core areas within peripheries (capital cities in countries in the Global South), and peripheral areas within the core. This happens, for example, in areas where immigrants from former colonies or global peripheries resettle to participate in the labor demands of the global core. Many people worry about “ghettos” forming in downtowns and peripheries of European cities, where immigrants supposedly self-segregate. Research shows that this is a transitory phase caused more by the cost of living, the difficulty of finding housing, family and social ties, and the exchange of information than by an unwillingness to integrate (Castañeda and Cione 2024).

In France, the term “banlieue” is used to describe the area outside of the political limits of a city, the neighborhoods in its urban periphery. While the majority of the population in the Parisian metropolitan area actually resides in the banlieues, the mental image that often accompanies these areas is one of separation from the “real Paris.” Parisians think of banlieues as the places where people from the former French colonies live in poverty, and where crime is widespread (Wacquant 2008). Yet from an analytical perspective, it is impossible to understand banlieues, ghettos, and other stigmatized spaces without examining their interrelations with the neighboring metropolitan spaces. Researchers should not discuss the Parisian banlieues without talking about Paris, and one cannot fully understand Paris without considering its banlieues. Understanding the historical and contemporary relationships between places of stigma and their surroundings allows one to see them as productive spaces for creative ideas and practices. The conjunctive spaces that border and unite Paris and its banlieues create opportunities for interaction among various social groups, adaptation, and improvisation.

This chapter begins by briefly discussing “social boundaries” as a theoretical concept that can be used to schematize the parallel processes that stigmatize urban spaces, inhabited by different ethnic

groups in distinct countries. It compares social boundaries to the concept of “the edge.” Next, it provides a brief overview of the history of the Parisian banlieues, illustrating how the current stigma prevalent in most banlieues is rooted in a long-standing legacy of unequal power relations inscribed in social space. Lastly, it briefly draws from interviews, participant observation, and secondary sources to describe how contemporary practices, in and around the banlieue, are in conflict with the political, journalistic, and sometimes the sociological approaches used to frame the banlieue as worlds apart from the rest of Parisian society.

While there are differences among the definitions of the ghetto, the barrio, and the banlieue, they all share similar processes that produce stigmas in city dwellers’ mental maps (Wacquant 2008). Interactions across racial and ethnic groups happen in all these spaces. However, the overall outcome of such interactions—further segregation or integration—depends on the specific location and the broader social context.

II. Boundary Making

Lamont and Molnar define symbolic boundaries as “conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorize objects, people, practices, and even time and space” (2002:168). Categorization is a core mental process that organizes ongoing stimuli (Massey 2007, Simmel 1971, Zelizer and Tilly 2006). Social categories arise when there is an implicit agreement within a group about how to categorize others and determine their symbolic worth (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006). Group boundaries result from a process of relational identifications and feedback loops. For example, how group X defines itself in relation to group Y is likely to cause a response from group Y, which could in turn affect group X’s self-conception and so on (Tilly 2005). Various mechanisms and boundary-work keep X different from Y (Gieryn 1983, Massey 2007, Roy 1994, Thorne 1993, Tilly 1998, Tilly 2004). We use the term social boundaries to describe “a boundary [that] displays both a categorical and a social or

behavioral dimension” and is accompanied by norms that dictate “how to relate to individuals classified as ‘us’ and ‘them’ under given circumstances” (Wimmer 2008). Thus, the existence of social boundaries often affects the life-chances of individuals within certain groups. For example, minority workers, with an address in a stigmatized banlieue, are less likely to be employed than those living in central Paris. Moral rationales are often provided to deny or justify these unequal outcomes (Lamont 2000). As Tilly writes, a common process of differentiation boils down to the simple black and white thinking that, “We are the worthy people, they the unworthy” (Tilly 2008). Once these beliefs are internalized, it is difficult for one to re-humanize the other, and stigmatization appears “natural” (Bourdieu 1991, 1998). Moral boundaries between groups may appear stronger when spatial configurations segregate and accentuate differences. Here, spatial arrangements emulate what Georg Simmel calls “concentric social circles” (Simmel 1964) that influence how social networks are confined to certain neighborhoods. These social boundaries further separate individuals residing there from inhabitants of other areas.

In multicultural global cities such as Paris, London, and New York, diverse demographic groups and networks overlap at the neighborhood level, including natives, immigrants, and minorities from different national origins, religions, and languages. The challenge facing multicultural societies is to move beyond exclusionary nationalisms and theoretical “primordial” groupings, to accept the reality on the ground — a reality of diversity, complexity, fusion, and reinvention. This does not have to be interpreted as disrespectful to local traditions and solidarities (Calhoun 1997). A plausible ‘rooted cosmopolitanism’ most likely “will depend to a very large extent on local and particularistic border crossings and pluralism, not universalism” (Calhoun 2003:875). A way to enact such pluralism, at the urban level, is to reduce residential segregation, and create institutions that foster the creation of shared public realms. Many American cities have historically succeeded at this by creating a common civic community, embodying the spirit of E

Pluribus Unum, “out of many, one,” resulting in a de jure and de facto citizenship for all the residents of a city and country despite cultural differences.

III. Edges

While administrative borders and symbolic boundaries divide urban landscapes, such as those between Paris and its banlieues, it is essential to recognize that social and symbolic boundaries are often crossed and even transcended by the inhabitants of these spaces. Frequent interaction, socialization, and cohabitation may initially draw attention to intergroup differences along the lines of race, class, gender, or nationality. However, after continued interactions and exchanges with members from a particular social group, vital factors such as commonalities, alliances, friendships, and hybrid cultures may arise. Urban edges are places “where people may come in contact with outsiders” (Sennett 1994:18) and such processes become visible.

When writing about “edges,” social scientists often refer to the work of pioneer American ecologist Eugene Odum, An ecotone is a transition between two or more diverse communities as, for example, between forest and grassland or soft bottom or hard bottom marine community. It is a junction zone or tension belt ... narrower than the adjoining community areas themselves. The ecotonal community commonly contains many of the organisms of each of the overlapping communities and, in addition, organisms which are characteristic of and often restricted to the ecotone. Often, both the number of species and the population density of some of the species are greater in the ecotone than in the communities flanking it. The tendency for increased variety and density at community junctions is known as the edge effect. Organisms which occur primarily or most abundantly or spend the greatest amount of time in junctional communities are often called “edge” species. (Eugen Odum "Fundamentals of Ecology" 1959:278 cited in Rhoades 1978)

As Odum’s ecological “edge effect” leads to greater density and diversity of flora and fauna in the zone of transition, there is also more diversity in the liminal spaces between areas with separated social groups. When applied to human societies, the term “edge effect” refers to the common and sustained interactions between members of different cultures that occur in these peripheral spaces. Commercial and cultural exchanges in ports, global cities (Sassen 2001), borderlands, and transitional urban zones increase the probability of social, technical, and scientific innovation, but boundary-making processes also occur in these places. The goal here is not reify most spaces as lacking diversity, where animal species “naturally” segregate—as such places do not exist in nature—but rather to recognize the higher levels of complexity in places that have the highest biodiversity, and a similar phenomenon occurring across distinct cultural groups of the human species.

The theoretical concepts of boundaries and edges aim to help explain similar phenomena but have different emphases. Social boundaries are internalized ideas that result in behaviors that restrict mobility, prevent interaction, establish social closure, and unequally distribute economic resources and social status (Weber 1978). Edges, on the other hand, are zones full of interactions, exchanges, and flows, and thus, places of possibility and radical openness. The analytical challenge in applying these theoretical conceptualizations to specific urban spaces is to observe and describe how and why conflict and cooperation occur. Furthermore, the narratives about these encounters can create mental maps full of “areas to avoid,” which then reduces edge effects.

We should not reify edges and see them as sui generis; “edgy” conditions that foster interaction can in fact occur across spaces, organizations, institutions, and even in central areas (Odum 1950). The “edge” is a metaphor used to describe physical places where social boundaries overlap, where we can see interaction and cross-fertilization between groups. The concept of edges relies on an ecological metaphor, where different species flourish in a transitional area. The concept of the edge has been applied to the human species

to talk about interactions between ethnic groups in urban areas (Rhoades 1978). However, the “edge effect” hypothesis has been contested in the ecology literature, particularly in the debate over whether natural species distribution occurs along well-defined communities or in a continuum of probabilistic distributions correlated with changes in climate and biome (Rhoades and Phillips 1980). The theory of the edge in social science also relies somewhat on the conception of recognizable and mutually exclusive communities and groups, an abstraction that is easily understood but challenged by most empirical social arrangements (Tilly 1984). The concept of the edge can be used as a heuristic to understand urban life, but when taken as a descriptor of reality, it may indirectly imply the caging of different ethnic groups in territorial neighborhoods. Each group is then framed as containing members of different species rather than the same one. Historical examples give us the social distance to understand these dynamics more clearly, as the social boundaries will appear old-fashioned to us today.

IV. The Venetian Ghetto: Creating Moral, Social and Spatial Boundaries

In 1382, Jewish people were allowed for the first time to act as merchants in the Catholic Principality of Venice. However, in 1516, they were mandated to stay, after sunset, within the confines of the island that used to house a foundry (Haynes and Hutchinson 2008). Some theories suggest that the word “ghetto” derived from the Venetian (local proto-Italian) word “gettare,” meaning “to pour,” which was used to name the foundry (Sennett 1994). The term was later used to describe the forced Jewish enclave. Thus, we see the first use of the word ghetto to designate a relationship between a place of stigma and the concentration of a despised ethnic/religious minority. In this fashion, the understanding of “ghetto” as an urban semi-sealed area, concentrating a segregated and stigmatized group, was born. Interestingly, this historical development coincides with another meaning of *gettare*: “to throw, to cast away.”

