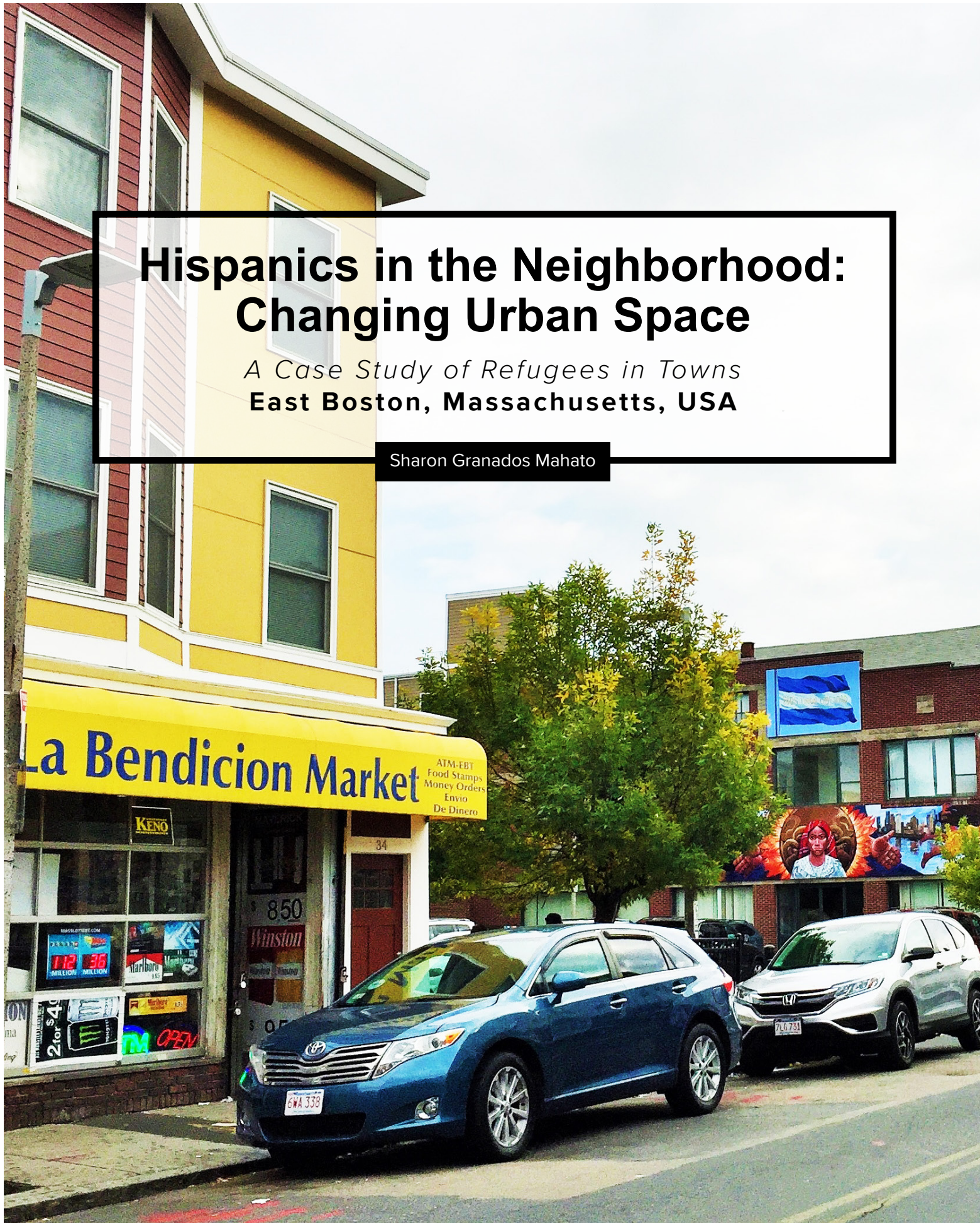


Hispanics in the Neighborhood: Changing Urban Space

A Case Study of Refugees in Towns
East Boston, Massachusetts, USA

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About the RIT Project

The **Refugees in Towns (RIT)** project promotes understanding of the migrant/refugee experience in urban settings. Our goal is to understand and promote refugee integration by drawing on the knowledge and perspective of refugees and locals to develop deeper understanding of the towns in which they live. The project was conceived and is led by Karen Jacobsen. It is based at the Feinstein International Center at Tufts University and funded by the Henry J. Leir Foundation.

