

Edited by Amba Pande and Camelia Tigau

# Migration and the Rise of the United States

The Role of Old and New Diasporas



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# MIGRATION AND THE RISE OF THE UNITED STATES

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*The Role of Old and New Diasporas*

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Camelia Tigau**

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The birds on the cover represent the global movement of people and the inevitable challenges of adaptation resulting from migration to the US. Birds' migration in flocks reminds us of the transnational belongingness of diaspora communities. The change in colours represents the diversity and the double identity of migrants, with continued belonging to their native places and where they decide or are forced to arrive.

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# CONTENTS

List of Figures	viii
List of Tables	x
About the Contributors	xi
Preface	xviii
Introduction: Factoring Transnational Diasporas in the Rise of the US as a Great Power and a Multi-cultural Society <i>Amba Pande, Camelia Tigau and Telésforo Ramírez</i>	1
<b>Part I Old Diasporas (Pre-1965)</b>	
1 Italian Workers in the US: The American Accomplishments of a Transnational Diaspora <i>Stefano Luconi</i>	31
2 Immigrants as a Transnational Political Resource: The Case of American Jews <i>Kenneth D. Wald</i>	53
3 Irish Immigration to America: Revisiting Famine, Transnational Networks and Memorialisation <i>Jyoti Atwal</i>	73
4 Transnational Experience: The Armenian Diasporic Community in the US <i>Ani Yeremyan</i>	95

- 5 The Labelling of Migrants and Diasporas in US Media and Policy:  
A Historical Sketch 112  
*Camelia Tigau and Amba Pande*

## PART II New Diasporas (post-1965)

### *Part IIa Diasporas as Transnational Actors*

- 6 The Naga Diaspora in the US: Integration and Transnationalisation 153  
*Ajailiu Niumai*
- 7 The Indo-Caribbean American Contribution to the Growth and Development of the US and Transnational Linkages with Countries of Origin 175  
*Vishnu Bisram*
- 8 West African Islam in the US: The Senegalese Murid Transnational Community 209  
*José Luis Gázquez Iglesias*
- 9 Integrationist Acculturation: Experiences of Social Insertion of Professional Mexican Migrants in the US and their Contribution to American Multi-culturalism 228  
*Laura Vázquez Maggio and Lilia Domínguez Villalobos*

### *Part IIb Diasporas as Diplomatic and Cultural Actors*

- 10 Civic and Political Engagement among Muslim and Arab Americans 257  
*Vera Eccarius-Kelly*
- 11 Mexico City's Diasporas in Chicago: An Approach from Urban and Trans-Local Diplomacy 282  
*Antonio Alejo*
- 12 The Contribution of International Migration to the American Film Industry 300  
*Alejandro Mercado-Celis*
- 13 The Contributions of Latinx Art to the Fight for Social Justice in the US 319  
*Maria Cristina Fernández Hall*

**Part IIc Diasporas in US Politics**

14 Chinese Immigration in the US in the Post-Trump Era: Major Impacts and Trends <i>Yan Yuan</i>	353
15 Moral Concerns: Immigrants who Reject Immigrants in the US <i>Alejandro Mosqueda and Enrique Camacho Beltrán</i>	374
16 The Unrecognised Contributions of H-1B and H-4 Immigrants to the US Economy: An Ethnographic Study <i>Annapurna Devi Pandey</i>	400
Conclusion: An Everlasting Endowment: Insights from a Multi-dimensional Analysis of Migration and Diaspora in the US <i>Amna Pande and Camelia Tigau</i>	423
Index	436

## FIGURES

I.1	The immigrant population in the US by region of birth, 1850–2019	8
I.2	Percentage of the immigrant population in the US by region of origin, 1850–2019	9
I.3	Highly qualified immigrants in the US by region of birth, 1940–2019	10
I.4	Percentage of highly qualified immigrants in the US by region of birth, 1940–2019	10
3.1	Why are US presidents so keen to be Irish?	78
3.2	Irish American ironworkers, 1932	86
3.3	Famine Memorial in Dublin	88
3.4	New York Irish Famine Memorial at Battery Park	90
9.1	Change in self-identified ethno-national identity	232
13.1	Deported Artist (2021), ‘Mural 3: Deported and returned migrant community’	325
13.2	Mural by San Francisco-based artist Gregory Amos and a group of deported veterans	326
13.3	The Jericho Walk	327
13.4	‘Missing forever’	329
13.5	Poster for the 2021 Tijuana Zine Fest	338

13.6 Still from <i>Chupacabras: The myth of the bad immigrant</i> by Silvia Rodriguez Vega (2015)	339
C.1 Contributions of migrants and diasporas to the US	431

## TABLES

5.1	Friends and foes in the US migration legislation	117
9.1	Identity and immigration status	233
9.2	Identity and social class	237
9.3	Identity and language spoken at home	238
9.4	Identity and travels to Mexico	240
9.5	Identity and discrimination for being Mexican	244
9.6	Identity and disadvantage of having a non-native accent	245
9.7	Identity and the evaluation of the migratory experience	247
9.8	Identity and the desire for a possible return to Mexico	249
14.1	Chinese international students in the US (2010/11–2019/20)	361
14.2	H-1B temporary visas issued to Mainland Chinese	363
14.3	Immediate Relative Visas issued to Mainland Chinese (FY2011–20)	365
14.4	Number of F1 and J1 visas issued to Mainland Chinese nationals (FY2013–20)	367

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## PREFACE

This edited volume is an attempt to foreground the frequently neglected relationship between diasporas and immigration and the rise of the US. By bringing together eminent scholars, the book highlights the current scholarship in the field of migration, which tries to present a counter-narrative to the popular anti-immigrant rhetoric and the populist domestic politics of the US. There has been a growing global trend of alternative histories and anthropologies that brings forth voices from the margins and the developing world (Vertovec and Cohen, 1999), with concepts such as provincialising the US (Knauf, 2007) and Europe (Chakrabarty, 2009). In this sense, the present volume, without undermining the eminence of the US, tries to deprovincialise (Burke, 2020) or deparochialise it from within, or through the histories of the immigrants. In other words, it attempts to re-read the emergence of the US as an important power, with immigration as the site of analysis.

This volume is the first of its kind to bring together a rich anthology of case studies and theoretical frameworks regarding the immigrant population in the US. The volume outlines the contributions of immigrants and diasporas to the US scientific and economic hegemony. It analyses the historical outcome of major ethnic diaspora groups such as Italians, Jews, Irish, Armenians, Indians, Chinese, Africans, Muslims, Arabs and Mexicans in the US. It is organised based on ethnic rather than occupational groups in order to emphasise the characteristics of the immigrants and their influence on US

policy, economy, science, arts and gastronomy, to name just a few. The volume includes novel lines of research, such as (but not limited to) diaspora diplomacy, diasporas and soft/hard power, political organisation of migrants, civic engagement, post-liberalism and immigration, assimilation, integration, liminality and several innovative concepts. It discusses public responsibility and the paradox of immigrants rejecting new immigrants in an adverse populist context of border closure and increased anti-elite discourse.

This volume will draw the attention of researchers, policy-makers, practitioners and activists. It may be included in reading lists for undergraduate and postgraduate university courses on Migration and Diaspora Studies, International Relations, Globalisation and Sociology. Transnational migration and diaspora are powerful and visible phenomena today. Given the present circumstances around the globe, this phenomenon may acquire greater importance in the near future, making this volume extremely relevant. Overall, this volume celebrates immigrants' contributions to the rise of the US, by providing a comprehensive and in-depth theoretical and empirical discussion. Immigrants have built the US as a multi-cultural society; they helped to establish the first industrial infrastructure and further positioned the country as a leader in the knowledge economy. Foreign workers of all skills – from enslaved people and forced migrants, over undocumented migrants, to highly mobile and educated elites from all over the world – have provided the country with dynamism, creativity and a continuous source of labour, sometimes readily available and not entirely recognised and assimilated. In this sense, what was meant to be a cosmopolitan society, with the analogy of a 'salad bowl' virtually representing all the cultures of the world, has remained a somewhat segregated society.

We take great pleasure in acknowledging the institutions, scholars and friends who have been a source of constant support and encouragement all along. First, we would like to extend our sincere thanks to all the authors and scholars who have contributed to this volume, as well as the staff at Edinburgh University Press – in particular, Nina Macaraig, who as copy-editor helped to improve the text.

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Diaspora and Transnationalism (GRFDT) and the India International Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies (IISECS).

Finally, Amba Pande extends her sincere gratitude to her children and fellow Bharat Soka Gakkai practitioners. Camelia Tigau would like to thank family and the General Department for Academic Personnel (DGAPA) at UNAM for the support to the PAPIIT Project IN302324, ‘Diaspora Communication and Diplomacy: Perspectives from the Receiving Contexts in the Americas, Europe and Asia’.

# INTRODUCTION

## FACTORING TRANSNATIONAL DIASPORAS IN THE RISE OF THE US AS A GREAT POWER AND MULTI-CULTURAL SOCIETY

*Amber Pande, Camelia Tigau and  
Telésforo Ramírez*

This volume is the first of its kind to bring together a rich anthology of case studies and theoretical frameworks regarding the diaspora populations in the US. The chapters included outline the contributions of immigrants and diasporas to the scientific and economic supremacy of the US. The authors analyse the historical outcome and the transnational existence of major ethnic diaspora groups, both old (such as the Italian, Jewish, Irish, Armenian, Chinese and Mexican diasporas) and new (the Naga, Indo-Caribbeans, Senegalese, Muslims and Arabs, among others). Some of the novel lines of research and analysis that have been adopted are diaspora diplomacy, the political organisation of migrants, civic engagement, post-liberalism and immigration, assimilation, integration and liminality as well as several other innovative concepts. We also discuss public responsibility and the paradoxes of immigrants rejecting the new immigrants in an adverse populist context of border closure and increased anti-elite discourse.

The two main themes that will be the focus of discussion in this volume are the transnational diasporas and their role in the development of the US. This introductory chapter aims to establish these two and other major concepts and theories discussed throughout the book and to give a definite framework to the

volume. It will also underline the major analytical questions around which the authors have constructed the following chapters. We use transnationalism to bridge diasporas with other key concepts, such as economic and cultural progress, global civil society and alternative diplomacy. In a vein similar to Fischer's (2021), we subscribe to a transnational epistemology that may help the US generate a broad view of how diasporas have contributed to US power and how the US itself has utilised these diasporas (Marinova, 2017).

### **Transnationalism and Diasporas: Two Intertwined Concepts**

Transnational diaspora, in fact, involves two separate concepts – that is, transnationalism and diaspora. Both these concepts are well-developed and independent but intersect with each other comfortably at many points. These intersecting points will be the centre of analysis while discussing the context of the US and its rise. Diaspora and transnationalism are popular concepts in the academic literature and public discourses. Between these two terms, diaspora is a much older concept that has evolved over time. Moreover, the term diaspora and its derivatives are being used with different connotations as a popular and, to some extent, politicised concept. Historically, it was used more frequently in a Jewish context, describing forced displacement, victimhood and the desire to return. However, as it evolved, it adopted a much broader context. Various scholars have warned against its overuse, regarding it as an innocuous analytical concept. Panibratov and Rysakova (2020) have noted that not all globally mobile individuals can be considered diaspora members. One of the criteria to evaluate the existence of diasporas is their loyalty to the destination country and their socio-culturally adaptation, which, in turn, may serve as a valuable driver of development and economic growth of both their country of origin and destination country (Panibratov and Rysakova, 2020, p. 116).

Various scholars have laid down some essential characteristics that can be considered as starting point for understanding diasporas (Safran, 1991; Faist, 2008; Bhabha, 1994; Clifford, 1994). Broadly, three significant characteristics can be outlined, the first being cross-border migration or dispersal; the second relates to cross-border inter-connectedness between home and host land; and the third relates to the incorporation or integration into the countries of settlement (Bauböck and Faist, 2010, p. 13). Pande has outlined four essential attributes to define the diaspora: (a) cross-border migration/dispersion and

settlement; (b) host land participation, which signifies not only residence but also participation in the economic and political processes of the host land; (c) homeland consciousness, which implies connectivity or a sense of awareness about the existence of a motherland beyond the borders of the country of settlement; and (d) construction of a multi-locational ‘self’ which involves the recreation of an identity, drawing from both home and host lands as a hybrid identity (Pande, 2013, pp. 59–60).

Another conceptual intersection of the book occurs between diasporas and migrants: while we study the contributions of migrants in general, we outline the importance of specific ethnic groups and minorities – diasporas – that have shaped the narratives and beliefs surrounding migration. Structuring the book around certain diasporas gives coherence to the idea that migrants are not just scattered individuals but a part of cultural groups that integrate into the larger ‘salad bowl’-type of US society in organised ways.

Lyons and Mandaville (2010) have previously outlined the critical role of diasporas in global politics as a natural consequence of globalisation, despite their perception as intruders by certain political groups. The transnational ties of diasporas situate them as intermediaries for their homeland, and their functioning is similar to that of other social groups. ‘Diasporas are not always liberal or radical, tolerant, or chauvinistic, any more than any other political party or interest groups inherently embody these qualities’, have Lyons and Mandaville said (2010, p. 5). However, the authors of this book focus on the positive outcome of diasporas, in line with the central argument that defines their contributions to the emergence of the US as a great power.

In the present, diasporas have become a significant contributor to the development of home and host country. This has resulted in governments taking an interest in engaging with their diasporas through various policy initiatives. Diasporas are also mobilised, evoking the transnational identity to encourage economic engagement and political loyalty towards the home country or, in other words, to pursue nationalist agendas. Some of the fundamental traits that the diasporas possess are the forms of engagement with the home as well as the host country in terms of cross-border mobility, socio-cultural, economic and political ties with the country of emigration and the countries of immigration, collective identity and hybridity built on transnationalism. The role of

diasporas in their countries of origin has been extensively studied to show their communication potential, their activities as track-two channels of diaspora diplomacy, as well as philanthropic agents whose actions are based on contact zones between origin and destination (Gillespie and Baumann, 2006; Tigau, Pande and Yuan, 2017; Carville and Lien, 2021).

### **On Networks and Diaspora Exchange**

Transnationalism exercised through return and networking are the main ways to repair the damage caused by the departure of valuable people of all qualifications. While brain drain has been widely studied in the literature on skilled migration, other types may also be considered, such as ‘care drain’ (Dumitru, 2011; 2016). New communication opportunities, especially the lock-down during the recent pandemic, have pushed all the migrants and diasporas to look back to their countries of origin, provide remittances, offer moral support and sometimes even consider their return. Digital technologies create new opportunities for ordinary people to participate in the symbolic construction of community and social movements, whether state-led patriotism or an oppositional minority movement (Yusupova and Rutland, 2021, p. 327). In other words, nationalism is no longer an elitist enterprise: it has become more accessible for ordinary folks, which means more potential engagement for diasporas in a bottom-up democratisation process (Yusupova and Rutland, *ibid.*).

However, networking has historically prevailed over return. In cases of small countries with excess skilled labour and limited labour markets, such as Lebanon, diasporas serve as escape valves and may, in fact, contribute more to the development of their country of origin from abroad. In the words of a Lebanese medical doctor living in Houston, ‘[i]f you look for us on a map you will not see us because we are a dot. It does not make any sense to have all of us in the country. There are more Lebanese living outside than inside the country . . .’ (interviewed by Tigau, 2020).

Skilled diasporas particularly show an active interest in connecting with their countries and regions of origin through professional networks that entail business exchanges, lecturing back home and receiving student internships in the case of scientists and physicians (Tigau, 2020). While official proposals for diaspora associations from the governments of origin

countries are not readily accepted, especially in the case of political exiles, diaspora groups tend to create alternative networks for a symbolic, if not physical, return. In this way, transnationalism ‘from above’, which implies home country policies that channel the transnational activities of migrants, is not readily accepted (Guarnizo, 1997; Smith, 2003; Hourani, 2012).

Ethnic minorities may be studied not only in terms of their contributions to the societies of destination, but also for being the target of discrimination and prejudices due to nationalist views that compare countries to homes (Santa Ana, 2002). For opponents to immigration in destination countries, transnationalism is considered more of an invasion than a cultural benefit: immigrants should come, work and return to their countries of origin. This type of external prejudice towards foreign workers also affects their cohesion as strong diasporas, leading to further mistrust between newcomers and older diasporas, as in the case of the Mexican diaspora in the US (Tigau, 2020). As one of the chapters below will show, diasporas may eventually turn anti-migrant in their voting behaviour, to prove their assimilation to the US in a general context of aggressive discourse revived by recent waves of populism and border enforcement. The impossibility of returning also implies a greater pressure for migrants to assimilate, not only to save their professional careers but also to adapt their identity. Once the subjects are integrated, they prefer to remain where they are, rather than face the possibility of a new adaptation or re-adjustment to their countries of origin. In this way, those who originally planned to return no longer do so over the years. However, as previously stated, this repressed return can generate more transnational networks. Other authors have characterised this process as ‘localised transnationalism’, referring to the prolonged and intense maintenance of cross-border connections by migrants with minimal geographic mobility (Sobczyk, Soriano Miras and Caballero Calvo, 2020).

Thus, the transnationality of the diaspora remains at the centre of their existence and location. As Sheller and Urry (2006) have suggested, the transnational geographical mobility itself translates into a specific type of identity, cultural, economic and political participation in the country of emigration and immigration. Transnationalism refers to the diffusion and extension of social, political and economic processes between and beyond the sovereign jurisdictional

boundaries of nation-states (Glick Schiller, Basch and Szanton-Blanc, 1995). Transnationalism is a process that spans various multidisciplinary realms. A transnational perspective in research means shifting the unit of analysis from individual states to a global system. Transnational perspectives provide a deeper understanding of a number of globally contingent processes, including cross-border movement, connectedness across borders, socio-cultural activities, post-migration integration, cross-border exchanges of capital and ideas, everyday practices of migrants, cross-border economic activities and entrepreneurship, governance and politics, dual citizenship, terrorism and organised crime, and the reproduction of the repressive state among others (Kearney, 1995; Pilati and Herman, 2020; Beauchemin and Safi, 2020; Baser and Ozturk, 2020). Such processes concerning individuals and civil society are termed transnationalism ‘from below’, as they are carried by individuals and civil society, for particular reasons of identity, cultural reproduction or political engagement of migrants in both countries of origin and host countries (Guarnizo, 1997; Smith, 2003; Hourani, 2012; Tedeschi, Vorobeva and Jauhainen, 2022, p. 5).

### **Diasporas in the US Context**

This book takes the research line as followed by scholars such as Marinova (2017) on how host rather than home states utilise diasporas to enhance their foreign policy goals. She makes her point by showing how the US State Department and USAID have previously sponsored the International Diaspora Engagement Alliance (IdEA), which includes 1,500 diaspora groups from across the US. This type of action through IdEA ‘provides competitive grants toward investment and entrepreneurship, innovation, and philanthropy in the diasporas’, according to Marinova (2017, p. 50). Her proposal of diaspora utilisation can also be seen as a way to enhance cooperation with countries of strategic interest to the US, using diaspora as intermediaries.

We believe that diasporic activities are pursued through transnational connectivity. In this volume, we subscribe to a transnational epistemology to generate a broad view of how diasporas have contributed to the rise of US, identity, post-liberalism and immigration, ethnic boundaries, social mobility and so on. The transnational connections of diasporas can exist in the form of transnational social, political and economic spaces and transnational identities, which

connect them to their motherland. Yet, they play a crucial role in the growth and development of the host countries. The US can be cited as one of the best examples of this phenomenon. The transnational diasporas, thus, have played an extremely significant role in the rise of the US as a great power and multi-cultural society. Nye and Keohane (1971) have argued that transnationalism affects diverse areas of international governance, including interstate politics, values, US foreign policy and international organisations. This volume intends to offer an alternate view on diasporas, as seen from the countries where they live, not as newcomers, but as historical contributors to cultural diversity and economic wealth.

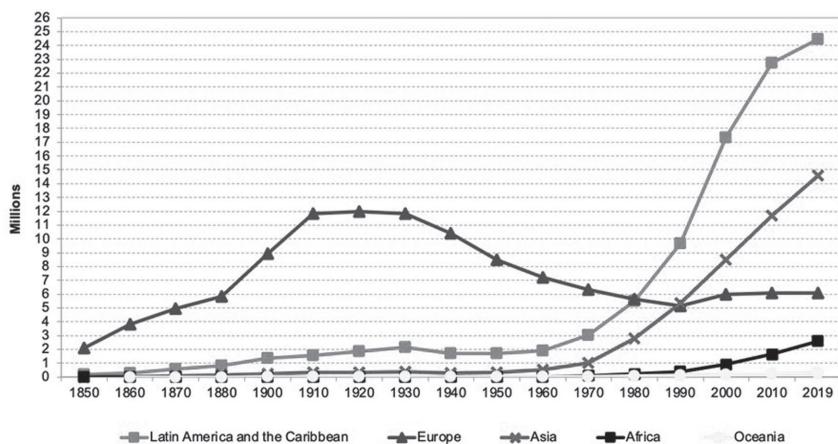
The US is composed of immigrants from different countries and regions who have migrated for different reasons and at different times throughout history. Until the end of the nineteenth century, most immigrants were of European origin. The vast majority came from countries in southern, central and eastern Europe (such as Italy, Ireland, England, Germany, Hungary and Poland, among others); together with the Africans who arrived as enslaved people and other immigrants, they contributed to populate the US territory (Echevarría, 2020). Census statistics indicate that, in 1880, 5.8 million immigrants were natives of European countries (86 percent), followed very distantly by those from Latin America and the Caribbean, among whom those born in Mexico were the majority, while migrants from Asia, Africa and Oceania came to a lesser extent (Figures I.1 and I.2).

This numerical composition of the immigrant population in the US remained stable until 1940. Thereafter, there was a slight increase in Latin American and Asian immigrants, representing 16 percent of the total population born abroad. The number of immigrants of non-European origin grew gradually, until reaching the figure of 4.1 million in 1970; in relative terms, Europeans already represented 40 percent of the total immigrant population in that year. These numbers indicate that, at the end of the 1970s, around two out of every five immigrants residing in the US had been born in countries outside the European continent. Unfortunately, along with the growth and ethnic diversification of immigration in the US, racial discrimination also increased. Some immigrants were discriminated against because of their skin colour, mother tongue, religion, immigration status and socio-economic level (Arriaga, 2007). These discriminatory practices

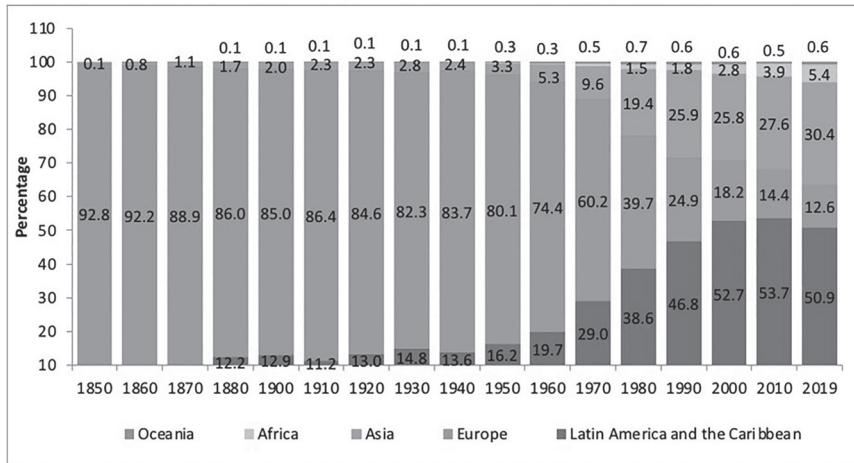
triggered political actions against immigration, thereby affecting the living conditions of immigrants and patterns of integration into American society (Arriaga, 2007). The number of immigrants of Mexican origin, along with other Latin Americans and Caribbeans, experienced overwhelming growth from 1970 to 2000 (Calleja-Fernández, 2005).

According to census information, since 1980 the number of immigrants from Latin America and the Caribbean has grown fourfold, from 5.5 million in 1980 to 22.7 million in 2010. Currently, Latin American immigrants represent 54 percent of the total foreign population residing in the US, approximately 24.4 million. Most are from Mexico, El Salvador, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala and Colombia. However, over the last decade immigration of Asian origin has also registered an upward trend (Budiman, 2020), and native immigrants from countries such as India, China and especially the Philippines, with a colonial American past, have increased – this has a substantial impact on the ethnic composition of American society. Migrant labour has contributed to US national development, economy, culture, science, technology and innovation (Meissner et al., 2006).

In addition to changes in national origins, the socio-demographic profiles of immigrants today differ dramatically from those held by people who came



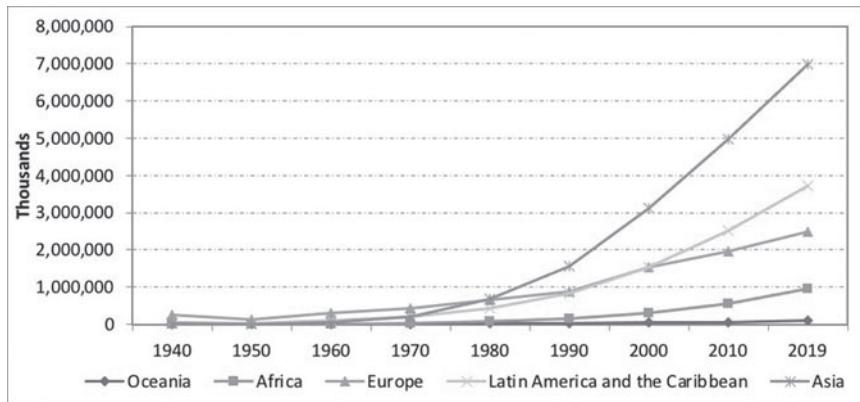
**Figure I.1** The immigrant population in the US by region of birth, 1850–2019. Source: Authors, based on IPUMS (Ruggles et al., 2020).



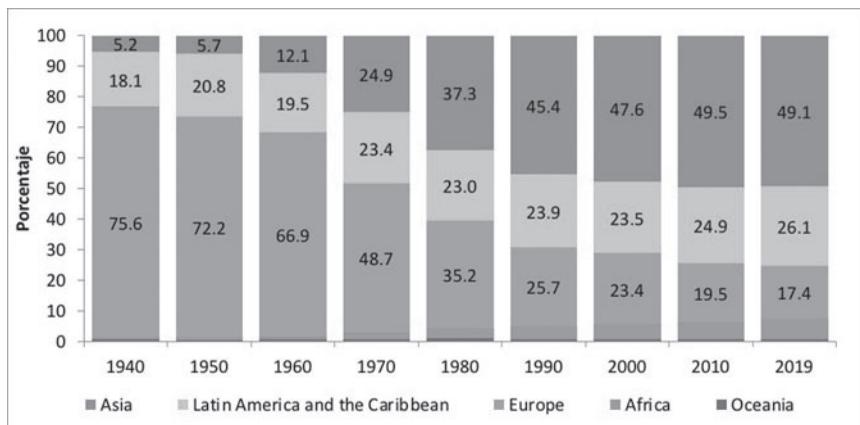
**Figure I.2** Percentage of the immigrant population in the US by region of origin, 1850–2019. Source: Authors, based on IPUMS (Ruggles et al., 2020).

to the US long ago (Budiman, 2020; Budiman et al., 2020). Many migrants with higher educational credentials, cultural training and education began to arrive after the 1990s, mostly from Asia and Europe (see Figure I.3). This trend was a further marked in the twenty-first century, with the rise of professional migration from Latin America. Figure I.4 shows that the majority of these highly skilled migrants are natives of Asia (49 percent), most of them from India, China, the Philippines, Korea, Taiwan and Japan. Likewise, Latin America and the Caribbean are positioned as the second region of origin of skilled immigration to the US (26 percent), the majority coming from Mexico, Cuba, Colombia, Brazil, Venezuela, Peru and the Dominican Republic, among others.

Recent opinion polls show the division of US society when it comes to immigration. According to Budiman (2020), 66 percent perceive that immigrants strengthen the country with their work and talent, and only 24 percent say that they are a burden to the country by taking jobs, housing and medical care from the native population. However, this discussion has been central to the recent US election and is based on a long-term historical confrontation, as this introductory chapter shows.



**Figure I.3** Highly qualified immigrants in the US by region of birth, 1940–2019. Source: Authors, based on IPUMS (Ruggles et al., 2020).



**Figure I.4** Percentage of highly qualified immigrants in the US by region of birth, 1940–2019. Source: Authors, based on IPUMS (Ruggles et al., 2020).

## A Country Built from Diasporas and Immigrants

One factor that has remained constant is the relentless rise of the US to a position of supremacy in terms of hard as well as soft power. In this journey spanning almost three centuries, immigration has run parallel, adding a rare and rich dynamism to the country's cultural, institutional, idealistic

and material growth. It would not be an exaggeration to say that immigrants have gone on to become the backbone of American success and power. In his famous essay ‘The Future of American Power’, Farid Zakaria has stated: ‘Ultimately, this (immigration) is what sets the country apart from the experience of Britain and all other past great economic powers that have grown fat and lazy and slipped behind as they faced the rise of leaner, hungrier nations’ (Zakaria, 2008, p. 36). This statement is valid for the economy and every other sphere of power that the US has achieved. The streams of people coming to the US have constantly revitalised the economy, polity, society and technological growth, while at the same time making a new and successful life for themselves. Thus, two grand themes remain at the crux of America’s success, the first being the way in which the US system and environment influenced and led the immigrants towards ‘making it big’, and the second being the way in which immigrants influenced and led America towards being a great power and all-round success. Amongst these two themes, the former has received greater and more positive attention than the latter.

As a matter of fact, immigrants and the impact of immigration have received an extremely negative response in the popular narrative in the US and many other countries worldwide. This negative discourse tends to take its toll: Panibratov and Rysakova (2020, p. 116) have proven that anti-migrant policies and hostile countries of origin can, in effect, cause an increased liability of diaspora members’ foreignness and, as a result, marginalise certain ethnic diasporas at their destinations, which in turn tends to decrease their positive role in economic and businesses activities. In the recent political, social and economic discourses, immigration and immigrants have become a hot potato, with COVID-19 adding additional fire to this debate. An ultra-nationalist populist politics, surging anti-immigrant propaganda and discrimination have gripped many nations, especially the US. This has resulted in raging xenophobia and adverse policy decisions in many countries. Most of these anti-immigrant perceptions have been historically present in US society. However, previous studies have pointed out a completely different picture: that is, high-skilled or low-skilled immigrants have brought a range of positive effects, skills and dynamics to the US in every sphere.

The US can be cited as the best example of immigrant-led growth. The successive waves of immigration over a long period of time have affected the

country in various ways. Despite all the anti-immigrant rhetoric and recent politicisation, the data and resulting studies have pointed out that immigrants – whether skilled or unskilled, or even unauthorised – have greatly enhanced the productive capacity of the US economy. One estimate suggests that the total annual contribution of foreign-born workers is roughly \$2 trillion, or about 10 percent of the annual GDP (Borjas, 2013); the contribution of unauthorised immigrants is estimated to be about 2.6 percent of the GDP (Edwards and Ortega, 2017). The estimates also show that allowing more immigration would increase the annual GDP growth by 0.33 percentage points over the next decade (Edwards and Ortega, 2017). Another statistical analysis conducted in the US has shown that an increase in immigration by one percentage point leads to a GDP growth of 0.1 percent (Malinovska, 2018).

Oliinyk et al. (2021) have reinforced the idea that an influx of highly skilled workers directly impacts the economic growth of the destination countries in terms of GNI per capita and competitiveness. According to their research, in the macro-economic management of a competitive economy, actions aimed at attracting highly skilled migrants have the most significant and noticeable impact on economic development. In a global context of talent shortage (Manpower-Group, 2020), productive diasporas can add value not only to technological, but also to social, emotional, basic cognitive and even physical talent in general, rather than damaging native workers.

In their research on migrant inventors, Breschi, Lissoni and Miguelez (2015, p. 31) have further proven ‘the diaspora effect’ in the US, according to which ethnic inventors’ patents are more frequently cited in their countries of origin, while at the same time having a ‘brain gain’ effect for the US. According to their database, there has been a substantial increase in the contribution of patents from China, India and, to a lesser extent, Germany, between 1980 and 2010. They conclude that this type of information contradicts the xenophobic discourse against foreigners, especially against the Chinese in the US, and does not seem to be in the interest of the country. However, recent accusations of espionage towards the members of the Chinese Thousand Talents Plan may explain tense relations between the two countries or clarify the reasoning behind the anti-Chinese policies at a federal level and in universities (*The Economist*, 2021).

Immigrants’ contributions to the US affect much more than just the economy. They possess higher college and advanced degrees than native-born

Americans, work in STEM fields, contribute to innovation and generate many more patentable technologies. Nearly 40 percent of the Nobel Prizes in Physics, Chemistry and Medicine won by US Americans have been awarded to immigrants. Apart from the direct impact, there are substantial spill-over effects and positive impacts of immigration for native-born citizens in terms of government finances and productive growth. In some US industries, immigrants make up more than a third of the workforce, and their geographic mobility alleviates worker shortages in local economies.

Contrary to popular perception, estimates show only a slight impact of immigration on the wages of low-skilled native-born workers. The demand for low-skilled immigrant labour itself indicates that there has been a substantial shrinkage of the US-born, less-skilled working-age population. Immigrants take up the low-skilled jobs for which the natives are either unavailable or which they are unwilling to take. Therefore, rather than clashing with native-born US citizens, the immigrants' role somewhat positively impacts native-born workers' wages (Ottaviano and Peri, 2012).

Immigrants' social impact on the US has also been dynamic and has helped it emerge as one of the most successful models of a multi-cultural society. Immigrants bolster the national birth rate by providing practically all the net prime-age population growth in the US. The increasing number of immigrant workers and their children help support the native-born retirees and bolster Social Security and Medicare trust funds. Partly for this reason, an increase in immigration tends to improve the Social Security trust fund's health. Studies have long found that immigrant children attain more education, earn higher earnings and work in higher-paying occupations than their parents (Trent et al., 2019). Such contributions add to the nation's long-term strength, for instance, in the number of Nobel Prizes in the US (Kando, 2018). Although they constitute only 18 percent of the twenty-five-plus-year-old workforce, immigrants obtain 28 percent of high-quality patents. Knauft (2007, p. 796) has pointed out that, 'as a nation of immigrants, the United States should have reservoirs of knowledge for understanding the world that few could match [...] but perhaps the pressure to assimilate was so great that this richness was lost'. This phenomenon is well reflected in the development of third- or fourth-generation immigrants becoming part of the anti-immigrant rhetoric.

This volume, therefore, presents a deeper understanding of immigrants' contribution to the US economy, society and polity, through scholarly assessment and critical analysis of several empirical cases and theoretical frameworks, taking a multi-disciplinary approach and methodology that would be useful for both academia and policy-makers, in the fields of Sociology, Migration Studies, Diaspora Studies, International Relations and Globalisation. A better understanding of the role of immigration and immigrants may lead to a better understanding within the US for the rest of the world.

### **Major Analytical Questions and the Dimensional Analysis of Migration**

We consider migration as a complex phenomenon that may be studied in various dimensions and through a varied catalogue of disciplinary methods. These dimensions and methods converge around the same idea of the transformations that migrants and diasporas have brought to a complex multi-cultural society such as the US. The arguments in this book, albeit diverse, are structured around five transversal topics and research questions.

First, a historical dimension of analysis runs across all the chapters, as they try to identify the primary waves of migration to the US, associated conflicts of identity and discrimination incidents. As such, the book's first part elucidates the conditions that explain America's early benevolence to newcomers, as opposed to the recent anti-migrant opinion. Throughout the chapters, some critical historical questions are: What is the process that allows the transformation of certain minorities from the most hated to the most appreciated (that is, Jews, Asians and so on)? What causes the conflict/paradox between the migrants' desire to integrate and the rejection at their destination? Why are they not accepted, even when they try to contribute and integrate? How is discrimination magnified through specific intersectional dimensions, such as gender, social class, employment and so on?

The second dimension concerns integration policies and diaspora organisations in the US. With the help of several examples of integration issues that often end up reproducing prejudice and discrimination, some of the key questions addressed by the book are the following: How much of this integration failure can be attributed to a clash of identity? When and how was the correlation between migration and harm created? Is migrants' de-skilling a political or an economic issue? What if immigration is harmful only under certain

modifiable relative conditions that are not under the control of immigrants, such as changes in labour policy? How do diasporas fight discrimination and amalgamation into homogenous communities? What is the complementarity between bottom-up and top-down approaches to integration? Sometimes, the answers to these questions are unexpected, as in the case of anti-migrant diasporas; other clues come from cultural and/or religious transnationalism and even from the informal economy. Related to diaspora organisation, the book also studies the role of cities (urban diplomacy) and the international lobbying of those who, according to Antonio Alejo's chapter, may be called 'people in motion'.

A third dimension of our collective work consists of the correlations among integration, transnationalism, nationalism and cosmopolitanism. How and why was the idea of the US melting pot changed to that of a salad bowl? Is it because assimilation policies are predisposed to failure? Is the salad bowl a product of migrants' transnationalism? Or is the opposite true, with transnationalism being a condition for satisfactory integration? Does cosmopolitanism eliminate discrimination, and how does nationalism/nativism discourage new waves of migration?

A fourth essential topic common to all the chapters sheds light on the contributions of migrants and talent gain, which we believe provides new and original evidence from a multiple and varied collection of migrants' experiences. Some of the questions are meant for a comprehensive synthesis of migrants' contributions, such as: What have migrants given to America? To what extent was the transformation of the US a product of the skills/knowledge and hard work brought by immigrants? What are the contributions of migrants to the image of and respect for the American Dream (opportunities, abundance, freedom)? How do migrants experience the American dream? What is the balance of talent drain/gain in industries such as Hollywood and, in general, in the context of intellectual migration?

Lastly, the book provides a complex reflection to identify old and new forms of transnationalism, by providing elements for classifying transnational activity of heuristic value. We have chosen some of the major diaspora groups that have shaped US history, while also including newer and more original, understudied groups such as the Naga, the Indo-Caribbeans, the Senegalese and the Armenians, among others. As this is an academic book with a central

argument on diaspora contributions in the US, it does not aim to be an all-encompassing, dictionary-type introduction to all the different diasporas. We have selected mainly transnational groups relevant to contemporary discussions; including all diasporas within the US was beyond the scope and possibilities of the present project.

## **Book Contents**

This book follows a historical structure divided into two main parts: old (pre-1965) and new (post-1965) diasporas. The first part includes five chapters on the Italian, Jewish, Irish and Armenian diasporas, along with a more general reflection on the labelling of migrants and diasporas in the US media and policy. The second part includes eleven chapters on new diasporas, organised around three main topics, in three sub-parts: (i) diasporas as transnational actors, (ii) diasporas as diplomatic actors, and (iii) diasporas as cultural actors in US politics.

The first part on old diasporas aims to offer an updated historical reflection on the diaspora groups that have contributed to the rise of the US since the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the perceptions that formed around their integration into US society. The book opens with the chapter titled ‘Italian Workers in the US: The American Accomplishments of a Transnational Diaspora’, by Stephano Luconi. It describes the history of Italian migrants who moved from their motherland to the US in order to improve their living conditions within a global diaspora and thus helped their adopted country’s economic growth. Their contribution began even before the establishment of the US as a sovereign nation because glassworkers of Italian origin landed at colonial Jamestown in 1621. Small groups of other artisans and merchants followed these pioneer craftspeople until tidal mass immigration waves from Italy started in the late nineteenth century. The later newcomers worked mainly in construction jobs, coal mines and textile and clothing industries. They also fell victim to nativism among allegations that they provided unfair competition to native labourers. Italian-born workers and their children enthusiastically supported Washington during World War II, as the conflict marked their promotion to skilled positions and women’s entry into the factory workforce. The Italians’ contribution to the US economy continued in the post-war decades. However, those arriving with the brain drain have no

longer been unqualified labourers but technicians, businesspeople, entrepreneurs and researchers – all in all, more transnational individuals able to form networks between their countries of origin and destination.

Chapter 2, ‘Immigrants as a Transnational Political Resource: The Case of American Jews’, by Kenneth D. Wald rounds off the historical discussion of traditional diasporas. Nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Jewish immigrants to the US brought specific resources and dispositions that meshed well with the features of the American economic and political system. As a result, Jews achieved unparalleled success in sectors crucial to the rise of the US as a global power. In the realm of ‘hard power’, they contributed disproportionately to the scientific sector, including arms production and finance capitalism. They also played an essential role in the domain of ‘soft power’ via their participation in mass entertainment, an essential component of American cultural hegemony. Their active commitment to social welfare and human rights promoted social stability, a soft power component that further undergirded the US rise to global prominence. Maintaining transnational ties with their co-religionists abroad, they have extended their efforts to the realm of foreign policy, successfully promoting a durable alliance between the US and Israel that brought benefits to both nations.

Chapter 3, ‘Irish Immigration to America: Revisiting Famine, Transnational Networks and Memorialisation’, by Jyoti Atwal is about the historical, socio-cultural and political milieu of Irish immigration in America. It flags the significance of understanding the historical, transnational migration and the migrant transnationalism of the Irish people. A historical mega-event, such as immigration due to the Great Famine or Great Hunger, has left a strong imprint on the identity of the Irish diaspora. Emerging as a significant labour force in the US, the Irish Americans have experienced both oppression and incorporation into American life. Aspects of gender, religion and labour have been discussed at length, and Irish Americans have emerged as a formidable political force. This chapter, then, examines the preservation and memorialisation of immigration in the present-day US.

Chapter 4, ‘Transnational Experience: The Armenian Diasporic Community in the US’, by Ani Yeremyan, deals with another old diaspora community, the Armenians. This essay is a brief account of the Armenian community in the US, in order to understand the trajectory of their diaspora formation in

the host country. Most settled in the host country during and after the Genocide perpetrated in the Ottoman Empire in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. As a diasporic community, the Armenians rose from a highly racialised host society. Bearing the memory of the lost homeland and facing the challenges of a new environment, the Armenians managed to attain high social status in the host country thanks to their education, linguistic knowledge and flexibility when integrating themselves. In due course, their successful integration and hard work helped to raise awareness about the Armenian Genocide, so that it should not come as a surprise when, on 24 April 2021 (Genocide Memorial Day), President Joe Biden made a statement on the Armenian Genocide.

Chapter 5, ‘The Labelling of Migrants and Diasporas in US Media and Policy: A Historical Sketch’, is co-authored by Camelia Tigau and Amba Pande. This paper is based on a historical and discourse-based analysis of US migration, with a focus on legislation and media reporting on migrants. Populist governance and anti-migration rhetoric have prompted racial and skill-based discrimination, as present throughout the history of US migration. This chapter discusses the recent debates against foreigners and brings out specific patterns of discrimination that already existed in the history of migration legislation in the US. Since the first Naturalisation Act of 1790, citizenship was only granted to naturalised and quota-free white persons with good moral character. Throughout the nineteenth century, the selection of immigrants admitted to the US depended on race rather than skills. The US government assumed that European migrants were more suitable for integration and had more compatible moral values. Poor migrants or those in ill health were required to pay a certain amount of money to enter the country. This historical trend lasted until World War II when the boom of European refugees coming to the US determined a different strategy. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 (McCarran-Walter Act) gave preferential treatment to high-skilled migrants whose services were needed in the country, together with their spouses and children. This act also created the H-1 visa, a category before the present H-1B visa. The Cold War marked the beginning of a new stage that ended racial discrimination and instead launched a selection based on education and ‘citizenship for skills’. This trend was reversed under Donald Trump’s administration, in the context of a general anti-migration discourse that questions the preference for

skilled foreigners and migrants in general based on economic and cultural arguments. The America First Policies (2020) and the repeated holds on H-1B visas decreased the entry of new migrants. Citing populist claims for justice, meritocracy was questioned for perpetuating elites rather than offering equal opportunities. Replacing the American Dream with the America First Policies created a new, unfriendly image of the country as a potential destination and affected the integration and coexistence of migrant minorities.

The second part of the book sheds light on newer and less studied populations of foreign origin, such as the Naga, Indo-Caribbean and West African (Senegalese) migrants, along with migrants from India, Mexico, China, Latin America and the Middle East. The first sub-part focuses on diasporas as transnational actors. Chapter 6 by Ajailiu Niumai examines the historical background and waves of migration of the Naga diaspora to the US. Niumai explores the process of acculturation and integration of the Naga diaspora from a sociological perspective. Most exhibit outstanding performance in academics, religion, medicine, sciences, entrepreneurship and government. The argument of the ‘melting pot’ versus the ‘salad bowl’ is analysed, since diasporic communities often attempt to give up cultural components to the more dominant American culture and acculturated to become a part of US society. This study employs a qualitative methodology, including individual interviews, purposive sampling and reflexivity. Niumai studies the first-generation Naga diaspora who was born in Nagaland and Manipur in Northeast India and migrated to the US as adults. This chapter shows how the Naga diaspora is keen to improve the quality of people’s lives around them, giving back for what Naga society in India has received from the American Baptist missionaries during the pre-Independence period.

Chapter 7, by Vishnu Bisram, analyses post-1965 Indian Americans and their contribution to US progress. Bisram recalls that Indian Americans were not welcome in the US until after the passage of the Immigration Act of 1965, which removed restrictions on immigrants from India and other Asian countries. Skilled Indians (professionals) were encouraged to migrate to the US to fill a labour shortage caused by the conscription of young men who were forced to fight in the Vietnam War. Indians also came as international students, especially in the fields of science, technology, engineering and medicine. Indians from the Caribbean also journeyed to the US as skilled workers

(medical professionals, accountants, engineers, bookkeepers, pawn-brokers, garment cutters and seamstresses, among other technical personnel), or as international students in trade, science and technology. The Indian diaspora today has grown to over four million, accounting for just over 1 percent of the US population. From the time of their first arrival post-1965 to the present, the Indian diaspora has significantly contributed to the national growth of the country. In fact, it is referred to as the most productive immigrant community in the US, and it has the highest per capita family income, exceeding \$100,000. This essay discusses the Indian American contribution to the national growth and development of the US post-1965 and the transnational ties promoted by this highly skilled diaspora.

Chapter 8 on ‘West African Islam in the US: The Senegalese Murid Transnational Community’ traces the sustained interest in Muslim communities post-9/11 and in Islam worldwide, within academic circles as well as the larger public. However, José Luis Gázquez Iglesias shows that Islam and Muslims have been present in the western hemisphere since the centuries of the transatlantic slave trade. Since the 1970s, and overwhelmingly since the 1980s and the 1990s, there has been a significant growth in the influx of African migrants to the US due to various economic, political and social factors, as result of the decline and legitimacy crisis of several African post-colonial nation-states in these decades. Since then, African Muslim immigrants, their transnational livelihoods and their social institutions and culture have emerged as a structure of belonging and religious identity in US cities, especially New York, where the neighbourhood of Harlem stands as a symbol of Black and, more recently, Islamic culture. By focusing on the history and institutional development of the Senegalese Murid transnational Islamic community in the US, Gázquez Iglesias highlights the positive role that their leaders and followers have played in providing a linkage with the long history of Islam on the continent and, more recently, as a cultural reference and rallying point for African Muslims in America looking forward to the promotion of Islamic and African values in Western societies.

Chapter 9 by Laura Vázquez Maggio and Lilia Domínguez Villalobos discusses professional migration to the US based on the Mexican experience. This chapter, titled ‘Integrationist Acculturation: Experiences of Social Insertion of Professional Mexican Migrants in the US and their Contribution to American Multi-culturalism’, uses a mixed methodology to explore

various issues of migrants' identity: whether they feel Mexican American, Mexican, or North American; the language they speak at home; the networks they maintain with their country of origin; and experiences of discrimination. In fact, this chapter shows that many of these migrants have experiences of discrimination that hinder this adaptation process. For example, the correlation between the desire for a possible return to Mexico and the discrimination perceived by MPs suggests that not all have the same ability to overcome psychological distress. To conclude, the authors show that adaptation to a new country, in this case to the US, requires that individuals try to overcome their resistance to adjust to the new culture, therefore achieving a double diasporic identity.

The second sub-part includes four chapters on diasporas as diplomatic and cultural actors, based on the specific cases of transnational political activity and inherent contradictions in Middle Eastern/Muslim and Arab-American, West-African Islamic and Mexico-US networks. In her chapter, 'Civic and Political Engagement among Muslim and Arab Americans', Vera Eccarius-Kelly examines diverse Muslim diaspora communities by highlighting their disparate paths to asserting political and socio-economic agency in the US. Eccarius-Kelly evaluates the organised efforts in pursuit of anti-discrimination campaigns and analyses successful voter mobilisation in recent years. Her contribution is located at the intersection of political and civic engagement among Middle Eastern/Muslim Americans and the larger field of Diaspora Studies. The chapter describes organisations of central significance, such as the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC), founded in the 1980s, and the more recent Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), a civil rights group. This chapter also highlights the many contributions that have been made by Middle Eastern/Arab/MENA immigrant community members to a range of scientific advancements, technological innovations and the creative and artistic fields in the US. Educational levels among Middle Eastern immigrant and diaspora communities tend to be high, adding to an expectation that these constituencies will contribute to shaping the socio-economic and political landscape in the US over the coming decade.

The following chapter is a case study of diaspora activism and urban diplomacy based on citizen networks between Chicago and Mexico City. In his essay, Antonio Alejo positions diaspora communities and organisations as

relevant agents in urban diplomacy and examines the role of diaspora activism within urban diplomacy in North America. This analysis is necessary when the multi-scale global context (nativism and autochthonous narratives) promotes the exclusion of people in motion from where they reside. What role do cities play in a hostile environment against people in motion? As part of critical Diplomatic Studies, this chapter aims to understand how Mexico City's urban diplomacy and diaspora play a relevant role in building a cosmopolitan Chicago through their trans-local dynamics. The empirical basis of the analysis is the urban diplomacy policies framework oriented to migrants' civic engagements and the diaspora's mobilisation repertoire in the relations between Mexico City and Chicago. Even though this study focuses on Chicago, its findings can be an initial point to reconsider the broader phenomenon of diasporas in urban diplomacy operating in other US cities.

Chapters 12 and 13 describe the contribution of foreigners to US arts. Alejandro Mercado-Celis analyses the role of international migration in the US film industry, which has historically dominated global film markets. Migrants of different nationalities have been vital in the aesthetic, narrative and technical innovation that has characterised this industry. The migrants who have contributed to this sector throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first centuries involve creatives and technicians worldwide. The Jewish diaspora has perhaps been the most visible since the film industry began in the US. Moreover, this industry is concentrated in Los Angeles, one of the largest recipients of migrants in the US. This city's multi-culturalism has also fed the Hollywood film industry, capturing the information/imagination and impacts of these migrants and their cultures. This chapter recovers the history of the contribution of migrants who have joined the Hollywood film industry and the relationship of this industry with the migrant communities settled in Los Angeles.

The chapter by María Cristina Fernández Hall analyses the contributions of Latinx Art to the fight for social justice in the US. She shows that Mexican American, Hispanic and Latinx art in the country has contributed significantly to the fabric of society, by sparking meaningful dialogue on social justice and highlighting the inequitable systems at play in the contemporary US. Considering today's predatory policing and for-profit detention systems, coupled with survival work and gang activity in the face of illegality, Latinx

artists have illuminated the ways in which racialised subjects are excluded from higher education and the job market. Feeding from masterworks such as Gloria Anzaldúa's 'Borderlands' and Luis J. Rodríguez's book *Always running*, contemporary Latinx artists and writers such as Javier Zamora, Omar Pimienta, Silvia Rodríguez Vega and Audry Funk continue to articulate Latinx intersectional solidarity with all oppressed peoples in the US – much-needed solidarity given the undocumented status of approximately 11 million people in the US, about half of whom are Mexican. Art from the Latinx community has contributed to struggles that have born fruit, including affirmative action, diversity in cultural production and even President Biden's proposal to create paths to citizenship for undocumented immigrants.

The last sub-part of the book provides an updated overview of diasporas in US politics. In Chapter 14, 'Chinese Immigration in the US in the Post-Trump Era: Major Impacts and Trends', Yan Yuan points to the moderation of immigration policies under Joe Biden, as opposed to the previous strict restrictions, disgust and rejection under Donald Trump. However, as far as Chinese immigrants in the US are concerned, a series of policies aimed at China, including overseas Chinese students and researchers, as well as other related immigration reform policies still negatively impact existing and potential immigrants. Especially when the US positions China as a strategic competitor, it dramatically influences Chinese students who wish to immigrate to the US after studying abroad to become high-tech talents. Chinese talents are blocked from studying in or immigrating to the US, which will also have a certain impact on China's domestic education: students from elite families who attend international schools and devote themselves to studying in high schools and/or universities abroad are now forced to participate in the fierce educational competition in China. If the US policies and actions to restrict Chinese students continue for a long time, they will also have a specific impact on the composition and number of Chinese immigrants in the US in the long run.

In what follows, Chapter 15 by Alejandro Mosqueda and Enrique Camacho Beltrán examine 'Moral Concerns: Immigrants who Reject Immigrants in the US'. The anti-immigrant rhetoric and politics of the descendants of former immigrants in the US is a well-known fact. This attitude might be considered ethically unsound but is quite prevalent. They are now seen as native-born Americans, and many became a cornerstone of Donald Trump's coalition of

xenophobic voters. While also contributing significantly to the development of the US, the third- and fourth-generation immigrants across different races have made it big for themselves. This means that they have benefits and privileges for themselves, but denying these to others, based on the assumption that they would lose their own privileges. These assumptions and narratives may make sense from the perspective of prevalent theories of social justice, which consider that, under certain conditions, low-skilled immigrants play a role in lowering the wages of low-skilled natives, thus harming them. These theories justify the immigration policies aimed at keeping out low-skilled immigrants. Mosqueda and Beltrán argue that this may be misleading as it does not encompass the whole picture. A more holistic account based on the ethics of international relations may show that immigrants have always had an overall positive impact on the US and that former immigrants have genuine responsibilities towards would-be immigrants.

The last chapter consists of an ethnographic study by Annapurna Devi Pandey, illustrating the specific unrecognised contributions of H-1B and H-4 immigrants to the US economy. In her chapter, Devi Pandey recalls that recent neo-conservative controls on migrants in Europe and the US have invoked a concomitant academic interest in forced, voluntary or unwanted migrations worldwide. She believes that an ethnographic connection between subversive solidarities and humanitarian concerns is visible in such migrations. Her paper focuses on the struggle for identity among those H-4 visa holders who come from India as spouses and dependents of H-1B skilled professionals but are not allowed to work in the country and are thus suffering under numerous restrictions imposed by the US government. Devi Pandey documents the struggles and challenges of these H-1 and H-4 visa holders through their life experiences and analyses the role of Indian American political leaders and various support groups organising in support of H-4 visa holders for definite policy changes and legal amendments.

In the concluding chapter, we underline several empirically tested theories that this volume foregrounds. We also highlight that the immigrants or diasporas have significantly contributed to the US social fabric, economy and scientific pursuits. They contribute to a plural and multi-cultural society while undergoing their own acculturation processes. The diasporas have achieved unparalleled success in sectors crucial to the rise of the US in terms of hard and soft power.

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# **Part I**

## **OLD DIASPORAS (PRE-1965)**

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# 1

## ITALIAN WORKERS IN THE US: THE AMERICAN ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF A TRANSNATIONAL DIASPORA

*Stefano Luconi*

### Introduction

The US has been the chief destination for Italy's global diaspora. Over 40 percent of the more than 26 million Italians who left their motherland between 1876 and 1976 settled in this country (Vecoli, 1995, p. 114). Although the number of immigrants declined in the following decades, the influx continued. The US was the seventh-most popular adopted society for Italian expatriates in both 2020 and 2021. It was also home to 297,917 Italians in the latter year (Licata, 2022, p. 13). All these migration waves benefited not only many of their protagonists and their relatives, who often found better economic chances abroad, but also the US, which acquired the workforce of the unqualified greenhorns and the expertise of the skilled newcomers alike. Furthermore, despite their relocation to the other shore of the Atlantic, the newcomers retained, at least in part, ties to the mother country and, therefore, provided some evidence of transnationalism.

In *The Brotherhood of the Grape*, writer John Fante's fifth novel, the seventy-seven-year-old patriarch of the Molise family, Nick, an accomplished stonemason, guides his eldest son, Henry, an established writer, through a tour of the small town of San Elmo, California, priding himself on being the builder of the city's main edifices. The buildings stand out as monuments to his craft and capacity to secure his Italian immigrant family a better future in America

(Fante, 1977, pp. 20–23). Fante's pages are an apt metaphor for Italian workers' double achievements in the US. The Italian-language expression *fare l'America* means both 'to make it in America' and 'to build America'. In fact, the Italian migrants who moved to the US in the hope of earning more money than in their homeland and improving their living conditions in general also spurred the economic growth and overall development of their adopted country.

Against the backdrop of a survey of Italian immigration waves from colonial times to the present-day brain drain, this chapter reconstructs how individual resettlement motivated by personal and family reasons ended up being an asset for the US as a whole. In particular, it shows that Italian immigrants' contribution to their host society was not confined to the manufacturing labour force at the turn of the twentieth century. Their beneficiaries also included Washington's military machinery during World War II on both battlefields and home front and nowadays include the current service economy and tertiary sector industries.

### The Pioneers

Italian migrants' contribution to the build-up of American power began even before the establishment of the US as a sovereign nation. As early as 1621, a few glassworkers of Italian origin landed at colonial Jamestown, Virginia, to manufacture beads and pottery. The English settlers planned to use these artefacts in their trade with Native Americans during the early stage of interaction, which eventually resulted in the latter's dispossession and genocide (Harrington, 1952, p. 9). Small groups of other artisans and merchants from northern Italy followed these pioneer craftspeople. They settled primarily in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the most populous and thriving centre in North America around the time of the Revolutionary War (Juliani, 1998, pp. 1–90).

After US independence, a handful of artists, musicians, language teachers and entrepreneurs joined the small elite migration tide of traders and craftspeople from Italy. Lorenzo Da Ponte, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's former librettist, was appointed as the first professor of Italian Literature at Columbia College in 1824 and created the first US opera house in New York City nine years later (Hodges, 2002). Luigi Tinelli, a political exile from Italy, promoted the silk industry in the US (Sioli, 2003). Constantino Brumidi painted the frescoes decorating the rotunda of the Capitol in Washington DC (Wolanin,

1988). Luigi Palma di Cesnola served as the first director of New York City's Metropolitan Museum from 1879 to his death in 1904 (Alduino and Coles, 2000). Domenico Ghirardelli became a successful chocolatier after making money by selling sweets to the miners taking part in the gold rush in California (Teiser, 1945). In this state, immigrants from Piedmont also established profitable winery companies (Cinotto, 2012). Sicilian merchants launched a gainful business in New Orleans, Louisiana, as importers of oranges and lemons from their native Mediterranean island long before the outbreak of the American Civil War (Nystrom, 2018, pp. 15–23). Such trade relations and the resulting commercial network offer an early example of economic transnationalism.

US society welcomed these initial immigration waves. The main exception was the Sicilian colony in New Orleans, the third-largest Italian settlement in the country in 1870, following New York City and San Francisco (Nelli, 1983, p. 62). This community initially was a target of xenophobia because its members were accused of participating in organised crime, and such nativistic feelings resulted in the 1891 lynching of eleven Sicilian immigrants (Kurtz, 1983, pp. 355–67). Two main reasons explain Americans' early benevolence towards the newcomers. Firstly, Italians were relatively few in number. They accounted for only 25,518 of the 7,377,238 foreigners who moved to the US between 1820 and 1870 (US Bureau of the Census, 1960, p. 57). Secondly, they brought with them some type of skills. In particular, individuals such as Da Ponte or Palma di Cesnola aptly catered to the American establishment's nineteenth-century fascination with Italian culture. These immigrants, therefore, nourished a pre-existing inclination that encouraged members of the US elite to visit Italy during their traditional European Grand Tour, strengthening the transnational connections between the two shores of the Atlantic (Baker, 1964).

### **Mass Waves**

Unlike the pioneers, the bulk of latter-day Italian immigrants did not bring their expertise and capital to the US. Instead, they brought their physical strength. In the late nineteenth century, to sustain its own growth, the US industrial economy needed workers rather than intellectuals, professionals and investors. As Italian American journalist Camillo Cianfarra (1904, p. 33) ironically pointed about plight of his fellow ethnics in the US in the

early twentieth century, ‘nobody is more unfortunate than the individual who can only boast a high school or even a university degree’. Yet, since in 1901 the illiteracy rate in his motherland was 56 percent, very few expatriates from this country suited Cianfarra’s portrayal (D’Amico, 2015, p. 263). Conversely, Italy offered a large reservoir of the most sought-after employees in America within the context of a transnational and transatlantic labour market that steam navigation had made more cohesive (Hoerder, 1985). Indeed, in the early twentieth century, former farmers made up 77 percent of Italian newcomers, artisans and skilled workers 13 percent and professionals only 0.5 percent (Lopreato, 1970, p. 33). The prevailing agricultural background of Italy’s potential workforce was less of a drawback than it was an asset. With an increasing trend towards the assembly line and division of labour, the American system of manufacturing had come to rely extensively on unskilled workers who suitably could be newly arrived and untrained peasants from the Italian countryside (Martellone, 1980, p. 50).

In response to the increasing demand for unskilled labour in the US, the late nineteenth century witnessed the start of waves of mass immigration of workers from Italy. The US, therefore, began to stand out as a main destination for the Italian global diaspora. About 55,000 Italians landed in that country in the 1870s. Their arrivals then rose to more than 4.1 million between 1880 and 1920, with a peak of about 2 million from 1901 to 1910 (US Bureau of the Census, 1960, pp. 56–57). As a result, by the early twentieth century Italians had become the second-largest diasporic community in the nation, lagging behind only the Germans. Their presence was intended as labour force for the US economy. In fact, males accounted for about three-quarters of the immigrants in the first decade of the twentieth century. Among them, almost 85 percent were between the ages of fourteen and forty-five – that is, they belonged to the main cohort of working age (Nelli, 1983, p. 42). However, since making money was the almost exclusive purpose of immigration to the US, all members of each family generally held some sort of job. A greenhorn recalled that ‘[e]verybody went to work upon arrival, women, children, old men. If school was obligatory there were ways of avoiding it’ (as quoted in Mangione and Morreale, 1992, p. 145).

Work was a priority to make as much money as possible. The newcomers’ earnings, however, hardly resulted in consumption or investments in the adopted

country. Savings fed remittances for relatives who had remained in Italy. Such funds were used to pay off debts, to buy small plots of land, to purchase government bonds and to improve the standard of living in general at the family level; yet, overall, they also helped Italy offset its international balance of payments and sustain its economic growth (Sori, 2009, pp. 255–56; Fauri, 2015, pp. 96–106). This aspect of transnationalism was so significant that in the early twentieth century Italian migrants sent an average of roughly 45 million liras – that is, about \$215 million in current US dollars – to their motherland each year (Masullo, 2001, p. 162).

Most Italian newcomers settled in the heavily urbanised northeastern states, the heart of the nation's thriving industrial economy. Very few, however, were hired by steel, metallurgical, or automotive plants, which provided good wages, especially during the Roaring Twenties. As historian Rudolph J. Vecoli (2002, p. 57) has argued, Italians were regarded as the *Lumpenproletariat* of the US workforce – namely, as second-rate labourers – and consequently ended up being relegated to pick-and-shovel and low-paying positions. These unqualified workers found employment primarily in the construction and maintenance of buildings, railroads, subways, sewer systems and other infrastructures, especially in the northeastern region and in the Chicago area, which was a key transportation hub (Michaud, 2015). They also toiled in coal mines and paid a heavy toll due to disasters in this sector. For example, as many as 171 persons who had arrived primarily from the Calabrian village of San Giovanni in Fiore were killed in an explosion at Monongah, West Virginia, in 1907 (Lombardi, 2007). Congressperson Fiorello H. La Guardia argued in 1924 that the average Italian immigrant could be found ‘building our railroads, digging our canals, boring our subways, or in the depths of our mines’ (as quoted in Jeffers, 2002, p. 111).

Scavenging and street-cleaning were other tiring and unrewarding jobs for Italian newcomers, who gained almost a monopoly on these occupations in several cities, such as San Francisco and Philadelphia (Perry, 1978; ‘Netturbini’, 1914). The waterfront was an additional Italian bailiwick. In 1912, more than a third of the longshoremen at the New York port, the largest in the country, were from Italy (Moses, 2015, p. 156). Textile and clothing industries, as well as the making of artificial flowers, appealed especially to women because they offered the opportunity to earn a living at home while performing domestic tasks such as housekeeping, childcare and preparing meals (Vezzosi, 1984). Such positions also

pandered to cultural taboos against women's employment outside the home. In garment factories, however, brutal exploitation turned the industry into a dangerous workplace. For instance, forty-two Italian women lost their lives in the 1911 fire at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory in New York City, because the overseers had locked the labourers inside the building to prevent them from taking any breaks during their ten-hour workday. The youngest casualties were fourteen years old (Argersinger, 2016). In western states such as California, cannery plants provided additional job opportunities for female newcomers, while numerous men worked in lumber camps (McKibben, 2006). Commercial fishing was another widespread occupation for Californians of Italian origin. Their relevance in this economic sector was so significant that by the turn of the twentieth century Italian fishermen caught 90 percent of the fish consumed in San Francisco and 80 percent of that eaten in California as a whole (Nelli, 1983, p. 73).

In New York City, the top destination of Italy's diaspora in the US, by the late nineteenth century Italian immigrants made up roughly 75 percent of construction workers and 90 percent of day labourers (Anbinder, 2016, p. 396). In 1916, according to a survey of the school population, 50.4 percent of the Italian students' fathers were common labourers, 5.4 percent tailors, 5.3 percent barbers, 2.9 percent shoemakers, 2.1 percent carpenters and only 1.2 percent professionals (Pretelli, 2011, p. 48).

In 1900, one-third of all Italian newcomers to the US were 'general labourers' (US Senate, 1911, p. 169). Throughout the country, skilled Italian immigration was confined primarily to mosaic, stucco and terrazzo workers, who came mainly from Friuli and slowly managed to rise to entrepreneurial positions (Grossutti, 2021, pp. 65–81), as well as stonemasons, who arrived from Carrara in Tuscany and from the pre-Alpine valleys of Piedmont and Lombardy and concentrated mainly in Barre and Proctor, Vermont, because of the vast local granite deposits (Busdraghi, 2007). Additional trained newcomers were the weavers and dyers from the provinces of Biella and Como. They often found employment in the silk and wool mills of Paterson and West Hoboken, New Jersey, thanks to the transnational connections of a few small local entrepreneurs of Italian ancestry who hired such labourers because they had already become acquainted with them in factories in the native country. These workers brought not only their own expertise but also innovative techniques to the US (Sione, 1994, pp. 277–84).

Although in 1900 only 6.2 percent of Italian immigrants were employed in agricultural activities (Nelli, 1983, p. 49), the US economy managed to take advantage of them as well. In southern states, after the end of the American Civil War, they usually replaced former black slaves on cotton plantations in Alabama, Arkansas, Mississippi and Texas, as well as in the sugar cane fields in Louisiana, on the ground that newcomers from Italy were more reliable and subservient than recently freed African-American tenants and share-croppers (Scarpaci, 1975; Milani, 1987). Conversely, the establishment of rural colonies, not for production purposes but as attempts to save the Italian greenhorns from the overcrowding of the urban slums and to Americanise them, often resulted in failure (Ruvoli, 2010).

### **Exploitation and Prejudice**

Overall, by performing ‘the heaviest, most tedious and worst paid work’, newcomers from Italy helped provide the workforce that enabled the US economy to grow in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Green, 2004, p. 22). However, besides satisfying what journalist Alberto Pecorini (1909, p. 158) then called ‘the crying need [...] for mill workers and unskilled labourers of every kind for the building industries’, the fact that most Italian immigrants thought of America as a land of economic opportunities and moved there for personal and familial betterment implied an additional asset for the US. Very few initially intended to stay in the country for good. Rather, they planned to repatriate within a short time to enjoy in their native country the money that they expected to make overseas. About 50 percent of the immigrants eventually returned to their motherland (Pretelli, 2011, p. 42). In particular, periods of economic crisis caused a significant shrinkage in the number of arrivals and a relevant volume of return migration. The repatriation rate, for instance, rose to 72.6 percent in the wake of the 1907 recession (Nelli, 1983, pp. 46–47). This attitude, therefore, majorly contributed to the flexibility of the US workforce: Italians disembarked when the US economy wanted them to continue its own expansion and left if they were no longer necessary.

Entrepreneurs such as the Jewish merchant Cyrus L. Sulzberger (1912, pp. 11–12) realised that benefit. In addition, a few years earlier, Eugene Schuyler (1889, p. 494), a former US consul-general in Rome, had remarked that, ‘as the Italians are notoriously hard-working and industrious, they

would prove extremely desirable' in the US. Nonetheless, in their appreciation of the Italian workforce, they were in the minority. Moreover, Italians generally fell victim to a nativist rhetoric that failed to acknowledge their help. In a Protestant society where most residents were of Anglo-Saxon stock, Catholicism and Mediterranean origins were the greatest liabilities for immigrants from Italy (LaGumina, 2018).

Yet, anti-Italianism had an economic dimension, too. Fellow labourers, especially the US-born cohort of the American proletariat and more militant minorities such as the Jews, often complained that the newcomers from Italy lacked class consciousness and were a hindrance to workers' achievements and solidarity. They blamed Italians for creating unfair competition on the job market, as Terence V. Powderly – the leader of the Holy and Noble Order of the Knights of Labour – stressed before a Congressional Committee as early as 1884 (US House of Representatives, 1884, p. 8). Major charges included the propensity to accept wages lower than the standard that unions had negotiated with employers, along with the tendency to break strikes instead of joining walk-outs. As a Jewish labour organiser contended, Italians 'worked for cheap. They didn't like me because I was no good for them, because I wanted a union shop. I didn't like how they worked there, they were slaves' (as quoted in Glenn, 1990, p. 192). Another stated that, 'if they were more civilized, they wouldn't take such low pay' (as quoted in van Kleeck, 1913, p. 37). In broader terms, as the Pittsburgh-based *National Labor Tribune* contended, Italians displaced native labourers by accepting to be underpaid (Archer, 2010, p. 68). This specific accusation was based on the evidence that, since most were unskilled, they were paid less than their qualified co-workers and consequently became the employers' first choice. The innuendo, however, mistook cause for effect. In other words, Italians did not curb wages because they inflated the job market with untrained greenhorns. Likewise, their presence on the other shore of the Atlantic in itself did not pose a threat to the recruitment of the more expensive US skilled workers. Rather, it was the transformation of the US manufacturing industry that lured an increasing number of Italy's peasants into crossing the Atlantic Ocean, because the American economy no longer needed many qualified operators and required a large group of unskilled workers.

### The Partial Closing of US Doors

Legislation restricting US immigration was in part a response to Italian labourers' alleged behaviour. In view of the newcomers' activities, the 1885 Foran Act banned the entry of aliens brought to the US under contract, assuming that they 'would fill the places of American workingmen, to glut the market and thus depress wages' (US House of Representatives, 1884, p. 3). Likewise, Samuel Gompers was an early supporter of the Literacy Test. This measure – conceived in 1895 but enacted in 1917 – aimed at closing the US doors to people of at least sixteen years of age unable to read and write their native language. As president of the American Federation of Labor, a union that promoted almost exclusively the interests of US-born workers of Anglo-Saxon stock against the newcomers' alleged encroachments, Gompers endorsed such a provision as a means to disqualify most prospective Italian immigrants, because the illiteracy rate was extremely high in their home country in the late nineteenth century (Mandel, 1963, pp. 187–89).

This, however, was no longer the case upon the eventual enforcement of the Literacy Test because the Italians' primary education had improved remarkably in the intervening years. The proportion of illiteracy in Italy fell from 50 percent in 1901 to 26.8 percent in 1921 and was progressively confined to the older cohorts of the population, namely to individuals who were unlikely to expatriate (Vigo, 1993, p. 50). Consequently, with the resumption of immigration after the end of World War I, when almost 350,000 Italians landed in the US in 1920, fewer than 2,000 were denied entry (Boyd, 1976, p. 15).

The failure of the Literacy Test to restrain the arrival of Italians and other undesired nationalities induced Congress to pass the Emergency Quota Act in 1921 and the Johnson-Reed Act in 1924. Introducing a ceiling for the visas issued each year to prospective newcomers from Europe, these laws restricted the annual number of Italians admitted to the US to 42,057 and 3,845, respectively. Notwithstanding an increase of that quota to 5,802 in 1929, such legislation put an end to mass immigration from Italy (Shanks, 2001, p. 92).

While those provisions reduced the influx of Italian labourers to a trickle, the interwar years witnessed an increase in the immigration of intellectuals, professionals and other skilled individuals. This exodus of qualified migrants resulted primarily from the political flight of anti-Fascists who chose the US as their destination. The early cohort of what historian Renato Camurri (2010) has ironically called 'Mussolini's gifts' to America, in reference to the dictator

who ruled Italy from 1922 to 1943, included intellectuals such as Max Ascoli and Gaetano Salvemini. The former was a professor of political philosophy who arrived in 1931 with a scholarship from the Rockefeller Foundation and taught at the New School for Social Research in New York City (Grippa, 2009). The latter held the Lauro De Bosis Chair in Italian Civilisation at Harvard University from 1934 to 1948 (Audenino, 2009). Such a wave of Italian scholars gained momentum after the enforcement of the 1938 Fascist anti-semitic legislation in Italy, which forced numerous Jewish scientists to seek sanctuary on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean (Gissi, 2010). These researchers stood out among the roughly 2,000 Italian Jews who escaped to the US (Toscano, 2003, p. 195). Refugees comprised economist Franco Modigliani, who arrived in 1939 and was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1985 (Camurri, 2013). Another Nobel laureate, gentile physicist Enrico Fermi, left for America with his Jewish wife immediately after collecting the prize in 1938 so as to shield his spouse from the discrimination of the Fascist regime. He received a chair at Columbia University before becoming a leading member of the team that produced Washington's first atomic bomb within the Manhattan Project (Fermi, 1954). As a Jew, Emilio Segre (1993) accepted a low-ranking and little-paying position at the Berkeley Radiation Laboratory in California to flee from Mussolini's racial measures, but he, too, subsequently made his way to the Nobel Prize in physics in 1959. Another Jewish physicist, Eugenio Fubini Ghiron, alias Eugene G. Fubini, reached the US in 1939 (Fubini, 2009). He specialised in weapons technology and, after naturalisation as a US citizen in 1945, became Assistant Secretary of Defence in 1963, serving in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations until 1965. As these experiences show, feeling rejected by their motherland, many Jewish refugees decided not to repatriate after the fall of the Fascist regime and the end of World War II. They, therefore, continued to contribute to the rise of the US in the post-war decades, too (Pontecorboli, 2013).

## World War II

Nativism alleged that Italian immigrants were inassimilable and would even be disloyal towards their host country. Yet, their behaviour during World War II disproved such innuendoes. After Italy had joined Japan and Germany in the military conflict against the US, almost 700,000 unnaturalised Italian citizens residing in the country were designated as enemy aliens and

subjected to limitations in their rights for national security reasons. Nonetheless, only few more than 1,400 were detained during the war, on the grounds that they were part of a fifth column supporting their native country against their adopted land (Tintori, 2004, p. 95). Conversely, an estimated 850,000 first- and second-generation immigrants served in the US Armed Forces. As further evidence for their allegiance to the US and support of Washington's military machinery, many fought and even volunteered to fight against the Italian army, stifling their previous transnational loyalty to the ancestral land (Pretelli and Fusi, 2023). However, they not only provided cannon fodder for the American impact force; a few – such as Max Corvo (1989), an immigrant from Sicily – also became operatives for US intelligence, especially during the invasion of Italy, when they were able to exploit their fluency in the Italian language and local dialects, knowledge of the territory and transnational ties to people living in the combat zones, to the benefit of Washington (LaGumina, 2016). Others contributed their professional expertise. Physicist Fubini Ghiron, for instance, played a key role in locating and jamming German radar, thanks to his previous research into microwave technology (Pace, 1997).

Moreover, on the home front, Italian-born workers who had acquired US citizenship and their children enthusiastically backed the US war efforts by seeking employment in the industrial arms production. The conflict against the Axis powers marked both their promotion to skilled positions and the considerable entry of women into the factory workforce. Girls such as twenty-four-year-old Margaret 'Peggy' Ferrone moved straight from using kitchen appliances to operating machines in defence plants (LaGumina, 2006, p. 135). Others, such as Rose Mirandi, left their secretarial occupations and started to work for defence plants (Mormino and Pozzetta, 2000, p. 143). Electrical manufacturing, chemical industries and aviation stood out as Italians' new fields of employment (Mormino, 2007, p. 17).

The newcomers and their progeny also rushed to buy war bonds to fund Washington's military machinery upon the urging of their ethnic associations, such as the Order Sons of Italy in America, the largest and most influential Italian-American association in the US (Venturini, 1984–85, p. 460). By mid-1944, their purchases had totalled nearly \$37 million – that is, almost \$574 million in today's dollars ('Bond Sales').

As a result, Italian immigrants not only contributed to strengthening the material build-up of the American economy, finance and power at wartime, but by participating in Washington's victory in the military conflict against Nazi-Fascist totalitarianism, they also helped the US consolidate its model as the epitome of liberal democracy worldwide.

### The Brain Drain

Italy's entry into World War II caused a temporary halt to Italian immigration to the US. When the exodus resumed following the conclusion of the hostilities, it was still subjected to the restrictions of the 1920s, which the McCarran-Walter Act reiterated in 1952. The single major exception was the 1953 Refugee Relief Act, enabling Italian evacuees from those regions which Yugoslavia had taken over at the end of the war as well as the relatives of US citizens to settle in the US as non-quota immigrants. It was only in 1965 that Congress repealed the national origins system and granted Italy 20,000 visas per year, starting with 1968, as in the case of other European countries (Marinari, 2020, pp. 111–23, 158, 173–74).

Besides an increase in family reunions, the post-war decades witnessed a growth in the number of immigrants who were qualified labourers, because both the 1952 and the 1965 legislation exempted skilled workers, professionals, scientists and artists from quota requirements. However, not all the newcomers were luminaries, such as biologist Renato Dulbecco (1989), who worked at Indiana University and at the California Institute of Technology before being awarded the Nobel Prize in Medicine in 1975. Beneficiaries of the post-war provisions, for example, included certified master tailors such as Giovanni DeMasi, who moved from the Calabrian village of Gioiosa Jonica to Troy, New York, in 1963. His relocation was possible thanks to a petition from a local clothing entrepreneur of Italian background and with transnational ties to his ancestral land, who needed a highly expert dressmaker but could not find any in the area of his business (DeMasi, 2021, pp. 63–75). In fact, the US enforced a special tailor employment programme that appealed specifically to Italians (Battisti, 2019, 121–30).

The category of the unqualified labourer, however, did not disappear among newcomers from Italy. As late as in the 1990s, some Italians travelled to the US on a tourist visa, overstayed its expiration and ended up finding occupation as

undocumented workers in restaurants and construction companies that were often owned by entrepreneurs of Italian ancestry (Russo, 2003, pp. 30–31; Molinari, 2011, pp. 51–54). Transnational connections, therefore, once more brought Italian labourers to the US, albeit by violating immigration laws in this specific case. Both economic sectors continued to rely on legal immigrants from Italy who resembled their forerunners of the mass migration era with their low qualifications (Fiore, 2017, p. 171). Yet, as the US consolidated its transition to a post-industrial society in the last decade of the twentieth century, most Italian immigrants in America were no longer unskilled individuals, but technicians, businesspeople, entrepreneurs, researchers and students. They either pursued better educational opportunities in US universities than those available in Italy, or they found positions that were more commensurate with the professional training they had received in the native country before expatriating. They also escaped from corruption, gerontocracy and lack of a merit-based system, both in academia and on the job market of their native country. As a researcher who found a position in Baltimore recalled, ‘I severed my ties to Italy the day I saw my professor rig a competitive exam for a position of technician’ (as quoted in Nava, 2009, p. 99).

The early twenty-first century did not alter this trend. In 2003, Italy ranked fourth among the European countries in terms of the number of highly skilled workers residing in the US (Pretelli, 2011, p. 100). The number of professionals and researchers was so high within the Third-Millennium Italian community that they decided to establish organisations of their own. The Italian Scientists and Scholars in North America Foundation was created in 2007 and reached a membership of about 4,000 within ten years. The Business Association Italy America was founded in 2006 for young entrepreneurs in the field of new technologies operating in San Francisco’s Bay Area (Brandi, 2017, pp. 196, 200). Indeed, Silicon Valley has been a major magnet for Italians excelling in science and operating in high-tech and biotech, who ‘did not run away from anything but opened a door into the future’ (Veronese, 2019, p. 6). These remarks also reflect the current perception of the brain drain at home, as success stories that also contribute to enhancing Italy’s reputation in the US and to promoting their own native country in America, as the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs has recently pointed out (Mucci, 2021). Even the achievements of a little-known migrant practitioner of street photography

can become a source of pride in the eyes of the Italian media (Solaro, 2021). The relocation of hyper-qualified workers to the US is obviously considered a loss for Italy's economy and a damage to the country as a whole, especially because the Italian state spends more than half a million dollars for the education of each graduate who attends school and university in the motherland before expatriating (Milo et al., 2012, p. 29). But conventional wisdom has it that the traitors within the brain drain dynamics are not the highly skilled workers and students who move abroad but the Italian governments which are unable to enact policies to retain the country's best human resources, as well as the corruption and lack of meritocracy, that shape the domestic job market and encourage the brightest people to leave (Beltrame, 2007, pp. 45–50; Nava, 2009; Pastorella, 2021). A few entrepreneurs who settled in the US, however, retained transnational relations with Italy and exploited them for their business activities, which eventually benefited the economy not only of their native land but also of their adopted country (Pretelli, 2020).

The inflow of Italian skilled workers gained momentum in the wake of the 2008 economic recession that revitalised their native country's diaspora (Fiore, 2017, pp. 169–71). Entrepreneurs, professionals and managers accounted for 46 percent of Italian citizens living in the US in 2013, while 52 percent were white-collar workers (Costa, 2013, p. 81). Furthermore, one-third of the newcomers who arrived the following year held management positions (Egmont, 2015, p. 174). Not even the COVID-19 pandemic halted the brain drain. In 2020, more than 6,000 Italians applied to attend a master's or PhD programme in the US. Many planned to remain and find a job there after earning their degree (Galeazzi, 2021). A sample of those who protested against the Trump and Biden administrations' COVID-curbing rule preventing Italian and other EU citizens from re-entering the US after leaving it for short visits abroad offered a cross-section of the profile of the new Italian workers in the country: astronomers, researchers, entrepreneurs, engineers (Lombardi, 2021).

The presence of a remarkable number of Italian students who intend to stay in the US after graduating not only represents future enrichment for US society, but also constitutes an instant source of wealth for the host country. Following their arrival, the monetary network between the US and Italy based on the existence of transnational families underwent a partial reversal in the flow of funds. Contrary to the economic immigrants who sent remittances

from America to relatives in the motherland during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries and who have continued to do the same in the early twenty-first century, albeit with a significant decline in the amount of money – fewer than \$100 million in current dollars were transferred to Italy in 2016 (Colucci, 2017, pp. 67–69) – the Third-Millennium expatriates for educational reasons generally drain resources from their native country and use them in the US. Indeed, their parents usually support them financially from home by paying their tuition fees and taking care of their living expenses. They also spend additional money in the US when they travel to visit their children there (Bonatti, Del Pra', Rallo and Tirabassi, 2020, pp. 2, 37, 47, 50–54, 97).

## Conclusion

Italian-born but US-naturalised Riccardo Giovannelli, an astronomer at Cornell University and part of the post-war brain drain, has suggested that migrants carry ‘economic energy’ that eventually benefits their adopted societies (as quoted in Associazione Dottorandi, 2001, p. 42). A number of individual and familial success stories has marked the Italian workers’ experience in the US. Placed in a broader context, however, the newcomers’ personal achievements were instrumental for the development of the host society as a whole. Against this backdrop, while unskilled labourers made a significant contribution to the growth of industrial America between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, professionals and other qualified newcomers in the decades following the end of World War II helped the US take the lead in the service economy and tertiary sector industries. Moreover, by backing Washington’s military machinery against the Axis regimes during World War II, Italian immigrants and their offspring played an important role in the establishment of the US as a global power.

The pick-and-shovel labourers of the turn of the twentieth century have not completely disappeared nowadays but constitute a very small minority. They have largely been replaced by hyper-skilled Italian professionals such as Enrico Casarosa, a native of Genoa who moved to the US in the early 1990s to become a star storyboard artist for Pixar, the leading computer animation studio in the world (Carotenuto, 2021). If, as Democratic President Woodrow Wilson reportedly stated, Italian temporary immigrants ‘left the railroads’ in America before World War I (as quoted in Amore, 2009, p. 75), current expats such as Casarosa enrich the US with their expertise and prolific creative talent.

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# 2

## IMMIGRANTS AS A TRANSNATIONAL POLITICAL RESOURCE: THE CASE OF AMERICAN JEWS

*Kenneth D. Wald*

### **Introduction**

When a small ship from Recife, Brazil, docked in the port of New Amsterdam in 1654, the colony's governor refused it permission to release the cargo – mostly Jews from Holland who had been expelled from Brazil when Portugal recaptured the colony from the Dutch and imposed the Inquisition. Having lost the protection of the Dutch flag, these Jewish emigrants sought refuge in the Dutch colony in North America (which would later be renamed New York).<sup>1</sup> Given Holland's reputation for religious tolerance toward Jews, the refugees hoped they would be welcomed, but Peter Stuyvesant, governor-general of New Amsterdam, denied asylum to what he characterised as a 'deceitful race' of 'hateful enemies and blasphemers of the name of Christ' (quoted in Schappes, 1950, p. 2). The Dutch West India Company, which had jurisdiction over the colony, over-ruled Stuyvesant and the refugees were granted residence. They established the first permanent Jewish settlement in the New World.

Over the centuries, subsequent waves of Jewish immigrants made their way ashore in New York and other port cities. In the mid-nineteenth century, a sizable cohort of Jews fleeing the Austro-Hungarian Empire sought entry to

<sup>1</sup> For background on the Dutch Jews, see Klooster (1906).

the US. The collapse of the revolutions of 1848 induced many German Jews – 50,000 in 1850 alone – to settle in the US. But the single largest wave of Jewish immigrants was yet to come. An estimated two million Eastern European Jews arrived in the US between 1881 and 1914, fleeing poverty, limited economic opportunity and pogroms in Southern and Eastern Europe. Although met with nativist hostility, most gained legal entry due to the essentially unregulated immigration regime in the US.

Even after Congress imposed draconian immigration restrictions in the 1920s, Jewish emigration continued. Thanks to forged papers, a significant number of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe made it into the US well into the 1930s and beyond. Another 50,000 Austrian and German Jews successfully fled Hitler by moving to the US in 1939 alone, and about 80,000 Jewish Holocaust survivors and/or residents of displaced persons' camps were admitted legally between 1945 and 1952.<sup>2</sup> Although there were subsequent surges in Jewish immigration, particularly after the collapse of Russian communism in the 1980s, the Jews who arrived between 1848 and 1952 from Central and then Eastern Europe (known colloquially as Germans and Russians, respectively) were important contributors to the rise of US power.

These Jews and their descendants became America's model minority, a term used to describe an ethno-cultural group that over-achieved in positive ways, despite enduring prejudice and discrimination. The transformation from pariah to exemplar would have stunned the nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century critics of Jewish immigration who were obsessed with a 'Jewish threat'. These nativists warned about the Jews' alleged predisposition to political radicalism, anti-social behaviour, criminality, clannishness, susceptibility to communicable diseases and various forms of moral impurity. The widespread poverty apparent in the Jewish ghettos of big cities seemed to reinforce these concerns, but Jews rapidly overcame their economic disadvantages. After about five years of residence, their occupational attainment and earnings matched or exceeded those of their native-born peers and, by 1940, thanks largely to greater investment in education, they

<sup>2</sup> Brinkman (2017), Kahan (1978) and Garland (2014) have provided the most reliable estimates of Jewish immigration. The German Jews who arrived in 1939 after the *Kristallnacht* pogrom in Germany included the author's parents.

had higher incomes and were appreciably more likely to occupy white-collar positions than white, native-born Americans (Chiswick, 1999).

Hence, Jews overcame barriers meant to keep them out of the US, rapidly acculturating and standing out for their strong communal values, educational achievements, patriotism, law-abidingness and rapid upward mobility. By the twenty-first century, as Robert Putnam and David Campbell have reported, Jews had become the single most positively regarded religious group in the US (Putnam and Campbell, 2010, p. 505). Using a different data source, the Pew Research Center (2014) has confirmed that finding. Although they compose only 2 percent of the population, Jews in the US constitute the largest Jewish diaspora in the world.