In this early ghetto, stigma was inscribed in space and marked on the body (Sennett 1994). When Jewish people went into Venice, men had to wear a yellow circle and women a yellow scarf, and no jewelry (Haynes and Hutchinson 2008). Many years later, this practice was adopted throughout much of Europe. Nazism reinforced the connection between ascribed characteristics and special treatment: Jews were marked physically with yellow stars and officially with notes on their identity cards, passports, and concentrated in living quarters and camps with known dire consequences. As Sennett writes, a ghetto can function as a “prophylactic to maintain social boundaries while allowing for capital investment and labor exploitation (Sennett 1994, Wacquant 2010).” Thus, in the first half of the millennium, Jewish bankers and merchants were in active contact with the population of Venice in daylight.

Chicago Ghettos and the Myth of Community

The seminal Chicago School of Urban Sociology also followed an analogous ecological methodology to the edge theory, conducting community studies that would map and designate “natural areas” within Chicago (Calhoun 2007). These originally descriptive studies had a performative effect, in which, by partly describing the city of Chicago, these scholars created neighborhood names, ascribed them certain characteristics, and went on to convince politicians, school teachers, social workers and others to use their neighborhood labels and boundaries, even if many of the actual residents would not recognize the given classification as that of their neighborhood (Venkatesh 2001). Similar phenomena occur when real estate agents and investors rename contemporary gentrifying neighborhoods.

While the Chicago School left a legacy of excellent ethnographies as well as methodological and theoretical contributions, it also created the myth of ethnic enclaves as foreign rural villages transplanted into urban spaces in industrialized nations. This created an obsession for policymakers and social scientists to impose an order, in which social groups would be placed in certain

neighborhoods, as if they were plants in a botanical garden (Bauman 1989, Scott 1998). Through this process, we see the reproduction of the romantic ideal of traditional rural communities contained in the concepts of the ghetto, barrio, banlieue, and immigrant enclave (Viveros, Fennelly, Beck and Castañeda 2021), alongside the desire to round up and fence in unknown “others” such as the poor and “dangerous” classes (Gould 1995, Harvey 2003, 2008).

The ideal-typical rural community is frequently used as a contrast to modernization, industrialization, urbanization, and globalization in the major theories of social change, including those of de Tocqueville, Durkheim, Simmel, Weber, Wirth, Thomas, Park, and others. These theories depict city-dwellers as atomized, anonymous, seemingly autonomous, and able to remake their identity without the social norms and integration provided by small communities. In cities, labor and cash can be substituted for keeping social relations with most fellow residents.

This is not necessarily the case for rural and international migrants who arrive at their destination cities through chain migration. They arrive in new social environments and know few people, but they depend on family members and co-ethnics to survive in the early stages. Social networks, homophily, cheap housing, and exclusion by others often result in newcomers being concentrated into ethnic enclaves (Tilly and Brown 1967, Wilson and Portes 1980). This does not signify a complete lack of desire to structurally assimilate, as is assumed by many outsiders who think that the population inhabiting a ghetto, barrio, banlieue, or Chinatown remains constant through time. Instead, research indicates that these neighborhoods serve as places of passage, and that most residents eventually move out (Dávila 2004, Lin 1998, Zhou 1992).

Defining the banlieue

The French word *banlieue* literally refers to the residential areas surrounding a city; but now commonly refers to areas in central Paris that were incorporated into the city centuries ago (Castañeda 2009b). There is a temptation to compare French banlieues with American

suburbs, but there are important differences. In the United States, the word “suburb” usually carries a positive connotation and is associated with private property, middle-class ease, low population density, and an overall high quality of life. This is not always true. It must then be noted that when suburbs originally emerged, they provided affordable housing for lower-middle-class white ethnics (Gans 1982, Katznelson 2005), and that, in recent decades, American suburbs have been growing increasingly diverse in recent years in terms of origin and class (Fry 2009).

In contrast to the idyllic representation of American suburbs as homogenous, peaceful, and affluent, the contemporary image of the banlieue and its inhabitants, the *banlieusards*, is one of crime (Wacquant 2010), overcrowded public housing, radical politics, low social class, people of color, and new immigrants, mainly from former French colonies, as well as social discontent, political unrest, and rioting (Castañeda 2022). Thus, the representation of the banlieue in the popular imagination is something closer to the stereotype of “the ghetto” or the “inner city” in the United States at the turn of the twenty-first century (Hutchison and Haynes 2012). While there are important differences, what is common to both is the aggregate of exclusion from the labor market, categorical inequality, social boundaries, and housing policies and practices that result in residential segregation (Massey and Denton 1993).

The word *banlieue* carries a negative connotation in contemporary France, yet this barely approximates the complex history and social reality of these spaces. In fact, the modern-day Parisian banlieues, defined as areas outside central Paris, also include some of the wealthiest areas of France, such as La Défense, Neuilly (where former French President Nicolas Sarkozy served as mayor for many years), and even famous historic places like Versailles and Fontainebleau, where the wealthy would gather. These “exclusive” areas are places of racial, class, and cultural homogeneity, featuring wealthy gated communities (Pinçon and Pinçon-Charlot 2007).

Not all banlieues are the same (Wacquant 2008), Western banlieues include wealthy areas, while St. Denis, La Courneuve, or

Sarcelles and others include stigmatized and heavily populated *cités* (public housing projects). These banlieues are over-stigmatized because they lack the objective poverty and infrastructure that can be observed in American ghettos, colonias in the Southwest, Mexican *ciudades perdidas*, Brazilian favelas, or Argentinean *villas miseria*—not to mention the extreme poverty present in semi-urban areas in Haiti, Morocco, Turkey or sub-Saharan Africa, where some of the banlieue inhabitants come from. Instead, most residents of the banlieues and the *cités* have a roof over their heads, food, healthcare and other basic life necessities. Yet, it is often relative deprivation that matters, since long-term residents and their children compare themselves not so much to their country of origin anymore, but to the wealthy in their new society. Some of the inhabitants of the banlieue—especially those living in the housing projects—feel a strong sense of physical and symbolic marginalization. This stems from their sporadic interactions with wealthier Parisians, and especially by the differences in the popular representation of Paris and their own experiences.

V. History of the Banlieue

During the *Ancien Régime*, the Parisian banlieue contained vast open areas of countryside where the nobles of Paris and Versailles went to spend time surrounded by nature. As more people built on these idyllic lands, the banlieue was quickly transformed from forest into urban and suburban space. The remaining forests of Vincennes and the Bois de Boulogne are legally protected; while technically located outside of the city limits, they have been annexed to the city and are under its jurisdiction. This is a legacy of the symbolic and social value emplaced in controlled green areas, epitomized by the gardens of Louis XIV at Versailles (Gieryn 2000, Mukerji 1990).

The stigmatization of the banlieue has compounded over time. The stigma of the banlieue can be fully understood in a historical accumulation of stigma attached to some banlieues. This process is best understood through the examination of the banlieue over time, and in relation to the city of Paris as a whole. Like many medieval

cities, Paris was a walled city for defense purposes. As the city grew, new walls were constructed around its growing perimeter. In the years preceding the French Revolution of 1789, a new wall was constructed to demarcate Paris proper, primarily for taxation purposes. Everyone entering or leaving with commercial goods had to pay a fee or tax called the octroi. These octroi walls, put in place to extract customs, were spatial and legal barriers to free trade and mobility. But they also created a social boundary between those living inside (*intra-muros*) and those living outside (*extra-muros*), with real economic consequences for trade and production (Fourcaut, Bellanger and Flonneau 2007). Consequently, the cost of living, food, and goods, were lower outside Paris than inside, resulting in an early division. A large segment of the labor force settled in the banlieue, while most financiers, administrators, and rulers resided within the city's walls (Castañeda 2009b).

After the French Revolution of 1789, the Constitutional Assembly decreed that the limits of Paris should be a circle with a circumference determined by a radius of three leagues (*lieues*) around the center, set at the Cathedral of Notre-Dame. In 1841, the politician Adolphe Thiers ordered the construction of a new set of walls and customs towers, surrounded by a zone where new buildings were forbidden. In 1860, Baron Haussmann expanded the city. Entrance taxes continued to be levied. In this expansion, Paris officially engulfed "*l'ancienne banlieue*," which included the communes of Batignolle, Belleville, Bercy, Passy, la Villette, and other neighboring areas. The Paris octroi was instituted in these communities, forcing many industries to move out of the new city borders for fiscal reasons, and many laborers followed (Harvey 2008). Some of the most developed and industrialized external communes decided to also charge *octroi* to raise funds for local infrastructure and public spending. Less wealthy banlieues did not, in order to attract industry and population, through such tax incentives. The *octroi* taxation system of Paris and its surrounding metropolitan area was not abolished until 1943, during the German occupation, when it was substituted by a general sales tax (Fourcaut,

Bellanger and Flonneau 2007). An expressway around Paris was built in 1954. It represented a re-drawing of the boundaries between Paris and the growing banlieue, following the same lines as the historically constructed walls.

As the population density of Paris increased, the city looked to the banlieue as a location for its new cemeteries and public parks. In 1887, in the exterior commune of Nanterre, a large building was constructed as a poorhouse (*dépôt de mendicité*). It then hosted mental patients, vagabonds, the homeless, aged single people, and “deviant” women. In 1897, the building was turned into a hospital. Today, this building is known as “L’Hôpital de Nanterre,” and still offers shelter to the poorest of the region and to newly arrived immigrants who have neither a place to stay nor a supportive social network, established hometown, or ethnic community.