Our goals are twofold

Our first long-term goal is to build a theory of integration from the ground up by compiling a global database of case studies and reports to help us analyze and understand the process of immigrant/refugee integration. These cases provide a range of local insights about the many different factors that enable or obstruct integration, and the ways in which migrants and hosts co-exist, adapt, and struggle in urban spaces. We draw our cases from towns in resettlement countries, transit countries, and countries of first asylum around the world.

Our second more immediate goal is to support community leaders, aid organizations, and local governments in shaping policy, practice, and interventions. We engage policymakers and community leaders through town visits, workshops, conferences, and participatory research that identifies needs in their communities, encourages dialogue on integration, and shares good practices and lessons learned.

Why now?

The United States—among many other refugee-hosting countries—is undergoing a shift in its refugee policy through travel bans and the suspension of parts of its refugee program. Towns across the U.S. are responding in different ways: some resist national policy changes by declaring themselves “sanctuary cities,” while others support travel bans and exclusionary policies. In this period of social and political change, we seek to deepen our understanding of integration and the ways in which refugees, migrants, and their hosts interact. Our RIT project draws on and gives voice to both refugees and hosts in their experiences with integration around the world.

For more on RIT

On our website, there are many more case studies and reports from other towns and urban neighborhoods around the world, and we regularly release more reports as our project develops.

www.refugeesintowns.org

Location



Introduction

During the last decade, East Boston has become home to more than 26,000 Hispanics in Boston, representing over 58% of the total population living in the city (United States Census Bureau, 2010-2015).

This case study of East Boston explores the integration process of Latin American immigrants in East Boston through the interactions of migrants and the host population. It examines how immigrants have transformed the community, appropriated the urban space, and are providing a new life to East Boston. The question of status across generations is also explored, looking at the experiences of first, second, and third generation forcibly displaced people. It also demonstrates that there are complex overlapping interactions between forced migrants and economic migrants, and that there is ambiguity in practice between

regular and irregular migrants that the laws used to categorize them do not reflect. While this is a report for the “Refugees” in Towns project, this report demonstrates the conflicted experiences of migrants who do not neatly fit into the tidy legal boxes: “TPS,” “refugee,” “economic migrant” and regularly intermix with other migrant and host groups. Understanding the urban integration experience requires going beyond these imposed categories and recognizing the rights of thousands of migrants who have raised their families and contribute every day to the social and economic development of East Boston and American society. This case study seeks to contribute to a better understanding of the Latin-American immigrant community in East Boston, its integration challenges, and how its presence is fundamental to constructing and developing the social fabric of the city.

About the Author and How the Report was Written

As a woman, immigrant, and resident for the last three years in an area of Boston that concentrates three cities/ neighborhoods of Latino immigrants (Chelsea, Everett, and East Boston), I developed a curiosity to understand its conformation and development in space and over time. The need to find my Latin roots led me to East Boston where I had the opportunity to discover the complex and exciting world of the Latino community there. My role as researcher and my experience working with migrants and refugees in Latin America allowed me to approach and meet key informants, always with an open perspective and with the objective of building a collaborative relationship with the immigrant and host community.

A bike ride from Chelsea to East Boston, and volunteering for migrant literacy summer classes opened the door to an extraordinary journey that showed me the faces of Latin American men and women who carry the deep scars of past flight and hard times in search of opportunities and protection.

This case study was conducted in the East Boston area during four months in the fall and winter of 2017. The report’s findings are based on qualitative interviews with key informants, such as Community Based Organizations (CBOs), government representatives, community leaders, and host population members. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted, capturing conversations and life stories with immigrants—both long term residents and newcomers—as well as a focus group with English as a Second Language (ESL) Latino students.

The work of recognition and socio-spatial observation was fundamental to this case study. Non-participatory observation in strategic sites within the neighborhood, as well as geographical data

About the Author and How the Report was Written (cont.)

collection allowed me to comprehend the patterns of distribution, the construction of integration and appropriation spaces, and the re-signification of the neighborhood as a result of the interventions of migrants in the territory. Going through the neighborhood has confirmed that even though Latino migrants are spread throughout East Boston, they have managed to create sub-territories of appropriation in which they express their culture and defy the neighborhood with their own strengthened identity.