In both the domestic and transnational spheres, Jews have drawn on a favourable political opportunity structure to play an undeniably important role in America's rise to global power. This chapter examines their contributions to two domains that political scientist Joseph Nye has identified as 'soft' and 'hard' power. Before reaching that point, however, I will consider the resources that this population drew on to achieve stunning upward mobility and the conditions in the US that facilitated their eventual success and contribution to America's global pre-eminence.

### Sources of Successful Diasporic Integration

The rapid change in the status of American Jewry poses a central question: To what extent was this socio-economic transformation the product of unique Judaic qualities – that is, the skills and cultural orientations that Jews brought with them as they sailed to America? Rather than join the endless debate about this question, which is beyond the purview of this essay, I will summarise what we know about the factors that contributed to Jews' upward mobility and adaptation to the US.

Research on diaspora communities suggests that the adjustment of immigrants to their new environment generally depends on how well the skills and orientations they bring with them from their home country mesh with the structural conditions in their host societies (the places to which they migrate and where they take up permanent residence). All other things being equal, the closer the match, the greater the prospects for immigrant success. Jews appear to have enjoyed two key advantages over other immigration streams in that regard.

The relatively rapid incorporation of American Jews was once explained through the human capital and cultural resources that they brought with them on arrival in the US. That is, Jews from Europe had relatively high levels of literacy and education, which enabled them to fill high-status occupations, and certain cultural dispositions such as ambition and discipline, which facilitated their rise in the social hierarchy. Lederhendler (2009) has discounted both these human capital and cultural resources arguments, arguing instead that Jews in the 1890–1920 immigrant cohorts had a comparative advantage over many other immigrant groups because of their considerable pre-immigration experience in manufacturing, a largely urban enterprise. This was particularly true in the garment industry, then one of the fastest-growing economic sectors in the US and a field where Eastern European Jews had a head-start due to their concentration as tailors in the Old Country (Kahan, 1978). In the dynamic open economy that Jews discovered in the US (for white men, it must be acknowledged), they quickly found or created openings for employment as clothing manufacturers, distributors and retailers. Conditions in the old Country had prepared them for success in the North American diaspora.

Second, the Jews from the Eastern European immigration wave enjoyed a high degree of what today would be called mentoring from the German Jews who had had a head-start on the Russians due to their earlier arrival in the US. In 1890, the two groups had very different occupational structures, with the Germans mostly engaged in higher-paid trades as ‘bankers, brokers, wholesalers, retail dealers, collectors, agents, and so on’, while most of the Russians still worked in the so-called needle trades (Kuznets, 1960; 1636). Rag-pickers and piecework tailors generally earned lower incomes and confronted greater hardships. As is often the case in diasporas, the earlier waves (in this case, the German Jews) both mentored the newcomers and provided models of how to adapt to the new environment.

The immediate needs of the newly arrived Russian immigrants were met by the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) which ‘provided translation services, guided immigrants through the medical screening processes, argued before the Boards of Special Enquiry, lent needy Jews funds for landing fees, [...] obtained bonds for employment status [and located] family and friends of recent Jewish emigrants in order to avoid their becoming public charges’ (Williams, 2017, p. 91). Not surprisingly, the organisation’s advisory board was studded with the names

of the leading German Jews from the commercial and legal sectors – ‘veterans’ such as Jacob Schiff, Louis Marshall, Oscar Straus, Cyrus and Mayer Sulzberger, and Simon Wolf, among others (Wischnitzer, 1956, p. 50). The same preponderance of German Jewish names was evident in New York’s Educational Alliance. This organisation provided classes for Russian immigrants in both English and Yiddish on such essential topics as the English language, American history and politics, and other vital subjects. Beyond social services, German Jewish manufacturers and entrepreneurs tended to favour fellow Jews in their hiring practices and also mounted significant campaigns to help the newcomers obtain citizenship, challenge antisemitic policies and, ultimately, penetrate the American economic system.

These efforts by ‘uptown’ German Jews to ‘Americanise’ the newly arrived immigrants from Eastern Europe were not always appreciated by the ‘downtown’ target population because they seemed to reflect an unctuous paternalism. Even if such efforts did serve the perceived self-interest of German Jews who worried that the Russians would generate antisemitism among the American population, the services provided to the newcomers contributed to the latter’s relatively rapid incorporation in the US.<sup>3</sup>

Neither of these advantages would have mattered much without a favourable economic and political context in the receiving society. The US economic system permitted and even facilitated these routes to financial success. Jews particularly embraced the opportunities for education that their new country provided in the form of free public elementary and secondary schools and public college/university systems that kept tuition low and affordable. There were also available niches, such as the entertainment industry, that Jews could utilise because of the absence of established elites whose antisemitism would otherwise have impeded Jewish success. Moreover, many Jewish veterans of World War II also obtained from the federal government important post-war economic benefits for their military service – low-cost mortgages, preferential hiring and, most importantly, access to higher education.

<sup>3</sup> ‘The arrival of hundreds of thousands of Jewish East European immigrants – poor, visible, concentrated in the huge ghettos of the large American cities, seemingly troublesome – did nothing to improve the public (and private) standing of the Jewish upper class of German origin in the eyes of the gentiles, who mostly did not distinguish between different sorts of Jews’ (Friesel, 2002, p. 65).

The Eastern European immigrants and their descendants likewise benefited from the favourable political opportunity structure that greeted Jews in the US (Wald, 2019). Founded on classical liberal principles, the federal government insured that Jews had equal rights based on law, rather than depending on the uncertain force of tolerance. Jews were free to participate in politics and appointed themselves as the guardians of the secular state designed by the Founding Fathers. Jewish communal defence organisations, which emerged in the early twentieth century, became effective advocates that helped protect Jewish immigrants from employment discrimination.

Although antisemitism was a real factor in American life and occasionally expressed itself in lethal violence, Jews did not experience nearly the same degree of discrimination and persecution as African Americans or Catholic immigrants. Along with other factors (see Diner, 2017), familiarity with and respect for the Hebrew Bible had generated a degree of philo-semitism among many American intellectuals, which translated into an attitude toward Jews less negative than was common in Europe. David Smith's (2015) verdict that 'antisemitism succeeded as prejudice but failed as politics' nicely captures the ability of Jewish immigrants to achieve success despite nativism, discrimination and other barriers. The road may have been bumpy, but it could be traversed.

### **Hard and Soft Power**

Joseph Nye (2021) was the first to introduce scholars to the critical distinction between two types of power wielded by nation-states against other nation-states. Rather than pose 'hard power' and 'soft power' as opposites, he conceptualised them as endpoints on a spectrum according to the degree to which the 'target' nation was accorded choice and agency. Because they are tough, coercive and meant to force the target nation to comply, military force and economic sanctions exemplify hard power. Indeed, they are often seen as its basic components. In soft power mode, to the contrary, the agent of influence seeks to attract the target nation's population through what Nye calls positive sanctions or attractiveness. The target has volition to decide whether to respond to such factors, which are often cultural in nature. Over time, Nye's conception has become more nuanced, but this summary arrives at the essence of his framework.

Jews achieved unparalleled levels of success in sectors that were crucial to the rise of the US as a global power, enabling them to contribute significantly to both domains. In the realm of hard power, the most visible example was the role of Jewish scientists and technicians in developing nuclear weapons during World War II. The use of those weapons was often justified by the abstract models developed by influential Jewish intellectuals.<sup>4</sup> American economic strength, also an important component of hard power, benefitted from access to transnational financial networks through important Jewish capitalists in the US.

Jews also played a significant role in augmenting soft power by transmitting attractive features of the US to targeted international audiences via movies, television programmes and other means of mass communication. When Jewish social workers and social scientists helped build the infrastructure of a welfare state, they also helped promote the political and social stability that is widely considered an important resource for global influence. Jewish lawyers, journalists and political activists promoted policies of equality and pluralism that further burnished the global reputation of the country (Arzt, 1986; Dollinger, 2000). Given that the American Idea is a cognitive construct that may attract foreign audiences and potential immigrants, it falls into the realm of soft power, more so than hard power.

### *Jews and the Realm of Hard Power Realm*

The orientation of American Jews to international politics was driven principally by two factors – the extremely positive environment for Jews in the US in the nineteenth century and the later threat of Nazism to Jews and Jewish

<sup>4</sup> I am keenly aware that these broad claims can all too easily reinforce virulent antisemitic tropes about Jewish ‘control’ of key sectors in the US and around the globe. My emphasis on the Jewish role does not mean that Jews alone are or were responsible for these developments but that they contributed disproportionately to them. Similarly, the decision to wield power – whether hard or soft in nature – did not usually rest with the Jewish elites who helped manufacture the means. To take a recent example, the US invasion of Iraq may have been promoted by a coterie of neo-conservatives, some with Jewish ancestry, but the critical decisions came from elected officials with last names such as Cheney, Bush and Rumsfeld. Even in these cases, the bulk of American Jews often opposed US military action during the Cold War and after. Claims that overlook these nuances do not advance our knowledge or improve our world.

civilisation around the world. Given their history, it is not surprising that Jews developed a hard shell when it came to protecting the interests of the US.

Those factors ultimately persuaded many Jewish scientists and technicians to join the effort to build nuclear weapons during World War II. It was the leadership of Albert Einstein who arrived in the US in 1933, just months after Hitler's appointment as German Chancellor, that prompted President Roosevelt to authorise the development of a nuclear weapon by what became known as the Manhattan Project. Originally a pacifist, Einstein in 1939 became alarmed by the possibility that Germany would soon develop atomic weapons. Hence, he encouraged the president to authorise an initiative that was no doubt adopted at least in part due to Einstein's status as the most famous scientist in the world. Roosevelt appointed a Jewish theoretical physicist, J. Robert Oppenheimer, to head the project, and he recruited an extraordinary team of scientists, engineers and technicians consisting mostly of Jewish refugees from Nazi persecution. They were amenable to the effort because they had witnessed how the Nazis rejected Einstein's work as 'Jewish Physics' (Fraser, 2012). Awareness of the ongoing genocide against Jews both in Germany and later across Eastern Europe prompted urgency in this effort. America's status as the first nation with nuclear weapons promoted its leadership in world affairs, even if the weapons – the hardest of hard power – were only used twice during the world war and never since. Ironically, many of the people involved in the development of the A-Bomb, including Oppenheimer who was considered its father, became opponents of the subsequent effort to develop a hydrogen bomb and, like Einstein, promoted disarmament and international control over nuclear weapons. The *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, first published in 1945, became an influential voice of caution about the use of nuclear weapons. Its founders and most of its contributors came mainly from among the Jewish physicists who had worked on the Manhattan Project.

These critics had less influence on the actual governing of nuclear weapons and the regulation of nuclear power than they had hoped. Not all of them were dovish. One of the Manhattan physicists, Edward Teller, considered the father of the hydrogen bomb, promoted an extremely hawkish line regarding its use against the Soviet Union when that country emerged as the major rival for international influence in the 1950s. Teller had lost his teaching position in Germany due to the Nazis and, as a Hungarian national, expressed a deep

animus to the Soviet Union after it violently repressed the Hungarian Revolution in 1956. Although his policy positions were rarely implemented, Teller's subsequent influence was enhanced due to changes in elite thinking about the US role in world affairs.

The atomic capacity that the US acquired due in part to the exertions of the European Jewish emigres might not have transformed American foreign policy absent a change in the climate of opinion favouring active global engagement over isolation. One of the most influential voices in this transformation, Hans J. Morgenthau, promoted what became known as the realist approach to world affairs. Yet another immigrant who had reached safety in the US after Hitler had come to power in his native Germany, Morgenthau exerted 'a permanent imprint on the thinking of both theoreticians and practitioners in the field' of international relations (Mollov, 2000, p. 113). His *Politics Among Nations*, first published in 1948 and still issued in new editions more than fifty years later, exerted enormous influence on such important thinkers as Henry Kissinger, George Kennan, Walter Lippmann, Reinhold Niebuhr, Raymond Aron and Arthur Schlesinger Jr. Probably no one took more from *Politics Among Nations* than Henry Kissinger (Gewen, 2020).

Morgenthau's book rested on the assumption that human beings are power-seeking by nature. Given that reality, as Morgenthau saw it, 'the job of the statesman was to preserve his country's security in the face of this unending struggle. Good intentions by themselves, without power behind them, could do nothing, and might make matters worse' (Gewen, 2020). Although this position does not explicitly distinguish between hard and soft power, Morgenthau much preferred the use of political power over military force. He was a strong opponent of the Vietnam War, precisely because it reflected an idealist mentality, assuming that the Vietnamese would prefer a government based on Western democracy and would thus rally to support the regime in South Vietnam.

Without reducing Morgenthau's entire worldview to his personal experiences, his biographer noted that Morgenthau's decidedly jaundiced view of human nature was to some degree a natural reaction to the vicious antisemitism he encountered growing up in an ultra-nationalist region of Bavaria, his poor treatment at the hands of the townspeople after Hitler's rise to power and his continued exposure to antisemitism within academia (Mollov, 2000). His

pessimism about politics as a form of salvation owed much to watching his fellow German Jews invest all their political hopes in liberalism and rationalism only to watch the movement collapse in the aftermath of World War I, unleashing fascist tyranny against Jews. The viciousness of Nazis of minor rank that he had observed in Germany was a harsh reminder of the innate power drive that produces a lust for domination.

Morgenthau's worldview carried enormous influence and could be used – not inevitably but via contingency – to favour military action over diplomacy and thus to tolerate violence and the use of force as deemed necessary. It became in a sense the underlying intellectual infrastructure that justified using US military power to achieve global political ends. That perspective has helped legitimate policies that affect the use of the military technology to which American Jews contributed so greatly. Morgenthau's intellectual heirs, the so-called neo-conservatives (Friedman, 2005) who emerged during the Reagan era, reinforced the more bellicose anti-communist tendencies of the Republican party and played an important role in the administrations of George W. Bush and Donald Trump. Ironically, as opinion data reveal, the adoption of policies advanced by these hawkish intellectuals actually reduced the international standing of the US (Pew Research Center, 2021).

Just as the scientific infrastructure that sped up the ascent of US power was to a substantial degree driven by Jews, so was the development of a financial sector where Jews – German Jews in particular – played an outsized role. During the Middle Ages, European Jews developed extensive global networks of finance, distribution and exchange. This was partly a function of the ethnic tradition of sending family members abroad so that they could develop businesses that complemented and extended those already created by an earlier generation of entrepreneurs.<sup>5</sup> Such networks were often put at the service of monarchs who relied on so-called Court Jews to raise the funds necessary to build armies or launch other initiatives (Zenner, 1990). Thanks to royal

<sup>5</sup> The widespread belief that Jews dominated global financial systems because of Christian prohibitions on usury, forcefully contradicted by Trivellato (2019), stemmed from the practice of defining anyone who charged interest regardless of religious heritage as a Jew. As she has demonstrated, Christians actively charged interest, despite the opposition of the Church. For the persistence of the antisemitic trope into our day, see the thinly veiled Republican attack on Jewish financiers and officials in the 2020 presidential election (Cassen, 2020, pp. 373–74).

patronage, the Jewish ‘middlemen’ often claimed the leadership of their own Jewish communities.

If the expulsion of Jews from Palestine and later from various European nations generated the concept of diasporas, Jews who created networks of extended kinship crossing national boundaries operationalised transnationalism as a two-way street between homeland and host land. That aspect of diaspora existence was evident as early as in the mid-eighteenth century in what would eventually become the US. These transnational networks headquartered in Holland actually prevented the deportation of the Jews from Recife who arrived in New Amsterdam in 1654. Dutch Jews who owned shares in the Dutch West India Company successfully lobbied the corporation to overturn Peter Stuyvesant’s edict against their co-religionists seeking asylum in North America. Their trans-Atlantic intervention on behalf of fellow Jews demonstrated the significance of transnationalism between diaspora communities long before the globalist revolution of the late twentieth century.

The conditions in the nineteenth-century US, the growth in the economy and improvements in transportation were particularly helpful to those German and Russian Jews who played the middleman role. In relatively short order, the peddlers who travelled across the rural areas accumulated enough capital to become merchants of modest stores and wholesale distributors. As Williams (2017, p. 93) has noted, they provided rural America with durable goods produced in the cities and brought food from the countryside to urban areas. Some founded what became retail giants, such as Sears, Gimbels, Bloomingdales, Saks and Altmans. Through their family and kinship connections in Europe, other German and Russian immigrants entered finance and banking by raising capital to fund the building of railroads and other major economic initiatives. Firms such as Kuhn Loeb, Warburg, Goldman Sachs and Lehman Brothers along with those founded by families named Seligman, Saloman, Bache and Guggenheim soon competed with established behemoths such as J. P. Morgan (Carosso, 1976). Their activities expanded the American economy and helped build the wealth on which future growth depended.

### *Soft Power*

Beyond their efforts to provide tangible resources to strengthen the US militarily and economically, Jews also worked mightily in the cultural domain. They

sought to build international awareness and respect for the American Idea. The notion of the US as a place where initiative and hard work are rewarded, where individuals are treated respectfully regardless of religion, was an important element in making the US a preferred destination and cultural touchstone around the globe. Moreover, although the US was late to develop a social welfare state, Jews were important in the coalition that pursued social justice through civil rights initiatives and the safety net programmes that enhanced the health and well-being of Americans. Boosting the reputation of the US was seen as an important way to promote American leadership in the world.

Whatever the challenges of adjustment and adaptation faced by Jewish immigrants to the US in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the nation was widely perceived as the best available option for Jews seeking economic opportunity and social calm. Despite efforts by various activists to keep Jews in Europe or channel emigrants to the nascent Jewish state in Palestine, the vast majority of Eastern Europeans who left Europe had stampeded in the direction of the US (Mendelsohn, 1993). Examining the political culture of American Jewry in the nineteenth century, leading rabbis of all Jewish denominational streams and communal activists ‘virtually deified the founders and their work, treating the United States as the truest expression of Jewish religious values and the creation of the federal constitution as a world-historical event’ (Wald, 2019, p. 105). In a sense, soft power brought the Jewish masses to the US, and they, in turn, amplified this message globally.

Much of the appeal of the US was its relatively high level of social and political stability.<sup>6</sup> Recognising how social disorder has often generated virulent antisemitism, Jews contributed through multiple paths to building a society that has seemingly been effective in tamping down social conflict and thus has been ‘good for the Jews’ (Fein, 1988). As Nye has emphasised (2021, p. 2), social stability is usually counted along with military force, natural resources and other factors as a correlate of national power. I will focus on entertainment and civil rights activism, disparate modes that disproportionately engaged American Jews in building a humane society.

<sup>6</sup> The level of social and political stability that Jews enjoyed in the US was appreciably discounted for people of colour. Considered as whites (Goldstein, 2006), Jews escaped much of the violent racism that so damaged the lives of African Americans and other non-white minorities.

The entertainment industry in general and motion pictures in particular have long been recognised as potential elements of soft power. In an apparently non-political setting, films can convey messages about the (idealised) nature of life in the US and help generate a positive valence for the country in the minds of international audiences. Even when covering unsavoury aspects of American life, such as violence against Black Americans, heroic cinematic accounts of people such as Martin Luther King, John Lewis and Rosa Parks may inspire viewers to emphasise the possibilities of social change in their own societies.

From its inception, the film industry in Hollywood was permeated by Jewish writers, performers and studio executives who transmitted what Neal Gabler (1988, p. 4) has described as ‘a ferocious, even pathological embrace of America’. The collaboration of the studios with the federal government during World War II transmitted the image of ‘a harmonious, achieving American society struggling to survive and being regenerated in a world divided between good and evil’ (Dingman, 1989, p. 112). That Manichean worldview led the studios to churn out ‘film after film about the Nazis’ cruelty, the sedition of Nazi sympathizers here, the bravery of our soldiers, the steadfastness of our people, and the rightness of our mission’ (Gabler, 1988, p. 348). Although initially aimed at the domestic audience, this initiative also illustrated the willingness of the industry to emphasise the attractiveness of the US and thus build support for the war effort among a much larger global audience.

Jews were also significantly over-represented among the pioneers of social welfare programmes in the post-World War I era. As early as 1917, Sears executive Julius Rosenwald of Chicago created a fund that ultimately donated millions of dollars to build more than 5,000 schools for African American children in the rural South (Ascoli, 2006). Private philanthropy was soon outstripped by governmental programmes aimed at the general population. The rudiments of what became the federal safety net were pioneered during the 1920s by the administration of Alfred E. Smith, governor of New York from 1923 to 1928 (Chiles, 2018). Drawing on a talented group of Jewish leaders that included Belle Moskowitz, Joseph Proskauer, Lillian Wald and Robert Moses, as well as Jewish labour union leaders such as Sidney Hillman and Rose Schneiderman, he pioneered policies such as unemployment insurance and passed a wide range of progressive social programmes – support for

labour unions, workplace safety, state hospitals – aimed at improving the life of New York's working class. Franklin Roosevelt, who succeeded Smith in the governor's office in 1929 and became president in 1933, built the New Deal on Smith's heritage by incorporating many of the people who worked in New York State and adding Jewish advisors and activists such as Wilbur J. Cohen, David K. Niles, Felix Frankfurter and Samuel Rosenman (Dinnerstein, 1983). Not for nothing did nativists back-handedly refer to FDR's programmes as 'the Jew Deal'.

As they had early in the twentieth century, when they cofounded the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Jews disproportionately participated in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s (Arzt, 1986; Albin, 2018). There were divisions among Jews on the advisability of participating in this struggle, due to concerns about its effect on Jews in the American South and, undoubtedly, due to some degree of racism in the community. History was an important factor in overcoming these concerns. Many Jews remembered the 1930s, when racist attacks on German Jews by the Nazis prompted Jews and African Americans to forge a strong alliance based on 'mutual identification as victims of discrimination and oppression' (Sitkoff, 2010, p. 159).

Compared to other groups, Jewish opinion strongly supported the efforts of the Black community to achieve equality (Glaser, 1997), and Jewish political elites were deeply involved in drafting and passing the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act a year later. In coalition with African American attorneys, Jewish lawyers helped identify cases that could be used to increase legal protections for minorities, recruited plaintiffs and often litigated the cases in court. Although the position of Jews became untenable when the movement entered the Black Power phase, many continued to work for civil rights through other organisations such as the American Civil Liberties Union and the Lawyers Committee on Civil Rights Under Law.

### *Political Power*

There is another realm of public life, somewhere between the poles of hard and soft power, where American Jews have been important transnational political actors. American Jews are perhaps best known globally for their role in the creation of the state of Israel and the forging of a long-lasting alliance between

the Jewish state and the US. Like other American diaspora communities who have advocated for the US to favour their homelands abroad – Irish Americans, Cuban Americans, Armenians, South Asians and African Americans, among others – American Jews have lobbied, funded charitable enterprises, educated public officials and taken other political actions on behalf of Israel (DeConde, 1992; Smith, 2001). The close ties between American Jews and Israel are evident in the fact that three Israeli prime ministers – Golda Meir, Benjamin Netanyahu and Naftali Bennett – were either born or largely raised in the US and that Israel often appoints American-born Israelis to represent the Jewish state as diplomats in the US.

Contrary to popular wisdom, the US did not develop an alliance with Israel until almost two decades *after* the country had been established, and the two nations, albeit allies, have often differed on Middle Eastern policy.<sup>7</sup> In fact, the US embargoed military weapons sales to Israel during its War of Independence and did not deploy its diplomatic resources on Israel's behalf until very late in the Yom Kippur War of 1973. Nor, as one popular narrative insists, was American support for Israel due to the financial and supposed political power of American Jewry. Rather, as scholars have documented in considerable detail, Israel was valued by the US as a strategic partner and a force for stability in a very unstable region (Bass, 2003; Spiegel, 1985). When presidents proposed actions perceived by many American Jews as counter to Israel's interests, such as weapons sales to Arab states or the Iran nuclear agreement during the Obama administration, those actions were invariably sustained in spite of Jewish political mobilisation against them (Bard 1991).

If the impact of the so-called Israel lobby on US foreign policy is overstated, so has the degree of cohesion among American Jewry regarding Israel. When the Zionist movement developed in the late nineteenth century, it attracted enthusiastic support from some segments of the American Jewish community but generated intense opposition from others. The largest Jewish denomination in the US, the Reform movement, strongly opposed the creation of a

<sup>7</sup> US support for the partition of Palestine into Jewish and Arab states and its recognition of Israel at the outset were largely the product of then President Harry Truman's personal ties to a one-time Jewish business partner. The 'Arabist' faction in the State and Defense Departments strongly opposed these decisions (Makovsky, 2012).

Jewish state and insisted that Judaism was a religious rather than a national movement (Wald, 2019, chapter 7). Only after Israel's military success in the Six Day War of 1967 did defending it become a major priority for American Jews. But Israel has since turned into a source of division among American Jewry, due to both the political power of Israeli Orthodox parties that reject the Judaism practiced by most American Jews and the continuing Israeli presence in some of the territories gained on the west bank of the Jordan River during the wars of 1967 and 1974 (Waxman, 2016; Rosenthal, 2001). These divisions do not mean that most American Jews are anti-Israel, as some politicians have argued, because there is strong evidence that the Jewish community generally values Israel and supports it despite policy differences over territorial issues (Wright, Saxe and Wald, 2020).

With these qualifications, which are essential to correct widely circulated misconceptions, support for Israel (however defined) remains an important item on the agenda of American Jewish politics. As already noted, such trans-national linkages between diasporas and homeland countries are common in American political life. The success of American Jews in maintaining a disposition generally favourable towards Israel among the American public, regardless of their own misgivings about specific Israeli policies, attests to the openness of the American political system. The ongoing campaign to enlist the US on behalf of Israel also sets a standard which other ethnic diasporas – even American Muslims who generally have a narrative about Israel very different from that of American Jews – have been encouraged to emulate (Mazrui, 2004).

## Conclusion

Michael Walzer (2010, p. 36) has noted that Jews have long been ‘accused of being parochial, hostile to outsiders, exclusionist, chauvinist, and, in any group except our own, disloyal, and subversive’. Survey data confirm that they are still perceived by a non-trivial share of Americans as clannish and more concerned with the welfare of fellow Jews rather than that of other Americans. There is some truth to this claim about clannishness in the high level of within-group social interaction among Jews and the degree to which the Jewish diaspora has long prioritised the welfare of Jews regardless of where they are found. Of course, these traits are likely to be a consequence rather

than a cause of antisemitism, as well as the result of a long history of persecution that has abated but not disappeared. Although the stereotype is potentially positive, reflecting admiration for the cohesion and communal feeling exhibited by Jews, it can also take a decidedly negative form, buttressing assertions that Jews are overly self-interested.

The nineteenth- and twentieth-century immigrants from Central and Eastern Europe did not behave as if they were solely motivated by either individual or group self-interest. They perceived little distance between the two ends. As this chapter has demonstrated, Jews contributed substantially to improving the quality of life and law in the US, enhancing social peace and shoring up the image of the US as a country worthy of respect despite its imperfections. They also pursued ‘hard power’ advantages for their new homeland by equipping the US with important weaponry and facilitating the economic development of the US via finance capital. Of course, as US citizens, they believed that they benefited from these efforts but that does not justify discounting their gratitude for the freedom and security they enjoyed.

In these labours, they were motivated by the belief that what was good for the US was good for the Jews. In their eyes, the nation was a land where Jews could at last be confident of their safety, opportunity and respect. Hence, they invested in the US to a degree that had rarely been possible in what they perceived as their long exile from the homeland. Although the rise of the anti-semitic Alt-Right (Taylor, 2020) and the virulent strain of Christianity that was on display among the insurrectionists who invaded the US Capitol on 6 January 2021 may have undermined that confidence, it cannot erase their outsized role in strengthening the US as a military, economic and cultural power.

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# 3

## IRISH IMMIGRATION TO AMERICA: REVISITING FAMINE, TRANSNATIONAL NETWORKS AND MEMORIALISATION

*Jyoti Atwal*

### **Introduction**

This chapter looks at Irish Americans historically through the dynamics of immigration as well as transnational alliances. The Irish diaspora in America has been largely contextualised by the historic Great Famine that gripped Ireland from 1845 to 1850. The immigration pattern was quite steady from the 1850s until 1914. The Catholic Church acquired power as the consolidation of Irish society in America took place. The New Irish immigrants (those who entered between 1890 and 1920) were largely ‘Americanised’ in the streets and in the churches of America between 1900 and 1930.

Most of the historiography addresses factors leading to the emigration from Ireland. Historically, Irish-American connections were appropriated in diplomatic avenues for political purposes, by both American and Irish leadership. Nineteenth-century Irish leader Charles Stuart Parnell stated how Irish leaders longed to emulate the achievements of the US, particularly the principles of liberty, equality and justice. The Irish American population sought the integration of their past, anti-colonial movements and war on poverty. The development of capabilities among the immigrants enabled their transformation into effective citizens. The construction of this transatlantic and transnational community was as much the result of debate and discussion in the public sphere of a hybrid community, the role of print media and media

events. Ireland has been immensely successful in transforming revolutionary memory into public history which transcends their own national boundaries and thrives on the Irish diaspora. This chapter specifically traces the oppressive conditions for Irish American women and workers in America, who developed a sense of political consciousness against colonialism and social injustice. I will also explore the modern-day symbols, museums and sites of remembrance of the Irish immigration.

I noticed an excited, cheerful American tourist family in the locker room of the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI), Belfast, in 2012. The excitement was over a file that was to arrive from the genealogy records section within the next few minutes. They would soon learn about their great-grandparents who had emigrated from Ireland to America in the late nineteenth century. Next, the family gathered around a table in the document consultation room. The lady in the centre announced that she had found the street where their great-grandfather had lived in 1840s Ireland!!! I was familiar with the Great Famine but had been totally alien to emotions of this kind. I was reminded of what William Faulkner had said: ‘The past is never dead. It’s not even past’.

Genealogy services are quite popular with European, Australian, Scottish and British tourists with Irish ancestry. Notwithstanding the fact that the Irish Americans’ link with Ireland is hinged around the spiritual and emotional domain of the emigration from Ireland during the Great Hunger or Great Famine (*An Gorta Mór*). A rich, diverse and intensive scholarship on the Irish diaspora has emerged since the 1940s. Oscar Handlin’s doctoral thesis was published as *Boston’s immigrants, 1790–1865* (1941), followed by *The uprooted* (1951), which revealed the story of waves of Irish immigration to America. The book was a study of the psychological and cultural adjustments that Irish people had to make after settling in the US. More recently, in 2012 the fascinating *Atlas of the Great Irish Famine: 1845–1852* appeared, highlighting the diversity of local, county, provincial and emigrant conditions and experiences due to the Famine – the result of a project led by scholars of the University College Cork.<sup>1</sup> Based on

<sup>1</sup> The project was launched in Dublin in 2012, by the former President of Ireland, Mary Robinson. It was officially initiated by Professor Joe Lee at the Irish Consulate in New York in November 2012. On St Patrick’s Day in 2013, a leather-bound copy was also presented to President Barack Obama by the then Taoiseach Enda Kenny.

its inter-disciplinary scholarship, to this day it stands as one of the most elaborate works contributing to our understanding of the Great Irish Famine.

It must be highlighted at the outset that this chapter, in tandem with the other chapters in this volume, draws on the present-day concern that academic debates on transnationalism, immigration and citizenship have been neglected. This has often led to the marginalisation of migrants' perspectives on citizenship. Leitner and Ehrkamp (2006) have argued that even naturalised migrants experienced discrimination between promises of equality and fairness which are components of liberal democratic citizenship. Drawing on the feminist concept of positionality in ethnographic research on Somali, Sudanese, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Mexican and Central American immigrants in Minnesota, USA, and on Turkish and Kurdish immigrants in Duisburg, Germany, Leitner and Ehrkamp have observed how migrants create the meaning of, ascribe value to and practice citizenship. Positionality is significant as it indicates migrants' social situatedness within particular socio-spatial contexts.

Guarnizo and Smith (1998) have flagged the significance of understanding transnational migration and migrant transnationalism 'from below'. In a similar vein, this chapter also shows how migrants forge and sustain familial, economic, cultural and political ties and identities that cross national borders. This transnationalism does not erase local identifications and meaning systems; rather, transnational ties are sustained by local ties. Arguing in support of the transnational approach, Fischer (2021) has claimed that instrumentalist framings of diaspora do not acknowledge diaspora as a *category of practice*. There exists research-based evidence to show that a transnational actor-centred research framework can transcend the nation-state-centred gaze.

Territorially speaking, 32 million people across 60 percent of US states claim Irish heritage. Historically, more than 4.5 million Irish immigrants arrived in the US between 1820 and 1930. Between 1740 and 1922, around 7 million people emigrated from Ireland to Northern America (Miller, 1980). In thirty-one out of fifty-one US states, the Irish stand third in terms of population. In Massachusetts and New Hampshire, the Irish rank first (the other communities being French, Italian and English). Within the Irish diaspora, there have occurred transformations in sociological and cultural terms (Dowling, 2011). It has been observed that Irish Catholic men and women who came to America between 1945 and 1960 were young, single and worked

as babysitters, contractors and domestic assistants in houses and restaurants. The Irish who immigrated between 1981 and 1991 were better educated and technologically and electronically more globally connected. The New Irish in America have been shaped by transformations that have taken place in Ireland since the 1960s. There was a marked improvement in secondary schooling and in the system of undergraduate degrees. Economic investments were encouraged, followed by improvements in the social welfare services. In 1975, the legendary republican leader Eamon de Valera passed away. By then economic and social modernisation, having accelerated from 1973 onwards thanks to Ireland's membership in the European Community (now the European Union), saw a remarkable break from the traditional link between nationalism and Catholicism. Some significant issues of choice and gender equality (first in respect to equal employment rights, then birth control, divorce, abortion and finally gay marriage or marriage equality) began to be discussed, debated and eventually adopted.

It is important to note different waves of migrants from Ireland in America; moreover, in the present-day US many Americans who identified themselves as Irish are Protestant, not Catholic. Scholars of Ethnic, Religious and Cultural Studies have engaged with the complex question of how Protestants became a majority amongst the Irish Americans (Caroll, 2006; Greeley, 1988). Surveys on settlement patterns of the Irish in America reveal some interesting findings. In the South, which was settled mostly by the pre-Famine Irish and least impacted by the post-Famine Irish immigration (which largely consisted of Catholics), nearly 73 percent of respondents were Protestants. They later labelled themselves as Scots Irish, so as to distinguish themselves from the poor Catholics fleeing the Great Famine.

David Fitzpatrick (2020) has explored the unexpected ways in which the *reverse effects* of emigration remoulded Irish society. His demographic research is based on rich accounts of individual experiences in order to assemble a vivid picture of the dynamic Irish society. Most importantly, he explores the transformative impact of *reverse migration* from America to post-Famine Ireland. This research complicates the question of Ireland's growing population of US-born residents.

Politically, since the 1990s we have witnessed several US Presidents showing a keen interest in tracing their ancestry to Ireland and publicly displaying

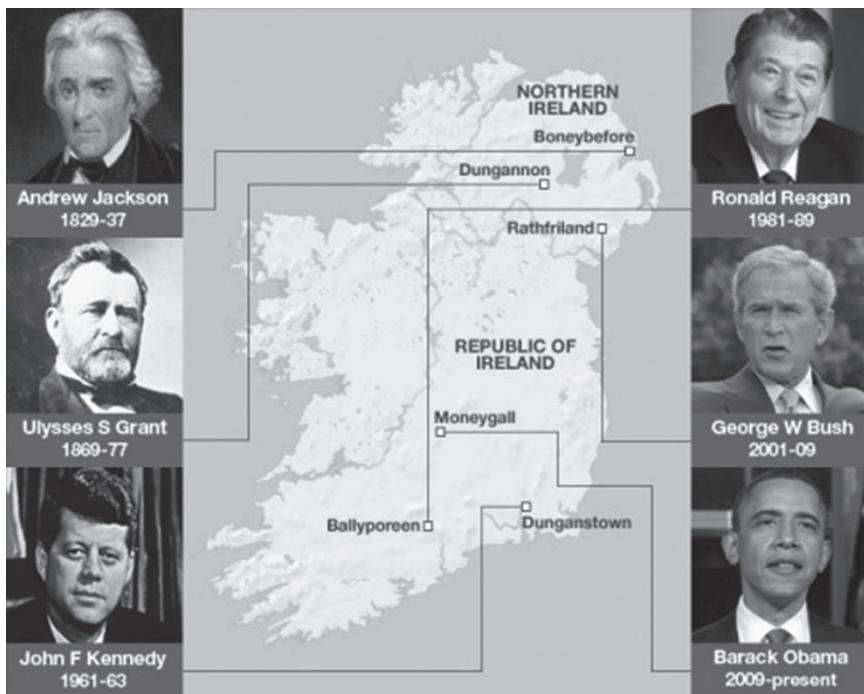
their Irish roots, however distant. In contrast to Clinton, Bush and now Biden, throughout most of the twentieth century US governments were oblivious to Irish American pressure on Irish freedom and on Northern Ireland. The leaders valued relations with the UK far more – one example is John F. Kennedy, despite playing up his Irish Catholic heritage. Ronald Reagan's great-grandfather, Michael Reagan, was born in Ballyporeen, County Tipperary, in 1829, and Reagan delivered a speech at this Irish village in 1984. John F. Kennedy, however, was the only Roman-Catholic Irish American president; his great-grandfather Patrick was from Dunganstown, County Wexford.<sup>2</sup>

Some political historians have viewed this display of Irish ancestry as a strategy adopted by US Presidents to accumulate Irish American or, more specifically, Catholic votes. John Robert Greene is of the opinion that during Barack Obama's presidency his visit to Moneygall<sup>3</sup> in Ireland played out effectively in the Rust Belt, in former steel-making cities such as Buffalo, Cleveland and Detroit, in New York City and in parts of Massachusetts. Such a campaign ensured exposure in the Catholic newspapers, which were not traditional Obama supporters because of his stand on the abortion issue, as well as his African-American roots.

It is worth noting here that, by the late twentieth century, Irish Americans had become effective *foreign policy entrepreneurs* (White and Pausa, 2019). As the first president of the self-proclaimed Irish Republic in 1919–20, during the Irish War of Independence, Eamon de Valera travelled throughout the US, seeking to mobilise this diaspora to convince President Wilson to grant diplomatic recognition to the Irish Republic. The Irish understanding was that the diaspora in America could be used to pressure the US government and subsequently influence US foreign policy to align with Irish interests. De Valera and many other Irish leaders discovered that, while the Irish American diaspora often expressed sympathy for the idea of Irish independence, this had no effect

<sup>2</sup> The Irish ballad *Danny Boy* was played at Kennedy's political rallies, and he mingled with prominent Irish Catholics, such as Tip O'Neill who later became the second-longest serving House speaker in history.

<sup>3</sup> Moneygall is a small village in Ireland, located on the border between North Tipperary and South Offaly, from where in 1850 Barack Obama's ancestor Falmouth Kearney, son of the shoemaker Joseph, emigrated to the US.



**Figure 3.1** Why are US presidents so keen to be Irish? Source: *BBC News*, 26 April 2011, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-13166265> (retrieved 11 August 2022).

on US foreign policy, as Ireland's enemy Great Britain was seen as the US' most reliable partner. This chapter looks at the Irish Americans historically, through the twin themes of immigration and transnational alliances.

### Transnational Alliances and the 'New Irish': Undoing the 'Paddy' Image

One important strand in the study of Irish American immigration is a cultural one, based on recent arguments on post-colonialism and transnationalism in America. Scholars have shown that, in America, nationally bounded public and scholarly conversations have shaped transnational exchanges. Spatial divisions such as North/South and US/Mexico were created because of these transnational conversations, which acknowledge differences, hierarchies and national identities. While historical connections with Ireland had

to be spelled out in diplomatic avenues for political purposes, for the Irish American population the integration of their past became a cultural tool that enabled them to trace continuity with anti-colonial movements and the war on poverty, thereby creating among the immigrants the capability to transform into effective citizens.

We might find it useful to realign the question of transnational movement in terms of how the present influences the past. Joseph O'Connor's famous novel *Redemption Falls* was published in 2007. According to the story, General James O'Keeffe is appointed governor of the Mountain Territory by President Lincoln. O'Keeffe had escaped from a British prison in Ireland to join thousands of Irish immigrants to fight in the Civil War. Moynihan (2008) has suggested that O'Connor's revisiting of this turbulent period raises questions regarding Ireland and Irish America's historical and contemporary transnational intercessions and ambivalences. In *Redemption Falls*, O'Connor reveals Irish and Irish American attitudes towards African Americans and slavery. In another case, Lyons (2019) has looked at the Irish language as it crosses transnational borders, the creation of debate and discussion in a hybrid community public sphere, and the role that print media and media events played in constructing this transatlantic and transnational community.

Another important factor encourages us to look at the historical relationship between the Irish and the US Americans as a transnational encounter that has depended on a multiplicity of cultures: some of these cultures were based on shared/lived poverty. Lewis (1959) has suggested that the cultural differences he observed among the poor in Mexico were a 'subculture', rather than a national 'culture' of poverty. He has argued that the culture of poverty sprung from the colonial past and global capitalism rather than any contemporary failings of the Mexican nation. In the case of the US, successive generations of people identifying as 'Irish American' have climbed the economic and social ladder. Whereas African Americans remain disproportionately trapped in low-income, low-status occupations, Irish Americans are by and large middle-class and increasingly associated with conservative political values and movements.

Transnational connections occupy an important cultural and political space in the present-day US. A strong cultural component of the Irish

American culture and identity has been music. Mick Maloney,<sup>4</sup> professor of Music at New York University, has played and studied Irish folk music and explored its emigrant history in the American landscape and small villages. This exploration has gone beyond the confines of the pubs, where Irish folk music received only ‘fugitive attention’. He explored undocumented links between Irish American and Jewish music, on the one hand, and Irish American and African American music, on the other, as well as Irish musical links with Galicia and Africa.

In 2008, Taoiseach (Irish Prime Minister) Bertie Ahern delivered a speech on ‘Ireland and America: Our Two Republics’ to a Joint Meeting of the US Congress in Washington DC. He asserted that to be an Irishman among Americans was to be at home. He invoked Charles Stuart Parnell<sup>5</sup> who had turned to the US and stated how Irish leaders longed to emulate the achievements of the US, particularly the principles of liberty, equality and justice. Ahern recalled the words of the 1916 Proclamation, so resonant of the US Declaration of Independence: ‘The Republic guarantees religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens, and declares its resolve to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and of all its parts, cherishing all the children of the nation equally’.

He moved on to the topic of the 9/11 terrorist attack on the US, recalling Father Mychal Judge, the chaplain of the New York Fire Department and the son of Irish immigrants from County Leitrim. Father Judge had rushed to help and eventually lost his life in trying to rescue people from the World Trade Center. Yet, Judge’s association with the Fire Department reminds us

<sup>4</sup> Mick Maloney passed away in July 2022, at the age of seventy-seven. His loss was mourned by American and Irish academics and musicians. See <https://www.meathchronicle.ie/2022/07/28/death-of-johnstons-musician-dr-mick-maloney/>; <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/01/arts/music/mick-moloney-dead.html>

<sup>5</sup> In 1878, an agricultural crisis in Ireland seemed to threaten a repetition of the terrible famine and the mass evictions of tenant farmers of the 1840s. Irish landlordism had become very unpopular. The Irish Land League was founded in 1879 by a Fenian, Michael Davitt. Parnell was its first president, thus becoming the centre of the great ‘new departure’, the national movement in which revolutionary methodology was combined with agrarian agitation. Parnell organised widespread land agitation in Ireland. Due to problems with his methods, thirty-six Irish members were suspended from the Parliament.

that, along with the police of cities with large Irish immigrant populations, the occupation of fireman was a traditional pathway out of poverty for men of Irish origin. Such pathways were also essentially ‘white’ and characterised by dismissive and racist behaviour, particularly towards poor African-Americans, Hispanic Americans, indigenous or Native Americans and other people of colour. Another person whom Ahern recalled in his speech was Annie Moore, an Irish girl, aged only fifteen, from County Cork. She was the first immigrant to pass through the Ellis Island Immigration Station when it was officially opened in 1892.

The US was an important centre for the exchange of political ideas. The Irish forged important transnational alliances to consolidate their freedom movement in the 1920s. De Valera’s speech addressing the Gadar Party (Indian radical nationalists) in 1920 is very significant in this context. Several Irish American newspaper reports and journals from between 1915 and 1922 show intensifying Irish nationalism in America (Atwal, 2021; Silvestri, 1998). The British heightened their vigilance over these Irish groups in America, which were historically already well entrenched as Fenians in the 1860s and later in the 1920s as members of the Irish Republican Army (IRA).<sup>6</sup> It is notable that the American government took no action against the Irish Americans who had conspired with the German embassy to organise the 1916 Rising. Yet, they cracked down hard when US-based members of the Indian nationalist Gadar movement attempted a similar initiative in alliance with the Germans. The chief suspects were prosecuted in a conspiracy trial in San Francisco in 1917–18. The explanation for the different treatment received by Irish and Indian separatists who conspired with Germany surely relates to race. The US government was hostile towards non-white independence movements generally. In 1898, the US had taken over Spain’s role as colonial power in the Philippines, and from 1916 onwards, it was very alarmed by activist Marcus Garvey’s transnational ‘Back to Africa’ movement which threatened to destabilise race relations in the US and across the colonised world.

<sup>6</sup> O’Halpin (2008) has shown how during World War II, although Irish neutrality existed in the context of Anglo-Irish relationship, the networks of British espionage and intelligence remained intact.

Other political events in Ireland deeply impacted the immigrant Irish population (for example, the land war of 1879–81; the various Home Rule campaigns of 1886, 1892–93 and 1912–14; the 1916 Easter Rising; and the Irish Civil War of 1922–23). Scholars have addressed the question of how the US proved to be a critical theatre of war in the Irish revolutionary movements. Nyhan's (2016) edited volume is extremely helpful for understanding ethnic allegiances in the neutral US, revolutionary networks and diaspora nationalism. The new century has seen a sustained transnational exploration of the Indo-Irish-American connection in the broader context of emerging nationalist challenges to imperial rule in a world transformed by the Great War, as well as the collapse of the German, Austro-Hungarian and Russian empires (O'Malley, 2008; Silvestri, 2009).

In recent years, in Ireland and India historical mutinies (the 1857 Revolt and the 1920 Connaught Rangers Mutiny by Irish soldiers in India) came to be interpreted against the backdrop of revisiting the empire and to some extent reimagining India and Ireland, based on the notion that there exists a shared revolutionary past linked to the global convulsions caused by the success of the Bolshevik revolution in Russia (Atwal and O'Halpin, 2021). Such trans-national histories help understand the process of decolonisation in some ways; events with a commonality of purpose have been recalled and re-examined, although most such studies have concluded that nationalism rather socialism was the main driver of revolution for colonised peoples.

Ireland has been enormously successful in transforming revolutionary memory (both real and imagined) into a public history which transcends its own national boundaries and thrives on the Irish diaspora. This public history appears to be primarily dependent on state patronage and is largely a shared history. One can see the employment of historians and historical methods outside of academia: in government, private corporations, the media, historical societies and museums, and even in private practice.

### **The Famine Museum and Archive: From Pain to Remembrance**

A discussion on the historiography of the Irish diaspora in America is important, as immigrants have been largely contextualised by the historic Great Famine that gripped Ireland from 1845 to 1850. There has been substantial research on the factors leading to the emigration from Ireland. Push factors have been illustrated by several historians. David Fitzpatrick in his rich study

has drawn our attention to the fact that the Irish Americans came from countries which can be considered ‘backward’ (Fitzpatrick, 2020, p. 129). It is peculiar that these ‘backward’ emigrants should have chosen the more expensive passage to America rather than to Britain. Fitzpatrick thus has conceptualised the emigration as a chain movement.

Robert Kennedy and Cormac Ó Gráda (1980) have looked at the emigration process in the context of the economic modernisation of Ireland. Historians have also argued that the Irish emigration was ‘not a social necessity, but a political oppression’. Miller has suggested that the Irish question had more universal import as it was defined in Anglo/Irish terms (those of conflict). This universal import came to be understood as an adjustment of Irish identity and culture, both personal and national, to the demands of the modern industrialising world. Irish American nationalism linked Ireland’s past to the politicisation of the Irish Americans, thus making *psychic modernisation* possible (Miller, 1980, p. 97). McCaffrey, who wrote in the 1980s, believed that American Catholicism had de-ethnicised the Irish. Irish nationalism therefore had been diluted. The question of business had taken over the question of politics. Culturally, Irish America exists in a ‘cultural nowhere’ (McCaffrey et al., 1987, p. 178).

Valuable research has been accomplished on the American reception of Irish immigrants during the peak of the famine. On Staten Island in New York, a special quarantine hospital was set up in 1848. It was common practice for shipping agents to send ill or destitute passengers to private hospitals where they were more likely to die due to lack of care. Most of the poor Irish immigrants were given transatlantic tickets by agents without advance payment, and some of the immigrants were not able to pay the cost upon reaching the US. These would be sent to the poorhouse (associated with the agent or his connections) in order to work to pay off the cost of travel. Charitable efforts were made by the Society of Friends, synagogues and the Catholic Church. Irish men who had been naturalised were eligible to vote after 1845. The Whig Party perceived the Irish immigrants as a source of danger in terms of employment and political agency. Knobel (1986) has suggested that, during the decade and a half immediately preceding the Civil War (the antebellum period), the relatively benign ‘Paddy’ of the Irish immigrants in the 1820s transformed into the depraved and degraded ‘Paddy’ suitable only for the crudest occupations.

However, during the Civil War, this image was transformed once again due to changing ethnological views, partly as result of the Irish contribution to the war effort. This was also the consequence of a new, more confident image of US nationalism which was a result of the Civil War.

Tammany Hall assisted in the naturalisation of the immigrants. This led to the rise of John Kelly, the son of Irish immigrants, who became an alderman in 1854.<sup>7</sup> By the 1850s, there were several factors that led to the political strengthening of the Irish among all other immigrant groups. The Emigrant Industrial Savings Bank (EISB) further helped the Irish to build communities in New York. ‘Dagger John’ Hughes, an Irish immigrant, fought for state funding for Catholic children.<sup>8</sup> After his failed attempts at fund-raising, he initiated the construction of parochial schools for New York’s Catholics. Irish immigrants continued to pour into New York City until 1892, when Castle Garden was supplanted by Ellis Island. The immigration pattern was quite steady from the 1850s until 1914. While the Catholic Church was a powerful element in the consolidation of Irish society in America, some ethnographic studies on migration have revealed that the New Irish immigrants (those who entered between 1890 and 1920) were largely ‘Americanised’ in the streets and the churches of the US between 1900 and 1930. Furthermore, many Irish Americans descended from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century immigrants were Protestants. Barret and Roediger (2005) have explored this characteristic. They claim that the community was divided also between the upwardly mobile ‘steam heat’ or ‘lace curtain’ Irish and more recently arrived ‘greenhorns’ and ‘shanty’ Irish, many of whom remained in the labouring ranks alongside Slavic and Italian immigrants (Barret and Roediger, 2005, p. 5).

In a similar vein, Hout and Goldstein (1994) have shown how 4.5 million Irish immigrants became 40 million Americans. Several factors have worked to explain Irish growth in the US. They were religiously diverse, reasonably educated and dispersed throughout the US, although the majority are descendants of the Irish settlers along the East Coast and in the Northern and Midwestern

<sup>7</sup> He orchestrated Irish control over City Hall, which lasted until the World War II.,

<sup>8</sup> John Hughes served as Archbishop of New York between 1842 and 1864. Originally, he was from County Tyrone in Ireland.

states. Moreover, they remained ‘close’ to Ireland, which contributed to the size of the Irish American population in the 1980s.

In Meagher’s (1986) excellent edited volume on the cultural adjustments made by Irish immigrants, historians have observed several interesting patterns and present an overview of Irish efforts to develop cultural accommodation with the natives in Worcester, Massachusetts, throughout the decades between 1880 and 1920. Different essays trace the rise of political leadership amongst the Irish American population. For instance, in Philadelphia, a city with a complex and mature Irish social structure, Irish immigrants became conscious of their ethnic status in a newer and more positive way as Irish American leaders emerged. Ellen Skerrett (1986), in her chapter on Chicago, has examined the role of the Catholic Church in the Irish immigrants’ adjustment to the city from 1880 to 1920.

The image of the Irish immigrants as builders of America has become popular over the years. An iconic 1932 photograph titled ‘Lunch atop a Skyscraper’ shows eleven Irish American ironworkers eating their mid-day meal on a 850-feet -high girder over downtown Manhattan.<sup>9</sup> This portrait of Irish American workers was published in *The New York Herald-Tribune* on 2 October 1932. Unfortunately, there exists no additional information about the workers or the photographer. However, the well-known photograph has served to magnify the romanticisation of the Irish working-class image in the US.

Archives containing letters and accounts of Irish immigrants dating to the period since the 1840s have now mushroomed across the US and Ireland. Some letters have been used to explain the suffering, pain and expectations of these famine-driven immigrants in the context of various projects. For instance, *Re-imagining migration* was established in partnership with leading scholars at UCLA’s Graduate School of Education and Harvard’s Project Zero. The Rutgers University Libraries Special Collections also have rich holdings of immigrants’ letters. For example, Mary Garvey,<sup>10</sup> an Irish

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/lunch-atop-a-skyscraper-photograph-the-story-behind-the-famous-shot-43931148/>

<sup>10</sup> Letter from Mary Garvey, Irish immigrant, to her mother, 24 October 1850, <https://doi.org/doi:10.7282/T3707ZXM>



**Figure 3.2** Irish American ironworkers, 1932. Source: Rockefeller Center Archives, <https://www.rockefellercenter.com/magazine/arts-culture/lunch-atop-skyscraper-irish-immigrants/>

immigrant, worked as servant for Rescarrick Moore Smith, a Hightstown businessman and New Jersey State Treasurer; her preserved letter was dictated to and transcribed by Smith's daughter, Mary Elizabeth. In this letter to her mother in Ireland, Garvey asked after various family members and friends. She also repeatedly asked her mother to consider leaving the 'poor state of Ireland' to emigrate to America. Moreover, she discussed her work duties, wages and social life.

The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, displaying great sensitivity to the Irish immigrant question in its online texts, openly states that 'fueling anti-Irish attitudes was the view that the Irish were a nonwhite, racially inferior group, a view informed by existing British attitudes that saw Irish physical and social attributes as dangerous and subhuman'. One of the many letters which are highlighted on the society's website consists of that of Hannah Curtis to

her brother John Curtis, dated 24 November 1845.<sup>11</sup> Hannah wrote to her brother John with great anger. Hannah felt that he, and the other members of her family, had forgotten her now that they had settled in America. She told of the way in which relatives had been sending prayers for their family members' safe passage to the US, as well as the declining state of Ireland in terms of labour, famine and disease.

Other important developments in the research on Irish emigration include the emergence of the Mellon Centre for Migration Studies, located at the Ulster American Folk Park, outside Omagh in Northern Ireland. This centre was established in 1998 and comprises three main elements: the Library, the Irish Emigration Database and a teaching and research programme.

Recently, the gender question has acquired centrality in Migration Studies. Jennifer Redmond (2018) has explored the Irish women's immigration to Britain and shown how morality, keeping 'respectable' and upholding the religious values imbued in Ireland were markers of success, in a way in which they were not for the female immigrants' male counterparts. She has also looked at the role of religious societies (such as the International Catholic Girls' Protection Society) in defining cultural and moral codes for immigrant women.

Leanne McCormick's research has been featured in a new exhibition titled 'Bad Bridget', highlighting the adversities that many women and girls faced when they migrated from Ireland to North America in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. McCormick has explained the reason behind the exhibition title as follows:

We chose Bridget as it was both a really common name for Irish women in the nineteenth century, but also Bridget, or Biddy, was the term used to refer to Irish women who worked as servants in American homes – often in a derogatory way. We hope that visitors to the exhibition come away with more understanding of how tough it can be to be a migrant, to leave your home, to be away from family, friends and support networks. That this might influence the way migrants today are viewed.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> History Society of Pennsylvania, <https://hsp.org/education/primary-sources/letter-hannah-curtis-to-brother-john-curtis-november-24-1845>

<sup>12</sup> Leanne McCormick, <https://www.ulster.ac.uk/news/2022/april/uu-researcher-supports-launch-of-bad-bridget-exhibition>

In a recent article, Breathnach (2022) has argued that limited knowledge of medico-legal dictates often brought poor Irish immigrants into conflict with public health authorities in New York and Boston in the years following 1852. She has suggested that Irish immigrant women were ill-equipped for life in urban settings where public health authorities and instruments such as the decennial census from 1860 and the Dillingham Commission 1907–11 singled them out as exhibiting ‘problematic behaviours’. Although voluntary in-patient hospitals were established in Manhattan, they proved to be short-lived due to funding deficits.



**Figure 3.3** Famine Memorial in Dublin. Source: <https://www.anphoblacht.com/contents/22366>

In a recently published volume on gender history, Fitzpatrick (2022) has suggested that the question of epigenetics and its public health consequences, both physical and mental, as well as of deprivation and illness in mothers, in particular in the late 1840s, now witnesses a raised profile on the research agenda. The emigrant flow to the US was more female-dominated than that to imperial destinations (that is, Great Britain), but women were also beginning to make up a majority of those crossing the Irish Sea to Britain after 1890.

Irish American women exhibited political consciousness as a result of their early experiences with colonialism. In the 1880s, women created and participated in a vibrant Ladies' Land League in the US. The Ladies' Land League was an effort initiated in Ireland by Anna and Fanny Parnell, with the aim to help raise funds in order to mitigate the after-effects of the Great Famine and to keep starvation at bay. The movement resonated in the US and found remarkable success. In her seminal work, Janis (2008) has observed that members of the Ladies' Land League made no mention of taking up of arms against England, Ireland's political enemy. Moreover, physical warfare and military action were exclusively for males, while females were expected to base their lives on societal codes and norms. (Later on, in the 1980s, one of the main challenges of the Irish community was the difficulty in pushing the US to pursue an anti-UK agenda.)

Significantly, the efforts by scholars of Irish History and Irish Studies across Ireland and America have been to not simply trace ancestry in the interest of family histories or local history, but also to attempt providing a closure to the painful and horrific aspects of the immigration experience, through setting up museums and memorials. One such spectacular memorial is the Irish Famine Memorial in New York. It was inaugurated in 2002, with plants and stones imported from all thirty-two counties of Ireland. The paths lead to a viewing point 25 feet above street level, which permits views of the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island. Later on, a renovation repaired the damage caused to the site by the waters of the Hudson River. Lee (2012), in his thought-provoking essay, situates the memorial in the debate on holocaust museums in the 1990s. While there exists a strong collective memory of pain and dislocation amongst the Irish Americans, victimhood alone was the basis for several memorials that mushroomed in the 1990s. Hence, scholars felt some discomfort about this common basis and the conflation of diverse, decades-long experiences of the Famine. This



**Figure 3.4** New York Irish Famine Memorial at Battery Park. Source: <https://irishfaminememorials.com/2014/01/16/battery-park-city-new-york/#jp-carousel-362>

engagement with memorials, with their objectives and designs, constitutes a crucial area of research for historians of the contemporary world.

### Conclusion

At present, Ireland and the Irish Americans are linked through traditional historical and global issues. The trope of rights – gay rights, abortion rights

and adoption rights – all resonate very strongly in both the US and Ireland, although polling evidence indicates that Irish Americans have become increasingly conservative in social and economic terms. The presence of diverse non-white immigrant populations in the US have seen Irish Americans benefit, not because they are sympathetic to such new arrivals, but rather because they are white.

There is a need to study the transnational advocacy networks (TANSs) associated with the Irish diaspora and their impact on American diplomacy. The 1990s turned out to be a landmark decade for Ireland in terms of political gains. The Northern Irish nationalist leader John Hume mobilised his American connections, the US government and key leaders of both major political parties to persuade the IRA and Ulster Loyalists to cease their terror campaigns and participate in peace negotiations, brokered by President Bill Clinton's administration; this resulted in the signing of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement.

There has been a variety of cultural outcomes of the Irish immigration, as represented in terms of cinema. Epitomised in John Houston's 1952 classic *The Quiet Man*, Hollywood has dealt with the most dominant aspects of Irish lives in America. Some examples of films depicting the emotional and psychological issues of both individuals and families are *In America* (2002), *Brooklyn* (2015) and *The Devil's Own* (1997).

In conclusion, although Ireland is now one of the world's richest economies, and although the Irish people can now freely travel and work throughout the European Union, as well as in the post-Brexit United Kingdom, the US undoubtedly remains the most desired destination for emigrants. This is because for several centuries America was the promised land for impoverished Irish emigrants, because the US has a well-established Irish diaspora, because English is the national language, and because through cinema, television, the internet and social media it is culturally so familiar to Irish people, long before they leave Irish shores.

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# 4

## TRANSNATIONAL EXPERIENCE: THE ARMENIAN DIASPORIC COMMUNITY IN THE US

*Ani Yeremyan*

### **Introduction**

This paper is a brief account on the Armenian community in the US. In order to understand the trajectory of the diaspora formation in the host country, an overview of the Armenian diaspora is necessary. According to various sources, there are currently more than a million Americans of Armenian origin in the US. Most of them settled in the host country during and after the Genocide in the Ottoman Empire in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. As a diasporic community, the Armenians rose from a highly racialised host society and without a nation-state behind them. Bearing the memory of the lost homeland and facing challenges in their new environment, Armenians managed to achieve high social status within the host society, due to their education, knowledge of languages and flexibility in terms of integration. This eventually helped them to overcome racial discrimination against the diasporic community, on both the legal and social level. In due course, they were included within the category of ‘whiteness’. In addition, thanks to their successful integration and their hard work to raise awareness about the Armenian Genocide, it did not come as a surprise when on 24 April 2021 (Genocide Memorial Day), President Joe Biden made a statement on the Armenian Genocide:

Each year on this day, we remember the lives of all those who died in the Ottoman-era Armenian genocide and recommit ourselves to preventing such an atrocity from ever again occurring. Beginning on April 24, 1915, with the arrest of Armenian intellectuals and community leaders in Constantinople by Ottoman authorities, one and a half million Armenians were deported, massacred, or marched to their deaths in a campaign of extermination.<sup>1</sup>

Scholarly discussions on diasporas as ‘communities of transnational moment’ (Tölölyan, 1996) may be particularly relevant in respect to the Armenian community in the US. It would be accurate to say that their tragic memories of genocide transcend the heterogeneity of their identities, thus linking the members of the community based on the experience of a ‘victim diaspora’. Furthermore, the Armenians’ transnational experience will be discussed in this chapter, based on their philanthropic activities across borders; despite their complex belonging, the community members have successfully established ties among various spaces.

### **Overview of the Armenian Diaspora**

In the early 1970s there emerged a rising interest in Diaspora Studies, and the case of the Armenian diaspora served as a classic example for a number of scholars. Like most diasporic nations, the Armenian nation also has its diaspora scattered all around the world. Due to historical reasons, out of 11 million Armenians more than between 8 and 8.5 million live far from their homeland. About 3 million Armenians live in post-Soviet countries, while 2.5 million live in America, Europe, the Near and Far East, Africa and Australia (Dallakyan, 2004, p. 8). Many authors believe that, from the dawn of their history, the Armenian people settled in different foreign countries in massive numbers. There were several reasons, but mainly this was due to exile and forced resettlement (Dallakyan, 2004, p. 3). Hence, the Armenian dispersion or *espiurk* is an ancient phenomenon. As Panossian has rightly noted, writing about Armenia and the Armenians entails writing about

<sup>1</sup> Statement by President Joe Biden on Armenian Remembrance Day, 24 April 2021, *The White House*, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/04/24/statement-by-president-joe-biden-on-armenian-remembrance-day/>

dispersion and diaspora (Panossian, 2006, p. 1). The major cause of dispersion was the loss of sovereignty over its territories and invasion by nomadic groups, until the present borders were fixed in 1921 (Walker, 1981, p. 11).

Based on historical records, the earliest banishment of Armenians took place in the sixth century AD, by the Byzantine emperor. This resulted in occupations related to long-distance commerce for many Armenians, which continue to today (Cohen, 2008, p. 3). However, it is generally accepted that the modern diaspora was caused by genocide. Based on this understanding, the scholarly literature on the Armenian diaspora classifies it as a ‘victim’ diaspora, as a conflict-generated diaspora which serves as example of an ‘archetypal’ (Armstrong, 1976, p. 394) diasporic community. Therefore, the term ‘diaspora’ has often been applied to Armenians by themselves as well as by others (Cohen, 2008, p. 48). Crucial historical events that led Armenians to be characterised as a victim diaspora were the massacres of the late nineteenth century and the forced displacement (of 1.75 million people) in 1915–16 by the Ottoman Turks, to Syria and Palestine. Many Armenians subsequently migrated to France and the US.

Apart from subjugation by foreign invaders, long-term economic and cultural decline also constituted a reason for the dispersal and formation of the Armenian diaspora (Armstrong, 1976, p. 394). The Armenian diaspora, as a ‘victim’ and ‘archetypal’ diaspora, emerged as a result of trauma, ethnic cleansing, forced migration and exile. However, many other reasons within the history of the Armenian state and the Armenian people equally caused migration from the homeland.

Located at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, Armenia witnessed a history of struggle against foreign invaders to preserve its statehood, faith, territory, culture and, finally, its identity (language, religion, folk traditions and marriage institution within the diasporic community). For many centuries, Armenia had been a marketplace for the exchange of goods from both Europe and Asia. It is not surprising that the great empires of the ancient world constantly sought to extend their way into the Armenian highlands (Lang, 1970, p. 184). This largely affected the dispersal of the Armenian people from their homeland. In this sense, several turning points later played a significant role for the formation of their ‘diasporic identity’ in different host countries worldwide. Therefore, writing about the Armenian diaspora presupposes

writing about the Armenian identity and cultural heritage, as they emerged in different diasporic communities far from the homeland, exhibiting different features in different periods.

A turning point for the evolution of the modern Armenian diaspora and the Armenian identity was the Genocide in the early twentieth century. Robin Cohen has noted that the most traumatic event in Armenian history happened in 1915, when Ottoman Turks massacred and deported Armenians: ‘On the night of 23 April 1915 political, religious, educational and intellectual leaders were murdered’ (Cohen, 2008, p. 49). In fact, some Armenian authors, such as Minasyan and Vardanyan (2010), have considered the Armenian diaspora as one that emerged only after these atrocities led to exile. The Genocide forced Armenians worldwide to carry out a ‘struggle’ for preserving their national identity, by establishing churches, schools and other organisations (Minasyan and Vardanyan, 2010, p. 5). These events resulted in the formation of a global Armenian diaspora, ‘which today enjoys “classic” diaspora status’ (Dahinden, 2010, p. 67). We can rightly say that this period marked the emergence of an *institutionalised* multi-local Armenian diaspora that was established from East to West, not only by wealthy merchants or their networks, but also by various other groups. ‘Nation’ and ‘national identity’ was (re)interpreted and reformulated anew during this period. History, common myth and new symbols became important in those times. These narratives either inscribed the nation into ancient times or took a particular date from the past to build the Armenian identity around it. Needless to say, each of these dimensions had a different set of myths, symbols and imaginations that defined Armenianness. But despite these differences, ‘the subjective sense of belonging to the nation overrides the symbolic, and even cultural, variations inherent in the widely dispersed collective known as the Armenian nation’ (Panossian, 2002, p. 126).

The tragic events and the loss of homeland received expression in the writings and poems of Armenian poets. Here is one example by Gevorg Emin:<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Translation from Armenian into English by Tatul Sonentz-Papazian, currently Director of the Publications Department of the Armenian Relief Society.

**We**

And what were we  
 And our land?  
 Let us stand tall, and tell the truth!  
 If a vessel – then on dry rock;  
 If a cask – then full of tears;  
 If soil – then petrified by fear;  
 If stone – then screaming with pain;  
 A mighty spirit, devoid of body;  
 A unique quality, devoid of quantity;  
 Valiant, yet without army,  
 A creed of antiquity and relics . . .  
 And what were we  
 And our land?  
 Even if we told the truth, standing tall –  
 Tourists all, in our own homeland;  
 Guests in our own home and hearth;  
 River, with only one bank in our view;  
 Mountain, visible only from far;  
 Land without people;  
 People without land,  
 And scattered beads, that never gather.  
 We are half deaf,  
 Though acutely aware of any new sound,  
 Yet unable to fall in line and follow;  
 In our ears,  
 Rumbles the chaos of Armenia's history  
 Trying to turn into clear words.  
 We are half lame,  
 For wherever we set foot –  
 On Syrian sand,  
 On a Paris sidewalk,  
 On the banks of the Nile,  
 Our other foot  
 Is sunk in the snow of Massis Mountain,  
 And we do not walk,  
 We do not reach,  
 We only trace  
 The closed circle of our exile  
 Wandering endlessly around Massis . . .  
 We are half blind;  
 Our eyes were always wet with tears,  
 And we see things in a mist,  
 Incomplete;  
 We have built only with one hand,

Forced to hold a weapon with the other,  
 With incessant warfare on our land.  
 We are half mute;  
 They have cut off our tongue so many times,  
 Preventing us to speak our thoughts . . .  
 So that we may not rejoice in our joy,  
 To stand proud with our pride  
 And . . . not to mourn our countless dead.  
 We fall in love like Ara;  
 It always seems to us,  
 That we leave our land with feelings of love  
 And . . . the fear of a new Semiramis.  
 We are assessing the world with half a brain,  
 The other half has gone dark  
 With curses  
 And pain . . .  
 Bisected –  
 We are halved,  
 Had we not been half,  
 We would be Armenian,  
 Not Turkish-Armenian,  
 Not French-Armenian,  
 Or Arab-Armenian,  
 (And tomorrow, Star-Armenian  
 Or Moon-Armenian . . .)  
 We are half,  
 Bisected,  
 Split,  
 Bi-summitted  
 Like our Mountain, our sacred symbol . . .  
 But, as our split Massis Mountain is our witness,  
 As our half, slaughtered at Der Zor, is our witness,  
 And that half,  
 Which is me,  
 Which is you, and the other,  
 We shall unite  
 And become whole,  
 Finding someday the unattainable way  
 Of becoming one . . .  
 We are small, yes,  
 Small,  
 Like a stone breaking loose from a mountain top,  
 That has the clout of a rock fallen in a field;  
 Small, like our mountain streams,

that have dammed up enormous might,  
 Unknown  
 To the languid rivers of the valley.  
 We are small, yes,  
 We are small,  
 But like the bullet in the barrel,  
 Like the seed of the oak tree in fertile soil,  
 A nugget of gold,  
 That looks from above  
 Upon lead and tin;  
 We are small,  
 But we are spice . . .  
 That pinch of salt,  
 That gives taste to an entire meal . . .  
 We are small, yes –

Who told you  
 To squeeze us with such force  
 That . . . turned us into diamonds?  
 Who forced you  
 To scatter us like stars,  
 So that you always see us  
 Wherever you go . . .?  
 We are small,  
 But, like our country,  
 whose boundary  
 Stretches from Biurakan to Luna, the Moon,  
 and from Lunavan to Urartu . . .  
 Small,  
 Like that awesome Uranium,  
 Which, for century after century  
 Radiates  
 Emitting its light  
 With no end in sight . . .

This poem indicates the ambivalence of homeland. Although the author lives in eastern Armenia, he still feels like a tourist there. For him, his real homeland is in western Armenia which is now lost to the past and maintained only through memory. Thus, because of the loss of his homeland and because of the scattering, he, on behalf of the Armenian people, feels himself as half in every aspect. He assigns much importance to the land, the territory, using historical names for the boundaries of Armenia. The mythical aspect is also prevalent here, as he mentions the Biblical Mount Ararat (*Masis*).

It is not surprising that many scholars have accepted the post-1915 period as a breakthrough in the (re)construction of the Armenian identity, which happened in various diasporic communities worldwide. Consequently, in this period two other narratives – of the Genocide (exile) and of the homeland – became prevalent, along with other narratives and myths. In this context, it should be noted that after the Genocide the narrative of ‘homeland’ became ambivalent. The reason is that the majority of modern diaspora communities came from western Armenia, which is now located within the boundaries of eastern Turkey (Kasbarian, 2009, p. 358) and hence no longer within the actual territory of the Republic of Armenia. Due to this ambivalence, the older diasporans had to work out the gap between a mythical homeland and an

actual ‘step-homeland’ on behalf of the present Republic of Armenia (*ibid.*). This occurs because it acts as a substitute for a ‘homeland’, as the diaspora has no historical, physical connection to the Republic of Armenia. Therefore, this ‘historic homeland’ is more spiritual and sustained by myth (*ibid.*, p. 359), which helps to give a sense of unity to the heterogeneous, multi-layered Armenian diaspora (*ibid.*, p. 360). This occurs also because after a few generations the memory about the life and those places in the homeland fades, and it becomes part of a mythical narrative. If the narrative of homeland involves mainly a desire to return home as an important characteristic of diaspora, then in this case even the ‘return to homeland’ becomes ambivalent; there is a notion of a lost homeland in ‘historic Armenia’. Hence, ‘homeland’ may not be a ‘fixed territory to which diaspora can trace its roots’. It can be those sites and cultures rooted in the past with history, memory, as well as the present included in it (Kasbarian, 2009, p. 359). In this regard, the Armenian diaspora is confined to the spiritual, mythical realm and functions as a tool to build group cohesion and identity. Therefore, the Armenian ethnicity, as well as the ‘unity’ among the Armenian diasporic community, is based on shared language, a common religion, a collective memory and remembrance of the Genocide.

However, there exists a divide in the Armenian collective identity. Panossian (2008) has called this a ‘multilocal perspective’. The multilocal identity firstly manifested itself in the differences between the eastern and western dialects of the language. Secondly, in the modern historical period the duality of homeland vs diaspora became actual. As Panossian has noted, two ‘identity points’ narrowed from various centres to two overall tracks: one was the Sovietised republic of Armenia, the other was the post-Genocide diaspora (Panossian, 2008, p. 4).

Gradually, the discourse of identity survival among the first-generation diasporic communities worldwide was replaced by the discourse of the diasporic actor among the second-generation diaspora. As Poghosyan has noted, the second generation established many different structures operating in the diaspora (Poghosyan, 2009, p. 63). Various political parties and charities, such as the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF, the ‘Dashnaktsutyun’), the Ramkavar-Azatakan Party (Labour-Liberal Party), the Social-Democrat Hnchakian party ('Hnchak') and the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) emerged as actors wherever there was a considerable number of Armenians (*ibid.*).

Due to their skills and ability to accommodate themselves within the dominant ethnic communities, the Armenian diaspora turned from a survivor into an *actor*. As Bahar Baser and Ashok Swain have argued, citing the example of the Armenian community in the US, . . .

. . . many Armenians migrated to the US soon after the 1915 Ottoman deportations, and faced harsh conditions in the beginning. They had to adapt to the host-land's culture in order to survive. Yet, due to the education that they received in the host-land and their will to succeed helped them to rapidly climb to the upper ranks of the social and economic ladder . . . (Baser and Swain, 2009, p. 53)

### **Armenian Spaces in the US**

Vartan Malcom in his book *The Armenians in America* (1919) wrote that nearly every Armenian was a refugee as result of the persecution (Malcom, 1919, p. x) perpetrated by the Ottoman Empire. It is also generally known that, prior to the massacres in the Ottoman Empire, Armenians had arrived in North America already in the colonial period. Martin the Armenian and George the Armenian were among the first to land in the host country in the early seventeenth century. Armenians then were already known for silk textile production (Fittante, 2017, p. 3). Vartan Malcom noted that colonial history may indicate that Armenians sought their fortune in those lands, thus becoming some of the first settlers in America (Malcom, 1919, p. xvi).

Intense migration of Armenians to North America may be observed in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when their situation at home became vulnerable. Therefore, a significant number of immigrants came from the Ottoman Empire (Fittante, 2017, p. 4). Fittante has noted that '[b]y World War II, approximately 80,000 Armenians had relocated to the United States' (*ibid.*). Unlike other 'immigrant races' from Southeastern Europe and Asia Minor, Armenian people were skilled labourers; both men and women were educated professionals (Malcom, 1919, p. xvii). During the early twentieth century, the number of the Armenian children studying in US public schools outnumbered the children of other races. Gradually, they successfully integrated in the host country, occupying high social positions.

In this respect, it should be noted that, as a diaspora group, they tended to be quite distinctive, as they turned out to not be a temporary formation

but a community that had a home away from home (Clifford, 1994, p. 308). However, the formation of the community and the re-construction of Armenian identity within the host land happened within a ‘racialised space’. Boris Torosian (2021, p. 32) has noted that Armenian immigrants attempted to find admission into spaces of whiteness within the host space. Therefore, the relationship of the migrants with their host country was, on the one hand, about the legal concept of citizenship and, on the other hand, about ‘belonging’. In the 1900s, the US Naturalisation Bureau found it inadmissible for Armenians to acquire citizenship as they were not considered ‘white’ within the legal framework. Within the framework of racial theories, Armenians were categorised as an Alpine sub-category of the Caucasian race (Craver, 2009, p. 41).

Being persecuted in their homeland, Armenians had nowhere to go; therefore, they initiated petitions and requested numerous meetings with the director of the Naturalisation Bureau. Without citizenship, they would become stateless (*ibid.*, p. 44). We can read in the Bill by the Sixty-First Congress of 5 April 1910 that the category of ‘whiteness’ put forward by the naturalisation law was questioned (*Proceedings of the Asiatic Exclusion League*, 1908, p. 7). One may also notice in this document that the courts ‘admitted citizenship to Syrians and Armenians’ (*ibid.*). The matter was also discussed in the host country’s public sphere. One such article under the headline ‘Citizenship for Armenians: Circuit Court declines to bar them on government’s plea’ appeared in *The New York Times* in 1909. The article discussed the case of four Armenians whose citizenship was granted by Judge Lowell. In his decision, the judge mentioned that ‘the Western Asiatics have become so mixed with Europeans during the past twenty-five centuries that it is impossible to tell whether they are white or they should come under the statutes excluding the inhabitants of that part of the world and applied usually to the yellow race’ (*The New York Times*, 1909, p. 3).

Craver (2009) has described that a trial occurred in 1924. One of the main arguments in support of the Armenians was that, being a sub-category of Indo-European stock, they had for many centuries kept themselves intact from mixing with the people surrounding them. It was also stressed that, as the first to adopt Christianity as a state religion, Armenians were different from their Muslim neighbours and kept themselves apart from them, except in business matters (Craver, 2009, p. 45). The flexibility of the Armenian migrants to be

integrated with Europeans was another asset. In other words, they were ‘consumed in American life’ (*ibid.*, p. 47) due to their communication skills and knowledge of English. Strong linguistic skills characterised them as ‘mobilised’ diaspora (Armstrong, 1976). Combined with the larger pattern of communication skills and their flexibility, this ensured high social ranking for the Armenian diaspora members, resulting in their assimilation into the white American population. Eventually, in the 1920s there were highly educated professionals in the state of California who had mastered both English and Armenian (Craver, 2009, pp. 47, 48). Torosyan has noted that assimilation was intended to resist racial discrimination and that it forced the migrants themselves to assume ‘European racialist ideologies’ (Torosian, 2021, p. 33). Anglo-Saxon moral conduct idealised masculinity, identified with the notion of ‘whiteness’. This indicates that colour or bodily appearance was not the only marker of ‘whiteness’. Ultimately, the Armenian community achieved its legal classification of white through attaining US citizenship with the survival of the 1923 Naturalisation challenge (Craver, 2009, p. 51). Moreover, Okoomian has considered that ‘Armenian whiteness’ was a tool to exclude Asian migrants from racial whiteness (Okoomian, 2002, p. 218).

It should be noted that the concept of ‘race’ was used to institutionalise the ‘minority’ discourse. Clifford (1994) has argued that, in this case, the diaspora discourse complicates the structure of ‘minority’ minorities, as the latter define themselves in a nationalist way (Clifford, 1994, p. 329). In this regard, developing ideas of ‘race’, ‘culture’, ‘gender’, ‘ethnicity’ and ‘diaspora’ also means to materialise the vision of peripheral space within the host country. It may be considered that social practices and cultural differences racialised and classed the diasporic community. Initially, many immigrant Armenians found it difficult to find housing next to the ‘native white Americans’ (Torosian, 2021, p. 35). Consequently, they used to inhabit geographically restricted neighbourhoods. To a certain extent, this made the Armenian diasporic community visible within the host country. However, a geographically segregated neighbourhood also denotes that the community has turned into an institutionalised diaspora with no intention to ‘return home’.

Fresno was the first concentrated settlement of Armenians. It later became the centre of the Armenian diaspora in the US. Fresno’s Armenian community was different from other migrant communities due to its history of oppression

in the homeland from where they had emigrated (Malcom, 1919, p. 88); basically, they were merchants and shopkeepers. Thanks to their business acumen and their prudent living, Armenians prospered in and around Fresno despite racial adversity (Fittante, 2017, p. 6).<sup>3</sup> As Fittante has noted, the success of the Armenian community is reflected in the establishment of various Armenian institutions (schools, churches, the press, restaurants) within their detached diasporic space in the host country (*ibid.*). The press and political parties have played a significant role in the Armenian diasporic space in the US. It is noteworthy that many of the newspapers and periodicals were published by political parties. For instance, *Asbarez*, a daily paper, was founded by the Armenian Revolutionary Federation in 1908. The Armenian parties in the US were not involved in the national politics of the host country, as they were only addressing issues concerning the Armenians. The liberation of the Armenians from the oppression of the Turks and the establishment of Independence were the main issues that the parties discussed in the newspapers. This reveals that for the diasporic community the press was not merely a medium to transmit business news. Rather, it developed a new element, the ‘political’ in the idea of journalism (Habermas, 1991, p. 182), which aimed at communicating the major issues that the community faced, in both host and home country.

Within the diaspora space, religious monthly journals were also of importance. *Etchmiadzin* was one of them, as it represented the interests of the Armenian Apostolic Church (Malcom, 1919, p. 121). As one may notice, most periodicals were founded and published either by a political party, a church, or an organisation. Thus, one may infer that, to a certain extent, a public/political sphere emerged within the segregated diasporic space in the host country. The church was an important element of Armenian identity across various diasporic communities. Yet, it was also the institution through which members of the diaspora expressed their attachment to ‘home’.

Apparently, educational institutions also played a major role in establishing an institutionalised diaspora. The Armenian Educational Society was founded in 1906, by an Armenian merchant in honour of his daughter. The objective of the society was to lend money to needy Armenian students who wanted

<sup>3</sup> Commerce has been a significant characteristic occupation for the Armenian diaspora throughout its history, as well as for various other diasporic communities.

to pursue higher education. The Armenian Students' Association constitutes another important institution; it was established in 1910 and also finds mention in Malcom's book (Malcom, 1919, p. 116).

We may infer that the diasporic community attempted to resist assimilation by inhabiting a detached space within the host country. In other words, the community made efforts to regain the lost 'home' in another space and time. The above-mentioned institutions served this specific purpose. At the same time, as a mobilised diaspora community, the Armenians in the US tried to adapt to and adopt elements of the host culture in order to resist the racialised politics prevalent there.

### **The Contribution of the Armenian Community**

Malcom claimed that 'numerous societies, clubs and associations maintained by the Armenians in the United States are, in most instances, educational and philanthropic. In every colony there is always some sort of movement to support a school or a hospital back in the old country' (Malcom, 1919, p. 113). As is accepted in the scholarly literature (Flanigan, 2017; Brinkerhoff, 2011), philanthropy is one way of expressing diaspora identity. In the case of the Armenians in the US, it provided a specific platform to show their emotional and cultural attachment to the lost homeland. To date, this practice is prevalent within the community, through individual philanthropists.

Names such as Cafesjian and Kerkorian are well-known among the Armenians in the US as well as those in Armenia. Gerard Leon Cafesjian was born in 1925 in New York. As a businessman and philanthropist, he donated to the Armenian Fund USA and the Armenian Assembly of America. He also founded the Cafesjian Centre for the Arts in Yerevan (Armenia). Kirk Kerkorian was another important figure in the Armenian diaspora. Born in Fresno in 1917, Kerkorian is known as one of the figures who shaped Las Vegas and served as CEO of the Tracinda Corporation. Throughout his lifetime, he sent enormous amounts of charitable contributions to Armenia.

Perhaps the most celebrated donation that Kerkorian made was for the film *The Promise*, which tells the history of the Armenian Genocide in the Ottoman Empire. One may assume that, through such activities, a return to home occurred within the diasporic space. Moreover, this type of philanthropy also demonstrates the eagerness to become a well-known member of

the diaspora community and to maintain the connection with the ancestral homeland. In the absence of the ancestral homeland, the philanthropists' contributions were directed either to raising awareness about the question common to all Armenians or to the contemporary Armenian state.

On one hand, establishing certain institutions was meant to raise awareness about the Genocide that the Armenians had experienced in the Ottoman Empire. On the other hand, these institutions also aimed at reinstating the Armenians distinct national identity within the host country. The Armenian Museum of America serves as an exceptional example of these two aims within the diaspora space. The museum was founded in 1985 and represents the largest collection of Armenian objects outside the state of Armenia. As the museum's website states, the objective is to tell the story of the Armenian people through objects and to promote awareness about Armenian culture.<sup>4</sup> To this end, interactive exhibitions, concerts and displays of antique Armenian objects are regularly held in the museum. The institution is also a unique materialised site of memory for the second and third generation of Armenians in the US, so that they can get in touch with their 'roots'. Moreover, from this perspective the museum also produces a sense of 'imagined community' among the members of the diaspora in the US. Constant visits to the museum and the events organised there add to this objective. Interestingly, virtual exhibitions, virtual concerts and classes have converted it into an institution to which Armenians worldwide may gain access as well.

Despite their attempts to assert themselves in the host county, over time the members of the Armenian community in the US became very much immersed in the host society. Being highly educated, they have contributed to different spheres, which demonstrates their hybrid while at the same time flexible identity. For instance, Raymond Damadian (1936–2022) is perhaps the most noteworthy scientists, as the inventor of the first MRI scanner. Thanks to his discovery, the first full-body scan of a human to diagnose cancer could be performed in 1977. Damadian has thus been recognised as the 'Father of the MRI'. Ardem Patapoutian is another US scientist of Armenian origin. Patapoutian won the Nobel Prize in Psychology and Medicine in 2021 and currently serves as professor of Neuroscience at Scripps Research in La Jolla,

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.armenianmuseum.org/>

California. He is one of the many Armenians in the US who migrated from Lebanon. Apart from complicating diaspora-homeland relation for diaspora members, this migration route also complicates feelings of belonging among the community. Although Armenians from Lebanon are well integrated and to some extent even assimilated in the host country, the level of their belonging to the US as well as their sense of ‘home’ present differences. Similarly, Ardem Patapoutian, who was born and brought up in Lebanon, considers that country his home, even though ethnically he identifies himself with the larger Armenian nationality. The geographic parameters of the Armenian nation-state have much less to do with his ethnic identification. Moreover, by reading his public twitter account, one may infer that Patapoutian still experiences complex feelings in terms of belonging to the host country. Despite the fact that, legally, he belongs in the US, he tends to present himself as migrant.

Another Armenian figure born in Lebanon is Noubar Afeyan. His grandfather was a survivor of the Armenian Genocide and settled in Lebanon. In the 1980s, Noubar Afeyan migrated from there to the US and acquired a doctorate in biochemical engineering. His contribution to science has been immense, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, since he is the founder of the biotechnology company Moderna which has focused on producing COVID-19 vaccines.

It is evident that over time these diaspora members with their valuable professional skills contributed not only to the host country but also to humankind in general, despite their conflicting sense of belonging. On the one hand, their achievements have helped them to become respected citizens of the receiving country; on the other hand, there also exists a resistance to asserting their national identity in the host country.

### **Transnational Experiences**

In the scholarly literature, ‘transnationalism’ has been defined based on multiple ties that include both people and institutions beyond the nation-state (Vertovec, 2004). It should be noted that internal institutionalisation in various Armenian diasporic communities is different; it may or may not be present. Due to this heterogeneity, it is difficult to discuss Armenian Diaspora relations as belonging to a single lineage. It should be noted that some scholars think that this heterogeneity will one day serve as a positive resource (Tölölyan and Papazian, 2014).