Currently, there is a critical demand for housing for students, single parents, artists, and the poor who cannot afford the rent within Paris but may earn too much to qualify for public housing. The need for housing is especially acute for foreigners who are widely considered to be untrustworthy and the *sans-papiers* (undocumented migrants) who cannot demand social welfare. Yet, many new citizens and people, living in bad housing conditions (*les mal logés*), engage in social movements to demand what in modern France became a human right in contemporary France: access to decent housing (Castañeda 2009a).

Boundaries of Distinction and Exclusion

Many French banlieues still testify to their own past as old provincial villages that have been engulfed by the growing metropolitan area. They share many common elements such as train stations, public squares, churches, city halls, stores, restaurants, private houses, and *cités* on their own periphery, along with accessible buses providing transportation around the banlieue.

The residential concentration of the *cités* in the banlieues contrasts with the area of La Défense, a banlieue west of Paris, which in 2008 provided 150,000 jobs, but only housed 20,000 residents (Price

2008). The zone of La Défense was launched in 1958, with the goal of making Paris the financial capital of Europe and attracting multinational corporations. The plan succeeded in attracting French and transnational corporations but failed to reproduce the mixed-use and around-the-clock busy public areas that can be found in downtown Paris.

Jean-François Gravier (1947) blames Paris for devouring all the resources, talent, and wealth of the whole country, and one could add that it was doing the same in its colonies. Even Haussmann, the one in charge of urban planning and beautifying Paris even while relocating people, was concerned about a luxurious center surrounded by a proletariat ring of workers (Fourcaut, Bellanger and Flonneau 2007). Therefore, rather than discussing the poverty of the banlieue by itself, it is more illuminating to discuss the over-concentration of wealth in Paris and the continuous gentrification of the city. As many French public intellectuals have warned, the Paris of the 21st Century risks becoming a “city museum” for the millions of tourists who visit Paris every year and are oblivious to the backstage that is the banlieue. Most tourists only see part of the banlieues, through the train windows, as they travel past them on the ride from the airport to their hotels. With the excessive gentrification of recent years, like New York, DC, Barcelona, and London, Paris risks becoming the exclusive property of its wealthiest inhabitants and young people, artists and immigrants, who know how to share apartments and live frugally. This concentration of the very rich and the very poor is a common characteristic of neo-liberal global cities (Sassen 2001).

Thus, we can see how historical dynamics have created real boundaries between Paris-dwellers and those on its periphery, as well as how unequal economic relations have stigmatized the banlieue and romanticized Paris. Even though the banlieue has been represented as an isolated, enclosed place, there are interactions between residents of the banlieue and other Parisians. Residents of the banlieue travel to central Paris and Parisians go to the banlieue. These are not completely walled off disconnected areas.

VI. Spatial Segregation in France

In discussions of French immigration, the idea of the banlieue is often brought up. Scholars sometimes assume that to study immigration in France, one must study the banlieue, and many French citizens themselves like to compartmentalize the “problem of immigration” to the banlieues. After the riots of 2005, it became common to speak of “the crises of the banlieues.” Deeper sociological analyses, however, have demonstrated that the issues surrounding banlieues are complex and are related to employment and access to upward social mobility, and that immigrant integration is not the exclusive problem of the banlieues. There is as much diversity within banlieues as across them (Wacquant 2008, Wacquant 2010).

A common question in academic comparisons between urban exclusion in the U.S. and France is whether the concept of the ‘ghetto’ can be applied in France. In order to answer this question, we must listen to the voices of the second-generation Africans who were born and raised in Paris, or in its banlieues. In his memoir about growing up in France as a child of Algerian immigrants, journalist Nadir Dendoune writes, “The projects are a glass cage. The frontiers are there; so inscribed in the asphalt, that you have the sense of an implicit message saying, ‘you are not part of society.’ Civilization stops here” (Dendoune 2007:19). This quote shows the spatial component present in his stigmatization. The lack of proper cultural capital is another component (Bourdieu 1991).

In reaction to what many young French minorities see as blatant discrimination from the larger French culture, some banlieues have produced a self-declared ghetto sub-culture with their own French rap music. Although the music was deeply inspired by the popular countercultures originally created in the African American ghettos and spread across social classes and countries by media and marketing (Aidi 2014, Daniels 2007, Pattillo 1999), it expresses local concerns *en français*. Another example of a growing counterculture is

a “banlieue/youth language,” the *verlan*, which takes French words and inverts their syllables. For example, French people often use the word “Arab” in a derogatory sense and as a cultural putdown, often failing to distinguish between citizens and non-citizens, and among immigrant generations. In an example of reactionary identity (Portes and Rumbaut 2001), the second-generation French Arabs call themselves *beurs*, the *verlan* play-on-words derived from the syllabic inversion of “Arab.” The word *beur* became part of a politicization of second and third generation Arab French in the 1980s. This is not far from the once derogatory term *Chicano*, now used proudly by individuals of Mexican descent in the American Southwest to identify themselves proudly. However, words like *beur* mark and reproduce the symbolic boundaries between the French of European descent and those of Arab descent, as well as between Arabs, Blacks, and Jews. Therefore, one can speak of *French ghettos*—in the original sense of the term combining ethnic stigma, spatial segregation, entrapment, and counterculture.

Wacquant argues that banlieues are structurally very different from black ghettos in the United States, partly because they lack their own subculture and informal cultural/political institutions (Wacquant 2008). However many banlieue locals would disagree with Wacquant because there is a growing banlieue-based French rap industry, graphic art, movies and theatre, a particular language and dress style, as well as associations and movements such as CRAN, the *Indigènes de la République* and car-burnings across banlieues—all protest movements by inhabitants of the banlieues—which may contradict Wacquant’s hypothesis. Furthermore, the relative lack of ethnic organizations and coordinated actions may have more to do with French republican laws and values than with a lack of segregation and relegation of visible minorities (Castañeda 2012). Whether or not the banlieues can be called ghettos, they surely are places of stigma, where “edge effects” have resulted in a new culture of the banlieue.

While the French government, the objective material conditions, and different social relations (Wacquant 2008) would deny the

existence of “real ghettos” in France, some French banlieue inhabitants have themselves embraced the term, often with an implication of segregation, lack of social integration, and equality. This is most clearly seen in music, from which, as in the rap from the U.S., demonstrates that a certain ghetto pride and sub-culture have emerged. This counterculture reflects a long history of differentiation between Paris proper and the rural, “wild” and “uncivilized” areas outside it that were always economically and symbolically subordinate to it. Yet, through contacts and edges, there is a frequent cross-pollination between Parisian culture and banlieue culture.

The Case against (single) Community Studies

The discussion of the development of a “ghetto culture” leads us to ask an important question: Can we make a relevant distinction between voluntary and involuntary processes of spatial isolation and segregation? Right-wing politicians such as Le Pen and Sarkozy, public opinion pundits, as well as many in academic circles, denounce the ghettoization of France, arguing that poverty concentration and “neighborhood effects” impact the integration of youth living in the banlieues, especially in the *cités* or housing projects. Academics and politicians enter these areas sporadically to point fingers (e.g. former cabinet member Fadela Amara took a tour of the banlieues before presenting her anticipated but uneventful Plan Banlieue). However, as demonstrated in the previous section through a review of the historical record, the causation arrow should be inverted; as people live in ghettos because of initial discrimination and purposeful segregation by non-migrants (Gans 2008). This segregation is compounded because information regarding the availability of housing is efficiently spread through social networks to friends and family who will likely be co-ethnics (Mahler 1995, Menjívar 2000). Therefore, spatial concentration—what some Europeans call “ghettoization”—does not occur because of an overt refusal to “integrate,” but is an outcome of not being allowed to integrate.

In fact, segregation in the Parisian metropolitan area may be, in great part, due to the rich French natives, who, through the decades,

have done much to make sure that they remain concentrated in the Parisian west, and spatially separated from immigrants and members of the French working-class (Pinçon and Pinçon-Charlot 2004, Pinçon and Pinçon-Charlot 2007). If these processes of segregation occur, the way to study the integration of immigrants and their descendants is not by looking closely at life in one banlieue but by looking at the larger unit of which they aim to integrate: the entire French territory.

Despite a long history of spatial boundary-making, the lived space and experiences of the franciliens (Parisians and banlieusards, inhabiting the Île-de-France or Parisian metropolitan area) go beyond obsolete political and administrative boundaries. The banlieues are an integral part of Paris, because much of its business, work, and daily life are conducted there, behind the scenes. Without the backstage provided by the banlieue, the Parisian frontstage would be very different. Thus, we should not talk about the Parisian banlieue without talking about Paris, in the same way one could not talk seriously about Paris without taking into account its banlieues. The same holds true for other major francophone cities. That is why, I set out not merely to study a French banlieue, but to study immigrants across the ecological system of the Parisian urban region, including those within Paris *per se*. Frequently traveling in and out of Paris to different banlieues provided me the opportunity to observe, as an outsider, how divided the inhabitants of Paris and the banlieues really are, as well as how they work together as a social and urban system.

The daily experiences of the *banlieusards* sharply contrast with the stereotypes held by many Parisians. For example, the 1995 movie *La Haine*, directed by Mathieu Kassovitz, presents a powerful metaphor, but is an exaggerated representation of life in the banlieues. It draws much needed attention to the issue of police brutality and broad discrimination, but it further reproduces the negative stereotype of the banlieue and exaggerates inter-ethnic socialization within it. The 2004 movie *L'Esquive* by director Adbellatif Kechiche does a much better job of portraying the everyday life of young banlieusards,

whose lives are very different from those of the teachers in their schools who try to teach them proper French, and from the policemen who scare them away from public areas.