Prior to interviews and fieldwork, I performed a literature review and analysis of quantitative data collected from several sources cataloging demographics, urban planning, and development at the national and local levels, some of which were developed by Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and government agencies.

This case focuses on the Central American-originating population of East Boston due to my interest in understanding the dense presence of this community in this particular area of Boston, and the constant flows of displacement over the past few years. I explore the vulnerable situation that thousands of Temporary Protected Status (TPS) holders are facing because of current political and social pressure that is putting people at risk of falling into irregular migratory conditions. Despite this focus, the study reflects many other nationalities that are connected with the Hispanic and Latino communities in the neighborhood.

It was fascinating to be part of this case study, as a researcher, but also as a woman and migrant who is living and experiencing the city and its nuances. I found work with the Refugees in Town Project was a fantastic opportunity to review academics' approach to understanding minority groups, as well as develop more authentic measurements of how social stakeholders are contributing (or not) to the integration process. Refugees and migrants find in RIT the hope to advance their living conditions, and find validation of their human rights in host communities because of the research. These ends should always be our commitment.

East Boston Non-Representative Sampling Chart

Stakeholders	Description of Participants	N Value	Men	Women	
Key Informants (14)	<p>Organizations represented: Centro Presente, East Boston Ecumenical Community Council, NOAH- Neighborhood of Affordable Housing, VR Cultural Center.</p> <p>Most of the representatives are American citizens or U.S. Permanent Residents with Latino origin mainly from Honduras, Nicaragua, Mexico and Dominican Republic.</p> <p>East Boston Neighborhood Health Center (Mass League of Community Centers)</p>	6	1	5	
	Government	<p>Mayor's Office for Immigrant Advancement, East Boston Public Library, Consulate General of El Salvador in Boston.</p> <p>Most of the representatives are American citizens or U.S. Permanent Residents with Latino origin mainly from El Salvador, Mexico, Venezuela, and Guatemala.</p>	4	1	3
	Community Leaders	Central American migrant leaders, part of the CBOs.	2	1	1
	Host population	Americans and Italo- Americans Long-time residents of East Boston.	2	1	1
Individual Interviews (21)	Immigrants	<p>Latin American Immigrants mainly from El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Mexico, Colombia. Including individual semi-structured interviews (8) and Focus groups participants (9).</p>	17	8	9
	Immigrants Entrepreneurs	Immigrants owners of Hispanic businesses such as multiservice stores, restaurants, mainly of Colombian and Salvadoran origin.	4	2	2
Total		35	14	21	

Background on Refugees in the US

The United States has a long history of welcoming refugees, and though recently resettlement numbers have declined, the United States remains one of the top resettlement countries in the world. Over 3 million refugees have been resettled in the U.S. since 1975 (Refugee Council USA, 2017). Resettlement of refugees is conducted through the United States Refugee Admission Program. The program is comprised of several federal agencies including the State Department, Homeland Security, Department of Justice, and the Department of Health and Human Services (U.S. Department of State). The President of the United States each year determines the number of refugees who may be admitted, along with the designated nationalities and processing priorities (Refugee Council USA, 2017).

The U.S. history with refugee settlement begins with the end of World War II when the United States resettled nearly half a million Europeans through the Displaced Persons Act of 1948. Resettlement of refugees continued through the Cold War period with the U.S. focusing its resettlement initiatives on taking in refugees from Communist states. Following the large resettlement of Southeast Asian refugees in the 1960s and 1970s, Congress passed the Refugee Act of 1980, which incorporated the United Nations definition of a refugee as defined by the 1951 Convention. Through the Refugee Act, the U.S. standardized the resettlement services for refugees by creating the U.S. Refugee Admission Program.

Since the 1980s, refugee resettlement demographics in the U.S. have become more diverse and less defined by Cold War dynamics, with refugees coming mostly from Democratic Republic of Congo, Syria, Burma, Iraq, Somalia, and Bhutan (Igielnik, 2017). The largest shift in resettlement patterns occurred post September 11,

2001: under the Bush and Obama administrations, refugee resettlement numbers decreased, with the lowest numbers reaching 27,110 in 2002. Numbers under the second term of the Obama administration began to increase, only to shrink again under the Trump administration with a projection of 45,000 refugees to resettle in 2018 (Rose, 2017).