Although transnational spaces are problematic, a major link among the diverse communities of the diaspora is constituted by a few elite members of the churches. As mentioned above, political parties and organisations such as the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU), also play a significant role in this regard. As a matter of fact, the feeling of loss and the tragic memory of the Genocide established the transnational moment in building a diasporic community. Furthermore, literary works (such as poetry) have also stressed the loss of home, thus adding to the transnational paradigm; in fact, the above-mentioned poem also seeks to unite the heterogenous Armenian communities worldwide. The construction of transnational spaces has added to the process of maintaining the diaspora identity. Despite the problematic sense of belonging, the Armenian diasporic community has managed to become integrated in the host land by producing transnational elements reaching beyond the borders of the nation-state. Transnationalism in this case also implies the multiple belongings of a diasporic being (Alfonso, Kokot and Tölöyan, 2004, p. 3). This is more relevant in the case of the Armenian diasporic population in the US. As discussed above, on the one hand, Armenians play a major role in contributing to the homeland and to the Armenian communities worldwide. On the other hand, they are loyal citizens of the host country.

The age of advanced telecommunications adds to the new methods connecting diaspora groups and producing more vibrant transnational communities. The second war of Nagorno Karabagh (Artsakh) may serve as a relevant example here. Hybrid identities with multiple belongings resulted in a show of loyalty to the Armenian homeland, through donations, online campaigns and awareness-raising activities on various digital platforms. In this respect, '[d]iasporas are the exemplary communities of the transnational moment', as put forward by Khachig Tölöyan (1991, p. 3). Global networking on social media helped to bring together and integrate hybrid identities during the war. The peaceful protest organised by the Armenian community in Los Angeles, meant to demand truthful war coverage, in front of the CNN headquarters, constitutes one of the events mobilised through social media. Another relevant event consisted of the march of more than 100,000 Armenians in Los Angeles, which brought together Armenians from various parts of the US to influence the international community (Yeremyan, 2020, p. 8).

## Conclusion

It may be concluded that in the experience of a long separation, both temporal and spatial, from the homeland becomes a building block for a transnational community based on longing for the old country, the memory of trauma and the loss of ‘home’. Various social and political institutions contribute to constructing a transnational diasporic being that expresses loyalty and attachment to both the host land and the homeland. Apart from literature and the church elite, which both evoke keen feelings towards the homeland by transgressing heterogenous identities, in critical moments advanced technologies also play a major role for integrating various diasporic identities.

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# 5

## THE LABELLING OF MIGRANTS AND DIASPORAS IN US MEDIA AND POLICY: A HISTORICAL SKETCH

*Camelia Tigau and Amba Pande*

### Introduction

This historical chapter begins with three brief reflections by migrant writers in the US. The first one belongs to refugee writer Randa Jarrar (2008), half-Egyptian, half-Palestinian, who describes her US life as a place where ‘everybody is half one thing, half another’. In particular, she describes her bewilderment about being in a country that never gets attacked by another.

At night I would wake up and search the room around me for clues about where I was: in Kuwait, in Alexandria, or in Texas. I would take minutes. I had dreams about great fires and swooping airplanes, that the earth in Texas would open up and swallow me. When I woke up and heard birds chirruping, I wondered if this was the calm before the storm and I worried. I would have to remind myself that America was the one that attacks people and that I was safe here, because it was too strong, and no one dared invade it. That would set my mind at ease until I began to feel guilty about being in a place that never gets attacked but attacks others. (Jarrar, 2008, p. 218)

This feeling of being in the most powerful country in the world, where people could make their dreams come true, has accompanied migrants in US history

as the ‘American Dream’. In his wonderful book about ‘the cooking gene’ of the Black population in the US, Michael Twitty, who describes himself as ‘the twelfth generation of slaves in the US’ clearly explains the difference between the US and the American Dream:

I say ‘America’ because the term ‘United States’ conveys politics but not dreams. There is no ‘United States dream’, but apparently, there is an ‘American dream’, so I call out America with all due respect to all lands involved in the legacy of Amerigo Vespucci as if his name above all others was perfect for naming places or dreams. (Twitty, 2017, p. 7)

Even when we believe that the American Dream is a social construction and a metaphor that has widely served the US image, it certainly involves US natives and migrants alike. The present chapter aims to show how the American Dream has been enriched by migrants’ transnationalism, in certain cases at the cost of the countries from which they migrated, a cost that an important part of the migration literature rooted in the 1960s has often described as ‘brain drain’. In his memoir *Out of Place*, Edward Said (1999) has recalled the claim of a certain rabbi he once met in the US, who summoned him to return to Egypt: ‘You should go back. Your people need you. They need doctors, engineers, teachers. There is so much misery and ignorance and illness among the Arabs that people like you are a crucial asset (Said, 1999, p. 279).

Despite such claims and the value that migrants have constantly put into the US as a hegemonic power, the ambivalence towards their presence and integration has been a constant that can be traced in both US legislation and media. Racial and skills-based discrimination promoted the exclusion of foreigners from the US labour market; the distinction between good and bad migrants – that is, those who contribute and those who represent a drain on the system – are not necessarily a new argument of the recent anti-migration rhetoric and populist politics of Donald Trump.

This chapter will introduce the historical background of migrant selection in the US from the nineteenth century to the present, considering particular legislation as well as the perception of migrants in the US, based on an in-depth review of the *New York Times* archives over the past two centuries. We argue that subjectivity and labelling are key to defining

migration policy and diaspora integration in the US. In this way, media and political discourse have direct consequences on the quantity and ‘quality’ of migrants’ acceptance.

Our objectives are two-fold: on one hand, we track the process of how skills came to be as important as race and even displaced the ethnic discrimination of migrants; on the other hand, we aim to prove that, despite the vituperative discourse, the transnational and multi-cultural contributions of skilled migrants have been key to the rise and maintenance of the US as a great power. This narrative entails two other histories: that of skills/occupations, and that on the rise of transnationalism. This study serves as a historical reflection on what ‘skills’ are and as a challenge to the more common and widely-used definition of skilled migrants as professionals with undergraduate or graduate degrees. In fact, we show that all migrants have skills that are needed in the labour market; therefore, foreign agricultural workers, along with IT engineers, among a large variety of other migrant occupations in the US, tend to be transformed into the valuable workforce of the top world economy. The other parallel story concerns the difference between migrants before and after the rise of transnationalism – that is, before and after globalisation. Today’s diasporas are able to maintain links to their countries of origin, thus being more likely to maintain biculturalism and, therefore, integrating rather than completely assimilating into US society.

This chapter is structured in three main parts: (a) theoretical approach; (b) method; and (c) historical and discourse analysis based on Demig Policy Data (1790–2013) and *The New York Times* archives (1850–2021).

### **Theoretical Approach**

This chapter will use two different but complementary approaches to study the history of immigration to the US and subsequent reactions from politicians, public opinion and the media: on the one hand, the historical shortcomings of the US immigration system and, on the other hand, the contributions that expatriates and refugees have made to the American sciences, culture, business and political system, to name just a few. These two views help us understand the paradoxical stand of the anti-immigrant discourse, sometimes led by individuals from former immigrant families, who try to point to foreigners as guilty for the various economic and political crises in US history, labelling them in negative ways.

The first illustrative theoretical approach points to the long-term tendency to reject new waves of immigration to the US, seen to compete with public workers or interrupt the integration of previous diasporas, a line of research followed by Naomi Paik in her book suggestively called *Bans, walls, raids and sanctuary* (2020). Similar to what follows in this chapter, Paik aims to unearth ‘the deep histories that have led to the emphatic embrace of xenophobia, white supremacy, and patriarchy’ (Paik, 2020, p. 2). Her book aims to show that the populist context of the anti-immigrant vitriol experienced under the Trump administration is by no means new. It is based on a historical tendency to select certain immigrants and reject others. ‘The nation of immigrants does not embrace all immigrants’, says Paik (2020, p. 8).

Paik’s work has also shown that categories of migrants (documented vs undocumented, wanted vs unwanted) are created by the law itself, which criminalises the entry of certain workers while allowing the entrance of others. The rich, the talented, or those belonging to certain races – considered more compatible with a white background, preferably of Christian religion and heterosexual – are considered more able to assimilate. As a scholar of law, Paik has proven that crimes exist because laws name them (‘crime is a byproduct of the law’), and this has direct implications on immigration law. Immigrants have been deemed criminals when legislation outlaws foreign workers, and this foundational racism contributes to maintaining and sustaining richness. Says Paik (2020, p. 21): ‘The United States has been, from its very origins, defined as much by whom it excludes as by whom it includes. The range of exclusions has changed over time, from race to gender to wealth, from sexuality to health to ability’.

Her proposal is definitive: rather than reforming certain parts of US immigration law, there should be an ‘abolitionist sanctuary proposal’ or a ‘non-reformist reform’ planned outside the status quo, in which all immigrants already inside the country are absolved from accusations and all newcomers are welcomed based on human rights rather than their qualities. This would help surpass circumstantial policies and plan for a more inclusive future. According to Paik (2020, p. 131), ‘[t]he problem is not Donald Trump. The problem is the United States of America. That means the future is a problem: the predicaments we are confronted with long predicated, and will also long outlast, the current regime’.

Now that the Donald Trump presidency has become part of history, we do indeed see a continuation of previous problems of migrant detention,

deportation and rejection based on new criteria, such as COVID-19 vaccination. Fortunately, the anti-immigrant discourse has not been reproduced by the new president, Joe Biden, who seems to recognise the historical contribution of migrants to the wealth of his country, despite limited possibilities for a change in the US ‘immigration machinery’ (Meissner et al., 2013; Capps et al., 2018).

A second stand that may help us understand Biden’s discourse and, in general, take a more purposeful position comes from recognising the contributions of foreigners to the US economy, politics and sciences (Burke, 2017; Kando, 2018; Bolaños and Tigau, 2020). These authors have described the rise of the US as a hegemonic power after World War II, as in the context of Nobel Prizes received by scientists representing the US, even when they have been born, raised and educated elsewhere. This is a ‘winner takes it all history’, in which the US has become the main attraction for foreign talent who contributes to patents, innovation and multi-cultural society.

Both Burke and Kando start from a ‘presentist’ preoccupation with the recent anti-immigrant discourse to prove that top science in Western countries has historically benefitted from foreign minds and ideas. In particular, historian Peter Burke has detailed the contributions of three types of exiles and expatriates: commercial, religious and academic. He argues that exile becomes a cognitive privilege, particularly worthwhile for countries of destination. Exiles and expatriates tend to reinvent themselves, enter new fields and master new disciplines; in a process of cultural mediation, they ‘deprovincialise’ themselves and also the environments in which they arrive, widening cultural and scientific horizons. The scientific trajectories included in his prosopography would make a list too long to be mentioned here. Political figures such as Henry Kissinger, former Secretary of State, and political scientist Hans Morgenthau, the founder of realism, were both born in Germany but transformed the American political landscape. They may be considered cultural hybrids who mediate between different cultures, adding an additional quality of detachment from the local, so necessary for the objectivity of the scientific process. This ‘bifocal vision’ makes expatriates essential for comparative studies in the Social Sciences and, in general, enhances tolerance and intercultural learning in the US and elsewhere.

While the work of Peter Burke has focused on science, we believe that immigrants of all kinds may be equally useful for a country, depending on the historical moment and circumstances. The recent COVID-19 pandemic has taught us that the undocumented agricultural workers became ‘essential’ to the country’s economy and food safety. The point that we are trying to make in this chapter is that all migrant worker’s contribution and ‘skills’ should be understood in a sense broader than the one required by the knowledge economy.

## Method

North American Immigration history and, in particular, US legislation can be studied from a perspective of ‘friend and foe’ – that is, privileged migrants vs unwanted aliens (Tigau, 2021). We may graphically synthesise this process as a ‘Friend and Foe Matrix of the US immigration System’ (see Table 5.1), based on the screening of US legislation provided by DemigPolicy Data (2013). We identify ten different periods in the US migration legislation, starting from the free movement before the nineteenth century to the present restrictive legislation based on health considerations, among others. In what follows, we will briefly describe the historical context of these different stages in US migration policy, based on testimonies traced in the *New York Times* (hereafter *NY Times*) since 1850.<sup>1</sup>

**Table 5.1** Friends and foes in the US Migration Legislation. Source: Adapted from Tigau (2021).

Migration Stage	Friends (Privileged Migrants)	Foes (Unwanted Aliens)
<i>1. Beginning of Eighteenth through Nineteenth Centuries: Free Movement and Little Regulation</i>	Free white persons of good moral character (1790); colonisers and Europeans (1824)	Paupers (1891)
<i>2. End of the Nineteenth Century: Racial and Historically Based Prohibitions</i>	Japanese (1894)	Chinese (1875–88, 1902, ends in 1943)

<sup>1</sup> Since our media discourse analysis begins with 1850, the year in which TimesMachine makes *New York Times* articles available, this analysis starts in the second period of this matrix.

<b>Migration Stage</b>	<b>Friends (Privileged Migrants)</b>	<b>Foes (Unwanted Aliens)</b>
<i>3. World War I: Agriculturalist Period</i>	Mexican agricultural workers (1917–21, 1942–64)	Charity cases; migrants from enemy nations; the illiterate; Southeast Asians (1917)
<i>4. Interwar Period: The Beginning of 'Skills' Preferences (1921)</i>	The skilled (1921, 1924)	Japanese (1921)
<i>5. World War II and its Aftermath: The Boom of European Refugees</i>	Family reunification with minors and spouses, especially from Mexico and Canada (the US, 1924); displaced persons after World War II, preferably from Europe and skilled (1948)	Mexicans (deportations of 1930, 1954); foreigners who did not comply with language criteria (1941); ban on previous war enemies and sexual minorities (Immigration Act of 1952); Communists (1953)
<i>6. The Cold War Emanicipation / End of Racial Discrimination and the Beginning of Selection Based on Education and Citizenship to Skills Integration</i>	Certain European countries under the category 'preferred class' (1952); workers of distinguished merit (H-1 visa); Cubans (1966, 1982); families of H-1 workers; Vietnamese, Laotians and Cambodians (1975, 1982, 1987); Canadians, especially business-persons (the US, 1988)	Undocumented aliens (the US, 1986)

<b>Migration Stage</b>	<b>Friends (Privileged Migrants)</b>	<b>Foes (Unwanted Aliens)</b>
<i>7. The Human Rights Turn in the 1990s</i>	<p>Refugees from Russia (1990); speciality occupations and employable skills (1990); Soviet Union scientists employed in a biological, chemical or nuclear technical field, in defence projects (1992); business visitors, treaty traders and investors from Canada and Mexico (NAFTA, 1994); Temporary Protected Status: Honduras, Nicaragua (1998), El Salvador (2001); nurses (1999)</p>	Cubans (1994)
<i>8. Cooperation for Twenty-first-century Talent Competition / A Regional Market for Talent</i>	<p>Family-related migration, victims of trafficking and violence and the skilled (American Competitive-ness in the 21st Century Act, 2000)</p>	Terrorists (USA Patriot Act, 1996, 2002)
<i>9. Migration Restrictions in the Populist Stage (after 2017)</i>	<p>Skilled migrants in a limited number, preferably with graduate studies under the America First policy (2017)</p>	<p>Muslims (US, Travel ban of 2017); chain migration/family reunification (America First Policy, US, 2017); caps and temporary hold on H-1B visas (2017, 2018, 2019, 2020)</p>
<i>10. The Migration President and the Post-pandemic Period</i>	<p>Eight-year pathway to citizenship for undocumented migrants, ease of family immigration (Proposal of the US Citizenship Act of 2021)</p>	<p>Central American displaced migrants (Return to Migration Protection Protocols or ‘Stay in Mexico’, 2021)</p>

Apart from being counted as one of the most important newspapers in US history, the *NY Times* will serve as a mirror of political and social perspectives on migration in the US of the last 170 years. As a matter of fact, media discourse can be a powerful tool to shape migration opinions, and from this perspective, the media can be considered as a simultaneously primary and secondary source of analysis. Its importance as a primary source rests on the discourse analysis applied to media as international and domestic actors directly involved in the making of migration policy, while its use as a secondary source refers to the use of quotes from other actors.

The *NY Times* provides a specific search engine called The Times Machine, a browser-based digital replica of all issues from 1851 to 2002, available to subscribers. Articles from the past twenty years are available in interactive digital format. We used the phrase/keyword 'skilled migration' to select 1,238 of those articles from the *NY Times* database. Most of the articles published in the nineteenth century on migration – in fact, very few in number, with only eighteen items – were anonymous.

At present, however, the *NY Times* is one of the world's most famous newspapers, and important US stakeholders and renowned academics have shared their opinions on migration on its pages. Indeed, many of the authors featured by the *NY Times* are not journalists, but opinion leaders and eminent scholars on migration; therefore, studying this particular newspaper allows for an overall view on immigration to the US, not just the *NY Times'* position on the topic. Looking back at the newspaper's history, journalist Warren Hoge has synthesised the role of his journal as follows:

Our business reporting competes with the *Wall Street Journal*, our foreign desk with the *Washington Post* and *Los Angeles Times*, our metro desk with the tabloids. The cultural-news desk competes with some magazines and newspapers, and if the net is cast wide enough geographically, the *Los Angeles Times* provides competition in movies but not in other disciplines. As for coverage of high culture, such as the theatre, we are told by the community that we have undisputed power. They think we do. We dispute this. But since the appearance of power gives power, the perception exists and it carries weight. (Diamond, 1995, p. 329)

Our corpus of news analysis was then carefully revised for any specific labelling in terms of stereotypes, the author and/or readers' framing and contributions

of migrants to the US. The stereotypes we found mainly refer to the historical foundations of hate, the underlying conflict between migrants and the native working class, ‘good’ vs ‘bad’ immigrants judged in terms of their skills and assimilation qualities, as well as stereotypes on banned races and populations such as ‘the Negro’, the Chinese, or the Muslim. We encountered different types of negative and positive framings, such as the ‘American type’ as a combination of races, the American Dream and the issue of guilt concerning internal and international brain drain to the US. Finally, history shows a wide range of migrants’ contributions: economic, cultural, scientific, military, demographic and gastronomic – overall, a list too long to be displayed here in its entirety.

## **Historical Analysis, Results and Findings**

### *The Beginnings: Nineteenth-century Colonisers, Migrants and Open Borders*

The most recent discourse against foreigners is, in fact, emphasising certain patterns of discrimination that already have a long existence in the history of migration legislation in the US. Since the first Naturalisation Act of 1790, US citizenship was granted only through naturalisation, to ‘free white persons’ of ‘good moral character’. Throughout the nineteenth century, the selection of migrants in the US did not depend on their skills but was race-based. This meant that black people or even American Indians born outside US territory were banned from naturalisation (Paik, 2020, p. 22). However, colonisers and Europeans were accepted into the country without too many restrictions, as the US government assumed that European migrants were more suitable for integration and had more compatible moral values. Poor migrants or those in ill health were required to pay a certain amount of money to enter the country. This racialisation was further emphasised towards the end of the nineteenth century, when racial prohibitions were made explicit by the law. The ‘ill and insane’ were not admitted to the country (General Immigration Act of 1882). At that point in time, selection criteria highly depended on ‘able-bodied’ immigrants who could contribute to US agriculture and railway construction.

Since the nineteenth century, we can identify an incipient migration industry and intermediaries such as the Massachusetts Emigrant Aid Company (MEAC), described in the oldest available *NY Times* article on migration (1854). The clients of MEAC were mainly European peasantry,

artisans, tradespeople (pioneer colonies) and native-born Americans who moved from East to West ('Kansas Settlement: Interesting account of the Massachusetts Emigrant Aid Company'. Correspondence of *London Times*, Boston, Wednesday, 16 August 1854). The anonymous author of this 1854 article also described how companies offered philanthropic aid to transport migrants, but later ended up charging rent for occupied land in the US. Interestingly, the founders were the same as those who advocated for the Fugitive Slave Law: the owners of settler companies were supporters of free labour instead of slave labour. This first article on migration included the story of Mr Thayer, who worked hard to be admitted to university, graduated and managed to settle with the help of the MEAC, a success story that illustrates what later would be called the American Dream. In the nineteenth century, the image of the migrant was 'furnished in the shape of human skill and muscle' (being skilled at that time meant being capable of hard labour), a person who may start as an employee and then become an employer. Migrants were seen as pioneers and hard-working; therefore, companies such as the MEAC even offered free transportation to migrants, an expense that would eventually be reimbursed.

This still was a period of brain attraction, with a discourse favourable towards immigration from Europe. Another *NY Times* article from 1865 described Italian skilled emigration to Egypt and suggested that Italians would be a good target population to attract to the US: 'an infusion in the American veins, of Italian blood, which is yet strong and wholesome, would be probably of benefit'. This was so because the Italians in question were mainly skilled labourers, artisans and mechanics. In the same vein, other authors recognised the contributions of the Asian migration to California, at a time when migrants were still seen as colonisers of new territories in the US:

The colonists were skilled in silk culture, a branch of knowledge for want of which we are blundering wildly in crooked pathways that do not lead to prosperity in silk-making. In considering the Asiatic question, fair play and Christian charity demand that credit is given for the unquestioned benefits we have enumerated – resulting from offering a home and freedom to all the children of God, our cotenants on the Earth. (*The New York Times*, 1869)

However, during the Great Depression of 1870, the Chinese started to cause public concern, in particular Chinese women, who were perceived as potential prostitutes. Naomi Paik (2020) has given details on this first ban that equated Chinese women with immoral sexual behaviour and sex work, even as men were allowed to enter the US, because their labour was needed in the US West. ‘This ban – racial and gendered – separated women and children from migrant men for decades [...] in the banned Chinese migrant, the federal government created the original “illegal alien” – a non-citizen who is “unlawfully present” or “commits a deportable offense”’ (Paik, 2020, p. 22–23). In response to this first ban, the Chinese Six Companies, a coalition of mutual aid organisations, mobilised civil disobedience and legal challenges against exclusion. However, the court decided that the provisions of the Constitution did not apply to immigrants under exclusion or deportation orders (Paik, 2020, p. 24).

The first *NY Times* article to critique the large number of immigration arrivals (one in ninety-five persons would be newly arrived, thus an immigrant) was published in 1873. However, the author outlined the economic returns of migration and argued that the same path should be held, with an emphasis on ‘skilled migration’. Most of the features published by the *NY Times* at the end of the nineteenth century defended skilled labour and argued against increasing the head money per immigrant (the cash that migrants were supposed to carry when they entered the country), as their ‘skilled talent’ would allow them to contribute to the economy once they started working (*The New York Times*, 1874).

By 1888, the discussion significantly turned towards the prohibition of labour migration, with the establishment of an act ‘to prohibit the importation and migration of foreigners and aliens under contract or agreement to perform labour in the United States’. In legal terms, an ‘alien’ was a foreigner residing in the country, while ‘foreigners’ were brought from outside. Union labourers were against the hiring of foreigners because then wages were lowered. A discussion of this law followed in the years thereafter. An article from 1890 stated:

In practice, the law has been used as an instrument of oppressing and persecuting highly-skilled labourers, who would be highly useful citizens, and with whom contracts had been made abroad simply because they were more skillful and efficient in their various crafts than anybody that could be found in

this country. In these cases, it has not been a question of wages at all, and, so far from underbidding the natives, the imported foreigners have commanded higher wages than were paid to other workmen in the same line. The more of such men we have, obviously the better we are off. Nothing could be more discreditable to human nature than the spectacle, to which we have repeatedly been treated, of men, themselves foreigners, labouring to prevent foreigners who have arrived later from enjoying the equal protection of the law with themselves. (*The New York Times*, ‘The Contract-Labor Law’, 23 April 1890)

#### *Twentieth-century Twilight: The Agriculturalist Period*

The *NY Times* significantly changed its way of reporting on migration with the turn to the twentieth century, with authors signing their articles and taking a direct position against the prejudices against and discrimination of minorities and migrants. By 1901, concerns were expressed about the lack of growth in the cotton industry, due to the absence of skilled labour. The ‘Negros’ available, said the *NY Times* author, ‘are not disciplined enough for this type of work (they stay up all night to sing or for religious activities, therefore they are sleepy at day time)’. However, the author denied that his comment was a racial prejudice and emphasised that low wages in the South could not compete to bring in workers from the North, so that the Black population remained essential to economic growth.

One of the first pieces to speak openly about prejudice against ‘negros’ was also published in 1901. DuBois (1901) spoke against the restriction of the right to vote based on financial considerations and openly attributed the lack of economic prosperity of the Black population, due to racial prejudice. Said DuBois:

Before the Civil War, the negro was certainly as efficient a workman as the raw immigrant from Ireland or Germany. But whereas the Irishmen found economic opportunity wide and daily growing wider, the negro found public opinion determined to ‘keep him in his place. [...] the candid observer easily sees that the negro’s position in New York City has not been determined simply by efficiency in open competition, but that race, and prejudice has played a large and decisive part. [...] it is impossible for a group of men to maintain and employ itself in open competition with a larger and stronger group.

Thus, according to DuBois, racial prejudice made employment hard to find and also made it difficult to advance in a profession/occupation, which determined the internal migration of the Black population from southern to northern states. ‘Ten per cent of the coloured people are skilled labourers – cigarmakers, barbers, tailors and dressmakers, builders, stationary engineers, and so on’, according to DuBois (1901); ‘however, their labour integration is still difficult as they are perceived as outsiders. In this way, a parallel can be drawn between the Black minority and other newly arrived migrants to the US, whose conditions of labour hardship are similar, despite their skills’. This same topic was approached years later in a book on foreign professionals (Wyche and Alleyne, 2009), building on the idea that foreigners had to double their efforts to advance professionally. Even so, Black people preferred poverty in the North to discrimination in the South. Some were even willing to give up their skills: ‘minorities such as “negros” prefer a good wage in an unskilled job in the North, rather than staying in a skilled position for little money in the South’ (*The New York Times*, 1917); also ‘equality of conditions for work and education would keep negros [in the South – n. a.]’, however, they are ‘best understood and liked in the North’ (*The New York Times*, ‘A light in the South’, 1918).

Other authors took a similar stand against prejudice. Kohler (1901) defended Chinese workers for being ‘honest, frugal, law-abiding, and amiable’, with great intelligence hidden behind their docility. This article came as a critique of the Chinese exclusion act, which criminalised workers in the same way as thieves were seen, rather than attempting to achieve a fair labour distribution. Kohler described the ‘Frankenstein immigration system’ of the US as a violation of all civil liberties.

The first signed article on immigration in the *NY Times* was published in 1901, under the title ‘The Distribution of Migrants’ and signed by Carroll D. Wright, United States Commissioner of Labor (1901). Wright was the first to take the approach of separating professional from skilled labourers and acknowledged similar patterns of mobility of foreign and native workers, from less developed states to industrial areas in the US: ‘the foreign element is adopting the ways of the native element in changing its habitat as industrial interest demand’. This is an interesting approach, as it distinguishes between internal and external brain drain and outlines the importance of human capital to regional development.

More optimistic views recognised that '[t]he American type has always been a composite of many nations' (anonymous article, 2 July 1906) and that foreigners helped the country to fill vacancies in regions affected by internal migration. This was also a time when brain attraction was proposed to sustain America's prosperity. A letter to the editor, dated 6 December 1907, by Lajos Stejner under the title 'Why the immigrant returns' raised the topic of the need for skilled farmers in America and proposed the creation of the 'Immigrant's Agricultural Labour Bureau' to attract workers from abroad, by providing information in languages other than English. There was also increasing concern about how second- and third-generation migrants were leaving agricultural states to move to industrial cities to find better working conditions (Stejner, 1911): 'Immigrants labourers do not wish to stay for farm work, as they are isolated and can only work for half a year'. These are all topics still discussed and valid today, more than a century later, transcending the history of the ongoing problems concerning the immigration system.

By 1911, the discussion focused on the proposal to restrict immigration as it supposedly lowered the standard of living for Americans: 'many of the immigrants are criminals [...] it is necessary to restrict the tide until we have had time to assimilate these and to catch up before letting in more'. Other *NY Times* journalists and featured politicians were against the idea that 'immigrants are alien races that cannot be assimilated'. Due to the low population density of the US at the time, the argument was about correctly distributing migrants all over the country, rather than keeping them all in the cities.

... we have now such machinery of Americanizing them as the former immigrants never had – schools, immigrant classes, the press, labour unions and social and civic organizations, all working toward this one end. And even if some of them do return, they leave here far more than they take away. Some may return with their savings, but they cannot take away with them the subways and the railroads they built here. (*The New York Times*, 1911)

Distinctions began to be applied between good immigrants – that is, productive and with money – and bad immigrants – namely, unable to sustain themselves (interview with the Commissioner on Immigration of NY, William Williams, 1911). Other authors openly recognised the contribution of

immigrants and stated: ‘The supremacy of the white race in the United States has been achieved by the immigration of the last two decades. [...] It is by immigration that the US has achieved absolute supremacy in the Western Hemisphere. Yet the country fears its influx of immigrants. It seems to fear the increase of the white population, although it knows that this is needed to make it the powerful Nation that it is’. This is from an open letter to the editor, which describes the re-migration of farmers from the US to Europe and how food became more expensive as a direct consequence of the lack of workers (‘The re-migrants: The nation depends on the peasants of Europe’, Letter to the Editor by Adalbert Pereuyi, 23 December 1912).

Based on such a discourse, World War I also inaugurated what can be called the ‘agriculturalist period’ of immigration policy. Mexican agricultural workers were particularly appreciated as a substitute for or complement to native workers.

#### *The Interwar Period: Beginnings of the Skills Preference*

The Interwar Period (1918–39) is marked by the discussion on labour shortage, the beginning of ‘skills’ preferences in migrant selection through the Johnson-Reed Act, the ban on Japanese citizens as well as the deportation of political activists under the Anarchist Act of 1919. The immigration bill passed in 1924 specifically banned the ‘Asiatics’, including Hawaiian Japanese, except for professionals. Some politicians even proposed to widen the ban to restrict quotas for Canadians, Mexicans and South Americans. President Calvin Coolidge suggested that the law should define the nation as *not* Italian, Jewish, Asia, disabled, poor and so on, which may have been ‘a source of inspiration for fascists and Nazis around the globe’ (Paik, 2020, p. 27).

American journalists of the time spoke of the ‘immigration Dilemma’ (1920) concerning the need for more workers, as opposed to the desire to integrate new migrants: ‘We desire to keep our Republic free from Europe’s sickness but we don’t like to pay 80 cents an hour to men who remove the snow from the streets. We are torn by irreconcilable desires. Between them stands the migrant’. This article shows the paradox of the immigrant as ‘the goal of our desire and the object of our fear’, which could be solved, according to the author, by ‘working out a sound national labour policy’. Another article from 1923 (*The New York Times*, ‘Employers eager for alien labor’, 28 January 1923)

also supported the idea that immigration control should be led by the Department of Labour, in order to adjust to particular market needs and solve skills shortages caused by insufficient knowledge of the English language.

By 1930, a completely new discussion emerged about the need to attract skilled labour from abroad, due to automation. Interestingly, the US and the Soviet Union were implicitly pictured as direct competitors for skilled workers (Duranty, 1931, p. 10). The topic of America losing immigrants was explored by Dublin (1932, p. 172), who emphasised that 'the emigration era has come to a definite close in America, after 3 centuries'. This article marked the turning point in the discourse on immigration and a different moment altogether, when the author evaluated the contributions of migrants to US history, at the cost of the brain drain for their countries of origin, and the great pressure for their 'Americanisation' – that is, the effort to educate migrants and their children 'to facilitate their orderly absorption to the American life'. Dublin acknowledged the overall contribution of migrants:

One thing is certain, from whatever angle the subject is considered, America through her open-door policy for a century and a half increased her population greatly, added enormously to her health through the development of her resources and built up an empire of unprecedented size, plenty and general happiness. This could not have been accomplished in so short a time except through the free immigration policy of the past. [Immigrants . . .] were thoroughly willing to live on a relatively low standard and to do whatever work was available, menial work in many instances. They filled a definite need. They helped to build up the public works of the country. They were useful citizens, and they gave the country children who had both the capacity and will to achieve all that the country made possible. Then, too, immigration also brought to us a second and superior type of people, namely, those who in their own country had enjoyed economic circumstances and who came here to gain greater political freedom. There were many of this class. They proved to be a great asset to our body politic. They have added vitality to our arts and they have made their contributions to science and the practical affairs of the nation in a hundred ways. They supplied youth, ambition and energy to supply the continent. Immigration to the United States has not meant, as some would have us to believe, a replacement of better by worse people, but a material addition to our numbers and a real addition to our quality and to what is desirable and attractive in the complex of life which make up the United States. (Dublin, 1932, p. 172)

### *World War II and its Aftermath: The Boom of European Refugees*

After 1940, the administration of immigration to the US changed from the Labour to the Justice Department. The Patriot Act issued that year established the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) to ‘secure the nation from the many threats we face’, among them migrants (Paik, 2020, p. 37).

During World War II, the *NY Times* proclaimed the need for a larger military workforce. Some authors turned their interest to Mexicans,<sup>2</sup> while Black minorities were still called ‘negros’ in the media and even in the academic literature. As a consequence of the war and the US alliance with China, the US ended Chinese exclusion (1943) and started receiving displaced war refugees. In 1947, the US took in 15,000 refugees from Europe, of which 40 percent were farmers and the rest artisans, technicians and skilled labour. More would have migrated, had the borders been opened, according to journalists of the era. ‘Spaniards and Italians were favoured because they were most assimilable’ (*The New York Times*, 1947, p. 6). On the contrary, the Black population was still segregated and tended to be under-skilled. A piece by George Streator (1947, p. 29) pointed to the fact that ‘negroes’ were mainly employed as ‘menials’ rather than in skilled jobs.

However, political criteria were introduced for the selection of migrants, as the US banned the entry of communists, nationals from previous war enemies and sexual minorities (1952). There existed a broad framing of the contributions of newcomers, not only in economic but also in political terms, as many considered that ‘newcomers have narrowed the gap in between the political parties’ in the US (Neuberger, 1950, p. 177). Still, others feared that the ‘immigration business’ would affect the national labour market and allow the entrance of subversive foreigners (Walz, 1952, p. 151).

### *The Cold War: Replacing Racial Discrimination with Skills Selection*

The Cold War marked the end of many patterns of racial discrimination in US migration law and the beginning of selection based on education, also considered as discrimination by some authors (Lim, 2017). The quota system ended in 1965: many politicians, including President Lyndon Johnson, thought that

<sup>2</sup> When the US entered World War II, it reversed course: rather than expelling Mexicans, it recruited them (Paik, 2020, p. 85).

it was not compatible with the welcoming American tradition. The collateral damage of the Hart-Celler Act of 1965 consisted of an increase in unauthorised migrants (Paik, 2020), as well as in the brain drain suffered by the countries of origin of skilled migrants.

The ethics of skilled immigration was a major topic in the 1960s. Some journalists defended skilled immigration to the US and denied the problem of brain drain: ‘The Administration has concluded that the “brain drain” has been exaggerated by other countries and that no steps should be taken to curb the migration of scientists and engineers to the United States’. A particular study on the issue ‘was prompted by widespread concern that the United States, through public and private industry programs, was enhancing its technological domination by enticing away the skilled personnel needed by other nations to develop economically and to compete technologically with the United States’ (Finney, 1967, p. 1). Such critiques led to an increase in aid money, to face diplomatic pressure.

Hubert G. Grubel, a scholar from the University of Pennsylvania (Grubel, 1968, p. 185), stated that the margin of brain gain by the US was overstated and that it would be used to tax skilled migrants and exercise diplomatic pressure. Leslie Aldridge Westoff openly acknowledged:

For the United States, importing immigrant professionals is a cheap way of getting talent without investing in their training. It is estimated that we saved \$4 billion by importing 100,000 scientists, engineers and physicians between 1949 and 1967. [...] There is little doubt that the foreign brains we’ve hired have helped America on top in many ways – atomic, science, space technology, medicine, engineering and so on. Among American Nobel Prize winners, 41 per cent were foreign-born, and one-quarter of the members of the National Academy of Science members were also born abroad. (Westoff, 1973, p. 263)

Even though Alridge (1973) acknowledged that the US would have been poorer without these people, she thought that the brain drain was detrimental in the long run, for both countries of origin and destination. Her position was that immigration to America may have been more of a ‘dying historical symbol’ than a present need. This opens a different discussion on the unemployment of foreign workers, which later, in the 1980s, would

support the argument to combat ‘illegal immigrants’. According to a 1977 article, ‘Mexico is among the most efficient nations at producing people and among the least efficient at providing for their economic needs’ (Sterbaby et al., 1977, p. 171).

As shown in this last quote, the integration of historically excluded minorities such as Blacks, Asians and Latinos continued to be a topic of concern. In an extended *NY Times* feature article suggestively titled ‘The Negro today is like the immigrant yesterday’ (Kristol, 1966, p. 357), the author defended the ‘Negro’s’ contribution to the cities’ economies and supported their efforts to incorporate into the middle class, by way of a change of mentality: ‘Until now, we have spent an enormous amount of energy and money trying to assimilate Negroes into “our” cities. Is it not time we tried helping them to assimilate into “their” cities?’

Another article from the same year, with the suggestive title ‘Negro called victim of technology era’ (Lissner, 1967, pp. 1, 10) assessed the impact of technology on the US labour market and black minorities. ‘Negros’ (as they were still called at the time) were said to be ‘unskilled except as farmlands, pushed off the land by a technological revolution that has achieved ever greater harvests with less and less labour’. The author concluded that the industrial revolution would require more trained workers, and maybe training ‘negros’ from the slums to make them literate: ‘This is our chance to overcome a century of neglect’. Six months later, another article stated that ‘negros are trained for unemployment’ (Raskin, 1967, p. 250).

However, historically discriminated minorities such as the Mexicans and Asians came to be more appreciated for their skills and contributions in the 1980s. Asians came to be valued for their integration and even assimilation, as well as for the ‘sense of revitalization and entrepreneurial spirit infused to urban communities across the country’. Asians were now compared to the Jews: ‘There have the same kind of strong family ties and the same sacrificial drive on the part of immigrant parents who couldn’t get a college education to see that their children do’ (*The New York Times*, 1982). Consequently, the new generation of Asian migrants was more educated and had a higher median family income than natives and other migrants; in the 1980s, they suddenly became a model minority. ‘Most generalizations about the Asian immigrants are flawed. New stereotypes, like “hard-working” and “obsessed

with education”, fail just as badly as old ones, like “inscrutable” and “clannish” (*The New York Times*, ‘The new Asian immigrants’, 9 May 1982).

In the 1980s, a new type of ‘foe’ emerged to accompany undocumented migrants: the refugee. The US set a cap of 50,000 refugees in 1980. In this context, some combative journalists questioned the false illusion of the American Dream, citing racism and discrimination; growth in itself will not overcome persistent racial and ethnic conflict, as Stanley B. Greenberg clearly stated:

Across a wide spectrum of cultures and nations but particularly in America, there is a profound faith in economic growth in its ability to solve nagging problems, supplant old ways of thinking and doing things, transcend archaic conflicts and substitute old social patterns for new ones. [ . . . ] Yet evidence from our experience suggests that the faith’s central thesis may be wrong. Racial and ethnic antagonisms, segregation and inequality have accompanied and may have been fostered by growth growth. (Greenberg, 1980, p. 21)

There was, however, a new generation of Asian refugees who were blamed for overloading the public schools and medical facilities, as well as for occupying jobs and cheap housing that had previously been taken by Blacks and Hispanics. Vulnerable minorities in the US seemed to compete with each other. Most astonishing, this article showed that, ‘after some refugees admitted to news reporters that they often ate dogs and cats in their native lands, they are blamed whenever a nonrefugee family’s pet disappears’ (*The New York Times*, 1982).

While the cultural melting pot was appreciated (Reinhold, 1986), there was also growing concern about gangs of Vietnamese youth, or the widespread use of Spanish by Cubans and other Latin immigrants in Florida, which of course is not an offence, but certainly became transformed into a political issue. Said Reinhold: ‘Warmth and resentment ambivalence over newcomers has been the hallmark of American political oratory since before independence’. Roger Conner, executive director of the Federation for American Immigration Reform in Washington, saw a future in which American cities would resemble Third World cities, with a vast gap between rich and poor and ‘open political conflict’ between classes (quoted by Reinhold, 1986). Other scholars such as Rev. Theodore M. Hesburgh, president of Notre Dame University, also

quoted in the same feature, stated: ‘The genius of America is that we bring in genetic stock from all over the world. We need immigration’.

### *The Human Rights Turn in the 1990s*

In the 1990s, there emerged a new change in the general discourse and policy on migration. Black minorities were no longer called ‘negros’, and ‘illegal migrants’ were now referred to as ‘removable’ or ‘deportable’ immigrants. While euphemisms may seem easier to digest and put less pressure on people, they sometimes hide tough realities. As Paik has put it, the US ‘normalized deportation, making it seem not a terror that tears people from their lives, but merely a bureaucratic procedure, removing trespassers who either lost the privilege of living here, or never had it in the first place’ (Paik, 2020, p. 78).

The decade of the 1990s was marked by the fall of communism; accordingly, the US started accepting refugees from Russia, especially former Soviet Union scientists who had been employed in the biological, chemical, or nuclear technical fields, as well as in defence projects. The two main frameworks at the time were undocumented migration and the ambivalent contributions of young and skilled migrants, who were recognised for their hard work but also accused of lowering wages and causing dismal working conditions. Migration and labour experts acknowledged the skills of migrants, their young age and, in particular, their commitment to economic independence. In migration-friendly cities such as New York, where in the 1990s one in four residents had been born abroad, it was estimated that ‘foreign-born workers may have helped the city retain industries that would have moved elsewhere in search of labour, particularly the garment industry’ (*The New York Times*, 1990). Other articles also showed that immigrants tended to pay more in taxes than they obtained in public services, and they also consumed more when they held good jobs (Rohter, 1993, p. 139).

However, at a time of high immigration rates, the discussion of open borders returned to the media as a main topic, even when open borders had ceased to exist more than a century ago. Robert Reich, Secretary of Labor during Bill Clinton’s presidency, said that, when it came to immigration, ‘economics is no help at all in telling us what we should do, or why’ (Quoted in Rohter, 1993, p. 139).

A new topic emerged, on brain regain, or the return of Asian professionals to their countries of origin, which could be interpreted as a kind of loss for the US economy:

For years, the best and brightest of Asia flocked to the United States to pursue advanced degrees and jobs on the cutting edge of business, science and technology. But with the American recession of the last four years and the development of high-technology industries in Asia rivalling the best of the West, a small but significant number of Asian-born professionals, from aerospace engineers in Los Angeles to financial analysts on Wall Street, have begun moving home. [...] They are part of a growing emigration that the Census Bureau now estimates at 195,000 foreign-born Americans each year – the highest number since World War I. (Dunn, 1995, p. 1)

In a 1996 article (Schmitt, 1996, p. 1), yet another political view on immigration emerged, with a Republican politician taking the stance to defend migrants. From a free-market-oriented perspective, Republican Representative Dick Armey of Texas supported high levels of legal immigration, as a well-spring of economic growth and innovation. ‘Immigration today simply is not in the crisis stage that critics portray it to be. Most immigrants today are not sponges off the system; they are hard-working, and they carry with them that work ethic that made America great’ (Schmitt, 1996, p. 1). In this particular viewpoint interpreting the US migration system as a ‘machinery’ (Meissner et al., 2013), the discussion around restricting immigration depends more on political and electoral moments rather than on differences in the immigration views of the main political parties.

Towards the end of the 1990s, the framing of talent shortage returned, particularly of IT workers (Walter, 1997), a perspective that would pave the way for the adoption of the American Competitiveness Act in the twentieth century, to be discussed below.

#### *Cooperation for Twenty-first-century Talent Competition*

In the twenty-first century, many of the features on migration have been published on the front page of the *NY Times*, which means high visibility and interest in the topic. This latest period has also shown two contradictory tendencies in US migration policy: on one hand, skilled migration has

benefitted from the American Competitiveness in the 21st Century Act (2000), so that the cap for certain visas, such as the H-1B, was increased. The beginning of the century re-opened the discussion of a possible migration reform with President Bush. Yet, expectations were lowered after the attack on 11 September 2001, and security increased under the US Patriot Act, which meant that certain Muslim migrants were banned from entry into the US, under the suspicion of being terrorists.

Before the attacks, the issue of a possible migration reform that would legalise undocumented migrants was highly debated. Alan B. Krueger (2000) said that the ‘immigration reform, replacing Social Security, has become the new third rail of American politics’. The great numbers of immigrants were depicted in the context of a ‘Second Great Migration’,<sup>3</sup> which had begun in the late 1970s. George Borjas, a Harvard economist, was often quoted for his proposal to implement a Canadian-style point system to select migrants.

However, the restrictions after 2001 caused new concern about a possible loss for the US regarding the international competition for talent (Dillon, 2004, p. 1), in particular regarding the attraction of international students to English-language programmes in the European Union and the effective return plans of certain Chinese universities. This decline has been attributed to the difficulty in processing student visas from the Middle East and elsewhere.

The need for foreign nurses and health personnel, especially with English-language skills, also constituted an important topic (Rai, 2003, p. 6). Some articles also posed the problem of internal migration to the rich technological cities in the US, which take the majority of skilled foreign and domestic workers and thus fare better during an economic crisis. ‘Skills drive the success of individuals, cities and nations. America’s future rests on the human capital of its population’, argued one news piece dated 2009 (Glaeser, 2009). At this point, it is important to recall the economic crisis around 2008, during which some sending countries expected the brain drain to the US to be reverted. This did not really happen, as some foreign professionals changed places of work in the US, rather than returning to their home countries. In the same vein,

<sup>3</sup> The first occurred between 1880 and 1924, when twenty-six million immigrants arrived on US shores.

during what can be considered a political and discursive crisis under Donald Trump's administration, skilled migrants looked for other countries of destination, rather than returning to their country of origin.

Experts quoted by the *NY Times* have tended to show that immigration, especially of highly skilled immigrants, benefits the economy and innovation. They have pointed to the fact that many inventions and patents belong to H-1B holders, who also tend to create jobs, rather than take away from natives. However, some have acknowledged that 'the H-1B visa incentivize the displacement of native workers because employers may prefer foreign workers for their lower cost and exploitability' (Rampell, 2012). Ron Hira at the Rochester Institute of Technology has asserted that H-1B workers are not complements to but direct substitutes for American workers (quoted in Rampell, 2012). On the contrary, Mushfiq Mobarak, associate professor of economics at the Yale School of Management, also wrote for the *NY Times* to support the idea that foreign entrepreneurs and innovators start new companies and invent new products that employ more skilled workers. 'Do we really believe that people like Sergey Brin or Albert Einstein took away more jobs than they created?' asked Mobarak in 2013.

In 2013, the discussion revolved around a possible visa reform that would extend the cap for H-1B visas and allow visa holders' spouses the right to work, in order to retain talent already present in the US (in particular, foreign graduate students). Another renowned author who has written for the *NY Times* is Mae Ngai (2013), who stated that the system produced undocumented migrants due to quotas per country. That should change for an emphasis on labour migration, according to Ngai. Adam Davidson, founder of the National Public Radio programme *Planet Money* also weighed in to debunk the myth of the Job-Stealing Immigrant (2015). Davidson accepted a short-term cost in lowering wages but believed that immigration would benefit the US in the long term. He criticized the Lump of Labor Fallacy, according to which migrants take rather than create jobs. Davidson argued that migrants tend to enlarge the economy, pay more in taxes and buy more products:

Whenever an immigrant enters the United States, the world becomes a bit richer. For all our faults, the United States is still far better developed economically than most nations, certainly the ones that most of our immigrants have left. Our legal system and our financial and physical infrastructure are also far

superior to most (as surprising as that might sometimes seem to us). So when people leave developing economies and set foot on American soil, they typically become more productive, in economic terms. They earn more money, achieve a higher standard of living and add more economic value to the world than they would have if they stayed home. If largely open borders were to replace our expensive and restrictive lottery system, many of these immigrants would likely travel back and forth between the United States and their native countries, counteracting the potential brain drain by sharing knowledge and investment capital. Environmentally, immigration tends to be less damaging than other forms of growth, because it doesn't add to the number of people on earth and often shifts people to more environmentally friendly jurisdictions. (Davidson, 2020, MM20)

By 2016, the debate had started to be polarised based on the pros and cons of migration. The number of articles focusing on undocumented migrations increased, as it was an electoral year. Many authors tried to rationalise the debate by providing historical and economic analysis. An opinion piece by former Mexican President Ernesto Zedillo and Carlos M. Gutiérrez, Mexican consul, took on the task of sustaining that Mexico and the US could actually fix migration through diplomatic agreements (Zedillo and Gutierrez, 2016, p. 6). 'Since 1965, the two governments haven't worked together to regulate the flow of labour migrants. No wonder there's a huge black market', the authors stated. Other opinion pieces from the same year proposed to reinstall the Bracero programme in order to control low-skilled, undocumented migration.

#### *Anti-Migrant Discourse during the Trump Period*

The presidency of Donald Trump will be remembered for his anti-migrant rhetoric, the Muslim ban, family separation and questioning the attraction of high-skilled workers along with low-skilled ones, under what he called 'America First' policies – that is, prioritising native- over the foreign-born. Trump proposed to cut illegal immigration by half, not by offering pathways to citizenship, but by discouraging newcomers with tough measures such as children put in cages, away from their migrant parents. Many academic studies have criticised his xenophobic policies. In particular, the Muslim ban 'extends the long history of efforts to exclude those deemed undesirable, whether because of religion, race, gender, sexuality, health, poverty, or some combination' (Paik, 2020, p. 45). There also

emerged absurd practices in which, for instance, the gang databases in Chicago included all immigrants, even minor children:

The fact that gang databases have included toddlers shows that you do not have to *do* anything to be criminalized as a gang member. You only have to *be* the wrong type of person. Like terrorist watch lists that target Arab and Muslim people, these databases claim to pinpoint gang members to protect the rest of us, but what they actually do is racially profile Black and Latinx people. (Paik, 2020, p. 110)

Many articles written at the beginning of Trump's presidency took sides on the topic of immigrants, such as the one by Nicholas Kristof, himself a son of refugees:

Yes, immigration brings challenges, including security risks that we've seen with terrorism. Yes, there are economic challenges, with immigrants sometimes displacing low-skilled workers in particular. But above all, immigrants bring hard work, diversity and global connections. On balance, they strengthen this country. So we can't have open borders, but neither should we vilify immigrants and scapegoat them. Because they are us. Right, Mr Trump? (Kristof, 2017)

The *NY Times* reporting on migration changed between 2017 and 2021 to include the analysis of restrictive policies and even compare the US migration system with the Australian and Canadian systems which privilege skills rather than family reunification. However, the newspaper did not emphasise Trump's anti-H-1B discourse or the suspension of visas for H-4 workers, to the extent to which these topics were debated in other domestic media.

A bill sponsored by Senators Tom Cotton of Arkansas and David Perdue of Georgia proposed to privilege high-skilled over low-skilled immigration, in order to protect American manual workers and assure America's competitiveness (Baker, 2017). The bill was criticised from the very beginning, by Republicans and Democrats alike. Republican Senator Lindsey Graham of South Carolina noted that agriculture and tourism were his state's top two industries. 'If this proposal were to become law, it would be devastating to our state's economy, which relies on this immigrant workforce', he said. 'Hotels, restaurants,

golf courses and farmers', he added, 'will tell you this proposal to cut legal immigration in half would put their business in peril' (Baker, 2017). Other groups such as the National Immigration Forum, an advocacy group, also pointed to the lack of a workforce in certain areas: the US 'was already facing a workforce gap of 7.5 million jobs by 2020. Cutting legal immigration for the sake of cutting immigration would cause irreparable harm to the American worker and their family', said Ali Noorani, the group's executive director (Baker, 2017).

Dreamers – that is, children who had been brought to the US by their parents – were yet another hot potato during the Trump presidency. By 2018, Donald Trump had proposed to allow them pathways to citizenship, but only if a wall were built at the border with Mexico. Renowned scholars writing for the *NY Times*, such as George Borjas and Mae Ngai, strongly rejected the plan. Borjas recognised that this was a terrible deal: 'A wall is un-American and won't work anyway; the planned limits on chain migration are racist; and granting amnesty gives the wrong set of incentives to potential immigrants abroad' (Borjas, 2018)

Ngai (2018), similar to Paik (2020), claimed that the illegal or undocumented immigration was the result of law restrictions, rather than pathways chosen by immigrants:

In truth, undocumented migration is not an aberration of 'normal' immigration. It is the inevitable result of any general policy of immigration restriction. Restriction creates two streams of immigration, lawful and unlawful. It is a conceit of the sovereign power to think that it can have only legal immigration. (Ngai, 2018, p. 21)

Suketu Mehta (2019), author of *This land is our land: An immigrant's manifesto*, has also written for the *NY Times* (Mehta, 2019) to defend the idea that migrants move to richer countries because of colonialism and past invasion from North to South. His proposal comes as an issue of historical reparation and should be seen as a 'migration tax', conceived in a way similar to the carbon tax: 'immigration quotas should be based on how much the host country has ruined other countries'. Mehta has stated:

Today, a quarter of a billion people are migrants. They are moving because the rich countries have stolen the future of the poor countries. Whether it is Iraqis and

Syrians fleeing the effects of illegal American wars, or Africans seeking to work for their former European colonial masters, or Guatemalans and Hondurans trying to get into the country that peddles them guns and buys their drugs: They are coming here because we were there. Before you ask them to respect our borders, ask yourself: Has the West ever respected anyone's borders?

In 2020, at the beginning of the pandemic Gebeloff noticed that states where immigration had fallen also suffered from domestic outmigration and slower economic growth (Gebeloff, 2020). Soon enough, the crisis gave more reason to the defenders of immigration, as health, agricultural and food industry workers suddenly came to be recognised as 'essential workers'. Later that year, the journal assessed that 'Trump's overhaul of immigration is worse than you think', due to the decrease in annual immigration by half between 2016 and 2019 (*The New York Times*, 2020):

... rejecting, by law and action, the Trump administration's racism, cruelty, and xenophobia would reaffirm that America is a nation of immigrants who help revitalize the country – an ideal that most Americans support. With a pandemic and an economic crisis to address, immigration may not seem like a priority. Yet if it is not addressed, the immigration system Mr Trump has erected may be in operation for years to come.

The notion concerning the enduring effects of the restrictive measures promoted by Donald Trump would indeed be confirmed during the presidency of Joe Biden: the anti-migrant discourse and policies did, in fact, show long-term outcomes that were difficult to reverse after 2021.

During the pandemic, the shortage of health personnel was apparent in the US, as in other Western countries hit by COVID-19. However, the US was slow to implement fast-entry measures, and even workers with a work permit were banned from entry under certain circumstances (Jordan and Correal, 2020). During the hospital crisis in New York in March 2020, Governor Andrew Cuomo made a call to workers from outside the city: 'I am asking health care professionals across the country, if you don't have a health care crisis in your community, please come help us in New York right now' (Jordan and Correal, 2020). However, US migration policy works at a federal level and through consulates abroad, which oftentimes suspended their work or failed

to facilitate the entry of this type of worker, with a direct impact on the health of COVID-19 patients in the US.

*What Lies Ahead: Joe Biden, the Migration President*

With the inauguration of President Joe Biden, the discourse about and the intentions towards migrants changed to a softer and more promising tone. Biden did cancel the Muslim ban and the Migration Protection Protocols (MPP)<sup>4</sup> with Mexico, but the same programme was reinstalled in 2022. Biden promised to legalise eleven million immigrants (Jordan, 2021), a plan that was considered bold and ambitious, but not necessarily realistic. Jordan has asked whether ‘providing amnesty to those who have broken the law will encourage more people to try their luck’. This actually did happen, with more migrant caravans from Central America encouraged to cross Mexico in order to ask for asylum.

The plan proposed by Biden, called the US Citizenship Act of 2021, included an eight-year pathway to citizenship, easing family immigration, providing labour protection, reforming the immigration court system, investing in border security instead of a physical border wall and improving the asylum system. Some critiques have stated that ‘any amnesty that is not accompanied by a reform of the legal immigration system will have a “multiplier” effect on the number of foreign nationals who ultimately remain in and enter the United States legally’ (Bokat-Lindell, 2021).

These plans to ease immigration, which in theory would make it less difficult to immigrate to the US, according to *NY Times* estimations (Shear and Kanno-Youngs, 2021), did not really happen because of the pandemic and the suspension of some of the initial pro-migrant programmes. However, it is in the interest of this research to outline the importance of a different discourse and labelling of migrants in the US, with a direct impact on xenophobic attitudes and discrimination. We know that, for instance, under Donald Trump’s presidency and in the pandemic’s context many hate crimes were perpetrated against populations of Asian origin. This may be less likely to happen in the presence of a more humane discourse that gives justice to

<sup>4</sup> The Migrant Protection Protocols, also known as the ‘Remain in Mexico’ programme, was implemented in 2019 to stop Central American migrants from crossing the US border.

migrants and diasporas in the US, recognising them as part of society rather than a drain on the public system.

## **Conclusion**

The analysis of different ideological labels and stereotypes applied to migrants over the past two centuries of US history has shown an ambivalent discourse, ranging from an open-border policy to a tough selection of migrants based on race, gender, political bias and skills. On one hand, an open border and a more friendly policy towards migrants have constantly been reconsidered. The utopian and cosmopolitan transnationalism of open borders could eliminate certain problems of undocumented workers, in a better-conceived labour market that self-regulates according to vacancies, rather than based on racial criteria. This type of cosmopolitan transnationalism may be seen as an anti-discriminating philosophy, which can do justice to existing diasporas, recognise the contributions of past diasporas and pave the way for a more humane integration of future migrants.

On the other hand, the discourse of closed borders and ‘big, nice walls’ (as Donald Trump recently put it) denies the contribution of migrants and, therefore, the value of transnationalism itself. Immigration should not be considered a philanthropic issue, but a policy based on subjective contributions, depending on the actors involved in the definition of ‘good’ vs ‘bad’ migrants. This process of labelling determines waves of prohibition of foreign labour and further facilitates ‘the immigration business’ through ‘coyotes’, imprisonment and under-payment of migrants.

Even when the American/Californian/Western Coast Dream is not the main topic of this review, it may be used as a framework to understand the contributions made by migrants and diasporas to the rise of the US as a great power. Our historical analysis has proven that migrants of all skills are economically valuable. We have also shown that those considered ‘skilled migrants’ change over time. Today’s skilled migrants – those with university degrees and highly specialised knowledge – have replaced the young, able-bodied and healthy migrants who were required to build the US infrastructure. However, despite such labelling and discrimination between the skilled and the ‘unskilled’, evidence shows that all migrants in the US are helpful, not only managers and scientists, but also plumbers, carpenters, machinists and the like.

Finally, a long-term historical reflection on migration discourse points to the changes in international society that allowed the creation of transnationalism, understood on an individual and collective basis. Transnationalism has indeed flourished due to globalisation, and so did the world powers – also main countries of destination for international skilled migration – that benefitted from more connections and knowledge circulating beyond borders.

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## **Part II**

NEW DIASPORAS (POST-1965)

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## ***Part IIa***

*DIASPORAS AS TRANSNATIONAL ACTORS*

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# 6

## THE NAGA DIASPORA IN THE US: INTEGRATION AND TRANSNATIONALISATION

*Ajailiu Niumai*

### Introduction

The scholarship on the Naga diaspora in the US is still nascent, although Indian Diaspora Studies have emerged prominently over the past few decades. The Naga diaspora in the US is part of the Indian diaspora, as diaspora members may use an Indian passport as a travel document since they are under the Indian Union. However, most of the Nagas do not consider themselves as part of the Indian diaspora and form their own identity. They are mostly Christians and have been striving for self-determination and sovereignty from India already before India's independence.

There exists an ongoing political dialogue which, as of yet, has not borne the fruit of political settlement between the Naga minority and the Indian state. There has been an armed struggle against the government of India, demanding Naga sovereignty and self-determination. More than a hundred rounds of peace talks between the government of India and the National Socialist Council of Nagaland/Nagaland (NSCN), which has broadled represents the voices of the Nagas over the past years, have been held. A Framework Agreement was signed in 2015, between the government of India and the NSCN (Issac-Muivah). However, the outcome of this Framework Agreement is still being awaited. With regard to the Nagas who settled in the US, they have studied and worked in other states of India prior to their migration; personally, they have

benefited from the Indian state. Therefore, the animosity towards the Indian state has been suppressed. The Nagas occupy an ambiguous space of contested citizenship, because of what they have inherited from their homeland (such as culture, class, religion, tribe, values, food habits and the like).

This chapter has various objectives: firstly, it explores the sociological construction of the first-generation Naga diaspora that encompasses specific reasons for migrating to the US. Secondly, it analyses how they retain their homeland's culture and build social networks. Thirdly, it probes how they acculturated to, integrated into, or took root in the US. Fourthly, it looks at the transnational connections of the Nagas with their homeland and host society. Lastly, the conclusions discuss the development of a global Naga consciousness.

### **The Naga Ethnicity: A Background**

The Nagas constitute various tribes based in Nagaland, Manipur, Assam, and Arunachal Pradesh with a total population of around 2.5 million. They are also found in Myanmar. They speak their own dialects and have similar cultures. The majority of them have been converted to Christianity. Nagaland has seventeen recognised tribes, viz. Angami, Ao, Chakesang, Chang, Konyak, Kheimungan, Kachari, Kuki, Lotha, Phom, Pochury, Rengma, Sumi, Sangtam, Tikhir, Yimkhiung and Zeliang. It is worth mentioning that contrary to popular opinion, the Kuki and Kachari tribes are not Nagas but recognised as Scheduled Tribes in Nagaland. American Baptist missionaries such as Miles Bronson and Edward Winter Clark introduced Christianity among the Nocte (part of the Konyak) and Ao Nagas in the 1800s, and Baptists have greatly influenced the Nagas to arrive at their present-day value system.

The lingua franca in Nagaland is the Nagamese creole language (an amalgamation of Hindi, English, Bengali, Assamese and Naga dialects) which is spoken as a mode of communication among the local people. Culturally speaking, Naga people in their homeland are under existential threat because of immigrants from mainland India and neighbouring countries, such as Bangladesh and Nepal. The Nagas are a tiny minority amid dominant cultures that have subsumed many other minority cultures in close geographic proximities.

The concept of diaspora has been widely appropriated as it deals with decolonisation, increased immigration, global communications and transport – a whole range of phenomena that encourage multi-locale attachments, dwelling and traveling within and across nations (Clifford, 1994, p. 306). For the Nagas,

the term ‘diaspora’ harbours a memory of homeland and a desire for the self-determination and sovereignty of the Naga nation. Until now, the Nagas’ nationhood aspirations have not been realised; hence, they consider themselves a diaspora in their own homeland of India. A majority of Nagas believes that India will never be their nation; therefore, most do not identify themselves as Indians. Benedict Anderson’s (1983) theoretical framework of an ‘imagined community’ has enabled us to understand the nuances of the Naga diaspora in the US. Furthermore, Robert King Merton’s (1938) theory of the meritocratic principles that led to the American Dream, as nurtured by the American cultural system, will be analysed in the context of the Naga diaspora.

The total population of the Naga diaspora in the US is not officially documented. It has been recorded that 150 Nagas attended the First Naga Baptist Church’s (FNBC) inaugural function in Fort Worth, Texas, on 10 and 11 August 2019, at Burton Hill Baptist Church – which is their sponsoring church. The FNBC was launched on 4 November 2018 under the leadership of Pastor Lanutenzuk Lemtur and Honili Sema, President of Naga American Foundation (NAF) as well as similar functionaries. The launching of the FNBC is a historic event since it is the first Naga Baptist Church in the US, registered under the Conference of the Dallas Baptist Convention, an affiliate body of the Baptist World Alliance. The FNBC’s congregation comprises not only the Naga diaspora but also other ethnic communities and Caucasians. Around sixty Nagas, including students and families, live in the Dallas/Fort Worth (DFW) area\*. The statistics indicate that the Naga diaspora may number a few hundred members across the US. The Naga diaspora’s network within the host society was reflected in the presence and support of Patty Lane, Director of Intercultural Ministries of the General Baptist Convention in Texas, at the FNBC’s inaugural service. The functions of the FNBC include contributions to the host society in the form of support to local communities from diverse racial groups.<sup>1</sup>

## **Methodology**

This study uses qualitative methods, especially purposive sampling and semi-structured individual interviews, in order to collect data from the Naga

<sup>1</sup> See <https://morungexpress.com/first-naga-baptist-church-established-us>.

diaspora members who reside in the US and to tease out notions of cultural identity, acculturation, integration and transnationalism. The data were collected from June to July 2014 and from May to August 2021, using in-person and on-line interviews. I made a prior appointment to interview the respondents and sent questionnaires in advance by email, phone, WhatsApp and messenger inbox. The total unit of analysis consists of twenty Naga respondents, including fourteen men and six women from Illinois, Missouri, Colorado, California, Texas, Kentucky, New York, Washington DC, Alabama and West Virginia. Some respondents allowed me to use their real names, while a few others asked me to keep their names confidential.

Despite the apparent limitations due to the small sample size, it is assumed that these selected respondents most likely represent the voices of the entire Naga diaspora in the US. Their responses were analysed from multiple interdisciplinary perspectives, reaching conclusions regarding their trajectory of migration, gender findings, cultural identity, acculturation and integration, religious experiences, transnational consciousness, social network, struggles and challenges.

### **The Trajectory of Naga Migration**

The historical trajectory of the first-generation Naga migration to the US can be traced to the 1950s as per my study and available records. Nagas are concentrated mainly in Texas, California, East Coast cities, Illinois, Oklahoma, Kansas, Florida, Kentucky and Pennsylvania. They are connected to local home churches in the US; therefore, they receive help from these religious communities. The first wave of Naga migration in the 1950s and 1960s was limited to a few students who pursued Christian theological studies and medicine. These two professions were considered as esteemed professions by the Nagas, until the Information Technology (IT) boom displaced them. However, some returned to their homeland after completing their studies and entered employment in education and Christian ministry service. Samuel (name changed) said:<sup>2</sup> ‘These

<sup>2</sup> Specific names and related information have been used with informed consent from the selected respondents, whereas some names are synonyms since the respondents requested privacy.

early Naga migrants/immigrants are professionals like doctors, pastors and Christian workers'.<sup>3</sup> Alice (name changed) recalled:

My uncle from Manipur went to the US in the 1950s for Christian theological studies, and he served in the Christian Ministry. In 1969, another uncle, Dr Aryo A. Shishak, pursued his MS from New York Medical School after completing his MBBS in New Delhi. After his MS, he practiced and served in Pennsylvania for almost twenty-five years but died in 2017 at Milford. He was one of the pioneers of the Naga American Foundation (NAF) and hosted the first annual convention of NAF in 1989 at his residence, where many Nagas attended.

Most of the Naga diaspora belong to the Christian Baptist denomination. During the second wave from the 1970s to the 1980s, a number of skilled and semi-skilled professionals and students migrated to the US. Some of them returned to their homeland after completing their studies, although a few settled down in the US. For example, Ren Merry said:

I went to the US specifically to study western music in Chicago, Illinois, in 1984. Before that, I had just finished my master's degree in English literature from North East Hill University, Shillong, Meghalaya, in India. It was rather a late start to a completely new vocation, as I began the long and tedious journey of pursuing a career in music. I finally graduated in 1990 with a master's in music performance [classical guitar] from Roosevelt University in Chicago. I met my wife in Chicago [now married for twenty-seven years]. We went back to Dimapur, Nagaland, in 1994 to teach at Patkai Christian College for four years and returned to the US in 1997. Following that, I worked briefly at a correctional/therapeutic centre in North Dakota. Eventually, I moved to Louisiana

<sup>3</sup> Some first Nagas and leaders who migrated to the US include the late Inavi Chishi, the late Dr Iralu, the late Dr I. Ben Wati, Dr Shishak, the late Dr Rendy Keitzer, Dr Vik, the late Dr Aryo Shishak, Rev. Imotenjen Aier, Dr Wati Aier, Meyi Aier, Duncan Angami, Dr Senka Yaden, Rev. Dr David Jamir, Dr Zimik Luithuk, Dr Jonathan Iralu, Rev. Asung Lungleng, the late Rovi Angami, Mr Imli Pongener, Mr Vek Nuh, Mr Imna Imchen, Mr Ashu Theyo, Mr Ramayon Awungshang, Ms Sylvia Pongener, Dr Wilson Angumei, Rev. Dr Louis Meren Ao, Dr Paul Pimomo, Dr Ren Merry, Dr Mazi Nakro, Dr Moa Imchen, Dr Mar Imsong, Dr Atula Jamir, Dr Oren Humtsoe and so on.

to teach at Westminster Christian Academy, Opelousas, LA, which lasted for seven years. I started my doctoral studies in Greeley, Colorado, in 2005, earning my degree in music education [2010]. Since 2006, I have been teaching at Frontier Academy, a charter school in Greeley, Colorado. I have three children who have all graduated from high school. Our oldest is serving as a US Marine, our middle child Areni is married, and our youngest, Therali, just graduated from high school and is going to college.

Another respondent, Simon Hongsha Maring, who works at Hyatt Regency, Reston, West Virginia, said:

I studied theology in Youth with a Mission [YWAM], Big Island, Hawaii, in 1985 to 87. Later, I lived in Finland and Sweden from 1987 to 1991. I moved back to the US in September 1991, and I am a naturalised American now. My wife Alyssa is an American, and we have two sons who serve in the US Marine and US Army and a daughter who is working in an NGO. I live in West Virginia. I am a Khoibu Naga tribe from the Tengnoupal district, Manipur. People perceived me as Native American because of my surname Maring and physical features.

During the 1990s and 2000s, the third wave of migrants included skilled Naga professionals such as nurses, doctors, scientists, software engineers, management employees in the hospitality sectors, entrepreneurs and students. This trend basically coincided with the period when immigration services and immigration became standardised and even middle-class people could migrate with less effort and less red tape. On being asked why they migrated to the US, Tezenlo Thong shared:

In August 2001, I went to the US to pursue quality education beyond master's. I've always thought that the grass was greener on the other side, which led me to keep going, and further, I go and the older I get, I've gained more appreciation for my roots and what I've left behind. It's not just nostalgia that drives me to remember fondly my homeland. Still, there are many values to be appreciated and treasured before they are swept away by forces of globalisation and globalised culture.

Tezenlo has become a US citizen. Currently, he works as the District Superintendent in Denver, Colorado. He is an accomplished Naga diaspora author.

Sanyo Konyak, a doctor and Residency Program Director at Mercy Health Family Medicine Residency in Illinois, also talked about his struggles, including his efforts to recertify as a medical doctor:

I migrated to the US in July 2004, just ten days before my marriage to an American woman, Marsha, with a K-1 visa. I had no job because my medical training in India was not automatically accepted. I had to take multiple exams and then participate in the selection process for re-training in the residency program (I had already done obstetrics/gynaecology in India). Subsequently, I got a position in a family medicine residency program that lasted three years. My job has benefitted my family here in the US and also in Nagaland.

He lives in Rockford, Illinois, with his wife and four sons, but is not a US citizen yet.

David M. Jamir, who serves as pastor in the Methodist Church in Sun City, California, together with his American wife, said: ‘I went to the US in 2005 to study theology. After receiving a doctorate in ministry, I serve as clergy and am a US citizen now’. Achun Kamei, a registered nurse in the New York City Elmhurst Hospital Center who married an American man in 2017, said:

I came to the US in 2005 as a nurse. I’m from a low-income family. The US was in shortage of skilled nurses in the mid-2000s, and they were hiring nurses from different countries and were giving green cards to those who were selected. I appeared for the English and CGFNS examinations, and I was selected.

Another nurse in Medical City, Denton, Texas, Pearly Sam Meyer narrated:

I migrated to the US in 2006, after being married to an American man who passed away recently. I am a US citizen now. I was fortunate to have a loving and caring husband who spoiled me to the extent of cooking and serving me in most of our lives. However, he passed away in the blink of an eye, and my life turned upside down. Life has a way of changing, challenging me, though it is so painful to accept the reality. Change is inevitable in everyone’s life. I am an optimistic woman and attempt to enjoy my everyday life. I am a front-line worker during this COVID-19 pandemic.

One of the male nurses in Saint Luke's Hospital in Kansas City, Missouri, Shunghring Hrangbung, stated: 'I went to the US in August 2007 to do my master's degree majoring in Christian education but switched over to nursing. I'm from a poor socio-economic background of the Anal Naga tribe from Manipur. I enjoy my job and financially help my family in Manipur'. Some Naga migrants are married to US Americans (some choose to remain anonymous about their personal lives); hence, the diasporic Naga community in the US is growing, with both first and second generations expanding.

During the fourth wave, from 2010 to 2020, highly skilled Nagas migrated to the US. For instance, Dr Nesatalu Hiese arrived to pursue a post-doctorate in Morgantown, West Virginia. She said: 'I arrived in the US in 2015. I don't feel lonely being a single woman since my aunty, who migrated many years ago to the US, lives with her family close by, and I used to visit her'.

From the above narratives, it is evident that many Naga diaspora members in the US are primarily first-generation immigrants who were born in Nagaland and Manipur, Northeast India, but migrated to the US as adults. Essentially, the Naga diaspora has migrated for various purposes but settled down in the US, and some of them have become US citizens. The desire of the Nagas to migrate to the US primarily relates to their aspiration to higher studies in various disciplines.

In a previous study (Niumai, 2021), I discovered that people migrate to the US because they perceive it as the land of opportunity, abundance and freedom. This resonates with Robert King Merton's (1938) theory that Americans are socialised to believe in the American Dream, which is their national ethos – particularly in the form of liberty, democracy, rights, equality and opportunity. The American Dream celebrates success, prosperity and upward social mobility through hard work because US society is based on meritocracy and individualism. Most Naga diaspora members believe in hard work, much like US Americans, and they have been integrated to focus on finding success in their respective fields. A successful Naga diaspora is a 'role model' for the younger generation, particularly in the homeland; this is very much in line with Merton's theory (1938), which states that being a 'role model' helps others advance in their lives because success seems attainable. And success does away with hindrances by empowering people to climb the social mobility ladder.

## Gender Findings

Women form a sizeable number of the total Naga population in the US. Tezenlo Thong affirmed that ‘Naga women who came to the US are equally driven and ambitious. Not only that, but they are also equally educated and capable as their Naga male counterparts. Consequently, even those Naga women who grew up in Nagaland or elsewhere are persistent and independent comparable to women in the US. They are not beholden to the culture back home’. Concerning gender discrimination, Thong argued that ‘[n]ative women are not immune to gender discrimination in the US. For instance, women are paid less for the same work or position. Additionally, unlike in many countries, they don’t get paid maternity leave. Naga women, like any women of colour are likely to inescapably endure gender and racial discrimination, no matter how successful. A minority woman is likely to face double discrimination because of ethnicity or skin colour’.

Adinliu (name changed) likes her homeland because her parents, siblings, kinship, and community live there. And being a ‘Naga woman diaspora member’ is beneficial since many amenities – such as healthcare, job opportunities, the transportation system and the like, which ‘even in the homeland one does not enjoy’ – are much better in the US. She migrated to the US in the mid-2000s. After getting marrying an American in Alabama, she is a US citizen now and has transformed herself into a working woman, a symbolic transformation into the working population within US society, of the middle class and of national belonging. However, she retains her cultural identity by cooking her Naga recipes, growing her native vegetables in her garden, making her two children wear traditional costume on special occasions and travelling to her homeland. Bandana Purkayastha’s (2005) insights that less attention has been paid to women who migrate as spouses with their husbands resonate in this context. Sociologically, diaspora women have been carriers of culture and religion, and Naga women have been instrumental in propagating the Naga culture as well as the religious and social ethos of their society.

## Cultural Identity

The Naga diaspora in the US is a social construction of identity and not confined to a physical space such as ‘little India’ in Devon Street in the suburbs of Chicago. The ‘little Nagaland’ phenomenon in the US deals with a sense

of belonging based on Naga solidarity, Naga nationalism, episodic tribal consciousness and emotional rather than physical space. Diaspora members attempt to create their ‘little Nagaland’ through Naga food, music and costume. However, in the US there also exist certain forms of racism affecting the Nagas, as experienced especially during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020–21, since the Nagas resemble the Chinese and other East Asians.

The Naga diaspora has undergone specific processes of cultural creolisation in which the appropriation of American hybrid norms, values and cultural practices prevails, since they interact with diverse cultural groups and are eventually blended to create a new culture among the Nagas in the US. They uphold community identity ‘containers’, as is portrayed by their tendency to identify with the Nagas of Nagaland in their homeland as a ‘cultural container’ differentiating them from other diasporas originating in Northeast India, such as the Meiteis, Mizos, Assamese, Khasis, Sikkimese, Tripuris (Tipra) and Arunachalis. The formulation of the Naga diaspora’s sense of belonging, home and identity in the US is in juxtaposition to Benedict Anderson’s (1983) theory of ‘imagined community’; Anderson has argued that the nation is imagined because it entails a sense of communion. For Anderson, nations are an imagined political community, imagined as inherently limited and sovereign, and they are created by human beings. It is imagined since members of the small nations would not know each other nor meet regularly nor have social commensality with each other; however, in the minds of every Naga lives the image of communion with the ‘globally imagined Naga community’. This resonates with Arjun Appadurai’s (1990) idea that people live in such globally imagined communities nowadays.

The question arises as to why the Naga diaspora sustain or preserve Naga cultural identity and whether they speak Naga dialect, cook Naga food and wear traditional costume in the US. Cooking, gifting and eating of Naga food have emerged as essential parameters to define cultural identity, rather than the unique Naga dialects. Meren Temna explained:

I am identified as a Naga when speaking my own Ao Naga dialect with my friends, relatives and community. I carry a piece of Ao Naga traditional attire to put on whenever needed in various inter-cultural meetings in all my itinerary. Further, I have incorporated some Naga culture, traditional values and ethos

as my best resource partner in some of my research papers. I love to sing and sing as a Naga wherever I go. Singing and music become my first currency for friendship in most of my introductions. I love the communitarian way of life, extending hospitality by sharing Naga food and observing important cultural festivals. All these activities are timely performed and practiced even in the US.

To the question of reinventing the Naga diaspora cultural identity to adjust to American society, Sochanngam Shirik responded:

I think the adjustment is an inherent part of our journey. Either consciously or subconsciously, everyone adapts to their context – the societal, geographical, ecological, religious, or economic locations. I am making constant adjustments in my life journey, whether it is the way I spend money, the kind of church I choose to be part of, or the sub-culture I decide to integrate. The greater the gap of the geographical, economic, or social dissonance, the greater the adjustment. So, in terms of finance and society, the adjustment is more significant.

Regarding religion, it is not so big as I still associate with like-minded people in this regard. Even within the religious framework, I had to adjust and continue to adjust to express my religiosity. While my American church members and I worship the same God, read the same Bible and belong to the one universal church, the way I express my religiosity is to some degree still influenced and driven by my Tangkhul Naga cultural, societal and educational upbringing in India. Of course, I am no longer the same person I was ten years ago. The change and adjustment would have occurred even if I had not come to the US. But America has changed me, or more accurately, I have changed a lot in many ways by coming to America. Now, is this change the result of the ‘reinvention of my own identity’? I am not sure. The phrase ‘reinventing one’s identity’ seems to suggest a deliberate radical change to the extent of becoming a totally new person. If so, I have not reinvented my own identity. The adjustment I mentioned is more of a spontaneous action rather than a deliberate one, although, in some cases, circumstances compel one’s choice over the other. Thus, my adjustment is the result of my identity rather than changing my identity. I choose/change a certain way because of who I am not to become who I am, although, again, in some situations, the latter is also true. I am a new person, but I am not unique. I still love pork and bamboo shoots, many of the smelly and, in some situations, delicious home Naga food. Perhaps the main reason I didn’t have to ‘reinvent my identity’ is that my friend-circle has

always been those in a religious profession. As you may know, I came here to study theology, and I am still studying theology. I am mostly exposed to people, whether internationals or Americans, who are in one way or the other related to this field. Had I been encircled by people from other backgrounds, my story could have been different – I do not know.

The success of the Naga diaspora stands in sharp contrast to Manipur's diaspora<sup>4</sup> in the US, because of how the Nagas integrated and acculturated in the religious (Christian) spheres of life in their host society. Their cultural ties have been nurtured through the network of the Naga America Foundation (NAF), which enabled them to meet every two years in local Nagas meetings, such as the Tangkhul Long USA and the Chicagoland Nagas meeting, which takes place three to four times a year.

### **Acculturation and Integration**

The Naga diaspora members have acculturated to US society by changing their attitudes and behaviours due to prolonged interaction and social commensality with the Americans. There occurs a transfer of norms, values, beliefs and traditions. For example, Naga children and youth born and brought up in the US are socially and culturally conditioned to the patterns of US culture, like any other second-generation diaspora. Naga people dressing in western clothing is perceived as a form of modernisation and westernisation in their homeland, but it can be argued that it is an illustration of acculturation. The embrace of Naga and Indian cuisines in the US and the reciprocity of American food reveal the process of acculturation. Furthermore, acculturation takes place on individual and collective levels, also through the language. For instance, Achun Kamei said: 'I learned to speak in an American accent to communicate in American society easily'. Dr Konyak told the following:

<sup>4</sup> Manipur's diaspora from Northeast India to the US is much newer, dating to the late 1960s and onwards. These are mostly skilled professionals and students who constitute the 'new diaspora'. They resemble the old Indian diaspora since many of them are settling down, purchasing houses and cars, concentrating on their children's education, adjusting to life without an extended family, assimilating to the new culture of their host country and the like. They attempt to give to their younger generations world-class opportunities such as education, music, sports and the like, which they never had in their homeland (Niumai, 2021).

It was hard for me to acculturate and integrate at the beginning of my arrival in the US, and I felt lonely and had no friends to talk to. I had left a very vibrant practice and many friends back in India. Our son was born after a year of our marriage. I took care of my son for the initial few years as my wife worked. This was countercultural to my upbringing. Even after sixteen years, I have not fully acculturated with American food although I have been integrated in the US society. I have been serving as a physician in the US, attend a multicultural church, and my wife is an American. I try to cook Naga food and get together with some Naga families just to eat Naga food and have fellowship.

This indicates how the diaspora holds fond memories of homeland and long for authentic food. Ronny (name changed) said: 'I am a Pastor, and my church's congregation comprises diverse racial groups. We often eat fellowship fusion meals, including Naga food, and we also serve the local community who are needy. Now, we have been acculturated and integrated in the US society'. Susan (name changed), a doctor, stated: 'I have been brought up and lived with a very mixed culture in Manipur and studied in New Delhi, and I have married an American man. I also offer free medical services to my local community. I have easily adjusted and integrated into US society'. Tezenlo Thong, the Naga author introduced above, said:

I arrived in the US in my early thirties, which is somewhat old to assimilate easily. Additionally, having learned to appreciate my cultural identity upon arriving here, I don't try too hard to assimilate or adopt. Intentionally or unintentionally, I am being impacted by and submerged into the culture in which I live and function. Language, by necessity, is probably the most significant part of the culture that I have adopted, because I do not only speak but also process my thoughts in English. Not only that, I also dream [at night] in English because of the environment in which I live my daily life, which is a sign that I am being subsumed by the culture in which I live. I have lived in two other countries in Europe before arriving in the US. Hence, my past adventurous experiences made it easier to adapt to the new culture. In terms of food, initially, everything tasted either too salty or too sweet, and I missed the food I grew up eating. The great thing about this country is that one could be a full-time student and work to put food on the table for the entire family, and that's exactly what I did throughout the period of my studies. However, balancing study, work and family responsibility did not come easily. It was

not until I completed my studies and began working full-time that I felt fully immersed in the culture of my host country.

Simon Hongsha Maring explained:

My American wife and children love Naga food and culture. I often wear Naga clothes like necktie, muffler, shawl, and jacket, though I have acculturated and integrated in the US culture. US people are broad-minded, and I am accepted by the white community since they celebrate a mixed culture. My experience in Finland, Sweden and Big Island, Hawaii, helped me to acculturate in the mainland US society with ease. American people are not family-oriented. Once the kids reach eighteen years, they prefer to leave home. My kids lived with me till they started working and moved out due to jobs. American youth are independent and resourceful.

Migration to multiple countries indicates a nuanced understanding of transnationalism as it interacts and produces multi-culturalism. Multi-cultural transnationalism includes the experiences of diaspora in different countries. Both Thong and Hongsha have built their lives in more than one country and have integrated into US society. Moreover, communications technology has enabled them to maintain their homeland ties. Tennyson Lanah said:

Wherever we live, our native culture doesn't go away from our life. Every race loves its own culture and identity, and it can never be erased from our mind though we don't practice it in our everyday lives. Since my wife is an American, I have learned many Western cultures and gradually acculturated and integrated them. The American people are amicable, though the media highlights how racist the Caucasians are towards other races; it isn't like that in the US. Everyone is kind and respectful to all races.

Pearly Sam Meyer explained:

Americans identify me as an Asian. I wear Mayon traditional attire and perform a cultural dance at traditional festivities organised by diaspora groups. However, festivities were practiced slightly differently in the US, to keep room for everyone to participate. Every individual in the US is cordial since people

respect each other's opinions and inputs. Everyone has a voice to express their concerns in the US.

These narratives highlight that the 'melting pot' model of the US has been replaced by the 'salad bowl' model where peoples of different races become American without losing their identities or melting, but they become part of a whole (Niumai, 2021). The Naga diaspora in the US integrates with the host society like salad ingredients in a bowl rather than dissolving/melting in a cooking pot. Upon being asked whether Caucasians accepted the Naga diaspora, Sochanngam Shirik responded:

My family has no problem adjusting to American life. We have learned to adapt, and we are well received. My eight-year-old daughter reminds us of the real American way from time to time. Currently, we live at the seminary housing complex of Asbury Theological Seminary, Kentucky. We have never come across such a loving and humble community. All my international friends will agree with me. Some Caucasians here at Asbury (at least people I know) are more pro-international than some internationals. By 'pro-internationals', I mean they want to identify with us and stand for us. They want to learn from and with us. They accept us as we are. I don't think there are many communities like this either in America or elsewhere. Yes, the white population at Asbury fully accepts us. Unfortunately, however, I cannot say the same thing about all other places.

In a similar vein, Shunghring Hrangbung said:

Initially, it wasn't easy to participate in American society because of being an Asian foreigner. Gradually, I volunteered at the Kansas City Care Clinic in Kansas City, Missouri. That enabled me to go out in the community and advocate for [preventing] sexually transmitted diseases and their effects. This was a ground-breaking moment for me to participate in American society. I am integrated with the white community because I am fluent in English, so there are no barriers to communication, and thus, there is no room for me to be bullied. People I've encountered in the US, especially the Caucasians, have been kind, friendly and welcoming and have never failed to invite me on every Thanksgiving and Christmas holiday. They have been friends and family to

me. They have their issues in life, simply because they belong to a certain racial group. Still, having said that, I will boldly proclaim that as an Indian and Naga diaspora, we have our own set of prejudices towards certain racial groups. As people, we have our own set of strengths and weaknesses, and we are all imperfect beings working toward being perfect.

Acculturation took place among the Naga diaspora as a consequence of the prolonged stay in the US. At the same time, the Naga integrate into US society by uniting with individuals from other racial groups so as to provide a space for people's equal rights. Some Nagas have been serving as pastors across the US, where their congregation includes diverse racial groups. Such a trend shows that religion plays a significant role in integrating the Naga diaspora into US society.

In the acculturation process, individuals often experience various dimensions of integration, assimilation, separation and marginalisation. In integration, individuals maintain their own culture at home, but they can accept and adapt to the culture of their host society in the public space. Once individuals and families were allowed to unite in the US, acculturation was possible, and multi-culturalism emerged as a result. This is observed among the Naga diaspora since they have their own ethnic identity, remittances, festivals, celebrations and the like. Transnationalism applies to the Nagas since some of them have lived in other countries before they arrived in the US, and they are connected whenever there is an occasion.

Nagas have the significant cultural practice to give to the poor and needy, and so have the Americans. The first-generation Naga diaspora was involved in improving the quality of people's lives around them, as in the cases of Shunning in Kansas City and Dr Konyak in Illinois – this is a form of giving back in exchange for what Naga society has received from American missionaries, such as education and Christian values, during the colonial period in India. They attempted to establish roots and family in the US, although symbols and structure are still in the making, which may happen after the next generation.

### **Religious Experiences**

The Naga diaspora has established a unique tie with US society, in the form of a unified Christian religious community – that of the First Naga Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas – within which religious performative expression

has emerged as a way of negotiating the separation between their homeland and their host land. The church and its functions are an inalienable part of the Naga people, which no one can take away from them, much like the right to life and liberty in a multi-cultural and democratic nation. The church functions as a microcosm and ecosystem for the Naga people to work together and contribute to their host society. This resonates with Robert King Merton's idea that the functions of social institutions is to contribute to society. The success of the Naga diaspora in the US has led to acculturation, integration and a changing social dynamic, owing to inter-racial marriages and transformations in the aspirations of the Naga diaspora. Moreover, both space and chronology of migration play a critical role in informing such an identity. These factors intersect to form an ever-evolving sense of Naga diaspora identity, where changes in the social dimension are only possible by being included in the host society – which is invoked as a positive trait in the 'imagined community'.