Many of the young people living in the *cités* are unemployed, and, because of many social and economic restraints, they are often dissuaded from leaving their neighborhoods. Nonetheless, their foundational cultural frame of reference is still the larger hegemonic concept of “French culture.” They watch the same television channels as the rest of France and, like them, also watch many American television series and movies and listen to music in English. These young people filter them through their French lenses, which are sometimes reinforced by language dubbing that attempts to adapt the original content to the national context of the audience. It is partially due to this bi-cultural influence that an interesting, fecund French rap cultural scene has emerged — a phenomenon that, while inspired by African American rappers, remains distinctly French.

Figure 1: Three young French men of Maghrebi origin temporarily park a sports car along the Champs, flirting and drinking from juice boxes; soon after, I see a police car asking them to leave @ Ernesto Castañeda.



The immigrant youth and children of African parents may go to the Champs-Élysées to show off their success, parking their brand-new luxury cars and motorcycles in the street, while risking a ticket and police harassment for doing so. Younger kids may arrive on roller blades or on *velibs* from the public bicycle rental program. Because it is forbidden to ride bicycles on the Champs, by doing so, they also risk police harassment. Just when these young people are about to start as an evening of fun in Paris and potentially mix in and interact with others, their experience easily turns into a game of cat and mouse between the police and youth of the banlieue. Things may sometimes become violent when these youths are denied entry into the exclusive night clubs on the street, even though, many of the doormen are often of the same origin as the youth (Dendoune 2007). Despite its geographic and symbolic centrality, Champs plays the role of an edge in the sense that many groups come together there, but the opportunities for real and equal interaction are limited by the state’s presence (e.g., in the form of the police).

Figure 2: Members of different security forces prepare the Champs for an official ceremony involving the European Union @ Ernesto Castañeda.



Paris Ethno-surveys

While living in Paris during the 2007-2008 academic year, I talked to individuals of North African-origin across the Parisian metropolitan area. I found high levels of social distance from “mainstream” French society, especially amongst the first generation, and for men. This marginalization developed as an effect of their structural social invisibility. This lack of belonging is due to discrimination and unemployment. Unemployment rates for people of Maghrebi origin, especially those who are phenotypically “Arab,” are much higher than those for other groups. While in Paris, I spent much of my time with unemployed men, who rarely left their apartments and suffered high levels of depression, persecution, anxiety, and reactive xenophobia. They spoke French and had residency papers. Despite their relatively high levels of education and skills, they were systematically denied long-term employment.

Many of my informants identified themselves primarily as North Africans or “Maghrebis,” even when they had French citizenship. A French citizen whose grandparents came from Algeria, but who himself has only been to Algeria once and whose knowledge of the Arabic language is very limited, told me that he self-identified as Algerian. When I asked him why he did not identify as French, he said, “Look at me, look at my camel-face. Do I look French? When I am in the street, in the subway, people do not see a Frenchman but an Arab.” He reported a racialized description of the French as white. He was verbalizing a social boundary, which exists both inside and outside of the banlieue.

This individual no longer had formal employment when I interviewed him, but received disability because of an accident he suffered in the factory where he previously worked. He spent his evenings and nights hanging out in a bar next to residential projects within a banlieue to the south of Paris. He engaged in the underground economy to supplement his income. His father worked in construction and as a janitor in a public school. His words fraught with emotion, he shared with me that his father “worked so hard

when he came to France, and he sacrificed so much for me and my siblings.”

When I asked him if he had friends from different backgrounds, he first answered in the affirmative, saying that people come to see him from all over Paris [to buy drugs]. When I asked him about the people he trusts and feels close to, he said he prefers to stay by himself or with other Algerians. Referring to Black people he stated, “I respect them, but I prefer to keep my distance. I do not want any problems with them.” He distrusts “Whites” and is worried about people he does not know who suddenly appear, walk around, and ask questions. If they are not sociologists like me, they are often policemen trying to pass as civilians.

How Residents See their Neighbors and Neighborhoods

My informants often responded that they preferred spending their time alone, with close family members or with people like them. These informants mistrust strangers, including fellow countrymen and co-religionists. They said fellow Muslims often used the socially expected generosity to fellow Muslims to take advantage of them. For this reason, they prefer not to make many friends. Their relative poverty and social marginality prevent them from being able to satisfy expectations of generosity, aid, and reciprocity.² The community-wide lack of resources, added to the widely held mistrust French society has of ethnic communal life (Fassin and Fassin 2006, Lacorne 2003).

This results in high levels of social fragmentation among young immigrant Arab men in the Parisian metropolitan area, harmfully combined with low levels of socialization, even among those of their same ethnicity.³ While there are many men in similar structural positions, undergoing similar feelings of exclusion,

² This is similar to the condition that Menjivar (2000) documents amongst Salvadorians in San Francisco.

³ The second and subsequent immigrant generations tend to be more integrated in more diverse social networks and to have more capital

disempowerment, and desperation, they rarely form lasting relationships with one another. The few exceptions that exist are often fostered through music. For example, the black French rappers Rohff (who was born in the African island of Comoros, a country that is 98% Muslim) and Kéry James (who was born in the West-Indies to Haitian parents), are both former members of a group of rappers from Val-de-Marne banlieue called the Mafia K'1 Fry.

They describe this phenomenon in their song *Mal Aimé* or “unloved”: or “unloved” depending on the social segment they have assimilated to.

Se sentir mal aimé

*Oh cette douleur qu'on a peine à cacher
...C'est Trahison qui m'a fait connaître*

Méfiance

*Qui m'a clairement mise en garde contre
Confiance*

... Mon enfance rime avec Absence

*J'ai une rage intérieure qui pourrait exploser
J'ai grandi en banlieue parmi les névrosés
...Famille ou amis j'sais plus à qui m'fier*

...Déteste moi pour ce que j'suis

Ne m'aime pas pour c' que j'aspire pas à être

*...J'voile ma tristesse silencieux
J'intériorise mes déceptions j'ai pas baigné
dans l'affection*

...Se sentir mal aimé

To feel unloved

*Oh, this pain, so hard to hide
...It was Treason that made me meet*

Distrust

*What clearly puts me in the defense against
Trust*

*Trust has made much fun of me
...My childhood rhymes with Absence*

*I have internal rage that could explode
I grew up in the suburbs among neurotics
...Family or friends, I don't know who to trust
anymore*

...Hate me for what I am

Don't love me for what I don't aspire to be

*...I veil my silent sadness
I interiorize my deceptions I have not been
bathed in affection*

...To feel unloved

These lyrics reference the feelings that many men of color in the Parisian area told me about –mistrust, loneliness, and a sense of exclusion and even betrayal from what they learned in school about France from French educational institutions.

As a whole, immigrant Arabs from North Africa lack representative organizations, legitimate spokespeople, and political representation within political parties and government bodies. The second, subsequent immigrant generations do not experience much better outcomes, but being more cognizant of their rights as French citizens, they are more prone to “anger” and disorganized, semi-spontaneous demonstrations as exemplified by the riots of 2005—the reaction to the deaths of two young French citizens of Maghrebi origin by violent, continuous, and excessive policing (Schneider 2008). These riots were largely carried out by disenfranchised second-generation French citizens. Interestingly, most of my interviewees spoke against these riots, understandable because the riot’s main physical targets were the possessions, cars and businesses of other minorities in the banlieue.



Figure 3: Album Cover Rohff 2004.

Saint Denis

St. Denis is a stereotypical banlieue with a considerable number of recent immigrants from different countries. It houses the historical and magnificent Basilica of St. Denis, where French Kings and Queens are buried. Despite being very close to Paris, it is outside of most touristic paths, because it is in an ethnically diverse banlieue. St. Denis could act as an important edge being so close to Paris, accessibility on a relatively new metro line that goes there, its historical status and its architectural beauty, and the location of an important soccer stadium right on the edge. Nevertheless, St. Denis is still stigmatized by most Parisians.

St. Denis houses *Le Stade de France*, a modern stadium built for the FIFA World Cup that France hosted in 1998. While I was there in 2007, Le Stade de France in St. Denis housed the Rugby World Cup. Parisians and tourists from many of the participating countries would pack the metro and ride there wearing t-shirts supporting their national team. The plaza in front of the stadium housed free concerts, stands featured food and drinks from the participating countries, and had huge screens, where fans could watch what was happening in the stadium, for free. This was seemingly a great opportunity for Parisians, Banlieusards, and international tourists to mix, as well as an opportunity for France to showcase its multicultural and diverse population. Nevertheless, the police literally held a line with patrols and cars that blocked the avenues that connected the town of St. Denis and the stadium. The message to the local inhabitants was clear: you are not welcome. I attended many public events then and it was rare to see local inhabitants and descendants from immigrants in or near the stadium, except for the couple of occasions when Maghrebi or African-origin musicians gave free concerts and locals made an effort to go around police blockades including by going to Paris and coming back from downtown into the stadium metro station.

While neighborhoods such as St. Denis are not experiencing the theoretical positive edge effects, other Parisian neighborhoods such as the former working-class neighborhoods east of *Place de La*

République, or in the Belleville area, are. In *La République*, working class families, immigrants, students, artists, young professionals, and young bourgeois families interact as they go about their everyday business. In Belleville, locals pride themselves on the ability of the neighborhood to house people from categorical groups such as Arabs, Jews, Chinese, and French, among many others, without any conflict or open hostilities. While most groups primarily socialize among themselves, there is an interaction with other ethnic groups who are physically close. Belleville's location in central Paris, its density, and the availability of relatively cheap private housing, ethnic businesses, and places of employment, make civic and associational life rather active—something that differs from the average banlieue.