In addition to formally resettled refugees, throughout the history of the United States there have been large numbers of irregular migrants arriving and integrating in American cities. Since the 1990s, efforts like the Temporary Protected Status (TPS) program have attempted to formalize these self-settled migrant groups (Messick and Bergeron, 2014). The history of refugee integration in the U.S. is not limited to officially resettled refugees, but other forcibly displaced persons who arrive through a wide range of processes, regular and irregular.

Background on Immigrants in East Boston

Since its founding in 1636 and its annexation to the City of Boston in 1836, East Boston has witnessed the settlement of thousands of immigrants who have arrived in America and become part of a blended population. Immigration began with migrants originating from Canada and Ireland, followed by Russians and Italians towards the middle of the 19th century. In the early 1900s—due to extensive industrial development—East Boston was one of the most important ports of immigrants' entry to the United States. Between 1920 and 1960, East Boston experienced a significant wave of Italian immigrants and, subsequently, in the 1980s another wave of immigrants began arriving, mainly from the Latin American countries of El Salvador, Colombia, Mexico, and Guatemala.

East Boston has emerged throughout its history as a diverse set of neighborhoods with multiple social, economic, and cultural components. It is characterized as a space of interaction between host residents, longtime residents, and immigrants who are currently merging with a new wave of young American Bostonian professionals looking to live in a neighborhood with charm, character, and diversity.

As a part of Boston proper, East Boston provides an extensive network of urban public transportation and access roads through the Blue Line T, MBTA ferries, Williams, Callahan and Sumner Tunnels, and the Logan International Airport. In large part because of this ease of access, East Boston is currently facing a new wave of investors and Real Estate Market Development as well as low-income housing redevelopment, which is impacting community life and forcing changes to demographics.

Hispanics in East Boston

Latin American immigrants have settled in East Boston for decades over multiple generations, and the neighborhood currently hosts approximately 26,063 Hispanics who account for over 58% of the total population (United States Census Bureau, 2010-2015). Until the 1980s, the Hispanic or Latino population was relatively small, and made up an insubstantial share of East Boston's total foreign-born population.

A remarkable growth of the Hispanic population in East Boston began in earnest in 1989 and 1990, maintaining a constant increase during the 2000s.

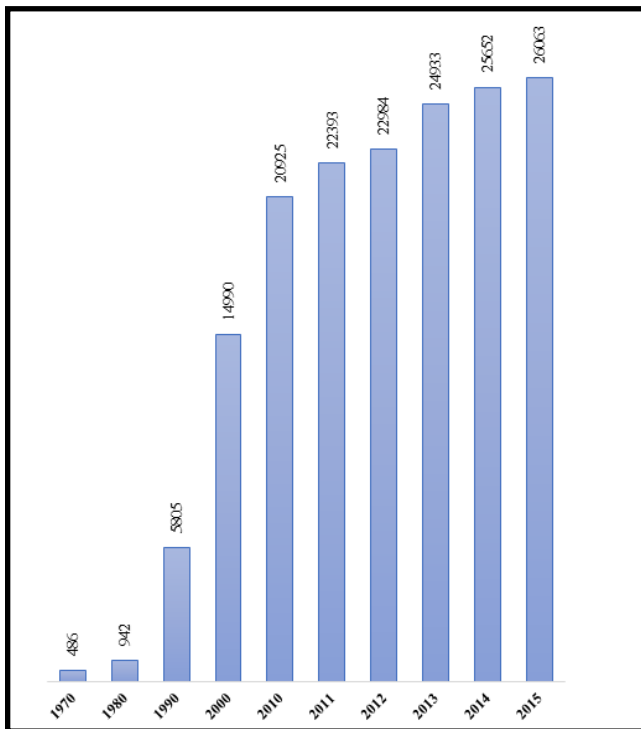
According to the American Community Survey, East Boston has more than half (55%) of its foreign-born population composed of people of Central American origin, mainly from the Northern Triangle region that includes El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. Immigrants from South American countries—primarily from Colombia and Peru—represent 21% of the population.

Also, 14% of Hispanics come from the Caribbean Islands, with the Dominican Republic as the largest country of origin for Caribbean migration to East Boston. A remaining 11% represent Latinos from Mexico and other individuals of Hispanic or Latino origin.