The move of Naga identity from local to global connections happens in the context of religion, and it also relates to transnationalism since the church interacts in a transnational manner. The migration of the Nagas resulted in the formation of transitional social and religious space, including exchanges of spiritual dialogue, creative ideas, remittances/donations, services, goods and the like. The processes of networking and transnationalism have enabled the Naga diaspora to take their local religious experiences global. Most respondents affirmed that their religious experiences had deepened in the US, and their vigour led to integration in the host society. For instance, Dr Konyak explained: 'My spiritual walk has gotten more mature. I have gained more understanding of the Bible'. In a similar vein, Ren Merry expressed:

I have spiritually grown by being exposed to faithful Bible teaching and preaching for which I am grateful to God. America has its share of religious phonies and counterfeits, and the evangelical church itself has weakened its faith and practice in some important ways. Some have continued to remain faithful to Christ and His purpose. I have benefitted from the teaching, preaching, and discipleship of such faithful.

Dr Nesatalu said: 'I have a good experience with the Christian community in Morgantown, West Virginia. I was welcomed warmly and was able to partake in the church services'. Interestingly, Maring affirmed: 'My spiritual life is my

relationship with God and not from USA or India'. Tezenlo Thong opined: 'The Nagas are generally very religious but lack in spirituality. Naga Christians tend to be rigid, legalistic and judgemental; I've learned and grown to move away from some of the religious beliefs and practices of my upbringing, which has been quite freeing and satisfying'. Sochanngam Shirik stated:

There has not been a considerable change in my religious experience in the US. I have not adopted a new religion or decided to follow a new religious leader. I am still connected to my home church, family and friends in the Christian service. However, my understanding of being religious has evolved/developed/matured – and perhaps even dwindled. I have become much more aware of being people who live in the liminal stage. Although I have been here for a decade and my two children were born here, I still consider India my home. I love and miss my people. I consider my life here as temporary. I am always looking forward to being at home, my real home, either here on earth or in heaven. My experience in the US has made me more conscious of this Christian liminal stage. Therefore, I am now more aware of what is temporary and permanent from a Christian perspective. Do I always live out my Christian conviction? Sadly, not always. But at least I am now more convinced that what we do for Christ in this short life matters the most. Lastly, I have learned and experienced Christian love and unity. We have, on many occasions, been the beneficiary of love and support. Many friends, both Americans and non-Americans, have supported us materially, spiritually and academically. One thing I have learned is that help ultimately comes from God. On many occasions, help has come from people I least expected, reminding me that God works in people's hearts. When God opens the door, no one can shut it, and when he closes, no one can open it.

Another respondent, Tenma Meren, said:

I arrived in the US for further studies in the discipline of theology, so from the outset, I settled in a Christian environment and setting. However, during my studies, I had the opportunity to involve [myself] in an inter-religious dialogue which I believe is much needed. I also continue to learn and see that people are aware of being a Christian more as an embodied way of life than considering it as an exclusivist religion per se. Overall, freedom of expression in all walks of life is what the US as a nation advocates and encourages to both citizens, immigrants and non-immigrants. The US is a cultural melting pot. I love the

good accommodation and the opportunity to contribute my cultural thoughts in the US. Overall, I am well integrated and accepted in the institutions and the churches that I attend. I am blessed to see my white Caucasian friends invest much into the multi-cultural importance and learning.

The Naga diaspora nurtures Naga lives in a transnational context where the church largely determines identity. Since the Nagas are mostly Baptist Christians, they are readily absorbed into US society. They uphold religious practices such as water baptism, tithing, Holy communion, dedication of the new-born babe in the church and celebrating Easter, Christmas, New Year and the like, which serve to maintain links with their homeland's churches. These religious experiences and festivities have established a global and accommodating consciousness, and it creates a new Naga diaspora identity.

### **Transnational Consciousness and Social Networks**

Transnationalism emerges through the interactions of multiple contextual layers. Notions of social morphologies, boundaries and borders, as well as the development of a transnational consciousness and institutions from the global to the local level and from the local to the global level, as engendered through activism, rest at the core of transnationalism (Sahoo and Purkayastha, 2020, p. 4). The Naga diaspora builds a transnational consciousness through cultural re-production in US society. Naga diaspora consciousness and solidarity are defined by their longing for their homeland and their plan to return at the right time. Tezenlo Thong said:

Naga diaspora consciousness has to do with the notion of identity and community. First, the shared experiences of longing for the home we left behind give rise to a common desire to recreate a microcosm of the community we miss dearly. Second, our affinity to each other as Nagas in a foreign land stems from the notion of or perceived identity as one people, despite our differences. However, back home, the Nagas segregate themselves into tribes and villages, often mired in tribalism and tribal favouritism. Can the Naga diaspora be a force for unity back home?

Thong here raised the fundamental question of 'isms' among the Naga tribes and of maintaining a unique tribal culture. Ren Merry said: 'As a Naga living in

the US, I have not abandoned my ties with Nagaland and am still very much a Naga at heart. Even though I have acquired a taste for American food like hamburgers and morning cereals, my favourite food continues to be spicy chicken curry with rice and dal'. These narratives reveal a solid emotional linkage between the Naga diaspora and its homeland. The Naga diaspora thus enjoys a hybrid identity.

The social networks primarily operate through the Naga America Foundation (NAF), which was launched in the 1980s by a group of like-minded Naga in the diaspora. The NAF is a cultural and social organisation, with the vision to work for its people in the US. Its primary objective is to promote and support shared interests and to engage in charitable, educational and cultural activities. The NAF encourages all Naga diaspora to connect with each other, support each other and network with one another (*The Naga Republic*, 2 July 2018). It also provides scholarships to Naga students in the US. Moreover, they reach out to each other through another network known as 'Connecting Nagas in the US', which seeks to bring together all Nagas within the country. These social networks are now easily connected with the help of digital communications technology.

The phenomenon of 'Mini-Nagaland' is found in the way in which they network with one another, help each other in times of crisis and get together for various purposes, such as annual conventions, festivals and the like, during which they wear their traditional costume and cook authentic food. Connections and social networks – which also deliver physical things, goods and services that were difficult to come by before globalisation – are now possible in the post-globalisation era. This type of social network and kinship indicates transnationalism in that the Naga diaspora in the US and their relatives in other countries can come together for certain occasions. For instance, now the American Naga diaspora members can visit their relatives in other countries in Europe or Asia for special functions, such as weddings. This is not only involves sending gifts or remittances through a virtual mode, but there exists a transnational social space in which the Naga diaspora participates. In a nutshell, transnationalism means that the connections and linkages go beyond homeland and host land.

### **Struggles and Challenges**

Like other immigrants, many in the Naga diaspora encounter struggles and challenges in the US, especially in their initial days. Dr Sanyo Konyak expressed

that the high taxes in Illinois, the expensive fees for his children's schooling and the needs at home in Nagaland constituted some financial challenges which he needed to juggle. Ren Merry shared:

I initially struggled with homesickness and adapting to a completely new way of thinking and doing. Coming from a culture where time was irrelevant, I was always late for classes and appointments and had to work hard to be disciplined in my thinking and getting things done. Structure and compartmentalised thinking are prevalent in the west, but the Nagas tend to see things holistically. COVID-19 has also prevented me from participating in an important youth rally. Americans are going through a time of turmoil, angst and confusion. Moral decay is rampant, and Christianity is being rejected as unessential. To live amid such a culture can be a challenge.

This indicates that there is disillusionment with capitalism, but this is expressed in a veiled form. Paramthonbuibou Nkhanpuinamai said:

When I first arrived here, my first struggle was a cultural shock. I felt like I was alone almost the entire day for the first three weeks. Apart from meeting a few Naga friends and attending seminary classes, I was home alone. Slowly I realised that the culture here is more individualistic than the culture of home. Everyone is either at work, with family, or engaged in some sort of activity. There is not much free time, as time slots were filled with scheduled activities. There were a few challenges regarding studies. The format and style of writing were different from what I was used to. It took a semester to get acquainted with this new system. Also, for the first few months, I wasn't satisfied with the food. Even if I ate an American meal, I would typically go home and eat a second meal. Now I have adjusted to the food choices here and still make dishes at home. Another lesson I have quickly learned is that their work ethic is very high in general. In about four months, I was fully accustomed to their culture and practices. The following semesters were so much better than the very first. The best thing that happened was getting married to Jenny, an American. We come from different backgrounds and upbringings, but our different cultures didn't divide our marriage because the foundation of our marriage is spiritual.

The migration of the Naga diaspora to the US resulted in a sense of belonging and integration due to communication with and acceptance by US society.

## Conclusion

The Naga diaspora's acceptance in US society is a story of great success. The Naga diaspora provides emotional, social and religious support to its community members in the host society. The diaspora has created strong emotional dynamics and notions of self and belonging to both the homeland and the US. At the same time, the Nagas attempt to retain their homeland's cultural identity through food, traditional costume, religious practices and the like. The Nagas' contemporary transnational network is based on the NAF and church, which often involves both homeland and the US. The Nagas are bonded with the local church communities, a bond that seems to give them the best of US society. Hence, they have easily acculturated to and integrated into their host communities.

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# 7

## THE INDO-CARIBBEAN AMERICAN CONTRIBUTION TO THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE US AND TRANSNATIONAL LINKAGES WITH COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN

*Vishnu Bisram*

### **Introduction**

Immigrants generally have been viewed as a drain of and burden on the US economy, that they come to consume wealth rather than contribute to the prosperity and development of the nation. The purpose of this chapter is to assess this statement as it relates to Indian Americans (specifically, Indo-Caribbeans). This essay also discusses the contributions and linkages of Indo-Caribbean immigrants to their home countries, making cross-comparisons with life in their home countries and with other US immigrant and American-born groups based on several socio-economic indicators such as educational attainment, poverty level, unemployment, median household income and home-ownership, among others.

The Indo-Caribbean Americans, estimated to number 750,000, are ethnic Indians whose roots are in the Caribbean and India. Since the bulk of Indo-Caribbean Americans are from Guyana (60 percent), Trinidad (35 percent) and Suriname (3 percent), the focus will be on Indo-Guyanese, Indo-Trinis and Indo-Surinamese. Despite their long presence and large numbers, there is a paucity of academic studies on Indo-Caribbeans; data and information are

not readily available. Thus, this study relies more on qualitative (descriptive and explanatory) rather than quantitative data and analyses. It utilises anecdotal evidence, empirical observations primary and secondary sources from digital media, as well as the personal knowledge and experience of the author, who has lived and socialised among Indo-Caribbean Americans for over four decades.

### **Background to Indian (Indo-Caribbean) Immigration**

Indian Americans, including Indo-Caribbeans, were not welcomed into the US until after the passage of the Immigration Act of 1965, which removed restrictions on immigrants from India, other Asian countries, as well as other non-European countries. After the passage of the 1965 Act, skilled Asians (such as Indians, Latinos and Anglophone Caribbean nationals, among others) were encouraged to migrate to the US to fill the labour shortage caused by the conscription of young men to fight in Vietnam (Jain, 1990; US House of Representatives [n. d.]; 'Anti-Indian sentiment' [n. d.]; Hanna and Batalova, 2020; Wangchuk, 2020). Most Indian immigrants, including Indo-Caribbeans, were skilled (as scientists, medical workers, accountants, engineers, garment cutters and domestic workers, among others), although unskilled labourers equally came to work in factories and on farms. Many also came as foreign students. As Roopnarine (2003) has observed, Indo-Caribbeans journeyed to the US in an ever-increasing number, coming annually in search of better economic opportunities.

Not unexpectedly, the Indo-Caribbean diaspora as well as the sub-continental Indian community in the US has grown rapidly, from mere hundreds during the mid-1960s to thousands during the late 1960s and early 1970s. More than 10,000 arrived annually from the late 1970s through the 1990s, and likewise during the new millennium. Today the Indian diaspora has grown to some 4.5 million, accounting for more than 1 percent of the US population (*The Economic Times*, 2017; Hanna and Batalova, 2020; 'Indian Americans [n. d.]; 'Indian Americans' [n. d.]).

Although grouped together as Indian Americans for census purposes, Asian Indians and Indo-Caribbeans have maintained separate identities. Shukla (2001, p. 553) has grouped all Indian diaspora communities as 'one', referring to them as South Asians – 'peoples who have at some time in the

past come from countries that comprise the Indian subcontinent'. But Indo-Caribbeans prefer to distinguish themselves as also having Caribbean roots, not dissimilar to how Indo-Fijians label themselves – hence the term Indo-Caribbean (Carter and Torabully, 2002) as well as Indian and Indian diaspora, which was coined by this and other authors during the 1980s (Bisram, 2020; Jaikaran, 2015; 'FAQs' [n. d.]).

Asian Indians and Indo-Caribbean Americans have divergent historical and cultural experiences, given that they come from different countries. Tinker (1974) has explained that Indians in the Caribbean, Africa, the Pacific and the Indian Ocean are descendants of indentured labourers (1834–1921) and constitute the old or original Indian diaspora. Asian Indians who migrated from India post-independence (1947) formed the new diaspora, distinguishing them from the descendants of indentured labourers or *girmityas*.

The new Asian Indian and the older Indo-Caribbean diasporas in the UK, US, Canada, France and the Netherlands maintain separate spaces of socialisation and pursue their own respective community representation. In fact, South Asian Indians were taken aback in their first encounter with Indo-Caribbeans in the 1960s, seemingly unaware that there existed such a large group of Indians outside of India or the sub-continent. Also, people outside of the Caribbean (especially in North America) seem very puzzled when encountering Indians who claim that they are not from India. Non-Indians (except for those from the Caribbean) in Europe, North America and Latin America seem ignorant of the presence of People of Indian Origin or PIOs in the greater Caribbean, incorrectly assuming that they are from South Asia. As Lal (2006) has noted, Indians have emigrated not only from India but also from Fiji in the Pacific, from the islands of Mauritius and the Seychelles in the Indian Ocean, Asian nations, African and Caribbean states, and elsewhere. About one million Indian Americans (Indo-Caribbeans, Fijians, Africans, Burmese, Singaporeans, Mauritians, Malaysians and so on) are not directly from India but are twice removed migrants or double diasporans – that is, migrants from India to another country and from that country to the US (Jaikaran, 2015; Deebrah, 2016; Berger, 2014).

Indo-Caribbeans comprise Guyanese, Trinidadians, Surinamese, Jamaicans, Grenadians, St Lucians and residents of other West Indian islands as well as Belize, Central America. The commonly known push and pull

factors responsible for migration to the US apply also to them. But unlike immigrants from India, they have migrated to the US largely because they have suffered from ethnic discrimination in virtually every aspect of life, from high unemployment rates and widespread poverty. They have fled their homelands to seek economic survival on international shores (Maikoo, 2016; 'Indo-Caribbean Americans' [n. d.]; Ramsaran, 2018; Gosine, 2002; 1990).

Since independence from colonial rule, the level of Caribbean emigration has been driven by limited opportunities for employment, a high degree of political instability (especially in Guyana and Suriname), periodic outbreaks of social unrest and violence, relatively open doors abroad to its citizens and high levels of education (Jain, 1990). As a consequence of steady emigration, at present more Guyanese live abroad than within the borders of Guyana (which has a population of 750,000) (*Guyana Chronicle*, 2021), more Surinamese live abroad than within Suriname (which has a population of less than 600,000), and hundreds of thousands of Trinis live abroad (about half the country's population of 1.4 million) (*World Population Review* [n. d.]; Bada, 2019; Macrotrends, 'Guyana Population'; Lewis, 1994). Khandelwal (2002, p. 230) has observed that Indo-Caribbean migration and the Indian population in the US grew vastly between 1980 and 2000, a result of migrant link-ups to their home countries and economic conditions there. The overwhelming majority of those who came to the US settled in New York – in the boroughs of Queens, the Bronx and Brooklyn, in clusters that ultimately became Indo-Caribbean neighbourhoods separate from Asian Indian neighbourhoods.

Gosine (1990) has also noted that Indo-Caribbeans see themselves as 'communities' separate from Indian nationals, explaining that, much like the latter, Indo-Caribbeans in the US have their own communities or neighbourhoods and their own institutions (businesses, law firms, real estate agencies, travel agencies, social clubs, bakeries, butchers, fishmongers, bars, ethnic stores, temples, mosques, churches, radio and TV programmes, festivals such as Holi, Diwali, Eid and Navratri, parades and so on). Although Indo-Caribbeans and immigrants from India share common observances and similarities in ritual celebrations, such as religious festivals and observing India's Republic and Independence Days, they have very limited social or cultural and religious interactions. Moreover, they form their own national origin organisations,

clearly delineating that they are from Guyana, Trinidad, or Suriname (*The West Indian Online*, 2017; Bisram, 2005; Khandelwal, 2002).

### **The Size of Indian and Indo-Caribbean Communities and their Geographic Location in the US**

Over the past couple of decades, Indian Americans have become the largest source of new immigrants to the US, surpassing even Mexicans or Chinese, the two largest immigrant groups (Deepak and Neera Raj Center; *Guyanese Online*, 2014; *News Source Guyana*, 2013; *Kaieteur News*, 2013). Indian Americans number approximately 4.6 million or 1.5 percent of the US population according to the 2020 national census (Budiman and Ruiz, 2021; Hanna and Batalova, 2020). However, the US Census, conducted decennially, does not identify or break down the Indian American population or Caribbean people by country of origin. Censuses tend to exclude many Indo-Caribbeans who do not identify themselves under the broad category Asian or Indian American. Many identify themselves as Guyanese, Trinidadians, Surinamese, Grenadians, Jamaicans and so on, rather than as Indians or Asians or Indo-Caribbeans. Thus, it is difficult to arrive at a somewhat accurate estimate of Indo-Caribbean Americans from each country, as well as their total number. Furthermore, the high number of illegal aliens among the Indo-Caribbeans and the community's attitude toward census responses (2020, or earlier decennials) result in an undercounting of the numbers that in fact may be well over the three-quarter million mark. Data on the number of Indo-Caribbeans and their socio-economic indicators (such as median income, poverty level, economic achievements and the like) are estimates based on interviews with tax accountants and the author's own assessment of data, observations, and in-depth personal knowledge of the group and its settlement patterns.

Most Indo-Caribbeans reside in the Northeast (New York and New Jersey) and Florida, with smaller numbers in other states. New York City and its environs are home to over 65 percent of Indo Caribbean Americans, with the next-largest number in the Orlando and Fort Lauderdale areas (20 percent). Over 60 percent of Indo-Caribbean Americans are Guyanese, and a third are Trinidadians, with the rest being Surinamese (about 3 percent) and other islanders (1 percent). When Caribbean territories began to achieve independence starting in 1962, immigration to the UK slowly closed off and the US opened

up in 1965, Indo-Caribbeans began migrating to the US as skilled or semi-skilled workers, farm workers or students at tertiary institutions ('Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965' [n. d.]; 'Guyanese Americans' [n. d.]). Reports have pointed out that, when Guyana's economy rapidly deteriorated at the height of the ethnic dictatorship during the 1970s, the migration of Guyanese increased substantially, from several hundred annually in the early 1960s to 6,100 yearly between 1969 to 1976, and then to 14,400 annually between 1976 and 1981. A report on Guyanese migration has stated that almost every Guyanese was looking for an opportunity to leave the country. As many as 30,000 Guyanese migrated to the US annually during the 1980s and early 1990s. With the restoration of democracy and the improvement of the economy in 1992, emigration has stabilised to around 20,000 annually. The Guyanese have continued to emigrate to this day, whether legally or in the form of undocumented migration (Guyanese American Chamber, 2018; *Guyana, USA*, 2020; *News America Now*, 2016).

The number of Guyanese in the US is not exactly known, but a study on Guyanese emigration has reported that, by the end of the 1980s, some 350,000 Guyanese had left for the US. It is projected that, between 1965 and 1990, these 350,000 Guyanese migrants added several thousand US-born Guyanese. The same report has also projected that, given migration trends, the majority of Guyanese would be living in the US by 2005. In 2005, Guyana's population was 750,000, suggesting that the Guyanese American population in the same year would number a minimum 750,000 plus their American-born off-spring – this leads us to infer that some 400,000 Guyanese migrated between 1990 and 2005. It is not known how many of these 750,000 Guyanese Americans are Indians. Yet, given that the Indian segment of the population declined substantially – from 51 percent in 1966, over a high of 55 percent during the 1970s, to 40 percent today – then the bulk of Guyanese migrants must consist of Indians.

Since the African population has remained relatively consistent during this period, at around 30 percent, this led to the inescapable conclusion that more Indians than Africans had migrated (*Guyana, USA*, 2020; *World Population Review* [n. d.], 'Guyana Population 2021'; Bacchus [n. d.]; "Demographics of Guyana" [n. d.]; *Stabroek News*, 2009; *Find Easy* [n. d.]). It is estimated that since the 1960s some 60 percent of migrants from Guyana have been Indians.

Guyana's population growth rate has been negative since the early 1970s. Guyana has sent an average of more than 13,000 immigrants annually to the US over the past fifty five years, or a total of 750,000, with an estimated 60 percent being Indians, or some 400,000. When considering their American born-children, this number increases probably by another 50,000, for a projected total of 450,000. Thousands of Indian Guyanese have also immigrated from the UK, Canada, the Caribbean islands, Venezuela, Suriname, French Guiana and Brazil, where they had sought refuge during the difficult period of the ethnic dictatorship (1966–92 and later). From these places, many Indians migrated to the US through family sponsorship or overstaying visitor visas, raising the number of Indian Guyanese Americans to about half a million. This estimate is affirmed by reports that suggest that more Guyanese live in the US than in Guyana, whose population is just below 800,000. Assuming that the US-based Guyanese community exceeds 800,000 and that 60 percent are Indians, then the estimated number of Indo-Guyanese Americans should be around 500,000 (Sandin, Matera and Alvarez, 2020).

Many of the Guyanese emigrants have been middle-class professionals, with a significant number being businesspeople. Their migration to the US is a significant brain drain of vitally skilled individuals and financial loss to Guyana, but a brain gain for the US. The Indo-Guyanese have institutionalised their presence in Richmond Hill, Queens, and for several decades the area has been dubbed 'Little Guyana' because of their large presence (estimated at over 100,000), dozens of businesses and thousands of homes. The area was officially named 'Little Guyana' in May 2021, with a sign erected on a lamp post next to the train station stairway, unveiled by New York City's mayor (*Guyana, USA, 2020; CBS News New York, 2021; Robinson, 2021*).

Similar to the case of the Guyanese migration, Indo-Trinidadians emigrated to the US to escape economic privation and discrimination. Only a few hundred Trinidadians migrated yearly (as students or skilled workers) during the mid-1960s, followed by thousands annually during the late 1960s and 1970s and thereafter. They came as visitors or as students and overstayed their status, opting to settle down, much like other ethnic immigrants did before and after them – getting sponsorship for permanent residency and subsequently becoming citizens. US Immigration record shows that, from 1966 to 1970, some 23,367 Trinidad and Tobagonian immigrants, primarily from the educated

elite and the rural poor classes, legally migrated to the US. (Indians populate the rural areas of Trinidad, while Africans populate the urban areas, suggesting that the bulk of migrants were Indians). These numbers do not include those who came with visitor or student visas or through illegal means and who opted not to return to their homeland.

From 1971 to 1975, the figure of legal immigrants climbed to 33,278 (or about 7,000 a year), then dropped to 28,498 from 1976 to 1980, and only half of that number between 1981 and 1984, when the Reagan administration began placing greater restrictions on US immigration policy (Murrell, 1991). A report has noted that, 'when oil prices fell, a larger number of Trinidadians migrated in the late 1980s, sending the country into a deep recession. And Trinidadians and Tobagonians became the second largest group of English-speaking immigrants in the US', behind the Guyanese (Murrell, 1991; 'Migration of Trinidadians to the US' [n. d.]; *The Free Encyclopedia*, 2020). The numbers would have increased significantly from 7,000 annually during the 1980s, to an estimated 10,000 annually during the 1990s and thereafter, because of chain migration through family sponsorship and declining economic conditions on the island. Although educationally qualified for a variety of positions, because of racial discrimination, limited opportunities and low wages, Trinis have chosen emigration to greener pastures (*Soca Warriors*, 2010). It can be reasonably concluded that at least 50 percent of the Trinis who migrated after the colony achieved independence in 1962 were Indians. In addition to those obtaining green cards as permanent residents, there were thousands of Indo-Trinidadians who used their visitor visas to gain entry to the US and pursued (illegal, off the book) cash employment as domestic aides, restaurant workers and in other jobs. Many thousands violated their visa conditions, opting to reside in the US as undocumented aliens; many benefited from the immigration amnesty in 1986 and 1996 and from marrying documented residents or citizens to legalise their status. Estimating that half of the average 10,000 annual immigrants from Trinidad were Indians means that some 5,000 Indo-Trinis have settled in the US annually over the past fifty years. The total number, then, would amount to about 250,000 Indo-Trini migrants, plus their American-born off-spring. Some Indo-Trinis in the UK have also settled in the US, adding to that number.

Like the Trinis and Guyanese, the Surinamese first opted to settle in their colonial motherland, in their case the Netherlands. There was little migration to the US. With independence achieved in 1975, migration to the Netherlands was restricted, and Surinamese emigrants flowed into the US. Immigration to the US picked up after 1980, following a military coup, violent tensions between Indians, Surinamese of Indonesian Javanese descent and Africans (Creoles), as well as the massacre of several prominent political opponents, including Indian political leaders. The lengthy civil war for political control of the state between the military and the 'Bush Negroes (Maroons)' was another push factor in emigration, as the Surinamese escaped dictatorship and violence (Runs, 2006; Ames, 2010; MacDonald, 1988).

The 2000 Census reported some 3,000 Surinamese, but they may very well have been under-counted because of the general fear of immigrants when it comes to self-reporting information to government agencies. A news report has suggested that some 15,000 Surinamese lived in the US in 2006 ('Surinamese Americans' [n. d.]; Runs, 2006). This means that the Surinamese American population more than quadrupled between 2000 and 2006, to about 15,000, suggesting an increase of 2,000 annually. Surinamese migration would have increased because of chain migration through family sponsorship and because of those who had overstayed visitor visas to avoid returning to a nation under authoritarian rule. At a rate of increase of 1,000 to 2,000 annually, by the year 2020 the number of Surinamese Americans would have increased by a minimum of 15,000, for a total estimate of 30,000 persons, plus their American-born off-spring. Since Indians have been victims of racial discrimination post-independence (1975), resulting in declining numbers of the Indo-Surinamese population from 40 percent during the 1970s and 1980s to less than 37 percent in 2020, it is likely that more Indians than any other groups would have migrated from Suriname ('Racial composition of the population of Suriname' [n. d.]). Assuming that half of the Surinamese migrants to the US have been Indians, we may estimate that the number of Indo-Surinamese Americans would be over 15,000. They are known to settle among other Indo-Caribbeans in New York and Florida. As is also the case with the Guyanese and Trinidadians, Surinamese migrants tend to be technically skilled and comprised of the country's elite or intelligentsia; they would be an economic asset to either the US or their home

country. Many of them also own businesses, including restaurants and ethnic stores.

In addition to Indian migrants from Guyana, Trinidad and Suriname, smaller numbers also come from Jamaica and other Anglophone islands in the Caribbean, as well as Belize in Central America. These groups number several thousand, which constitutes only 1 percent of the overall Indo-Caribbean American group. They are dispersed all over the US.

### **Education and Indian (Indo-Caribbean) Americans**

Indian immigrants from both the Caribbean and India have a strong tradition of pursuing tertiary education and come to the US with various skills. Data reveal that Indian American adults have the highest level of formal education, with most having secondary education and tertiary training. The data also suggest that income is directly correlated to education – with higher educational attainment resulting in higher income.<sup>1</sup>

One study found that Indians (the grouping under which Indo-Caribbeans are considered) are by far ‘the best-educated group’ in the country – roughly three times more Indian-born residents have college degrees than the general US population or other immigrant groups.<sup>2</sup> Indo-Caribbeans are also highly qualified, with large numbers having had secondary education and tertiary training. Almost every recent adult immigrant of Indo-Caribbean origin has completed a secondary education that culminated in a mandatory regional Caribbean Exam in the case of English-speakers, or the national exam in the case of the Surinamese. This contrasts starkly with the US, where only two-thirds of native-born citizens receive (albeit not complete) secondary education.<sup>3</sup>

A 2014 study found that 26 percent of Black immigrants held a college degree, only 4 percent below those in the overall US population (30 percent). However, more Black immigrants hold a college degree than US-born Blacks (19 percent). About 35 percent of Black African immigrants over the age of

<sup>1</sup> For these data, see Deepak and Neera Raj Center on Indian Economic Policies, <https://indianeconomy.columbia.edu/>

<sup>2</sup> See Deepak and Neera Raj Center on Indian Economic Policies, <https://indianeconomy.columbia.edu/>

<sup>3</sup> See the enrolment statistics by country, as provided in UNICEF. [n. d.]. ‘Secondary Education’. UNICEF, <https://data.unicef.org/topic/education/secondary-education/>

twenty-five hold at least a bachelor's degree. Black South American immigrants follow second, with 25 percent of college degree holders. Caribbean and Central American immigrants follow, with 20 percent and 17 percent having obtained college diplomas, respectively. Asian immigrants tower above all others, with almost half holding at least a bachelor's degree. Two-thirds of Indian immigrants hold at least a bachelor's-level education (Lueck, 2018). Another 2017 study has revealed that 69 percent of Indian immigrants came to the US with tertiary education (McNulty, 2017). And in 2018, more naturalised citizens (38 percent) had an educational attainment of bachelor's and higher degrees than native-born Americans (33 percent). An additional 26 percent of non-citizens held a bachelor's or higher degree in 2018 (USAfacts, 2019). In 2020, some 75 percent of Indians were found to hold a bachelor's degree or higher educational attainment, when compared with 33 percent of other Americans (Budiman and Ruiz, 2021).

While the percentage of Indo-Carribbeans with tertiary education may not be as high as that of immigrants from India, Indo-Caribbean immigrants tend to have higher educational attainment than the overall foreign- and US-born populations. A 2014 study by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) found that, between 1980 and 2012, more than 70 percent of nationals with a tertiary education from Trinidad, Guyana and the Anglophone Caribbean countries had migrated to the North (US, Canada and other developed countries). About 43 percent of Guyanese who had completed high school and 89 percent with a college degree had migrated. Some 22 percent who had completed high school and 79 percent with college education migrated to the US, Canada and other OECD countries. About 74 percent of Surinamese with a secondary education and 48 percent with a tertiary education migrated to OECD countries in the above-mentioned time-span (*Go Lean... Caribbean*, 2014). A World Bank study of Guyana's economy in 2017 found that 89 percent of Guyanese with tertiary education left their homeland (*Guyana Chronicle*, 2015). And almost every Guyanese foreign student enrolled at a US university opted not to return to the homeland after graduation, contributing their skills to their new host country.

In terms of correlation between education and income, data for 2020 show that people living in the US with a bachelor's degree or higher level of educational attainment earned \$107,000, when compared with those with some

college background earning \$64,000 and those with only high school education making \$47,000 (Shrider, Kollar, Chen and Semega, 2021). Among the Asians, Indians had the highest educational attainment and, not surprisingly, the highest median household income, exceeding \$120,000 in 2020, clearly suggesting that they are a great economic asset to the US.

### **Occupational Preferences and Income: Comparisons with Home Countries**

Because of their educational background, Indians (Indo-Caribbeans) tend to pursue the so-called prestigious professions and therefore, not surprisingly, fall into the highest income group (*Gulf News*, 2019). Indian Americans (including Indo-Caribbeans) tend to gravitate towards high-paying occupations in science and medicine or health-related fields, information technology and engineering, with some being investors or owning investment companies on Wall Street. Some are also employed in stock exchanges. Some Indian Americans have founded IT and other high-tech companies, thereby creating employment. Many Indian families (immigrants from India and the Caribbean) own businesses in various fields, including high-tech manufacturing and production as well as legal firms. Indians are also found to dominate the patents issued in the US, as well as the research labs in science and engineering (Guruprasad, Kanagavel, Srikanth and Sonal, 2003). An Indian politician remarked that 38 percent of doctors in the US are Indians, as are 36 percent scientists at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and 34 percent of Microsoft employees (*SiliconIndia*, 2008). Indo-Caribbeans are also employed by NASA and Microsoft, as well as by Apple and other major STEM companies. A 2020 report on Guyanese immigrants in the US found the following: ‘They are an educated and skilled community. Over half of working-age Guyanese are in professional, managerial, or sales occupations. Other Guyanese living in the US work in the service, construction, and agriculture industries’ (Matera, Sandin and Alvarez, 2020, p. 10).

Because of their economic achievements, high productivity and low incidence of crime, Indo-Caribbeans are seen and referred to as a model ‘minority community’ in the US. High-tech and other businesses have recruited them for management positions and as staff. US Politicians across the political aisle have lauded their contributions to America, while courting them for election

campaign funds and encouraging Indian investments in their districts or states (Bisram, 2021).

Indian immigrants in the US – be they Guyanese, Trinis, Surinamese, or of other nationalities – have the highest median family income, earning between four and twenty-five times the average income of their home country. The median income of Indo-Caribbean Americans is about US\$85,000, according to Indo-Caribbean tax preparers in the US Northeast. In Guyana, the present national median income is \$4,500, a significant increase from the \$360 of the 1960s (Statista, ‘Gross national income Guyana’; Macrotrends, ‘Guyana GNI’). In Trinidad, the 2020 national median income is US\$15,500, a substantial increase of the \$1,000 of the 1960s and 1970s (Statista, ‘Gross national income Trinidad and Tobago’; Macrotrends, ‘Trinidad and Tobago GDP’). The national median income of Suriname is US\$5,500, a major increase from \$300 during the 1960s and the \$1,000 of the 1970s (Statista, ‘Gross national income Suriname’; Macrotrends, ‘Suriname GDP’). The national income of Jamaica amounts to US\$4,600, an enormous increase from \$500 of the 1960s (Statista, ‘Gross national income Jamaica’; Macrotrends, ‘Jamaica GDP’). The national income of Grenada is \$8,740 – a substantial increase of the average \$1,200 of the 1970s and 1980s (Statista, ‘Gross national income Grenada’; Macrotrends, ‘Grenada GNI’).

An income comparison reveals that Indian Americans have earned substantially more than other American groups, over a span of several years. In 2013, for example, the Pew Research Center found that Black immigrants’ median household income was \$43,800, approximately \$8,000 less than that of Americans overall at \$52,000, but \$10,000 more than that of US-born Blacks (\$33,500). Among Black immigrants, South Americans earned \$55,000, with African and Caribbean immigrants earning \$43,000 and Central American immigrants \$41,400. Indian Americans earned an average of \$100,000 in 2013 (NDTV, 2015). In 2014, the median household income of Asian immigrants was \$70,000, compared to the overall immigrant household median income of \$49,000 and the US-born household median income of \$55,000. However, the distribution of income among Asian immigrants varies greatly, depending on country of origin. Immigrant households headed by Indians had the highest median income at \$105,000, followed by Taiwanese (\$91,000), Filipino (\$82,000) and Malaysian (\$80,000) households. Immigrant households from

Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Burma comprise the lowest median incomes, with each making \$22,000, \$27,000 and \$38,000, respectively (Radford and Budiman, 2018; Brown and Stepler, 2016).

In 2016, the median income of foreign-born households was \$53,200, compared to US-born residents' median household income of \$58,000. Among foreign-born households, there is great variety in earnings, depending on the country of origin. Mexican foreign-born households earned \$41,500, Central American households \$43,000, Caribbean American households \$44,000, South and East Asian American households \$78,000, followed by European American and Canadian American households (\$65,000), South American households (\$56,000), Middle East American households (\$53,000) and Sub-Saharan African American households (\$52,000). The income of Indian immigrants was \$110,000 (Indo-Caribbeans are included in this category) (Cox, 2017; 'Indian household income', 2013; Wilson and Mokhiber, 2017). In 2018, Asians residing in the US earned \$78,000, compared to \$58,000 for US-born residents, \$53,000 for foreign-born, and \$44,000 for Caribbean immigrants. In 2018, foreign-born Asians earned \$1,129 per week, compared to \$1,093 for foreign-born whites and \$699 for foreign-born Blacks. In 2019, the average median income of Asians was \$98,174, while whites earned \$76,057. The average income of Indians was \$119,000. In 2020, the average median income of Asians was \$95,000, in comparison to whites earning \$75,000, Hispanics \$55,000, Blacks \$46,000, all foreign-born populations living in the US \$62,000, native-born US citizens \$69,000 and Indian Americans \$120,000 (Muhammad and Chu, 2023; Budiman and Ruiz, 2021).

With data not readily available on Indo-Caribbeans median income, they presumably fall into income brackets similar to other Indian Americans, since they have somewhat similar levels of educational attainment. In comparison to other ethnic groups, Indo-Caribbeans live a relatively comfortable life, with most families being home-owners and almost every family having at least one member with college education. Community tax accountants suggest that in 2020 Indo-Caribbeans had an estimated average median household income of between \$80,000 and \$85,000, which is much higher than the overall foreign-born population earning \$66,000 and the US-born population earning \$70,800. However, accountants also state that the Indo-Caribbean median family income is lower than that of Indian Americans. Median family income

for Asian Indians for the year 2020 is some 20 percent higher than that of Indo-Caribbean Americans in New York (or, in absolute terms, more than \$100,000). This likewise contrasts sharply with the national average median family income of Indian Americans, which is \$120,000.

A study conducted by the former City Planning staff member Tara Singh (2017), extrapolating and analysing New York City's (2010) census data, found that some 42 percent Indo-Caribbeans earned an individual (not family) income below \$50,000, in contrast to 45 percent for the rest of the city. Some 26 percent earned more than \$100,000, in contrast to 28 percent citywide. The median income of Indo-Caribbeans was thus 7.3 percent higher than that in the rest of the city; the Indo-Caribbean American median income was \$59,800 in comparison to the city average of \$55,252. The Indo Caribbean income was some 15 percent less than that of other Indian Americans (with a median income of \$68,770) in the city. Also, extrapolating data from the 1990 census, the study found that the median income of \$34,400 for Indo-Caribbeans was much higher than the city's average of \$30,000 for all New Yorkers.

## Poverty Rates

In addition to income level, the poverty rate constitutes another measurement of whether a person or ethnic group is a burden on a nation. The poverty rate among Indian Americans is relatively low when compared with that of other ethnic groups. Tax accountants have told this author that, in 2020, about 5 percent of those who filed taxes as single head of household earned below the poverty line of \$26,500. Of some 10,000 tax returns filed in Queens, New York City, virtually no husband/wife couple filed a tax return below the poverty rate. Because of their high income, it should not come as a surprise that Indian Americans have the lowest level of poverty, as few adults or heads of household are unemployed, or were unemployed even during the dreadful COVID-19 pandemic. Tax accountants have informed this author that the tax returns filed by Indo-Caribbeans in 2020 revealed an income three times above the poverty line (defined in that year as an average of \$26,500 per household of four – that is, two adults and two dependents) (American Council on Aging, 2024).

The poverty line threshold income (the minimum amount of funds that a single person or family needs for basic goods and services for sustenance) varies from year to year but has averaged around \$26,000 over the past five years. For

each preceding year, it was about \$250 less. In 2019, 10.5 percent of all Americans lived below the poverty line (with an income of \$26,246.00 for a family of four), in comparison to 4 percent of Asian Americans (not disaggregated by ethnic groups). The 2020 poverty rate among all Americans was 11.4 percent, compared to 8.1 percent for Asian Americans (Giannarelli, Wheaton and Acs, 2020; Shrider, Kollar, Chen and Semega, 2021). The poverty rate increased in 2020, probably because of the COVID-19 pandemic that caused many adults to stay at home for several months. The poverty rate among Asian Americans has been consistently below the national average for the past several years – 5.7 percent for 2018, 6.5 percent for 2017, 5.3 percent for 2016 and 6.5 percent for 2015. The poverty rate for Indians is believed to be much lower than that of Asian Americans in general, because they have a higher median income (Statista, ‘Percentage of Asian married couple families’; ‘Poverty rate among Asians’, 2020; Fontenot, Semega and Kollar, 2018). One may compare the Indo-Caribbean Americans’ poverty rate to that in their countries of origin: in 2017 the poverty rate in Guyana was 41 percent, while that of Trinidad was 20 percent (Jaayfer, 2020; Selasi, 2017), and that of Suriname 26 percent (World Bank [n. d.]).

### **An Economic Asset to America**

Clearly, as the data indicate, Indo-Caribbean and other Indian Americans have maintained higher median incomes than US-born residents and immigrants overall. Every Indo-Caribbean, legal or undocumented, of working age and available, has performed productive labour. Initially, when Indo-Caribbeans first came to the US in the 1960s and 1970s, when undocumented, they tended to work in factory jobs, accepting any type of employment for economic survival. Once they had acquired legal status and upgraded their skills, they sought employment in professions earning higher wages. Several established their own businesses, including in the healthcare and engineering sectors, hospitality and shop-keeping. Indians have founded high-tech businesses based on fuel cells, cloud-based services, data analytics, electrical vehicles, artificial intelligence, drones and other advanced technologies. Since the 1980s, Indian entrepreneurs have established hotel chains, food chains, 7/11 branches, green-groceries, newsstands and fast food outlets. They have worked in financing and stock companies. As billionaire businessman Romesh Wadhwani, founder of

the Symphony Technology Group, a private equity fund, told a newspaper reporter, 'Indians use their knowhow to create great new technology products and build high-tech companies' (*Knowledge at Wharton*, 2018).

Other examples of Indian business investments include Syed Ali, who studied electrical engineering in India and then co-founded Cavium, which designs and develops semi-conductor processors for information technology networks. In 2018, it was acquired by Marvell Technology for cash and stock totalling \$6 billion. Dev Ittycheria founded BladeLogic, a software company, which in 2008 was acquired by BMC Software for \$900 million. Ittycheria is the CEO of MongoDB, a New York-based database platform with a market value of \$4.2 billion. In 2001, K. R. Sridhar co-founded Bloom Energy, an on-site clean energy system using electro-chemical processes, valued at \$3 billion. In 2009, Dheeraj Pandey co-founded Nutanix, which makes operating system software, with a market value of \$7.3 billion (*Knowledge at Wharton*, 2018).

In terms of additional economic achievements, according to a 2016 study by the National Foundation for American Policy, Indians started fourteen of the eighty-seven fastest-growing private US companies. Those fourteen Indian companies, with a valuation of more than \$1 billion, numbered twice as many as those set up by entrepreneurs from Canada and the UK (*Knowledge at Wharton*, 2018). While Indo-Caribbeans are not known to have founded high-tech companies or been involved in billion-dollar investments, several of them are investment bankers, real estate magnates, landlords and store owners in their areas. Indo-Caribbeans have one of the highest median incomes when grouped with Indian Americans whose median family income is twice that of the general American population and even higher than that of American-born whites. They contribute more to the US in taxes than they receive in benefits. They are patriotic and serve in the armed forces in a proportion higher than their numbers within the population. They also tend to pay their fair share of taxes for the running of government operations at the national, state and local levels. And they do not seem to have significant numbers among the poor, as their poverty rates are among the lowest in the US.

### **Contributions to US Economic Growth**

Since Indo-Caribbeans and Indian Americans in general have the highest median income and lowest poverty rate, and since many are known to be

investors and creators of wealth, it can be safely concluded that they have contributed significantly to the growth and development of the US. Their contributions in terms of dollar amount or measurements in GDP or growth are difficult to calculate, as data on each ethnic group's wealth creation are not available. Yet, for Indian Americans, it is estimated to be in the tens of billions of dollars, if not higher. The numbers can be estimated through some simple arithmetic calculation. The estimated size of the Indian American population (documented and undocumented) is around five million. With four persons constituting a household, one may calculate a minimum of one million households. With a median income of \$120,000 per household in the year 2020, the total income of the Indian American community would then amount to \$120 billion. The average tax rate is 25 percent, but much higher for high income earners. At a tax rate of 25 percent, Indian Americans would then contribute \$30 billion in taxes. Then, there are thousands of Indian-owned businesses, several billion- and multi-million-dollar companies which generate tens of billions of dollars in income and also pay taxes amounting to tens of billions. Moreover, large numbers of Indian Americans are home-owners and pay real estate taxes in the billions of dollars. City Planning staffer Tara Singh (2017) in a study based on extrapolated data has found that Indo-Caribbeans had a home-ownership rate of 65 percent in New York City, which is second only to Italian Americans and just above Filipino Americans. It was found that Indo-Caribbeans and Indian Americans have the shortest time-span between their arrival in New York and home-ownership: of between three and five years. In sections of New York populated by Indo-Caribbeans, 70 percent of the residents own homes. Also, tax accountants and real estate agents have informed this author that an estimated two-thirds of Indo-Caribbean and other Indian Americans families are home-owners. Each property is valued at between \$600,000 for one single family and \$850,000 for a multi-unit home, thus amounting to an average value of \$725,000. A population of 750,000 with four individuals per household would amount to about 125,000 homes. At a value of \$725,000 per home, the Indo-Caribbean real estate value would then exceed \$100 billion.

With regard to Indian Americans, when assuming one million Indian households with 65 percent of home-ownership, then about 650,000 would own properties. Furthermore, some Indians, including Indo-Caribbeans,

own multiple or multi-unit dwellings that generate rental income. In some communities – as in Queens in New York City, in the neighbourhoods of Richmond Hill, Briarwood, Jamaica, Queens Village, Hollis and so on – between 60 and 80 percent of properties are owned by Indians (predominantly Indo-Caribbeans). Indo-Caribbeans have also acquired and transformed buildings in large swathes of inner cities that previously had been inhabitable due to their poor state of repair – such as New York City (the Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens), Schenectady, Orlando, Miami, Fort Lauderdale, Houston, Boston, Chicago and so on. As tax accountants estimate, the real estate property assets of Indian Americans may be valued in the hundreds of billions of dollars. (Using an average of \$725,000 per property and a number of more than 650,000 properties, the estimated total value would amount to around \$500 billion). Many Indians also own financial assets (stocks, bonds, bank accounts), as well as other non-movable assets (land, commercial and residential real estate) that should be valued in the tens (if not hundreds) of billions of dollars and for which they pay taxes. The total net worth of the Indian American community would thus be much more than \$500 billion. Hence, the spending and investment of Indian Americans, based on the multiplier or spread effect (of six, as estimated by economists) throughout the US economy, must have created tens of thousands of jobs and also contributes a significant chunk of the GDP of the US. Assuming that their net value is just half of the estimated \$500 billion, or \$250 billion, and given that the total US national income was \$20 trillion in the year 2020, this means that the small Indian American population contributed more than 1 percent of the GDP of the entire US.

### **Transnational Linkages: India and Home Countries**

Indo-Caribbean Americans exhibit diasporic orientations towards India and their homelands. They exist in a transnational social space, being in touch with family and friends in various home countries. They express and demonstrate solidarity with each other, especially when in distress and when it comes to ‘home’, responding appropriately to events. As Brettell (2006) has explained, this behaviour is known as transnationalism; it is important to immigrants because of family, ancestral, emotional and cultural ties with the homeland. It also serves as a building block of diasporic communities. Vertovec (2009)

has stated that technology and transport have made these linkages faster, easier and less expensive than in the recent past. The diaspora now receives updated information about events happening back home, through communications technology. Furthermore, there has been transnational networking among Indian diaspora communities around the globe, as well as with the ancestral homeland (India), through organisations such as GOPIO (Global Organisation of People of Indian Origin), IDC (Indian Diaspora Council) and many others (Bisram, 2012; 2016).<sup>4</sup>

Indo-Caribbean migrants have continuous ongoing linkups not only to home (that is, the Caribbean), but they also have cultural connection with and interests in India, which are maintained through music and film, costume, food, print media and so on. Indian American ethnic publications provide news about India, and Indo-Caribbeans subscribe to these as well. Tanikella (2009) and Bisram (2005) have reported that the weekly printed Indo-Caribbean media in New York as well as weekly TV and radio programmes have provided news from home since the 1980s. Indo-Caribbeans also keep abreast with events at home and in India through the online versions of the major national papers of Trinidad, Guyana, Suriname and India, as well as through telecommunications with family members.

A major form of connectivity with the homeland is staying in touch with family members and friends, as well as sending financial support for them or for various worthy causes. They visit the homeland regularly and/or send large amounts of remittances or various other forms of material assistance. A study on Guyanese Americans, for example, found that there has been a long tradition of linkage and support for family members in Guyana, as well as for schools and villages linked to diaspora members (Marera, Sandin and Alvarez, 2020).

Some Indo-Caribbeans, like in any other immigrant community in America, also invest in their countries of origin or provide technical skills to government for national development. Indo-Caribbean diaspora philanthropists and foundations have undertaken humanitarian missions to Guyana and Trinidad, providing health care and other forms of assistance to the poor (*Guyana Chronicle*, 2020; Welling, Rich and Elster, 2015; *Kaieteur News*, 2017). Whenever

<sup>4</sup> For more information on these two organisations, see <http://www.gopio.net/> and <http://www.indiandiasporacouncil.org/>, as well as Ramsaran, 2012.

there have occurred natural disasters in Guyana, Trinidad, Suriname, India, or any other relevant country, Indo-Caribbean Americans have organised relief efforts, sending millions of dollars in relief assistance in recent years. Indo-Caribbeans have organised large amounts of COVID-19 assistance (masks, sanitisers, PPEs, oxygen containers, testing kits and so on), valued in the tens of millions of dollars, which were sent to Guyana, Trinidad and Suriname as well as to other territories in the region. In May and June 2021, Guyana was inundated by floodwaters, causing Indo-Caribbeans (Guyanese, Trinis and Surinamese) to respond to the natural disaster by raising funds and various material forms of aid. And when Trinidad was affected by widespread flooding in 2018, Indo-Caribbean Americans, regardless of national origin, came together and organised relief assistance that was sent to the island for public distribution to the affected communities. Indo-Caribbeans are also known to organise relief in response to natural disasters in India and elsewhere (*The New York Times*, 2021; IDRF, 2021; CARICOM, 2021).

The Indo-Caribbean diaspora in the US and elsewhere sends large amounts of remittances to the home countries. Guyana, for example, has received an average of \$400 million in remittances annually over the past few decades (Kumar, 2013; *Trading Economics*, ‘Guyana remittances’). Over the years, remittances have contributed approximately 15 percent of the GDP. Remittances to Trinidad have averaged about \$140 million annually over the past decade, less than 1 percent of the country’s GDP (*Trading Economics*, ‘Trinidad and Tobago remittances’; *Index mundi*, 2019; Rambaran, 2017). Remittances to Suriname have been modest over the past five years, averaging \$95 million annually, which constitutes less than 2 percent of Suriname’s GDP over the past several years (FRED, 2022). Overall, remittances contributed an average of annually 2 percent of Guyana’s GDP between 1980 and 2012. For Trinidad and Suriname, it is less than 1 percent annually over that period of time. Overall, between 1980 and 2012 the percentage contribution of remittances to GDP increased over time (*Go Lean . . . Caribbean*, 2014).

Transnationalism is further reinforced by travel to the home countries to visit loved ones and friends. Hundreds of thousands of Indo-Caribbeans visit home every year, contributing to the economy via taxes and general spending for goods and services. To illustrate, in the case of Guyana, about 285,000 members of the

diaspora visited the homeland annually in the decade preceding the COVID-19 pandemic, and about 200,000 annually in the following decade, most of them flying from the US (Statista, 'Number of international tourist arrivals in Guyana'). Travel agents have informed this author that every adult visitor spends an average of \$2,000 when visiting a Caribbean homeland, with the cash flow benefiting the overall economy. With hundreds of thousands visiting every year, cumulatively this is a very large injection of cash, creating jobs and propping up the weak economy. It is estimated that over the past two decades visitors annually contributed about 8 percent of Guyana's GDP (Knoema, Guyana').

With regard to Trinidad, about 480,000 visited in 2019 and 375,000 in 2018, averaging 350,000 annually for the preceding decade (Knoema, 'Trinidad and Tobago'), with the bulk coming from the US where the national carrier, Caribbean Airlines, offers several flights daily from airports in cities heavily populated by Trinis. With an average of \$2,000 spent by each adult visitor, in addition to costs for tickets and airport and security taxes, Trini Americans inject a large amount of money into their former homeland's economy, thereby creating jobs and raising the GDP. In the decade prior to COVID-19, Suriname had an annual average of 230,000 visitors, most of them from the Netherlands (Statista, 'Number of international tourist arrivals in Suriname'; Rambarran, 2017). It is estimated that 25,000 Surinamese Americans visit their former homeland, annually leaving about \$2,000 per person in addition to thousands of dollars more for rehabilitating homes. As in Trinidad and Guyana, the injection of these critical funds from the diaspora has helped to prop up the economy via tax collection, job creation and the benefits that come from the general spending of visitors.

The American-based diaspora of Caribbean countries has responded to official government appeals to invest in their former homelands. The political leaders of Caribbean countries have regularly visited metropolitan cities, almost annually over the past couple of decades, pleading with their diasporas to invest in their former homeland or enlisting their service to secure development. Some in the diaspora have responded positively to these appeals (*News Source*, 2016; UN IOM, 2015; Reis, 2007; Matera, Sandin and Alvarez, 2020). The diaspora has had a history of organising engagement programmes and events in the US in order to support their home countries. For example, diaspora engagement events were organised for the president of Suriname in New York in September 2021,

for the president of Guyana in New York in September 2021 and for the prime minister of Guyana in Miami and New York in October 2021 (Bisram, 2021a; *Indo-Caribbean*, 2021; *Demerara Waves*, 2021).

## Conclusion

Almost all studies on Indian Americans have focused on immigrants from India, neglecting Indo-Caribbeans who make up a sizeable group (Singh, 2017a). This study highlights the contributions of Indo-Caribbeans to the US and to their home countries. As it has demonstrated, much like immigrants elsewhere, Indians from the Caribbean yearn to migrate to the US, thereby fuelling continuous immigration flows. Indo-Caribbeans have migrated to the US mostly for socio-economic and political reasons after 1965, when the US first opened its borders to them. Once in the US, like all other Indian Americans, they have not been a burden on the economy in any shape or form. Like most other immigrants, they have taken up jobs which US-born citizens have been unwilling or unavailable to perform or for which they lack skills and competence.

Educationally and financially, Indo-Caribbeans and other Indian Americans have outperformed other immigrant groups and US-born citizens. They have acquired substantial wealth and made enormous contributions to the development and growth of the US, particularly over the past two decades. Since then, Indo-Caribbean prosperity in the US has increased manifold, especially when compared to the 1960s and 1970s, among the pioneering Indian immigrants. There has been a slow transition from low-income status during the 1960s and 1970s (with an average income of \$4,000) to high-income earnings from the 1980s onwards, and from manual (factory) labour to professional occupations during the 1990s and thereafter. Their life has also seen a major transformation in terms of home- and vehicle-ownership – from virtually none during the 1960s and 1970s to a high percentage of home- and car-ownership from the 1980s onwards. In addition, they have launched businesses that create large numbers of jobs, and they earn and spend hundreds of billions of dollars annually, thus boosting the GDP.

Indo-Caribbeans have experienced a remarkable economic advancement over the last fifty-five years, both in absolute terms and relative to the rest of the Indian (South Asian) American and non-Indian population of the US. This

is an unprecedented achievement relative to the other ethnic and immigrant groups that constitute the American population. This achievement may be unprecedented not only for the Indian and Caribbean diasporas, but also in terms of worldwide modern immigrant history.

Indo-Caribbean Americans have been financially better off than they were in their home countries, be it Guyana, Trinidad, Suriname, or another nation. Through transnational linkages, they have contributed much help to jump-start the economy and prosperity of their homelands. Their infusion of remittances and material assistance, as well as their investments and technology transfer have helped fuel the growth of their home countries. Although this chapter's focus has been on Indo-Caribbeans, this study holds relevance also to other immigrant groups, debunking the myth that immigrants are a burden on the US.

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# 8

## WEST AFRICAN ISLAM IN THE US: THE SENEGALESE MURID TRANSNATIONAL COMMUNITY

*José Luis Gázquez Iglesias*

### **Introduction**

The 1980s and 1990s witnessed a significant growth in the influx of African migrants to the US. Since then, African Muslims migrants, such as the Murids from Senegal, with their transnational livelihoods and their social institutions and culture, have emerged as an important structure of belonging and religious identity in American cities, especially New York. By focusing on the history and institutional development of the Senegalese Murid transnational Islamic community in the US, the aim of this chapter is to highlight the positive role that their leaders and followers have played in providing a linkage with the long history of Islam on the continent and, more recently, as a cultural reference and rallying point for African Muslims in America looking to promote Islamic and African values in Western societies.

### **The History of African Islam in North America: Connections and Hemispheric Presence**

The main objective of this section is to portray a diachronic historical perspective that allows the re-evaluation of the presence of West African Islam in North America, not as a recent phenomenon linked to the sustained increase of migratory flows since the latest stage of globalisation, but rather going back to at least the seventeenth century (Austin, 1997; Gomez, 2005; Diouf, 1998).

The importance is twofold: first, it renders visible historical connections that link events taking place simultaneously in West Africa and the Americas (Islamic reformist movements in West Africa motivated by the slave economy and deportation of enslaved populations), and, second, it places Islam in the Americas within a larger historical perspective, rather than limiting it to a more recent period from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries onwards.

For example, critical historical studies about the history of the pre-colonial West African Wolof kingdoms of Senegambia during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries show that, while the growing French presence and French victory against the Wolof monarchy and their Islamic allies was a deciding factor in the implementation of a colonial order, movements such as the Murid Sufi brotherhood, the subject of this research, cannot be directly associated with and reduced to a reaction to the former's encroachment, but are part of broader Islamic renovation movements sweeping the region and linked to the social disruptions that the slave trade brought to the political systems and societies in Africa (Glover, 2007; Diouf, 2001). As some authors have shown, the emergence of the mystical figure of the founder Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba and the rise of his Sufi movement of the Muridiyya is better understood as a dissident stance that the Cheikh adopted towards monarchical and Islamic power in Kajoor, rather than just as a reaction or replacement of Wolof monarchical resistance to the French colonial order (Robinson, 2000; Searing, 2002).

During this period, until the mid-nineteenth century, political systems such as the Wolof kingdoms that incorporated Islam as an ally of power, intensely participated in the slave trade, provoking the deportation of millions of Africans to North America. Recent studies have demonstrated that a good portion of the enslaved African population forcefully displaced to the American continent were, in fact, Muslims. By acknowledging that Islam was present in the Americas already in these centuries, it is also recognised that this religion was present in the continent before others, such as Judaism and Protestantism, which arrived at a later stage (Diouf, 1998). In fact, some calculate that more than 50 percent of the enslaved African population that was brought to British North America may have been Muslim, since most of them came from areas where Islam had been the predominant culture for centuries, as is the case of many West African countries, such as Guinea, Gambia, Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, or from areas with important Muslim

minorities such as Nigeria, Ghana, or Côte d'Ivoire (Abdullah, 2013). It is also worth mentioning that, by recognising this additional historical fact, it is also acknowledged that West Africans represented the total of the Muslim population in America for centuries before the arrival of the first Arab immigrants in the late nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> Equally important in the acknowledgement of this historical presence of African Islam in America is the possibility for contemporary African Muslims in the USA to draw a connection of their presence that goes back to the founding years of the country. In fact, a crucial aspect of the construction and negotiation of the Senegalese Murid transnational identity is their active role in the struggle against both racial and religious discrimination.

While it is important to frame issues about the historicity of the African diaspora (especially the African Islamic one) in America within this diachronic historical dimension, and especially to highlight this connection with the pre-colonial involvement of African political regimes in the massive deportation process, this chapter deals with a more recent presence of Africans and African Islam in the USA: the Murid Sufi order from Senegal.

The first West African migrants of the contemporary period were former British African colonies that obtained independence in the late 1950s and 1960s, such as Nigeria and Ghana. Migrants from these countries still represent the most numerous West African foreign populations in the US. Among the factors that explain further growth of the West African migrant population since then is the adoption of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which repealed national quotas. By contrast, West African migrants from Francophone countries started to arrive in the US in the late 1970s, because of the increasingly restrictive migration policies implemented in France during that decade. Before these restrictions, France had been the main country of destination for migrants of this region since the early twentieth century, and especially during World War II and in its aftermath. The Senegalese diaspora in the US has been growing steadily since then, as a result of the overall increase of West African migration coming from Francophone countries from the 1990 onwards. This increase has been fostered by the implementation of amnesty reforms aimed to regularise irregular migrants and the adoption of policies

<sup>1</sup> For a portrayal of the first West African Muslims slaves in America, see Austin (1997).

such as the Immigration Act of 1990, as well as its encompassing Diversity Visa Program, created for migrants coming from countries with low rates of immigration, such as West African nations. The number of Senegalese living in the US is estimated to be approximately 18,000, out of a West African population estimated to be 2.1 million (US Census Bureau, 2019).

Regarding the current Islamic presence in the US, it represents a growing and diverse population estimated between 4 and 6 million, with projections of becoming the second-largest religion of the country by 2050 (Kane, 2011; Abdullah, 2013). Regarding African Muslims specifically, they account for approximately 30 to 40 percent of the total Muslim population in the US. Although a great majority of Muslims in America are immigrants coming from eighty different countries, African American Muslims and American Muslims also represent a significant proportion of the total Muslim population in the US (Abdullah, 2013).

Despite this diversity in terms of country of origin and/or ethnic appropriation, the stereotyped depictions of Muslims as mainly Arab are prevalent and continue to feed American representations about this religion in the US. In fact, one of the multiple consequences of the 9/11 attacks on the Muslim population of the US was the amplified police harassment of West African Muslim migrants based on racial profiling despite their country of origin, in the framework of measures implemented under the USA PATRIOT Act as a strategy to counter terrorism and its supposed links with Muslim and Arab cultures.<sup>2</sup>

### **Senegalese Islam and Murid Studies in Africa and Abroad**

One of the main features of the Muridiyya transnational Sufi order is the notion of work and its religious dimension, which its adherents have developed since the order's creation. While not of his authorship, Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba is credited by Murids for coining the phrase 'Work as you may never die and pray as you may die tomorrow' to highlight the importance of work in his religious project.

<sup>2</sup> USA PATRIOT Act stands for 'Unifying and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism'. Cases were reported of Senegalese migrants, many of them carrying Arab names, charged for illegal street-selling under suspicion of financing terrorism (Buggenhagen, 2008).

But, in order to understand how this notion of work has become institutionalised into concrete practices and how the Murid brotherhood has been able to adapt to changing circumstances, especially in the US cultural environment, it is necessary to briefly explain its main principles, institutions and celebrations.

First of all, the Murid community is constituted by a series of religious leaders called *marabouts*, *cheikhs* or *serigne*, linked to their disciples or *talibé* by a pact of allegiance called *njebellu* (submission). This individual bond – the marabout-taalibé relationship – links disciples to their leaders, who in turn are disciples of marabouts of higher ranks, who are connected to the apex of a pyramidal organisational structure headed by the paramount authority figure of the Khalife Général, who is the eldest surviving son (now grandson) of the founder of the order, Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba Mbacké.

Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba defied the political alliance of Islam with secular power and refused to occupy a traditional position as adviser of the latter within the context of the pre-colonial Wolof kingdom of Kajoor. After several trips in the region of today's Mauritania, and after receiving his last Islamic formation from Quranic masters of the region, he decided to return to his homeland, the pre-colonial kingdom of Bawol. There, he aimed to promote a new Sufi way based on a revolutionary pedagogical method. He called this method of education *daara tarbiyya*, which combined Islamic education with physical work:

Tarbiyya is a holistic approach to education invented by the Sufis that goes beyond the mere transmission of knowledge and seeks to transform the whole being by touching the body, the mind, and the soul. It establishes a special relationship between the sheikh and his disciple, who is no longer a *taaleb* (student) but a *murid* (aspirant) on the path of God who surrenders his will to his master and gives him command of every aspect of his life. Tarbiyya requires from the aspirant a clear commitment to follow the sheikh's recommendations on all matters, temporal and spiritual. (Babou, 2007, p. 63)

It is also important to highlight the role that the first disciples of Bamba played in the success of the Murid way, as a means for reconstructing the social Wolof tissue disrupted by violent conflict. One in particular, Cheikh Ibrahima Fall,

stands out from the rest, as he is the founder of a sect within the brotherhood: the *bayefalls*.<sup>3</sup> From the standpoint of Murid sources, Cheikh Ibrahima Fall is the hagiographical representation of what is supposed to be the raw model of the marabout-taalibé relationship, the behaviour of total submission of the latter to the former and the Murid religious code of work. The total submission of Ibrahima Fall to the spiritual authority of Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba and his devotion towards work on his behalf is supposed to illustrate to all Murid followers the core beliefs and practices of the *tarixa*. Together, Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba, Cheikh Ibrahima Fall and other followers of the first hour of the brotherhood established *daaras* (Quranic School) where they combined physical work with Islamic instruction and formation.

Besides the pact of allegiance that defines the organisational structure of the chain of authority, the brotherhood is sustained by two other socio-economic practices that create value within each maraboutic community and within the religious community as a whole. These are the concepts of *khidma* and *hadiyya*. The first, which is translated as ‘service’, but commonly referred to as ‘work’, is known to be a central element of Murid doctrine and practice. In fact, the name that Amadou Bamba coined for himself – Khaadim ar Rasul, Servant of the Prophet – was derived from this concept. In fact, *khidma* is a kind of work performed for the cheikh, for the sake of others, or the community as a whole, in which there is no material but only otherworldly reward expected. The second refers to the material tribute that a disciple must give to his spiritual leader for caring for him/her in this life and by mediating with God on his/her behalf. While *hadiyya* is a common Sufi practice, the role that it plays in the creation of spiritual economic circuits (Kane, 2011; Bugenhagen, 2012; Babou, 2007) in the Murid organisation allows the growth and expansion of its followers and institutions. For example, by contributing in terms of *khidma* or *hadiyya* offerings to the efforts for building the Great Mosque at Touba, Murid disciples are in their mind-set assuring the continuation of the founder’s mission and thus contributing to the materialisation of its *Baraka* or spiritual grace.

<sup>3</sup> Bayefalls today are some of the most prominent figures among contemporary Murids. For some, their Islam is located outside Muslim orthodoxy because of practices considered illegitimate. However, Bayefalls also represent the syncretism between Islam and pre-colonial Wolof culture.

*Hadiyya* is offered for the first time at the conversion ceremony and afterwards during *ziyaras* (religious visits) and Murid celebrations, such as the Great Magal of Touba, a pilgrimage to commemorate the return of Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba from his forced exile in Gabon, where he was deported by the French colonial administration who feared that the growing popularity of the marabout could instigate a revolt against them.

In fact, the Great Magal of Touba is the central event and main celebration of the Murid brotherhood. Every year, it attracts millions of pilgrims from different regions and cities of Senegal and its diaspora. While it is a duty for every Murid disciple to commemorate and perform the pilgrimage to the holy city, a great number of them, especially those living far away and/or with an unstable migratory status in their host country, are unable to attend. As in the case of the *ziyara*, the celebration of the Magal in diaspora settings has become a distinctive feature of Murid transnational communities. Moreover, Magals are instances where Murid transnational disciples can confirm the materialisation of their religious contributions and remittances through redistribution via the leadership of the brotherhood or development projects for the city of Touba (Bava, 2001). Indeed, the transnational circulation of religious celebrations through digital media or the broadcasting of Magals, as some have suggested, are a central feature for the development of the circuits of the spiritual transnational economy (Buggenhagen, 2012).

Finally, when Murid disciples started migrating to urban centres in Senegal, they were forced to re-create religious bonds with their rural cheikhs through the creation of urban Sufi associations called *dahira* (prayer circle in Arabic), in order to assure the survival and reproduction of their Islamic community in the new context of the city where spiritual leaders were initially absent. *Dahiras* were created based on several criteria, such as allegiance to the same marabout, place of work, or neighbourhood of residence (Diop, 1981).

Gradually, as the brotherhood members improved their position in urban commerce and trade, *dahiras* became springboards for international migration as an extension of Murid networks (Ebin, 1995), while they also turned into the main structure of belonging in the countries of immigration. Cheikh Anta Babou and others identify several types of them, as well as the vital social functions that they fulfil for members of the brotherhood in the diaspora in the

US and other countries of Murid immigration (Diouf, 2000; Gázquez, 2021; Babou, 2002; Bava, 2004).

### **Murid Studies and Murids in the US**

One of the most remarkable features of the Muridiyya order is the interest that it has attracted in Western knowledge production institutions since colonial times (as in the figure of the colonial anthropologist). It is worth mentioning that it is possible to establish a link between Western representations of African Islam – in this case, the Murid *tarixa* – and the goals of the French colonisers to control the territory and impose a colonial order. In fact, the scholarly work of Paul Marty (1917) helped the French administrators create a menacing image of Islamic Sufi leaders such as Bamba, by trying to relate the latter with other instances of violent *jihad* occurring in the region at the time. Since then, Western approaches to the Murid brotherhood have struggled to come to terms with the limits of Western methodologies to accurately represent non-Western societies. Nevertheless, the number and diversity of scholarly works that have been inspired by the numerous and multi-faceted dynamics of this religious movement and transnational community continue to be noteworthy (Riccio, 2001; 2004).

In general, it is possible to organise Murid Studies into two broad categories: those centred on the political relationship between the Sufi organisation (its leaders and institutions) and the state (either in its colonial or post-colonial versions), and those committed to the study of Murid transnational networks and circuits spanning the globe and cities in Senegal. The first field of scientific interest that the Murid order aroused can be traced to historical studies analysing the relationship between secular and religious Islamic power. This issue has been raised at several moments during the centuries spanning the slave trade, regarding Muslim participation and the Islamic reform movement that it entailed.

As these research studies have suggested, major Islamic movements taking place in West Africa during these centuries – such as the one commanded by Usman dan Fodio, leading to the establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate (today's Nigeria) or by El-Hadji Ummar Tall (in *Toucouleur* country) – were primarily concerned with the articulation of the religious language of Islam, particularly the concept of *jihad*, along with the goal of conquering political power by any method, including armed resistance (Robinson, 1985). Instead,

the non-violent character of Bamba's Sufi movement and the philosophy it promoted could best be described as a proposal of Islamic renewal through the rehabilitation of a peaceful Sufi perspective called Muridiyya. According to Murid sources, Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba never claimed to have founded a new *tarixa*, but recovered and rehabilitated a Sufi way already put forward by the Prophet Muhammad.<sup>4</sup> Based on education as the primary tool for achieving change in a Wolof society disrupted by the violence of the slave trade and the political struggles and conflicts associated with it, Bamba promoted another conceptualisation of jihad, built around the internal struggle that each believer fights against him- or herself and thus discredited violent action (Babou, 2007). While his movement was not the only one adopting a non-violent stance towards colonial rule, it was the most successful one negotiating and resisting the cultural assault of French imperialism, at the same time providing a framework of emancipation from the former despotic regimes (Searing, 2002).

While it is possible to consider both versions of jihad operating in this historical context as resistance to European encroachment/domination, following France's military victory and the imposition of colonial rule in the former Wolof kingdoms and other vast regions of the continent, the relationship between Islamic Sufi organisations and Western colonial state power evolved into different paths that oscillated between accommodation and cooperation, but no direct confrontation (Robinson, 2000). In fact, all historical research conducted for dealing with this and the subsequent periods has focused on the political influence that Sufi Islamic organisations have exerted on the nation- and state-building processes in colonial and post-colonial Senegal.

The other body of academic knowledge produced about the Murid brotherhood is concerned with the creation, dynamics and expansion of transnational Murid networks originating in the rural and semi-deserted region of Ferlo in Senegal, where Ahmadou Bamba founded the village of Touba in the former Wolof kingdom of Bawol, to span multiple cities in

<sup>4</sup> It is important to highlight this issue as it has been a Murid contention since its emergence: the adherence to the Islamic Ummah. This claim has been a constant in the history of African Islam battling for recognition first and foremost within the Islamic orthodoxy dominated by Arab culture.

Senegal, Africa and countries and cities of the Global North, including the US. While it has been argued that both bodies of knowledge and phenomena intersect in multiple ways (Gázquez, 2021), this chapter is concerned mainly with the more recent presence of the Murid transnational community and its institutions in North America, especially in New York City.

### **Murid Integration in the US**

Murid migrants have been known to work in several sectors of both the formal and informal economy, in Senegal as well as in its diasporas. One of the most visible forms of employment for Senegalese Murid migrants has been street-selling. Street-selling by West African migrants has been a current phenomenon at work in global cities, especially in Europe and North America for at least the past three decades, but it is the most visible dimension of a transnational economic system that connects Murid businesses and stores in US cities, such as New York City, with Sandaga or Ocasse markets in Dakar and Touba back in Senegal (Ebin, 1995; Diouf, 2000). The constitution, expansion and dynamics of Murid transnational networks have been well-studied for this time-span, demonstrating the entanglements between religious and commercial interests. This system is also supported by ethnic businesses located in enclaves (such as Harlem) that provide various kinds of services to the migrant community, such as African products, restaurants, cash transfer businesses, hair-dressing salons, communication services and so on.

It must be said that, while many Murid migrants (especially those with a regular migratory status) have also been employed in other sectors of the economy that are not directly linked with these networks, they equally contribute to the development of the transnational space as a whole, with the financial resources remitted to their families and the brotherhood back in Senegal. Overall, as Diouf has stated, '[p]recisely because of their logics of accumulation and their forms of organisation, Murids occupy special neighbourhoods in the cities where they are present in large numbers. Their overriding concern is to preserve their identity and the rites of social exclusiveness that are displayed and experienced in ideological, symbolic, and mythical intensification' (2000, p. 693).

In fact, the most remarkable feature of the Murids' presence in the US, when compared to other diaspora formations elsewhere, is the high degree of

its institutionalisation and recognition by local authorities. While most of its ritual dynamics and institutions are under construction in each country and city of destination, it is in New York City that the Murid *tarixa* has obtained its highest degree of recognition by a host government: on 28 July 1989, the mayor of Manhattan, Dinkins, declared Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba Day. Since then, under the leadership of the MICA,<sup>5</sup> not only the Murid of New York City, but also those living in other American cities every year celebrate the date with a parade and multiple cultural activities, which include lectures at the United Nations. Scholars have highlighted important features of the Murid parade and cultural activities. One of them is the large number of American and Senegalese flags displayed by the participants, underscoring the Murids' cosmopolitan and transnational ways of life while showing deference and respect to the host country.

Another aspect that has been pointed out is the number of Murid women involved in the organisation and celebration of the events, which in turn is a reflection of the importance of women as active members in the history of this brotherhood. One of the central historical characters and adored figures in the historiography of Muridism is Sokhna Mame Diarra Bousso, mother of Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba. In addition to her importance for Murid historical narratives and perspectives, the figure of Mame Diarra Bousso has become a rallying point for Murid women, enabling the creation of exclusively feminine spaces within the male-dominated structures of the *tarixa* (Bâ, 2008; Coulon, 1988; Buggenhagen, 2012; Massó, 2013).

Why has the Murid brotherhood achieved this level of development and visibility in the US and not elsewhere? Among the main reasons is the above-mentioned Islamic and African presence in the Americas since the era of the slave trade. From the nineteenth century onwards, Islam has become an important component of the race liberation struggle fought by African Americans, including the American Civil War, the Civil Rights Movement, the Black Panthers, and the Nation of Islam led by Elijah Muhammad and later Malcolm Shabazz. Another factor that has been put forward to explain a more visible and therefore more integrated and developed version of Muridism in

<sup>5</sup> Murid Islamic Community of America (MICA) is the name of the main Murid dahirah in the United States. It was founded in the late 1980s.

the US rather than in European countries such as France is the secular regulation of public space regarding the display of religious practices or symbols in Europe, when compared to the more tolerant multi-cultural context of cities such as New York.

Finally, the rise of identity politics since the late 1970s in countries such as France, which has been experiencing increased migration from its former colonies, has also played an important role in the brotherhood's development there being less visible than in the US. Although most Murid migrants are usually Francophone, and despite the fact that France has been the primary international migratory destiny for Murid and Senegalese migrants, the development of religious institutions and integration into French society is less apparent than in America. Undoubtedly, one of the most important contributions of the Murid transnational Islamic community in the US is the engagement of its members in building a positive and peaceful image of Islam in the post-9/11 period. Although this could be partially explained by the cosmopolitan character displayed by its members in diverse migration contexts, it is important to establish its pacifist orientation rooted, as we have mentioned, in the context of West African Islamic reform movements and French colonial power.

While it is not possible to reduce Senegalese international migration to the Wolof members of the brotherhood, the latter have been a constant throughout the migratory history of this country to the US. As stated above, Murid presence in the US goes back to the late 1970s and early 1980s, as an extension of the growth of religious-commercial networks originating in Touba or Dakar. They first Murids arrived in New York City and, like other immigrant groups, established themselves in neighbourhood enclaves, mainly in the Black African American neighbourhood of Harlem.

In many accounts, Murids openly established a link with the Black emancipation movement, by reinterpreting the ideological influences that Martin Luther King Jr had received in order to shape his movement. Murids, by establishing connections between Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba and Gandhi, proposed a historical perspective that linked the Christian-led civil rights movement in the US to the non-violent, peaceful Islamic resistance movement of Bamba in the late nineteenth century, in the context of the internal struggle within the Wolof kingdoms and the French imperial project in West Africa (Abdullah, 2013). While this historical view could be questioned, it is helpful to grasp

how Murids have framed and interpreted history and how this interpretation has helped them to negotiate their difficult and ambivalent relations with the African American population in the ‘Black encounter’ that occurred since the 1980s onwards in US cities such as New York, Chicago and Atlanta, and within neighbourhoods such as Harlem. Finally, this interpretation of Black emancipation history has also helped to shift the focus of their cultural resistance from opposing colonialism to opposing racism (Abdullah, 2013, p. 34)

When negotiating their identity within the context of the US, there are two basic historical claims laid by the Murids: that they as Africans are part of the larger Black world, and – as followers of Bamba, a follower of the Prophet Muhammad himself – they are part of the larger Muslim world. The first is a response to their relations with African American people, whereas the second concerns their relations with Arab Muslims and with the American public as a whole. Even though relations between African Americans and West Africans in America have been characterised by cultural and historical tensions, their development also represents a major possibility for further integration of African Muslims in the US as well as a major possibility for Black African Americans to re-evaluate their bonds with Africa and reconfigure their identity.

Finally, transnational religious communities such as the Murid should be appreciated for providing insights into what it means to implement collective cultural practices such as *khidma* in global neoliberal economic contexts, where the belief in the autonomy of the individual has been hegemonic, as in the case of American capitalist society.

### **Murid Studies and Knowledge Production: The Transnational Field**

In their classical study, *Nations unbound: Transnational projects, postcolonial predicaments and deterritorialized nation-states*, Basch et al. (1995, p. 7) have defined transnationalism as ‘processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement’. If we adhere to this definition, one of the major contributions of Murid Studies lies in its theoretical value to the field of Transnational Studies and thereby the challenge that it represents to the hegemony of Western methodologies in the social sciences and the capitalist economic system at this critical global juncture. Since its inception, capitalism has been backed by an

ideological system based on a belief in the autonomy of the individual and the predominance of rationalist thought in the development of the modern social sciences. As it has been widely demonstrated by de-colonial contemporary thinkers, universities worldwide, especially those at the heart of the Eurocentric intellectual tradition, have played a crucial role in the production of the knowledge necessary for the reproduction of this economic model and social system. In this sense, the body of scholarly work on the constitution and expansion of Murid networks is particularly useful for understanding the ways in which formal economic and political processes in Senegal and the US, for instance, intersect with the processes of creation and re-creation of a religious transnational community.

As it has been argued, it is no longer possible to ignore or simply label as theoretically irrelevant what is arbitrarily designed as traditional practices and exchanges occurring in the so-called ‘informal’ sector of the economy. In the case of African nation-states, this kind of exchange amounts to more than 50 percent of the total economic activity (Sarr, 2014). Related to this, it must be remembered that the recurrent crisis of African economies is one of the main factors for the sustained increase of migrants within this continent and beyond, ever since the end of the Cold War and since the rise of neoliberalism as the hegemonic economic model has had disastrous social consequences for most of the countries under its rule. Our case study shows that Senegalese migrants abroad not only send remittances to support their families in Senegal, but also contribute to the development of the Murid brotherhood.

It has been widely demonstrated that, since its inception, the Murid Sufi organisation has played a central political and economic role in the construction of the Senegalese colonial and independent state (Cruise O’Brien, 1971; Coulon, 1983). Migrating from their rural homeland to Dakar since the 1940s, Murid urban disciples gradually became an integral part of the economic landscape of cities in Senegal, by participating in urban markets such as Sandaga. By investing in commercial activities of the ‘informal’ sector, they were able to gain enough economic power to recreate the religious links with their leaders in the countryside, by adapting its main rites, rituals and institutions to the urban context. These transnational networks have paved the way for a process of accumulation and redistribution at the top hierarchy of the brotherhood,

which, in turn, has enabled its members to migrate to different cities all over the world. A transnational migratory space thus connects the multiple diaspora formations with the urban development project of the holy city of Touba, via the federative Murid system of the *dahiras* (Ross, 1995; Gueye, 2000).

While the various dimensions of Touba's special relations with the Senegalese state have themselves been a subject of academic interest and are at the base of what enables the creation of a transnational field, it also lives transnationally in the migratory cities of destiny and settlement. Whenever there is an important Murid celebration such as the Great Magal, or when a high rank marabout visits the city/ies of immigration, the whole community is mobilised to re-create the *ziyara* practice by organising the event. In the case of the Murids in New York, the biggest religious celebrations take place in Masjid Touba, a three-story building in Harlem, bought by members of the *tarixa* following the instructions of Serigne Mourtalla Mbacké.<sup>6</sup> In fact, Murids in European cities have obtained similar real estate properties, naming them *Keur Serigne Touba* (home of Serigne Touba)<sup>7</sup> and searching to promote and share their worldview with the host societies while providing a structure of belonging and social and cultural services to their members.

But it would be a mistake to think that the formal and the informal sectors of the economy are dissociated. This is the main reason why the analysis of non-state actors, such as the Murid, could be useful for understanding the intersections and entanglements between formal and informal economic practices, by blurring their abstract boundaries:

[T]hey often work both in the unregulated and in the regulated sectors of the global economy. They also participate in other kinds of financial institutions beyond the formal banking sector, but to understand them, we need to see how they operate in relation to each other. Murids employ a variety of money

<sup>6</sup> The late Cheikh Mourtalla Mbacké and his son, Mame Mor Mbacké, are known to be ambassadors of Muridism in the countries of immigration. Every year until his death, he toured European and American cities, instigating disciples to develop their institutions and peaceful and respectful relations with host governments and societies.

<sup>7</sup> Serigne Touba, the marabout of Touba, is the name by which Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba is popularly known.

management strategies to create long-term value in the face of volatility and turbulence. Murid economic practices have been forged over the *longue durée* to cope with conditions of volatility. (Buggenhagen, 2012, p. 63)

As mentioned above, Murid economic circuits help to maintain religious bonds between leaders and followers, but they also work to develop their institutions and their holy city back in Senegal, while they provide a structure of belonging in the diaspora. If we consider the overall development of the Murid brotherhood and its extensive diaspora in the historical context of the post-colonial period, it is possible to conclude that it has become the main means of social reconstruction in the context of state decline, especially since the neoliberal period. This last point has led some authors to consider the Murid brotherhood as an agent of development in Senegal (Moreno, 2005; Babou, 2007).

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has addressed the issue of the history of African Islam in the US, by focusing on the presence of the transnational Murid Sufi community from Senegal since the late 1970s. In the first place, I have shown that, while Murids represent a contemporary trend of African Islamic migration in North America, African Islam has been present in the Americas from the seventeenth century onwards, as result of both the West African political context and the capitalist slave system. In the second place, this contribution has presented the Murid brotherhood's main institutions, rites and organisation, arguing that religious bonds have been reworked and recreated by the Murids in order to adapt to changing urban and Western diaspora settings.

Thirdly, this article has shown how the transnational Sufi organisation has attracted much research interest from Western and African scholars. Most of them deal with the Murid influence in the state-building process of Senegal and the transnational development of the former, as a religious community that has spread from its rural origins in Senegal to multiple cities worldwide. While Murid and Senegalese international migration flows concerned mainly French cities during the 1960 and into the mid-1970s, they afterwards diversified to North and South America, Asia and other European cities. However, this article argues that it is in the US, particularly the neighbourhood of Harlem in New York City, where Murid institutions have reached their highest degree

of institutionalisation and recognition from host country and society. In fact, being a Black Muslim organisation, the Murid brotherhood connects its history and worldview with the historical struggle for racial emancipation and, more recently, against pejorative and negative representations of Islam in the post-9/11 period. In particular, it has been underscored that Murid collective practices such as *khidma*, when deployed in Western societies such as the US, imply questioning the social dynamics of capitalism while simultaneously proposing cultural alternatives to the alienating effects of individualistic scenarios.

Lastly, this chapter ends by highlighting the theoretical value of studying the transnational dynamics of a movement such as the Murid order. Indeed, when analysed throughout all of its history in Senegal and its diasporas, it is possible to argue that this community has been built systematically, by bridging formal and informal economic and social practices. Touba, the holy city of the Murids, constitutes the example of an urban project built and developed by transnational networks that span the world and concur here. By sending religious remittances for the development and growth of their institutions, especially for the development of Touba – today's second-largest city in Senegal – and by recreating and adapting their rituals in the US, Murids effectively continue to contribute to Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's dream.

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# 9

## INTEGRATIONIST ACCULTURATION: EXPERIENCES OF SOCIAL INSERTION OF PROFESSIONAL MEXICAN MIGRANTS IN THE US AND THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO AMERICAN MULTI-CULTURALISM\*

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### **Introduction**

In a previous study (Domínguez Villalobos and Vázquez Maggio, 2019), we observed that, for almost two-thirds of the skilled/professional/tertiary-educated Mexican migrants we surveyed, the decision to emigrate was not influenced by having family or acquaintances in the US. Nor did they choose their residence seeking to be close to other Mexicans. This suggests that most of our respondents had, in principle, the intention of integrating and interacting with US society. However, this does not necessarily imply that, once they arrive in the host society, they assume the new culture as their own and build a common cultural life in North American society without major problems. Migrants must go through an adaptation process which is difficult, more so for some than for others; undoubtedly, the significant differences in norms and culture, as well as language, represent obstacles to this adaptation.

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As a recent study on the acculturation and adaptation of migrants (Ferrer, Palacio, Hoyos and Madariaga, 2014) has pointed out, adaptation to a new country requires that the individual strive to overcome their resistance to a new environment, be able to adjust to the new culture and adopt a new language, or at least a new accent. Total assimilation is not achieved, which would mean leaving the culture of origin behind and adopting the culture of the host country as one's own; this would not even be desirable. According to the same authors, this adaptation is achieved with greater or lesser difficulty based on the degree of cultural difference between the host society and the society of origin, as well as the ability to overcome physical and psychological discomfort, which seems crucial for our purposes here.

There are several changes that the migrant must face, among which are new habitats, types of food, employment, norms and culture and, above all, new interpersonal and group relationships. Following Berry (2003), this population tends to integrate rather than assimilate. This occurs when there is a strong identification with both societies or their cultures – in this case, the Mexican and the North American – and the immigrant tries to preserve the characteristics of their culture. In our opinion, this type of social insertion via integrationist acculturation is a relevant contribution to the social fabric of a country such as the US in the context of globalisation.

One issue that must be considered is that the professional migration of Mexicans to the US is a relatively new phenomenon, having practically begun in the 1990s; furthermore, as the literature shows, years of residence matter for the integration process. Hence, the spectrum of this integration is wide among Mexican professional migrants, depending on the number of years of residency. We aim to explore the way in which our respondents are incorporated into US society and examine how they deal with it. We analyse the language at home and the transnational contacts that they have with family and friends in Mexico; how they live their experience of having emigrated and how they perceive themselves regarding their cultural affinities – that is, their ethno-national identity. Regarding the reception by North American society, we are interested in delving into their experiences of discrimination, the influence that it may have on their labour and social incorporation process, as well as their wishes to remain in the US or return to Mexico. Finally, it is important to analyse how the above issues are related to the national identity that they adopt as migrants. We are

particularly interested in emphasising how their attitudes, experiences and practices determine their contributions to American multi-cultural society.

Previous scientific literature has generally emphasised the economic contribution of skilled/professional/tertiary-educated migrants in the sense of a greater capacity to generate income, scientific and innovation contributions, as investors with economic capital and so on. However, the general migration literature also points to the contribution of migrants in terms of other types of capital that enriches host societies (Costigan, Lehr and Miao, 2016). In this sense, our participants make a significant contribution to US society by having integrationist attitudes (in Berry's sense) that contribute to greater social openness and multi-culturalism.