Figure 4: Some city officials are aware of the isolation of many residents and thus sponsor an *annual fêtes des la musique* and *des voisins*

or neighbors' party where people make a point of talking to their neighbors. Here is a breakdancer by the Arc de Triomphe.

VII. Conclusion

For decades, the populations settled in the banlieues and seen as problematic were the ones coming from current and former colonies. The colonial enterprise was partly justified by the theories of a “civilizing mission,” but especially by White supremacy. Therefore, it was easy for people in the metropole to see the newcomers as biologically and culturally inferior and able to carry out an “uncivilizing mission.” Europe brought Catholicism and Christianity to the world's “peripheries,” and now some fear that immigration from the periphery would bring Islam to Europe. Clearly, these potential threats are out of proportion, and the historical processes are not symmetrical. Current population movements to the Global North are led by individuals looking for work and safety, not by countries or empires. Their goal is not to impose their culture. Most immigrants admire their immigration destinations. Their children center the give primacy to the culture of the places where they live and allow for the survival, growth, and rejuvenation of European populations, languages, and cultures.

Interactions among diverse people can occur more often in peripheral urban spaces we can call “edges.” While much of the literature describes these areas as places of possible contact, cohabitation, and cosmopolitanism, some of the cases in the Parisian metropolis that I have briefly described demonstrate processes of boundary-making, which supersede the opportunities to overcome assumed cultural differences. These boundaries are set in place by accentuating differences rather than commonalities. While these “edges” and “edge effects” are theoretically, economically, and morally desirable and superior to rigid boundaries or enclosures, they sometimes fail to materialize because of larger social processes and policies. This chapter uses a negative-case methodology (Emigh

1997) to illustrate why some “edge effects” are being prevented from materializing in some Parisian “edges.”

The political and symbolic boundaries between Paris and its banlieue make this process much more difficult. Parisian governments have pioneered the creation of public spaces and the organization of free public events, where residents and tourists mingle. However, these events are less likely to include banlieusards, especially since the boundaries between Paris and its banlieue are policed by a controlling and repressive police force. Inside Paris, formerly “edgy” working class neighborhoods often become gentrified, but as soon as this occurs, new “edges” begin to form.

Larger social, cultural, and political contexts allow or disallow the opportunity for urban edges to showcase the “edge effect.” How governments administer and police space has consequences for social mixing. Multicultural policies are both part of the state discourse and ideology. These policies are embodied in practice by civil society. In recent years, Paris has lost much of the openness that made Montmartre an “edgy place,” including political refugees and organic intellectuals. Paris, a world city full of “edges,” has become full of social boundaries that guard old racial and symbolic privileges. This opportunity hoarding is happening at a time when the welfare state is under attack. Paris stopping to offer “edgy” spaces where diverse people could come into contact and create new art and ideas is a global loss for immigrants and cosmopolitans who once believed in the city’s promise of openness and creativity. However, there remains no reason why the boundaries among French, foreigners and immigrants, or among Parisians, provincials and Banlieusards — whether at the edges or in the core, both in the public imagination and in practice— could not succumb to their many daily interactions and commonalities and create a realm of confluence and mutual benefit. Breaking down existing social boundaries against immigrants would not mean the end of French culture but an infusion of new energy that can re-make Paris into a meeting point for writers, artists, dissidents, businessmen, workers, and students from different parts of the world.

Note: Portions of this text appeared in a book chapter in “The Ghetto,” edited by Ray Hutchison and Bruce D. Haynes, and published in 2012. The material has been expanded and updated. A shorter version will appear in the book, “Handbook of Peripheries in European Studies,” 2026, edited by Clemens Sedmak and Pamela Balinger.

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7 Typologies and Assumptions in Studies of the Transnational

by Ernesto Castañeda

This chapter discusses the origins of “transnationalism” as a term and phenomenon of study.ⁱ It focuses on discussions, theories, empirical cases, and controversies surrounding the use of a transnational approach within migration studies. It provides a typology of different understandings of transnationalism in migration studies, along with their theoretical and political implications. It then briefly discusses the use of the term in other areas, particularly history and social movements research. It concludes by cautioning against overstating the reach, novelty, and implications of transnationalism per se and instead calls for the continued denaturalization of the category of the “national.”

WHAT IS TRANSNATIONALISM?

The term “transnationalism” is used differently in various contexts and thus requires further specification. Early uses of the term referred to corporations such as HSBC, Citibank, and Sony, which have branches in many countries and headquarters in global cities like New York, London, or Tokyo.ⁱⁱ Since the 1980s, scholars have used the term transnationalism to refer to a series of presences, identities, and movements that do not easily map within the geographical borders of contemporary nation-states. Therefore, in its broadest sense,

transnationalism refers to the movement of capital, people, and ideas back and forth across political borders. Not coincidentally, this characterization is similar to what people refer to as “globalization.”ⁱⁱⁱ Original proponents also linked an increase in transnational practices with a decrease in the effect of national policies on economic outcomes. The rise of academic work on transnationalism took place during the same time as a rise of neoliberal policies, a decrease in economic development models such as import substitution industrialization in Latin America, and an increase in the conditioning of loans from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund on structural adjustment programs that included reducing national deficits and funding for social programs, while opening national markets to imports from the developed world.

In the 1970s, international relations scholars employed the term “transnational” to describe exchanges and movements by non-governmental actors that crossed state borders.^{iv} Colloquially, the term was used in the 1980s to describe corporations with offices in multiple countries. Furthermore, starting in the 1980s, Theodore Levitt, a business school professor, defined globalization as the practice of transnational corporations selling the same products in multiple countries.^v Later, many authors incorrectly drew a causal connection, suggesting that globalization increased migration and vice versa in a self-reinforcing loop.^{vi} Perhaps too quickly and eagerly, some scholars framed migration as a form of globalization or transnationalism from below,^{vii} contrasting it with top-down policies that opened borders to capital, goods, firms, and factories. Nevertheless, there was a theoretically and politically unwarranted conflation between migrant transnationalism and globalization. As historians have documented, this is misleading because previous waves of globalization and long-distance migrations have preceded the most recent wave.^{viii} Furthermore, we should not equate “transnational” with “global” a priori. Most transnational processes are regional, occurring within

border areas, or from specific places to other particular places (e.g., migration between former colonies and the metropole).^{ix}

Nonetheless, there is still a theoretically and empirically sound manner of studying historical and contemporary migrant transnational practices. The so-called transnational turn made meaningful and lasting contributions. Migration scholars use the term transnationalism to describe migration from a perspective that takes into account the twin processes of emigration (leaving) and immigration (arriving),^x as well as the social ties maintained between emigrants and their communities of origin.^{xi} Therefore, I use the term *migration* in acknowledgment of emigration and transnational links as parts of the larger processes that are overlooked when we discuss only arrival or *immigration*. Nina Glick-Schiller and colleagues propose the term *transmigrant* for this “new type” of migrant,^{xii} but this term is not the most appropriate to use always because 1) to a degree, all migrants are transnational, 2) historically speaking, this is not a new phenomenon, 3) through time and immigrant generations, transnational behavior may decrease, 4) one can use a transnational frame without using the term “transmigrant,” and 5) it did not catch up and is not widely used. This does not detract from Glick-Schiller and colleagues’ theoretical contributions.

The consideration of the community of origin allows for the inclusion of internal migration, where the sending and receiving communities are part of the same national territory, while simultaneously having sufficient cultural, ethnic, or economic differences to be studied under this methodological framework. Mexican anthropologist Federico Besserer uses the term “translocalism” instead, which involves logic similar to a transnational framing, even when no national borders are crossed.^{xiii} An example is women from Mayan communities in southern Mexico who move to Cancún to work, sending money back to their nuclear families in their towns of origin.^{xiv} Translocalism is a more suitable theoretical term than “transnational,” but it has not been widely adopted, partly due to

the division of labor between those who study international and internal migration.^{xv}

TRANSNATIONALISM WITHIN MIGRATION STUDIES

Traditional migration theories emphasize long-term settlement and assume — or even prescribe— the end of all social, political, and economic ties with the community of origin. However, except for certain exiles and refugees, historically, migration has not entailed the complete severance of ties with the society of origin.^{xvi} Transnational studies, however, reveal the strong connections that migrants maintain with their native country. Transnationalism gained scholarly attention in the 1990s, primarily proposed and described by anthropologists, sociologists, and geographers.^{xvii} Given the relative novelty of transnationalism as a theoretical perspective and its particular emphasis on multisited field research as a method,^{xviii} there is still a lively debate about its theoretical implications and procedural definition. There has also been debate on whether transnationalism is a novel phenomenon or whether it existed before it was recognized and labeled as transnationalism.^{xix} The data shows that long-distance connections and back-and-forth moves are not new, making it even more important to keep these ties in mind, as they are likely to continue into the future.

“Remittances” refers to money, gifts, and other resources that migrants send back to their places of origin —most commonly to their nuclear families or their parents and grandparents.^{xx} Many academic and policy papers have theorized about the economic and political implications of remittances, presenting them as evidence of transnationalism. Some groundbreaking work expanding the field of transnational migration studies introduces the introduction of the concept of social remittances to discuss cultural changes at the country of origin due to contact with people living abroad and adopting new cultural practices who stay in touch, visit, and return,^{xxi} documents the

role of religious institutions in transnationalism;^{xxii} and studies the involvement of the country of origin in fostering ties with the diaspora.^{xxiii} Over the past several decades, the academic subfield of migrant transnationalism has grown considerably, with a great deal of energy put in by many researchers to “prove” the existence of transnationalism by adding new case studies.