People of Central American and Colombian origin represent the largest Hispanic presence in East Boston. Together they amount to approximately 62% of the total immigrants in East Boston.

Although there is a higher presence of Central Americans, the East Boston neighborhood shows diverse interactions among migrants regardless

Chart 1. Hispanic or Latino Origin Population in East Boston, 1970- 2015 (US Census Bureau)



Main Countries of Origin of Hispanics, East Boston (US Census Bureau)

Country of Origin	Total	Percentage (Rounded)
El Salvador	11,503	44
Colombia	4,624	18
Mexico	2,016	8
Guatemala	1,965	8
Dominican Republic	1,765	7
Peru	508	2
Honduras	457	2
Others	3,225	12
Total Migrant Population	26,063	26,063

of the country of origin, not only in commercial spaces such as restaurants and stores, but also in religious places like churches and community celebrations. Educational organizations such as

schools, community organizations, and the public library are spaces enriched by the mixing migrant community, which includes people from Central and South America, Asia, and Africa. Despite the social differences between nationalities and the differing causes of migration, the neighborhood in general is a space in which the entire migrant community has created an oasis of solidarity, support, and connection with the countries of origin.

The Central American community in East Boston consists of groups of families who were established by a first generation of immigrants born abroad, who over time have produced a second generation of US-born individuals with at least one parent of Hispanic origin. These communities have been growing and establishing roots with multinational families, including Americans and residents from other countries of Latin America. Recently, a third generation of people of Central American origin born in the United States has arisen whose children are from American parents of Hispanic origin.

Due to the causes of migration and arrival times, family reunification has contributed to demographic evolution of Central Americans in East Boston. According to the participants in this study, most migrants who arrived in East Boston since the 1980's aim toward one central goal: reunification of their entire family, including spouses, children, parents, and siblings.

“I came to change my life; I wanted to give my children another life. I arrived here on November 3, 1988. I am from La Union, Santa Ana, rural people. In 1991, I obtained my work permit and then my residence. I have three children. In 1996, I brought my older child, in 2000 my second child, and by 2006 I finished and brought my daughter. They are here with me, and they have their own families. I have my grandchildren who are also Americans; I live with them and with my daughter. My three children already have their own homes.”

- Salvadoran Immigrant, East Boston

Legal Status of Central Americans Forcibly Displaced Immigrants

The majority of Central American immigrants, mainly Salvadorans, Hondurans, and Nicaraguans living in East Boston were granted Temporary Protected Status (TPS). Although TPS does not provide a migrant lawful permanent status, most of the first generation of Central Americans who arrived in Boston in 1989-1990 were provided permanent status by the Nicaraguan Adjustment and Central American Relief Act in 1997.

There are more than 12,000 TPS holders in Massachusetts: 6,058 Salvadorans and 834 Hondurans who have been living an average of 22 years in the United States (MIRA, 2017). Salvadoran TPS recipients in Massachusetts are parents of approximately 4,200 US-born children who have grown up in Boston and are part of the education system in high school or college. Most of these children recognize Boston as their home and show little connection with their parents' countries of origin. According to Center for Migration Studies (2017), 4,800 workers in Massachusetts are Salvadoran TPS holders.

Currently, people who received temporary protection in 1999 and 2001 face a situation of confusion and fear regarding the termination of the TPS program, which could mean their deportation to home countries where conditions are unsafe and uncertain, especially for the families with children born in the United States who are unprepared for living in and unconnected with Central American countries.

The political motivations for the TPS cancellation go beyond the national security of the United States and are based on features of discrimination and intolerance. These motivations have affected other families with the elimination of legal migration programs like the Central American Minors (CAM) program and the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, marginalizing many migrant families in East Boston and across the US. The lack of permanent protection or non-regularization for migrants who have been protected by TPS will affect not only migrants and their families but also their host communities, US-born children, employers, and local economies.