Our database comes from an online survey of professional migrants, carried out from September 2016 to August 2017. The survey contained a total of fifty-eight questions, both Likert-type and open-ended questions, addressing the motivations to migrate and stay, work conditions in Mexico and the US, family and social aspects, and identity, among others. The method to reach the participants was through institutions and various associations that have contact with qualified Mexicans in the US, such as the Global MX Network (formerly called the Talent Network), as well as the 'snowball' sampling technique.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the sample collected in this research is non-random, and the types of sampling used were deliberate and convenient, so that the representativeness of the results is limited to the surveyed population. In total, 813 complete responses were collected. It should be noted that our study differs in some results from the American Community Survey (ACS), the official and representative survey of society in the US. For example, the present research finds a younger qualified population with a higher educational level, compared to those in the ACS survey. It also has a lower proportion of women.<sup>2</sup>

The chapter is divided into four parts: the first section explores the basic concepts of identity and analyses the views of the participants regarding their integration process. The second section investigates the experiences of discrimination and their relations with national identity. In the third section, we

<sup>1</sup> At the end of the questionnaire, the support of the participants was requested for the dissemination of the survey among their acquaintances in the US, who also were Mexican professionals.

<sup>2</sup> For those interested in the differences between our sample and the ACS, see Vázquez Maggio and Domínguez Villalobos (2023).

review the balance of the migration experience in the voice of the participants themselves and explore their wishes for a possible return to Mexico. The last section presents our final thoughts and conclusions.

## Identity

Both the literature and the everyday real-world show that identity matters (Gilroy, 1997, p. 301, in Romaine, 2011). People have strong beliefs and emotions regarding various characteristics of their identities. In the context of migration, the globalisation of economies and the intensification of mobility have facilitated (not without friction) a mixture of cultures and identities on an unmatched level (Romaine, 2011). Migration scholars have addressed certain aspects of identity and examined the ways in which people relate to their environment (their new host/destination society), as well as how they perceive their own position within it, both as individuals and as members of a group.

Identities have, as Appiah (2019, p. 17) states, an objective and a subjective dimension: 'Identities cannot be arbitrarily imposed on you, but neither can you simply design them the way you want them to be'. It is important to recognise that immigrants are not simply passive recipients of labels conceptualised by the host country and its citizens. Migrants have agency in the construction of their identities and the freedom to highlight one or more of their aspects. This agency tends to be more limited among the working class than among the middle class, given the different forms of capital they possess – that is, economic, symbolic, social and cultural (Bourdieu, 1984). However, external categorisation and the way in which other people conceive them also influence the acculturation processes.

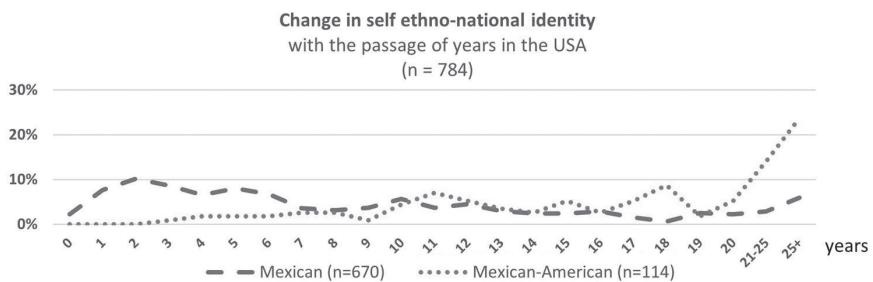
In terms of how Mexican middle-class professionals in the US view themselves in terms of their national identity, a significant majority of these participants (82 percent) say that they consider themselves Mexican, only 14 percent consider themselves as Mexican American and almost no respondents (1 percent) see themselves as US American. The fact that the vast majority consider themselves Mexican, as we will see below, does not mean a rejection of US culture but rather that they retain their 'Mexicanness' and adopt something of Americanness. The pattern of national identity found through the survey was corroborated and expanded by the interviews through which almost all the interviewees (with two exceptions, one female and one male)

demonstrated a strong attachment to Mexico and Mexican culture and, for that matter, an unmistakable desire to transmit their Mexican identity to their descendants.

### Factors that Influence Self-perception of Identity

Of the minority who consider themselves Mexican American (114 persons), 60 percent have lived in the US for more than fifteen years, with the remaining 40 percent less than fifteen years. Understandably, all respondents who have been in the US for less than three years consider themselves Mexican. To consider themselves Mexicans in the first place is no surprise, since it would be unreasonable to assume that first-generation migrants shortly after arriving ‘completely shed the markers of a foreign upbringing [that is, their country of origin]’ (Massey and Sánchez, 2010). Figure 9.1 illustrates this. As time goes by, some eventually begin to feel like Mexican Americans. This trend agrees with the findings reported by Casey and Dustmann (2010), Manning and Roy (2010) and Vazquez Maggio (2017), who found that the identity of the country of origin of immigrants declines with age and years of residence, while at the same time the identity of the destination country increases. It is also appreciated that, although identity changes over time, it is a slow and gradual process.

From the reflections of the interviewees, it is clear that, firstly, they perceive themselves as Mexicans; some, with the passage of time, do consider that they have ‘something of Americanness’ in them. Their Mexicanness seems to be



**Figure 9.1** Change in self-identified ethno-national identity. Source: Vázquez Maggio and Domínguez Villalobos, 2023.

**Table 9.1** Identity and immigration status. Source: Vázquez Maggio and Domínguez Villalobos, 2023.

Identity	Citizenship	Permanent Residency	TLCAN VISA	Other	Total
Mexican					
Num.	320	170	55	125	670
%	48	25	8	19	100
% of 813					82
North American					
Num.	5	2	1	0	8
%	63	25	13	0	100
% of 813					1
Mexican-North American					
Num.	107	2	2	3	114
%	94	2	2	3	100
% of 813					14
Other					
Num.	16	2	1	2	21
%	76	10	5	10	100
% of 813					3
Total					
Num.	448	176	59	130	813
%	55	22	7	16	100
% of 813					100

the central cultural identity that they adhere to while in the US. More importantly, if the individual is married to an American, then he or she invariably internalises aspects of being an American. For example, Gonzalo (54), with a master's degree and married to a woman born in the US, stated:

I am very clear that I am from Mexico, that I am a ‘chilango’. But I do have a ‘gringo’ part, that is, I do have a passport, yes, I am happy . . . I even vote in municipal elections, which even ‘gringos’ don’t do anymore. ‘Gringo, gringo’ in that sense, I notice it in certain habits. They are very curious things that you only realise when you return. [ . . . ] Those things are changed by the culture and the country in which you are living. Whether you want to or not, you must adapt. There is no other. The environment is forcing you to do that, and then that is the other part of my identity, the gringo part.

Gonzalo acknowledges how migration to the US and the time he has spent living in a culturally different society has altered and shaped his ‘original’ identity (he even hints that he himself is more American than the ‘real’ Americans themselves in his greater participation in politics). However, his emphasis on ‘what the gringo does’ and the separate description of the ‘gringo part’ in him still illustrates the distinction that he makes between the Mexican and the US American group.

Possession of citizenship also plays a role in defining one’s identity. Of those surveyed who feel Mexican, only 20 percent have US citizenship. In contrast, 81 percent of those who identify as Mexican Americans are US citizens.

However, it is interesting that having citizenship does not necessarily invalidate the cultural aspects. Gonzalo, despite having US citizenship and having lived in the US for twenty-two years, understands himself as exclusively Mexican:

No, I don’t consider myself a gringo. There are many reasons. First, to be a gringo you need to have been born here and that all of society makes you feel it clearly. Another thing is that you speak English well, you have become citizen, you are adapted to customs and habits, you live in a suburb, that is, you do all the things that others do. They accept you perfectly as that, but never as a ‘gringo’.

For Gonzalo, the question of one’s identity is inseparably related to one’s place of birth. Thus, for many respondents, citizenship alone or strong integration efforts still do not grant them access to an American identity. Gonzalo continued:

The gringo always establishes that distance . . . even if he is an open, liberal person. Which I also think this is normal in all countries. There is always that distance between who was born here and who came later. That is the first filter that you will never be able to pass, you will always be a foreigner, even if you are a citizen.

Talking about her experience as a migrant in various countries, Tatiana (forty-three years old, she emigrated to Chicago eighteen years ago and is married to a Mexican) affirmed that ‘sometimes [ . . . ] you feel identified with a culture, but that does not mean that the culture feels identified with you’. This specific type of rejection leads to an attitude in which migrants emphasise their Mexicanness. Both Bebout (2016) and Massey and Sánchez (2010) have identified a pattern in which Mexican migrants constitute their identity against the specific receptive context of the US, what they call ‘emergent identity’ (Massey and Sánchez, 2010, p. 184). It is the inaccessibility of ‘true’ Americanness that leads them to highlight their original Mexican identity. Following this logic, some interviewees expressed feeling upset when a Mexican in the US hides their Mexican heritage from him. Jorge, who had immigrated with his wife and Mexican children to California in 2009 and who had previously lived in Australia, stated:

Over there [in Australia] we were so alone . . . ‘Hey Mexicans, let’s get together’. Yes, we are Mexicans, and we are proud to be Mexican and we love being Mexican because we are exotic, because we are folklore and not here. Here [in the US] people are afraid and sorry to be Mexican. That drives me crazy.

Few interviewees demonstrated a clear rejection of US identity by associating it with certain negative attributes. They often hinted at two different and opposite sets of values inherent in group identity, be it Mexican or American:

I don’t like gringo values. It is a society that is based on consumption and law enforcement. Here you consume and demand or are sued. Those are the two pillars of the American culture, one hundred percent. Consume, consume,

consume. It consumes either content, food, or entertainment, but everything is based on consumption. (Jorge, Los Angeles)

Jorge's narrative suggests a general image of an uneducated, individualistic and consumerist US, in stark contrast to a warm, friendly and culturally diverse Mexico. In this sense, one can find the logic of the concept of strategic essentialism (Hall, 1996), especially in the contrasting representations of the two identities and the way in which the interviewees rely on stereotypical representations when describing what characterises 'us' vs the 'Other'. Their Mexicanness arises in what is called the 'aestheticisation of identities', while representations of the US tend to generalise cliché representations at the other end of the spectrum (Coronado, 2003, p. 121).

In the same sense, Lilia, who lives in Houston, Texas, and comes from a small city in Mexico, simply seemed to miss the warmth and character of Mexicans, which is possibly typical of what is lived in small cities, more than in Mexico in general:

There are aspects of life that you value and that you cannot find in the United States, the warmth of the Mexicans. Here I have met very nice Anglo-Saxon people, but they are different. I have some African American neighbours who feel more Mexican. With them it is like this: 'Hey, how are you, Mickey?' And it is nice to feel that hug but no, it is not the same. Mexicans even go on the street without knowing each other and it is 'Hello, good afternoon . . .'

We have pointed out that the migration of Mexicans with university education is a migration of the middle classes, with the wide range that this implies. Hence, the question arises about a possible relationship between identity and social class. Table 9.2 shows that this relationship is not very clear, in the sense that one identity is predominant among one specific social class. The participation of the working or lower-middle class among those who self-identify as North Americans or Mexicans is above average. However, in the upper class, the participation of Mexican Americans and North Americans stands out, and in the middle class, the participation of Mexican Americans and Mexicans stands out – that is, the correlation between social class and identity is weak.

**Table 9.2** Identity and social class. Source: Vázquez Maggio and Domínguez Villalobos, 2023.

<b>Identity</b>	<b>No response</b>	<b>Lower and lower middle class</b>	<b>Middle class</b>	<b>Higher middle and higher class</b>	<b>Total</b>
Mexican					
Num.	15	111	328	216	670
%	2	17	49	32	100
% of 813					82
North American					
Num.	0	4	1	3	8
%	0	50	13	38	100
% of 813					1
Mexican-North American					
Num.	1	4	56	53	114
%	1	4	49	46	100
% of 813					14
other					
Num.	1	2	7	11	21
%	5	10	33	52	100
% of 813					3
Total					
Num.	17	121	392	283	813
%	2	15	48	35	100
% of 813					100

Other factors can influence the preservation of identity, for example, the language spoken at home, contacts with friends or family in Mexico and sending money home. Concerning the use of the Spanish language, our survey revealed that two-thirds (63 percent) speak it at home, although

**Table 9.3** Identity and language spoken at home. Source: Vázquez Maggio and Domínguez Villalobos, 2023.

<b>Identity</b>	<b>Other</b>	<b>Spanish</b>	<b>Combination</b>	<b>English</b>	<b>Total</b>
Mexican					
Num.	10	452	120	88	670
%	1	67	18	13	100
% of 813					82
North American					
Num.	0	2	2	4	8
%	0	25	25	50	100
% of 813					1
Mexican-North American					
Num.	2	52	37	23	114
%	2	46	32	20	100
% of 813					14
Other					
Num.	1	8	7	5	21
%	5	38	33	24	100
% of 813					3
Total					
Num.	13	514	166	120	813
%	2	63	20	15	100
% of 813					100

in different proportions, depending on their ethno-national identity. For example, 67 percent of those who identify as Mexican speak Spanish at home, while only 46 percent of those who identify as Mexican Americans speak it. These practices of preserving the native language may be considered as a contribution to enriching the cultural capital of the host society.

The combination of both languages is most used among those who identify themselves as Mexican Americans (32 percent), North Americans (25 percent) and, ultimately, as Mexican (18 percent). Finally, speaking only in English, as expected, occurs mostly among those who identify as North Americans (50 percent) and Mexican Americans (19 percent). In other words, there is great heterogeneity among the respondents.

Pamela, who already has US citizenship, shared with us that speaking Spanish at home is a way to preserve part of her identity:

At home we always speak Spanish; I know this is going to open [my son] doors by only 10 percent. But, in fact it's more because of me. I have not managed to get Mexico out of my head. It is part of me. I want him to have this culture and the traditions. I am imposing them because the truth is I cannot say that he is Mexican and I know that he is no longer Mexican, but I want him to have a grip on it. Mexico is part of my past and I like it and I am proud of it.

One issue we discovered is that the language spoken at home is also related to the place of birth of the spouse, but this does not necessarily weaken their identity as Mexicans, because many times they speak Spanish with their children. One example of this is Arturo, married to an American woman, who maintains many contacts with his family and wants his daughter to be bicultural:

We want to keep both languages and one of the theories to achieve this is that you must be constant. One language, dad. And the mother the other, right? I always try to speak in Spanish, although sometimes she [my daughter] answers in English. I try to avoid idioms and speak clearly so that she learns good Spanish. The nursery school is also bilingual. We know that the language issue is complicated, but in due course it will give her more opportunities. I believe that she will be able to take advantage of cultural diversity to interact with that magnificent, spectacular world of Oaxaca and Mexico and with American culture. For example, music. Every time my daughter listens to folk music in either Spanish or English, she likes to clap. Be it Texan or Mexican music.

A matter of interest, regardless of feeling Mexican or Mexican American, is the social identity of migrants, which is reflected in their activity. Lilia's

**Table 9.4** Identity and travels to Mexico. Source: Vázquez Maggio and Domínguez Villalobos, 2023.

<b>Identity</b>	<b>Other</b>	<b>Never</b>	<b>2–5 times</b>	<b>Once a year</b>	<b>Total</b>
Mexican					
Num.	48	14	83	525	670
%	7	2	12	78	100
% of 813					82
North American					
Num.	0	0	3	5	8
%	0	0	38	63	100
% of 813					1
Mexican-North American					
Num.	4	5	18	87	114
%	4	4	16	76	100
% of 813					14
Other					
Num.	2	0	4	15	21
%	10	0	19	71	100
% of 813					3
Total					
Num.	54	19	108	632	813
%	7	2	13	78	100
% of 813					100

case is interesting because she has dedicated her time to volunteer work, first at her children's school to support Hispanic students with learning disabilities and, subsequently, working in a foundation linked to the church in the neighbouring area, educating Mexican migrants and supporting them as they follow the Mexican education programme. Similarly, María, with a

doctorate in education from a Chicago university, has focused her activity on projects to support minority students at the university where she works, among whom Latinos make up an important portion.

In relation to ties with family in the origin country, our respondents maintain a lot of contact with family and friends, even those who identify as North Americans, showing a strong transnational connectivity. Naturally, this bond is more intense among those who identify as Mexican, but not by much of a difference from those who identify as Mexican Americans. Those who identify themselves as Mexicans and Mexican Americans communicate with Mexico by telephone or social networks with a daily frequency at the rate of 60 and 40 percent, respectively. It is also notable that 78 percent of Mexicans and 76 percent of Mexican Americans return to the country at least once a year. Undoubtedly, geographical proximity is a contributing factor. Finally, 44 and 40 percent of those who identified as Mexican and Mexican American, respectively, send money to Mexico. All these practices show how transnational families link the country of origin with destinations where migrants have settled (Glick Schiller, Basch and Blanc-Szanton, 1995).

### **Identity and Experiences of Discrimination**

There is evidence from several studies that migrants' appearance (their phenotype and skin pigmentation) can affect their employment opportunities, as has been pointed out by Pager and Shepherd (2008) and Ho and Alcorso (2004). According to our findings, ethnic characteristics also amplify the possibility of prejudice and rejection within a certain native community. It has been demonstrated that the bias against 'Latinos' and Latino immigrants (as they are called) parallels what occurs with African Americans, but carries an additional dimension of foreignness (Gluszek and Dovidio, 2010). It has further been indicated that recent concern about undocumented immigration plays a crucial role in the general attitudes and prejudices of 'Anglos' towards Latinos in general (Zarate and Shaw, 2010). Mexicans are the largest national group of Latinos in the US. Next, we will analyse the profile of the migrants who have perceived some type of discrimination and present some examples of experiences lived by our interviewees.

Our survey revealed three types of discrimination: for being Mexican in the US, for having an accent and in terms of payment. While not all respondents have experienced discrimination, it is necessary to consider those who did. Of the sample, 38 percent have perceived discrimination for being Mexican; this percentage was higher among women (43.6 percent) than among men (32.8 percent). The second type of discrimination refers to the frequency with which qualified Mexican migrants feel at a disadvantage due to their accent; 16 percent of the total sample declared that they have always or very frequently felt it. Again, this is more pronounced among women. The third type of discrimination refers to the perception of having received a salary lower than that of their colleagues with the same qualification: 34 percent of the total answered that the salary of their colleagues with the same qualification was higher. We have observed that 29.8 percent of men and 39.5 percent of women reported that, sometimes, their colleagues with the same qualification received a higher salary. The survey revealed that women perceive more discrimination, an example of which is recounted by María:

Last year I was interviewed for a position at the university where I worked for six years. My work was known at the university. In my interview I felt very pleased and very sure that I had a chance. In addition, my professional experiences, studies, skills, knowledge and relationships in the community aligned perfectly with the expectations of the position. Ten days after my interview, they hired a man with less education and less professional and community experience. In an email sent to me by the person who hired the new project manager, he told me that the reason this person had been hired was because he had even more knowledge of the community and the organisations they wanted to work with. This reasoning did not convince me at all of the decision that was made. I felt very bad, and I thought that, because I was a woman, they did not believe in my ability to lead the programme. In the end, this person was not effective, as he recently resigned from his position and went elsewhere. Days after his resignation, the federal government withdrew the grant from the university because they did not meet the programme's expectations. The university lost more than a million dollars in funds that were to be distributed in five years.

Our survey revealed that few have experienced all three types of discrimination. The largest number of respondents said that they had simultaneously

experienced discrimination for being Mexican and wage discrimination – a total of 153 out of a total of 813. Of this group, most of the respondents who answered having had experiences of discrimination tend to be of middle age (43 percent and 27 percent belong to the age groups of 30–39 and 40–49 years, respectively), have between fifteen and twenty years of residence without significant educational differences, with less than good command of English and identifying themselves as lower middle class; as mentioned previously, a higher proportion of participants in this case tended to be women.

Without a doubt, discrimination for being Mexican is the most important. One of the most common ways in which this discrimination appears is grouping all Mexicans within a limited stereotype, so that, if a professional does not fit within it, they are told: ‘You don’t seem Mexican’. In relation to the above, Pamela, speaking of her immigration experience, told us the following:

Fortunately, I tell you, the immigration part was easy for me. In fact, I didn’t do anything. The lawyers took care of everything. For me the hard part is the discriminatory part. For example, people cannot understand that in Mexico there may be good educational institutions. And suddenly in the conversations the following arises: ‘Wow, do you really know that? Did you learn that in Mexico? Were you an engineer in Mexico? How is it possible?’ As I do think that people still see us as [...] thrown in the maguey. That part was very sad.

Sometimes, Mexicans are mistaken for the pizza deliveryman or the waiter due to their phenotype and skin pigmentation. Arturo told us the following story:

Discrimination is a very strong point right now here in the United States, and I am more aware now and more annoyed with everything that has happened [with Trump]. However, sometimes I have not noticed. More than discriminated against, I have felt like framed in certain aspects. For example, once I was going up at my house and my neighbour was going down, and she thought I was the food delivery man. It’s not discrimination, just her vision of her associating Latinos with it, and she was waiting for her food. So, I didn’t feel discrimination, but I felt a bad judgement of her on her part. She apologized and, because of that I try to make jokes, right? The most recent happened the weekend that we went to a restaurant in the botanical garden. At some point when picking up the family’s dishes to throw them away, a person jokingly asked me

**Table 9.5** Identity and discrimination for being Mexican. Source: Vázquez Maggio and Domínguez Villalobos, 2023.

<b>Identity</b>	<b>Prefer not to say</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Total</b>
Mexican				
Num.	20	388	262	670
%	3	58	39	100
% of 813				82
North American				
Num.	1	5	2	8
%	13	63	25	100
% of 813				1
Mexico-North American				
Num.	7	71	36	114
%	6	62	32	100
% of 813				14
Other				
Num.	2	12	7	21
%	10	57	33	100
% of 813				3
Total				
Num.	30	476	307	813
%	4	59	38	100
% of 813				100

in English: ‘Hey, you kind of need more umbrellas here’. I say: ‘Yes, I think they do need more umbrellas here’, as a joke, right? Then he tells me: ‘Do you work here?’, ‘No, do you need something?’ And he says to me: ‘Yes, clean my table’. I replied: ‘Look, the process is easy. You need to go for napkins, you go for water, you wet them, clean them, and here is the trash can’. And he didn’t tell me anything anymore. I felt like my words fell like a bucket of cold water. He changed the perception and automatically went with a waiter who was white and had the shirt. He didn’t even turn to see me anymore.

**Table 9.6** Identity and disadvantage of having a non-native accent. Source: Vázquez Maggio and Domínguez Villalobos, 2023.

Identity	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently	Total
Mexican					
Num.	147	208	197	118	670
%	22	31	29	18	100
% of 813					82
North American					
Num.	3	4	1	0	8
%	38	50	13	0	100
% of 813					1
Mexican-North American					
Num.	35	44	29	6	114
%	31	39	25	5	100
% of 813					14
Other					
Num.	9	5	4	3	21
%	43	24	19	14	100
% of 813					3
Total					
Num.	194	261	231	127	813
%	24	32	28	16	100
% of 813					100

It is worth considering the potential impact of discrimination on the sense of belonging. Massey and Sánchez (2010, p. 2) have described that there is ‘a negative assimilation process in which the accumulation of discriminatory experiences over time constantly reinforces an emerging pan-ethnic “Latino” identity while promoting the formation of a new reactive

identity that explicitly rejects self-identification as “American”. They therefore believe that, in addition to an elevated Latino identity, immigrants cultivate a defensive identity that is specifically directed against the acceptance of a US American identity. Specifically pointing to the hostile reception context, ‘resistance to an American identity is something “made in the United States”’ (Massey and Sánchez, 2010, p. 212). In this regard, this seems to make a lot of sense considering the survey results. Although it can be said that – regardless of how the respondents identify themselves among Mexicans, North Americans, or Mexican Americans – discrimination for being Mexican has been present; indisputably, among those who identify themselves as Mexicans, this discrimination is much more frequent. Table 9.5 shows that, while 32 percent of Mexican Americans have perceived discrimination for being Mexican, the percentage rises to 39 percent in the case of those who self-identify as Mexican.

Gluszek and Dovidio (2010) have analysed the implication of having a non-native accent as a sign of ethnic difference and suggested that these differences are systematically related to feelings of exclusion and a certain sense of not belonging to the US. Consistent with the above, when asked how often they felt disadvantaged due to their accent, we found that of those who identified themselves as Mexican, 47 percent answered ‘always’, ‘frequently’, or ‘many times’ they have felt disadvantaged, while among those who identify as Mexican Americans only 31 percent have felt it – that is, 16 percentage points less.

To summarise, the process of adapting to a new life is a complex one. There is a mosaic of different situations. It cannot be said that discrimination affects all professional Mexican migrants (most of them have not suffered it); likewise, there is a good degree of heterogeneity in relation to how each person experiences this discrimination. The next and last crucial questions to understand the incorporation of migrants into North American society concern the evaluation of the migration experience and the desire for a possible return to Mexico, which we analyse below.

### **The Possible Return to Mexico and Balance**

In the survey, respondents were asked if they have seriously considered ceasing to live permanently in the US, to which 36 percent answered ‘sometimes’,

**Table 9.7** Identity and the evaluation of the migratory experience. Source: Vázquez Maggio and Domínguez Villalobos, 2023.

Identity	Not successful	Medium	Successful	Total
Mexican				
Num.	5	88	577	670
%	1	13	86	100
% of 813				82
North American				
Num.	0	2	6	8
%	0	25	75	100
% of 813				1
Mexican-North American				
Num.	0	10	104	114
%	0	9	91	100
% of 813				14
Other				
Num.	0	1	20	21
%	0	5	95	100
% of 813				3
Total				
Num.	5	101	707	813
%	1	12	87	100
% of 813				100

34 percent answered ‘yes’ and 30 percent ‘no’. In other words, about two-thirds at least have thought about it.

When asked for what reasons they have considered leaving the US permanently, 42 percent of respondents indicate ‘being with family and friends’,

27 percent for ‘job opportunities’, 25 percent ‘to be in a place where they feel they belong’, 6 percent ‘to be in a place where the language is Spanish’ and 13 percent another reason. The first reason is consistent with the fact that they transnationally keep in touch with family and friends. The second reason suggests that some of them have not done so well professionally. The third and fourth reasons – belonging and Spanish-language environment – suggest that the question of identity is very important to at least a third of them. It should be noted that the very low percentage (6 percent) of those who say they have considered leaving the US to be in a place where the language is Spanish reflects the high command of English that we found in our sample.

It is also interesting to know how they evaluate their experience in the US. Most of them (87 percent) considered it successful, while 12.6 percent considered it fair and a small part unsuccessful (see Table 9.7).

Half of those who consider their immigration experience ‘unsuccessful’ or ‘regular’ have seriously considered returning to Mexico, and 38 percent have considered it sometimes. Among those who consider their immigration experience ‘successful’ or ‘very successful’, most (36 percent) have sometimes thought about a possible return to Mexico, followed by those who do consider it seriously (35 percent); finally, 29 percent have not thought about it. These latter proportions, although lower than in the first situation, do not cease to suggest that, regardless of this evaluation, a possible return to Mexico is on the minds of a large part of those surveyed.

It is worth comparing these results with other studies that explore desires to return among migrants. The existing literature has found that, in general, many migrants maintain a certain desire to return to the country of origin (which is ‘triggered’ by negative experiences), regardless of how long they have been in the destination country. It becomes a question of nostalgia for the land that saw them born and raised. However, as time goes by, migrants increasingly put down roots in the host country, and this return becomes less and less realistic, even though the desire remains present on many occasions. Additionally, we believe that the desire to return ‘home’ speaks of the transnational connectivity maintained by these migrants in terms of various socio-cultural aspects.

**Table 9.8** Identity and the desire for a possible return to Mexico. Source: Vázquez Maggio and Domínguez Villalobos, 2023.

Identity	No	Sometimes	Yes	Total
Mexican				
Num.	174	256	240	670
%	26	38	36	100
% of 813				82
North American				
Num.	4	3	1	8
%	50	38	13	100
% of 813				1
Mexican-North American				
Num.	51	29	34	114
%	45	25	30	100
% of 813				14
Other				
Num.	6	9	6	21
%	29	43	29	100
% of 813				3
Total				
Num.	235	297	281	813
%	29	37	35	100
% of 813				100

Table 9.8 shows that, while 50 percent of Americans and 45 percent of Mexican-Americans do not think about returning, 26 percent of Mexicans do. However, 36 percent of Mexicans express a serious desire for a possible return to Mexico, compared to 34 percent of Mexican Americans and 13 percent of Americans. This suggests that there exists a relationship between Mexican identity and the desire to return to Mexico. It should be noted that, in this last

group, 50 percent have perceived discrimination for being Mexican, while 62 percent of those who do not have this intention have not been discriminated against for being Mexican.

Finally, it is important to inquire about the most important variables behind the national identity of Mexican professional migrants in the US. By performing a logistic regression, we were able to verify that the variables associated<sup>3</sup> with Mexican identity in a negative way were years of residence – that is, the fewer the years of residence, the greater the probability that the migrant identifies as Mexican and vice versa – and having US citizenship, which decreases the probability of identifying oneself as Mexican. On the one hand, the variable associated with Mexican identity in a positive consisted of experiences of discrimination for being Mexican, as pointed out by Massey and Sánchez (2010); this results in a greater probability of identifying as Mexican, having a serious intention to possibly return to Mexico and speaking Spanish at home. On the other hand, Mexican identity statistically is not significantly associated with age, the perception of a disadvantage due to having a non-native accent, command of English, the evaluation that migrants make of their migratory experience and the frequency of visits. For its part, Mexican American identity is positively associated with years of residence, being considered middle or upper class and the possession of citizenship. It is also negatively associated with being discriminated against for being Mexican and with the desire for a possible return to Mexico. Regarding the effect of discrimination for being Mexican, the thesis of Massey and Sánchez (2010) is confirmed.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, we have pointed out that adaptation to a new country, in this case the US, requires that migrants try to overcome their resistance and be able to adjust to the new culture. This does not mean that total assimilation into the culture of the host country is achieved or even desirable. In the case of professional migrants, we must consider that between Mexico and the US there are differences in culture, language, climate and institutional norms, among others, which migrants must learn and reconcile. We were also able to observe that a portion of these migrants has experienced discrimination, which hinders their adaptation process. For

<sup>3</sup> That is statistically significant, with a 95 percent confidence interval.

example, the correlation found between the desire for a possible return to Mexico and the discrimination perceived by Mexican professional migrants suggests that not all migrants have the same ability to overcome psychological distress.

As a result, we propose to observe a process of integration in Berry's sense of Mexican professionals in the US. This occurs when there is a strong identification with both societies or their cultures, Mexican and North American – that is, when the immigrant tries to preserve the characteristics of their culture while adopting the culture of the host society (and not an attitude of exclusion/marginalisation or separation). Regarding the fact that they preserve their culture and adopt the new one, we have mentioned that for most of them being close to relatives did not influence their decision to change country, nor did they seek to locate their residence near Mexicans. Likewise, most of the respondents mentioned being satisfied with their work and appreciated their decision to emigrate as successful. Hence, these migrants contribute to a plural and multi-cultural society, and their acculturation processes are particularly enriching in globalised societies where there is more and more migration and where, at the same time, greater acceptance of the 'Other' is needed.

The central concern of this work has been to investigate how the surveyed Mexican tertiary-educated (predominantly middle-class) professional migrants try to preserve their culture (if they do so) and what national identity they assume. Since the migration of Mexican professionals to the US considerably increased in the 1990s, this explains why we found a great diversity of life experiences of our respondents regarding the way in which they have been incorporated into North American society throughout at least these three decades.

Our results show that three-quarters of those surveyed identify as Mexican, followed by Mexican Americans (14 percent), other nationalities (3 percent) and North Americans (1 percent). We found that years of residence influence the transition towards adopting a binational identity, just as we expected. The migratory situation is an influencing factor for this identity. Their responses showed that they maintain quite remarkable transnational contact with family and friends in the homeland, whether by digital media (including email, voice-calls, video-calls), telephone, or trips to Mexico. But this transnational bond is more intense among those who consider themselves Mexican and who even express their desire for a possible return to Mexico. More importantly, the effect of discrimination for being Mexican seems to reinforce Mexican identity

and rejects self-identification as 'American'. On the contrary, not having this type of experience reinforces Mexican American identity.

In the interviews, to questions concerning identity as migrants, the respondents mentioned different reasons for considering themselves as Mexicans: for instance, even despite holding citizenship and voting in the intermediate and presidential elections, they still find issues of incompatibility with the culture in the US and that they miss the warmth of the Mexicans. Others refer to the feeling of Otherness in North American society; for example, there were those who pointed out that in their opinion identity is given by place of birth, hence no matter how much one was integrated into US society, North Americans would not accept them as such. In terms of discrimination, the feeling that Mexicans in the US tend to be seen as a rigid image that does not correspond to the diversity of Mexicans in the country was very present, seen, for example, in comments such as 'Don't tell me you studied this in Mexico?' or 'You don't seem Mexican' or, lastly, due to their phenotype and skin pigmentation, confusing them with people who typically have jobs that in the US are associated with less favoured Mexican and/or Latino migrants (for example, working as a waiter or pizza delivery boy).

It is important to consider that the responses to the survey and the interviews were collected and conducted in the period of Donald Trump's campaign for the presidency and in the first year of his presidential term, respectively (that is, in 2016 and 2017). This hostile context undoubtedly influenced the experiences and responses of our participants. We consider that, given the recent changes in US politics with the arrival of Joe Biden to the presidency, it would be worth exploring in future research the perception of these migrants regarding how they are received in US society when at least the official discourse is less xenophobic than in the immediately preceding presidential term. We believe that a less hostile reception context in the US contributes to better integration practices.

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## ***Part IIb***

### *DIASPORAS AS DIPLOMATIC AND CULTURAL ACTORS*

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# 10

## CIVIC AND POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT AMONG MUSLIM AND ARAB AMERICANS

*Vera Eccarius-Kelly*

### **Introduction**

This chapter examines the underlying motivations that inspire a growing commitment among members of Muslim and Arab American communities to become involved in civic and political activities. Behavioural patterns such as regular participation in voting, volunteering one's time, donating money, using media for outreach activities to benefit society at large, or taking on leadership roles in communal organisations indicate how Muslim and Arab communities exercise their citizenship in the US. Also often described as public sphere involvement, civic and political engagement can be represented by diverse levels of commitment and intensity among community members. Their selected activities, however, have to purposefully pursue the implementation of societal change, or strengthening norms and values in the public's interest to be considered public sphere involvement (Alamdari, 2020; Read, 2015; Takyi et al., 2010; Putnam, 2000).

This chapter not only provides insights into political advocacy patterns among Muslim and Arab American communities, but also explores how some communities form socio-political alliances or pursue transnational agendas. By contextualising and historicising civic and political preferences and attitudes held within Muslim and Arab American communities, it is possible to gain a more nuanced understanding of the intersectional nature of particular types of transnational activism in the public sphere. Of interest are a range of communities that define

themselves as either Muslim American, Arab American, or both. Some have been citizens for generations, while others acquired their citizenship in the past decade. Various convergence points among these diverse communities and their growing involvement in civic and political mobilisation have unsettled perceptions about the role of Muslim and Arab Americans in ‘mainstream society’. In the context of this discussion, mainstream society refers to the notion that predominantly white European social norms, values, beliefs and traditions have dominated the US socio-political environment.

Civic and political engagement is of particular interest in community-based analysis frameworks, rather than measuring an individual’s commitment to engagement. It tends to be more informative to examine how civil society organisations interact with or shape behaviours among members of communities. This particularly applies to communities on the margins of power. How can interactions between civil society organisations and community members on the margins result in a growing commitment to public sphere involvement? According to Blackwell (2018, p. 4), ‘it requires the full participation and leadership of people who bear the brunt of society’s greatest challenges’, instead of pursuing a top-down approach. Civil society organisations encourage and affirm high levels of engagement through public advocacy and professional associations, including legal aid organisations, religious and charitable groups, mosques and Islamic centres that are involved in fostering grassroots activities or educational outreach among Muslim and Arab Americans.

The following discussions centre on two aspects that help explain how and why members of Muslim and Arab American communities engage in the public sphere. By highlighting particular advocacy organisations, it is possible to gain insight into specialised interests advanced on behalf of Muslim and Arab Americans; by examining transnational agendas that are pursued by elected Muslim and Arab American representatives, it becomes obvious what issues particular ethnic and religious voters care about.

While socio-political engagement and the formation of civil society groups tends to be highly valued in the US, this is not necessarily the case when such mobilisation intersects with ethnic, racial and religious minority communities. It is well known that Black churches are sites of political education and mobilisation, which has made them targets for voter restriction laws or ordinances that discourage community-specific voting patterns (Corasaniti and

Rutenberg, 2021). Black churches also have been physically attacked and their members murdered, both recently as well as historically (Kaplan and Moyer, 2015; McDaniel, 2008). Experiences with barriers, restrictions and physical assaults are a reality for Muslim and Arab Americans as well, and this is especially the case when they exercise their citizenship in relation to visibly identifiable religious beliefs, cultural norms and values. Jamal (2005, p. 537) found that for Muslim Americans it is ‘the mosque [that] serves as a collectivizing forum’ since it is the location that ‘highlights Muslim common struggles in mainstream American society’. Both Muslim and Arab Americans frequently encounter biases and stereotypes that identify their communities either as unwilling to integrate into society, or of holding values that are considered to be fundamentally antithetical and threatening to American democratic principles (Hawley, 2019; Dana et al., 2017; Bail, 2012).

### **Disorientation, Census Data and Knowledge Gaps**

Pointing to the young Lebanese American student teacher’s headscarf, the supervising elementary teacher drew an air circle around her own face and commented: ‘My class really likes what you are wearing . . . you know . . . that around your head’. Taken aback by the teacher’s inability to find the proper wording, the student teacher replied: ‘Yes, it’s called a *hijab*, and you can also call it a headscarf. Many of the mothers of your students are wearing *hijab*, and it may be comforting for them to see me in the classroom with *hijab*'.<sup>1</sup>

In a rapidly diversifying US, knowledge gaps related to religious practices or cultural preferences are surprisingly common. Yet, part of Muslim and Arab Americans’ daily lives include exposure to openly ignorant, hostile and disrespectful comments in both professional and public environments. Hamid (2019) has argued that Muslim Americans experience a polarised US public in a particularly unsettling manner. He has suggested that, in spaces where right-wing political adherents have control, they tend to characterise Islam as a dangerous religious ideology. But supporters of left-wing positions also express a deep level of discomfort with religion because of their aspirations to an increasingly secularised country. For Muslim and Arab Americans, this is a challenging

<sup>1</sup> A Lebanese American student teacher shared this account with the author. This awkward exchange took place in a well-funded elementary school during the 2021 academic year.

reality to navigate, as many feel directly threatened by interest groups and political circles. This is often the case, when Muslim Americans are linked to the MENA (Middle East North Africa) region through their migratory histories. While federal state's bureaucracies categorise Muslim and Arab Americans in specific ways through reports related to demographic data, official categories are frequently challenged by a more personal understanding of identity among Muslim and Arab American communities. The notion of one's identity relates to life experiences, memories, types of relationships and values that are held. In totality, a range of factors influence and create a person's sense of self. An example of how one Arab American grappled with the complexities of her identity is explored in a contribution to *Egypt Migrations*. Wasef (2018) has suggested the following thoughts on what it might mean to be a Coptic Egyptian by heritage:

Identities are complex, constantly changing, morphing to our circumstances. They can anchor us to a glorified past or romanticized national experiences we have no tangible connections to. They are built up, torn down and put together in varied ways, by diverse people. They are formed, reformed and deconstructed. Perhaps the only constant is that identities are never constant.

The US Census Bureau collects information on ethnicity and race but does not ask questions related to religious affiliations. Since 1976, when the Ninety-Fourth US Congress enacted Public Law 94-521, the Census Bureau has been prohibited from collecting data about religious affiliations on a mandatory basis for the census. Instead, census data focus on self-reported information about ethnic identity and race. To gain additional knowledge about religious communities in the US, non-governmental research organisations pursue the collection of voluntary survey information about religious practices within specified communities. The Pew Research Center, for example, combines its own survey data about Muslim Americans (currently available from 2007, 2011 and 2017) with census data to further contextualise and supplement existing information. As a result, the Pew Research Center is one of the few organisations that provides population estimates and offers projected demographic trends related to Muslim populations in the country.

While Muslim Americans make up a very small percentage of the overall US population, the number of Muslims is expected to increase faster than that

of other communities, for a number of reasons. Muslim families on average have more children than other groups in the US; Muslim populations tend to be younger in comparison to other religious groups; and Muslims represent a higher percentage among recent immigrant groups and resettled refugees. Demographic changes, of course, are directly related to identity and demands for political influence. When 2020 demographic data were released by the Census Bureau, it indicated a significant shift in the country – namely, that four out of ten Americans identified with a race or ethnic group other than white. Overall, this trend showed that the US was becoming a more multi-racial and multi-ethnic country. For some members of society, this affirmed their growing racial anxieties, which were openly expressed during the Trump administration (2017–21). Many Trump voters believed themselves to be part of a declining white population that was increasingly less influential in public life (Metzl, 2020).

In a comparative demographic estimate between Muslim and Jewish Americans, the new data also created a sense of nervous apprehension. The Pew Research Center suggested that, ‘by 2040, Muslims will replace Jews as the nation’s second-largest religious group after Christians’, which likely would translate into Muslim Americans representing about 2 percent of the entire US population (Mohamed, 2018). Jewish Americans were already deeply concerned about the dramatic increase in anti-semitism throughout the US and began wondering what demographic shifts might mean in terms of their daily lives. In a 2019 survey, the American Jewish Committee (AJC) inquired about the primary sources of anti-semitism related to the growing political polarisation in the US and asked about the potential role that Islam played in the rise of anti-semitism. The AJC survey results showed that 89 percent of Jewish respondents believed that the extreme political right posed a threat to American Jews (with 49 percent saying that it was a very serious threat); 64 percent believed the extreme political left posed a threat (with 15 percent saying that it was a very serious threat); and 85 percent stated that extremism in the name of Islam was a serious problem (with 27 percent saying that it was a very serious threat). The results were not entirely surprising, as Jewish Americans expressed profound levels of well-founded concern related to the extreme right wing, in addition to fearing Muslim extremists (AJC, 2019).

Growing levels of political polarisation, ideological positioning, xenophobic anxieties and practices of systemic racism have led to a widespread and public misuse of terms related to various minority and immigrant communities in the US. Among the many misleading terms that Muslim and Arab Americans encounter is the descriptor ‘Middle Eastern American’, which has been relied on to interchangeably refer to someone who is Arab and Muslim. This, of course, is a deeply misleading label because immigrants from the Middle East to the US have always been affiliated with a wide range of faith traditions, including Islam, Judaism and Christianity, as well as other communities such as the Baha’i, Druze, Yezidi and so on. Furthermore, atheists, agnostics and secularists also constitute a significant part of this diversity. While many immigrants from the Middle East share particular belief systems and traditions, they also frequently disagree because of particular historical experiences, hostility from others toward their ethnic and religious identities, as well as language practices. Most objectionable about the term ‘Middle Eastern American’ is its exclusionary perception as it applies to Muslims of African heritage in the public imagination. The historical experiences of African American (and Black) Muslims are not included in this term, nor are the migratory histories of Muslims linking them to the geographic region of South Asia, specifically Bangladesh, India and Pakistan.

Many disparate paths have led Muslims to North America, and some particularly painful journeys are rarely acknowledged fully in the historical consciousness of the country. Enslaved peoples, especially those originally abducted from Muslim West African regions, struggled to practice their faith because of systematic efforts to erase their religious traditions (Diouf, 2013). Some African American descendants of Muslim slaves speak to this unnamed aspect of both colonial and US history (Winters, 1978). At the same time, free Muslims also settled in the Americas at distinct historical moments. Predominantly arriving from territories of the former Ottoman Empire from the 1840s until the end of World War I, they initiated another thread that diversified the presence of Muslims in Michigan, Ohio and other locations unrelated to the history of slavery.

Furthermore, a small sub-group of African American Muslims, often referred to as Black Muslims, formed a splinter group linked to the Nation of Islam. Established in Detroit in the 1930s, this movement was originally

founded by Elijah Muhammad and received disproportionate attention because of heavy-weight boxer Muhammad Ali's membership in the organisation. To this day, the Nation of Islam remains classified as an extremist group by the Southern Poverty Law Center, related to its lengthy history of supporting anti-semitic and anti-LGBTQ hate speech. The Nation of Islam represents an extremely small sub-segment of African American Muslims today, since 98 percent identify as either Sunni or Shia and belong to mainstream denominations rather than this particular splinter group.

African American Muslims represent about 20 percent of all Muslims in the entire country (Mohamed and Diamant, 2019). As American Muslims, they are an important group to consider and should not be disregarded when identifying the growing diversity within Muslim American populations. However, the focus in the following sections is on both Arab and Muslim Americans prevalent among recent immigration patterns to the US, which includes the arrival of refugees from Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria, among many others. As a result of this exceptionally varied history in regard to how and when Muslims came to the US, Muslim Americans can claim the most diverse range of ancestries, heritage languages, migratory experiences and hybrid racial, ethnic and diasporic identities.

### Civil Society and Transnationalism

Transnationalism refers to a range of processes that regulate and shape interactions between individuals, societies and organisations across borders. Studies that integrate the concept of transnationalism examine how cross-border connectedness between different geographic locations is established, maintained, advanced, or changed. This can include varying levels of formality, as well as diverse understandings of the depth or intensity of cross-border interactions over time. Transnationalism is connected to both state-led activities and civil society conduct, as identified early on by Nye and Keohane (1971). Grassroots (bottom-up), non-state and civil society transnationalism is at the centre of the analysis, rather than the more formalised state-led (top-down) regulatory approaches pursued by international governmental organisations or individual states. This theoretical framing emphasises Muslim and Arab American communities' civic and political engagement in practices of transnationalism. Such practices include participation in demonstrations or public protests related to

foreign policy incidents in the homeland, as has been the case related to Yemen, the Palestinian territories and Afghanistan, for example. In spring 2021, Arab Americans protested President Biden's visit to Ford's electric vehicle plant in Dearborn, Michigan, to highlight their disappointment with the continuation of the existing US policy toward Israel, which they identified as anti-Palestinian. While such protests are common in the public sphere, civic and political engagement can also be of a more personal nature. Many second-generation Palestinian Americans seek out opportunities to participate in a homeland tour of Palestine, which often not only affirms values, norms and political perspectives, but also creates new ways of understanding the complexities on the ground in Palestine.

Not all Muslim and Arab American communities engage in advocacy work, exhibit behaviours related to transnationalism, or even participate at the same level of intensity in particular mobilisation efforts. Muslim and Arab American communities exhibit wide-ranging socio-political behaviours, just like other communities that organise around ethnic, racial and/or religious principles. More recent immigrants and new US citizens tend to exhibit levels of public sphere engagement different from that of established communities, in part because of homeland experiences shaped by exclusion or violence. However, proximity to already mobilised communities matters just as much as the presence of advocacy networks and religious organisations that focus on outreach to advance norms and practices (Ayers and Hofstetter, 2008).

Afghan communities, for example, expressed profound fears for their relatives, months prior to the US military withdrawal from Kabul and the Taliban's successful establishment of control. Yet, few Afghan immigrants and citizens in the US believed that it was safe for them to join public demonstrations or to protest the US military's withdrawal.<sup>2</sup> Instead, many families reached out to religious and advocacy networks and transferred funds to their relatives to pay passport and visa fees, so that they could leave the country, mainly across the land borders to Pakistan and Tajikistan. While the political discourse in the US focused on how many Afghans could be (or how many more should have been) saved through military-led evacuations, Afghan Americans reached out

<sup>2</sup> This observation is based on the author's personal experiences with a wide range of Afghan refugee and immigrant communities in Albany, Schenectady and Troy in New York State.

to as many of their transnational connections as possible to mobilise regional assistance for relatives and friends. They met with legal teams; sent messages to contacts at international non-profits; collaborated with veterans' groups; met with representatives of human rights organisations; and huddled up with allies in local communities to build new networks. Just as Portes (2001) had suggested by stating that 'goal-oriented initiatives [...] require coordination across borders by members of civil society', Afghan grassroots-based activities were transnational in nature (p. 186). Their social networks are expansive and will strengthen in the coming years.

### **Transnationalism and Diasporas**

The literature on transnationalism and diasporas illustrates the enormous complexity of experiences with migration and belonging at the intersection of ethnicity, race and religion. Particular experiences with discrimination, racism and Islamophobia mould the ways in which immigrant and minority communities pursue civic and political engagement practices. Academic studies in these fields offer vastly different approaches to establishing empirical frameworks and embrace diverse methodological tools (Tedeschi et al., 2022; Cohen and Fischer, 2018). To narrow the emphasis on the lived experiences of Muslim and Arab communities in the US, their presence has to be historicised and contextualised. An interconnected approach can be used to explore the migratory processes that have historically shaped, informed and continually influenced Muslim and Arab American communities. Yet, at the same time, particular insights into the demographic, ethnic and racial realities help explain the conditions that encourage or discourage Muslim and Arab American communities to make investments that enhance practices of civic and political engagement.

Scholars have disagreed on whether transnationalism slows and disrupts the integration process for new citizens. Waldinger (2017) has argued that transnational ties tend to produce tensions between those who migrated and others who remained in the homeland, while disrupting the integration of migrants in the host society. Other scholars have suggested that transnationalism contributes to a dual process of staying connected to the homeland region or country of origin, while becoming actively involved in their new environment. Itzigsohn and Saucedo (2002, p. 767) have proposed that

practices of transnationalism help to ‘recreate a sense of community based on cultural understandings of belonging and mutual obligation’. Oeppen (2013) has offered a compelling ethnographic project related to a group of Afghans, some of whom remained as students at various universities following the 1978 Saur Revolution that established a Soviet-aligned government. This group of Afghans had access to some resources and a higher educational background, which helped them establish a thriving community in the San Francisco Bay Area, California. Her work showed that this group’s experience with transnationalism, involving return migration visits and investments in the home country, supported a larger process of integration. Oeppen’s interviews ‘reinforce the idea that integration and transnationalism are not mutually exclusive, that there is an interaction between the two and that in certain situations such interaction can be mutually supportive’ (p. 262).

In contrast to transnational processes, the field of Diaspora Studies is fundamentally paying attention to socio-political dynamics within specific communities or sub-groups that are linked by their identified ethnic/racial, linguistic, cultural and/or religious practices and often affirmed through articulated claims in relation to a lost or threatened homeland region (Sheffer, 2003; Safran, 1991). Research on diasporas commonly integrates narratives and memories in the context of specific migratory histories, experiences with expulsion and exile, and the formation of activist identities and agendas abroad (Eccarius-Kelly, 2020; Pande, 2017; Baser, 2015). In addition, particular ethnic communities and/or individual representatives of such groups are centrally important to examine how and why they maintain contact across national boundaries through socio-political engagement or economic activities (Klingenberg et al., 2020; Vertovec, 2009).

To grapple with the intersections of civil society engagement, grassroots transnationalism and the study of diaspora communities, the areas where the fields overlap, interact, or produce tensions have to be identified. A straightforward transnational analysis invites an examination of a range of cross-border practices in terms of their political, economic and socio-cultural consequences. The literature of transnationalism consistently intersects with scholarly work on migration and post-migration studies, globalisation patterns and lived experiences in diasporic communities who are in regular contact with homeland communities. Experiences with transnationalism can influence perceptions

related to one's sense of belonging (citizenship, nationality, voting rights) as well as one's identity formation (dual and hybrid identities, diaspora engagement, exposure to racialisation).

### **Migratory Patterns and Heterogeneity**

An exact number or even an approximation of the size of the Muslim American population is difficult to obtain, and estimates range widely, as shown in the second section of this chapter. The US government does not collect census data related to religious identities, which has made the question of counting Muslim Americans a deeply challenging one. Estimates tend to be questioned for political motivations, and the underlying disagreements can relate to the mobilisation potential among Muslim Americans (their peaceful engagement in society and also their involvement in acts of political violence). But disputes over demographic data also shape debates about Muslim Americans who vote, the influence of converts in particular communities (often suspected of more radicalised views), the lived experiences of Black Muslims throughout history, as well as changing immigration patterns from MENA and the impact on US social cohesion. There is little doubt that public discourses following the terror attacks of 9/11 and again after Trump's election to the US Presidency in 2016 inflamed references to growing Muslim populations in the US. In November 2021, at a church-based political rally, Michael Flynn, the disgraced former National Security Advisor under Trump, advanced the notion that Christianity should be the only religion in the country (an idea that appealed to the 75 percent of white evangelicals who voted for Trump in 2020).

To illustrate the wide-ranging estimates about the size of Muslim populations in the country, it makes sense to mention Huda (2006). He has relied on a range of 6–7.5 million Muslims in the US, among the highest estimates available. In contrast, the Pew Research Center proposed a significantly lower estimate of 3.45 million Muslim Americans, which would represent about 1.1 percent of the entire population. While the methodological approaches to how Muslim populations are counted in such estimates can differ widely, the higher estimates are often considered inflated in relation to populations with access to citizenship.

One factor that is rather uncontroversial among demographic researchers and social scientists is that Muslim Americans belong to a faith community that

is more diverse in terms of its racial and ethnic composition than any other religious group. According to the Pew Research Center (2011), 30 percent of Muslim Americans described themselves as white; 23 percent identified as black; 21 percent as Asian; 6 percent as Hispanic; and 19 percent claimed a mixed racial heritage. Some 2.15 million Muslim Americans are eligible voters in the country, which can constitute a significant voter bloc in several states, including in New Jersey, Michigan and Pennsylvania, among others. For the 2020 US Presidential election, the geographic concentration of Muslim American voters in swing states such as Michigan and Pennsylvania created a heightened sense of attention as to how Muslim American voting patterns might influence the political landscape on the local, state and national levels. According to the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), the country's largest Muslim civil rights and advocacy organisation, the data indicated that some 69 percent of Muslim Americans voted for President Biden, while 17 percent supported the re-election of former President Trump (Hooper, 2020).

As US citizens and legal residents, Muslim Americans express cultural preferences, communal behaviours and political attitudes that are often recognised as distinct from non-Muslim communities. Chouhoud et al. (2019) proposed that an increase of social salience in relation to behaviours and attitudes held by Muslim and Arab Americans (including those who are only perceived to be Muslim and/or Arab) expose particular communities to growing public scrutiny. Social salience is understood to mean that particular groups draw the attention of mainstream societal observers (for example, gatherings at religious sites, the wearing of *hijab* and so on.). This can be further contextualised by the fact that at least 25 percent of all Muslim adults in the US arrived during the past two decades (Pew Research Center, 2011). Such migratory patterns are conspicuous, as newly arriving families frequently settle in locations where they can live alongside other members of the same racial/ethnic and linguistic groups in locations such as Michigan, Illinois, New York and California.

The integration of new Muslims (a term used to describe immigrants who settled in the country after 2000) has shaped the lives of established Muslim American communities and continues to alter public perceptions about Muslims throughout the country. The very recent arrivals of refugees from Afghanistan following the US military withdrawal includes Pashto-, Dari- and Tajik-speaking Afghans, and this will further transform Muslim American

communities. Pashtun refugees, the largest ethnic group among them, have familial linkages in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. But as result of the practice of relying on racial data to classify particular groups in the US census, Pashtun Americans tend to be classified as white if they arrived from Afghanistan, but as Asian if they originated from Pakistan. In the general public's perception, however, Afghans are primarily seen as a non-white, homogenous Muslim immigrant group and secondarily incorrectly described as Arab, a term often used interchangeably to identify Muslims. Pashtun Americans live in larger numbers in the San Francisco Bay area, in New York State and in Chicago, Illinois.

Of particular interest are also Arab Americans, who as an ethnic group partially intersect with Muslim American communities and with Christian American groups. Arab immigrants began coming to the US in sizable numbers during the 1880s. Today, nearly 3.7 million Americans trace their roots to an Arab country. Arab Americans are found in every state, but one-third of the Arab population lives in Metropolitan Los Angeles and the cities of Detroit and New York. The majority of Arab Americans are native-born, and nearly 82 percent of Arabs hold US citizenship. While Arab American communities trace their roots to all Arab countries, the majority of Arab Americans have ancestral ties to Lebanon, Egypt, the Palestinian territories, Syria and Iraq.

Arab Americans also adhere to various Christian faith traditions yet continue to be classified as non-Christian. While cultural patterns or social norms reflect their MENA heritage, Arab Americans of Christian faiths encounter biases and threats that are similar to those of Muslim Americans. A particularly memorable incident took place in Manhattan when hostile protesters targeted Coptic Christians because an enraged crowd phenotypically identified them as Muslims. The Coptic community migrated predominantly from Egypt to the US, and an estimated half million Coptic Americans live in New Jersey, New York and part of Southern California today. Following the failed Arab Spring protests across North Africa, Coptic Christians from Egypt entered the US in larger numbers, requesting asylum and often settling in New York and California.

In spring 2010, rumours and hostile language circulated concerning the so-called 'Ground Zero Mosque' site, inflamed public protests and encouraged attacks on anyone who appeared to 'look like a Muslim'. Formally known as the Park51 Project in New York City, an Islamic Centre with an adjacent

mosque was envisioned on Park Place, for the purpose of encouraging inter-faith dialogue. Since the Islamic Centre site was to be constructed less than two blocks away from the actual ground zero location of the World Trade Center, virulent opponents to the Islamic Centre and mosque construction project labelled it the ‘Ground Zero Mosque’, suggesting that hostile Islamists had bank-rolled the construction plans. Two Coptic Christians, Joseph Nasrallah and Karam el-Masry, who ironically had arrived to protest against the Islamic Centre and mosque project, required active police intervention to be extracted from a crowd that visually identified the two men as Muslim (Friedersdorf, 2010). It was evident that opponents had stereotyped the Coptic Christians. While both men shouted that they were Christians and not Muslim, it was to no avail. Both could have been severely injured or even killed, had it not been for the intervention of the police.

The levels of hostilities affecting Arab communities can be illustrated through other examples that are commonly experienced by members of minority communities in relation to linguistic practices. Many Druze families in the US originate from Lebanon (although Druze also live in Israel and Syria) and are ethnically Arab. It is important to note that the Druze community broke off from Islam in the eleventh century, and since then Druze have rejected converts seeking to join their community. Druze also tend to object to the notion of intermarriage with either Christians or Muslims, and such marriages remain quite rare (permission is occasionally granted in the case of a Druze man marrying a non-Druze woman). This community is commonly confused with Muslims in the US, since many Druze manifest cultural norms that appear similar to Muslim American patterns (particularly in relation to food and alcohol restrictions). Since Arabic often is the language spoken in the Druze home, they can become targeted for their language use in public, as has been quite common. Arabic speakers are regularly subjected to accusations related to terrorism and continue to face such biases today (Fam et al., 2021).

Prior to the 1965 Immigration Act, more than 60 percent of Arab immigrants to the US represented a range of Christian faiths when they arrived from Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen and Palestine (Abraham and Abraham, 1981, p. 18). In the post-1965 immigration ‘waves’, however, immigrants from significantly more religiously and racially diverse communities settled in the US. Since then, Muslim immigrants from Iraq and Syria (Arabs and Kurds) and

from North Africa (Maghrebi Arabs and others) have reshaped the religious balance among immigrants from the MENA region. These changes in migratory patterns over the past decades directly reflected the devastating sectarian and civil conflicts in Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan, as well as the proxy war in Yemen; but they were also the result of the failed Arab Spring reform movements across North Africa (2010–12).

The majority of Arab Americans live in California, Michigan, New York and Florida and maintain particularly strong ancestral linkages to Lebanon, the Palestinian territories, Syria, Egypt and Iraq. Forming diverse diaspora organisations that strengthen socio-cultural and linguistic connections with their homeland regions, Arab Americans and Arab immigrants have established countless community centres. Outreach efforts tend to affirm new arrivals from the homeland and provide extensive support structures, ranging from establishing business ties to advocating for socio-political interests. Often, community centres organise social and educational events that support cultural identities and religious practices and celebrate one's heritage. For example, two Yemeni diaspora communities engage in outreach activities in Michigan; one is located in Dearborn and the other in Hamtramck, just northeast of Detroit. While the majority of Yemeni Americans are Sunni and endorse the US-Saudi alliance in the proxy war in Yemen, both Sunni and Shia Yemeni communities critique the enormous human suffering among the population in Yemen. The Yemeni community in Brooklyn, New York, has formed the Yemeni American Merchant Association (YAMA) in order to have an online presence that may help to articulate their rights as citizens in the US. In fact, as an advocacy group, the YAMA was founded in direct response to the Trump administration's executive order that focused on permanently banning Muslims from entering the US, including Yemeni relatives of Brooklyn residents.

Palestinian Americans are often considered the most transnationally engaged communities and rely on support from well-organised, multi-generational communities in Paterson, New Jersey, and in Chicago, Illinois. In a community-based case study carried out by Brocket (2018) among second-generation Palestinian Americans in New Jersey, participants articulated what is called 'positioned belongings', indicating that Palestinian Americans 'reflected on the ways in which they created and occupied spaces of "hybridity", which brought together aspects

of their Americanness and their Palestinianness' (p. 150). As these examples demonstrate, Arab Americans include a wide range of sub-groupings with distinct socio-political attitudes, transnational agendas and varying religious views. The Arab American Institute (AAI) has proposed that a total of 3.7 million people identify as Arab Americans today (making up about 1.2 percent of the US population). Located in Washington DC, the AAI is considered an influential organisation that works on three priorities – namely, strengthening democracy (voting rights, immigration legislation and so on), guarding civil rights and civil liberties (free speech, anti-discrimination efforts and so on) and protecting human rights in the Middle East (transnational efforts). One of its recent high-profile campaigns encouraged voter participation through the #YallaVote campaign, which represented a grassroots effort to encourage Arab American political activism. ('Yalla' is Arabic and means 'hurry up' in English).

The oldest advocacy organisation supporting a growing assertiveness among Arab Americans is the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) in Washington DC. Founded in 1980 by the very first Arab American Senator James G. Abourezk and political activist James Zogby, the ADC is a powerful grassroots-oriented advocacy organisation to represent Arab American interests across the country. The ADC is engaged in civil rights and public relations work, engages in legal action related to housing and employment discrimination and actively pursues hate-crime lawsuits. Over the past several decades, the ADC has lobbied the US government on behalf of Arab American interests, established extensive networks with other advocacy organisations and most recently endorsed Senator Bernie Sanders' campaign for the 2020 US Presidency. Sanders was the only presidential candidate who stated that Israel has a right to exist in peace while also emphasising that the Palestinian populations deserve the same rights.

While neither the ADC nor the AAI tend to be harshly critiqued in political circles, this is not the case related to the influential Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR). Established in 1994 in Washington DC, CAIR is a Muslim civil rights and advocacy group that has been deeply involved in pressuring Congress to pursue hearings related to civil liberties oversight related to the Patriot Act, for example. The organisation keeps track of Islamophobic and profiling patterns and advances an assertive transnational agenda. CAIR has demanded that the Biden administration pursue a more forceful approach

related to China's mistreatments of the Muslim Uyghur populations. Some of CAIR's leadership has been accused by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) of supporting radical Islamist agendas by endorsing Hamas. Without a doubt, this characterisation is deeply informed by disputes related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which has created the most contentious exchanges between Muslim Arab American and Jewish American advocacy organisations. It is obvious from this discussion that Arab Americans are neither a homogenous community, nor engaged in a unified approach to civil and political activism on a domestic or transnational level, as can be seen from the examples related to Lebanese American, Yemeni American and Palestinian American advocacy.

### **Visible Subjects and Political Leadership**

Some twenty years after the 9/11 terror attacks, Muslim and Arab American communities continue to feel pressure to demonstrate their loyalty to the US, as many believe that they have to justify their claims to belonging and citizenship. Some Muslim and Arab Americans struggle psychologically with repetitive exposure to racism and Islamophobia, others respond to hostilities by emphasising their ethnic and racial identities. But Muslim and Arab Americans also push back against stereotyping and profiling practices by organising themselves to challenge biases related to their political engagement or their pursuit of transnational linkages (Ponce, 2020; Lajevardi and Oskooii, 2018). Muslim Americans, just like Arab Americans who are Christians, reject the constant amalgamation efforts that classify them as a culturally unified and largely homogenous community.

Ignoring the diversity of paths that led these groups to the US, homogenising practices based on ignorance and fear are common in socio-political discourses in both local community conversations and among the highest political offices.<sup>3</sup> Despite the exceptionally diverse migratory histories that brought both Muslims and Arabs to North America, Arabic-language speakers are often perceived to be both ethnically Arab and practicing Muslims (such misidentifications deeply frustrate the Kurdish diaspora as well as Coptic Christians,

<sup>3</sup> IRB-approved interviews in Albany, New York State, indicated that recent refugees/immigrants and long-term/multi-generational local residents with links to the MENA region were incorrectly described by other community members as Arabs (Afghans and Iraqi Kurds, for example).

and the members of Somali, Eritrean and Ethiopian communities). During the Trump administration, long-held stereotypes about Muslim Americans found fertile ground. Members of the administration frequently used Islamophobic rhetoric to propose policies that were directly blaming a homogenised Muslim community for security threats and social problems. Among these policies was Trump's executive order that banned travellers from seven Muslim countries as well as Muslim refugees from gaining entry to the US. In response to the Trump administration's hostility directed at Muslims globally, Muslim Americans challenged these policies and increasingly participated in the US political system. Opinion polls carried out by the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding (ISPU), a non-profit research organisation located in Dearborn, Michigan, and Washington DC, found that 78 percent of eligible Muslim voters had registered to cast their ballots in 2020 (Mogahed and Ikramulla, 2020). ISPU survey results from 2016 showed that only 60 percent of Muslim American survey participants had expressed their intention to vote.

Muslim Americans were concerned that their faith was framed as incompatible with democratic practices. Political attitudes and behaviours among Muslim Americans were seen as predominantly shaped by religion, a position that ignored other significant factors that determine the levels of public sphere engagement, including one's racial and ethnic background, gender, national origin, educational level and social class (Hawley, 2019). Mogahed, director of research at ISPU, argued that the most significant determinant among Muslim voters was race, parallel to the voting pattern observed in the overall population (Fadel, 2020). White Muslim voters supported Trump at 50 percent, voters who identified as Muslim and Arab, Muslim and Asian, and Muslim and Latino endorsed Trump in the lower 20 percent. Black Muslim support for Trump only reached the lower 10 percent (Fadel, 2020).

Over the past few years, Muslim and Arab American populations (as well as African American and left-leaning voters) elected several outspoken Muslim and Arab American representatives in Midwestern states. Keith Ellison was the first African American and Muslim elected to Congress in 2006. He was then elected to the office of Attorney General in the state of Minnesota in 2018 and is currently running for re-election. As Attorney General, Ellison led the prosecutorial team that succeeded in convicting former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin for murdering George Floyd.

Ellison's leadership on this particular criminal case created opportunities for Muslim Americans to form a broader coalition with Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), for the purpose of collaborating more broadly and elevating grassroots Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests to state-level offices. Signalling support for such collaborations can be found in public statements and collaborative advocacy work. For example, Ferhana Khera, the founder of a non-profit called Muslim Advocates, released a statement expressing solidarity with the need to protect black lives and to engage in systematic police reforms following the Chauvin conviction (2020). These opportunities for Muslim American, Arab American and African American advocates and elected officials have grown substantially in recent years and will likely create grassroots alliances in several Midwestern states, such as Minnesota, Michigan and Illinois.

Several other Muslim Americans of note were also elected to public office in recent years. André Carson, the only second African American and Muslim elected to Congress in 2008 to represent the Seventh Congressional District of Indiana, is recognised by Muslim and Arab Americans for his progressive position related to Palestinian communities. He, along with colleagues, demanded that the Biden administration send COVID-19 vaccines to the Palestinian territories and pushed the administration to revise its Israel policies. Ilhan Omar, the first Somali American woman elected to Congress in 2019 to represent the Fifth Congressional District of Minnesota, and Rashida Tlaib, the first Palestinian American woman elected to Congress in 2019 to represent the Thirteenth Congressional District of Michigan, are known to be among the most outspoken elected representatives in Congress. Both Tlaib and Omar directly tangled with the Trump administration by challenging the unrelenting stereotyping of Muslim Americans, Arab Americans and immigrant communities. They embraced the use of their identities to advance particular positions and relied on contentious politics to activate their voter base. Contentious politics tend to be defined as civil and political acts that rely on disruptive discursive, advocacy and protest techniques. Tlaib and Omar use such techniques for the purpose of questioning and changing governmental policies, and to raise select disagreements in public to alert supporters. Contentious politics involve a wide range of tools that motivate politically active Muslim and Arab Americans, including reliance

on organising public anti-discrimination protests, strategic voter mobilisation campaigns and an increased level of socio-political assertiveness as citizens of the US. Since President Biden's election, both Omar and Tlaib have critiqued the new administration's lack of policy changes towards Gaza and the Palestinian population in the West Bank, repeatedly challenging the status quo relationship with the state of Israel.

Despite a myriad of studies examining factors that determine public engagement levels among minority and immigrant communities in the US, reliance on aggregated data has masked the diversity of backgrounds, experiences and involvement in the public sphere (Ahmad and Weller, 2014). Among the most challenging information to decipher in such aggregated data are varying categorisations that obscure the complex understandings of ethnic and/or racial identities. It is important to note that patterns of homogenisation have negatively impacted the lives of Afro-Caribbean communities, Sikhs, Hindus and South Asians in general, as they are more frequently targeted by right-wing nationalists and/or white supremacists (Rana et al., 2019). The common binary approach to phenotypical visibility has exposed many communities to stereotyping, bias and racism. As Song (2020, p. 2) has highlighted, classifications have become more complicated and contested in recent years, in part as a result of resistance to the practice, but also because 'the numbers of "hidden" racially mixed people with more distant non-White ancestors, who may look either racially ambiguous or White to others' defy a continued reliance on established binary categorisations.

Arab and Muslim Americans are among the increasingly multi-ethnic and multi-racial populations who have challenged the established racial and ethnic categories in the 2020 census. Asked to select their race, Arab and Muslim Americans had six options to select from, which included white, black, Asian, American Indian, Native Hawaiian and 'some other race'. Many selected the option 'white' and also 'some other race' but felt relegated to an undesirable or incorrect category. While the US Census invites participants to define their ancestry, heritage, or place of birth (including before their arrival in the US), many Arab Americans believe that additional categories need to be offered to capture more accurately the changing characteristics of their diverse communities (including the category of Arab). The central challenge has revolved around the notion of whiteness, which indicates a level of privilege that many

believe they do not have (Read, 2013). This is particularly the case when one's name, faith, or phenotypical appearance indicates a likelihood to be minoritised, surveyed and classified as a security risk in society.

## Conclusion

It is important to recognise the diversity of paths that Muslim and Arab Americans pursue to shape strategies that inspire active involvement in the public sphere. Muslim and Arab American communities, their affiliated civic organisations and elected representatives regularly express a sense of connectedness beyond state borders and involve themselves in cross-border socio-political exchanges. By examining both individual and communal expressions of identity, political positioning and sense of belonging, this chapter has discussed grassroots/civil society efforts that are relevant to contextualising the socio-political rise of Muslim and Arab-Americans in the US. It contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how Muslim and Arab Americans carry out communal advocacy work and connect with a variety of groups to advance their interests.

The integrated examples in this chapter included accounts shared by Afghan, Lebanese, Palestinian and Yemeni Americans. Their experiences contextualise the ways in which particular elected representatives advance anti-discrimination campaigns and organise voter mobilisation efforts. Muslim and Arab Americans are asserting their growing role in public life through the pursuit of transnational agendas. The findings confirm that Muslim and Arab Americans are successfully integrating into US society, but that they question patterns of exclusion in the socio-political sphere. Their push for meaningful engagement in society has been misinterpreted as contentious by mainstream society.

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# 11

## MEXICO CITY'S DIASPORAS IN CHICAGO: AN APPROACH FROM URBAN AND TRANS-LOCAL DIPLOMACY

*Antonio Alejo*

### **Introduction**

Diverse approaches to contemporary global challenges situate human mobility as a critical component in dislocating and decentring the state-nation spaces towards a transnational sense of belonging as a laudable feature of the world (Ferrajoli, 2018; Levin, 2020; Sager, 2018). Simultaneously, global political processes test state-centric governance through diverse scales and multiple dynamics (Juergensmeyer et al., 2019). One of these critical contemporary challenges is the position of cities as strategic spaces to implement global agendas (climate change, sustainable development goals and so on). This phenomenon is calling for more studies on the capacities of cities to assume their global role (Acuto, 2016). Acuto has stated that cities today are seen as 'critical engines driving the global economy, global information flows, and the worldwide mobility of goods and people' (Acuto, 2016, p. 510).

I argue that cities are spaces where everyday global dynamics materialise. This chapter assumes that, when studying the local, it can become isolated if actors do not consider the global perspectives in defining the environment where daily life activities happen (Bauman and Bordoni, 2016). This chapter analyses the importance of asking oneself about cities' capacities of inclusion in the face of contemporary human mobility. This analysis is necessary when the multi-scale global context (nativism and autochthonous narratives)

promotes the exclusion of non-natives where they are residing. What role are cities playing in a hostile environment against people in motion? Given the negative narrative against people in motion in the US, this study investigates how diaspora communities and organisations generate new paths to foster their rights and voices in North America. What are their strategies to make themselves recognised and maintain their dignity as diaspora communities in the US?

With the challenges posed by the global perspective mentioned above, Diaspora Studies discuss new issues that previously were not relevant (Baser Ozturk and Hoyo, 2020; Delano Alonso and Mylonas, 2019; Koinova and Tsourapas, 2018). With a view to Diaspora Studies, this chapter relates to emerging debates on the 'ascending importance of diaspora as non-state actors in international relations' (diplomacy) (Basar Ozturk and Hoyo, 2020, p. 2) and to evidence of how diasporas are promoting their rights and voices in specific urban contexts. In the context of the diaspora and diplomacy literature, this chapter contributes to identifying and recognising how diasporas take part in urban diplomacy.

Regarding the aim of the present book, this chapter contributes to demonstrating how diasporas and their transnational sense of belonging contribute to feeding cosmopolitan cities in the US. Thus, the chapter positions diaspora communities and organisations as necessary agents in urban diplomacy (Alejo, 2022). Following Sennett (2018) on how to think about collaboration in the design of cities and Vos (2018) on the study of inclusive urban diplomacy, my approach is incipient. It follows a research agenda on global human mobility and cities that have been developed with other perspectives – that is, paradiplomacy, the right to the city of civic binationality and the foreign policy of cities and migrants (Alejo, 2019; 2020). Based on this theoretical perspective on diasporas and urban diplomacy, this essay highlights how diaspora communities and their organisations share transnational knowledge between cities and their inhabitants. Following the people in motion activism in North America (Alund and Schierup, 2018; Bada and Gleeson, 2019; Cohen and Schuster, 2019; Jones, 2019; Mora, Rodríguez and Almeida, 2018; Nichols, 2019; Pries, 2019; Rosenberger, Stern and Merhaut, 2019; Schütze, 2016; Voss and Bloemraad, 2011; Wee, Kudakwashe and Jinnah, 2018), this analysis focuses on an incipient debate: the role of diasporas' activism in urban diplomacy.

The analysis offered here focuses on the experience of Mexico City's diaspora in Chicago. It aims to understand how Mexico City's urban diplomacy and its diaspora play a relevant role in building a cosmopolitan Chicago through their trans-local dynamics. I structure this chapter in the following sections: first, I present the theoretical framework of the agency of diasporas and urban diplomacy. The second section briefly exposes the analytical strategy and methodology to explain how I developed this research. The third section presents the empirical bases and the analysis of Mexico City's diaspora activism in Chicago.

### **Theoretical Framework: The Agency of Diasporas in Urban Diplomacy**

This study assumes a context where societies and nation-states are changing within a multi-scale framework at the global and local levels (Sassen, 2019) to recognise diaspora organisations as relevant actors in urban diplomacy. Global human mobility processes and dynamics are produced (Gonzales and Sigona, 2019, p. 4) so that diaspora organisations, like other civic actors, are 'socially constructed' (DeMars and Dijkzel, 2015, p. 8). This analysis recognises a crucial reason to support the acknowledgment of diaspora communities and organisations as contributors to urban diplomacy practices: diverse global human groups are constantly mentioned as relevant actors in speeches about business, cultural exchanges and local government between cities.

On one hand, this theoretical framework states that global human mobility dynamics promote contemporary social change. Hence, this study recognises diaspora organisations' agency to collaborate in order to transform the environment where they operate (Jonsson, 2020; Mora, Rodriguez and Almeida, 2018; Romanos, 2016; Tonkiss, 2019; Triandafyllidou, 2019). Various disciplines offer different definitions of what diaspora means. According to Horboken, a diaspora means a community created by migrants from a given country who keep socio-economic and cultural ties to the homeland (Horboken, 2004). Organisations, families and individuals with diverse skills, backgrounds and objectives feed diaspora communities. Based on the recognition of this diversity within diasporas, this chapter examines plurality in motion within diaspora communities. Thus, the present study focuses on the agency capacity of diaspora organisations interacting

dynamically with institutions to promote and defend their rights within specific urban contexts.

Based on this approach to agency, diaspora organisations both make and are formed by globalised societies. For the purposes of this analysis, diaspora organisations are plural and complex agents with the necessary know-how and skills to shape and foster their world perspective, through non-formal and formal mechanisms. Following their points of view, they gain motivation and create alternatives to transform the structural and cultural conditions that negatively affect their everyday lives. Therefore, this chapter highlights that diaspora organisations are becoming relevant voices in contemporary politics.

On the other hand, this theoretical framework establishes cities as diplomatic agents (Amari, 2022). This analysis follows Steger, stating that global dynamics and processes happen not only in the world but also in our consciousness (Steger, 2019, p. 4). The significance of city diplomacy is well-established (Amari, 2022). Based thereupon, this study follows a perspective on Critical Diplomatic Studies that track a 'reflective intellectual trajectory' which recognises paths of thinking about the 'multiplicities and pluralities of diplomatic practices, actors, and spaces' (Constantinou et al., 2021). To recognise the notion of urban diplomacy, I follow the definition of Constantinou, which decentres the understanding and application of diplomacy. Then, diplomacy can be 'broadly understood to emerge whenever someone successfully claims to mediate and negotiate for a territory or a group of people or a cause or successfully claims to mediate between others engaging in such representation and negotiation' (Constantinou, 2016, p. 23).

From this critical perspective on Diplomatic Studies, this chapter understands urban diplomacy from trans-local practices that resituate the spaces and agency of diplomacy (Dittmer and McConnell, 2016, p. 6). The study of diasporas in diplomacy as complementary and strategic agents who strengthen the presence and negotiations (processes and policy frameworks) between receiving, sending and transit states is well-developed (Alejo, 2022). Within the context of diaspora and diplomacy literature, this chapter contributes to identifying and recognising how diasporas constitute relevant agents in urban diplomacy.

Asking about the inclusion capacity of urban diplomacy (De Vos, 2016) and following a collaborative perspective on the design of cities (Sennett,

2018), this theoretical approach suggests that urban diplomacy should be a social tool that promotes sustainable development, global solidarity and social justice in the face of the contemporary global human mobility. Thus, this analysis suggests an urban diplomacy committed to peace, human rights, economic justice and collaborative attitudes in the context of contemporary social challenges. Based on this theoretical approach to diasporas and urban diplomacy, this chapter highlights how diaspora communities and their organisations contribute to reciprocal and mutual knowledge between cities and their inhabitants worldwide.

### **Analytical Strategy and Methodological Note**

This study draws on the analytical strategy developed by the Sociology of Collective Action to observe the interconnection between the mobilisation repertoire of diaspora organisations (narratives, projects and activities) and the institutional context where they operate. This analytical strategy understands the mobilisation repertoire as the set of actions (programmes, interaction with institutions, organisational structures and activities) that diaspora organisations perform to foster their understanding of the world. The analytical strategy selected is a most suitable platform to systematise and investigate diaspora organisations' repertoires and then identify their positions and codes of activism (de Mora et al., 2018; Wong, 2012). Through their mobilisation repertoires, diaspora organisations seek to meet their goals. Hence, it is appropriate to see diaspora organisations' activities as a field to analyse how diasporas promote their rights in specific urban contexts. From their world perspective, diaspora organisations generate strategies and alternative agendas to influence political agendas and processes that affect them directly. In this research, the diaspora organisation's repertoires represent the activities and narratives of diasporas in urban diplomacy. To evidence how these organisations foster inclusive urban diplomacy, the present study exposes the mobilisation repertoires that give evidence as to how these organisations promote their perspective of the world and defend their sense of belonging. I identify the activities (activities, narratives and programmes) to analyse how diaspora organisations' repertoires have developed in Chicago.

This research followed a qualitative multi-case study methodology (non-comparative intentions) to analyse one office of government and three organisations: (1) the Mexico City office in Chicago, (2) the Centro de Formación y

Educación para el Desarrollo Social (CEDES), (3) Chicagoatlan, (4) The Other Dreams in Action (ODA), and (4) Deportados Unidos en la Lucha (Deported United in the Struggle, DUL). I systematised the analysis around four topics: (1) trans-local solidarity, (2) extraterritorial political rights and civic engagement, (3) representative office abroad, and (4) Chicagoatlan and the cosmopolitan Chicago. I justified the selection of these cases based on the following reasons:

1. Diaspora communities created the organisations selected.
2. The diaspora organisations promote their rights based on a trans-local perspective and hybrid culture between Mexico and the United States.
3. The organisations use Mexico City's aspects in their activities.

I carried out the study from 2017 to 2022, using the process-tracing approach (Collier, 2011, p. 824) to expose the diaspora organisations' developing activism. For this research, I collected information from primary sources (documents, videos, virtual activities, Twitter and Facebook accounts, as well as virtual invitations for virtual and non-virtual activities) and secondary sources (press articles, scholarly articles and books). Also, I employed informal communication (emails and chats) with activists in Chicago to inform my analysis.

### **Empirical Evidence: Mexico City's Urban Diplomacy and its Diaspora in Chicago**

This empirical section offers qualitative evidence to understand how Mexico City's urban diplomacy and diaspora organisations feed Chicago's everyday cosmopolitan life through their trans-local practices. Moreover, this empirical analysis illustrates how diaspora organisations from Mexico City promote their voices and defend their rights in Chicago.

#### *The Trans-local Dynamics of the Mexican Diaspora and its Organisations in Chicago*

Chicago has a long history of diasporic waves from Europe, Asia and Latin America. The Windy City has been built by Czech, Irish, Italian and Polish communities. Currently, Latino, Chinese and Indian people have challenged the 'melting pot' scheme. Chicago has one of the most diverse populations in the US, and the city has established efficient policy frameworks to receive and

care for migrants in the face of contemporary human mobility dynamics. Cruz Leira has mentioned two framework policies that evidence a ‘positive local context’ which allows foreigners to create synergies with diverse city economic and political agents to foster an assertive environment for the civic engagement of diasporas (Cruz Leira, 2019, p. 12). On one hand, there is the American Welcoming Cities Coalition. This network recognises that all people are valued contributors in the cities where they are residing. Thus, the American Welcoming Cities Coalition fosters inclusive and prosperous communities by ‘ensuring everyone belongs’. On the other hand, Chicago is a Sanctuary City. By defining itself as such, Chicago is part of a process of international solidarity, in which different cities worldwide position themselves as spaces able to receive and care for people in motion. Thus, Chicago facilitates the arrival and settlement of foreigners. However, historically, Chicago has also been a city critical for implementing deportation programmes (Goodman, 2020, pp. 62–72), and ‘Mexican migrants have been a major target for immigration enforcement action under Clinton, Bush, Obama and even more systematically and brazenly under the Trump Administration’ (Gleeson and Bada, 2019, p. 11).

The largest Latin American diaspora in the US is the Mexican diaspora. Of the Latinos in the US, 62 percent are American/Mexicans or Mexicans (Maloney, 2019), and within the Latino diaspora Mexico is the top country from where Chicago’s immigrants originate. Mexicans started migrating to Chicago in the early to mid-twentieth century, drawn by ‘job opportunities and social networks’ (Goodman, 2020, p. 62). Currently, the Chicago metropolitan area has (after Los Angeles) the second-largest Mexican population in the US (Bada, 2014, p. 3).

The Latino diaspora in Chicago is one of the most dynamic in the US, and its members advocate for protecting their rights and contributing to political issues that affect them directly and indirectly. Mexican diaspora organisations have a long tradition in Chicago (Schütze, 2016, p. 125), and their civic activism is multi-faceted (Schütze, 2016, p. 111). Especially the Mexican diaspora is one of the most active diasporas to advocate for themselves, in both Mexico and the US. According to Bada, Mexican diaspora organisations have existed in Chicago since the 1930s, through various organisational formats and plural agendas such as ‘communist organisations, Catholic groups, mutual-aid organisations, civic committees, and social justice groups’ (Bada, 2014, p. 13).

Also, Mexican diaspora organisations in Chicago have shown their relevance in the mass mobilisation against immigration policy frameworks and laws against Latino communities in the US (as in the spring of 2006). The proliferation of Mexican organisations in the US in the twenty-first century shows that migrants remain socially engaged with their communities of origin and create new forms of cross-border political organisation (Schütze, 2016, p. 3). Today, Mexicans organised in Chicago are deeply involved in Mexican politics at the municipal, regional and federal levels (Schütze, 2016, p. 3). Following the objective of this chapter, I offer empirical evidence to show how the trans-local element of urban diplomacy and the diaspora of Mexico City feed the daily life of a cosmopolitan Chicago.

### *First Case Study: Trans-local Solidarity*

Mexican migrants in Chicago participate in trans-local arenas (Schütze, 2016, p. 3). According to the evidence identified in their trans-local repertoire of mobilisations, these organisations foster trans-local solidarity for families and communities. These diaspora organisations design trans-local infrastructures to develop their activities. For example, CEDES has a trans-local office in Mexico City (Alcaldia Magdalena Contreras) and Cicero/Illinois (Clearing-Chrysler Village), to promote the intercultural perspective between migrants and natives because 'cultures, races, beliefs are shared, mixed, and linked' (Interviewee 1) With its bi-national repertoire, the organisation promotes that 'the migrant communities, their families and communities themselves achieve the methodologies for their development since the ultimate goal is the community's prosperity in the places of origin and destination' (Interviewee 1) This trans-local activism, among other actions, involves organising campaigns to highlight their causes and promote their right to be part of both societies (the US and Mexico). Some examples are the campaigns deployed by Mexico City's diaspora organisations in Chicago and Mexico City, as outlined in the following paragraphs.

Deportados Unidos en la Lucha (DUL, Deported United in the Struggle) was founded in Mexico City by a Chicago-based mother who was deported after living in the Windy City for more than fifteen years; she left her children with friends in Chicago. The DUL promotes the right to motherhood as a 'remote mom'. This organisation refers to the 'remote mom' figure to show

how fathers and mothers fight for their right to be with their children born and growing up in the US. With campaigns such as 'Hugs, no walls' and 'Fight for hugs', these grassroots organisations promote family reunification and the right of parents to be with their children who remain in the US. The DUL organises virtual encounters with diverse organisations in the US and Mexico to elaborate and implement strategies to promote and defend their right to reconnect with their sons and daughters growing up in the US without their families.

The Other Dreams in Action (ODA) performs intensive work for solidarity mobilisations through visits (tours) to diverse institutions in order to expose their situation. This organisation participated in solidarity actions organised around the immigration agenda in North America. In the course of these tours, participants have visited many universities and organisations, and they have spoken about their experiences as deported and forced returned people living in Mexico City. With this objective, they have been in Michigan and Illinois to talk about how, through culture and arts, youth leaders resist the negative impact and the stigmatisation of deportation. The ODA has allies in the US and Mexico to reinforce its impact on society, allies who help them grow consistently. They frequently work with other organisations in Mexico and the US in other cities, such as Deportados Unidos en la Lucha, F\*ck La Migra, Dreamer Moms in Tijuana and Migrantólogos (a network of academic and non-academic experts on migrant issues). In the US, the ODA has allies in the Southwest Suburban Immigrants Project (Chicago) and the English Language Institute at the University of Dayton in Ohio. Many institutions have supported these activities, such as the Latino Cultural Center at the University of Illinois at Chicago and Alianzas Americas. According to their narratives and activities, these organisations promote trans-local senses of belonging for individuals and families who live in the US and Mexico. These groups of people state that they have a hybrid identity. Thus, they assume that they are 'from here and there', a product of their socialisation in the US combined with the Mexican culture that they recognise as part of their historical identity.