From being a novelty, transnationalism became quite central to migration studies in the 2000s. The term became fashionable, and many took its relevance for granted, eagerly providing new cases without questioning the theories and assumptions surrounding it. Hyperbolically, perhaps, some talked about a “transnational turn.” Despite its growing popularity, a consensus has not been reached on the extent to which immigrants who left their home countries at a very young age but grew up in the new country (1.5 generation) and second, third, and subsequent immigrant generations engage in transnational activities.^{xxiv} This is because the level of transnationalism is impacted by the context of reception, the possibility of migrants’ return to their country of birth, and levels of integration and racialization.^{xxv}

As Algerian sociologist Abdelmalek Sayad explains, it is essential to view migrants as both emigrants (leaving a place) and immigrants (arriving in a new place) in order to understand their unique social and psychological conditions.^{xxvi} The traumas of migration, the nostalgia, the sense of loss, and the idealization of the land left behind are also concerns in the psychoanalytical community.^{xxvii} An emphasis on transhumance (seasonal migration or, more broadly, any circular migration) and an examination of migrants from the perspectives of both their places of origin and arrival have long been a focus of interest for scholars of migration and international relations in Mexican academia.^{xxviii} The rise of transnational studies in the Anglo-American academic field since the 1990s also highlighted the importance of sending and receiving communities and the relation between the two in shaping the immigrants’ social worlds.^{xxix}

Nonetheless, the importance of studying both sending and receiving societies was also a significant part of Chicago School methodologies, as observed in the classic "*The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*" (1918-1920) by William I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki.^{xxx} Oscar Handlin's classic book, *The Uprooted* (1951), focuses on displaced peasants moving into cities, where they lose their local culture and social ties. However, John Bodnar's *The Transplanted*, although not fully transnational, demonstrated that immigrants, through chain migration and the establishment of ethnic halls and community institutions, attempt to recreate aspects of their culture to help them feel at home.

TYPES OF TRANSNATIONALISM AND ASSUMED IMPLICATIONS

Traditionally, migration studies have focused on the processes of immigrant integration into their host society.^{xxxi} Many studies show immigrant assimilation through time, while some alarmists frame immigration and ethnic enclaves as foreign communities or even "colonies" inside receiving countries.^{xxxii} The true colonial analogy mainly applies to the historical repopulation of the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand by Europeans and later others.

Analytically, we can categorize immigrants along a continuum based on the level of contact they have with their country of birth. The location on the scale is not meant to be normative. The length of the immigrant experience and the length of settlement (multi-generational) affect assimilation, integration, and mainstreaming, meaning becoming part of the majority society, being indistinguishable in terms of outcomes, and being protected from the negative effects of racialization.^{xxxiii}

Transnational practices are not inherently incompatible with an upward path to integration and social mobility, nor with exclusion.^{xxxiv}

I contrast *integration* (belonging despite cultural, religious, or racial differences) with *assimilation* (complete acculturation into the host society and loss of the culture of origin) and *ghettoization* (segregated access to political power and separate cultures and practices), which happens through the segregation of members of an ethnic or racial group and their stigmatization. Nonetheless, the growth of ghettos (either Jewish or Black) or colonias, barrios, Chinatowns, or ethnic enclaves can be perceived by some in the majority as an encroachment of national sovereignty and the formation of small foreign colonies within cities. But colonization is a different process. *Colonization* entails moving en masse to change and reshape society in the image of a new majority or elite in power, or of a population backed by an army using or threatening violence, largely for territorial and economic gain. This is a historical phenomenon predominantly associated with European settler colonialism. Historical cases in which this has become a reality include the arrival of Protestants to Texas and Coahuila in the early 1800s. Mexico allowed immigrants to settle if they promised to assimilate and not secede. The numbers grew large, and they were led by people such as Sam Houston and Stephen Austin to declare independence from Mexico, which the U.S. recognized, leading to the Mexican-American War (1846-1848). The Annexation of Texas led to the reinstatement of slavery in that large territory. And beyond Texas, the taking of half of Mexico's territory by the

U.S. led to the overwhelmingly Native American and Spanish-descent populations in the West being dwarfed by Protestants, who took much of the land and enforced a second-class citizenship status for non-Anglos.^{xxxv} In another example, the French attempted to make Algeria a permanent part of France by increasing the number of European settlers there.^{xxxvi} Present-day migration to Europe and the U.S. does not have the goal of taking land from another country or declaring an independent one.

Figure 1.1 Types of Colonialism and Decolonization

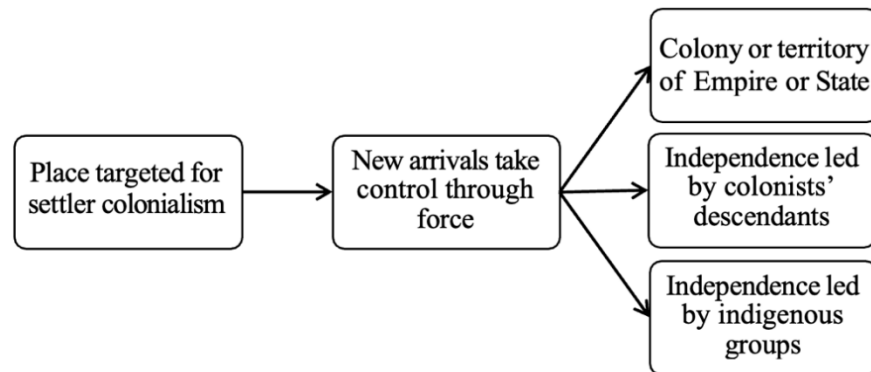
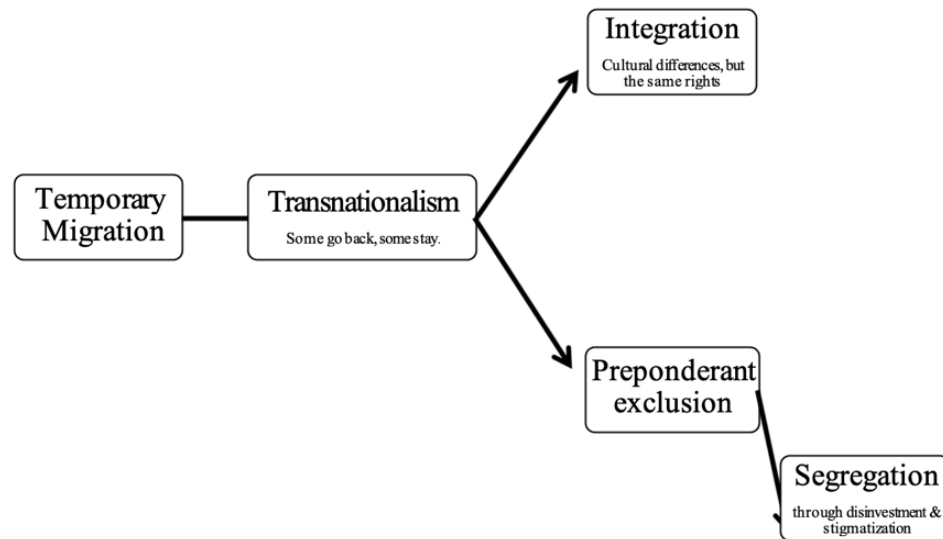


Figure 1.2 Immigrant Integration Pathways



Circular migration through temporary work, involving a series of short-term stays, can lead to transnationalism when individuals spend more time in the receiving place, often forming family relationships with locals and staying beyond the scope of seasonal work. Some research suggests that the more integrated immigrants are, the more sporadic and intentional their transnationalism will be, while others turn to transnationalism as a palliative for the racism and exclusion on the receiving side that often persist, regardless of citizenship.^{xxxvii}

Transnational behavior itself can vary depending on the conditions of exit, the context of reception, and the social position of a particular person or group. Most influential in the literature of the 2000s is a transnationalism that celebrated globalization and the declining significance of borders and the nation-state,^{xxxviii} and that sees migration as evidence of this. In this framework, remittances are assumed to be an example of globalization and border effacement, and as a way to produce economic development and reduce global inequality. In reality, the nexus between remittances and development is much more complicated.^{xxxix}

At the turn of the twenty-first century, some authors believed that people were experiencing a fast convergence of universal values and equal human worth. In this celebratory view, transnationalism empowers individuals across borders, opening new and limitless economic and political opportunities. Nonetheless, this cosmopolitan life is most often real for some elites, academics, and frequent flyers,^{xl} but not for working-class natives, immigrants, or those who are undocumented. Like those who wrongly proclaimed the end of history after the fall of the Soviet Union, early proponents of globalization and transnationalism as a teleological destination overlooked the deglobalization (the increase in the ratio of local transactions over global ones) brought about by pandemics, economic

crises, economic sanctions, and war. Theorists also failed to account for the backlash from White blue-collar workers through Brexit and Donald Trump's presidential campaign. These populist promises of Tories and Republicans did not solve any of the structural issues of increasing inequality. They did not lead to the end of transnational flows, nor did they stop everyone from engaging in some transnational practices or abandoning a cosmopolitan outlook. Not even tariffs can do this.

The theoretical framing of transnationalism as neoliberal globalization was a companion to an elite political project.^{xii} I call it elite transnationalism because it is mostly theoretical beyond the lives of a few. The framing of what I call "colonial transnationalism" is a political maneuver in which conservative restrictionists use the literature on transnationalism as evidence of a foreign invasion posing an existential threat to white American and European populations and a great demographic replacement in which the white race becomes a minority.^{xiii} These arguments are not only racist but also vastly overstate demographic change, the stability of ethno-racial labels, and the durability of transnationalism. Furthermore, it is important to recall that foreign-born labor plays a key role in creating wealth for established citizens; cheap labor from abroad has supplanted serfdom and the forced capture, transportation, and sale of enslaved people.