Mapping the Immigrant Population

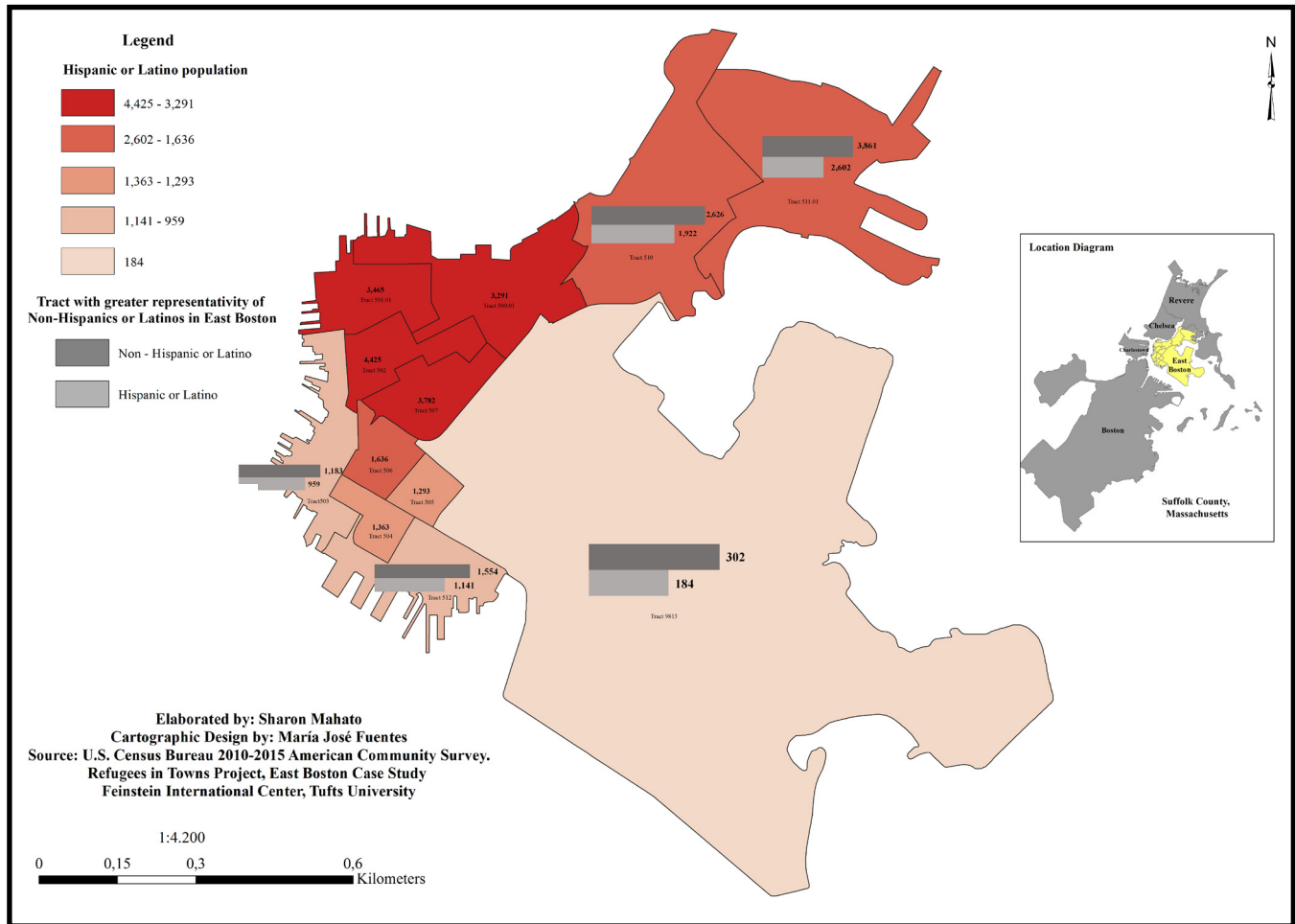
The geographic distribution of Latinos in East Boston shows the population is spread throughout the urban space. However, there are also specific areas with a large population of highly clustered Hispanics.

An initial identification based on the census tracts for 2015 shows a residential and commercial concentration of Hispanics in the central area of East Boston, especially the northeast area extended from Central Square to the edges of the

cities of Chelsea and Revere. This concentrates 57% of all Hispanic migrants in East Boston, as well as most Latin commercial services such as restaurants, food stores, beauty salons, multi-service stores, remittance and parcel offices, sales of nostalgic products, and CBOs along Bennington Street.

A second assessment based on ethnographic observation confirms that Hispanics have established an enclave in the city of East Boston.

Map 1. Distribution of Hispanic or Latino origin population in East Boston per census tract, 2015.



Hispanic and Latino immigrants are present throughout the East Boston neighborhood. Salvadorans, Colombians, and Dominicans have predominant participation along the territory while Hondurans, Mexicans, and Peruvians have a smaller presence.