#### *Second Case Study: Extraterritorial Political Rights and Civic Engagement*

From an extraterritorial perspective, the Mexico City diaspora has advanced in its political rights. According to diaspora organisations, they require

governments to take 'concrete actions to resolve the crisis experienced with human mobility', and to do this, the organisation proposes 'bi-national, regional and even multilateral' alliances (Interviewee 1). Following this perspective, Mexico City's diaspora organisations have been involved in the strategies organised by the Mexican Electoral National Institute to foster the vote for Mexicans abroad. For example, CEDES has developed a trans-local campaign using their office in Chicago as a focal point and launched a series of actions to invite Mexicans living in the US to vote in the 2018 electoral process. They were supported by consulates (Indianapolis, Milwaukee, New York and Chicago) to develop their activities; also, they have generated a network strategy with different Mexican migrant organisations (radio stations, church groups, unions, Mexican art centres, small businesses and others) to promote the extraterritorial vote.

Another example consists of promoting their first electoral process (2021), in which people from Mexico City could elect the first migrant representative in the local congress. According to the Constitution of Mexico City (2017), people from Mexico City who live abroad can stand as candidates for migrant deputy and have the right to vote for direct representation in the local congress. CEDES, like other organisations, has fostered virtual civic spaces (for example, debates between candidates and interviews with the candidates) to involve the Mexico City diaspora in the US in this extraterritorial electoral process. In Chicago, the diaspora organisations of Mexico City developed intense political-electoral activity. Three of the nine candidates in this election (all three women) reside in Chicago. Through social networks, they contacted people from Mexico City living on other continents (such as Europe) to promote the electoral participation of Mexico City's diaspora. For these organisations, this migrant deputy is a political right obtained after several years of hard struggle. They see the migrant deputy as 'critical' for the community of Mexico City in the US. They state that they need an intermediary in the local congress of Mexico City. These diaspora organisations seek to improve the quality of life in their places of origin, where their friends and some members of their families are still residing. Given that they send money to their places of origin and share culture and traditions between generations, they affirm that it is necessary to have 'the right to influence the politics' which define the future of the places where they were born (Oviedo, 2019, p. 10).

*Third Case Study: Representative Office Abroad*

Mexican diaspora organisations in Chicago have developed multi-scale dynamics to negotiate at the trans-local level (Alejo, 2022). Since the 1980s, Mexico's local governments have developed international strategies focused on migrant communities and their organisations in the US (Ortega Ramírez, 2019, p. 113). The government of Mexico City states that cities' international actions benefit local governments' objectives. It recognises that local governments require 'inter-institutional strategies and coordinated strategies' with other governments and stakeholders.

Following this strategy, the government of Mexico City created representative offices in the cities of Los Angeles and Chicago in 2007. With two phases (Houses of Mexico City from 2007 to 2012 and the Mexico City Initiative from 2013 to 2018), these offices fostered a common agenda in the commercial, tourist, migratory and cultural spheres and sought to 'strengthen' the cooperation between relevant stakeholders in Chicago. They also organised 'strategic dialogues' between the two cities for 'economic, social, cultural and governmental' exchanges, generating diverse activities in the US. For example, they promoted tourism in Mexico City, and this representative office organised school talks with eighth-graders in Chicago, inviting them to visit Mexico City and its emblematic sights, such as the Historical Centre. Moreover, they fostered a strategy between representative offices of other Mexican local governments in the US to protect Mexican migrants during the Trump administration. A third activity consisted of a health fair to provide specialised information and services to the Mexico City diaspora residing in Chicago. They also organised cultural activities such as the Day of the Dead to represent how it is commemorated in Mixquic (a local community in the southeast of Mexico City founded in the eleventh century).

According to Ortega Ramirez, these offices have a low institutional profile and exhibit institutional weaknesses that should be remedied so as to improve their capacities as political tools contributing to a successful and valuable relationship between the diasporas and local governments: 'staff continuity, budgets in Mexican pesos rather than dollars, and political change in Mexico' (Ortega Ramirez, 2019, p. 130). However, for this author, the case of Casa Michoacan in Chicago and the (sub-national) government of Michoacan in Mexico is a successful case of collaboration between the diasporas and their local governments (Ortega Ramirez, 2019, p. 130).

*Fourth Case Study: Chicagoatlan and the Cosmopolitan Chicago*

Chicagoatlan is a word that mixes Tenochtitlan (an Aztec city in the location that currently conforms to Mexico City's historic core) and Chicago. In the commemoration of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Tenochtitlan's fall to the 'European conquerors' in 1521, an organised group of Chicagoans of Mexican descent created the cultural project named Chicagoatlan. The project's goal was to expose and create a dialogue with the young generations of Mexican Americans and 'Chicanx Chicagoans' about the colonial legacy of those historical moments and to reflect on the cultural-historical resources that have been part of their trans-local identity. The project designed a printed and virtual map to identify the symbolic presence of Tenochtitlan in Chicago. Project participants also organised museum exhibits, panel discussions and dance performances. With the map, the project situated symbols of Aztec culture in mosaics, murals, streets, schools and restaurants in the city, identifying forty-seven sites (community spaces, religious buildings, murals, mosaics, shops, institutions and archaeological sites) in Chicago. Some examples are the Nuremberg Map of Mexico City in the Newberry Library and the Sanctuary of the Virgin of Guadalupe in Des Plaines. While these symbols were located in various places within Chicago and its metropolitan area, most of the Mexico City (Tenochtitlan) symbols were observed in neighbourhoods with a historical Mexican presence, such as Little Village and Pilsen.

To observe the symbols' relevance identified by Chicagoatlan in the everyday lives of Latinos and Mexicans in Chicago, I deepen into the Sanctuary of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Faith is an essential value in the identity of Latino diasporas, and religious institutions have a crucial role in Latino diasporas' dynamics. According to Bada, countless Latin American immigrant congregations diversify Christianity in new ways in Chicago's metropolitan area (Bada, 2014, p. 17). Bada has stated that religion is 'an essential component in the diaspora's repertoire for civic engagement' (Bada, 2014, p. 18).

The construction of a shrine for the Virgin of Guadalupe in Des Plaines needs to be viewed against this religious background. The painting of the Virgin of Guadalupe is a replica of the original image from the Mexican Tepeyac. It was brought to Illinois in 1987, by the Mexican-born priest Joaquin Martínez, who worked in the Chicago suburb of Northbrook at that time. After having been kept in various churches, the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe was

permanently installed in the Maryville Academie. In 2001, church and shrine were declared the Second Tepeyac, under the auspices of the Mexican Cardinal Norberto Rivera. Currently, Des Plaines is a pilgrimage site, and around 100,000 visitors arrive every year on 12 December to celebrate the anniversary of the Virgin of Guadalupe (Schütze, 2016, p. 140).

Bada and Schütze affirm that the site of the shrine of Guadalupe in Des Plaines is a contested place (Bada, 2014, pp. 17–19; Schütze, 2016, pp. 138–41). This sacred locale is evidence of the connection between Mexican's civic and political activism in Chicago and the religious symbol of the Virgin of Guadalupe. In this sense, the political and civic symbolism of the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Guadalupe shows how Mexico's City presence is part of everyday life in Chicago. Among the trans-local actions developed by Mexico City's diaspora, this case shows how Mexico City's presence has played a significant role in developing a cosmopolitan Chicago.

## Conclusion

This chapter has positioned diaspora communities and organisations as relevant agents in urban diplomacy. The analysis has focused on the experience of Mexico City's diaspora in Chicago. The chapter thus aims to understand how Mexico City's urban diplomacy and its diaspora play a relevant role in building a cosmopolitan Chicago through their trans-local dynamics. In line with the objective of this book, this study's contribution is oriented to demonstrate how diasporas contribute to feeding cosmopolitan cities in the US.

Considering the evidence, this analysis has identified how Mexico City's diaspora organisations have developed hybrid cultures due to their lives being defined by mobility. Hence, these diaspora organisations lean on the notion that people in motion fight against the stigmatisation of people who live in a place where they were not born through a trans-local sense of belonging. The analysed repertoires are relevant to understanding how diaspora organisations defend their dignity as a trans-local community in the US. In so much as they exhibit the agency of diaspora organisations that promote a trans-local sense of belonging, the above-mentioned experiences allow us to see how diasporas have channelled their personal experiences to create associations dedicated to demanding that both Mexico and the US respect their right to be from two places simultaneously. With this in mind, the diaspora

organisations contribute to obtaining abilities and skills that help them, as community members belonging to both countries, to maintain their lives with dignity. In this sense, they build opportunities to resituate their lives as people from here and there. I have highlighted that the diaspora organisations studied here did not bet on resistance but sought to improve the community's ability to adapt to its identity as people in motion. With this self-positioning, these people in motion embody a trans-local culture, seen not as a hindrance but as an asset to dignify their mobile lives. This trans-local community views itself as having the capacity to transform the migrant narrative and offers a reflection of what it means to be part of two localities simultaneously.

Regarding the relevance of diasporas in urban diplomacy, I conclude that the nation-state's thinking does not recognise the complexity and plurality that coexist outside and within them. I have posited that trans-local communities problematise modern state notions (such as sovereignty, territory, community). The challenges associated with globalisation dynamics create a need to rethink how people in motion participate in their increasingly complex and interdependent societies (Alejo, 2017). In this sense, I argue that diaspora organisations, in their different formats, are necessary agents for promoting an urban diplomacy that allows people in motion to acquire the skills and abilities required to participate in globalised policy processes. As this chapter has proven, the Latino diaspora is one of the most creative and multi-faceted diasporas in the US. Therefore, it affirms that diasporas and their social and political pluralism are essential for the image of the US as a cosmopolitan destination.

This chapter has highlighted and debated the role of diasporas in urban diplomacy. To summarise, it is necessary to reconsider the socio-political function of urban diplomacy concerning global human mobility, even more so given the present nativist and autochthonous multi-scale context, which fosters hostile attitudes against people in motion and rejects free movement. In terms of governance, if local and global institutions recognise the diaspora's characteristic as people 'from here and there', then trans-local communities will also recognise this characteristic and develop their lives with dignity. Cities cannot foster only human values and overlook the material and structural conditions that generate the inequalities and marginalisation of excluded people worldwide.

Cities require the development of more policy frameworks to promote inclusive conversations for all societies and their internal and external diversities.

I close this chapter by arguing for the relevance of going beyond the state-centric perspective when studying diaspora activism. This analysis of Mexico City's diaspora in Chicago calls upon us to rethink the challenges facing globalised societies and states when it comes to contemporary diasporas. Even though this study has focused on Chicago, its findings can serve as a starting point to reconsider the broader phenomenon of diasporas in urban diplomacy operating in other US cities.

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# 12

## THE CONTRIBUTION OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION TO THE AMERICAN FILM INDUSTRY

*Alejandro Mercado-Celis*

### **Introduction**

The American film industry, known as Hollywood because of its concentration in the eponymous neighbourhood of Los Angeles, has been the commercially most successful film industry globally. Hollywood has had one hundred years of uninterrupted economic dominance. During this period, a complex economic space was created, consisting of many companies, workers, technologies, organisations, institutions and formal and informal practices. The construction of this space has involved several generations who have been able to innovate and react to cultural and technological changes during the twentieth century and so far in the twenty-first century.

This chapter documents the contribution of immigrants to Hollywood's foundation, sustainability and presence in international markets. I argue that, from its inception, Hollywood has been a transnational socio-economic space where diasporas and new migrants of diverse origins have converged. The participation of immigrants and sporadic minorities in Hollywood is extensive and complex; therefore, I will illustrate the contribution of immigrants by highlighting three aspects. One is the fundamental role of the Jewish diaspora in the founding and continuity of the Hollywood industry. The second is the continuous nurturing of new talent in the creative and technical areas of the industry. The third aspect is the evolution of Hollywood as a hub for the

coordination of transnational production networks, many of them based on the professional networks of foreign migrants residing in Hollywood, especially since the twenty-first century.

The chapter begins with a section that characterises Hollywood as an economic cluster and describes the three stages through which the film industry has passed from its inception to the present day. Subsequently, I analyse the main aspects mentioned above: the Jewish diaspora, the permanent migration of new talent and transnational production networks. I conclude the chapter with a brief reflection on the relationship between American minorities and the constant influx of new migrants in the film production space, an aspect that seems relevant as a future line of research.

### **Hollywood as an Economic Cluster**

Hollywood, in short, is one of the most arresting examples of the burgeoning cultural-product agglomerations that are on the rise all over the world today, no matter whether their stock-in-trade is film, multimedia, music, fashion, or any other vehicle of aesthetic and semiotic expression. (Scott, 2005, p. 58)

An economic cluster refers to a system of territorially agglomerated companies, workers, organisations and institutions that articulate an economic space specialised in producing a particular product. Currently, the Hollywood film industry comprises a wide range of companies of all sizes, from large global media corporations, American or foreign, to micro-companies specialised in some component or service for film production or post-production. This universe of companies covers the services, products and skills necessary to produce any type of audio-visual product. In addition to this universe of companies, Hollywood's productive capacity builds on a set of highly specialised labour markets. This labour market primarily functions through free-lancers who move from one film project to another. Some of the job specialisations found in this industry are actors, directors, designers, scriptwriters, photographers and specialists in visual and audio editing, special effects, digital manipulation, set and costume design, to mention a few.

Another relevant component is the set of regulatory organisations of the industry, such as associations, unions and legal regulations implemented by different levels of government. Universities also participate in training specialised

personnel that continuously integrate into the different areas of film production. Finally, the industry has built a series of practices that have regulated its functioning over time. These practices implicitly facilitate the coordination of all the actors involved.

It is crucial to remember that Hollywood is a complex and diverse business and labour universe; new immigrants and diasporas already established in the US participate in all these sectors and in the social networks that sustain them. In its first stage, Hollywood emerged in Los Angeles from an improvised system of film production. In a short period, a group of companies or studios emerged, in which a process of vertical integration took place under a Fordist production logic (Storper and Christopherson, 1987). Seven studios would lead the industry in what is known as the golden years: Twentieth Century Fox, MGM, Paramount, RKO, Warner Brothers, Columbia, United Artists and Universal Pictures. These studios incorporated all facets of the film business: production, distribution and exhibition. I am interested in highlighting the high level of vertical integration that occurred within the production phase. Scott has pointed out that ‘in the major studios all the main tasks of filmmaking-writing, directing, acting, sound stage operation, musical composition and performance, film editing, and so on were largely brought together under one structure of ownership and employment, and the most talented workers were signed up to long term contracts, usually of seven years’ duration’ (Scott, 2005, p. 28). This fact is essential; many of the immigrants of this period joined this contract employment system with a specific aim.

The Majors not only structured the organisation of the film industry, but they also contributed two elements that increased its competitiveness: one was the strategic decision to make films appealing to broad audiences (Candence Jones, 1996; 2001), and the second was to establish the feature film as the standard format. These two elements gave Hollywood a competitive advantage over producers in other latitudes who neglected their contact with broad audiences and held on to the short-film format. Finally, the studios were active in seeking to export the films. By the second half of the 1920s, 30 percent of revenues already came from exports (North, 1926, p. 101). As we will see below, the international distribution strategy has had an essential impact in generating Hollywood’s transactional networks with the film communities of various countries and attracting international talent to Los Angeles.

Between the late 1940s and early 1950s, the Hollywood film industry entered a period of transformation that can be considered a second stage, which profoundly changed its organisation and its film products. Hollywood's restructuring was a response to the 'Paramount antitrust action of 1948' and the entry of television in the 1950s. By the 1970s, the organisation of the film industry in large vertically integrated studios changed into a project-based production system formed by a universe of specialised companies and a flexible labour market (Storper and Christopherson, 1987; Miskell and Li, 2014). In this new system, the Majors (while continuing to produce films) became sources of financing and centres for coordinating marketing and film distribution services for subsidiaries and independent production companies. Scott has described the new Hollywood production as a tripartite system consisting of the Majors, independent production companies and independent production companies working for the Majors (Scott, 2005). This tripartite system generated the multiplication and overlapping of production networks that expand the number of films shot and the aesthetic and narrative genres of these films.

The film production and film genre expansion created a renewed attraction of talent to Hollywood, fed by national and global migration. Another relevant transformation in this era was the accelerated rise of the so-called runaway productions. This phenomenon emerged because of the search for cost reductions at the filming stage. The use of locations in other countries has led many production companies to shoot films outside Los Angeles. Canadian locations were the mostly used, but runaway productions took place in many other countries, too. In this period, there was an increase in the relevance of international markets for Hollywood. The runaway productions and the increase in the participation of international audiences in Hollywood's income produced an increase in networking with foreign film industries, which accelerated the construction of transnational production networks that, in some cases, were consolidated by definitive migratory movements. Finally, it is essential to note that one of the competitive elements of Hollywood at this stage was the production of blockbusters aimed at global mass consumption, and film production aimed at smaller or niche markets served by independent production companies (Scott, 2005). Mass and niche markets were different but essential entries for the attraction and contribution of immigrants from different countries.

Finally, I identify the period after the entry of streaming platforms, notably Netflix, as the third stage in the history of Hollywood. The entry of Netflix into the motion picture business did not significantly transform Hollywood's organisational base built in the second stage. However, several processes that seem fundamental to framing the participation in the film industry of immigrants, diasporas and their transnational networks have intensified. Streaming services, first, hit the distribution and exhibition systems linked to Hollywood. Second, as platforms have grown in market power, they have become involved in direct film production and financing. Thus, streaming platforms' entry into the audio-visual business has similarities with the crisis generated by the entry of television in the 1950s. Just as the Hollywood production system integrated television production content, over time, there will be an integration of LA's film production system, which will reinforce the Los Angeles film industry. Some specific elements of this stage are of particular interest here. The blockbuster logic continues to be relevant for Hollywood but not for the platforms. Because streaming platforms' revenues are based on the number of subscriptions and not on the number of times each film is viewed, the platform's interest is to offer a wide range of options that capture both mass markets and thematic niches, but primarily regional and national niches (Hadida et al., 2021). For example, Netflix has been particularly aggressive in establishing different forms of cooperation with film industries in different countries. These schemes range from financing, direct production, co-production and other specific collaborative arrangements between the US and abroad (Smith, 2017). One should add that independent production companies are increasing their participation and becoming windows for new domestic and foreign talent to enter the film industry (Elsaesser, 2017).

The internationalisation of the Hollywood industry has intensified and diversified in the third stage. The relevance of foreign audiences continues to increase (Elsaesser, 2017). Likewise, the attraction of foreign talent remains a strategic resource for the industry's competitiveness (Elsaesser, 2017; Tierney, 2010). The practice of outsourcing specialised services abroad has also grown, particularly in high-tech services such as digital visual effects (Niu, 2020). The runaway productions outside the US that took hold at the end of the twentieth century have consolidated as a recurrent practice. These forms of internationalisation create transnational links that translate into the migration of foreign

talent in all labour-areas of the industry. The new migrant talent, in turn, sustains transnational social and productive networks. This element seems to be critical to the dynamics of the global film industry and the role of Hollywood in the twenty-first century.

### **Jewish Diaspora**

A group of Jewish businessmen, primarily first-generation immigrants, built the foundation of what is today Hollywood. Harry Cohn, the founder of Columbia, was born in 1891 in New York City, into a Jewish family. William Fox, the founder of Fox Pictures, a studio that would later join Twentieth Century, was born in Hungary in 1879. Joseph Schenck, born in Russia in 1876, established Twentieth Century Pictures. Samuel Goldwyn, born in 1879 in Poland, founded Goldwyn Pictures. Louis B. Mayer, born in Russia in 1884, was the founder of Metro Pictures, which later would become Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer studios. Carl Laemmle, born in Germany, founded Universal. The brothers Harry Warner and Jack Warner, the first born in Poland in 1881 and the second in Canada in 1892, immigrated to the US, where they founded Warner Brothers. David Sarnoff, born in Russia in 1891, founded RKO, and Adolph Zukor, born in Hungary in 1873, established Paramount. One must add to this list the founders of United Artists, who included Charlie Chaplin (English immigrant), Mary Pickford (Canadian immigrant), Douglas Fairbanks (Jewish-American) and Griffith (American) (Gabler, 1989; Scott, 2005; Horowitz, 2009). A mere glance at this list affirms that the very existence of the most influential film industry in the world is due to Jewish immigrants.

The Jewish Diaspora in the US occupied different positions during the consolidation of Hollywood. They included producers and executives such as Jesse Lasky of Paramount Pictures, Berney Balaban as president of Paramount Pictures, Irving Thalberg who was called ‘the boy wonder’ for his film successes (Vieira, 2010) and David Selznick, a film producer, screenwriter and film studio executive (Gabler, 1989). Gabler has indicated that, in 1936, ‘[o]f 85 names engaged in production, [...] 53 are Jews’ (Gabler, 1989, p. 10). Also notable are directors such as Ernst Lubitsch, Michael Curtiz and Alexander Korda (Robinson, 1968; 1977). Along with the so-called Moguls, executives, producers, writers and directors were responsible for inventing or helping to

implement a series of practices, conventions and film genres (such as western, adventure and comedy) that shaped the competitive basis of Hollywood films and would lead to consolidation in the so-called golden age (Scott, 2005; Gabler, 1989; Bernardi, 2013; Horowitz, 2009).

It is important to note that the Jewish community at the forefront of early Hollywood was also active in incorporating talent from all geographic backgrounds and social contexts. For instance, Thomas H. Ince was born in 1880 in Newport, Rhode Island, to a family of English immigrants; according to Scott, ‘Ince developed more systematic procedures based on his perfection of the continuity script. [. . .] The net result was to endow film production companies with a greatly enhanced ability to control the entire fabrication process, and, above all, to exert discipline over the conduct of talent workers like writers, directors, and actors’. (Scott, 2005, p. 22). Another example of a key figure’s role in the construction of Hollywood is D. W. Griffith, born in Kentucky; ‘he developed the close-up, the flashback, and fade-out techniques in cinematography, among other innovations’ (Scott, 2005, p. 22).

During World War II, Hollywood received many German-Jewish exiles trained in the important German film industry. This group of directors decisively contributed to introducing new aesthetic and narrative forms and, above all, to establishing the genre known as film noir. To this group of directors, we must also add a group of immigrant actors and actresses, great histrionic personalities who are now an indelible part of Hollywood history. Concerning the film noir genre, Brook has pointed out the outstanding participation and ‘seminal influence of Austrian and German film noir directors – Fritz Lang, Billy Wilder, Otto Preminger, Edgar G. Ulmer, and Fred Zinnemann among the Austrians; Robert Siodmak, Curtis Bernhardt, Max Ophuls, and John Brahm among the Germans’ (Brook, 2009, p. 1). These directors of Jewish origin, through the film noir genre, provide a narrative space for intellectual exploration and social questioning that mainstream Hollywood films tried to avoid (Davis, 2006). Thus, film noir created a space of greater creative freedom for these immigrants and other directors and writers. The film noir genre allowed for greater acceptance of the figure of the director as the central intellectual author of the films, a role that was not common as such during the years of long-term contracts with the Majors (Elsaesser, 2017; G. D. Phillips, 1998).

Another contribution of the Jewish Diaspora to Hollywood consists of the talent agencies. In the modern era, talent agencies took a central relevance in the production organisation of Hollywood. The importance of talent agencies is that they enabled the ordering of a flexible labour market in which talent moved in and out of projects continuously (Brook, 2017). For the most part, talent agencies developed under the strategic direction of members of the Jewish diaspora:

Two Jewish ‘super-agents’, Irving ‘Swifty’ Lazar and Sue Mengers, made mogul-like inroads in the postclassical period through their personal stables of A-list clients, [ . . . while in] the second decade of the new millennium, seven agencies, mirroring the eight major studios of the classical era, ruled the New Hollywood roost: CAA, WME, United Talent, APA, Paradigm, ICM and the Gersh Agency – headed or majority-partnered by Jews – all except for APA’s James H. Gosnell, Jr. (Brook, 2017, p. 10)

Contemporary Hollywood also features Jewish directors, producers and actors who contributed to the blockbuster formula, along with other American immigrants and creatives. One may highlight here Steven Spielberg and producers Jeffrey Katzenberg, Michael Eisner, Jerry Bruckheimer and David Geffen, along with James Cameron (Canadian), George Lucas (American) and Robert Zemeckis (American), who, in turn, contributed to the blockbuster formula. These and other directors ‘reinvented Hollywood around the blockbuster formula, around genres often taken from 1950s television, and they have used their author-producer status to adapt to changing technologies, notably digital cinema and special effects’ (Elsaesser, 2017, p. 238). In the independent film segment, Jewish directors Woody Allen and the Cohen Brothers (Bernardi, 2013) stand out, to mention just two relevant cases. Woody Allen and the Cohens were icons of the American auteur in the twentieth century, and their films have won international awards at prestigious European festivals. Jewish actors and actresses have excelled in every era and make up a long list of celebrities. To give an impression of this group and their contribution to the Hollywood industry, suffice it to mention these names: Alla Nazimova, Ed Wynn, Erich von Stroheim, the Marx Brothers, Felix Aylmer, Douglas Fairbanks, Edward G. Robinson, Joseph Schildkraut, Joseph Aylmer, Paul Muni,

George Burns, Gertrude Berg, Jack Benny, Fanny Brice, Anna Magnani, Peter Lorre, John Houseman, Melvyn Douglas, Louise Rainer, Paulette Goddard, Zsa Zsa Gabor, Martin Balsam, Jean-Pierre Aumont, Peter Sellers, Paul Newman, Judy Holliday, Jerry Lewis, Tony Curtis, Kirk Douglas, Lauren Bacall, Bea Arthur, Dustin Hoffman, Joan Collins, Barbra Streisand, Frank Oz, Bette Midler, Scott Glenn, Mary Hart, Jeff Goldblum, Ben Stiller, Sean Penn, Helena Bonham Carter, River Phoenix, Gwyneth Paltrow, and Jake and Maggie Gyllenhaal' (Bernardi, 2013, p. 7).

In today's Hollywood, the Jewish presence in management positions remains critical. Brook (Brook, 2017) has scanned senior executives in contemporary Hollywood and found that Paramount, CBS, Warner Brothers studios, Time-Warner, Disney (movie and TV branches), Marvel Studios, ABC, Comcast, Universal, NBC, Twentieth Century Fox studios, the Japanese company Sony's movie and TV operations have senior executives of Jewish origin. However, Jewish involvement in Hollywood is relevant in all its components and eras. In this chapter, it is impossible to discuss in detail the contribution of the Jewish Diaspora in other areas such as choreographers, makeup artists, designers, set designers, screenwriters, musicians, editors and lawyers specialised in the film industry, among others.

### **International Immigration of Talent to Hollywood**

International immigration to Hollywood has constantly nurtured its artistic and technical resources, strengthened its aesthetic and narrative renewal capacity and facilitated its penetration of global film markets. The immigration of foreign talent has occurred in two ways: on the one hand, the talent migrates seeking access to the enormous labour market of the Hollywood industry. On the other hand, immigration is by direct invitation to work; Hollywood has identified foreign talent and quickly incorporated them into the industry. It is expected that when a foreign film is successful, those involved in its making receive invitations to work in the US. Particularly when films win awards at US festivals such as the Oscars or Sundance, the participants gain notoriety and end up migrating to Hollywood. An excellent example of this is the case of Ricardo Marmolejo (Mexican), who participated as lead composer in the film *Beasts of Southern Wild* (2012), a film nominated in the Best Picture category at the 2013 Academy Awards (Medina, 2013). This film was Marmolejo's first

job; at the time, he was studying for his master's degree in San Francisco and was not looking to enter the industry. After the nomination, he received invitations to work on other projects in Hollywood; between 2012 and 2021, he participated in eighty-one projects (IMDB, 2021a).

One can find diverse temporalities of foreign immigration to the Hollywood economic cluster (Pike, 2007; A. Phillips, 2006). Some talent migrates to Los Angeles only for a short time, perhaps only to participate in one or several projects, after which they return to their country of origin. Jean Renoir, the celebrated French director, worked in Hollywood during World War II; at the end of the war, he returned to Europe, continuing his career there (Durnnat, 1974; Delaporte, 2014). Another example of temporary migrations occurred when Hollywood production companies in the 1930s decided to shoot the same film in several languages. In order to enter the Spanish-speaking market, studios brought in Mexican and other Latin American artists to film in Spanish (Carreras and Horak, 2019). These actors mostly did not stay in Los Angeles.

There is also cyclical migration: this type of temporality occurs when immigrant talents spend seasons working in the film industries of their countries and other seasons in Hollywood. Dolores del Rio (Mexican) had a cyclical trajectory, since she started her career in Hollywood in the silent period, returned to work in Mexico in the 1940s and then periodically returned to Hollywood to work on specific projects. Her career serves as an excellent example of the transnational trajectories (López, 1998) of many immigrant talents in Hollywood.

Of course, there are many permanent immigrants in the motion picture industry. Some of them began their careers in Hollywood; others migrated with an established career in the film industries of their home countries and then moved to the US permanently. Examples of permanent migrants are the actresses Yvonne De Carlo (Canadian), Greta Garbo (Swedish) and Zsa Zsa Gabor (Hungarian).

At present, the constant mobility of talent between different film industries, talent who travels to perform specific jobs for a particular project, forms a 'transnational project ecology' (Mercado-Celis, 2020). The following section will review some examples of this modality. The different types of foreign immigration to Hollywood have two implications. First, migrants have a differentiated contribution to the functioning and competitiveness of the

industry, according to their temporality. Second, non-permanent migrants generate spaces to construct transnational networks that can facilitate the permanent or temporary migration of new migrants.

Different types of film work have different challenges for the immigrant. Foreign actors face the difficulty of language in terms of their ability to eliminate their accent (A. Phillips, 2006). The most dramatic cases were seen when sound entered films. Some foreign actors and actresses could not adapt to the new conditions because of their limited command of English. Later, thanks to linguistic techniques, foreign actors were able to hide their accents with great success. However, it may also be the case that the accent of the actor/actress is not hidden as it is because the objective of casting these foreign actors is to reinforce his or her image of foreignness and exploit stereotypes linked to that nationality. For actors, there exists this specific duality of the implication of being a foreigner.

On the one hand, this constitutes an opportunity since it is possible to enter niches of work reserved for actors with a specific national look or accent. On the other hand, playing roles according to one's national or ethnic origin implies accommodating a stereotype that limits the opportunities to enter a broader acting market. An example of this is Antonio Banderas, who, despite being a very successful actor in Hollywood, almost always is cast in roles linked to his Hispanic background (A. Phillips, 2006). The foreign talent behind the camera does not have to face this typecast problem; their entry into the industry has other challenges, such as the assimilation of Hollywood-specific conventions and work practices.

Another relevant phenomenon of incorporating foreign immigrants into Hollywood is that most do not come from weak film industries. On the contrary, several authors have noted that many immigrants come from national film industries with their own dynamics. One of the reasons for this phenomenon is that Hollywood takes advantage of talent already recognised in international arenas, or that their national recognition allows them to enter niche national markets (Miskell and Li, 2014). It is important to note that, although some authors view this phenomenon as a 'talent drain' that weakens foreign national film industries, it must be taken into consideration that the phenomenon has many nuances. One of these is that migration is not always permanent; hence, the celebrity or notoriety that an

immigrant talent acquires in Hollywood can also be exploited in his or her country.

One should also keep in mind that migrants do not necessarily break their social and work networks in their sending countries, even when migration is permanent. Hong Kong directors are an exciting example of immigration that has enriched both Hollywood and the country of origin. Their migration is linked to the Hong Kong film industry's relevance in the second half of the twentieth century. Film directors such as Jackie Chan, Jhon Woo, Bruce Lee, Wonk Kar-Wai, Stanley Kwan and Fruit Chan entered Hollywood with cyclical and permanent stays. The impact of these Hong Kong migrants on thematic, aesthetic and narrative forms has been enormous in both commercial and auteur cinema in Hollywood (Marchetti and Kam, 2007).

The number of the examples of immigrants in all positions and roles in Hollywood film productions is immeasurable. As mentioned in the first section, Phillips has documented 900 European actors in the twentieth century alone (A. Phillips, 2006). The same is true for Canadian actors whose presence in Hollywood has been widespread and relevant since the beginning of the industry (Foster, 2003). The same has happened with many directors of different nationalities (Elsaesser, 2017; A. Phillips, 2006; Marchetti and Kam, 2007; Muscio, 2019), who have filmed in Hollywood under different migratory temporalities. To this list, one must add composers and choreographers (Hirschman, 2013; Penate, 2015), screenwriters (Horowitz, 2009), costume designers (Jorgensen and Scoggins, 2015), make-up artists (Basten, 2011) and many other positions that have been less studied, such as cinematographers, film and sound editors, technicians and the like.

### **Hollywood and its Transnational Production Networks**

In recent decades, the US film industry has intensified its internationalisation. Some authors have pointed out that the dependence on foreign talent has increased, while the practice of outsourcing in specialised services has also expanded. Above all, the dependence on foreign audiences has grown (Connor, 2015; Elsaesser, 2017). In particular, it is pertinent to highlight that the entry of digital platforms has boosted the internationalisation of Hollywood and, above all, the transnationalisation of production. Netflix has increased its production of foreign films because, with a logic that seeks to expand

its subscriber base, the incorporation of national material has become one of the main strategies (Muñoz-Larrea, 2021; Watson, 2021). Direct funding of local projects in different countries has also brought with it the formation of transnational teams. For example, ‘Netflix produced the series *Club de Cuervos*, for which the Mexican director [Alazraki] of the series imported not only the hitherto unknown US concept of the “writing room” for his show but also the writers themselves. American screenwriters drafted the scripts and then translated them into Spanish. [...] Yet somehow, the detail of the scripts, revised during the shooting process, stays close to the everyday life of Mexican viewers’ (Smith, 2017, p. 76). These productions also generate migration networks. Luis Gerardo Mendez, the leading actor of *Club de Cuervos*, joined the cast of *Murder Mystery* (2019) with Adam Sandler and Jennifer Aniston. *Narcos: Mexico* is another Netflix production focused on the Mexican market that contacts international teams from Hollywood (Chris Brancato, writer and film and TV producer; Doug Miro, writer; Carlo Bernard, writer) and Mexico City (Diego Luna, Luis Gerardo Mendez).

Los Angeles-based immigrants also initiate Hollywood’s transnational networks. Mercado-Celis (Mercado-Celis, 2020) has posited the thesis that the permanent or long-term migration of talent to Hollywood, coupled with the project-based organisation prevalent in the film industry, allows for production links between the US film industry and the film industries in other countries. This process produces a transnational project ecology. The figure of Guillermo del Toro allows us to illustrate these transnational networks. Del Toro was formed in Guadalajara and Mexico City. Between 1986 and 1992, he participated in different roles in short and featured films. His first film as a director, *The Invention of Cronos*, was shot in 1993 in Mexico City. The success of this film gave del Toro international visibility and strengthened his relationship with the Mexican film industry. Del Toro migrated to Los Angeles in 1994 and became a permanent resident of the US, but he also continued to participate in Mexican film projects. The Hollywood cluster has been his base of film activity; however, del Toro has not interrupted his presence in the Mexican film industry. He has participated in fifty-three film projects, of which twenty-three or 42.6 percent have Mexico as their country of origin. Of those for which he has credits as a producer, almost a half point towards Mexico as country of origin (IMDB, 2021b).

In addition to del Toro, other highly visible Mexican migrants in the film industry have formed transnational sub-groups, such as directors Alfonso Cuarón, Alejandro González Iñárritu, cinematographer Emmanuel Lubezki and actors Gael García Bernal and Diego Luna, to mention the best known. All of them have maintained, in one way or another, productive relationships with Mexico throughout their careers, even though they have migrated permanently or found their primary source of work abroad; therefore, they spend most of their time outside the country.

In the case of Hollywood's relationship with Mexico, transnational production networks centred on highly acclaimed directors can be documented from the golden age of Mexican cinema. Tierney has recorded that 'between 1945 and 1947, Emilio Fernandez, the director of classics like *Maria Candelaria* (1943) and *Flor Silvestre* (1943) and Mexico's most significant auteur, made two films with Hollywood studio RKO: *La Perla/The Pearl* (1946) and *The Fugitive* (1948)' (Tierney, 2010, p. 81). El 'Indio' Emilio Fernandez between both industries was vital in the cyclical migration between Hollywood and Mexico of actresses such as Dolores del Rio and Katy Jurado (Adams, 2020). Tierney has found a parallel with the current situation between Mexico and Hollywood, 'where in the wake of Mexican cinema's early 2000s revival, Hollywood [...] has once more contracted Mexico's successful creative teams (Cuarón, del Toro, Iñárritu, Guillermo Arriaga, Rodrigo Prieto, Emmanuel Lubezki, Gael García Bernal and others) to work on a series of US-based and US-funded projects' (Tierney, 2010, p. 96). We can conclude that the migration of Mexican talent and the establishment of transnational production networks with Hollywood has generated positive spill-overs for the Mexican film industry. Since the rise of del Toro, Iñárritu and Cuarón (and their migration), Mexican production has increased significantly (Hernández-Cornejo, 2009), and so has the participation and recognition of Mexican cinema in international festivals.

## **Conclusion**

Hollywood has been an immigration vortex and a transnational space throughout its existence: its industry has attracted talent worldwide. These talents have contributed to the industry in the aesthetic, narrative, technical and organisational fields. First-generation Jewish immigrants built Hollywood.

Jewish founders gave Hollywood its essential character, which has sustained the commercial success of the American film industry until now. Immigrants' participation and contribution to the Hollywood industry have changed as the industry has evolved, from the classic period of mass-like production of the Majors, over the system's disintegration into a project-based production dependent on free-lance labour, to the unsettling entrance of the high-tech industry in the digital content distribution and film finance/production in the US and elsewhere. Despite the significant immigrant presence and their relevant contribution to the US film industry, foreigners – along with ethnic, racial, religious and gender minorities in the US – have been stereotyped in films and under-represented in the industry.

The presence of immigrants in Hollywood does not translate into a relevant representation of minorities in the film industry, nor in the industry awards. According to UCLA's *Hollywood diversity report*, people of colour are under-represented. In 2019, people of colour made up only 27.6 percent: 15.1 percent among film directors, 13.9 percent among film writers, 32.7 percent among total actors and 9 percent among studio heads (UCLA, 2020). Due to persistent minority under-representation in Oscar nominations and awards, '[t]he Academy announced in 2016 an initiative to double by 2020 the share of women and people of colour among its more than 6,000 members. [...] By 2019, it was half women and fully 29 percent people of colour, diversifying Academy membership further' (UCLA, 2020, p. 41). It is also notable that, although Mexican actors and directors have been present in Hollywood since the early years of the industry, the Chicano Cinema did not receive 'wide theatrical distribution until the 1980s' (Maciel, 1995, p. 19). Future research in this area must explore the relationship between immigrants and US minorities in the specific field of the film industry. For example, we must pay special attention to the relationship of Mexican talent and their closeness with and participation in the Latinx/Chicanx cinema.

It is equally noteworthy that the migration of foreign talent to Hollywood has contributed positively to the film industries of their own countries.<sup>1</sup> There are migrants who, at some stage of their artistic careers, decide to return to

<sup>1</sup> The positive spill-overs generated by migrants to their countries of origin have also been documented for the high-tech industry in Silicon Valley (Saxenian, 2006).

their countries. These returned migrants bring recognition and contacts that become competitive resources for their countries. Cyclical migrants, such as those mentioned above, transfer knowledge and contacts to their home film industries; local producers can use these intangible resources to their advantage. Permanent migrants also create opportunities in their countries of origin, particularly directors/producers who sustain long-term relationships with the film industry from which they emerged. Migrants who have acquired prestige in Hollywood usually support the film industries in their countries of origin, either by directing or producing films by other directors, supporting the incorporation of new talent, or facilitating the funding of film projects that they find relevant. Some migrants who have joined Hollywood also create conditions for other creative workers from their countries of origin to be recognised and incorporated into Hollywood. Finally, the internationalisation of US film production also generates positive impacts in other countries. For example, the so-called ‘runaway productions’ have made it possible to sustain specialised communities in countries such as Canada and, to a certain extent, Mexico. Hollywood’s co-productions with other countries have been increasing, as has the contracting of specialised services for the post-production stage.

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# 13

## THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF LATINX ART TO THE FIGHT FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE IN THE US

*Maria Cristina Fernández Hall*

‘Nothing happens in the “real” world  
unless it first happens in the images in our heads’

– Gloria Anzaldúa

### **Introduction**

This chapter explores the ways in which Latinx artists have contributed to casting light on contemporary social-justice issues in the US and, in doing so, proposed new imaginaries and spaces of autonomy with which to resist the predatory systems at play. The chapter proceeds by discussing the term Latinx and then addresses two specific struggles in which Latinx artists have positioned themselves: firstly, deportation and immigration; and, secondly, detention, incarceration and predatory policing. To understand the first of these issues, I propose the term ‘cruel transnationalism’, by which market forces push migration northward, thus generating transnational communities which are then severed through southward deportation, creating a complex mesh of forcibly separated and fragmented families and communities. The chapter will focus on the important impacts of Latinx artists and community art projects, but it also recognises the vastness of the changes required to ensure dignity across the transnational Latinx community. Hence, this chapter underscores the importance of art as a space for autonomy.

Importantly, this book on diasporas and transnationalism posits that immigrants in the US, as well as those who once lived in the US and left due to

deportation, forced return, or other factors, along with their transnational communities abroad, have made significant contributions to the US social fabric, economy and scientific pursuits. In the face of the vitriol aimed at immigrants in the US – with those harbouring anti-immigrant sentiment emboldened and unmasked by the Trump administration – it is imperative that we highlight the ways in which immigrants and their transnational communities have fundamentally changed the nation for the better. Specifically, this essay outlines several struggles for social justice of concern to Latinx people, as well as to people of colour and the underserved in general, and the ways in which Latinx artists have positioned social justice issues in the public eye. Latinx art in the US and in Latin American migrant-sending regions has greatly contributed to the fabric of US society by sparking important dialogue on social justice – often following the path pioneered by the Black Lives Matter movement, also to be addressed here, whose calls to stop violence against people of colour and deconstruct the systemic racism imprisoning and exploiting racialised bodies have mobilised people across the board.

This chapter understands the term ‘Latinx’<sup>1</sup> as fluctuating with those who identify accordingly. In general, ‘Latinx’ has been used to broadly represent Latin American diasporas who live or have lived in the US, which would thus include deportees and returnees in Latin America. However, before proceeding, I believe that one should remain critical about the fact that the term ‘Latinx’ excludes Latin Americans who have not lived in the US (as posited by Borges 2018, p. 71, and Suárez Orozco and Páez 2008, p. 4), even though many Latin Americans in fact refer to themselves as Latinos, including the diasporas who live in Jordan, Spain and Canada (see Overmyer-Velázquez 2018, p. 40).

Many Latinx people maintain close ties to friends, family and broader communities across the US, migrant-sending regions in Latin America and other host countries, and this should urge us to adopt a more transnational

<sup>1</sup> Overmyer-Velazquez summarises ‘Latino’ as a notion forged by (1) the US military interventions in Latin America that ultimately provoked migration, (2) demand for cheap labour, (3) an expanding Latin American community in the US, (4) racial marginalisation and subordination, and (5) shared Catholicism and Spanish language (2018, p. 40). Overmyer-Velazquez has also argued that Latin American immigrants in other countries face similar conditions, perhaps pushing them to identify as Latino as well (2018, p. 40).

perspective when addressing Latinx phenomena. US academia's epistemological appropriation of the term, while inclusive of the full gender spectrum, came to exclude Latin Americans beyond US territory. To counter this US-centrism, Overmyer-Velazquez has suggested a more global perspective of the diaspora, by proposing the term Global LatinX AmericanXs, in a 'global, extra-Western hemispheric' approach that heeds transnational dimensions (Overmyer-Velazquez, 2018, p. 36).

Likewise, one should note that the term 'Latinx' tends to circulate in academic spheres, often among non-Latinx people, while most people who would fall under the category of Latinx do not employ the term – many have even reported being unfamiliar with its pronunciation (Noe-Bustamante et al., 2020). In this sense, some writers have proposed using the term Latin (Learning Network, 2021), which is also gender-neutral. As a Mexican-American who writes in English and in Spanish, and despite the tensions around the term Latinx, I have chosen to deploy it as a way of recognising non-binary and gender-divergent peoples – especially given the deep-rooted homophobia in many enclaves of Latin American culture – and contributing to an academic corpus on and by people of Latin American descent with ties to the US, thus addressing the diasporas as well as those who reside in Latin American countries but are engaged in US policies that impact their communities.<sup>2</sup>

It is also worth noting that this book's focus on the transnational is especially significant given the ways in which communities are intertwined today. For instance, while millions of Latin American people in the US are undocumented or have undocumented community members, the same can be said conversely: for deportees in Mexico and Central America, the issue of family reunification cannot be resolved without addressing politics in the US. The communities in the US and abroad are inextricably tied, as are their politics. Indeed, the globalisation and internationalisation of the labour force, in which the massive, local production in the Global North has relied on immigration from the Global South (Iglesias, 2014, p. 102), has yielded transnational communities in return. As Valenzuela has argued, 'transnationalism as

<sup>2</sup> Thus responding to William Robinson's (2007) critique that Latino/a Studies in the US tend to invisibilise Latin American Studies, despite the fact that Latinxs and Latin Americans are more globally engaged than ever before.

a process is bounded by the fields of capitalist reproduction and domination', but the challenge is to interpret the way in which transborder mediations yield 'imaginaries, representations, and identity formations that characterize border worlds' (Valenzuela, 2015, p. 24). Norma Iglesias has called such manifestations 'cultural resistance': she has expanded on how they operate by considering the border wall a control mechanism with 'fissures and gaps' that function like pressure cookers, 'generating great energy and an enormous potential for creativity and change' in the face of precariousness (Iglesias, 2015, pp. 102, 106).

Latinx artists observe, resist and propose new imaginaries in the face of numerous vulnerabilities. The deportation regime turning brown bodies into vessels of expendable and disposable labour, separating families and uprooting lives is perhaps the most pressing matter that Latinx people face today. However, the predatory policing and for-profit detention systems that have marked our age – which the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement has momentously exposed – do not trail far behind. Likewise, the exclusion of Latin American people (especially undocumented people, but also those living in blighted neighbourhoods with poor education systems) from higher education, housing and the job market, either due to discrimination, lack of university training, or undocumented status, have rallied people behind the push for diversity.

Latinx artists have contributed to exposing the inequitable systems at play in the contemporary US, following in the footsteps of subversive thinkers such as the profoundly insightful writer Gloria Anzaldúa, who authored *Borderlands* – a poetic account of the border, depicting the separation between the US and Mexico as a product of capitalism and colonialism 'running down the length of my body, staking fence rods in my flesh', that 'splits me splits me, *me raja me raja*' (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 2) – and Luis J. Rodriguez, who wrote *Always running* – a personal account of the ways in which gangs have regrettably stepped in to fill a void in the social fabric of the urban US, with the violence exacerbated by predatory policing. In their wake, contemporary Latinx artists and writers such as Javier Zamora, Regina Galindo, Omar Pimienta, Silvia Rodríguez Vega and Audry Funk continue to cast light on injustice, while resisting the forces of oppression by proposing different imaginaries and opening spaces for autonomy and community-building. To Valenzuela, transnational and transborder socio-cultural processes – including collective

action, social movements, anti-imperial and anti-colonial forms of resistance (Valenzuela, 2014, p. 23) – can erode the containment of borders and are what makes them porous (2014, p. 20). Such processes defy the divisions limiting the fields of agency of those whom the border excludes through racism and colonisation (2014, p. 22).

Notably, while artists from the Latinx community have participated in struggles that have borne tangible fruits, including more diversity in schools, inclusion in cultural production and even President Biden's proposal to create paths to citizenship for undocumented immigrants in the US, it is clear that the process of revolutionising the systems is far from over. US residents<sup>3</sup> who have lost loved ones to deportation still need the right to family reunification and free movement, the abolishment of ICE and a moratorium on college debt and unaffordable tuitions. People need the quality of public schools to stop depending on property taxes, further privileging areas where wealth already abounds. People need bilingual educations, living wages, public housing, an end to predatory policing, integration programmes for new arrivals, open borders and a complete overhaul of the detention system as we know it. Even with the gains already secured, there is plenty of work ahead. As such, beyond engaging in social justice struggles, art also provides a much-needed space of dissent and autonomy for people to exist and resist outside of the dominant systems that have kept families apart, imprisoned people and shut the doors to education and professional development for many.

This chapter will now proceed to address specific struggles – involving deportation and immigration, on the one hand, and detention, incarceration and predatory policing, on the other – and highlight a number of artists, community art projects and spaces that have contributed to putting these struggles in the limelight, before finally landing on art as a space for autonomy.

## **Deportation and Immigration**

Perhaps the most pressing issues that Latinx people in the US face today revolve around immigration. Of the 58 million-strong Latinx diaspora living in the US (Overmyer-Velazquez, 2018, p. 15), approximately 8.1 million are undocumented (Passel and Cohn, 2019), making up most of the US's undocumented

<sup>3</sup> Understood not as a legal status, but broadly referring to people who live in the US.

population of 10.5 to 11 million, half of whom are essential workers (fwd. us, 2020). Just as importantly, of the 18 million Hispanic children in the US, approximately one in four have an undocumented parent (Clark, Turner and Guzman, 2017). The consequences of deportation are at arm's length for many Latinx people, either due to their or a community member's undocumented status. Uprooted from their communities, deportees face isolation and family separation, along with challenges in evading the extortion of organised crime, securing housing and finding only jobs with wages that might not even remotely compare to those in the US and disallow them to support their families. In what I call 'cruel transnationalism', the transnational character of the Latinx diaspora is cruelly reinforced through deportation. Northward immigration boosted by market demands is reversed through the deportation regime, which expels migrants southward once again and separates and transnationalises families across a complex mesh of communities in sending regions and in the US.

In terms of resisting the deportation regime, the translocal art projects organised by Otros Dreams en Acción (ODA), a Mexico-City-based organisation whose reach has transcended borders and mobilised artists *de aquí y de allá* – that is, in the US and Mexico – come to mind. As part of the *Leave no one behind mural project*, the Tijuana-based artist Javier Salazar Rojas, also known as 'Deported Artist', created a mural called 'Deported and returned migrant community', which depicts the American continent against a yellow backdrop (Deported Artist, 2021). Its orange land mass runs north to south, with no border walls. Instead, bridges and butterflies connect one corner of the mural to the other, invoking the freedom to migrate.

The faces of several recognisable activists and artists mark the entire continent – including the slam poets El Deportee and Esme Flores, ODA director Maggie Loredo and a contingent of Tijuana-based deported veterans whose decade-long struggle against the deportation of service members<sup>4</sup> finally came to fruition in the summer of 2021, when the Biden administration declared

<sup>4</sup> The Deported Veterans Support House opened in 2012 to advocate for legislation that would stop the deportation of those who have served in the US military apparatus, while providing support in terms of acquiring proper identification, accessing medical and mental health services, and securing telephone and internet services in order to maintain contact with family in the US (Deported Veterans Support House, 2019).



**Figure 13.1** Deported Artist (2021), 'Mural 3: Deported and returned migrant community', *Leave no one behind mural project*. Source: <https://leavenoonebehindmuralproject.org/mural-3-deported-and-returned-migrant-community>

that it would help deported veterans and their families return to the US. The unveiling of the *Leave no one behind mural project* in Mexico City was accompanied by specific calls to action, urging spectators to contact US Congress and push for the New Way Forward Act, which seeks to put an end to the deportation pipeline and the over-policing of communities of colour while repealing the criminalisation of immigration, among other demands. This mural for the



**Figure 13.2** Mural by San Francisco-based artist Gregory Amos and a group of deported veterans. Source: Photo printed alongside Wax-Thibodeaux's (2018) article in the *Washington Post*.

*Leave no one behind mural project* is only one of dozens of explicitly translocal artistic interventions that Otros Dreams en Acción has conducted to create spaces for deportees and returnees, as well as their migrant communities still in the US. Such artistic manifestations highlight the injustices that the community faces and bring people together to push for action. Here, one may observe that, while Latinx artists work for transnational subversion, including literal paintings of bridges in their work, this very transnationalism is a product of the pain of forced separation between sending and returned communities and the diaspora.

On that note, we should delve deeper into Tijuana's Deported Veterans Support House (DVSH), which participated in painting a mural alongside artist Gregory Amos, this time on the border wall itself, to call attention to the unjust deportation of veterans. As per Pablo Argüelles's study on deported veterans (2020), many simply had not processed their US citizenships on time, to which they had the right after serving in the country's military apparatus, before being detained and deported (Argüelles has noted that veterans often put off or misunderstood the paperwork involved in securing citizenship). Members of the DVSH painted a mural of a US flag upside down, on the border wall, as a symbolic cry for help, complementing and drawing attention to the DVSH's calls for action in the political sphere. In



**Figure 13.3** The Jericho Walk. In what is known as the Jericho Walk, faith leaders circle the Cayuga Center's facility where undocumented immigrant children are being held separately from their families. Source: Image published in Cook and Simas' (2018) article in *AMNY*.

March of 2020, San Diego County supervisors approved the opening of a Vet Connect station at the DVSH in Tijuana, which is intended to provide medical attention and housing services to veterans (Clark, 2020). Notably, even before Biden's recent commitment, the DVSH had already secured pensions, medical attention and even return to the US for some veterans (Argüelles, 2020, p. 129), and this success points to the ways in which art and activism can work in tandem.

Meanwhile, in New York City, the organisation New Sanctuary Coalition (NSC) has also combined activism with performances that call attention to the inhumane detention and deportation practices that characterised the Donald Trump administration but still remain in place today. Despite recent upheavals in NSC's leadership and membership, for many years members of NSC organised citizen witnesses of ICE behaviour, a way of historically documenting and attesting to the horrors plaguing the immigrant community in the US, often in the shadows; accompanied undocumented persons to court dates; offered translation support for people filling out asylum petitions; and posted

bonds for people in immigration custody (New Sanctuary Coalition, 2021).<sup>5</sup> During the NSC's heyday, one significant protest action that stood out for its performative, artistic character was the Jericho Walk, in which for several years every Thursday faith leaders, activists and undocumented migrants solemnly marched around ICE's New York City field offices at 26 Federal Plaza, or around other epicentres of injustice (see Figure 13.3). This was in allusion to the Biblical walk around the fortified walls of Jericho; God commanded the Israelites to walk around Jericho for six days, so that on the seventh day, after they had walked around Jericho seven times and blown their horns, the walls would come crumbling down. The modern-day Jericho walk evoked a historic struggle against injustice, one held in peace at a time when the crumbling of the border wall and the entire immigrant-preying apparatus would be a miracle to many. The walk called on the attention of passers-by and demonstrated to ICE employees that people did, in fact, oppose, protest and denounce their predatory ways.

One may also highlight Omar Pimienta, the San Diego-Tijuana based artist and poet currently directing binational research at the University of California, San Diego. Pimienta deals with border politics and cultures in almost all of his artistic work. His piece *Collapsing Liberty* involved a five-hour performance in which an inflatable Statue of Liberty collapsed once every 10,000 deportations, with each hour symbolising a year of the Obama administration (Pimienta, 2018). It is important to note that, during the Obama administration, deportation by no means attracted the interest that it does today, despite the fact that Obama deported more than three million people, almost three times as many as Donald Trump. In this sense, Pimienta's work is especially significant, as it cast light on an issue that was often overlooked at the time.

From a transnational perspective, one should also highlight the Guatemalan artist Regina Galindo. Although she lives in Guatemala, she engages in US politics and has carried out community artwork in the country (such as *Comunidad* at Vanderbilt University). Her piece *Missing forever* makes a particularly incisive mark: in the style of 'Missing' posters for lost children, the artist

<sup>5</sup> Due to leadership controversies, as of 10 August 2021, the group no longer directly works with undocumented migrants but focuses on broader education and advocacy to end the deportation and detention systems in place (New Sanctuary Coalition, 2021).

# MISSING FOREVER



**JAKELIN AMEI  
ROSMERY  
CAAL MAQUIN**

Age: 7 years  
 Mother: Claudia Maquin Caal  
 Father: Nery Gilberto Caal  
 From: San Antonio Secortez, Raxruhá,  
 Alta Verapaz, Guatemala  
 Date of Death: 8-12-18

She died of a bacterial infection at the Children's Hospital of Providence, El Paso, Texas.  
 U.S., being in the custody of the United States Border Patrol.

During the past few months, more than five Central American children have died in  
 immigrant shelters, owned by the US Government, that have been subsidized  
 with the U.S. citizens taxes, paying \$750 everyday for each child locked.

**STOP THE INDIFFERENCE.  
 DEMAND ANSWERS FROM YOUR GOVERNMENT.**

**Figure 13.4** Regina Galindo, ‘Missing forever’. Source: <http://www.reginajosegalindo.com/en/missing-forever-2/>

prints and disseminates the names and faces of migrant children who have died in the custody of US Customs and Border Protection (Galindo, n. d.). Under the headline *Missing forever*, Galindo details how the child in the photo died, denouncing the cruelty and potential fatality of family separation. Galindo subverts the regular ‘Missing’ poster – which tends to be read with dread, but also with an inkling of hope that the missing person might be found. When

it comes to her *Missing forever* posters, hope is met with nothing but outcry and despair. This piece, along with the photographs of ‘kids in cages’ disseminated in media outlets, ultimately put these children in the public eye and called attention to the separation policy’s inhumanity. The public outrage that ensued after the images of ‘kids in cages’ flooded the media ultimately led to this cruel and secretive family separation policy’s uncovering and purported termination.

Still, this shift in policy has been less than triumphant, as 2,127 of the 5,636 children that have been identified as separated (Homeland Security, 2021) have yet to be reunited with their parents, if they ever will, and the trauma could prove indelible. Nonetheless, some major changes ensued after media outlets and artists galvanised the public outcry. First of all, Donald Trump was ousted from office, sparking hope for a new era for all people of colour, including Latinx and undocumented people in the US, as well as their transnational communities in both sending and transit countries, such as Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and Mexico. This change in administration has also led to the introduction of the ‘US Citizenship Act’ bill of 2021, by which the Biden administration has proposed a pathway to citizenship that would open temporary legal status applications to the 10.5 million undocumented immigrants who arrived in the US before 2021, green card applications for DACA recipients and those with Temporary Protected Status (TPS), as well as citizenship eligibility for people in the above categories within five to eight years. The plan would also eliminate the three- and ten-year bans keeping undocumented immigrants who have already left the US from returning.

To conclude this first section on how Latinx and transnational Latin American artists and art collectives across Central and North America have addressed the issue of deportation, one may note that, while artists are not always major players in policy-making, their positioning of important issues in the public space undoubtedly contributes to raising awareness and opening new imaginaries of the possible in contemporary society. To Norma Iglesias, ‘art is a provocation that seeks to reconstruct the most basic elements of the social fabric in which future possibilities are sustained; it’s the notion of art as an agent of change’ (2014, p. 116). Certain collectives, such as Otros Dreams en Acción (and formerly New Sanctuary Coalition, too, although it engaged in artistic practices only to a lesser degree) use art to decidedly participate in

public policy debates, pressuring Congress or even physically intervening in attempts at deportation. NSC, for instance, provided scripts to read when calling congressional representatives about immigration-related issues and raised bond money for people detained due to their immigration status. Likewise, in March of 2020, ODA published a video-format ‘Open Letter for the Biden/Harris Administration’ in response to the New Way Forward Act, demanding that the policy leave no one behind. This film which provides a glimpse of the ODA community’s personal lives casts light on the family separation afflicting deportees and returnees as well as their communities in the US. It pushes for the release of those stuck in a for-profit detention system and at risk of COVID-19, as well as a moratorium on deportations, legal pathways to mobility, the defunding of the police, the abolition of ICE and the right to due process for those requesting asylum (Otros Dreams en Acción, 2021). Thus far, in response to all the public criticism around Trump’s immigration policies, and to his punishment at the ballot box, we saw the temporary suspension of the Migration Protection Protocols (known as ‘Remain in Mexico’) that have kept asylum-seekers out of the US – albeit reinstated by the conservative-leaning Supreme Court on 25 August 2021 (García, 2021) and later by the government of Mexico itself – just as new pathways to citizenship and family migration are being discussed and some deported veterans are finally being allowed to return.

### *Detention, Incarceration and Predatory Policing*

A second key issue around which Latinx diasporas rally in the fight for social justice is detention – alongside other forms of deprivation of liberty. Notably, excepting expedited deportations, detention is often a precursor to deportation. Here, one should distinguish between detention and incarceration, both of which will be addressed in this section. In the US, detention is considered temporary and reserved for those accused of federal crimes (but not yet sentenced), or for those accused of breaking immigration law and therefore subject to deportation. Incarceration, however, is a longer-term practice confining sentenced persons. In the fiscal year 2019, detention in ICE custody lasted an average of 54.5 days, while the ICE-CBP average stood at 34.3 days (US Immigration and Customs Enforcement, 2019). In contrast, incarceration can include life sentences.

Immigration detention might appear more unfair than other forms of detention and incarceration when considering that 78.6 percent of the 25,526 people held by ICE, according to data from 6 August 2021, had no criminal record, while many had only minor infractions (TRAC Reports, Inc., 2021, *Immigration detention*). Still, we should bear in mind that incarceration is often the consequence of predatory policing<sup>6</sup> – and that the US infamously boasts the highest incarceration rate in the world (with El Salvador and Turkmenistan trailing in second and third place) (Pew Research Center, 2018). Furthermore, the private-prison system incentivises imprisonment and detainment with contracts for private operators such as the GEO Group, which accounts for 80 percent of ICE's detention beds, including payments for a minimum number of beds per facility (Rose, 2021). The GEO Group reported revenues of a staggering \$2.35 billion in 2020 (GEO Group, Inc., n. d.), which should lead US residents to question and protest the destination of tax dollars.

Significantly, the practice of imprisonment disproportionately affects Black and Hispanic people. According to Pew Research, ‘the black imprisonment rate at the end of 2018 was nearly twice the rate among Hispanics (797 per 100,000) and more than five times the rate among whites (268 per 100,000)’, and ‘in 2018, black Americans represented 33 percent of the sentenced prison population, nearly triple their 12 percent share of the US adult population. Whites accounted for 30 percent of prisoners, about half their 63 percent share of the adult population. Hispanics accounted for 23 percent of inmates, compared with 16 percent of the adult population’ (Gramlich, 2020).<sup>7</sup> The disproportionate incarceration of Black and Hispanic people, the warped incentives guiding private prisons to seek capital at the expense of people’s liberty and the

<sup>6</sup> In her book *#Blacklivesmatter to Black Liberation*, Keeanga-Yamaht Taylor has described how, in Ferguson, ‘Black households were inundated with fines, fees, citations, tickets, and arrests to such an extent that the revenues were the town’s second leading source of revenue’, while ‘failure to pay or appear in court to respond to tickets instantly produced an arrest warrant’ (2016, p. 155).

<sup>7</sup> Black people have borne the brunt of predatory policing and detainment in the US. Taylor has noted that one in six Black men between the ages of twenty-five and fifty-four in the US are missing: they are either imprisoned or dead, removed from public life. In Ferguson, the mecca of the Black Lives Matter protests in 2014, 40 percent of men were missing at the time of her book’s publication (Taylor 2016, p. 166).

fact that the US incarceration rate surpasses all other countries' suggests that not only the detention system, but also the US prison system is plagued with injustice.

When it comes to social justice struggles against incarceration, detention and predatory policing, Black Lives Matter has undoubtedly pioneered the way forward, specifically regarding police brutality, predatory policing and incarceration. The leadership of Black people in the social justice movement seeking to abolish the prison and policing system as we know it warrants recognition and exploration. Hence, this section will explore how policing, detention and incarceration affect Black and Hispanic people, as well as the ways in which Black Lives Matter has put these issues at the forefront of our current debates.

Although focused on the liberation of Black people from state violence (Roberts, 2018), the movement's leadership is crucial to the Latinx population, too, especially given that undocumented status leading to immigrant detention can preclude public organising, for fear of becoming an Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE) target. While this is especially significant to the Latinx population directly at risk of deportation or with community members at risk, one should also keep in mind that, in 2015, around 619,000 undocumented people in the US were, in fact, Black (Anderson and López, 2018), making up 20 percent of people facing deportation on criminal grounds (Raff, 2017). Despite this, there is some debate about the desirability of cross-racial coalitions. While certain community leaders in Black Lives Matter have played iconic roles – Patrisse Cullors, Opal Tometi and Alicia Garcia founded the movement in 2013 – BLM is mostly community-based,<sup>8</sup> and plenty of members have expressed resistance to the involvement of other groups (such as Latinx and Muslims), for fear that they might co-opt it. However, others within the BLM movement, such as Keeanga-Yamahtt Taylor, have noted that a diversity of peoples are united through oppression – including undocumented Hispanics – and that protests can only mature into movements when enough people come together to enact meaningful societal change.

<sup>8</sup> Roberts (2018) has cited 'Black Youth Project 100, the Dream Defenders, Assata's Daughters, the St. Louis Action council, Millennial Activists United, and the Organization for Black Struggle, to name just a few'.

Basic math would seem to indicate that 12 or 13 percent of the population, which is what African Americans constitute, would have no realistic capacity to fundamentally transform the social order of the United States. [...] This means building networks and alliances with Latinos in opposition to attacks on immigrant rights, connecting with Arabs and Muslims campaigning against Islamophobia, and organizing with Native organizations that fight for self-determination within the United States. (Taylor, 2016)

Taylor has drawn a connection between how the anti-Muslim wars being fought in the Middle East have ignited more stringent border restrictions and policing across the US, which ultimately affects Black and Hispanic people. To Taylor, it makes sense for all oppressed people to unite against unjust systems – especially when these same systems affect different groups of underserved people, as is the case with the incarceration and predatory policing systems in place. While keeping the focus of Black Lives Matter on Black people, the vulnerability of all detained bodies would warrant a multi-racial, but intersectional coalition for justice in alliance with BLM, leaving space for difference and particularities across groups. The infamous US ‘zero-tolerance’ immigration policy placing children in cages and separating them from their parents in an attempt to deter further migration, as well as the allegations of forced hysterectomies at ICE facilities (Manian, 2020), demand our attention.

Many Latinx artists have been addressing the injustices of predatory policing, detention and incarceration for decades. As early as 1992, Luis J. Rodríguez wrote the masterpiece *Always running*, a memoir about the experience of surviving gang culture after joining the Lomas gang as a child. His account exposes the appeal of gangs in the face of marginalisation – in underfunded schools, in communities where the police prey on children who loiter or break the curfew (ultimately reinforcing the barrio-to-prison pipeline) and in workplaces where undocumented status puts a cap on professional opportunities. As he recounts his loss of friends and family to gang and police culture, Rodríguez deploys a critical perspective to consider a plethora of events in which police interfered to stop gangs from drawing truces and ending violence – suggesting that the police use ‘divide-and-conquer’ strategies to keep Black and Hispanic communities disorganised and exploitable. Ultimately, however, Rodríguez found a way out of the gang by drawing on his creative powers: in

writing, he finds purpose and speaks truths. The book's influence is undeniable, as it offers a way out of gang culture, while underscoring the systemic injustices instigating violence and keeping people of colour behind bars. Hundreds of thousands of people have read this book (Simon and Schuster, 2021), and the author reports that *Always running* – among the books most stolen from libraries – is often required reading, but also often banned (Rodríguez, 2005, p. xiv).

The above-mentioned artist Regina Galindo has also cast light on punitive systems in her own way. In 2008, as part of the Artpace artist residency in Texas, she performed the piece *America's family prison*, confining herself in an immigration holding cell for twenty-four hours alongside her husband and child. In 2018, the piece was restaged at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA). For the performance, the artist rented a detention unit used to hold families at the border. When spectators approached the inhabited cell, they became not only voyeurs but also wardens (Cazali, 2019), keeping vigil over the space as they recognised the ways in which they, as members of society, had been complicit in passively allowing a system that unjustly detains families and treats Hispanic bodies as disposable to continue to fester. After Donald Trump's family separation practices that ignominiously marked 2020, the piece's relevance seems utterly uncanny.

In Black Lives Matter, some forms of resistance to predatory policing and state violence border the artistic and performative, too: die-ins, walkouts, marches and other public protests (as Taylor, 2016, p. 173, has described) call attention to injustice. Notably, BLM has successfully ousted corrupt prosecutors who fail to charge police officers who systematically kill Black people and has pushed Democrats to include police reform in their platforms (Roberts, 2018). Roberts (2018) has also argued that BLM very significantly returned abolitionist vocabulary to social movements: if it were not for BLM, so he claims, Democrats would not be calling for abolishing ICE, and Latinx people would not have adopted abolitionist rhetoric. BLM has expanded our imaginaries.

In parallel to the feats described above, one may point out some additional silver linings. The Black American imprisonment rate has dropped by 34 percent since 2006 (social movements aside, the drop has also been attributed to a decline in crime), the most out of any group in recent years – although

it remains disproportionately high and leads all other groups (Gramlich, 2020). Furthermore, undocumented immigrant detention fell from its peak of 55,000 persons under Trump to about 26,771 in late July of 2021 (up from the March 2021 low of 14,000, when many were released to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, although Biden also ordered fewer people to be detained) (Trac Reports, Inc., 2021, *ICE Detainees*; Rose, 2021). Trump's zero-tolerance policy that separated families and put kids in cages has also been declared terminated – although thousands of children have yet to be reunited with their families. Lastly, Biden revived an Obama-era executive order that had been paused under Trump, directing the Department of Justice to stop renewing contracts with private-prison operators (Adams, 2021). This would appear poised to eventually peter out private prisons and put an end to the market incentives to depriving people of liberty, but actually falls short, as it only affects the twelve private prisons contracted by the Department of Justice, which only house around 12 percent of the private-prison population, while excluding those contracted by the Department of Homeland Security and other agencies (McEvoy, 2021).

### *Autonomy, Community Building and Meaning*

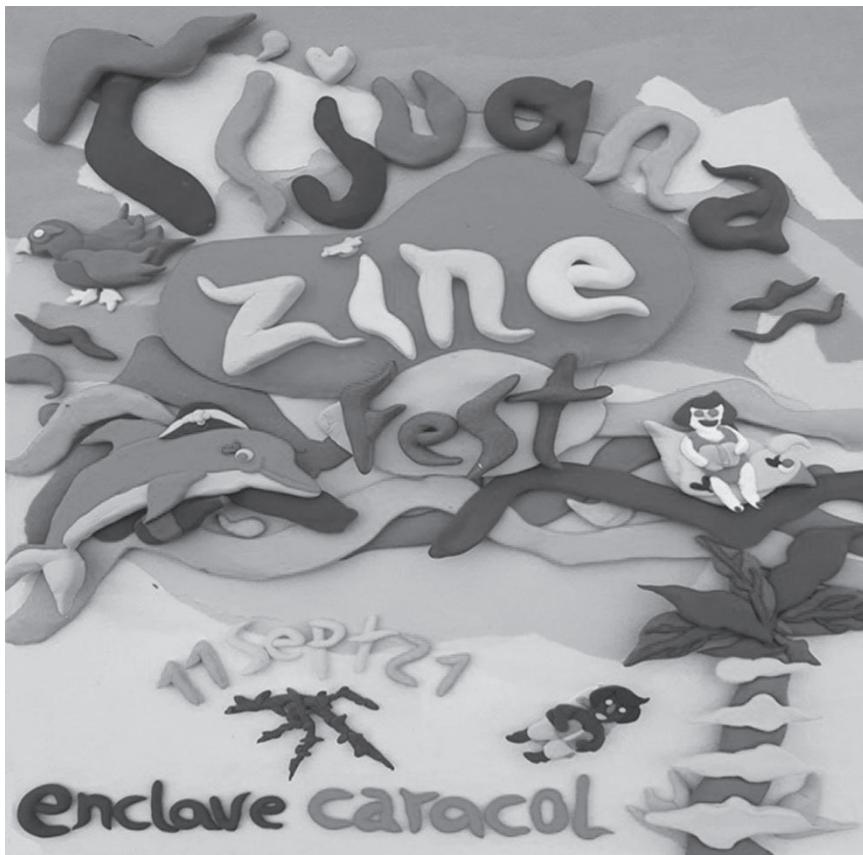
While Latinx in the US and across their deeply intertwined, translocal communities abroad have engaged in social justice on a myriad of fronts that are beyond the scope of this chapter – we might mention Undocupoets, led by the poets Javier Zamora, Christopher Soto and Marcelo Hernández Castillo, who have spearheaded the fight for diversity in literature by successfully pushing for US literary prizes to accept submissions from undocumented writers, and by awarding grants so that undocumented writers can cover the fees involved in submitting work to presses and prizes (Dorany, 2021) – I will now touch upon one last, but fundamental, contribution of Latinx artists: the way in which their art praxis creates spaces of autonomy.

In a region where the demands of capitalism have turned the cogs of migration while keeping bodies exploitable through undocumented status, where family separation abounds and where policing, detention and incarceration have plucked people out of their daily lives and severed them from their community ties, it makes sense for underserved communities to seek out spaces of

existence beyond the systems of oppression in place. These spaces of autonomy can be found in art.

As Cathy Cohen (2004) has written, we need to observe the spaces of autonomy created outside ‘traditional understandings of what constitutes legitimate politics, ranging from engagement with formal political institutions to the traditional, extra-systemic politics of riots, boycotts, and protests, to the adherence to dominant norms and expectations regarding behaviour’ (2004, p. 32). Following Cohen’s thought, art praxis can also provide a space to challenge the social structures of oppression, often outside ‘clearly defined political spaces like churches, civil rights organizations, and unions’ (2004, p. 29). Politics unfold in daily life, in community-building and in explorations of identity and possibilities – even when not articulated in the public sphere traditionally considered political. Without spaces of exploration and imagination, or what Cohen calls ‘deviance’, articulated politics would not emerge. Through deviance, ‘people can and do resist daily, through acts ranging from the outright challenge to those in power to participation in cultural forms thought to be deviant’, Cohen has stated (2004, p. 39). Art praxis provides an ideal way of enacting deviance, autonomy and resistance, as art can easily flaunt and challenge the norms and ideologies that govern our daily lives. Art, as a way of practicing deviance, can have lasting political consequences (2004, p. 41) since it creates opportunities to imagine possibilities outside the traditional systems of capitalism and exploitation that rule our world.

Deviance and the quest for autonomy have driven artists to create spaces to inhabit outside the normative realm. For instance, the Tijuana Zine Fest organises a yearly festival for artists to showcase, exchange and sell self-published printed materials known as ‘zines’. The fest describes itself as looking to ‘encourage artists and enthusiasts to discover self-publishing as a form of expression and cross-border communication’ (Tijuana Zine Fest, n. d.). The fest explicitly describes itself in a mix of Spanish and English with the tags ‘autopublicación’, ‘arte’, ‘comunidad’, ‘DIY’, ‘selfpublishing’ and ‘fuckborders’. These words suggest that the Tijuana Zine fest is a space of autonomy, as its do-it-yourself nature does not rely on the traditional printing industry. Yet, it is also a third space that defies borders: although in Tijuana, the fest translocally gathers a mix of English- and Spanish-speaking artists with cross-border ties (Tijuana Zine Fest, n. d.).



**Figure 13.5** Poster for the 2021 Tijuana Zine Fest. Source: [www.tijuanaazinefest.com](http://www.tijuanaazinefest.com).

One might also consider the film *Chupacabras: The myth of the bad immigrant* (2015), by Silvia Rodriguez Vega, which draws on the same principles of autonomy. For the film, undocumented immigrants wore a mask of Mexico's legendary, blood-sucking monster known as the *chupacabras* while denouncing the injustices that immigrants face in the US, subverting the notion that immigrants are undesirable by wearing the mask of a monster in solidarity with 'bad' immigrants, all while protecting their identity (given the participants' undocumented status). Indeed, Rodriguez Vega has commented on the ways in which legislation has perpetuated the categorisation of 'good' and 'bad' immigrants (2017, p. 139), by rewarding



**Figure 13.6** A still from *Chupacabras: The myth of the bad immigrant* by Silvia Rodriguez Vega (2015). Source: <http://www.silviarodriguezvega.com/artivism/film-project/>

the ‘good’ ones (DACA recipients, for instance) and punishing the ‘bad’ ones – even though it is often US policy that ultimately criminalises poor and undocumented people, pushing them to engage in illicit survival work in the face of the undocumented status precluding viable, legal work opportunities. The project subverts the respectability discourse that would have immigrants conform with and excel within the systems in place, engaging in ‘respectable’ behaviours as the only way of obtaining recognition: the film depicts a sex worker; a student at the University of California who cannot get a job as he does not qualify for DACA because of a robbery committed in his teens; a woman who received her first notice of removal at the age of eleven, on the day of her first communion; and a woman who called the police because her husband abused her, only to come home to

find that her husband had kidnapped her children, whom she has not seen since 2010 (Rodríguez, 2017, p. 142). As part of the film project, the artist invited people to take selfies with the *chupacabras* mask, making it possible for anyone to ‘join in on the opportunity to challenge hegemonic ideals on immigration’ (Rodríguez, 2017, p. 144), so that, as Cohen says, ‘seemingly deviant, unconnected behaviour can be transformed into conscious acts of resistance that serve as the basis for a mobilised politics of deviance’ (Cohen, 2014, p. 32).

In a similar vein, the Puebla-born rapper Audry Funk, who lives in the Bronx, New York, also uses art as a way of practicing autonomy. In the song *No me representas* (2017) ('You don't represent me'), she sings, 'porque mi voz con el viento se conecta / haciendo poesía declaro mi independencia' ('since my voice connects to the wind / making poetry I declare my independence'). Funk finds her independence in writing poetry and does not need to be represented by others. In an interview for *Voyage LA*, Funk has delved deeper into the idea of practicing art as a way of resisting and existing outside the system: 'I love community work, since I was in Mexico, I used to give rap workshops in very high-risk areas in my city, I believe art is healing and can help to find new ways to express and make your money without being part of the mass system, giving the hood the worth that has been taken away from us', she has stated, suggesting that art can be a path for economic survival outside of the larger systems that often exclude people of colour (*Voyage LA Magazine*, 2020). Her work is also clearly translocal: after practicing community work in Mexico, she now sings to and about immigrant communities in the US, even coining the term 'diaspo-resistencia' when singing about immigrant communities in the Bronx for the song *Barrio y diáspora* (2021), which Funk wrote during the pandemic. Funk studied philosophy in Mexico, and this comes through in her songs, which seek 'prosperity, love, freedom, and abundance' for women and people of colour (*Voyage LA Magazine*, 2020).

The importance of spaces of autonomy – or independence, as Audry Funk articulates it – is insurmountable: without creative incursions outside of the systems that dominate our lives, we would not have the imaginaries to seek the abolition of deportation, the private-prison system and the borders keeping families apart. Greater social justice movements start in private and then shared

spaces: they cannot happen without the philosophical explorations that a certain degree of autonomy – often found in art – permits.

The above-mentioned author Luis J. Rodriguez acted on this notion when he opened ‘Tia Chucha’s Centro Cultural’ in the Northeast San Fernando Valley, as a way to transform community by advocating for everyone’s right to ‘explore and develop their innate creative gifts’ with music, dance and mural painting, as well as Mexican dance, Indigenous cosmology and philosophy, and open mic nights’ (Tia Chucha’s Centro Cultural, n. d.). Rodríguez recognised the importance of drawing on the migrant and diaspora community’s roots, signalling that inherited cultures can provide new perspectives and imaginaries. Although these ancient philosophies no longer inform the systems governing us today (Maldonado and Mignolo, 2007), they could point to time-tested paths of dignity, identity and resistance.

Also in California, the AjA project (standing for ‘Autosuficiencia juntada con Apoyo’, or ‘Self-sufficiency along with support’) emerged in City Heights, San Diego, to host photography workshops for immigrants, refugees, the formerly incarcerated and the cross-border community, based on the conviction that ‘by working with youth to help them create their own images and tell their own stories, we can play a role in fostering their sense of imagination and possibility, for themselves and their communities’, with the ultimate goal of collective liberation (AjA, 2020). Underlying this philosophy is the idea that people possess knowledge, and that this can be transformed into visual stories, for instance. The process of tapping into such knowledge yields self-worth and recognition to communities often discriminated by the systems at play, but it can also catalyse healing and imaginaries for advocacy.

We could highlight hundreds artists more, ranging from Lin Manuel Miranda, over Jumko Ogata, to collectives such as Mujeres del Maíz working in the US and across transnational Latinx communities with an eye for social justice. However, given the spatial constraints of this chapter, I will end by touching upon the East-Los Angeles Chican@ band Quetzal whose lead singer and composer Martha González has written copiously about the importance of art as a component of activism. Beyond merely making music for mass consumption, Quetzal has adopted the philosophy that the embodied practice of culture, through ‘encuentros’ (meetings), ‘convivio’ (socialising) and collective participation, can be liberating, as it can operate outside market forces and lead

to critical thinking (González, 2020, loc. 1,919). Indeed, Quetzal positions itself against the capitalist forces that have turned culture into a commodity and has cultivated translocal ties with fandango groups throughout Mexico and the US (everywhere from Veracruz and Chiapas to San Diego and the Bay Area), with the goal of tapping into the imaginations of each community. Furthermore, the musicians in Quetzal posit that their ‘music did not have to be the “soundtrack” to the movement but rather became a movement tactic itself: The band has played at benefits for various rallies and travelled throughout Mexico to meet and strategise with the Zapatista movement in Chiapas (González, 2020, loc. 1,011). Speaking to the importance of culture as a political practice, González has written:

we need new strategies that undermine ideological and structural racism, strategies that have not been absorbed by the state – in fact, a new language and social practice adding to our social justice lexicon [...] these practices are simultaneously regenerative and strengthen our communities. These practices allow us to go beyond resistance, into actively building on the dream and tangible enactments of new worlds. (González, 2020, loc. 2,668)

Her emphasis on art harkens back to Cohen’s ideas on the need for autonomous spaces and deviance that can eventually generate new and more organised forms of resistance. Gonzalez points to the way in which knowledge in Western society has been boxed into the verbal realm – discrediting other forms of knowledge transmission, such as music, painting and dance. Embodying autonomous practices – in the case of Quetzal, with this autonomy drawing from the Zapatista tradition – becomes ever more significant. González has cited the Zapatista motto when pointing to the ways in which music performances can incite critical thought among participants and spectators, catalysing imaginaries of ‘a world where many worlds could exist’.

## Conclusion

This chapter has observed the ways in which Latinx artists in the US and abroad have contributed to two social justice issues particularly affecting Latinx diasporas in the US: the deportation regime, on the one hand, and predatory policing, detention and incarceration, on the other. It has deployed the notion

of the transnational to consider the term Latinx as fluctuating according to the people who self-identify as Latino, Latina and Latinx, thus including Latin American diasporas in the US, as well as their transnational communities across a complex mesh of sending and receiving areas. Indeed, the fluid cultural ties to which Latinx people may or may not ascribe – according to Overmyer-Velazquez's (2018, p. 40) delineation of the term 'Latino', such ties include speaking Spanish, sharing Catholicism, experiencing marginalisation and migrating as a consequence of US interventions – are deeply enmeshed with issues of social justice of transnational scope. Deportation policies in the US affect many transnational Latinx communities and diasporas, causing painful family separation and inhibiting movement and reunification. Indeed, this chapter underscores the fact that globalisation and capitalism have yielded a transnational Latinx community in a phenomenon that I call 'cruel transnationalism'. Given the enmeshing of Latinx communities across various countries, my essay looks not only to artists residing in the US, but also to those engaging with US politics from Latin America, recognising the transnational communities that have budded as a consequence of the cruel deportation regime in place.

To further develop this line of research, future studies might look to unearth the ties between art projects and mutual aid, which is perhaps more easily quantifiable than the impact of art on public policy, for instance. Likewise, researchers may study art practices across other migrant populations and regions. For instance, Fakhrashrafi, Kirk and Gilbert (2019) have studied how Black, Indigenous and racialised artists in Toronto 'engaged with, reflected upon, and refused the practices of internal bordering in the city by establishing other ways of belonging and forming sanctuaries of their own' (2019, p. 90). Meanwhile, Emily Hollingsbee (2019) has described how mural painting ultimately forged a community and a sense of solidarity among Syrian refugees in Greece, while providing an opportunity for accurate self-representation. For refugees and asylum-seekers in the United Kingdom, Maggie O'Neill (2008) has similarly explored the ways in which art (ethnographic biographical narratives specifically) allows people to 'speak for themselves' (2008, p. 13). In terms of autonomy and subversion, the work by Rachel Lewis (2019) on lesbian refugees in England is quite interesting as well, with the filming of performance art used to resist deportation. Indeed,

Lewis has studied how refugees have circulated films in which they perform queer acts in order to make deportation too dangerous an option for immigration officials, as the refugee would no longer be able to live ‘discretely’ in the country of origin and thus avoid homophobic violence. ‘One’s ability to experience hope is contingent upon one’s ability to imagine alternatives to the present’, Lewis has written (2019, p. 185). Perhaps one idea that all of these researchers share is the notion that art has the potential to create spaces in which people outside of power can represent themselves and forge paths for better futures.

Echoing Lewis’s idea that hope requires imagination, this chapter argues that, for Latinx people across a myriad of transnational communities, practicing art provides opportunities for independence, identity formation, self-assertion, creativity and the exploration of imaginaries of the possible. In the understanding that the fight to achieve true liberation and social justice for all is far from over, the present chapter also moves beyond politics and the idea of utilitarianism in art by closing with an exploration of the art praxis as a space for autonomy. Paradoxically, this autonomy also emerges as a necessary precursor to any political change. It is only through creativity – through song, painting, performative protest and dance – that we can embody the knowledges that have been excluded by the dominant, Western systems that exploit people of colour and perpetuate capitalism. It is only creatively that we can move past the stagnant thought patterns that have been crystallised through generations of colonialism, capitalism and unequal systems. Creatively, we can overcome.

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## ***Part IIc***

*DIASPORAS IN US POLITICS*

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# 14

## CHINESE IMMIGRATION IN THE US IN THE POST-TRUMP ERA: MAJOR IMPACTS AND TRENDS

*Yan Yuan*

### **Introduction**

In the past few decades, transnationalism has swept the world with the development of globalisation. Millions of transnational Chinese have gone abroad and immigrated to other nations and regions since China has moved from closed to open in the 1970s. The US has been the top destination for Chinese immigrants, especially elites such as overseas students, high-tech immigrants and investment immigrants. In recent years, nationalism has been rising with the intensification of competition between China and the US, while transnationalism still seems to be in the ascendant in both countries. It appears that currently the willingness of potential Chinese immigrants eager to study or move to the US has not been particularly impacted.

However, Chinese immigrants in the US have undoubtedly been affected since Sino-US relations have been undergoing dramatic changes. Containment, competition and confrontation have surpassed cooperation and have become the main feature of US policies towards China. Compared to immigrants in the US from other nations, Chinese immigrants have been living in a tense atmosphere caused by the Sino-US trade war and scientific and technological competition. Hate crimes against Chinese and also other Asian immigrants increased during the COVID-19 epidemic. The Trump administration took numerous measures to undermine the academic and cultural exchanges

between China and the US and promulgated some restrictive policies for potential immigrant Chinese students. Although Joe Biden's administration has made many amendments to Donald Trump's immigration policies, the negative impact of the latter's administration on the educational exchanges between China and the US still exists.

In this chapter, these restrictive immigration policy and measures towards Chinese immigrants under Donald Trump and the changes in the Biden administration will be first surveyed. Then, the chapter will analyse the current situation of different Chinese immigrant groups in the US and the main affects and trends of Chinese immigrants under the circumstances of competition between China and the US. Finally, the conclusion will discuss the tensions between transnationalism and nationalism.

### **Restrictive Immigration Policy in the Trump Era and Chinese Immigrants**

Like its economic-trade policy and foreign policy, the Trump administration's immigration policy was characterised by the slogan 'America First', populism, xenophobic tendencies and racism. Donald Trump's immigration policy showed aversion to and rejection of immigrants, mainly reflected in restricting Muslim immigrants, repatriating illegal immigrants from Latin America and trying to reform the green card lottery system. The Trump administration issued 'entry restriction orders' against citizens of Muslim countries such as Iran, Libya, Somalia, Yemen and Syria three consecutive times and suspended the reception of Syrian refugees. These three administrative orders were different in content, but they all emphasised that the purpose was to 'prevent foreign terrorists from entering the United States' and to 'safeguard the national security of the United States' (Trump, Executive Order 13769, 13780, 2017; Trump, Proclamation 9645, 2020). During his presidential campaign, Trump made verbal attacks on Mexican immigrants to cater to some middle- and lower-class white voters. After taking office, Trump kept his promise to block and crack down on illegal immigrants, vigorously promoted the construction of a border wall between the US and Mexico, cancelled federal aid to 'sanctuary cities', increased border law enforcement and intensified the search for and repatriation of illegal immigrants. In order to promote the construction of the border wall, Trump ignored the opposition

of both houses of Congress and used the veto power. Finally, with the support of conservative judges of the Supreme Court, Trump was able to allocate \$2.5 billion in military spending to build the wall, although this amount was far from the original requirement of more than \$8 billion in annual funding for wall construction. Trump also tried to reform the green card lottery system and reduce the number of legal immigrants. In August 2017, the Trump administration announced that it would replace the lottery system for issuing green cards with a system of ‘merit-based points’ and to terminate the ‘chain immigration’ system based on family reunion, thereby achieving the goal of reducing legal immigration (Trump, 2019).