A more prevalent account of actually existing migrant transnationalism is what I call "relational transnationalism." In this process, migrants act on and react to the receiving society while simultaneously looking back home. This constant comparison poses unique opportunities and problems in everyday life. For instance, parents who migrate with the explicit goal of sending remittances home will engage in relational transnationalism because the focus of their actions is rooted in the country of origin – sending money to their children or other relatives. This focus on earning as much money as possible through low-paying jobs means long hours and weekends,

making it harder for them to engage much beyond work in the communities where they live; they do not have the time to worry about new social mores, dispositions, or ideas.

Economically or socially, migrants may be in a disadvantaged position in their new communities, making achieving salience at the place of origin even more appealing. Politically, transnationalism allows interested actors to be active in two political communities without any deleterious effects on either. Nonetheless, the type and extent of participation in the economy, social landscape, and politics will depend on the immigrants' socioeconomic status and the characteristics of each group. By shaping the context of reception, the receiving society and the state play a central role in regulating the social, economic, and political activities of migrants.

Remittances demonstrate migrants' strong social ties to family members in their hometowns of origin. Remittances also constitute an "emotional investment" that goes beyond economic calculations. Their cost is often the separation of families that can last for many years. Again, this cost partly depends on the remitter's economic success, legal status, social networks, and the public policy sphere of the locality in which the immigrant lives. Things are better emotionally if family members have visas that allow them to visit each other periodically or if they can move as a family.^{xiiii}

One should not overlook that migrants also invest significant economic resources in the host society. In addition to working, immigrants pay income taxes, social security, rent, mortgages, and property taxes. They go to restaurants and shop in the areas where they live and work. They often start businesses that become community fixtures. Relational transnationalism is but one type of migrant transnationalism.

Table 1.1 shows the different understandings or types of transnationalism. While this typology is not meant to be strict or exhaustive, it is essential to discuss the many perspectives and manifestations of transnationalism. For immigrants themselves, there

are multiple kinds of transnational experiences associated with the economic and legal capabilities to engage physically or intellectually with both their host and sending communities.

Colonial transnationalism reflects the exaggerated view of many residents — particularly in a city or country where many immigrants or refugees are perceived to be arriving for the first time or from new places— that immigrants represent an economic and cultural threat. It reflects a fear that immigrants will take over land, resources, and even government and change the place's culture. Beyond settler-colonialism practiced historically by China as well as Great Britain and other European colonial powers, this is rarely the case in the West today. Colonial transnationalism frames remittances as a form of resource extraction from the local economy. This framing pushes migrants to assimilate quickly or leave, as this framework presents them as a cultural threat and invasion.

Exile transnationalism is the experience of exiles and asylum seekers – they engage transnationally but cannot visit their country of origin, much less return permanently, for fear of their lives. They may keep in touch with family or friends back home, but a return is almost impossible. Border transnationalism is almost the opposite – the practice of people who live near a border and often cross for access to economic, social, or housing opportunities.

Table 1.1. Types of Transnationalism

	Relational Transnationalism	Reactive Transnationalism	Elite Transnationalism	Border Transnationalism	Exile Transnationalism	Colonial Transnationalism
Definition	This is characterized by deep connections between immigrants, whether sanctioned or undocumented, and their place of origin. Internal and international migrants with visas will be able to visit their home communities in some countries and historical periods, for instance, those working in the US before the 2000s.	This is a type of restorative transnationalism. The children of immigrants look to the “country of origin” for affirmation and identity reasons.	We could also refer to this as “cosmopolitan” or “resource-based” transnationalism. ^{slv} It is the type of transnationalism engaged in by privileged individuals with access to papers and money who can choose to travel back and forth at will for profit and pleasure.	This occurs due to living in a border region where crossing between countries is often part of a survival strategy for the relatively privileged and for those for whom brokering between borders is the difficult yet only way to make ends meet. ^{sv}	This type of transnationalism is engaged by exiles, asylum seekers, and political refugees who cannot physically return to their home countries as long as the same regime is in power there. Nonetheless, they can remain active in political opposition against the regime and maintain contact with family and friends.	In this alarmist framework, migrant enclaves show that immigrants are not adapting to their new society and thus pose a cultural threat to the host community. ^{slvi}
Arguments	Migrants act on and react to the receiving society while also looking back home. This poses opportunities and problems. States and borders are not irrelevant. The state plays a central role in regulating the social, economic, and political activities of migrants. ^{slviii}	This occurs when immigrants and their offspring are dissatisfied with their position in the host society. Transnationalism appears as nostalgia for a better past and the idealization of a better future outside of poverty and racialization within the host society.	Individuals in this category have the papers and resources to cross back and forth across political borders.	This occurs among individuals who constantly cross international borders for economic, social, and cultural reasons. It is real and unique, but cannot be fully generalized to all the residents of a border area.	Political refugees and asylum seekers may form “governments in exile” to advocate for political change in their country of origin. They may sometimes be labeled as terrorist groups (e.g., Sri Lankan immigrants in Paris who support the Tamil Tigers).	This gives credence to arguments about a “Reconquista” of the Southwest by Mexicans, or the incompatible character of Muslims in Europe.

	Relational Transnationalism	Reactive Transnationalism	Elite Transnationalism	Border Transnationalism	Exile Transnationalism	Colonial Transnationalism
Assumptions	Migrants may be in a disadvantaged position in their host communities, making achieving salience on the sending side even more appealing. ²⁴³ However, a full return has to be postponed. ²⁴⁴	In countries that have exclusivist cultures, minorities may have to look elsewhere for more tolerant environments for different religious and cultural practices.	This type of transnationalism was often implied in earlier discussions of the weakening of the nation-state, postnational membership, and citizenship à la carte. ²⁴⁵	Some people can move freely back and forth across borders in a border city.	People cannot go back for fear of their lives.	Claims transnationalism distracts people from getting involved in local community, service and politics. Transnational individuals exhibit double loyalties, which both pose a problem and present an opportunity for international politics.
The Implied Effects	Transnationalism allows interested actors to be active in two political communities without any deleterious effects on either. ²⁴⁶ Nonetheless, the type of participation will depend on each community's characteristics and the socioeconomic status of the immigrant in question.	Transnationalism is practiced to secure the dignity, identity, and cultural purity lost by the family's migration and downward assimilation. Transnationalism often remains aspirational, as return is not practical and many cultural differences persist.	Transnationalism erases borders and allows for new business and cultural connections, but is limited to a small group.	It is embodied in bilingualism and working or studying in Ciudad Juárez but in El Paso, Texas, who do not remit per se but carry cash with them and spend it in either country indistinctly).	Transnationalism is a means of staying involved in politics from a distance.	Remittances represent an extraction of resources from the host society. Remittances indicate that immigrants are primarily concerned with the well-being of their countries of origin.
Implications Regarding Remittances and the Development of Sending Community	Remittances show strong social attachments to family members in the town of origin. ²⁴⁷ Remittances also constitute an "emotional investment" that goes beyond economic calculations. One should not overlook that important economic resources are also invested in the host society.	Remittances are not part of the return aspirations of second- and third-generation immigrants, as they often have limited financial resources to remit and few family members to remit to. Transnationalism is more often expressed through nostalgic tourism, music, and cultural consumption.	Educated cadres, professionals, and business owners can make productive investments in both the host and sending countries, contributing through charitable donations; however, the number of people in this position is relatively small. ²⁴⁸	This form of brokerage involves a back-and-forth movement as a strategy to overcome poverty and marginalization, contingent upon citizenship, residency, or visas.	The goal is often to start a new life in exile or return to a country under a different political regime.	

Transnationalism is an integral part of their everyday life through their physical engagement with the border, whereas for an exile, the border is more of an idea; it is not physically present in front of them, nor is back-and-forth travel for political reasons.

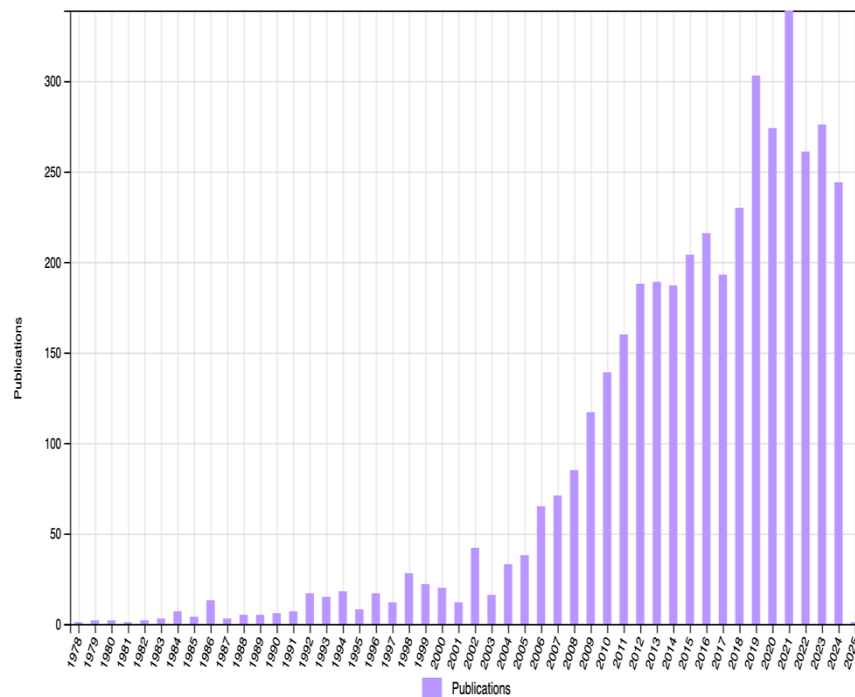
In contrast, elite transnationalism refers to the migration of economic, artistic, or intellectual elites who, due to their secure legal status and abundance of economic resources, can travel back and forth as they please, even if their home country is not nearby. This is increasingly the case for middle-class digital nomads from the Global North working in the Global South. Some of these diaspora members boast of their transnational activities by being active in hometown associations, sometimes running for office, or sponsoring charities and cultural events through resources from their often transnational businesses; they are sometimes touted as the heroes of some transnational ethnographies. However, they are far from representative of the larger immigrant community. They are exceptional in both senses of the word.

In contrast, relational transnationalism describes the experience of most economic migrants. Reactive transnationalism is experienced by the children of immigrants and 1.5 generation immigrants – embedded in their country of residence but looking to the other country to understand where they ‘come from,’ for identity and affirmation.

As previously stated, since the 1990s, scholars have increasingly used the term “transnationalism” to refer to a series of presences, identities, and movements that do not easily map within the geographical borders of contemporary nation-states. However, to paraphrase Bruno Latour, we have never been national. Therefore, examples of transnationalism can be found throughout history and around the world, in regions such as Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East.²⁴⁹ As Figure 1.3 shows, the publication of papers on transnationalism has grown steadily since the 2000s. A search in the Web of Science citation index shows that the most-cited papers about transnationalism concern migration. Nonetheless, transnational

behavior is not limited to migration, as scholars have applied it to social movements, identity formation, and cultural diffusion, and to understanding historical events in a way that is not encumbered by national borders. Thus, the increasing call to move from the study and teaching of national histories towards a study of global history.^{lv}

Figure 1.3 Publications on Transnationalism until 2024



TRANSNATIONAL STUDIES

After transnationalism began to have influence in migration studies, and after the fruitful interrogation of methodological nationalism^{lvi} (which starts with the wrong assumption that political borders contain mutually exclusive units of analysis), other academic fields, including sociology, anthropology, political science, and the humanities, have begun looking at practices, connections, and solidarities transcending national borders. Many chapters in this book take this approach. In doing so, they do not marginalize culture and practices; instead, they correct previous studies that artificially limited the scope of study of relations, contentious performances, and social movements to the political limits of a nation-state. Flows of money, goods, people, and ideas across political demarcations are not new; nation-states are a more recent phenomenon.^{lvii} Despite homogenizing national institutions and ideologies, most nation-states are ethnically diverse or plurinational. This is not a “problem” to solve. The ideal is not further independentist movements to achieve the lowest level of ethnic-cultural distinction, but rather further democratization to include all categorical groups and trust networks into local governing structures, so that opportunities and results vary at the individual level, not the group level, thereby achieving a true meritocracy.^{lviii} It is not about having every tribe or possible ethnic subgroup with their own government, but about having every individual represented and supported where they live.

In another example, social movements engage in what Charles Tilly calls “contentious performances,” which are locally legible and legitimate ways to protest state policies or ask for more rights. Activists, performances, and agendas often diffuse across political jurisdictions. For example, in 2011, Occupy Wall Street was deeply influenced by the May 15 camps in Spain, which in turn were influenced by Icelandic protests against foreign debt as well as by the Arab Spring.^{lix}

To conclude, let us revisit migration as an example to discuss theoretical discussions—building partially on French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu’s theories—that wrongly argue that transnational social fields transcend nation-state politics and render political borders less relevant.

CONCLUSION: MIGRATION AND TRANSNATIONAL SOCIAL FIELDS

Many authors have implicitly described remittances as both evidence and consequences of transnationalism. Remittances are attractive to transnational households because they connect two different labor fields. Whether or not they create a new social field, migrants become flexible labor power and cultural brokers between distinct social fields. Their uniqueness comes not from existing in closed ethnic enclaves with virtual halves in faraway lands, but instead from connecting different social fields such as Boston, Massachusetts and Miraflores, a town in the Dominican Republic,^{lx} or towns in Puebla,^{lxi} or Guerrero,^{lxii} Mexico, New York City; or ranches in central Mexico and Albuquerque, New Mexico.^{lxiii} The separation of the place where one works from the place where one grows up and retires^{lxiv} creates transnational households divided across borders, resulting in teleparenting.^{lxv} Nevertheless, during most of the waking day, immigrants live not in a transnational social field but in the receiving community. Immigrants must navigate the new places where they live and work but do so with the cultural frameworks they bring with them, all while thinking about their loved ones who had to stay in their place of origin and reproducing cultural and political activities with other people from their hometowns.

The growing interdisciplinary field of migrant transnational studies often employs the term “transnational social field” to describe the transnational activities of immigrant communities. This concept comes from transnational theory pioneers Nina Glick Schiller

and Peggy Levitt, who conceptualize this “field” as the “place” where social interactions occur between people living physically apart in migrant-sending communities and migrant-receiving sites. These authors explicitly state that they draw on the work of Pierre Bourdieu when coining the term “transnational social field.” The term has since been used to support the transnational perspective on immigration research^{lxvi} and to reify what Anthropologist Arjun Appadurai would call an “ethnoscape,” referring to the global flows of people.^{lxvii} Other scholars reproduce the term “transnational social field” by using transnational methodological and theoretical frameworks. The concept of “transnational social field” is a useful heuristic and abstraction, a theoretical construct that enables us to imagine, conceptualize, and discuss transnationalism. However, for readers who have not done fieldwork, the term may overstate the commonality and frequency of empirical transnational practices. The concept emphasizes a double presence rather than the double absence of emigrating and immigrating. It also excludes people in the receiving and sending communities who do not directly participate in transnational practices but often interact with migrants or their families left behind, who do. It is empirically limiting to study migration only through the lens of the long-term processes of immigrant integration into receiving societies, or only from the point of view of transnationalism since the emphasis on the transnational social field alone could wrongly imply that immigrants have no real or meaningful interactions with the locals abroad beyond providing labor or with those back in their previous place of residence besides sending money to them.^{lxviii} In more realistic theorizing, using a transnational lens does not then mean that all people involved in migration are equally exposed to transnational practices or that migration is the most meaningful experience of their lives. Indeed, Bourdieu’s larger corpus describes the overlapping of multiple fields that shape people’s social worlds.^{lxix} Migration fueled by the goal of remitting is a process of brokering between economies in unequally developed geographies. Bourdieu

knew the challenges that migration created for embodied culture. It is not coincidental that one of his closest students and collaborators, Abdelmalek Sayad, used his theories to explain the experience of Algerian migrants in France.^{lxx} Sayad was one of the earliest proponents of the conceptualization of migration as including both sending and receiving communities. In this sense, Sayad anticipated the theoretical need for a multisited transnational methodology — meaning conducting fieldwork in multiple geographic locations of origin and destination. Sayad’s approach is still useful because it does not depend on abstract “transnational social fields” or a monolithic “immigrant culture” but rather on a theory in which cultures of origin are carried by migrants in their own particular manner through their individual habitus —dispositions and social history embodied in individuals, structure becoming flesh. What Sayad calls “the suffering of the migrant” is due to the fact that communities of origin and destination have different (field-specific) types and valuations of cultural capital — know-how about the practices, unspoken rules, and hidden curricula of prestigious and powerful social circles and institutions.^{lxxi} But contrary to a “clash of cultures” perspective, I argue that this embodied culture is flexible and changes through time and continued interactions with others. Contrary to how states often frame this, the challenge is not one rooted in theology, economic competition, racial character, or national security but is a matter interpersonal relations — as messy and complicated as they are. Clearly, the state can moderate and incorporate or further alienate, vilify, and escalate ethnic and racial tensions and social boundaries.^{lxxii}

A relational understanding of migration and transnationalism provides a better approach to understanding human mobility.^{lxxiii} Migration scholars would do well to reassess transnationalism and integration through these powerful theoretical lenses because the premigration experience sets up expectations and the reference through which immigrants evaluate their integration and success postmigration. The term “transnationalism” was probably first used to

denote the supposed novelty of the described phenomenon. Nevertheless, the field of transnational history shows that sending money and keeping in touch with the place of origin is not new, but has often accompanied human mobility.^{lxxiv} Long-distance migration predates the nation-state.^{lxxv}

Some migration scholars used the transnational social field as the theoretical scaffolding for descriptive studies of cultural maintenance and long-distance communication among immigrants and their families, which in itself has produced useful findings and empirical descriptions. Using Bourdieu’s concepts of field, capital, and habitus together opens a new door to understanding contemporary migration. This does not take away from the important empirical research and fieldwork findings by all the many scholars contributing to studies of immigrant transnationalism. Future research bringing the concepts of cultural capital and habitus into discussions of migration can offer a more holistic description of the complex empirical reality behind the human migration experience. In the meantime, relational transnationalism —a procedural and mechanism-based approach to immigration based on transactions, social relations, actual networks, and contentious politics— provides a useful way to design social research and case studies to theorize about the political and cultural implications of transnationalism, whether in real-life spaces or cyberspace, or through movies and other cultural products.

- ⁱ A version of this chapter was published in *Transnational Humans and Transnationalism in the Humanities: Crossing Boundaries in the Americas*. Edited by Max Paul Friedman, Stefan Rinke, and Núria Vilanova. Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2025. I thank the editors, members of the Transnationalism in the Humanities seminar, as well as Eric Hershberg, Carlos Coleman, Isabella Goris, and fellow authors of the volume for their feedback. Diana Garay and Avery Hyra prepared CLALS Working Paper No. 58.
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