During Trump’s presidency, Sino-US relations took a sharp turn. He launched the ‘Sino-US trade war’ and positioned China as a ‘strategic competitor’ and ‘revisionist country’. The competition between China and the US in trade, science and technology also spread to education and academic fields. Once Donald Trump took office, there arrived many limited policies for Chinese overseas students in US universities and those who planned to enrol, which almost destroyed the educational exchange relationship that had previously been established between China and the US. For a period of time, the US used its judicial power to conduct arbitrary nuisance checks on Chinese students studying in the US and even fabricated charges to arrest and prosecute them. Many Chinese students were harassed at length by US law enforcement officers while in the airport, and their mobile phones, computers and other items were randomly checked or even confiscated. In addition, several Chinese American professors and researchers at US universities and think tanks were investigated or arrested because of their ties with China, while this connection had been allowed and even encouraged before and during the Obama administration. In the Trump era, the friendly atmosphere of Sino-US educational exchanges was severely damaged and deteriorated sharply. The loyalty of transnational Chinese talent immigrants was questioned and suspected.

In the National Security Strategy Report released in December 2017, the Trump administration claimed that, in order to prevent theft of intellectual property rights, foreigners studying science, engineering, mathematics and technology (STEM) in the US would be restricted (Trump, 2017). In 2018, the US Department of State shortened the validity period of visas

for Chinese students in some STEM majors. Under the Obama administration, Chinese students had been able to receive five-year visas. In June 2018, the Trump administration limited the validity of visas for Chinese students studying in sensitive research areas to one year. The restricted areas included aviation, robotics and advanced technology manufacturing. On 29 May 2020, Donald Trump issued presidential proclamation No. 10043, suspending the entry as non-immigrants of certain students and researchers from the People's Republic of China. This imposed a visa ban on graduates from some Chinese science and engineering colleges and prohibited so-called 'Chinese students and scholars involved in the Chinese military' from entering US universities to pursue post-graduate studies or engage in postdoctoral research (Trump, Proclamation 10043, 2020). This was another new measure taken by the Trump administration to restrict Chinese student exchanges in the US, and it was also a continuation of its policy of constantly restricting cultural exchanges between China and the US since Trump had taken office.

The above measures were mainly based on two considerations. First was the securitisation of 'Sino-US competition', according to which the US should prevent the leaking of secret scientific and technological research and development, thereby damaging US competitiveness in the fields of science and technology. In the Trump administration's view, some Chinese students studying in the US were attempting to help China acquire sensitive technologies and intellectual property 'to modernize its military as a threat to our Nation's long-term economic vitality and the safety and security of the American people' (Trump, Proclamation 10043, 2020). The US cancelled the visas of more than 1,000 Chinese students and researchers, claiming that they had undisclosed ties with the Chinese military. The move followed President Trump's proclamation to 'block certain graduate level and above Chinese nationals associated with entities in China that implement or support China's Military-Civil Fusion (MCF) strategy'. At the same time, the US greatly disturbed the normal academic exchange activities of Chinese students and scholars, which seriously damaged the extensive long-term cultural exchange activities between the two countries.

Second, from the perspective of promoting the 'decoupling' of China and the US, people-to-people exchanges were regarded as an important force

field. Since 2018, ‘decoupling’ had gradually become an important part of the Trump administration’s policies towards China, especially in three key areas: economy-trade, science-technology and humanities. Whether it was through restricting Chinese student visas, suppressing Confucius Institutes, or smearing the normal cultural exchanges between China and the US with the concept of ‘sharp power’ and other Cold War terms, the Trump administration was eager to limit or even cut off social interaction between the two countries. These policy considerations were influenced by the extreme anti-China forces in the US.

The anti-China conservative forces of the Republican Party constituted an important driving force in restricting the cultural exchanges between China and the US. Some ‘well-known’ anti-China lawmakers, such as Marco Rubio, Tom Cotton and Chris Smith, put forward motions to restrict the cultural exchanges between the two countries, thus creating an atmosphere of ‘Chinese threat’ in the US. Senators Tom Cotton, Rick Scott, Marsha Blackburn, Ted Cruz and Marco Rubio introduced the Visa Security Act to end China’s access to ten-year multi-entry visas. In addition, Tom Cotton even suggested that Chinese students should not be allowed to live in the US for the purpose of obtaining science-related degrees from US universities (Bowden, 2020). Stephen Miller, Trump’s far-right political adviser, once drafted a proposal to prohibit all Chinese citizens from obtaining visas for international students. In September 2020, the University of North Texas suddenly expelled fifteen Chinese students.

### **The Biden Administration’s Immigration Policy and Chinese Immigrants in the US**

In 2021, the new president, Joe Biden, signed nine executive orders related to immigration issues in his first month in office, trying to reverse the previous president’s obviously xenophobic and hostile immigration measures. First of all, he cancelled the ban on Muslims and relaxed the refugee policy. Second, his administration once again started to absorb highly skilled immigrants. Third, he ordered to stop the construction of the US-Mexico border wall. Fourth, he promoted the legalisation of illegal immigrants. Generally speaking, these immigration policies are good news for Middle Eastern and Latin American immigrants.

However, Biden's administration has continued the policy towards China established in Trump's era. In his first foreign policy speech, Joe Biden called China 'the most serious competitor' (Churchill, 2021). The Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, emphasised that the US relationship with China 'will be competitive when it should be, collaborative when it can be, and adversarial when it must be' (Lewis and Pamuk, 2021). The Strategic Action Plan to Confront Threats from China, newly formulated by the US Department of Homeland Security, mentions that China used the US immigration system and academic exchanges to acquire its cutting-edge technology, and it proposes to expand the screening activities for Chinese citizens wishing to obtain US visas (US Department of Homeland Security, 2021). These remarks and documents were extremely unfriendly to Chinese students studying in the US.

At the same time, stimulated by the pandemic, discrimination against Asian Americans spread in the US. As COVID-19 was spreading dramatically across the US, hate crimes against Asian Americans surged. Increasing numbers of 'hate incidents' were reported in the mass media; these had been spurred by the current social and political climate in which COVID-19 was repeatedly labelled as 'Chinese virus' or 'China virus' (Zhang, Yan et al., 2021). According to the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), the rate of violent crimes committed against Asians between 2015 and 2018 increased from 8.2 to 16.2 per 1,000 persons aged twelve or older (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2015, 2018). According to a report released by the Asian Pacific Policy and Planning Council and Chinese for Affirmative Action, 'more than 2,100 anti-Asian American hate incidents related to COVID-19 were reported across the country over a three-month time span between March and June' (Donaghue, 2020).

The Biden administration proposed the US Citizenship Act of 2021, which involved many immigration reform measures. Among them, there are two favourable policies for foreign students, including Chinese students: First, international students majoring in STEM will not be restricted by the quota of green cards when they apply for a professional immigrant green card after obtaining a doctoral degree. Second, foreign students with F-1 visas are allowed to have dual intentions. At present, F-1 international students can only study and are not allowed to work. If the bill is passed, F-1 students can also have

immigration intentions, and the relevant immigration application rate may increase. At present, China is the most important source country of STEM-major students in the US. The residence rate of Chinese doctoral graduates in the US is 85 to 90 percent. If STEM PhD holders may receive a green card immediately upon graduation, this will be very attractive to Chinese students who wish to immigrate to the US after studying abroad.

At present, it is not known whether the Biden administration will continue the practices and policies of the Trump period and restrict international students from China. The Biden administration has claimed to welcome Chinese students, while practically continuing to restrict Chinese students based on visa issues and creating problems for Chinese students entering the country. It is estimated that US consulates have refused to issue visas to thousands of Chinese STEM graduate students, for various reasons. Recently, several Chinese students were subjected to unwarranted interrogation when they arrived in the international airports of Houston and Los Angeles, and some of them were repatriated after border inspectors ‘identified [them] as possibly endangering the national security of the United States’. Most importantly, the presidential proclamation No. 10043 issued by Donald Trump, which is extremely unfair to Chinese students, has not yet been revoked by President Joe Biden. However, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, an American think-tank, has raised objections to Trump’s policy on Chinese STEM talents, arguing that the Biden administration needs a better balance, since some measures have risked unnecessarily harming the US science and technology base by disrupting one of the key pipelines of international talent supplying the US STEM ecosystem (Burke, 2021).

### **The Current Situation of Chinese Immigrants in the US**

Biao Xiang has argued that emigration from China may be categorised in two major streams: those who are highly skilled and/or wealthy, and those who are low-skilled or unskilled. High-skilled and high-value emigration from China is rising fast, while low-skilled and unskilled emigration is stagnant (Xiang, 2016, p. 1). Chinese immigrants in the US can be divided into these two categories as well. The US is the top destination for Chinese immigrants, accounting for almost 27 percent of the more than twelve million Chinese

living outside of China, according to mid-2019 estimates by the United Nations Population Division. Other popular destinations include Canada (920,000), Japan (785,000), Australia (750,000), South Korea (620,000) and Singapore (451,000) (Echeverria-Estrada and Batalova, 2020).

The population of Chinese immigrants in the United States has grown nearly seven-fold since 1980, reaching almost 2.5 million in 2018, or 5.5 percent of the overall foreign-born population. Whereas in 1980 Chinese immigrants did not appear among the ten largest foreign-born groups in the US, China in 2018 replaced Mexico as the top sending country. After immigrants from Mexico and India, the Chinese represented the third-largest group in the foreign-born US population of nearly 45 million in 2018 (Echeverria-Estrada and Batalova, 2020). In addition to the existing immigrants, Chinese new talent immigrants to the US mainly come through study abroad programmes, H-1B visas and investment immigration.

### *Chinese Overseas Students*

China is the leading sending country of international students in the US. In the 2019/20 academic year, the number of Chinese students in the country was 372,532, accounting for more than one-third of the total number of 1075,496 international students studying in the US (Open Doors, 2021). Among them, there were 148,160 undergraduate students, accounting for 39.8 percent of the total international undergraduate students; 137,096 graduate students, accounting for 36.8 percent of the total; 15,896 no-degree students; and 71,380 OPT (Optional Practical Training) participants (Open Doors, 2021).

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, especially during the Obama administration, the US has reformed the student visa system, relaxed visa restrictions for Chinese students and encouraged the education exchange between China and the US. This has ushered in the golden age of studying in the US for the Chinese. Since then, the number of Chinese students has continued to rise. According to Open Doors, in the 2010/11 academic year, there were 157,558 Chinese students enrolled in US schools, while only five years later, in the 2015/16 academic year, that number reached 328,547, exhibiting a two-fold increase.

**Table 14.1** Chinese international students in the US (2010/11–2019/20).  
 Source: ‘Open Doors 2020 fact sheets: China’, [https://opendoorsdata.org/fact\\_sheets/china/](https://opendoorsdata.org/fact_sheets/china/)

Academic Year	Number of Chinese International Students	Change (in %)
2019/20	372,532	0.8
2018/19	369,548	1.7
2017/18	363,341	3.6
2016/17	350,755	6.8
2015/16	328,547	8.1
2014/15	304,040	10.8
2013/14	274,439	16.5
2012/13	235,597	21.4
2011/12	194,029	23.1
2010/11	157,558	23.5

In addition to presenting a considerable number, Chinese international students in the US have a series of other remarkable characteristics, such as a high rate of students in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, as well as remaining in the US after completing their studies. China is the largest country of origin for foreign STEM students and supplies by far the most doctoral candidates in STEM fields to US universities. China is currently the US’ largest source of international STEM PhDs. According to the National Science Foundation and the National Science Board, the ten-year stay rate of Chinese science and engineering PhD graduates from 2006 to 2008 was 90 percent; the five-year stay rate from 2011 to 2013 was 83 percent. Both metrics far exceed global averages. From 2000 to 2017, annual intention-to-stay rates never dropped below 80 percent for Chinese new PhD graduates in computer science, biological and biomedical sciences, engineering, mathematics, health sciences, or physical sciences (Burke, 2021, p. 2). China is also one of the largest sources for international students earning master’s degrees in STEM fields in the US, and the overall largest source of foreign STEM students in the nation, at 162,000 in 2018 (Burke, 2021, p. 2).

This steady influx of Chinese talent carries benefits American science and innovation in multiple industries. In particular, it supplements domestic

labour shortages in certain emerging fields, such as artificial intelligence (AI). Research from Georgetown University's Center for Strategic and Emerging Technologies indicates that most of the US AI workforce was born abroad, and that China is one of the most common countries of origin for these international employees and students (Burke, 2021, p. 2). According to the Paulson Institute, an independent 'think-and-do-tank' dedicated to fostering the US-China relationship, China is the largest source of top-tier researchers, with 29 percent of these researchers having received undergraduate degrees in China. But most of those Chinese researchers (56 percent) go on to study, work and live in the US. Among those Chinese PhD students working on AI, only 10 percent may choose to return to China after completing graduate school in the US, while 88 percent will likely choose to remain to work in the United States (Paulson Institute, 2020).

In addition, Chinese international students studying in the US are characterised by a younger age. Open Doors' statistics indicate that the number of Chinese students studying for a bachelor's degree in the US has exceeded the number of graduate students. In 2019/20, there were 148,160 undergraduate students, while graduate students numbered 137,096 (Open Doors, 2021). There is also a significant number of Chinese students in K-12 education. During the calendar year 2020, there were 59,119 international K-12 students according to US records, while China sent 43.8 percent of all international K-12 students in 2020, with a total number of 25,941 (US Department of Homeland Security, 2021, p. 6). In 2019, there were 34,737 Chinese international students engaged in high school education (Grades 9–12) in the US (US Department of Homeland Security, 2020).

In addition to being a magnet for international students, the US is also the first choice for Chinese scholars to study abroad. According to the data of the US Department of State, in the fiscal years 2015–19, the US issued more than 50,000 F-type visas to Chinese scholars, spouses and their children every year. Previously, many Chinese universities required for promotion that teachers should have experience abroad, which forced Chinese university teachers and scholars to apply for state funding so as to obtain overseas study experience in order to achieve higher positions. In addition, quite a few visiting scholars hope to take their children abroad to broaden their knowledge and learn English.

### *Chinese High-skilled Immigrants*

According to the data of the Consular Affairs Bureau of the US Department of State, from 2001 to 2020, the number of Chinese who obtained H-1B visas amounted to 254,124, accounting for 9.2 percent of all H-1B visas issued (US Department of State, 2021). In the fiscal year 2018, Chinese citizens represented 12 percent of the 332,000 H-1B petitions (initial and continuing employment) approved by the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), representing the second-largest number of employer-sponsored H-1B temporary visas, after Indians (Echeverria-Estrada and Batalova, 2020). In the fiscal year 2019, the H-1B temporary visas issued to Chinese from Mainland China reached 28,483, accounting for 15.1 percent of all H-1B visas.

**Table 14.2** H-1B temporary visas issued to Chinese from Mainland China.  
Source: US Department of State, ‘Nonimmigrant visa issuances by visa class and by nationality: FY1997–2020 NIV detail table’, <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/legal/visa-law0/visa-statistics/nonimmigrant-visa-statistics.html>

Fiscal Year	H-1B Issued to Mainland Chinese	Total	Percentage of Total
2004	6,583	138,965	4.7%
2005	7,113	124,099	5.7%
2006	9,451	135,421	6.9%
2007	10,761	154,053	7.0%
2008	9,141	129,464	7.1%
2009	9,223	110,367	8.4%
2010	11,242	117,409	9.6%
2011	10,849	129,134	8.4%
2012	11,077	135,530	8.2%
2013	12,632	153,223	8.2%
2014	14,871	161,369	9.2%
2015	18,306	172,748	10.6%
2016	21,657	180,057	12%
2017	22,993	179,049	12.8%
2018	27,482	179,660	15.3%
2019	28,483	188,123	15.1%
2020	14,600	124,983	11.7%

### *Chinese Investor Immigrants*

In recent years, immigrant investor programmes which offer wealthy foreigners permanent or temporary residence in exchange for a sizeable, job-creating investment, have proliferated around the world. For the purposes of acquiring foreign identity, allocating overseas assets, accessing high-quality educational resources and so on, these immigrant investor programmes have attracted wealthy Chinese to emigrate from their home country. Chinese applicants have dominated in Australia, Canada, the US and several European countries, such as Portugal.

The US have long been the first choice for Chinese investment immigrants. In 2018, the Hurun Research Institute comprehensively evaluated the top ten countries in its China Immigration Index (CII 2018; see Hurun Report, 2018) based on eight indicators: education, investment destination, applicability of immigration policy, overseas home-ownership, low personal income tax, effectiveness of medical system, visa-free passport and the adaptability of the Chinese. For four consecutive years now, the US has been the most suitable country for Chinese high-net-worth individuals to invest and emigrate. Britain rose by one place, to second place. Greece, an emerging immigrant country, performed well, ranking sixth for the first time. Canada dropped by two ranks, to fourth place. Australia dropped one rank, to fifth place (Hurun Report, 2018).

The US has defended its title for four consecutive years, with a high score of 8.7 points. In terms of single indicator scores, the American education system is still one of the important reasons why Chinese investors choose to immigrate to that country today. In addition, visa-free passports and the adaptability of the Chinese also rank first. After Trump took office, he pushed hard for tax reform, which made the single indicator rating of tax rate increase 8 points in 2018 (Hurun Report, 2018).

For Chinese high-net-worth individuals, the US in 2018 topped the list of the most popular immigrant destinations, with 79 percent. This is followed by Canada and Australia, with 25 and 15 percent, respectively. The top five overseas home-buying cities favoured by China's high-net-worth individuals are the same as 2017, with Los Angeles ranking first for five consecutive years, New York rising one place to second place, Boston rising two places to third place, San Francisco maintaining fourth place, Seattle dropping two places to tie for fourth place with San Francisco, and London rising to sixth place. Melbourne, Australia ranks eighth. Greece entered the top ten for the first time (Hurun Report, 2018).

**Table 14.3** Immediate Relative Visas issued to Mainland Chinese (Fiscal Years 2011–20). Source: US Department of State, ‘Immediate Relative Visas issued at foreign service posts (by applicant’s area of birth), fiscal years 2011–20’, [https://travel.state.gov/content/dam/visas/Statistics/AnnualReports/FY2020/AnnualReport/FY20AnnualReport\\_TableXII.pdf](https://travel.state.gov/content/dam/visas/Statistics/AnnualReports/FY2020/AnnualReport/FY20AnnualReport_TableXII.pdf)

Fiscal Year	Number of Immediate Relative Visas
2011	14,497
2012	15,214
2013	11,592
2014	11,798
2015	15,627
2016	17,807
2017	12,318
2018	10,791
2019	9,296
2020	4,268

US visa issuance data also show that Chinese investor immigrants favour the US most, while this country reciprocally welcomes wealthy immigrants from China. Approximately 30,000 Chinese investors and relatives arrived via the EB-5 programme between 1992 and 2014. In 2014, 85 percent of all US immigrant investor visas (EB-5) were granted to Chinese nationals. In the fiscal year 2015, about 90 percent of those receiving a green card through the US EB-5 investor visa programme came from China. The rate surged in 2015 and 2016, when 15,000 migrated using the programme. Considering governmental statistics that suggest that another 40,000 to 50,000 Chinese investor migrants and family members moved to three other major destinations – Hong Kong, Canada and Australia – the total population of Chinese investor migrants may be as large as 85,000 to 90,000. Chinese nationals received nearly half of EB-5 investor green cards in 2018.

#### *Other Immigrants*

In addition to international students, highly skilled immigrants and investor immigrants, other new Chinese legal immigrants in the US mainly include family reunion and labour immigrants. In the fiscal year 2020,

4,268 immediate relative visas, 6,655 family preference visas and 1,272 employment preference visas were issued to Mainland Chinese, and the total immigrant visas issued to Mainland Chinese reached 12,217 (US Department of State, 2021).

### **Chinese Immigrants in the US in the Context of Competition**

Changes in international relations will have a certain impact on immigrants between countries; for instance, Japanese immigrants in the US suffered discrimination and exclusion during World War II. Chinese immigrants in the US are, of course, also inevitably affected by the tense relations between China and the US.

First of all, the anti-China atmosphere in the US has affected the attitude of US citizens towards Chinese immigrants and, more general, all Asian immigrants. For example, the media reported that Chinese elderly ladies were assaulted for no reason. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many Chinese immigrants were insulted with the term ‘Chinese virus’ and suffered unprovoked attacks. If the anti-China atmosphere in the US continues to strengthen, it will cause serious issues for Chinese immigrants in the country and will also impact potential immigrants.

In May 2020, according to the statistics presented in the report ‘The impact of COVID-19 on prospective international students’ released by QS, 96 percent of Chinese students interviewed said that the COVID-19 pandemic would not interrupt their study abroad programme (QS, 2020). However, the pandemic’s impact on studying abroad programmes will undoubtedly last for a long time. Various countries and regions introduced different levels of control measures, including border control, flight reduction and restrictions on unnecessary cross-border mobility, which greatly affected international students who rely on cross-border mobility. Without effective control of the pandemic, some Chinese students’ plans to study abroad had to be postponed. Tensions between China and the US (and the pandemic) caused some parents to re-evaluate the choice of sending their children to study in the US, given that personal safety is the primary factor for parents to consider, especially since a great number of Chinese students are only children.

According to a domestic survey in China, in 2019 the United Kingdom, Hong Kong and the US ranked top three in the choice of destinations for

**Table 14.4** The number of F-1 and J-1 visas issued to citizens of Mainland China (fiscal years 2013–20). Source: US Department of State, ‘Nonimmigrant visa issuances by visa class and by nationality: FY1997–2020 NIV detail table’, <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/legal/visa-law0/visa-statistics/nonimmigrant-visa-statistics.html>

Fiscal Year	F-1 Visas	J-1 Visas
2013	217,593	34,263
2014	244,927	38,024
2015	274,460	38,928
2016	148,016	38,606
2017	112,817	39,038
2018	98,904	39,010
2019	105,775	39,920
2020	14,436	8,356

undergraduate students studying abroad, attracting 28.7, 14.3 and 14.2 percent of students, respectively. Among these, the proportion of students studying in the US decreased by 2.5 percent when compared with 2018. This may be related to the tense bilateral relations caused by the Sino-US economic and trade friction since 2018 (Wang and Miao, 2021, p. 46). Wang Huiyao and Miao believed that the growth in the number of Chinese students studying in the US would experience an inflection point in the 2020–21 academic year, due to the pandemic combined with worsening Sino-US relations (Wang and Miao, 2021, p. 20).

There is no doubt that, if the US treats Chinese students with an inclusive and friendly attitude and does not tighten visa restrictions, Chinese students will still regard the US as their preferred destination for studying abroad, because the top US universities bring together the world’s top professors, scientists, publications, experimental equipment and other educational resources. Yet, the US has been making visa applications more difficult for Chinese students. According to the data released by US Department of State, in 2013 the number of F-1 visas issued to Mainland Chinese students was 217,593, and the number of J-1 visas issued to visiting scholars from Mainland China was 34,263. In 2015, the number of F-1 visas issued to Mainland Chinese citizens reached its peak at 274,460.

By 2016, that number had been reduced drastically, to 148,016. By the fiscal year 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, only 14,436 Chinese mainland citizens had obtained F-1 visas, and only 8,356 received J-1 visas, both of which thus reached a record low. In recent years, especially during Trump's term, the US, in fact, tightened visa restrictions for Chinese citizens.

Influenced by political factors, the professional direction of Chinese students studying in the US may be adjusted. It is more difficult for Chinese students in some technical fields to study in this country, and their enthusiasm for studying there continues to decline. During Trump's tenure, the US government led a series of protectionist policies that hindered the globalisation process, including obstructing international academic exchanges, increasing the scrutiny of study visas, restricting the study and work permit of sensitive majors and so on. This caused overseas students to fall into an unprecedented predicament. If the US policy tightened the visa restrictions for Chinese STEM students, this would probably lead to more humanities and social sciences students applying to study in the US. Based on past experience, Chinese students are rarely considered for majors involving national defence, military affairs, new energy, virus research, aerospace, nuclear energy, high-end materials, biosynthesis, AI, precision electronics, nano-technology and so on. Even if institutions were willing to recruit, visas could easily be declined. If the US restricts the entry of STEM students for the long term, it may affect the professional composition of Chinese immigrants in the US.

In addition, the tension between China and the US, especially the investigation of Chinese American scholars connected with China, will undoubtedly affect the international circulation of talent. In the past, many Chinese American scholars regularly travelled between China and the US to carry out academic exchanges. However, since the US wishes to prevent China from catching up with the US in the fields of science and technology, it tended to restrict Chinese scholars in the country from returning to China to carry out cooperative research. The arrest of several Chinese scholars in the US will affect the choice of other Chinese scholars, thus reducing the communication with Chinese academic circles.

Obstructing overseas students going to the US also has a certain impact on education in China. In recent years, the problem of educational involution has

emerged as an urgent issue on China's agenda. In China's first-tier cities, a considerable number of outstanding middle school students choose to go directly to the US, Britain and other European and American countries to receive an international high school and undergraduate education, so as to avoid excessive involvement in domestic education. The pandemic and the restrictive policies of the Trump administration caused some Chinese families reconsider their original plans to send their children to study in the US. This segment of students staying in China will intensify the competition for high-quality educational resources in China, including university education. In Beijing, Shanghai and other metropolitan cities, a large number of middle school students attend international classes and are ready to apply for undergraduate admission at US universities. This segment will now turn towards domestic education, which will intensify the competition in the school districts of China's metropolitan cities. Shanghai's housing price increase in 2020–21 is said to be partly caused by the cancellation of a considerable number of students' study abroad plans, and parents are competing to 'buy' school districts for their children, which aggravates the housing price increase. However, recently the Chinese government has taken measures to resolve the issues surrounding housing prices and education.

Given the unfriendly atmosphere towards China and Chinese immigrants in the US, personal safety was certainly taken into consideration by parents of Chinese students studying abroad. The number of young international K-12 students may decrease. China has long practiced the one-child policy, and since a considerable number of international students are only children, parents pay close attention to the safety of their children. In recent years, the number of students returning home after studying abroad has been increasing, which is equally related to the fact that most students are an only child, and many must return home to reunite with their families. If the number of returnees continues to increase and that of new immigrants to the US continues to decrease, the scale and composition of the Chinese immigrant group in the US will be affected in the long run.

## Conclusion

With the development of globalisation and the progress of science and technology, transnationalism means that more and more capital, technology and

personnel break through the limits of national boundaries, and cross-border migration, mobility and contact become more convenient and easier, as these become more interdependent between countries. However, transnationalism has not dispelled nationalism. Both ‘transnationalism’ and ‘nationalism’ between China and the US seem to be on the rise.

Nationalism does affect transnationalism. With the rise of nativism and nationalism in the US, its policies and actions show a certain degree of ‘anti-globalisation’. In the strategic competition between China and the US, the latter tries to decouple from the former and to exclude the former in many fields. In regard to immigration, the US is strengthening its nationalist policies by reviewing visa issuance, strictly scrutinising and carefully approving permanent resident status and citizenship, as well as adjusting policies on immigration, naturalisation, employment, education and social welfare. On the part of the US, the government hopes that the Chinese elite immigrants will be loyal to their new country and limit the transnational nature of their contact with China, while on the part of China, the government to a certain extent hopes to take advantage of the transnational nature of the Chinese elite immigrants in the US. One example in this context is the Thousand Talents Programme, which the US has criticised as espionage, while China merely hoped to make use of the knowledge and wisdom of the overseas Chinese scientific and technological elites to improve its own domestic development. The Chinese government did not consider such utilisation of its elites abroad as wrongful and, therefore, openly recruited Chinese talents around the world. As long as the power gap between China and the US was large enough, US authorities did not consider this policy of returning immigrants as inappropriate. Today, many other countries are also recruiting and utilising their intellectual elite immigrants in the US in order to serve their own development. Such non-Chinese elite immigrants who maintain close links with their home countries do not seem to have been subjected to arrest and interrogation, as the US authorities have done to Chinese-origin scholars.

Finally, from the personal perspective of Chinese students, studying and living in the US is a strategy of personal growth and development; enriching personal experience and enhancing competitiveness have become the biggest driving factors for studying abroad. After all, the US is the most developed country in science, technology and higher education in the world, presenting

itself as unique and attractive. Yet, this personal life choice has been wrapped up in the torrent of nationalism between China and the US.

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# 15

## MORAL CONCERNS: IMMIGRANTS WHO REJECT IMMIGRANTS IN THE US

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### **Introduction**

One of the biggest surprises of the US 2020 presidential elections was the increase of Latino voters in favour of the incumbent presidential candidate Donald Trump. As Lauter has described, ‘[j]ust four years after running a campaign fuelled by anti-immigrant rhetoric, including the accusation that Mexican immigrants were “rapists”, Trump significantly improved his standing with Latino voters’ (Lauter, 2021). Trump obtained approximately 32 percent of the Latino vote in 2020. This result is not only higher than the 28 percent he had previously obtained during the 2016 election but constitutes the highest participation of a minority-group vote than any incumbent presidential candidate ever obtained since Richard Nixon in 1960 (Cadava, 2020a).

This is perplexing because voting for Trump implies supporting a series of anti-immigration policies such as limiting access to permanent work visas, vetoing people of certain nationalities from entering the country, reducing quotas for refugees and increasing the bureaucracy to access asylum status. Thus, the anti-immigrant character of voters who themselves are of immigration origin may seem morally unsound: somewhat like the act of benefiting from some good or privilege and then making sure that others in the same position cannot benefit, so as to protect or increase one’s own access, privileges or benefits. But

this is too quick of a judgment because these voters are US citizens. Aiming to resolve this perplexing issue and substitute a more robust moral judgment, in this chapter we are interested in analysing three main points: (1) understanding why the Latino diaspora voted for Trump, (2) considering whether it is possible to justify the support of anti-migrant policies based on concerns of basic justice, and (3) propose grounds for moral concern that arise when minority social groups support policies that maintain social inequalities.

Before proceeding to our arguments, it should be noted that this chapter takes the perspective of applied political theory grounded in practical moral reasoning, but due to limitations of space we refrain from making a positive proposal. Instead, we deal with the foundations we think necessary for a prospective research agenda on the kind of moral agency required to improve the perspectives of immigrants in the US. We believe that the adjudication of moral responsibilities to the political views of the diaspora is a key factor for understanding the normative panorama regarding border policy. But beforehand, we need to ground the basis for moral concern regarding the beliefs that allow them to support a candidate such as Donald Trump. Consequently, this chapter remains within the limits such a grounding – in terms of political morality – the kind of concerns provoked by that fact. An account of epistemic justice focused on those beliefs will have to wait for further research.

### **How to Understand the Latino Diaspora’s Support for Trump?**

In order to explain the Latino diaspora’s perplexing voting preferences for anti-immigrant President Trump, we will first introduce some key elements of the social ontology of oppression.<sup>1</sup> We will use that social ontology to explain what we put forward as the three main group-identities in diaspora memberships: anti-communism, religious conservativism and patriotic/nationalist US citizenship. Finally, from this larger picture, we will see that we should transcend the broad and general migrant group-identity and capture the intersectionality of different oppression-driven identity-group memberships in order to understand the pro-Trump Latino vote.

<sup>1</sup> Here we closely follow a previous discussion by Alejandro Mosqueda, in ‘Inmigrantes antiinmigrantes: El incremento del voto latino a favor de Trump’ (Tigau and Mosqueda, 2022).

First, one needs to understand how the diaspora members identify themselves and how they are identified by others. Recall that social groups are sets of people who share a sense of identity. In turn, identities are fluid: they evolve in a process of continuous negotiation between the traits with which people identify themselves and the traits used by others to identify them as members of certain groups. Each person can be recognised as member of a variety of social groups. Members of society use social class, sexuality, gender and citizenship to pin each other into specific social groups: ‘Each of these collectives, to all of which [a] person simultaneously belongs, gives her a particular identity. None of them can be taken to be the person’s only identity or singular membership category’ (Sen, 2006, p. 5). In this sense, a person has multiple social identities. Each of us is deeply invested in identities of various kinds that arise from our origins, associations, preferences, or social activities.

Second, we must understand how different groups and identities acquire social value. In contemporary societies, social groups are stratified. This means that some identities are positioned as more valuable than others: ‘The identity group that is positioned as more valuable – the dominant group – will have more access to the resources of society. The group positioned as less valuable – the minority group – will receive less access to the resources of the society. People in society will be taught to see the difference in access to resources as fair and legitimate’ (DiAngelo, 2016, p. 64).

Third, we should highlight that identity-groups are often immersed in relationships of oppression. Social stratification generates a multi-dimensional imbalance of social, political and institutional power that explains how certain social group-identities are excluded from society’s bundle of resources. This multi-dimensional imbalance is called oppression. This means that oppression is ‘a matter of *social relations* between people or groups that have a particularly stable and permanent character and that are supported and sustained by social or institutional mechanisms’ (Stahl, 2017, p. 475).

At this juncture, it is very important to stress the structural nature of oppression. The fact of oppression describes a series of practices, norms, policies, traditions, cultural histories, narratives and definitions that are put to work in order to systematically benefit one social group at the expense of another (DiAngelo, 2016; Anderson, 2010; Young, 1990; Haslanger, 2004). All these elements sustain and reproduce the multi-dimensional imbalance

between social groups. The social group that benefits from an oppressive relationship is called privileged or dominant, while the group that is oppressed is called minority. Dominant social groups maintain the institutional power of society to control resources and impose their worldview across society, in ways that are difficult to avoid. The upshot is that oppression is a historical, structural and systematic social phenomenon that arises from the relationships and practices which social groups establish regarding one another.

Finally, it is important to recognise the element of intersectionality that allows one to be both the oppressed and the oppressor at the same time. Afrofeminists and decolonial feminists have coined the concept of intersectionality to point out that race, sexuality, gender and class should be understood as co-substantial categories (Crenshaw, 1991; Lugones, 2014). Intersectionality is a theoretical tool that allows us to understand the multiple forms of inequality that people must face, just by the mere fact of belonging to different identities that are structurally in a disadvantageous position. But it also shows that people can simultaneously belong to multiple social identities, both privileged and oppressed, and that these positions intersect in complex ways. It is possible for a person to be both: part of a dominant group by belonging to a certain identity and also part of a minority group by belonging to another identity that is in a position of oppressor. The ‘differences cut across individual lives in a multiplicity of ways that can entail privilege and oppression for the same person in different respects’ (Young, 1990, p. 42). The roles of privilege and oppression occupied by a person may not be coherent since ‘simultaneously we occupy multiple social positions and [...] these positions do not cancel each other out, they interact in complex ways that must be exploited and understood’ (DiAngelo, 2016, p. 216).

From this relational point of view on the constitution of social groups (established by the social ontology invoked so far), we will try to identify and understand the several identities that constitute the Latino diaspora in the US. The first membership that should be considered when defining the Latino diaspora is the rejection of the poor performance of corrupt governments which made them emigrate in the first place. The diasporas identify their home governments by their extreme left narrative, as conceptualised in the axis of socialism and communism (but often with little or nothing to

do with truly socialist policies). As a result, one of the strategies in Trump's presidential campaign was to propagate the idea that Democrats were drifting too far to the left and, just as it has happened in several Latin American countries, ruin would ensue, if they won the elections. In the same vein, the editorial board of the conservative Latino diaspora website *El American* declared that the US 'is being burned down by moral relativism, postmodernism, and Marxist ideas [...] Many of us have fled Marxism. We know that if America falls, there is no other place on earth for Freedom' (Sesin, 2021). For many voters who belong to the Latino diaspora, voting for Trump was a way of avoiding the same old story that they had known very closely in their own home countries.

For example, many Colombian migrants identify themselves as Republicans. Laureano Chileuitt, leader of the Florida-based group Patriots for Trump, declared that Trump was their *caudillo*: 'It just means he's *the leader*, like Uribe', he said, referring to Álvaro Uribe, the former right-wing president of Colombia. 'We are anti-globalization and anti-communism' (Sesin, 2021). Many Colombians living in the US believe that all leftist politicians are pro-Chávez. This belief fits perfectly with the narrative used by Republicans to equate Democrats with socialism: 'Conservative Colombian elected officials pushed the same message as they endorsed Trump and urged Colombians in the US to vote for him. They echoed misleading socialist messages saying Biden is a *castrochavista* [referring to support for Castro and Chávez], a term popularised by former Colombian President Álvaro Uribe' (Sesin, 2020).

Religion is the second membership of interest shared by many of the people who make up the Latino diaspora in the US. Many of them identify themselves with the Republican party on policy issues such as the right to life, religious freedom and the participation of religion in state affairs. President Trump made his way through to Evangelical leaders by affirming, as he did, in a church in Miami: 'America was not built by religion-hating socialists' but, rather, 'by churchgoing, God-worshiping, freedom-loving patriots' (Cadava, 2020b). Accordingly, Adreina Kissane, co-founder of the group Venezuelan-American Republican Alliance (VARA), stated the following in relation to her preference for Trump over Biden: 'All we can do is remain firm in our conviction and our love for God to save our nations' (Sesin, 2021). Furthermore, religious membership also establishes a connection with conservative memberships. For instance,

former President Ronald Reagan had already recognised the conservative ideology shared by many members of the Latino diaspora in the US. Reagan believed that he could win the Latino vote with conservative ideas and articulated his campaign accordingly with ‘the core characteristics of Latino conservatism: family values, work ethic, patriotism, and anti-Communism’ (Cadava, 2020b). Trump also took advantage of these ideas which many members of the Latino diaspora share with their white American electorate.

Finally, we cannot forget that the members of the Latino diaspora who voted in the last presidential elections are, in fact, US citizens; they like to show their allegiance in a way that also connects them with patriotic and nationalistic narratives. This membership has been increasingly important for Trump’s Latino vote. Puerto Rican-born attorney Alfonso Aguilar was the first head of the US Citizenship Office to promote the civic integration of migrants during the George W. Bush administration. He noted that Democrats do not understand the aspirations of the Latino diaspora: migrants ‘come to the United States [...] to find economic and religious freedom, and because they believe in America’s promise of equal opportunity and inclusion. They see themselves [...] not as members of a minority group but as individuals and families who left Latin America to look for something better in the United States’ (Cadava, 2020b). For Aguilar, Trump’s speech really included the Latino diaspora by saying out loud what many of them think: ‘You’re including me because you’re seeing me as an American – you’re not seeing me as a Hispanic that’s separate. Democrats just don’t understand this’ (Cadava, 2020b). Trump recognised and took advantage of this membership as citizens who have many members of the Latino diaspora in the US.

Having arrived at a broader view of the Latino vote group-membership and their identities, one can see a clearer picture of the diaspora voting preferences emerge. If we use the social ontology of oppression in order to establish an interpretation of the three main group-identity memberships of Latino voters, we may extract the following two lessons. First, we should avoid reducing the diaspora to one single homogeneous immigrant-membership altogether championing the interests of immigrants. The results of the 2020 presidential elections have shown that the Latino diaspora is not a homogeneous social group sharing the same political ideas. People who belong to this diaspora are at different intersections that influence their political positions. Second,

our analysis of oppression-driven social relations allows us to understand why Latino voters may not necessarily vote for policies that would benefit newcomers. Their membership in groups that share identity-markers such as the rejection of left-wing governments, a religious conservatist ideology and patriotic/nationalist US citizenship allows us to establish an alternative migrant narrative where many members of the Latino diaspora end up identifying themselves with positions related to the Republican party, because this is the group to which they aspire to belong. That is why membership to different group-identities are key to understanding the increase in the Latino vote in the elections. This, in turn, shows that the Latino diaspora is much more complex than its immigration group-identity.

This explanation is attractive because it explains the diaspora vote for Trump in a non-deterministic fashion: Latino voters identify their political interests with the interests of the identity-groups which they identify as more socially valuable because they now believe that inclusion in those groups is within their reach. But this is a result of the oppressive stratification of groups that could be removed or challenged, changing as a result the diaspora identification with the groups that may oppress them.

However, one should not hastily jump to any single type of interpretation. Nothing said so far amounts to a demonstration that there are no other ways to understand the diaspora's vote. Thus, before leaping to the complementary thesis that President Trump's policies and the Latino diaspora vote are both part of the same oppression-driven matrix, we should examine more generous ways to justify the Latino vote. A common argument that has been made to justify support for restrictive migration policies is based on the idea that migration has harmful effects on the societies of destination countries. Specifically, it is argued that migrants displace natives from jobs; therefore, migration policies should be toughened to protect natives whose rights are violated. The following section will analyse the strength of this kind of argument in favour of the diaspora preference for President Trump.

### **Demands for Distributive Justice and Low-skilled Workers of Immigrant Origin**

One familiar way of making sense of the anti-immigrant claims by Latino voters is to ask what the virtue of social justice requires in the given context.

Anti-immigrant Latinos may argue that justice requires that low-skilled Latino natives are highly vulnerable to accidents, changes in the market and trends of consumption. Two of these aspects that affect vulnerable natives consist of changes in job markets and immigration trends. From there, it seems that more restrictive border policies may be justified, if this protects vulnerable low-skilled Latino natives.

Such an argument belongs to a theory of injustice, as opposed to a theory of justice. This distinction depends on how we manage to establish a relationship between theory and reality. At one extreme, there stands an ideal theory of justice that purports a pure case by modelling conditions in order to establish the main conceptual relations and distinctions which we find relevant for that pure case itself (abstract states, their hypothetical citizens and their modelled borders). Thus, the pure case is not conceived to apply to any specific instance, such as the exclusion of needed low-skilled workers or the exclusion of those displaced by the violence caused by the demand of drugs, the black market of guns, or the lack of opportunities. At the other extreme, the application of the pure case to conditions of injustice needs to be elaborated. Theories of injustice, also called non-ideal theories or partial-compliance theories, are constructed from the ground up, by asking what morality or justice requires from immigration policy faced with a well-specified case of injustice (such as typically being less-well off as result of the detrimental effects of bad luck, or as result of the arbitrary decisions of others). The general strategy would be to identify the worse-off in the given scenario and ask what justice requires from their fellow citizens in order to improve their condition.<sup>2</sup>

In a similar vein, proceeding from the ground up, as theories of injustice do, we may consider as an empirical basis the well-known study by George Borjas (2003) on the detrimental impact that immigration has on US job market and wages. Similar to Borjas, we may consider that the emphasis on family reunification has increased low-skilled immigration. As a result, immigration since the last decades of the twentieth century may have had the effect of lowering the wages of native workers without a high school diploma (roughly the bottom 10 percent of wage earners) by 9 percent (Borjas, 2003). Indeed,

<sup>2</sup> For ideal theories of justice in immigration, see, for instance, Miller (2016) and Wellman (2008). For non-ideal theories, see Díaz (2010) and Silva (2015).

according to Borjas, low-skilled immigration is directly responsible for half of the expansion of the wage gap among high school dropouts (2001, pp. 22–38, 82–86, 103–4). This is particularly severe among native-born African American and Latino workers (Borjas 2001, p. 11). Once we have identified native-born Latino workers as a less well-off group, we ask what justice requires from their fellow citizens.

Stephen Macedo has recently tried to reconstruct this kind of non-ideal argument about what the virtue of social justice requires in a specific context, such as considering what is needed in order to protect low-skilled immigrants (Macedo, 2018, p. 287). First, he relies on Borjas' account purportedly showing that low-skilled immigration harms residents and the least well-off native-born, including those of immigrant origin. Second, he invokes a concern of political morality: citizens and residents share a bond of reciprocal special obligations to one another. From those two claims, Macedo's reconstruction infers that (i) the commitment to the requirements of social distributive justice stands among residents and citizens, in a way that it does not remain outside the bonds of reciprocal special obligations; and that (ii), consequently, we are permitted and required by the virtue of social justice to use immigration controls in order to protect the worst-off among our fellow citizens, even if those who seek admission are, in fact, more disadvantaged. In conclusion, provided that borders could protect these vulnerable native groups, it seems that immigration policy should exclude the low-skilled and low-educated immigrants by favouring more educated applicants. The argument concludes that these actions will 'substantially and disproportionately reduce immigration from Latin America and the Caribbean' (Macedo, 2018, p. 290).<sup>3</sup> However, we do not believe that this conclusion follows.

In order to challenge Macedo's reconstruction of the argument, we first question its empirical premise. According to this reconstruction, even if outsiders are more disadvantaged than natives, deprivation should be considered in *relative terms* (relative regarding members of the same polity who share an associative bond of obligation) so as to trigger demands for social justice

<sup>3</sup> It is worth mentioning that Macedo does not fully endorse this argument. He reconstructs it as a prevalent argument in political discussion, although at the end he distances himself from adopting a critical view regarding its conclusion.

that are alleviated by institutional means (Macedo, 2018, p. 293). The mere humanitarian claim of absolute deprivation triggers duties of assistance, but not duties of justice.<sup>4</sup> However, the deprivation of natives is presented in *absolute terms* as a net result of low-skilled immigration, without any relativisation to other important variables and contexts required by institutions of justice. Yet, Macedo remembers:

... all Americans have benefited from cheaper fruits, vegetables, and the many other products and services that immigrants (including undocumented workers) help produce. Firms have benefited from cheap labour. Wealthier Americans have also benefited from increased access to cheap labour to perform service work – as nannies, gardeners, etc. By decreasing the cost of childcare and housekeeping, immigration has helped highly educated women participate in the labour force. (Macedo, 2018, pp. 289–90)

But then the purported detrimental effect that immigration may have on low-skilled immigrants is never quantified against the detrimental effect that the absence of immigration could have on the same group. Once the detrimental effect of immigration is relativised against other variables and sources of harm, it becomes feasible to consider the possibility that the correlation between immigration and harm may be the result of a common cause.

This raises the following question: what if immigration is harmful only under certain modifiable relative conditions that are not under the control of immigrants? This is an alternative path to question Macedo's reconstruction. Perhaps once the conditions are removed, immigration ceases to be harmful, or at least as harmful as Borjas claims. This could help to challenge one of the inferences of Macedo's reconstruction (inference ii). Perhaps it is true that citizens and residents share a bond of mutual obligations to one another (inference i). But this does not necessarily imply (ii) that we are required by justice to use immigration controls in order to protect the worst-off among our fellow citizens, even if those who seek admission are, in fact, more disadvantaged. Let us unpack this moral concern.

<sup>4</sup> Macedo distinguishes between absolute and relative deprivation (Macedo, 2018, p. 293). The first establishes humanitarian obligations, while the second merits obligations of distributive justice.

There are at least two conditions to consider that the immigration of low-skilled workers is harmful only under removable arbitrary circumstances: firstly, the putative harm bestowed on low-skilled Latino natives, for the most part is not under the control of immigrants. Secondly, the putative harm may be removed, or to some extent at least diminished, by the native-born citizens themselves. In order to illustrate this, we will discuss two cases: the stigmatisation of native low-skilled workers in the US and the adjustment of wages to the market value. In contrast to egalitarian countries, such as Canada, where the source of national pride lies in the popular support of redistribution policies so that everybody can rely on a universal welfare system, the US heavily relies on means-tested welfare programmes, and these programmes stigmatise recipients.<sup>5</sup>

This means that the natives themselves stigmatise their low-skilled fellows, but instead of identifying the lack of an egalitarian *ethos* as the source of harm for natives, the argument seems to blame the immigrants. However, stigmas are not under the control of immigrants. They are not an inevitable result of their border-crossing. Instead, stigmas are socially constructed, and they can be institutionally modifiable by political discourse, education and responsible media (Banting and Kymlicka, 2017, p. 32). Why would justice require the exclusion of low-skilled disadvantaged and vulnerable immigrants, instead of requiring a change of the elite rhetoric that shames people who receive benefits or an improvement in wages, so that jobs become more attractive to locals? If institutional design *at home* could bolster or erode support to redistributive programmes, why focus on the effect of low-skilled immigration?<sup>6</sup>

Something similar happens with opportunities and wages. Consider, secondly, that opportunities and wages are not the inevitable result of disadvantaged people crossing the border; rather, they are socially and politically constructed by the design of just public institutions (Macedo, 2018, p. 293). Yet, someone could object that, despite the lack of control on part of the immigrants

<sup>5</sup> Johnston et al. (2017, p. 164), as cited in a previous manuscript of Macedo (2018), discussed at the Instituto de Investigaciones Jurídicas, 3 October 2018. In the following paragraphs of this section, we draw on some considerations discussed in that previous version.

<sup>6</sup> Hall (2017, p. 207), also cited in a previous manuscript of Macedo (2018), discussed at the Instituto de Investigaciones Jurídicas UNAM, 3 October 2018.

regarding the detrimental effects, these are spill-over effects of immigration. Suppose, for instance, that we supplement the argument by adding that high levels of low-skilled immigration interact with various features of the US institutional, social, political and cultural landscape, producing undesired effects on wages and solidarity. However, this is misleading, too, as it conflates effect and cause: low-skilled immigrants harm low-skilled natives because they interact, in the first place, within an unjust institutional structure that establishes and reproduces relationships of oppression.

To be sure, consider the analogy with women entering labour markets in the 1950s and 1960s. Many low-skilled male workers were displaced by low-skilled women. Yet, it would not be consistent with the principles of justice to say that, because of the harm imposed on male workers, justice requires excluding women from job markets. Instead, what morality required was the elimination of certain relations of oppression that enabled the harm caused to men by women entering the job market, so that both could participate in the job market under fair conditions.

This seems to suggest that the premise of the requirements of justice dissolves by invoking an old solution to an even older problem, already identified in Walzer's seminal work *Spheres of justice* (1983). Walzer has focused on the conditions and constraints imposed on domestic labour markets by free trade, globalisation, welfare state and unions that make it attractive for employers to shift jobs from the domestic to the international labour market (Walzer, 1983, p. 56). Immigrants are often associated with the stereotype of hard workers and non-complainers who willingly accept jobs and conditions that native workers do not; even if the latter would accept under protest, the employer still has incentives to hire immigrants because of their reputation as non-complainers and hard workers (Macedo, 2018, pp. 289–91). From there, the argument may jump to the conclusion that obligations of justice urge the US borders to protect low-skilled Latino natives from the detrimental effect of low-skilled immigration. But as Walzer has noticed, this is beside the point. The ultimate goal of just institutions is not only to eliminate the detrimental effects of brute bad luck but also to eliminate the detrimental effects of arbitrary and illegitimate decisions of others over us, such as the decisions that characterise oppressive institutional arrangements.

Much like with the case of women entering the job market, justice requires not only eliminating the effects of brute bad luck on the opportunities and

life prospects of low-skilled Latino natives, but also removing the sources of oppression that make these native workers so vulnerable. It may be true that low-skilled Latino native workers experience the state and their employers as pervasive and frightening oppressive powers that shape their lives, stripping them of the opportunities that they seek, without asking for their opinion. Their lives depend on the arbitrary whims of capital and politics. However, what Macedo fails to realise is that this experience of oppression is also shared by low-skilled immigrants.

Furthermore, what justice requires, then, is to correct distortions of job markets and solve collective action problems in order to protect *all* low-skilled vulnerable workers (including immigrants) from labour conditions that are detrimental in terms of justice (Carens, 2013, p. 115). Making job markets for low-skilled workers fulfil the standard of justice eliminates the incentive of internationalising job markets and increases the incentives for native workers to take those jobs. Blaming low-skilled immigrants for lowering the wages is much like blaming Black offenders for discrimination, or women for the actions of the rapist. It puts the burden of the blame on the victim, while allowing the guilty parties to get away with exploitative extraction of profits.

There are other aspects of Macedo's reconstruction that could be questioned, but for now this suffices to show that the reconstruction is incomplete, or at least too simplistic to account for all the complexities of the case. Once we dismiss the arguments concerning justice as too simplistic to be heuristic or illuminating for the case at hand, we can return to the broader outlook suggested in the second section. This means that Latino newcomers may indeed be harmful for some low-skilled Latino workers; but this is only because there are in place more basic oppressive relations that enable this kind of harm. Crucially, these kinds of relationships could be removed as a matter of basic justice, as the next section will discuss.

### Moral Concerns

As we saw in the previous section, Macedo's reconstruction offers an attractive explanation of the conditions under which low-skilled immigration may be harmful to low-skilled Latino natives; indeed, it may be correct to point out that this correlation is a matter of basic justice. What the reconstruction fails to consider, however, is that basic justice first must secure minimum standards

regarding wages, working conditions and other employment-related costs, which then will diminish both the detrimental effect of low-skilled immigrants on low-skilled natives and the unfair incentive to shift these jobs onto the international job market. That is, we must see the problem from the broader perspective of the relationships of oppression under which low-skilled Latino natives are harmed by low-skilled immigration.

Upon taking broader perspective, such as the one suggested in the second section, we may see a more complete picture. For instance, when a shortage of low-skilled workers occurs in a context where native low-skilled Latinos find themselves in conditions of unemployment, perhaps it means that unemployed Latino natives are not taking jobs that are below the price of the job market because they are in some way dirty, dangerous, demeaning, or demanding (Carens, 2013, p. 123). In a market economy, jobs of this sort should pay more; but instead of adjusting the wages to the market value, the employer shifts these jobs onto the international market because he wants to pay below the market-value of that job. Hence, the harm that the reconstruction picks up is, in fact, not under the control of the immigrants but instead a consequence of actions undertaken by the employers and by the government, who fail to ensure that wages are just or at least paid according to their market-value. Once these jobs are paid according to their value, there will be no incentive to shift the jobs onto the international market. Therefore, once relations of oppression are tackled, we can establish a more profound and precise view of the relations to different causes and harms.

This shift from the distributive justice view to the view from oppression-driven social relations may now allow us to see what justice really requires – that is, not only to correct the distortions of the labour market to improve the working conditions of all vulnerable workers with low qualifications, regardless of whether they are native or migrant, but crucially also to investigate the oppressive framework perpetuating inequalities between both Latino natives and Latino migrants. In order to do so, this final section will return to Latino voters and investigate further whether there is any other moral concern in the fact that the Latino diaspora has voted for a candidate like Trump. Before proceeding to the analysis, some contextual remarks are needed. First, it should be stressed that voting for Trump implies supporting the criminalisation of migration, as justified by a xenophobic and racist discourse.

During his tenure as president, Trump drastically reduced the number of admitted refugees, on the grounds that migrants abused asylum policies in order to benefit from the US job market. ‘In 2017, the country admitted 33,000, a figure almost two-thirds lower than in 2016 when 97,000 people were taken in, according to data from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)’ (Sánchez, 2020). In 2020, only 18,000 refugee applications were accepted, and in 2021 Trump set the refugee quota at a maximum of 15,000. Trump also announced that, if he were to continue as president in 2021, he would only accept a total of 1,000 asylum applications from Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador (Sánchez, 2020). However, secondly, it should also be highlighted that the criminalisation of migrants is not something new or specific to the Trump administration: ‘policies of expulsion or deportation are not exclusive to Republican or Democratic governments, because according to statistics the government of Barack Obama deported more migrants than the government of George W. Bush’ (Carrasco, 2017, p. 191).

On balance, historically, in the US migration has been criminalised as a threat to the law and order of American society, to the economic well-being of workers and/or to the health and education systems:

In recent years we have witnessed a process of restriction of migratory flows, particularly in the countries of the north and some of the south. The United States and southern countries have been tightening immigration policy to discourage the entry of the undocumented population, xenophobia and racism have spread rapidly throughout all destination countries until they become a social practice on the part of the native society. (García and Villafuerte, 2014, p. 102)

This means that voting for Biden does not necessarily mean casting a vote against this kind of immigration policy. However, unlike Biden, President Trump explicitly used a xenophobic and racist speech in an official capacity during his first campaign and presidency.

What is new and worrying is the increase in support from the Latino diaspora for political figures like Trump. The fact that the Latino diaspora supported through its vote a candidate who maintained a supremacist and xenophobic discourse during his campaign and presidency poses a not very encouraging outlook for migrants. Trump’s narrative focused on the criminalisation

of migration in a way that greatly contributes to normalising the segregation of this social group via the white-supremacist discourse, which is oppression-driven. We believe that this fact may trigger moral concerns, particularly when considering the role that the stigmatisation of minority social groups plays in the normalisation of social inequalities.

In order to see this more clearly, one should consider the nature of social inequalities as they may be understood from our account of oppression-driven relations. Social inequalities are ‘modes of social organisation whereby bounded social groups are subject to systematic disadvantages in relation to dominant groups’ (Anderson, 2010, p. 7). As mentioned in the first section, these inequalities are linked to many kinds of group identities, such as class, gender, sexuality, religion, race, ethnicity and citizenship. The term ‘group-inequalities’ is used to emphasise the relationship between the inequalities that individuals suffer and the social groups to which they belong. Social inequalities are the result of the different oppressive relationships that characterise the structure of our liberal and democratic societies.

One of the main causes of social inequality is the segregation of minority groups. Segregation processes consist ‘of any intergroup relations (laws, norms, practices, habits) by which one identity group closes its social network to counterpart groups’ (Anderson, 2010, p. 9). As a result, many group-identities are devalued in society in order to normalise and justify the inequalities they suffer. ‘This devaluation encompasses how the group is represented, what degree of access to resources it is granted, and how unequal access is rationalised’ (DiAngelo, 2016, p. 61).

One of the dynamics that allows to carry out this kind of devaluation is stigmatisation. Stigmatisation refers to conducts of contempt and scorn against someone identified as member of a socially devalued group (Rodriguez Zepeda, 2006, p. 37). It is through stigmas that members and the group are presented in negative, limited and superficial ways. Stigmatisation plays a fundamental role in reinforcing the segregation of minority groups. This is because stigmatising stereotypes represent subordinate groups as possessing traits that deserve attitudes of contempt, fear, suspicion and aversion.

These constant negative representations reinforce the prejudices that society holds about members of minority groups and causes a socially distorted understanding of their lives. At the end of the day, ‘society accepts the misinformation

and mistreatment of the minoritized group because the dominant group has been socialized to see them as less valuable' (DiAngelo, 2016, p. 84). In turn, this misinformation is used to rationalise the inferior position. 'The misinformation becomes normalised and taken for granted, enabling it to continue to circulate and be reproduced throughout society and, in turn, serve to justify the mistreatment of minoritized group' (DiAngelo, 2016, pp. 84–85).

In order to justify the contempt, as well as the associated exclusion from positions of authority that results in the placement in subservient and subordinate roles, immigrants of Latino origin have been stereotyped as a threat to US society. President Trump's discourse on migration is worrying, mainly because it creates stigmatising stories about people of migrant origin, explaining and rationalising their segregation as a direct result of alleged intrinsic deficiencies of talent, culture, or virtue. As Anderson puts it, 'stigma, in turn, often leads to prejudice, since it represents disadvantaged groups as deserving their inferior position and hence as contemptible (if they are exploited or role segregated) or alien (if they are spatially segregated)' (Anderson, 2010, pp. 19–20). Accordingly, we can observe a straightforward source of moral concern: the plain fact is that, based on Trump's speech, anti-immigrant extremists found support for spreading stigmatising narratives that influenced the debate on migration in the US. Given Trump's privileged position to convey his narratives, immigration policies rooted in fanaticism have become normalised. To put it in another way, the moral concern triggered by the increase of the Latino vote for Trump is that the xenophobic and racist discourse that he used during his campaign contributes to legitimising and reinforcing the segregation of migrants of Latino origin.

Behaviour based on the stigmatising of minority groups is 'always unjust because it assaults the dignity of groups that do not deserve to be demeaned, and it usually also impairs their access to important goods on unjustified grounds' (Anderson, 2010, p. 20). Yet, as we remarked in the second section, stigmas are socially constructed and may be institutionally modifiable by political discourse, education and responsible media (Banting and Kymlicka, 2017, p. 32). Hence, this is very similar to the case of means-tested welfare programmes which stigmatises recipients, in that it partly allows to put the blame for harming low-skilled Latinos on the newcomers; we are witnessing how the presidential narrative once again places blame on immigrants and contributes

to the normalisation of the segregation of this social group in American society, instead of developing a more egalitarian *ethos* that tackles the underlining problem of oppression-driven relations. This is of course disconcerting.

The fact that the Latino diaspora supports through their vote a candidate who during his campaign and presidency maintained a xenophobic and racist discourse focusing on the criminalisation of migration poses a not very encouraging outlook for migrants. It seems that not much is added here by simply identifying the oppression-driven matrix underlying both the stigmatising public discourse against Latino immigrants and the increasing support from Latino voters for politicians championing that kind of discourse. But this is misleading. We should stress that, once we have established the basis for moral concern, we can then work out what the appropriate response should be. And this, in turn, enables us to identify the kind of political agency needed to deal with the underlying problem.

For instance, now that a more complete normative and descriptive panorama comes into view, one may pose the question about the responsibilities of anti-immigrant voters of immigrant origin. Should Latino voters have a responsibility to avoid aspirational beliefs and identify themselves as minoritised groups? This question is interesting because it seems to go against a *prima facie* right to determine political beliefs as one sees fit. But as with any other right, rights over our beliefs have limits. There are various potential ways to take up this question. One way is to invoke an account of legitimacy and ask whether voters of immigrant descent have the right to decide over the lives of would-be immigrants and current immigrants. But it is not clear how the claim that Latino voters may have for self-determination rights to influence border policy is any different from the claim coming from the rest of the voters (Camacho Beltrán, 2020). Another alternative benefits from the powerful expressive potential of poetry in order to instil empathy regarding the experience and subjectivity of immigrants. Immigrant poetry blogs could help to avoid disentanglement from communities of origin in anti-immigrant voters of immigrant origin and help them establish an emotional connection with the hardship of immigrants. But this approach relies on the sensibility, disposition and aesthetic capacity of the subject, which are contingent (Mosqueda, 2021). We do not pursue these here. Instead, before concluding, we will examine how transnationalism may face the challenge.

### Transnationalism and Political Agency

Perhaps the most obvious path to face the challenge posed in the previous section is to offer an ethically robust orientation for transnationalism. From a theoretical perspective transnationalism is the study of the intertwined and reticular processes established between emigration and immigration: ‘Some theorized that migrants lived in ethereal *transnational social fields* resulting from the constant flows and interactions between migrant-sending communities and migrant-receiving areas’ (Castañeda, 2017, p. 175). This means that transnationalism is also a fact in the lives of immigrants and the communities related to them. But what matters here is that Latino natives may gain a certain moral clarity about the true ethical weight of their morally problematic allegiances if they remain in a normatively meaningful relationship with people in their countries of origin. This, in turn, may provide them with a more sensitive view about the interest of the newly arrived immigrants.

In this case, transnationalism would be normatively meaningful, if (i) Latino natives treated with equal concern the interest of close and loved people in countries of origin; particularly the strong interest that some of them may have in emigrating themselves; and if (ii) Latino natives could transfer some of this concern to the newly arrived in order to weigh their interests from the perspective of equal concern, and not only from the perspective suggested by Trump’s narrative. ‘In contrast to earlier waves of immigrants that, due to the lack of availability of rapid and cheap transportation, severed their links to their home countries, Latinos have retained extensive and continuous ties with their places of origin. Transnational, binational, plurinational loyalties have become the norm rather than the exception’ (Mendieta, 2011, p. 33).

This sort of ethical *transnationalism* is hardly new. Famously, Randolph Bourne, a pragmatist philosopher, articulated the first post-melting-pot idea of what a transnational America would entail. For Bourne, the gravitation that war and nationalism exert towards the establishment and elites in fact means an abdication from popular sovereignty and self-determination (Bourne, 1977; Mendieta, 2011, p. 29). In turn, cosmopolitan or ethical transnationalism allows the kind of democratic plurality that makes it possible to visualise oppressive relations.

The problem is that this kind of transnationalism may only be prevalent among some newly arrived and perhaps first-generation immigrants; however, at least in the form and strength needed to prevent self-identification with the dominant group, it loses its stamina over time. Transnational practices change over time, depending on the context prevalent within the country of reception (Castañeda, 2017, p. 176). Research in transnationalism 'show[s] that much of the immigrant's time is occupied by work and family. They also indicate that ethnic identity and nationalism had been forged before migration but solidified and transformed in the diaspora' (Castañeda, 2017, p. 175; see also the seminal work of Massey et al., 1990). It is this kind of transformation that encourages Latino natives to seek identification with the dominant group instead of identifying themselves as a minoritised oppressed group. As result, it seems that this kind of ethical transnationalism needs to be supplemented by a more systematic ethical critical position about what the US is and how native Latinos see themselves in the grand scheme of things.

In a similar vein, a more robust approach may begin with an account of the responsibilities we have regarding our political beliefs. Epistemic responsibility establishes certain constraints on the *pro tanto* right that we must hold beliefs without evidence or without reasonable evidence, and even more so, if we are somehow inclined to encourage others to share those beliefs. Accordingly, anti-immigrant voters of immigrant origin should think about the beliefs that they hold about other immigrants, the harm that they can cause them with their beliefs and the responsibilities that are attached to the process of forming beliefs in politics. Of course, this means that a full account of the responsibility of political beliefs needs to be developed. We hope that we can pick up some of these alternatives soon. In the meantime, however, it is worth noting that an account of this kind could perhaps supplement ethical transnationalism by allowing voters of immigrant origin to weigh their beliefs against a more complex political landscape. For instance, they could become aware of how neoliberalism and globalisation greatly benefited the global educated upper and middle classes while disproportionately harming the rural and working classes around the world. This, in turn, may permit multi-dimensional self-identification between different kinds of minoritised groups.

In order to see a sketch of how this may work, take for instance white working-class supporters of Trump. Some of them, particularly in small

towns, face a similar kind of stigmatisation through stereotypes that turns them in an oppressed minority group, in contrast to the urban white educated middle and upper classes. But instead of resenting this kind of oppressive relation, they respond by embracing one of the last resorts of self-esteem that is available to them following their systematic exclusion – which is, regrettably, their racial pride. As result, they harbour racialised sentiments of economic and cultural marginalisation against immigrants and non-whites in general (Macedo, 2021, p. 449). Furthermore, small-town working-class white Americans vote is driven by this racialised sense of exclusion and not by a distributively oriented sense of justice coherent with their class interests. Hence, much like Latino natives, instead of voting for policies that could reduce their marginalisation, they vote ‘to thwart progressive safety-net policies that could benefit them greatly. This reflects what Jonathan M. Metzl (2019) calls “dying of whiteness”’ (Macedo, 2021, p. 465).

Perhaps Latino natives could relate to the uncertainty and hardship that this minority group of whites faces in order to become more sensitive to the difficulties that would-be and newly arrived migrants face. However, paradoxically, this relies on the capacity of working-class whites to do as much and abandon their racial pride and identify themselves as oppressed groups along with other minoritised groups, such as newly arrived immigrants and Latino natives. Perhaps a shared front between distinct minoritised groups is required to face certain forms of oppression stemming from globalisation and neoliberalism. This, in turn, will require innovative ways to couple political theory and philosophy with the more empirical realms of policy-making, legislation and social intervention. This must be unpacked in a future study.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, we hoped to clarify in normative terms one perplexity: the moral concerns arising from the increase of Latino votes for former President Trump, despite his incendiary xenophobic, anti-immigrant and racist discourse. In order to begin to understand the problem, we have proposed an oppression-driven framework. This model has prevented us from reducing the Latino diaspora to one single, purportedly homogeneous group identity encompassing all Latino immigrants in the US; an intersectional analysis of Latino group-identities shows that several identities intersect in their group.

Before jumping to the complementary thesis that President's Trump policies and the Latino diaspora vote are both a part of the same oppression-driven matrix, the second section has examined how the familiar justification of stringent immigration controls, typically grounded in terms of basic justice, applied to the claims of Latin voters. According to these arguments, hard immigration policy is justified to protect low-skilled Latinos against the harmful effects of low-skilled immigration. However, upon closer examination, these kinds of arguments are rather simplistic, because the empirical evidence is stated in absolute terms (as opposed to relativising the evidence against other relevant facts) in such a way that it makes it very easy to conflate cause and effect. A more complete analysis shows that immigration is harmful only under certain conditions akin to oppression, which confirmed the suspicion present in the first section. Crucially, if job markets for low-skilled workers really lived up to the standard of justice, this would not necessarily mean implementing stringent immigration controls but eliminating the incentive of internationalising job markets and increasing the incentives for native workers to take those jobs. Indeed, blaming low-skilled immigrants for lowering the wages is like blaming Black offenders for discrimination, or women for the actions of the rapist. It puts the burden of the blame on the victim while allowing the guilty parties to get away with exploitative extraction of profits. Consequently, we employ the analysis presented in the first section as a framework that allows the kind of complexity needed for the case at hand.

From the analysis of oppression-driven relations, we have argued that President Trump's use of xenophobic and racist speech in official capacity triggers moral concern because of how much it contributes to the stigmatisation of minoritised social groups. This is crucial because of the role that stigmatising discourse plays in the normalisation of social inequalities within the context of domination-driven relations between social groups. As social inequalities are the result of the different oppressive relationships and as stigmatisation plays a key role in reinforcing the segregation of minority groups, the public presidential discourse focused on inegalitarian stigmatisation against Latinos legitimates and reinforces the kind of segregation against Latinos (native and incoming) that has profoundly deleterious effects on distribution.

Finally, we have discussed whether something can be done. In particular, we entertained the possibility of employing certain forms of ethically oriented

transnationalism in order to make native Latinos more sensitive to the interests of would-be and newly arrived immigrants. But transnationalism by itself falls short. As the stigmatisation of minoritised social groups is pervasive and systematic in the US, transnationalism needs to be supplemented by a sort of multi-dimensional self-identification between several minoritised social groups, such as white working-class Americans, immigrants and native Latinos. Perhaps a united front is better prepared to face oppressive relations of the kind bolstered by Trump's narrative.

This conclusion does not seem to take us very far. After all, nothing said so far amounts to a categorical moral prohibition against the use of xenophobic discourse or against being seduced by it, regardless of the complexities of our identities. In this chapter, we have only documented and grounded our worries. This means that the hard work still lays ahead. However, it should be noted that there is a *prima facie* right to determine our political beliefs as one sees fit. This would seem to excuse Latino voters for believing that President Trump champions their interests in a legitimate way. However, as with any other right, rights over our beliefs have limits. And now that we have identified the Latino support for politicians espousing a stigmatising discourse as a legitimate source of moral concern, we open the door to the diaspora for adjudicating the responsibility for their political beliefs, as much as to any other minoritised social group vulnerable to fall for this discourse. But the proper examination of that possibility will be undertaken at another time.

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# 16

## THE UNRECOGNISED CONTRIBUTIONS OF H-1B AND H-4 IMMIGRANTS TO THE US ECONOMY: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY

*Annapurna Devi Pandey*

### **Introduction**

Many studies (Huntington, 1996; Mehta, 2019) have suggested that the contributions of non-Western people, mainly from Asia, Africa and Latin America, have created the excess wealth of the Western world, and that they mostly go unrecognised. Starting with the colonial period, Europe and America have been mining precious resources from the non-Western world and recruiting the highly skilled labour they need. Like Britain during the colonial and post-colonial periods, the US has benefited immensely from Indian immigrants. The first group of Indians arrived in the US as early as in the late nineteenth century and engaged in agricultural work. Still, the Asian Exclusion Act (1917) and the Immigration Act of 1924 banned most Asian groups from migrating to the US and enacted limited ‘national origin quotas’ against non-European migrants (Rumbaut, 1997). As a result, Indian immigrants did not become a significant presence in the US economy until after the US completely modified its immigration law and repealed the Asian Exclusion Act in 1965 (Melton, 1999). The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 allowed the US to tap into global labour pools to strengthen its economy in the 1960s and 1970s. It opened doors for Indian immigrants to take advantage of higher education, predominantly in science and technology, and employment opportunities in the US.

At present, there are over 4.5 million people of Indian origin in the US. The India-born population numbers about 3 million (US Census Bureau, 2018). Around three-quarters of India-born in the US arrived in the previous two decades. Only 13 percent of Indians in the US are born in the country. They have become the most prominent Asian immigrant group since 2014. Indian Americans are the most successful minority in the US: they have the highest per capita family income (\$123,700 dollars); the highest educational attainment; 61 percent home-ownership; and the lowest crime rate. The prosperous are economically successful and known as a model minority (Shankar, 2008; Chakravorty, Kapur and Singh, 2017).

Being highly educated and uniquely skilled, these Indian immigrants have contributed to the increasing intellectual, technological and financial resources in the US. Since the 1990s, there has been an unprecedented demand for highly skilled labour, and Indians have contributed significantly to the rising technology sector in America. This new group is distinctly defined by higher education, with advanced degrees in computer science, engineering and other technology disciplines – more so than any other international migrant streams at any other time (Kapur, 2018, p. 50). They constitute about 10 percent of the American high-tech labour force. They come on a special visa called skilled worker visas (H-1B), and their spouses migrate on dependent visas (H-4). From 2001 to 2015, Indians received the largest share (50.5 percent) of all H-1B visas for first-time employment, while the second-largest share went to the Chinese (9.7 percent) (Chakravorty, Kapur and Singh, 2018). The US immigration agency reports an estimated 583,420 H-1B authorised work permit holders in the US as of September 2019. Indian nationals have received about 70 percent of all the H-1B visas issued (Sangani, 2020). The most common recipients of H-1B visas are male high-tech workers. Their wives, the dependent H-4 visa holders, most of whom are also highly educated and were working as professionals before migration, came to this country as dependents and are not allowed to work. They thus become economically, socially and psychologically dependent on their husbands.

These new group of immigrants are truly transnationals. For many of the H-1B visa holders, the cognitive maps of their decision-making encompass both the country of origin and of destination, known as transnationalism. The term was coined in 1916, by a journalist arguing against the dominant

‘melting pot’ metaphor of assimilation (Bourne, 1916, pp. 86–97). The term transnationalism has served as a framework for understanding the ways in which immigrant communities, particularly in developed countries such as the US, maintain links with their places of origin (Schiller, Basch and Blanc-Szanton, 1992). Even though they come to work in the US, they remain connected to the people and places they left behind. In many cases, their companies in India sponsor them to work on H-1B or L-1 visa in a sister company in the US. Also, the H-1B immigrants consider themselves as emigrants with deep roots in India. They keep the connection intact through sending remittances to their families, taking care of parents’ healthcare needs and helping with the education of younger siblings back home. They are aware of the temporary nature of their work-based visas and hope to continue living in the US so that they can support their families back in India while at the same time building a better future for their children in the US. Transnationalism is distinctive for its critical mass of people regularly and routinely engaging in economic, political and communicative activities with the country of origin (Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt, 1999, p. 217). For the most recent immigrants, such as the Indian H-1B and H-4 visa holders, ties with their homeland have been facilitated by technological changes, such as the availability of WhatsApp, which has made communications almost costless.

In this chapter, I will explore the notion that, instead of escaping patriarchy by leaving India, their home country, these educated professional women in the migration process ironically find a new kind of patriarchy tied to the neoliberal economy by reinforcing their housewife identity due to their economic dependence on their husbands. Radhika observed that ‘women follow their husbands because the number of men following their wives is negligible. Despite our qualifications that make us eligible to work, we become dependent visa wives, by rule’ (2016). My interviews have revealed that H-4 dependents experienced a loss of dignity, self-identity and increased self-depreciation in migrating to the US. The dispirited lives of spouses on the H-4 visa have been widely reported in recent years (Ravindranath, 2017; Damani, 2019). The findings have highlighted the problems that these H-4 visa holders have endured after moving to the US: professional setbacks due to the loss of their careers back home, loss of mobility and identity and, above all, total economic

and social dependence on their spouses. These issues have been accentuated during a global pandemic and proven to be devastating.

### Theoretical Overview

This chapter deals with the harrowing experiences of international migrants, for example, H-4 visa holders as dependent spouses and children of H-1B visa holders. The Immigration Act of 1990 (IMMACT 1990) introduced the distinctive categories of non-immigrant H-1B and dependent H-4 visas accompanying H-1B visa holders every year. The most common recipients of H-1B visas are male high-tech workers. This work visa scheme introduced by the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) has created insecurities for dependent H-4 visa holders, the spouses coming from India, who are highly educated, professional women but are not allowed to work in the host country. They become economically, socially and psychologically dependent on their husbands. Sanjoy Chakravorty et al. (2017) have noted that the H-4 visa is dubbed the ‘depression visa’ and the ‘prisoner visa’.

The ethnographic account of immigrants treated as non-existing ‘Others’ critically analyses the friction in the imagery of Indian immigrants as a model minority. Women immigrants on H-4 visas are mistreated at the hands of the USCIS, and as dependents are subject to domestic abuse and domestic violence. They are the victims/survivors of domestic abuse and routinely silenced in the Indian community, so as not to disrupt the model minority image. H-4 dependents, predominantly women, are discriminated against by US government policies. They are also looked upon as mere dependent wives in the community, which fails them by imposing the patriarchal norm that men are breadwinners and hence have the power to hurt the welfare of the dispossessed women at the personal, familial and societal levels.

Sherry Ortner (2016) has discussed the reaction to this dark turn under the rubric of ‘anthropologies of the good’, referring to studies of morality and ethics. She has visualised new directions in the anthropology of critique, resistance and activism. My respondents are creating a new kind of hidden solidarity bridging the secure to the non-secure worlds of human existences. In this context, H-4 visa holders are developing a coalition and have formed visa holder network groups on Facebook and other social media platforms, in order to support and organise. In this study, I refrain from

treating these women as victims of patriarchal values created by the US visa system. Instead, they become stakeholders who take advantage of the situation and create opportunities for themselves and their families. Based on the documented women's narratives, their life histories and life experiences, this chapter highlights the emergence of humanitarian solidarities (both actual and virtual) in the face of government-imposed restrictions on their mobility. These women simply cannot be dismissed as unwanted and vulnerable people and threat to the nation-state but are contributing significantly to the US economy.

### **Methodology**

Since May 2019, I interviewed thirty-five H-1B, H-4 and H-4 EAD visa holders scattered all over the US; they shared their life experiences on zoom calls. Furthermore, I collected about forty life experience accounts of dependent visa holders in the US, through open-ended questionnaires. I have used their responses as examples and personal quotes. In this chapter, I will analyse these personal narratives documenting their precarious situation. I also extensively interviewed about a dozen leaders of various activist groups of H-4, H-4 EAD and H-1B visa holders and leaders of South Asian organisations fighting domestic abuse and violence against women, immigration attorneys and the victims of domestic violence. They are my key informants.

This study uses qualitative methods based on both primary and secondary sources of information. The primary data collection involved the following methods:

- 1) Forty Structured and some additional unstructured interviews with key respondents – namely, H-1B, H-4 and H-4 EAD visa holders.
- 2) Thirty-five histories/narratives of H-1B, H-4 and H-4 EAD visa holders (male and female) who have compelling stories to tell.
- 3) Ten WhatsApp focus group discussions of H-4 EAD and H-1B visa holders, with the aim to understand specific issues and to obtain views from these workers and their communities.
- 4) Secondary data collection included research publications, policy documents and conceptual analysis.

The informants agreed to use their cases to substantiate my research arguments. In many cases, I have not used their real names but anonymised them. In the empirical analysis, I have used their voices to express their vulnerability, loss of identity and exclusion.

### **Review of the Literature**

Neoliberal globalisation is still fraught with the effects of coloniality in its construction of gender. It has produced new masculinised elites in global power centres (Connell, 2016) and has re-constituted, rather than abolished, the coloniality of gender, new forms of their dependency and marginalisation. The visa regime is embedded in the new coloniality of gender that controls the racialised masculinities of a technocratic labour force and their families entering the capitalist project of gendered global mobility (Banerjee, 2012). Most of the H-4 spouses are highly educated professionals from India. David J. Bier (2020) has stated that nearly 90 percent of H-4 visa holders are women from India with professional degrees and extremely well-paying jobs. They are dubbed ‘engineer brides’ whose educational credentials make them desirable in India’s marriage market. They come to the US on the H-4 family reunification visa to join their H-1B spouses.

Divya Ravindranath (2017, p. 217) has observed that the ‘H-4 visa affects women’s confidence and self-worth, constrains them financially, disables them in social settings, and provides no opportunities to build economic or human capital and skillsets’. Maneesha Kelkar (2012) has analysed the challenges faced by South Asian women immigrants, comprising women from Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, as dependents or derivatives of men. She has critiqued US immigration policies and practices, which have not prevented violence against these women as non-citizens.

Sabrina Balgamwalla (2014) has examined the various ways in which US immigration regulations perpetuate the disparate treatment of dependent H-4 visa holders: ‘The dependent spouse visa category imposes restrictions on the ability of these women to control their immigration status, work outside the home, obtain a divorce’ (Balgamwalla, 2014, p. 25). Despite increasing evidence of their suffering as social, economic, emotional and legal dependents, there has been no change in the US regulations for H-4 visa holders. Panvi Mittal (2018) has remarked that H-4 dependent status ‘changed under the Obama

administration in May 2015, when H-4 visa holders became eligible for an EAD, or employment authorisation, after their spouse's petition for permanent residence or green card had been approved'.

## Results

### *Work Authorisation for H-4 Visa Holders Known as EAD in Danger*

In May 2015, the Obama administration responded to various organised online activism concerning legal dependence, supported by sympathetic political leaders. It introduced a law allowing employment authorisation for certain H-4 dependent spouses of H-1B non-immigrant visa holders who have already filed for permanent residency. H-4 visa holders without permanent residency approval remained stranded. Since then, more than 100,000 dependent spouses have acquired work authorisation, with 93 percent being women.

In 2017, the Trump administration announced its intent to implement the Buy American and Hire American Executive Order.<sup>1</sup> This order created fear that the employment authorisation for H-4 visa holders would be revoked. My interviews indicated that these visa holders were constantly afraid that the Department of Homeland Security would rescind this programme. Even after having obtained work authorisation, these H-4 EAD holders felt unwelcome. President Trump's threat to ban H-4 EAD made these women realise that, even though they might have paid great sums of money to receive a US degree and even though were contributing to the US economy, they were not treated equally. In this capitalist society, they feel vulnerable and easily expendable. Twenty-eight-year-old Midori Sridharan\*,<sup>2</sup> born in Chennai, India, held a bachelor's degree in science. In December 2012, she married in India and received an H-4 visa to join her H-1-B visa holder husband in California. Midori then earned her master's degree in the US and obtained H-4 EAD status in 2015. Now she works at Abbot as a statistical analyst. With the H-4 EAD, Midori explained, 'I became more independent'. When

<sup>1</sup> On 18 April 2017, President Trump signed the Buy American and Hire American Executive Order, which sought to create higher wages and employment rates for US workers and to protect their economic interests by rigorously enforcing and administering US immigration laws against skill-based immigrants – namely, H-1B and H-4 visa holders.

<sup>2</sup> Names with an asterisk have been changed to protect the identity of the individuals.

asked about President Trump's recent threat to ban the H-4 EAD, she stated that the government should recognise the positive impact many immigrants with the H-4 visa have on American society through their specialised qualifications: 'They should recognize people like me [...] should not revoke H-4 EAD policy'.

#### *Various Constraints Faced by H-4 Visa Holders*

Several of my informants were concerned that, with the H-4 EAD, their dependent status still lingered. The patriarchal gender norm, man as the provider and woman as the reproducer, which US culture has long discarded, thus still prevails. Since the H-4 EAD visa depends on a spousal H-1B visa, many aim to switch their visa status. Sabita Panda\*, a bubbly thirty-one-year-old living in a prestigious university town in Michigan, had a flourishing corporate career in Kolkata, then came to the US on an H-4 visa in 2018. After her wedding in 2017, she had struggled to live away from her husband for a year. Finally, she resigned from her position and joined her husband: 'I was earning money and had an independent life. [But] I had to leave my job because how long could we stay separate?' First, she lost her earnings: 'Earning is not about money but having an identity. After one year of staying at home, I was feeling deficient. You can do nothing but sit at home. I had set my mind that I am not going to depend on anybody'.

In 2019, Panda received her H-4 EAD. Still, she felt like a lesser being since her visa depended on her spouse's H-1B validity. Sabita's company had sponsored her for an H-1B visa. 'There were 190,000 applications in 2019–20. The lottery quota was 65,000, and unfortunately, I was not one of them. I will try again next year'. The H-1B visa is a lottery selection. For Sabita, the COVID-19 pandemic was challenging: 'The people on contract have had to take a pay cut. Many have been fired from their jobs as well. Projects were going on hold'. She was worried that she may lose her job – and with it, her financial independence. In many cases, the lottery system causes competent people to pack their bags and leave the country.

These H-4 EAD visa holders are highly skilled professionals, making vital contributions to the success of US technology companies. However, they face numerous bureaucratic constraints to keep their jobs. Anisha Pani\* from Connecticut shared the critical challenges as an EAD visa holder in this

country: its renewal and its uncertainty. Since the year prior to our interview, the USCIS had taken an unusually long time to renew EADs. As result, several people lost their jobs. Even though most of the H-4 holders are women, there are also male spouses who benefit from the programme and suffer from the same vulnerability.

Sibal, who has been in this country since 2007, narrated his horrendous experience with employment on the H-4 EAD visa. The EAD requires renewal either every one or every three years, depending on the validity of the accompanying H-1B visa. His EAD was up for renewal, and he had applied for it six months before it expired. He could not obtain the visa on time as he had to wait for biometric clearance. The application support centres in charge of biometrics were closed during the pandemic, as of 18 March 2020. These centres, which are independent contractors, and have re-opened on 13 July 2021, but were not fully functioning. What, then, would happen to people waiting for their EAD renewal in the interim? Sibal said: ‘Unless I get the work extension, I will lose my job’. Without a job, the mental agony would be immeasurable.

Neha Mahajan, working as a radio host in New Jersey, had been on an H-4 EAD visa since 2015. She shared her greatest fear: ‘... because of renewal delays, we might lose work authorisation. USCIS is taking anywhere between a couple of months to a year to renew H-4 EAD’. Following the inauguration of the Biden administration in January 2021, the USCIS publicised that it would clear the backlog and expedite H-4 EAD visas without much delay.

The Trump administration, in contrast, had painted a negative image of H-4 EAD visa holders, looking upon them as job-snatchers and accusing them of stealing jobs from US citizens. Neha Vyas, on H-4 EAD, from Virginia, shared that, in 2017, after multiple interviews, she finally landed a job as architect. Neha’s employers have been very impressed with her performance. Neha shared that ‘they had received 300 applications and had no luck to find someone, because it is such a specialised job and requires so much more than a simple architecture degree’. Because of her sterling performance and specialised skill, her company sponsored her H-1B status for the subsequent three years, but she had no luck in the lottery system. In many cases, US citizens are not qualified to perform the jobs that these professionals have taken on. Hence, they receive the visa, but feel insulted for being looked upon as ‘stealing jobs’.

The opposition to highly skilled foreign workers is quite strong among advocates of reduced immigration who claim that changes are necessary to protect US workers. This new development will make the lives of H-1B and H-4 EAD visa workers more precarious and uncertain. In support of H-4 EAD and H-1B visa holders, Netra Chavan, an immigration counsellor from the San Francisco Bay Area, observed that ‘the US invited them as guest workers and approved their I-140, and now they are stuck because of the green card backlog’. The companies who sponsor them recognise that what these employees offer is no longer merely skilled labour, but an advanced level of experience accumulated by staying with the same company in the long term. The companies need them, and clearly they are not replacing the jobs of US citizens.

Another major challenge with H-1B and H-4 visas has to do with H-4 children. Once children turn twenty-one, they age out of the H-4 status. They no longer qualify to be H-4 dependents and legally become foreigners in the only country they know as their own.

The news that the Trump administration would restrict H-1B work visas through the end of 2021 hit tech workers from India the hardest. Many H-1B and H-4 visa holders travelled to India for family emergencies and were stuck there, for several reasons. First, the US embassies were closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and could no longer provide the stamps required for re-entering the US. Second, the White House effectively suspended travel from India on 30 April 2021, which had a devastating impact on the mobility of H-4 and H-1-B visa holders. Among them was great concern that jobs would disappear and that they would be separated from their children.

Subsequently, businesses and industry groups shared their concerns, highlighting the importance of this highly skilled workforce for the US economy. Many technology companies, including Apple, Google, Microsoft, Amazon, Zoom and Oracle, have supported H-1-B and H-4 EAD visa holders for their own profit. America’s foreign-born workforce, so the Information Technology Industry Council has written, ‘is enabling many Americans to continue to work remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic, and is playing an essential role [...] keeping businesses running securely and people connected’.

The only way in which H-4 EAD visa holders dependent on H-1B visas can remain in this country is to be sponsored by a company. Once that company

terminates their job, they must find another position within sixty days so as to remain in the US. The 40 million people in the US who lost their jobs were to claim these new job openings, and H-4 EAD visa holders should be the last to be hired. This approach makes H-4 EAD visa holders feel inferior and humiliated, reminding them of the indentured servitude that existed during the colonial period.

### *Visa Non-renewals and Job Loss*

How were they adjusting to the new socio-cultural environment? Especially with the pandemic, there were long delays in renewing H-4 and H-4 EAD visas, causing great stress for vulnerable groups of women on dependent visas. Medha\* Gupta, a stellar professional who had received accolades from her company, was afraid of losing her job because of the delay in biometrics. She had come to the US from Mumbai, India, and had lived in North Carolina for nine years as an H-4 dependent spouse. Medha had received her EAD nearly five years ago, right after the Obama administration approved it in 2015. Now, she is a software analyst at a large, well-known healthcare company and was an integral part of the company's COVID-19 project. Medha applied for her H-4 and EAD renewal in March 2020. Her receipt date was 22 March 2020, but as of the date of the interview she had not yet received her biometric appointment.

Medha called the USCIS office several times but there was no definitive response. With her H-4 visa expiring in the first week of January, she needed to have it renewed before December to keep her job. At that point, she did not believe that this would happen because the delay in processing was so long and she was not close to finishing it. 'Once I get my biometric done, I have to get my H-4, and then after H-4 will go for renewal, EAD will be processed', she said. 'So, it will take time based on the H-4 approval. There is a 90 percent chance that I'll lose my job in December'.

Even with all her achievements at work, Medha was sure that, 'as soon as my manager will get to know I have a problem with my visa, they will have my replacement. I will be losing my job'. As a critical resource in her company, she had in-depth knowledge about their COVID-19 operation. She helped her company make enormous profits, and she helped people across the nation by working on a home-based testing kit; however, Medha's

expertise was inconsequential in the eyes of the law. ‘I don’t feel valued. We are not getting anything back from this country’, Medha said. After living in the US for nearly a decade and raising her daughter, Medha now had to prepare herself and her family to go back to India, if things were not to work out. At the time of the interview, her future was uncertain.

Mandal\* Verma, another H-4 visa holder, was greatly affected by the pandemic and the biometrics requirement. Since he had not been able to complete his biometrics requirement, the USCIS did not renew his EAD. Now he was without a job, simply because of factors outside of his control. He said: ‘I have two job offers in my hand, I cannot join them’. He was afraid that ‘the people who are waiting for their biometrics get pushed back, and back, and back. There is no first in, first out anymore’. Mandal has a master’s degree in plastics engineering and had worked for more than fifteen years in mega-corporations, such as PricewaterhouseCoopers and a robotics company, and he owned a patent. Despite these qualifications, he was still unemployed because of a delayed biometrics appointment. He found the situation ironic. ‘Unless you have an H-4 EAD card, which is like the driver’s license, in your hand, your employer will not authorise you to work’, Mandal said.

Sarvari\* Jampanam had moved from Hyderabad to the US in 2012, on an H-4 visa. She had left behind in India a prestigious position as a stock exchange adviser for Factset, an American financial analysis company. With her expertise and experience, she had hoped that it would not be difficult for her to find employment and acquire an H-1B visa. In 2013, she did indeed find a job, but when her company applied for her H-1B visa, she found a lottery system in place, due to the excessive demand. Her company sponsored her H-1B visa for three years, but the lottery failed her. Thus, in 2015, she switched to an H-4 EAD to work in the US without any restrictions.

Sarvari’s H-4 visa expired on 11 June 2020. She had applied for visa renewal on 18 March, and her receipt date from the USCIS showed as 26 March. This date happened to coincide with the beginning of the pandemic when all Application Support Centres (ASC) were closed down. She called the USCIS office to expedite her case, pleading: ‘I was under financial strain. I had to pay my home loan, and [I] have no medical insurance. But they just denied it’. Without the H-4 visa renewal, her employment ended on 11 June. Her company put her on administrative leave without salary until 11 September. She was

not very hopeful that she would have her biometrics appointment before the end of the extended break. ‘Since February 2020, people who applied for visa renewal are still waiting’, Sarvari said. ‘I have a kid who has medical conditions. The insurance is so expensive that I can’t afford it’. She was also aware that ‘it’s hard to get another job. In this pandemic situation, with the layoffs, all the people on furloughs and the retail industry are down. I am losing my job because of the visa’ (personal communication, 7 December 2021).

#### Pandemic: Long Wait Times and Still No Result

The pandemic had been very stressful for Sarvari. Without a definite date for her H-4 renewal, the uncertainty was taking a toll on her. ‘Every day is a waiting game. Just keep waiting and waiting and waiting. And every day, I check my UPS and try to see if I have my biometrics appointment’, she said. Her vulnerability reminded her of how she felt when she came to this country on an H-4 visa in 2012 and was not allowed to work. The economic dependency was the most humiliating aspect for her. ‘When you’re an independent woman before marriage, and then you come here, even for small things, you get dependent on someone’, Sarvari said.

Many applicants were unable to renew their H-4 EAD visas because of the closing of government offices. Ananya Hariharan applied for her visa renewal in November, nearly ten months before her interview with me. Still not having received a decision, she felt helpless and had no choice but to accept that she may never receive it. ‘I lost hope of getting it by next month. For sure, I won’t be getting it because I have people around me waiting since February, March, April. And I am last in that order. So, I’m not getting it’, she said.

#### Wrongful Action and Misinformation by the USCIS

The USCIS has made mistakes with biometrics appointments, and as a result many H-4 visa holders have lost their jobs. Mandal confirmed that the USCIS did not even acknowledge these common errors. Sriman\* Varma and his wife worked in this country on H-4 EAD and H-1B visas, respectively. Sriman’s H-4 visa was not renewed for months, even though he called USCIS three times to expedite his request. When his EAD card finally came, it had the wrong date printed on it – his EAD was to renew fourteen days after it had expired, meaning that he did not have employment authorisation for two weeks. Without an

EAD, he was not an illegal immigrant (because he still had his H-4 status), but this did mean that he was no longer eligible to work in the US. He had to leave his employment for this reason.

There emerged many other instances of misinformation by the USCIS. For example, on a WhatsApp group, Vimala shared that, ‘when I called USCIS, they said that they received fingerprints from ASC, but I never gave it in the US other than the port of entry in November 2019. However, the status of the case remains as “case received”’.

### Strict Rules at USCIS Prevent Change

The USCIS has very strict regulations about performing the biometrics capture only at certified ASCs within the US. These rigid laws and complicated bureaucratic procedures make it difficult for H-4 visa holders to complete the process without complications. In one instance, the H-4 visa of Ananya Hariharan, employed by a software company in Phoenix, along with her spouse’s H-1B visa, was valid until September 2020. They applied for a visa extension at the end of May, and the receipt date appeared as 8 June. However, all ASCs were closed until 20 July. Their friends’ appointments scheduled in March 2020 were cancelled; hence, they were waiting. Ananya was concerned that her chances of visa renewal were very slim.

Ananya had come to the US in 2011. For five years, she had been a housewife because of her inability to work on the H-4 visa. In 2015, with the introduction of the H-4 EAD, she had finally been able to go on the job market. However, with the non-renewal of H-4 EAD visas, she was dreading loss of employment. The loss of her driver’s license would also take away her mobility. In addition to experiencing financial hardship, she would also lose the privileges of completing her master’s degree in computer science and being sponsored by her company. At the time of the interview, she was required to repeat the renewal process, since her previous H-4 EAD visa had been valid for only one year: ‘We spend almost ten months for H-4 EAD renewal and then again, we must apply for renewal. So, all the time is spent in applying and reapplying for visa renewal’.

The USCIS would not use her recent biometric data to speed up the process. Ananya shared: ‘I had done my biometrics in India in July 2019 for my visa stamping. But USCIS does not accept it’. The H-4 visa renewal form states

that the biometrics must be captured at an ASC within the US. Mandal was dealing with similar problems and said: 'I am a frequent traveller. I travel outside the US three to five times a year. Every time I travel outside the country, I provide biometrics, with my photo at the port of entry as a requirement. But UCSCIS does not accept it as proof'. Given the current situation, he was afraid that he would not complete his visa process for several months.

The USCIS is not willing to be flexible when it comes to biometrics requirements; this was so even during the pandemic, when the renewal process had become very lengthy and severely affected the careers of H-4 visa holders. Sarvari confirmed that she would not work or go back to her office without the physical biometric ID card. 'They can't hire me on the approval or anything. They need the card for me to join back', she said.

### Insurmountable Problems

Sumana Leelaraman, from Chennai, had been in the US since 2015. She lived in Chandelier, Arizona. Her H-4 EAD was expiring on 21 September 2020; therefore, her company, Wells Fargo, asked her to have it renewed so as to not lose her position. In June 2020, she and her husband applied for a visa renewal at the California USCIS Centre, known for taking the longest time. Her husband could use this centre on a premium basis to speed up the process, but she was not eligible for such preferential treatment. Because H-1B and H-4 visas were now processed in different tracks, and not together for family members (as had been done before), the H-4 and H-4 EAD renewal faced a considerable delay. Sumana's husband's H-1B visa renewal was approved by 1 July (they had submitted it in June), but now hers was being pushed back. She had not received her biometrics appointment letter; only after completion of her appointment would the USCIS process her H-4 and then EAD.

Sumana had not even received her biometrics appointment yet. Her family's health insurance was her responsibility, as her husband was employed on a contract-basis. She needed her request for H-4 EAD renewal approved before 21 September 2021, or she would lose her job at Wells Fargo. The USCIS does not support any applicants until they get past the biometrics. She was convinced that, in September 2021, she would lose her job and her health insurance. At the time of writing, the USCIS was still processing applications from

August 2019. Sumana's chances were very slim. Also, many of her friends reported that, even if they received their H-4 EAD visa renewal, there currently were no printed EAD cards issued.

The members of several H-4 visa holder activist groups, such as 'H-4 and H-1B Visa Holders' and 'Skilled Immigrants in America', opened a court case in order to save their jobs. They each had to pay legal fees of at least \$3,000 to \$4,000; had they fought individually, they would have had to pay \$25,000. This was an expensive affair, but they were willing to fight for their right to stay in the US. H-4 visa holders have come to this country legally, pay taxes and earned their rights to work and to live with dignity and self-respect. They have made significant contributions to creating wealth for this country and demand better treatment from the USCIS.

Aruna, a thirty-seven-year-old woman from Kerala, had earned B.Tech. and had been working in India as an IT professional. Through an arranged marriage, she had come to the US in 2009. Her H-4 visa status would not allow her to work in the country, therefore, she was taking care of their household and their children. Her challenge was her ineligibility to work in the US. Since it was difficult to obtain a work permit or green card, she wanted to return to India and resume her career there. When asked whether she had a support base in this country, she quickly answered that the friends she had made here and the temple – a place of worship that reminded her of back home – constituted her support. Even though for her it had been worth coming to the US, it was her economic independence that she missed the most.

### Visa Maladies

Chaithra, born in Mysore, had come to the Bay Area with her husband in 2017. At that time, she received an L-2 visa. The L-2 visa, like the H-4, is intended for the spouse of an L-1 (identical to an H-1B) visa holder. She had transferred her job from India to its branch in the US. Describing how US culture is much more individualistic and not family-oriented, Chaithra reminisced how people connected more often and got to know each other better in India: 'But in the US it's not the same. It's like you are on your own; you can do whatever you want. It's good in a way; it's bad in a way, but you're independent'. Since she had held a job in India, it had been a smooth transfer, 'exactly because I had an experience of five years in India'. Her husband could not switch companies

because of her. ‘If he changes jobs, I will move to H-4 Visa – and would not be able to work’. Chaithra stated that she and her husband ‘want to learn new things which we can implement in India’. When asked if she planned to return to India, Chaithra stated: ‘Yeah, for sure we will go back’.

### *Domestic Violence and H-4 Visa Holder Women*

In the US, 85 percent of all violent crimes experienced by women are cases of intimate partner violence, compared to 3 percent of violent crimes experienced by men. H-4 visa-related abuse may not be gender-specific. Men who are dependent on their spouse’s visa also face abuse. Advocacy groups report that the same kind of power and control manipulate dependent relationships. Yet, 93 percent of H-4 visa holders are women, and their incidence of abuse is significantly higher than in men. Several South Asian advocacy organisations report that 70 to 80 percent of cases occur in non-immigrant H-4 women. At the Family Violence Prevention Services in Texas, Marta Prada Pelaez observed that ‘a victim who comes to their shelter is on average a thirty-six-year-old woman with children in the age range of eight, four and a baby in diapers’. She defined domestic violence as ‘coercive control – the many ways an abuser might dominate and control every aspect of a victim’s life without ever putting a hand on her’.

The US visa policy shapes family structures and familial relationships for high-tech workers by reinforcing a patriarchal family with the man as the breadwinner and the woman as the homemaker. Sanjoy Chakravorty et al. (2018) have observed that, ‘instead of escaping patriarchy by leaving (India), they find it reinforced (in the US) since they are completely dependent on their husbands’. The US has benefitted from these high-tech workers at the cost of their wives’ well-being. Considering the marginal status of these women, Divya Ravindranath has observed that ‘H-4 visa affects women’s confidence and the idea of self-worth, constrains them financially, disables them in social settings, and provides no opportunities to build economic or human capital and skillsets’ (Ravindranath, 2017, p. 217). Amy Bhatt (2018) has argued that the stigma, isolation and loneliness experienced by H-4 visa holders breed marital tension. The H-4 visa promotes a terrible sense of inequity, disenfranchising women and depriving them of work, of any educational and health benefits.

### H-4 Visa Holders and Domestic Violence Laws

US immigration policy plays a critical role in the perpetuation of domestic violence among H-4 visa holders. The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) in 1994 introduced necessary legal provisions benefiting abused immigrants whose spouses are permanent residents and citizens. It applies to abused spouses, their parents and adult children, creating a process whereby non-immigrant women can self-petition for immigrant status and seek protection from their abuser as well as from deportation. Sadly, H-4 visa holders do not benefit from these provisions. The restrictions of the H-4 visa can lead to even more severe legal problems for some women, particularly when they report domestic violence. If they leave their husbands, they lose their visa status and are subject to deportation.

The Battered Immigrant Women Protection Act of 2000 (VAWA 2000) created a 'U' visa meant for non-citizen victims of violent crime. When H-4 visa holders experience domestic violence, they can convert to a 'U' visa, which provides lawful status to non-citizen victims of crime who assist the authorities in investigating or prosecuting crimes committed against them. There is a catch: the victim requires certification from a law enforcement agency about the victim's moral character and proof of substantial physical or mental abuse by the spouse. The victim must assist the police in pursuing the perpetrator's crime. Since the abusers face prosecution, they oftentimes threaten their victims or play tricks in an attempt to extricate themselves from any legal entanglement. This process is arduous, and very few victims take this route. Lack of financial independence and the absence of a familial support system make it harder for these Indian women to pursue any legal help.

At Chetna, a Texas-based advocacy organisation for victims of domestic violence in Dallas, Sushma narrated the arduous process of getting legal help for Rashmi\*, a thirty-year-old H-4 visa holder who had come to their organisation with her eight-year-old daughter. One night, her abusive husband had broken Rashmi's arm, and she had called the police. Her husband accused her of not being a good mother. She went to court and was fortunate to encounter an empathetic female judge. In a male-dominated legal system, especially in Texas, alimony is not offered to the spouse, unless there exist particular circumstances. At the final hearing, the judge granted her financial support from her husband, but he vanished without a forwarding address.

Rashmi could not pay rent, nor did she have any other financial resources. The local police and the court were of no assistance in issuing a certificate proving her abuse so that she could receive a 'U' visa. Sushma took Rashmi to the state's Congress member to ask for a support letter to USCIS on her behalf. This letter should have stated that Rashmi had suffered abuse at the hands of her partner and that she should be granted an H-4 EAD and, ultimately, a 'U' visa. Sushma recalled: 'He just talked but did not write the letter'. Then, she went to the police and the courthouse to petition for a 'U' visa as a last resort: 'Nobody wants to do anything. Only talk'. Chetna provided Rashmi with legal and financial support for a short period of time. Unfortunately, despite the community support, she could not acquire the visa and ultimately was deported to India. Even with some legal provisions available for these women, it is, in fact, very challenging to receive legal relief.

#### *Actions by H-1B and H-4 Workers*

Under these circumstances, H-4 visa holder women have developed coalitions in the form of visa holder network groups on Facebook, Whatsapp, Slack and other social media, for support and organising. Women have become victims of patriarchal values created by the US visa system, but they protest through social media groups on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. They have become active players and create various opportunities for themselves, while challenging the US legal system.

Members have posted job listings and also combined questions and advice, as shown in a post by Abhishek Gupta: 'Does anyone have any employer centric template for a request letter for expediting pending H-4 EAD application? Also, does anyone have any experience if this has worked/not worked in their case?' Questions range from very specific to more general. For instance, Abir Choubey posted: 'My wife is coming to the US on an H-4 dependent visa. Please suggest the best health insurance for my spouse if I don't want to add her to my employer's insurance'.

Blogs and Facebook groups concerning policy and questions about jobs and the visa process serve as a place for members to express their frustrations regarding the US government's treatment of those residing in the country on the H-4/H-1B visa and to facilitate mutual help. In one Facebook group, suggestively titled 'H-4 visa, a curse', Anjali Vikrant K commented that 'we simply

earn each penny after work, no free rides; still this trauma is just for us; we pay taxes; huge application fees'. Many group members referenced the current policies banning individuals with an H-4 visa from acquiring an employment authorisation document (EAD). Regarding this, Sailaja Kallur commented: 'The feeling of despair and stress is unreal. H-4 EAD changed our lives since 2016 . . . just when we started to build ourselves back up slowly . . . this happened. If only getting an H-1B visa sponsored was not a nightmare, we would never depend on H-4 EAD. It's unbelievable' (personal communication, 18 November 2021). Many members respond to the questions posted, offering support. Rajni Shroff replied to a question about the EAD processing time: 'My friend applied EAD on March 18th, and she did not get EAD yet, just to give u an idea'. Communications such as these are standard fare in H-1B/H-4 EAD Facebook groups.

'H-1B & H-4 Visa / EAD Holders' Facebook group and similar groups are used to communicate new visa policy updates, create space for questions about living in the US with the H-1B/H-4 visa and voice frustrations regarding the challenges of living with said visas. The Facebook group 'H-1B & H-4 Visa / EAD Holders' comprises 2,200 members posing questions, article links and testimonials. Other Facebook groups have as many as several 10,000 members – many of which are private. Thereby, H-1B and H-4 visa holders are creating support groups of people just like them, and these groups act as surrogate families where they freely discuss their problems and are supported by various members to find solutions to these issues.

## **Conclusion**

Based on my in-depth interviews, I have observed that – except for a handful – most of these professional women, especially those with EAD status, want to continue to work in the US and fight against the present visa system. Several Facebook groups have emerged for networking among H-4 and H-1B Visa Holders. They have filed petitions with local congressmen, hoping to extend their EAD and expedite their H-1B visas. Now that four members of congress are of Indian origin, with three in very visible and powerful committees, they are building a coalition to represent these women at the highest level.

The Indian embassy in Washington DC and the Indian consulates routinely receive calls from the community on domestic violence. During the

pandemic, the highest number of calls to the consulate in Houston was due to domestic violence in the H-4 and H-4 EAD visa holder categories. Various Indian organisations working for women's equal rights, safety and protection, especially for those of women suffering from domestic abuse and domestic violence, reach out to the embassy. But as of yet there exist hardly any provisions for better treatment of the accompanying spouses.

### **Postscript**

Donald Trump lost the 2020 elections, and Joe Biden became the forty-sixth president of the United States on 20 January 2021. The new president has undone some of Trump's executive orders – namely, the cancellation of the H-4 work authorisation (EADs). On Tuesday, 26 January 2021, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) withdrew its proposal to rescind H-4 work authorisations (EADs), signalling the Biden-Harris administration's commitment to supporting the about 100,000 H-4 EAD immigrant workers, the vast majority of them women, who now kept their eligibility to work. They played an essential role as the US continued to battle COVID-19.

On 22 April 2020, Trump had suspended the entry of H-1B workers, which caused unimaginable damage. Families were separated when one parent went to India for personal, family, or work reason and remained trapped there. Many lost their 2020 diversity visas and the path to realising their American dream. The visa suspension also harmed the US industries that utilise talent from India. On 24 February 2021, President Biden revoked Trump's order and reinstated the possibility for migrants and immigrants coming to this country for work. Despite this positive development, many women who had adversely impacted by significant delays in processing H-4 work authorisation documents continued to suffer.

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# CONCLUSION

## AN EVERLASTING ENDOWMENT: INSIGHTS FROM A MULTI-DIMENSIONAL ANALYSIS OF MIGRATION AND DIASPORA IN THE US

*Amba Pande and Camelia Tigau*

This volume has brought to the fore various diaspora groups' contributions to the success of the US as a world power, underlining the diasporas' role in the country's hard and soft power. Immigration has given the US a rare quality of continued revitalisation and dynamism. The immigrants have made it big for themselves and their families, while simultaneously becoming the backbone of America's rise as a great power. The discussions in this volume also highlight the transnational existence of the diasporas, by highlighting how they have continued to network with their home countries and their co-nationals, co-ethnics, co-religionists and fellow native-language speakers around the world. It is thus interesting to see how the US has turned from the metaphorical melting pot into a salad bowl.

As the organisers and editors of this volume, we have learned that this discourse validates some of the fundamental theoretical concepts on which diasporas, host lands, homeland and transnationalism are grounded (Clifford, 1994; Panibratov and Rysakova, 2020; Pande, 2017; Minasyan and Vardanyan, 2010; Kane, 2011). Therefore, we try to underline some empirically tested theories that this volume foregrounds.

The growth of alternative histories and anthropologies by various communities and nations has opened a hidden treasure which brings richness and strengthens national narratives and consciousness. These trends can truly and effectively be seen in the US, where various communities have come together to build status and power. Such diverse histories add to the abundance and vibrancy of the US as a pre-eminent global power, rather than diffusing it. The critical insights of alternative perspectives do not decentre or recast the US American significance as a nation.

Another related aspect, which emerges prominently, is the transnationalisation and diasporic spaces in the social, political and economic realms. The ease and confidence with which diasporas have connected with their homelands, contributing significantly to their growth, and the way in which they maintained their cultural connections is remarkably prominent in all cases discussed in this volume. Their connectivity with their homeland has supported their loyalty towards the US rather than undermined it. This discussion is significant for understanding how national loyalties have become more inclusive and diverse. It acknowledges the diasporic loyalties towards both home and host land. The transnational belonging of diasporas has made them part of the global system between and beyond the jurisdictional sovereign boundaries of nation-states and international relations. The transnationalisation of communities is maintained through a complex mesh of social networks between sending and receiving areas. The immigrants preserve the characteristics of their culture by maintaining transnational contacts through the use of digital media, while adopting the host society's culture. In this process, fluid identities are constructed by developing transnational consciousness and institutions, thereby creating multi-cultural societies. Such multi-layered transnational connections and social networks are only possible in the post-globalisation era.

Another aspect that comes out clearly in this discussion is the diversity within the diasporas originating from the same country. By contextualising and historicising various diasporic groups – old and new – we realise that diasporas are not homogeneous. Some have been citizens for generations, while others have acquired their citizenship only in the past decade, and some are non-citizens. They also differ in terms of skill, economic class, political leanings and other variables. Various points of divergence and segregation exist among these diverse communities. We often see old diasporas opposing the

entry of new immigrants. It is essential to have a more nuanced understanding and to recognise the diversity among the diaspora groups as well as the strategies which they adopt to integrate and connect with various groups to advance their interests. Often, diasporas are perceived as homogeneous units and become stereotyped.

\* \* \*

This book has studied migration to and diasporas in the US as a complex phenomenon. We explore these through five dimensions of analysis that cross all the included chapters.

- a) Historical waves of migration, conflicts of identity and discrimination;
- b) Integration policies and diaspora organisation;
- c) Correlations between transnationalism and nativism;
- d) Contributions of migrants and talent gain;
- e) Forms of transnationalism.

The **(a) historical dimension** begins by recalling the generally welcoming atmosphere towards migrants in the US before the nineteenth century, explained by their relatively few numbers when taken by country cohorts, by their clearly visible contributions and by the skills which they brought to the country. Their enthusiasm for personal achievement meant hard work and the enhancement of physical and professional skills, visible in their economic outcomes and the structure of families where all members, including women and sometimes even children worked. The fact that diasporas came from so far away – from continents such as Europe, Asia and Africa – and were characterised by geographic dispersion as opposed to proximity speaks to their desire to integrate into the US rather than return to their countries.

We have also highlighted the way in which certain minorities, such as the Jews, Italians and Asians, have come to be appreciated and favourably looked upon due to their contributions, while others, such as Latin Americans or Muslims, have become a source of collective fear. Becoming a model minority means gaining a position of privilege that favours professional integration and, therefore, enhancing the possible outcomes of a population's skills. On the

contrary, the burden of discrimination implies de-skilling, further reproducing the vicious correlation between lower jobs and more prominent negative stereotypes. This situation is further amplified by intersectional conditions of vulnerability, such as gender, social class and, of course, visible contrasts to the Anglo-Saxon phenotype, such as skin colour. In this way, even though migrants and diasporas strongly desire to integrate, this illusion of integration is not always favourably received by pre-existing diaspora communities and native populations. Discrimination and prejudice are present, despite the diaspora's will to integrate.

According to our findings, de-skilling is not always the result of purely economic conditions of job availability and compatibility, but a situation that is politically created in atmospheres of hate or distrust. For instance, Chapter 2 has shown that the relatively rapid incorporation of American Jews may be due to their human capital and cultural resources, generating a positive phenomenon – philosemitism – not necessarily present in Europe during comparable waves of migration in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, other minorities demonstrate different experiences, such as skilled middle-class Mexicans, whose integration seems to be downward rather than upward.

At this point, the book introduces a second dimension of analysis: the ongoing efforts of specific diaspora communities to **(b) integrate**, to network with other migrants, to avoid amalgamation under all-encompassing stereotypes and to re-affirm positive outcomes in US society. Migrant organisations are often a form of transnationalism. They lobby not only for the recognition of fundamental human rights of mobility and citizenship, as well as the right to work and education, but also for recognising the otherness of different identities that may clash with what people expect to see and hear.

The question of how diasporas fight discrimination and defend their hybrid, transnational identities is key to this book. In particular, Chapters 10, 11 and 16 provide new evidence on Middle Eastern/Muslim and Arab-Americans, people in motion (especially Latinos) and Indian women, respectively. The discriminatory visa regimes and unfriendly gender policies clearly indicate the ongoing difficulties and unwelcoming attitude towards immigrants, such as H-4 visa holders. There is hardly any provision for better treatment of accompanying spouses. Such an attitude has also resulted in social activism among immigrant communities, as most of these professional women

continue to fight against the present visa system. Women have filed petitions with local congressmen and women to extend their Employment Authorisation Documents (EAD) and expedite their H-1B visas. There has also been a growing commitment among members of Muslim and Arab American communities to become involved in civic and political activities. Often described as public sphere involvement, civic and political engagement can be represented by diverse levels of commitment and intensity among community members. Moreover, art has also been an essential source for the manifestation of resistance. For people across a multitude of transnational communities, practising art provides opportunities for independence, identity formation, self-assertion, creativity and the exploration of imaginaries of the possible. Art reflects the fight to achieve true liberation and social justice for all.

In this way, bottom-up approaches often substitute for top-down, state-centric approaches to transnationalism and diaspora organisations. This book shows a rich constellation of strategies, which fluctuates between the ways in which diasporas emphasise their identities to fight, for instance, Islamophobia or Sinophobia. In contrast, others try to accelerate their integration and acceptance by becoming anti-migrant, as in the case of Latino migrants who vote for a migration-conservative agenda. In the middle of these two extremes, emerging diplomatic actors, such as sanctuary cities, lobby for migrants and connect with other cities beyond the state and/or traditional diplomatic networks. Given that most migration nowadays occurs between cities, this alternative approach to transnationalism provides a solution-oriented approach to diaspora networks, as in the example of exchanges between Chicago and Mexico City. Sanctuary cities have a more cosmopolitan approach and emphasise the importance of cultural diversity, be it art, food, or education. If we explain cosmopolitanism based on tolerance to newcomers, then it may appear to constitute an authentic way to fight the current anti-migrant feeling in the US, since it creates awareness and empathy for others. Above all, cosmopolitanism praises the idea of mobility and trans-local perspectives, in contrast to the non-mobility of those who stay or do not migrate.

This book proves that diasporas' transnationalism and assimilation are opposed concepts: while the first recognises and praises differences, the second is an effort to erase those differences in identity. This understanding means that transnationalism is a tool for migrants who escape the control of the state by

being in two or more cultures and places simultaneously. Transnationalism is also non-belonging, not subscribing to the cultural rules of one state only but instead having the freedom to leave and return to the destination countries.

These conditions of vulnerability point to the third dimension of this study – that is, the relation between **(c) transnationalism and nativism** (Brinkmann, 2017; Dahinden, 2010; Kivistö, 2001; Faist, 2008; Hawley, 2019), which also affects the integration of migrants. Migrants' aspirations are concentrated around the idea of the American Dream, but they, in turn, reproduce this idea of wealth, meritocracy and hard work. In her chapter on the Naga diaspora, Niumai reflects on the American Dream, 'which is their national ethos, particularly liberty, democracy, rights, equality and opportunity. The American dream celebrates success, prosperity and upward social mobility through hard work because their society is based on meritocracy and individualism'. However, according to her chapter and the other cases illustrated in this book, the idea of the melting pot has been replaced with that of the salad bowl; hence, the idea of assimilation that accompanied the American Dream has turned into a more transnational idea of diversified integration which oftentimes is criticised by conservative, populist politics.

While some minorities, such as the Indo-Caribbean Americans, seem to navigate this rhetoric more quickly, others, such as the Mexicans and the Chinese, have faced more complex situations of permanence or return. In all the cases included, transnationalism points to a personal level (being in touch with and sometimes in charge of the family back home, philanthropic activities, responses to natural crises and disasters) as well as to a professional one (establishment of knowledge networks, investment, academic exchanges). The simple act of conserving the minority's language and culture contributes to US society in terms of cultural awareness and internationalisation at home.

Transnationalism is not the same as or should be equalled to migration networks. Not all migrants have migrated based on established networks, and some may even choose to relate to different diasporas and native populations in order to integrate. The most extreme case covered in this book consists of the moral contradictions of those diasporas who turn anti-migrant, identifying with a right-wing discourse in the US to mirror their rejection of leftist governments back home. Sometimes transnationalism can be understood in ideological terms:

as diasporas are opposed to certain political ideas in their countries of origin, be they left or right, they try to continue sustaining specific ideas back home and vote according to their political views in one or more countries. In this way, they implicitly deny the adverse effects of anti-migration discourse and even turn away from the contributions that their fellow migrants have made to the US in terms of their work in essential economic activities such as food processing, health, or agriculture. Rather than voting for a correct labour migration policy that selects migrants according to the needs of the market, the blame is sometimes put on the migrants themselves: they, and not the system, are to blame for their work contributions, sometimes in positions and under conditions that the native workers would not accept.

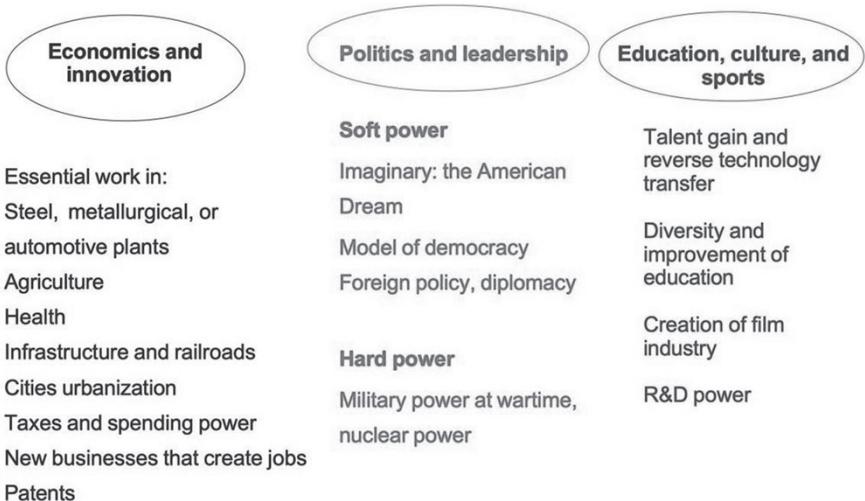
The current anti-migrant discourse results from many years of incorrect integration policies and lacking coordination between economic and migration policy, complicated by politics. This ongoing conflict between migration and the economy not only encourages cruel human rights violations, but also damages the well-being of entire communities, societies and countries that fail to accept migrants after centuries-long migration traditions. The US is one such example and perhaps the most representative case of a country built by migrants who become citizens, some of whom then reject competition with other migrants. This may be the symptom of a fragile identity rather than an exercise of power over those who do not have it.

In this respect, the volume describes how some political leaders and public opinion-makers tend to see immigration as a negative factor for the native economy and society. Government policies have emboldened public anti-immigrant perceptions and sentiments. Although the data and literature stand entirely against this kind of simplistic argument and perception, it has stigmatised minoritised social groups and resulted in stringent immigration control measures. This anti-immigrant rhetoric is based on the belief in protecting native low-skilled workers from the harmful effects of low-skilled immigration. The stigmatisation of immigrants also relates to the connections between host and homeland, which impacts the attitude towards the relevant diaspora communities. A case in point is the precarious position of Chinese immigrants due to the intensification of competition between China and the US. Several restrictive policies and measures were taken to undermine the academic and cultural exchanges between China and the US.

This criminalisation of migration is also explored in the case of Chinese migrants and Chinese-Americans, who suffered from cruel prejudice during the Trump presidency and the pandemic. Because of the economic conflict between the US and China, Chinese students and academic exchange with China have suffered, due to the virus and purported cases of espionage. The famous Thousand Talents Plan, a programme of return previously considered a model for highly skilled return migration on a global level, has recently been criticised for dubious outcomes of knowledge transfer. Consequently, some academics returned during their stays in the US, while many international Chinese students have considered studying somewhere other than in the US. This type of situation presents an example of the effects of nationalism on transnationalism, and of the mutual effects that both processes – both nationalism and transnationalism – have on migrants who are caught in between two extremes: globalisation potential vs protectionism and America First policies. The ups and downs in the history of Chinese migration to the US – from essential for building the railway infrastructure, over restricted before World War II, to a hard-working model minority which has recently once again been downgraded and accused of espionage – shows that political discourse is essential for the well-being of migrants and diasporas.

The fourth dimension of analysis outlines the **(d) contributions of migrants** (Wickramasekara, 2009; IOM, 2020; Sahoo, 2021) **and their multi-culturalism** (Marinescu, 2015; Demir, 2016; Kurien 2004). While the examples are not exhaustive – this would be the objective of a dictionary of migrants' participation in the US economy, politics, science, culture and society in general – we analyse some representative cases, as relevant for the present debate. Significant contributions have been identified in the economic, political and intellectual/cultural spheres (Figure C.1).

In economic terms, migrants have been available to take on heavy work not always accepted by native-born workers, many times under conditions of underpayment and de-skilling. Migrants and diasporas have contributed to the urbanisation of the US, by working in various industries, setting up new businesses and obtaining patents that, in turn, created jobs. They have also been helpful in constructing infrastructure and performing essential work in agriculture and health, even during the pandemic.



**Figure C.1** Contributions of migrants and diasporas to the US.

Source: Authors.

Regarding politics and leadership, the US has benefitted in terms of hard and military power in wartime (such as becoming a nuclear power during World War II), but, above all, migrants have enriched the US imaginary in the world. Migrants and diasporas have consolidated the US ‘as the epitome of liberal democracy worldwide’, raising ‘international awareness and respect for the American idea, reputation and leadership’ (see Chapter 2 by Wald). The presence and lobbying of diasporas have also changed the configuration of domestic politics in the US, building on the ideas of democracy and acceptance of different minorities.

Lastly, migrants have provided immensely for education and culture in the US, increasing the options and levels of education for all students. Contrary to the notion of talent gain for the US, international students sustain a very expensive system that is sometimes paid by scholarships and families at origin, rather than at destination. Their studies in the US represent a reverse international talent transfer – not rich countries investing in the South, but poor or middle-income countries investing in the North. Contrary to the idea of migrants as a burden, they actually give their financial and intellectual remittances to the US.

In cultural terms, this book has outlined the paradigmatic case of the film industry in Hollywood; its internationalisation further benefitted from the internet and the digitalisation of the production (see Chapter 12 by Mercado-Celis): ‘Hollywood has been an immigration vortex and a transnational space through the years: its industry has attracted talent worldwide. These talents have contributed to the industry in the aesthetic, narrative, technical and organisational fields’. In general, diasporas’ contributions to the American arts have been particularly enriching and have fundamentally changed the nation for the better. Other activities not covered in this book, such as sports or music, have benefitted in a similar way. Due to diasporas’ transnationalism, these contributions may not always be a drain for their countries. For instance, in the case of the film industry, runaway productions promoted by immigrants have brought the film industry to their countries of origin, along with specialised post-production services.

The discussions in this volume have also outlined the immense contributions that immigrants and diaspora communities make to their host country. There has been extensive research on the impact of immigration on the host country, and this volume further adds to this debate by elaborating different cases. While it is a well-known fact that skilled diaspora professionals and other qualified newcomers have made a significant contribution to the growth of America, semi-skilled and unskilled labour has also played a relevant role in helping the US take the lead in the service economy and tertiary sector industries. Immigrants also help in rebalancing demographics, as younger people join the workforce and support the economy. Maintaining transnational ties with their co-religionists abroad, they extend their efforts to the realm of foreign policy, successfully promoting durable alliances between the US and home countries, which have brought benefits to both nations. They contribute to the richness and diversity of US society, making it into the successful model of a multi-cultural society.

Lastly, the book has provided a complex reflection meant to identify **(e) old and new forms of transnationalism** (Brinkmann, 2017; Dahinden, 2010; Kivistö, 2001; Faist, 2008), by providing heuristic elements for a classification of transnational activity. Transnationalism is expressed in contributions to countries of origin and destination, as well as in a constant flow of people, knowledge and money. Transnationalism may acquire **symbolic, virtual, or**

**material** value. The **symbolic** aspect refers to the migrants being in various cultural spaces at the same time, to the diaspora's myth or idea of a return to home countries while being outside. The **virtual** element comes from the internet and new communication possibilities, which allows them to work, care for and share experiences with families and colleagues from two or more countries. Finally, **material transnationalism** points to the possibility to circulate physically, the come-and-go of people and goods between countries, also facilitated by globalisation. While these general findings are based on the experiences of migrants and diasporas in the US, they may apply also to other regions and contexts. Drawing on the contributions of migrants described above, we may also talk of economic, political and cultural transnationalism.

This book has outlined different and out-of-the-box experiences of migrants such as the Senegalese or Indians who transnationalise religious practices as a way to maintain their culture. Their integration is not straightforward but mediated by their experience of belonging to an ethnic diaspora community. The case of the Senegalese has also demonstrated that economic transnationalism can be based on religious transnationalism. Gázquez Iglesias has proven that 'the transnational circulation of religious celebrations through digital media or the broadcasting of Magals, as some have suggested, are a central feature for the development of the circuits of the spiritual transnational economy'. Furthermore, his chapter has shown the informal economy as a form of transnationalism, connecting Murid business in the US with exporters back in Senegal. Recognition of diasporas such as the Senegalese one – either at a federal or local level – by cities and states helps to integrate and strengthen diaspora communities, and in the long run this recognition may contribute to the fight against discrimination.

Finally, transnationalism is not always a story with a happy ending: deportation creates the need for what Fernández Hall calls 'cruel transnationalism', as families are split by one or more borders. Long-distance parenthood created by prohibiting undocumented parents to return to their children for a decade opens channels of communication and remote care that are welcome but does not substitute for the shared experiences of family and friends living together.

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To conclude, we can highlight that migrants and diasporas have made significant contributions to the US social fabric, economy and scientific pursuits. They contribute to a plural and multi-cultural society while at the same undergoing their own acculturation processes. Diasporas have achieved unparalleled levels of success in sectors that were crucial to the rise of the US as a global power, in terms of both hard and soft power. It is imperative that we highlight the ways in which immigrants and their transnational communities have changed the world in which we live. In globalised societies where there is more and more migration, greater acceptance of the ‘Other’ is needed.

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# INDEX

- ability, 21, 58, 102, 115, 132, 229, 242, 251, 295  
abolition, abolitionist, 114, 331, 335, 340  
accent, 164, 229, 242, 245, 250, 310  
accomplish, accomplishment, 31, 83, 128, 158  
acculturation, acculturated, 19–20, 24, 55, 154, 156, 164–6, 168–9, 174  
achievement, 32, 28, 43, 45–9, 55, 73, 108, 179, 186, 191, 198, 204, 410, 425  
activism, activist, 21, 64, 171, 257, 272–3, 283–4, 286, 289, 294, 296, 327, 341, 403  
administration, 18, 40, 44, 62, 65, 67, 115, 129–30, 136, 140, 186, 215, 271–2, 274–6, 288, 292, 320, 324, 327–78, 330–1, 353, 360, 369, 371, 379, 388, 406, 408, 410, 420  
advocacy, 91, 139, 257–8, 264, 268, 271–3, 275, 277, 299, 328, 341, 347, 416–17  
Afghan, Afghanistan, 263–6, 268–9, 271, 273, 277  
Africa, African, 7, 19, 20, 21, 37, 58, 64–7, 72, 77, 79–81, 96, 111, 140, 147, 161, 177, 180, 182–4, 187–8, 209–13, 215–25, 236, 241, 260, 262–3, 269, 271, 274–5, 334, 382, 400, 425  
agricultural, agriculturalist, agriculture, 37, 50, 80, 114, 117–18, 121, 124, 126–8, 138, 140, 400, 429  
amalgamation, 15, 273, 426  
ambivalence, ambivalent, 79, 100–1, 113, 132–3, 142, 221, 227, 279, 434  
amnesty, 139, 141, 182, 211  
ancestral, ancestry, 36, 41–3, 59, 74, 76–7, 89, 107, 193–4, 207, 263, 269, 271, 276  
anglophone, 176, 184–5  
anthropology, 25–6, 174, 205, 298, 403, 422, 434  
Arab, Arabic, 21, 67, 71, 72, 99, 109, 113, 138–9, 161, 188, 211–17, 221, 223, 234, 257–65, 267–81, 334, 426–7  
Armenia 15–18, 67, 95–110, 435  
Asia, Asian, Asiatic, 7–9, 14, 19, 67, 97, 102–4, 110–11, 118, 122, 127, 131–2, 144, 147, 162, 166–7, 172, 176–9, 185–90, 202, 262, 268–9, 274, 276, 353, 358, 366, 400–1, 404–5, 416, 425  
aspiration, 155, 160, 250, 379, 391, 428  
assimilate, assimilation, 1, 5, 13, 15, 104, 106, 108, 114–15, 121, 126, 131, 164–5, 168, 229, 245, 250, 310, 402, 427–8  
association, 4, 41, 43, 66, 80, 106, 215, 230, 258, 271, 301, 376  
asylum, 53, 63, 141, 269, 298, 327, 331, 342, 374, 388  
attract, attraction, 58–9, 122, 126, 128  
authorities, authority, 88, 96, 183, 213–14, 219, 227, 370, 390, 417  
autonomous, autonomy, 221–2, 319, 322, 323, 336, 337–8, 340–4  
background, 19, 34, 42, 5, 113, 115, 154, 160, 164, 173, 176, 186, 266, 274, 276, 278, 284, 293, 310  
barrier, 55, 58, 167, 259  
behaviour, 5, 39–40, 54, 81, 88, 123, 164, 193, 214, 257–8, 264, 268, 274, 327, 337, 339–40, 390  
beliefs, 3, 164, 170, 214, 231, 258–9, 289, 375, 391, 393, 396  
bias, 142, 241, 253, 259, 270, 273, 276  
Biden, Joe, 18, 23, 44, 77, 95, 116, 140–1, 252, 264, 268, 272, 275–6, 279, 323–4, 327, 330–1, 336, 354, 357–9, 378, 388  
bilingual, 239, 323  
biometric, 408, 410–14

- blame, blamed, blaming, 38, 132, 274, 384, 386, 390, 395, 429
- brain drain, brain circulation, 4, 12, 25, 32, 42–9, 99, 113, 121–2, 125–6, 130, 134–5, 137, 181
- Britain, British, 11, 74, 78–9, 81, 83, 86–7, 89, 210–11, 364, 369, 400
- campaign, 68, 77, 96, 187, 252, 272, 291, 354, 374, 378–9, 388, 390–1
- Canada, Canadian, 118–19, 177, 181, 185, 191, 305, 315, 320, 360, 364, 365, 384
- capitalism, capitalist, 59, 79, 173, 221, 224–5, 322, 336, 337, 342–4, 405–6
- career 5, 157, 309, 313–14, 402, 407, 414–15
- Caribbean, 7–9, 15, 19, 175–98
- Caucasian, 103, 155, 166–7, 171
- China, Chinese, 8–9, 12, 19, 23, 129, 273, 353–71, 429–30
- Christian, Christianity, 62, 69, 103, 115, 122, 153–4, 156–64, 168–70, 173, 220, 261–2, 269–70, 273, 293
- citizenship, 6, 18, 23, 41, 57, 75, 103–4, 118–19, 121, 137, 139, 141, 154, 233–4, 239, 250, 252, 257–9, 267, 269, 323, 326, 330–1, 358, 363, 370, 379–80, 389, 403, 424, 426
- civic, 1, 126, 257–8, 263–5, 277, 283–4, 287–8, 290–4, 379, 427
- class, 14, 38, 57, 66, 79, 85, 118, 121, 128, 131, 154, 159, 161, 181, 231, 236–7, 243, 250–1, 259, 275, 354, 363, 367, 373, 376–7, 389, 393, 394, 396, 424, 426
- collective, collectives, 3, 15, 89, 98, 101, 143, 164, 225, 322, 330, 341, 376, 386, 425
- colonial, colonialism, 8, 16, 20, 32, 73–4, 78–9, 89, 102, 139–40, 168, 178, 183, 210–17, 220–2, 224, 293, 322–3, 344, 377, 400, 405, 410, 434
- colonies, 37, 122, 211
- colonisers, 117, 121–2, 216
- colony, 33, 53, 106, 182
- commerce, commercial, 33, 36, 57, 72, 97, 105, 116, 193, 215, 218, 220, 222, 300, 314
- commitment, 17, 133, 213, 257–8, 327, 382, 396, 427
- communication, 4, 59, 104, 109, 154, 166–7, 172–3, 194, 218, 253, 287, 337, 368, 402, 433
- companies, 33, 43, 112, 123, 132, 136, 141, 186, 190–2, 300–4, 309, 327, 402, 407, 409, 415, 428
- company, 53, 63, 108, 121–2, 132, 191, 308, 402–3, 407–11, 413–14, 420, 426
- competitive, competitiveness, 6, 12, 43, 119, 134–5, 138, 302–4, 306, 309, 315, 356, 358, 370
- conflict, 14, 16, 40–2, 65, 83, 88, 97, 108, 121, 131, 174, 213, 217, 271, 273, 425, 429
- confrontation, 9, 217, 352
- congregation, 155, 165, 168
- Congress, congressional, 35, 38–9, 42, 54, 80, 103, 260, 272, 274–5, 291, 325, 331, 355, 418–19, 427
- connectivity, 3, 194, 240, 248, 424
- conscious, consciousness, 3, 38, 74, 85, 89, 154, 156, 162–3, 170–1, 340, 424
- conservative, neo-conservative, 24, 70, 79, 91, 331, 355, 357, 378–9, 427–8
- consolidate, consolidation, 42, 43, 81, 84, 303–6, 431
- cooperation, 6, 119, 134, 217, 292, 304, 353
- cosmopolitan, 142, 219–20, 283–4, 287, 289, 293–5, 392, 427
- cosmopolitanism, 15, 226, 427
- creativity, 322, 344, 427
- crime, 6, 33, 115, 141, 186, 272, 324, 331, 335, 353, 358, 401, 416–17
- criminal, criminality 54, 115, 125–6, 138, 275, 325, 332–3, 339, 387–8, 391, 430
- criminalisation, 325, 387–8, 391, 340
- crisis, 20, 37, 80, 134–6, 140, 172, 222, 291, 304
- criteria, 2, 116, 118, 121, 129, 142, 215
- culturalism, 20, 22, 114, 166, 168, 230, 430, 434–5
- DACA, 330, 339
- democracy, democratic, 42, 61, 160, 180, 272, 428, 431
- democrat, democratic, 45, 75, 101, 138, 169, 335, 378
- demographic, demographics, demography, 8, 26, 76, 92, 121, 180, 200, 208, 260–1, 265, 267, 432
- deportation, 63, 116, 118, 123, 127, 133, 210–11, 288, 290, 319–20, 322, 323–4, 326–31, 333, 340, 342, 243–4, 388, 417
- descendants, 23, 54, 58, 84, 177, 232, 262
- dialect, 41, 101, 154, 162
- digital, 4, 28, 109, 120, 172, 176, 215, 251, 301, 304, 307, 311, 314, 371, 424, 433
- dignity, 283, 294–5, 319, 341, 390, 402, 415
- diplomacy, 1–2, 4, 15, 21–2, 62, 91, 282–7, 289, 294–5
- disasters, 35, 195, 428
- discourse, 1–2, 11, 18, 101, 104, 114, 116–17, 121–2, 127–8, 137–8, 140–3, 267, 278, 339, 384, 387, 388–91, 395–6, 428–30

- discriminate, discrimination, discriminatory, 7, 11, 14–15, 18, 21, 25, 40, 54, 58, 66, 75, 104, 113–14, 118, 121, 124, 128–9, 131, 132, 141–2, 161, 178, 181–3, 211, 229, 241–6, 251–2, 265, 272, 276–7, 322, 341, 358, 386, 395, 403, 425–6, 433
- domination, 62, 130, 217, 322, 395
- dream (American), 112–13, 121–2, 132, 139, 142–3, 155, 160, 165, 225, 287, 290, 324, 326, 330–1, 342, 420, 428
- earning, 13, 32, 34, 44, 54, 186–7, 188, 190, 361, 407
- egalitarian, 384, 391, 395
- elite, 1, 19, 23, 32–3, 57, 59, 61, 66, 70, 109–10, 156, 182–3, 328, 353, 370, 384, 392, 405
- emergence, 3, 87, 98, 210, 217, 404
- emotional, 12, 74, 91, 106, 162, 172, 174, 193, 391, 405
- empathy, 391, 427
- empire, 18, 53, 70, 82, 94–5, 102, 106–7, 128, 262
- enemies, enemy, 40, 53, 78, 89, 118, 129
- engineer, 19–20, 44, 60, 108, 113–14, 125, 134, 158, 176, 186, 190–1, 243, 355, 356, 361, 401, 405, 411
- England, 7, 89, 343
- entrepreneur, entrepreneurship, 6, 19, 32, 36–7, 42–4, 57, 62, 77, 131, 158, 190–1, 316
- equality, 59, 66, 73, 75–6, 80, 125, 132, 377, 389, 428
- ethic, ethical, ethically, ethics, 23–4, 130, 134, 173, 298, 379, 392–3, 395, 403
- exclusion, 22, 68, 103, 113, 115, 123, 129, 245, 251, 262, 264, 277, 283, 322, 366, 381
- exile, 5, 32, 69, 96–100, 116, 215, 266, 366, 381, 384, 390, 394, 397, 400, 405
- expatriates, 31, 34, 45, 114, 116, 144
- expectations, 21, 135, 242, 337
- expertise, 31, 33, 36, 41, 45, 411
- experts 133, 136, 290
- extraterritorial, 287, 290, 291
- famine, 17, 73–6, 82–3, 85, 87–90
- federal, federal register, federation, 12, 39, 57–8, 64–5, 101, 105, 123, 132, 140, 223, 242, 260, 289, 328, 331, 354, 433
- feeling/s, 33, 40, 69, 99, 108, 109, 110, 112, 235, 239, 245, 252, 407, 419, 427
- female, feminist, 36, 75, 87, 89, 231, 377, 404, 417
- festivals, festivities, 163, 166, 168, 171–2, 178, 307–8, 313, 337
- finance, financial, financially, financing, 13, 17, 42, 45, 57, 59, 62, 63, 67, 69, 124, 134, 136, 160, 163, 173, 181, 190, 193–4, 197–8, 218, 223, 303–4, 314, 401, 405, 407, 411, 413, 416–18, 431
- finding/s, 22, 42, 55, 76, 99, 121, 156, 160–1, 232, 241, 277, 296, 324, 402, 426, 433
- flexibility, flexible, 18, 37, 95, 103–4, 107, 303, 307, 414
- flow/s, 44, 89, 137, 183, 196–7, 209, 224, 284, 388, 392, 432
- force, forced, forces, 2, 17, 19, 23–4, 32, 34, 40–1, 58, 61, 62, 64, 67, 96–100, 104, 158, 171, 191, 210, 215, 272, 290, 319, 320–2, 326, 334, 341–2, 356–7, 362, 383, 401, 405
- foreign-born, foreigner, foreignness, foreign affairs, 5–8, 11–12, 17–19, 22, 33, 43, 59, 61, 67, 77–8, 96–97, 113–16, 118, 120–1, 123–6, 129–30, 134–7, 141–2, 167, 171, 176, 185, 188, 211, 232, 235, 241, 264, 283, 288, 301, 303–4, 308–11, 314, 354–5, 358, 360–1, 364–5, 409, 432
- foundation/s, founded, founder/s, founding, 13, 21, 35, 40, 43, 58, 60, 63–4, 68, 89, 103, 105–8, 115–16, 121–2, 136, 155, 157, 164, 172–3, 186, 190–1, 194, 210–11, 213–14, 217, 240, 263, 269, 271–2, 275, 289, 300, 305, 308, 314, 333, 361, 375
- function/s, functioning, 3, 62, 101, 155, 165, 169, 172, 215, 295, 301–2, 309, 322, 408
- gender, gendered, 14, 76, 87, 89, 104, 115, 123, 137, 142, 156, 161, 171, 274, 314, 321, 376–7, 389, 405, 407, 416, 426
- genocide, 18, 32, 60, 95–8, 100–1, 106–9
- geographic, geographical, 5, 13, 104, 108, 120, 154, 163, 179, 240, 262–3, 268, 306, 425
- global, globalisation, globalism, globalised, globally, globe, 2–3, 6, 12, 14, 16–17, 22, 31, 34, 45, 55, 59, 61–6, 76, 79, 82, 90, 98, 109, 114, 138, 143, 154, 158, 162, 169, 171–2, 194, 209, 218, 221, 223, 229–31, 251, 266, 274, 282–6, 295–6, 300–1, 303, 305, 308, 321, 343, 353, 361, 368–9, 370, 378, 385, 393, 394, 400, 403, 405, 424, 430, 433–4
- governance, governing, government, governmental, 3–4, 6, 7, 13, 18–19, 24, 35, 44, 53, 57–8, 60–1, 65–6, 77, 79, 81–2, 91, 103, 121, 123, 137, 140, 153, 183, 191, 194, 196, 219, 242, 263, 266–7, 272, 275, 282, 284, 286, 291–2, 295, 301, 331, 337, 341, 365, 368–9, 370, 377, 380, 387–8, 403–4, 407, 412, 418, 428–9

- graduate/s, graduated, 44, 85, 114, 119, 122, 136, 157–8, 356, 359–62
- grassroots, 258, 263, 265, 266, 272, 275, 277, 290
- grow, growing, grown, growth, 2, 7–8, 11–13, 16, 20, 32–3, 35, 37, 42, 45, 61, 63, 76, 84, 124, 132, 134, 137, 140, 160–1, 169–70, 175–6, 181, 191–2, 197–8, 209–12, 214–15, 220, 225, 257–8, 261–3, 267–8, 272, 275, 277, 290, 304, 360, 367, 370, 424, 427, 432
- Guyana, Guyanese, 175, 177–8, 179–80, 181–7, 190, 194–8
- habits, 154, 233–4
- harm, harmful, harming, 14, 24, 65, 139, 359, 380, 382–90, 393, 395, 420, 429
- hate, 14, 121, 141, 263, 272, 353, 358, 426
- health, healthcare, 13, 18, 64, 88–9, 115, 117, 121, 128, 135, 137, 140–2, 159, 161, 186, 190, 194, 292, 324, 361, 388, 402, 410, 414, 416, 418, 429–30
- hegemonic, 113, 116, 221, 222, 340
- heritage, 66, 75, 77, 98, 235, 260, 262–3, 268–9, 271, 276
- heterogeneity, 96, 108, 238, 246, 267
- heuristic, 15, 386, 432
- Hispanic/s, 22, 81, 132, 188, 240, 268, 310, 324, 332–5, 379
- historian/s, historic, historical, historically, histories, historiography, history, 1–2, 4, 7, 9, 11, 14–20, 22, 35, 39, 57, 60, 66, 69, 73–5, 77, 78–83, 85–6, 89–90, 96–102, 104, 106, 112–17, 120–1, 126, 128, 130–1, 137, 139, 142–3, 155–6, 177, 196, 198, 209–11, 216, 217, 219–21, 224–5, 257, 259–60, 262–3, 265–7, 273, 287–90, 292–3, 304, 306, 327, 328, 376–7, 388, 404, 424, 425, 430
- Hollywood, 15, 22, 65, 91, 300–15, 432
- Holocaust, 54, 89
- home, homeland, 2, 3–6, 18, 21, 31–2, 35–6, 39, 41, 43, 45, 55, 63, 67–80, 82, 87, 95–110, 122, 134, 135, 137, 154–8, 160–6, 168–75, 178–9, 181–3, 185–8, 190, 192–8, 213, 222, 229, 237–9, 250–1, 264–6, 270–1, 284, 309, 315, 336, 339, 358, 362, 364, 369–70, 377, 378, 384, 392, 401–2, 405–7, 410–11, 415–16, 420, 423–4, 428–9, 432–3
- homogeneous, homogenous, 15, 269, 273–4, 379, 394, 424–5
- Honduras, 119, 330, 388
- host country, country of reception, 3, 18, 40, 44, 95, 102–9, 139, 166, 185, 215, 219, 225, 229, 231, 248, 250, 393, 403, 432
- hostile, hostilities, hostility, 11, 22, 42, 54, 68, 81, 245, 252, 259, 262, 269–70, 273, 274, 283, 295, 357
- house, household, housing, housewife, 9, 32, 35, 76, 104, 132, 167, 175, 186–9, 192, 243, 272, 322–3, 326–7, 336, 369, 383, 415
- human, humane, humanitarian, humanities, 17, 24, 44, 56, 61, 64, 107–8, 115, 119, 122, 124–5, 133, 135, 141–2, 162, 194, 265, 271–2, 282–4, 286, 288, 291, 295, 357, 368, 383, 403–5, 416, 426, 429
- Hungarian, Hungary, 7, 60, 61, 305
- ideological, ideology, 104, 142, 218, 220, 222, 259, 262, 337, 342, 379–80, 428
- illegal, 22, 137, 139–40, 179, 182, 354, 357, 413
- illiteracy, 34, 39, 118
- image, imaginaries, imagination, imagined, 15, 19, 65, 69, 78, 82, 84–5, 98, 113, 122, 162, 216, 220, 236, 262, 293, 295, 310, 319, 322, 327, 330, 335, 337, 340–2, 344, 403, 408, 427, 431
- imperial, 82, 89, 217, 220
- imprisonment, 142, 332, 335
- incarceration, 319, 323, 331–4, 336, 342
- improve, improvement, 13, 16, 19, 35, 39, 63, 76, 180, 215, 291–2, 295, 370, 374–5, 381, 384, 387
- inclusion, inclusive, 116, 282–3, 285–6, 288, 296, 321, 323, 367, 379–80, 424
- income, 20, 55–6, 131, 175, 179, 184–93, 197, 230, 237, 303, 364, 401
- independence, independent, 2, 32, 67, 77, 80–1, 105, 132–3, 153, 161, 166, 178–9, 182–3, 211, 222, 303, 340, 344, 362, 406–8, 412, 415, 417, 427
- India, Indians, Indo, Indo-Caribbean, 8, 9, 12, 19–21, 24, 53, 63, 81–2, 153–5, 157, 159–65, 168, 170, 175–98, 262, 276, 287, 360, 363, 400–6, 409–11, 413, 415–20, 426, 433
- Indigenous, 81, 275, 341, 343
- industrial, industries, industry, 13, 15, 16, 22, 32–3, 35–8, 41, 45, 56–7, 65, 83–4, 121, 124–6, 130–1, 133–4, 138, 140, 186, 300–15, 337, 361, 409, 412, 420, 430, 432
- inequalities, inequality, 132, 295, 375, 377, 387, 389, 395
- innovation, innovative, 1, 6, 8, 13, 21–2, 36, 116, 134, 136, 230, 306, 361, 394

- institute, institution/s, institutional, institutionalisation, institutionalised, 10, 20, 97–8, 104–8, 110, 169, 171, 178, 180, 181, 209, 213–14, 216, 218–20, 222–5, 230, 243, 250, 272, 274, 285–6, 290–3, 295, 300–1, 337, 357, 362, 364, 368, 376–7, 383–5, 390, 424
- insurance, 65, 411–12, 414, 418
- integration, 1, 2, 6, 8, 14–16, 18–19, 55, 73, 79, 95, 113–15, 118, 121, 125, 131, 142, 153, 156, 164, 168–9, 173, 218, 220, 221, 228–30, 235, 251–2, 265–6, 268, 302, 304, 323, 379, 425–9, 433
- integrationist, 228–30
- intellectual/s, 15, 33, 39, 40, 58–9, 62, 96, 98, 222, 285, 306, 355–56, 570, 401, 430–1
- intelligence, 41, 125, 190, 362
- intercultural, 116, 155, 289
- intersection/s, intersectional, intersectionality, 3, 14, 21, 23, 223, 257, 265–6, 334, 375, 377, 379, 394, 426
- interviewee/s, interviews, 19, 155–6, 179, 231–2, 235–6, 241–2, 252, 266, 291, 340, 366, 402, 404, 406, 408, 410–13, 419
- investing, investment, investments, investor/s, 6, 33–4, 54, 62, 69, 76, 119, 130, 137, 141, 171, 186–7, 191–4, 196, 198, 222, 230, 251, 265–6, 283, 286, 353, 355, 360, 364–5, 368, 376, 387, 417, 428, 431
- Iraq, 139, 188, 263, 269, 270–1
- Ireland, 7, 73–9, 82–3, 85–7, 89, 90–1, 124
- Irish, 1, 16, 17, 67, 73, 74–91, 124, 287
- Islam, Islamic, Islamophobia, 20–1, 209–17, 219–20, 224–5, 258–9, 261–3, 265, 269, 270, 272–4, 334, 427
- island/s, 33, 81, 83–4, 89, 158, 166, 177, 179, 181–2, 184, 195, 306
- Israel, Israeli, 17, 66–8, 264, 270, 272–3, 275–6, 328
- Italia, Italy, Italian/s, 1, 7, 16, 31–45, 75, 84, 122, 127, 129, 192, 287, 425
- Jamaica, 177, 179, 184, 187, 193
- Japan, Japanese, 9, 40, 117–18, 127, 308, 360, 366
- job/s, 9, 13, 16, 23, 34–6, 38, 43–4, 61, 125, 129, 132–4, 136, 139, 159–61, 166, 182, 190, 193, 196–7, 252, 301, 309, 322, 324, 339, 364, 380–1, 384–8, 395, 405, 407–16, 418, 426, 430
- Jordan, 68, 141, 320
- journalist/s, journals, 33, 37, 59, 81, 105, 120, 126–7, 129–30, 132, 140, 401
- Judaism, 68, 210, 262
- just, justice, justified, justify, 19, 22, 24, 59, 62, 64, 69, 73, 80, 141, 142, 273, 286–8, 319–20, 324, 333–4, 336, 340–4, 375, 377–90, 3945, 427
- Keohane, Robert, 7, 263
- kids, 166, 336, 412
- kingdom/s, 91, 210, 213, 217, 220, 343, 366
- kinship, 63, 161, 172
- Kissinger, Henry, 61, 116
- knowledge, 13, 18, 41, 88, 95, 104, 117, 122, 128, 137, 142–3, 176, 179, 213, 216–18, 221–2, 242, 259–60, 283, 286, 315, 341–2, 344, 362, 370, 410, 428, 430, 432
- Kymlicka, Will, 384, 390
- label, labelled, labelling, 16, 18, 76, 112–14, 120, 141–2, 177, 222, 231, 262, 270, 358
- labor, labour, labourers, 4, 8, 13, 15–17, 19, 32, 34–45, 65–6, 69, 84, 87, 102, 113–14, 122–9, 131, 133, 136–7, 141–2, 176–7, 190, 197, 229, 301–3, 305, 307–8, 314, 321–2, 362, 365, 383, 385–7, 400–1, 405, 409, 429, 432
- land, landed, landscape, 2, 3, 16, 21, 32, 34–5, 37, 39, 41–2, 44, 58, 63, 69, 80, 82, 89, 91, 99–103, 109–10, 113, 116, 122, 131–2, 139, 160, 169, 171–2, 191, 222, 248, 264, 268, 323–4, 385, 393, 402, 408, 423–4
- language/s, 21, 32, 39, 41, 57, 79, 91, 95, 101, 118, 126, 128, 154, 164–5, 216, 228–9, 237–9, 247, 250, 262–3, 269–70, 290, 309–10, 320, 342, 429
- Latin, Latino/s, Latinx, 7–9, 19, 22–3, 131–2, 138, 176–7, 240–1, 243, 245, 252, 274, 287–90, 293–6, 295, 309, 314, 319–24, 326, 330–1, 333–6, 341–4, 354, 357, 374–5, 377–82, 384–92, 400, 425–7
- law/s, lawyers, 39, 43, 55, 58–9, 66, 69, 103, 115, 121–5, 127, 129, 138–41, 178, 235, 243, 258, 260, 263, 272, 289, 308, 331, 354–5, 357, 388, 400, 406, 411, 413, 417
- leader/s, leadership, 20, 24, 38, 60, 63–5, 73, 76–7, 80, 85, 91, 96, 98, 120, 155, 170, 183, 196, 209, 213–16, 219, 222, 224, 257–8, 273, 275, 290, 327–8, 333, 378, 404, 406, 429, 431
- Lebanese, 4, 258, 273, 277
- Lebanon, 4, 108, 269–71
- legacy, 113, 293

- legal, legalise, legally, legislation, 24, 43, 54, 57, 66, 95, 103–4, 108, 123, 134–6, 139, 141, 170, 180, 182, 186, 190, 258, 265, 268, 272, 301, 330–1, 339, 355, 357, 365, 405–6, 409, 415, 417–18
- legitimate, 62, 337, 376, 395–6
- liberal, liberalism, liberation, liberties, liberty, 3, 41, 58, 62, 66, 73, 75, 80, 89, 105, 125, 160, 169, 219, 235, 272, 328, 331–3, 336, 341, 344, 389, 427–8, 431
- limitations, limited, limiting, limits, 4, 41, 54, 88, 116, 119, 139, 156, 162, 178, 182, 210, 216, 230–43, 310, 323, 355–7, 370, 374–5, 389, 391, 396, 400
- literacy, 39, 56
- literature, 2, 4, 32, 97, 106, 108, 110, 113, 129, 157, 229–31, 248, 265–6, 283, 285, 336, 405, 429
- London, 122, 364
- Macedo, Stephen, 382–6, 394
- mainland, 154, 166, 365, 367
- mainstream, 258–9, 263, 268, 277, 306
- management, 12, 44, 136, 158, 186, 224, 308
- Manhattan, 40, 60, 85, 88, 219, 269
- manufacturing, manufacture, 32, 34, 38, 41, 56–7, 186, 356
- marginalisation, margins, 11, 75, 130, 168, 258, 295, 334, 343, 394, 405, 416
- market/s, 4, 22, 23, 34, 38–9, 43–4, 97, 113–14, 119, 128–9, 131, 137, 142, 191, 218, 222, 300–1, 303–4, 307–10, 312, 319, 322, 324, 336, 341, 381, 384–8, 395, 405, 413, 429
- marriage, married, 76, 97, 157–61, 165, 169, 173, 190, 233, 235, 239, 270, 405–6, 412, 415
- membership/s, 43, 76, 263, 314, 327, 375–80
- memoir, memorial, memorialisation, memorials, memories, memory, 17–18, 73–4, 82, 88–90, 95–6, 100–101, 107, 109–10, 113, 155, 165, 260, 266, 269, 334
- meritocracy, 19, 44, 160, 428
- Mexican, Mexicanness, Mexicanos, Mexicans, Mexico, 1, 5, 7–9, 19–23, 75, 79, 118–19, 131, 137, 139, 141, 179, 188, 227–52, 282, 284, 286–94, 296, 309, 312–15, 321–2, 324–5, 330–1, 338, 340–2, 353, 360, 374, 426–8
- military, 32, 40–2, 45, 57, 58, 61–2, 64, 67–9, 89, 121, 129, 183, 217, 264, 268, 326, 355–6, 368, 431
- minorities, minoritised, minority, 3–5, 14, 19, 38, 45, 54, 66, 104, 118, 124–5, 129, 131–3, 153–4, 161, 211, 232, 240, 258, 262, 265, 270, 276–7, 300–1, 314, 374–7, 379, 389–91, 393–6, 401, 403, 425–6, 428–31
- mobility, 3, 5–6, 13, 55, 125, 160, 231, 282–4, 286, 288, 291, 294–5, 309, 331, 366, 370, 402, 404–5, 409, 413, 426–8
- Morgenthau, Hans, 61–2, 116
- motherland, 3, 7, 16, 31, 34–5, 37, 40, 44–5, 183
- Muhammad (Prophet), 217, 219, 221, 263
- multi-culturalism, multiculturalism, 20, 22, 166, 168, 228, 230, 430
- murid, muridism, 20, 209–25, 433
- Muslim, 1, 20–1, 68, 103, 119, 121, 135, 137–8, 141, 209–12, 216, 221, 225, 257–77, 333–4, 354, 257, 425, 427
- Naga, Nagaland, 1, 15, 19, 153–74, 428
- narrative, 3, 11, 22, 24, 67–8, 98, 100–1, 114, 160, 167, 172, 219, 236, 266, 282–3, 286, 290, 295, 303, 306, 308, 311, 313, 343, 376–80, 388, 390, 392, 396, 404, 424, 432
- nationalism, nationalist, 3–5, 15, 76, 81–4, 91, 104, 162, 276, 353–4, 370–1, 379–80, 392–3, 430
- native, nativism, nativist, 7–9, 12–13, 16, 23–4, 32–3, 36–41, 43–5, 54–5, 58, 61, 66, 81, 85, 113, 121–2, 124–5, 127, 131–2, 136–7, 158, 161, 166, 184–5, 188, 238, 241, 269, 276, 289, 295, 334, 370, 380–8, 392–6, 423, 425–6, 428–30
- naturalisation, naturalised, 18, 40, 84, 103–4, 121, 370
- Nazi, 42, 59–60, 62, 65–6, 127, 307
- Negro, Negroes, 121, 124–5, 131, 183
- neoliberal, neoliberalism, 221–2, 224, 393–4, 402, 405
- network/s, networking, 4–5, 17, 21, 33, 44, 59, 62–3, 73, 82, 87, 91, 98, 109, 154–6, 164, 169, 171–2, 174, 191, 194, 215–18, 220, 222, 225, 230, 240, 264–5, 272, 288, 290–1, 301–13, 321, 334, 389, 403, 418–19, 423–4, 426–8
- newcomers, 5, 7, 14, 16, 31, 33–9, 41–2, 44–5, 56–7, 115, 129, 132, 137, 380, 386, 390, 427, 432
- Nobel Prize, 13, 40, 42, 107, 116, 130
- Nye, Joseph, 7, 55, 58, 64, 263
- Obama, Barack, 67, 77, 288, 328, 336, 355–6, 360, 388, 405–6, 410

- occupation, occupational, 13, 35–6, 41–2, 54, 56, 79, 81, 83, 97, 114, 119, 186, 197
- oppressed, oppression, oppressive, 17, 23, 66, 74, 83, 104–5, 123, 322–4, 337, 375–7, 379–80, 385–9, 391–6
- organisation, organisational, 1, 7, 14–15, 21, 43, 56–8, 66, 98, 105, 109, 123, 172, 178, 194, 213, 214, 216–19, 222, 224–5, 242, 257–8, 260, 263–5, 268, 271–4, 277, 283–92, 294–5, 300–4, 307, 312–13, 324, 327, 389, 404, 416–17, 420, 425–7, 432
- Osca rs, 57, 74, 308, 314
- Pakistan, 262, 264, 269, 405
- Palestine, Palestinian, 63, 64, 97, 264, 269–73, 275–7
- pandemic, 4, 44, 108, 117, 119, 140–1, 159, 162, 189–90, 196, 340, 358, 366–7, 369, 403, 407–12, 414, 420, 430
- paradigm, 109, 307, 432
- party, 3, 62, 81, 83, 101, 105, 357, 378, 380
- peace, peaceful, 69, 91, 109, 153, 217, 220, 267, 272, 286, 328, 359
- philanthropic, philanthropists, philanthropy, 4, 6, 65, 96, 106–7, 122, 142, 194, 428
- philosophy, 40, 142, 217, 340–1, 394
- pluralism, plurality, 59, 284–5, 295, 392
- policies, 5, 11, 12, 14–15, 19, 22–4, 44, 57, 59, 62, 65, 68, 115, 137–8, 140, 211, 274–5, 288, 321, 331, 343, 353–5, 357–9, 368–70, 374–6, 378, 380–1, 384, 388, 390, 394–5, 403, 405, 419, 425, 426, 429–30
- populism, populist, 1, 5, 11, 18–19, 113, 115, 119, 354, 428
- postcolonial, 221, 224
- poverty, 54, 73, 79, 81, 125, 137, 175, 178–9, 189–91, 263
- power, powerful, 1, 2, 3, 7, 10–12, 17, 24, 32, 41–2, 45, 54–5, 58–69, 73, 81, 84, 112–14, 116, 120, 127, 139, 142–3, 160, 210, 213, 216–17, 220, 222, 258, 272, 304, 334, 337, 344, 355, 357, 370, 376–7, 386, 391, 403, 405, 416, 419, 423–4, 429, 431, 434
- presidency, president, presidential, 18, 23, 39, 45, 60, 62, 66–7, 76–9, 91, 95, 115–16, 119, 127, 129, 132–3, 135, 137–41, 155, 196–7, 252, 264, 267–8, 272, 276, 305, 323, 354–7, 359, 374–5, 378–80, 388, 390–1, 394–6, 406–7, 420, 430
- prison, 13, 332–3, 335, 336
- privilege/s, 24, 116–17, 133, 138, 276, 374, 377, 390, 413, 425
- professional, professions, 4, 5, 9, 20, 24, 33, 34, 36, 39, 41–5, 102, 104, 108, 114, 125, 127, 130, 134–5, 140, 156–8, 164, 181, 186, 190, 197, 228–31, 242–3, 246–7, 250–1, 258–9, 301, 323, 334, 358, 368, 401–3, 405, 407–8, 410, 415, 419, 425–6, 428, 432
- qualification/s, 4, 43, 68, 242, 387, 402, 407, 411
- quota/s, 18, 39, 42, 127, 129, 136, 139, 211, 358, 374, 388, 400, 407
- race/s, 18, 24, 53, 81, 102–3, 114–15, 121, 124, 126–7, 137, 142, 166–7, 219, 260–1, 265, 274, 276, 289, 377, 389
- racialised, racially, racism, racist, 7, 18, 23, 40, 66, 81, 86, 95, 103–6, 113, 115, 117–18, 121, 123–5, 129, 132, 138–42, 155, 161–2, 165–6, 168, 182–3, 211–12, 221, 225, 258, 261–5, 267–70, 273–4, 276, 314, 320, 323, 342–3, 354, 387–8, 390–1, 394, 395, 405
- reform, 23, 67, 98, 115, 132, 135–6, 141, 210–11, 216, 220, 260, 271, 275, 335, 354–5, 358, 360, 364
- refugee/s, 18, 40, 42, 53, 60, 102, 112, 114, 118–19, 129, 132–3, 138, 261, 263, 268–69, 274, 341, 343–4, 354, 357, 374, 388
- religion, religious, 7, 15, 17, 19–20, 53, 55, 64, 68, 76, 80, 84, 87, 97–8, 101, 103, 105, 115–16, 124, 137, 154, 156, 161, 163–4, 168–71, 174, 178, 209–16, 218, 220–5, 258–62, 264–8, 270–2, 274, 293–4, 314, 375, 378–80, 389, 433
- remittances, 4, 35, 44, 168–9, 172, 194–5, 198, 215, 222, 225, 402, 431
- representation/s, 12, 177, 212, 214, 216, 225, 236, 285, 291, 314, 322, 389
- Republican, 62, 76, 81, 134, 138, 357, 378, 380, 388
- responsibilities, responsibility, 1, 24, 165, 375, 391, 393, 396, 414
- return, returnees, 2, 4–5, 21, 37, 101, 106, 113, 123, 126, 133–6, 156–7, 171, 182–3, 185, 189, 213, 215, 229, 321, 233, 240, 246, 248–51, 266, 290, 309, 314–15, 320–1, 324–7, 330–1, 335, 362, 368–70, 386–7, 415–16, 425, 428, 430, 433
- reunification, reunited, 42, 118–19, 138, 290, 321, 323, 330, 336, 343, 355, 365, 369, 381, 405
- revolution, revolutionary, 32, 54, 61, 63, 74, 80, 82, 101, 105, 131, 213, 266, 323

- rise, 1, 2, 6–7, 9–11, 16–17, 24, 36, 40, 54–6, 59, 61, 69, 84, 85, 114, 116, 142, 171, 210, 220–2, 245, 261, 277, 301, 303, 313, 360, 370, 423, 434
- rising, 81–2, 96, 353, 359, 364, 401
- sanctuary, 40, 115, 288, 293–4, 327–8, 330, 427
- school/s, 23, 34, 36, 40, 44, 57, 65, 76, 84–5, 98, 102, 106, 126, 132, 136, 157–8, 173, 185–6, 194, 214, 239–40, 292–3, 323, 334, 360, 362, 369, 381, 382
- science/s, scientific, scientist, 1, 4, 8, 17, 19, 20–1, 24, 40, 42–3, 55, 59–60, 62, 107–8, 114, 116–17, 119, 121, 128, 130, 133–4, 142, 156, 158, 176, 186, 216, 221–2, 230, 267, 320, 353, 355–7, 359, 361, 367, 368, 369, 370, 400, 401, 406, 413, 430, 434
- security, 13, 41, 61, 69, 135, 138, 141, 196, 267, 274, 277, 330, 336, 354–9, 362, 406, 420
- Senegal, Senegalese, 1, 15, 20, 209–12, 215–20, 222, 223–5, 433
- separation, 110, 137, 168–9, 251, 322, 324, 326, 329–31, 335–6, 343
- settlement, 2–3, 33, 53, 76, 104, 122, 153, 179, 221, 223, 288
- skill/s, skilling, 4, 9, 11–12, 15–16, 18–20, 24, 31, 33–4, 36, 38–9, 41–4, 55, 102, 104, 108, 113–14, 118–19, 121–31, 133–6, 138, 142–3, 157–60, 176, 180–1, 183–6, 190, 194, 197, 228, 230, 242, 284–5, 295, 301, 357, 359, 365, 400–1, 405, 407–9, 416, 424–6, 430, 432
- slave/s, slavery, enslaved, 7, 20, 37, 38, 79, 113, 122, 210, 216–17, 219, 224, 262
- socialism 82, 153, 160, 176, 177, 290, 377–8
- sociological, sociology, 14, 19, 75, 154, 161, 286
- soft power, 10, 17, 24, 58–9, 61, 63–6, 423–34
- solidarity, 23, 38, 162, 171, 193, 275, 286, 288–90, 338, 343, 385, 403
- Soviet, 60–1, 101, 119, 128, 133, 266
- Spanish, 132, 237–9, 247, 250, 309, 312, 321, 337, 343
- sponsored, sponsorship, 6, 138, 155, 181–3, 402, 407–9, 411, 413, 419
- spouse, 18, 24, 40, 118, 136, 161, 239, 362, 401–8, 410, 413, 415–18, 420, 426
- stereotype, stereotyping, 69, 120–1, 131, 142, 212, 236, 243, 259, 270, 273–6, 310, 314, 385, 389–90, 394, 425–6
- stigmas, stigmatisation, stigmatising, 290, 294, 384, 389, 390–1, 394–6, 416, 429
- strategic, strategies, strategy, 6, 18, 23, 67, 77, 212, 224, 236, 276–7, 282–6, 290–2, 302, 304, 307, 312, 334, 342, 355–6, 358, 362, 370, 378, 381, 425, 427
- structure, structural, 3, 14, 16, 20, 55–6, 58, 85, 101, 104, 114, 168, 173, 209, 213–15, 219, 223–4, 271, 284–6, 295, 302, 337, 342, 376–7, 385, 389, 404, 416, 425
- struggle, 23–4, 61, 66, 97, 153, 156, 159, 172–3, 211, 216–17, 219–20, 225, 259, 262, 273, 287, 289, 291, 319–20, 323–4, 328, 333, 407
- success, successful, 11, 13, 17, 21, 24, 33, 43–5, 54–9, 63, 68, 74, 79, 82, 87, 89, 95–6, 102, 105, 122, 135, 160–1, 164, 169, 174, 213, 217, 247–8, 251, 264, 277, 285, 292, 300, 305, 308, 310, 312–14, 327, 335–6, 401, 407, 423, 428, 432, 434
- Suriname, Surinamese, 175, 177, 178–9, 181, 183–5, 187, 190, 194–6, 198
- symbol, symbolic, 4, 5, 20, 74, 98–9, 130, 161, 168, 218, 220, 231, 293–4, 326, 328, 432, 433
- Syria, Syrian, 97, 99, 103, 140, 263, 269–71, 343, 354
- talent, talented, 9, 12, 15, 23, 45, 65, 115–16, 119, 123, 134–6, 230, 300–11, 313–15, 355, 359–61, 368, 370, 390, 420, 425, 430–2
- tax, 130, 133, 136, 139, 173, 179, 187–9, 191–3, 195–6, 323, 332, 364, 415, 419
- technological, technologies, technology, 4, 8, 11–13, 19–21, 40–3, 62, 76, 110, 130–1, 134–6, 156, 166, 172, 188, 190–1, 194, 198, 300, 307, 353, 355–6, 358–9, 361–2, 368–70, 400, 401–2, 407, 409
- temporary, 42, 45, 102, 119, 170, 309–10, 330–1, 363–4, 402
- terror, terrorism, terrorists, 6, 80, 91, 119, 133, 135, 138, 212, 267, 270, 273, 354
- Texas, 37, 112, 134, 155–6, 159, 168, 236, 335, 357, 416–17
- theological, theology, 156–9, 164, 167, 170
- Thong, Tezenlo, 158, 161, 165, 170–1
- threat/s, 38, 54, 59, 81, 129, 154, 259, 261, 266, 269, 274, 356–8, 388, 390, 404, 406–7, 417
- tolerance, 53, 58, 116, 427
- Tölöyan, Khachig, 109
- tourism, tourist, 42, 74, 99, 100, 138, 196, 292
- trade, trading, 20, 32–3, 56, 80, 119, 122, 195, 210, 215–17, 219, 270, 353, 355, 367, 385

- tradition, traditional, 17, 33, 62, 76–7, 81, 90, 97, 130, 161–2, 164, 166, 172, 174, 184, 194, 213, 222, 239, 258, 262, 269, 288, 291, 337, 342, 376, 427, 429
- transatlantic, 20, 34, 73, 79, 83
- transform, transformation, 14–15, 38, 54–5, 61, 73–6, 79, 82–4, 114, 116, 132, 161, 169, 193, 197, 213, 268, 284–5, 295, 303–4, 334, 340–1, 393
- transition, transitional groups, 43, 169, 197, 251
- translocal, 295, 324, 326, 336–7, 340, 342
- transnational, transnationalisation, transnationalism, 1–7, 15–17, 19, 20–1, 31, 33–6, 41–4, 53, 55, 59, 63, 66, 68, 73, 75, 78–9, 81–2, 91, 95–6, 108–10, 113–14, 142–3, 151, 153–4, 156, 166, 168–9, 171–2, 174, 175, 193–5, 198, 209, 211–12, 215–25, 229, 240, 247–8, 251, 257–8, 263–6, 271–3, 277, 282–3, 300–1, 303–5, 309, 311–13, 319–22, 324, 326, 328, 330, 341, 343–4, 353–5, 369–70, 391–3, 396, 401–2, 423–8, 430, 432–4
- trauma, 97–8, 110, 330, 419
- Trinidad, 175, 177, 179, 181–5, 187, 190, 194–6, 198
- Trump, Donald, 18, 23, 44, 62, 113, 115, 136–42, 243, 252, 261, 267–8, 271, 274–5, 288, 292, 320, 327–8, 330–1, 335–6, 353–9, 364, 367, 368, 369, 374–5, 378–80, 387–90, 395–6, 406–9, 420, 430
- truth, 68, 99, 109, 139, 239, 335
- unauthorised, 12, 130
- undocumented, 23, 43, 80, 115, 117–19, 132–3, 135–7, 139, 142, 180, 182, 190, 192, 241, 321–4, 327–8, 330, 333, 334, 336, 338–9, 383, 388, 433
- unemployed, unemployment, 65, 130, 131, 175, 178, 189, 387, 411
- union/s, 38–9, 60–1, 65–6, 76, 91, 101, 109, 119, 123, 126, 128, 133, 135, 153, 291, 301, 337, 385
- universities, university, 12, 23, 34, 40, 42–5, 57, 74, 80, 85, 122, 130, 132, 135, 142, 157, 185, 222, 236, 240, 242, 266, 290, 301, 322, 328, 339, 355–7, 361–2, 367, 369, 407
- unskilled, 12, 34, 37–8, 43, 45, 125, 131, 142, 176, 359, 432
- value/s, valued, 7, 12, 15, 18, 20, 55, 64, 67–8, 75, 77, 79, 87, 113, 121, 131, 137, 142, 154, 158, 162, 164, 168, 191–5, 209, 214, 221, 224–5, 235–60, 264, 288, 293, 295, 376, 379, 384, 387, 404, 411, 418, 433
- victim/s, 2, 16, 38, 66, 89, 97, 119, 131, 183, 358, 386, 395, 403–4, 416–18
- Vietnam, Vietnamese, 19, 61, 75, 118, 132, 176
- violence, violent, 58, 61–2, 65, 119, 178, 183, 213, 216–17, 220, 264, 267, 320, 322–35, 344, 358, 381, 403–5, 416–17, 419–20
- virtual, virtually, 64, 107, 172, 178, 189, 197, 287, 290–1, 293, 404, 432–3
- virus, 358, 366, 368, 430
- visa/s, 18–19, 24, 39, 42, 66, 118–19, 135–6, 138, 159, 181–3, 212, 233–4, 264, 355–60, 362–8, 370, 374, 383, 401–20, 426–7
- vote, voters, 21, 24, 77, 83, 224, 233, 258, 261, 267–8, 272, 274–7, 291, 354, 374–5, 378–80, 387–91, 393–6, 427, 429
- vulnerability, vulnerable, 102, 132, 322, 334, 381–2, 384, 386–7, 396, 404–8, 410, 412, 426, 428
- wage/s, 13, 24, 35, 38–9, 86, 123–5, 133, 136, 182, 190, 243, 323–4, 381–2, 384–7, 395
- Wald, Kenneth, 17, 53, 65, 68, 265, 431
- Walzer, Michael, 68, 385
- wealth, wealthy, 7, 44, 63, 98, 115, 116, 175, 192, 197, 323, 359, 364–5, 383, 400, 415, 428
- welcome, welcoming, 19, 33, 53, 115, 130, 167, 169, 176, 288, 359, 365, 425, 433
- welfare, 17, 59, 64, 65, 68, 76, 370, 384–5, 390, 403
- white, whiteness, 18, 44, 55, 56, 91, 103–4, 115, 117, 121, 127, 166–7, 171, 188, 191, 244, 258, 261, 267–9, 274, 276, 332, 354, 379, 389, 393, 394, 396, 409
- xenophobia, xenophobic, 11, 12, 24, 33, 115, 137, 140–1, 252, 262, 354, 357, 387–8, 390–1, 394–6
- Yemen, Yemeni, 264, 270–1, 273, 277, 354