Their presence since the late-80s, and the constant influx of arrivals has generated the gradual displacement of other groups, especially Italians, who have gradually left the area in search of new residential areas. Older migrants, like those within the Italian community, saw the opportunity for profit because of the high demand for housing by Central Americans and Colombians.

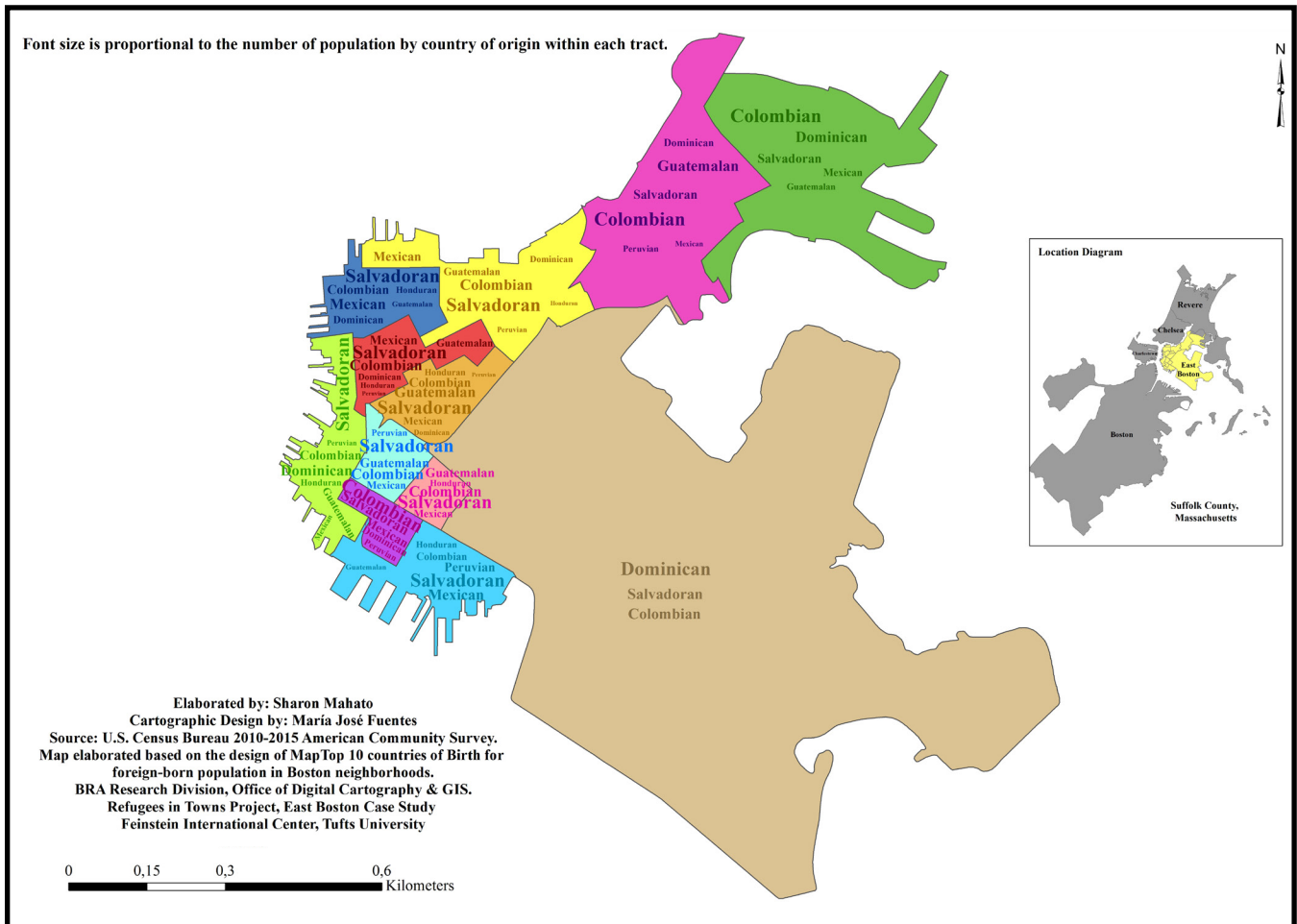
It is essential to note that the distribution of migrants based on the official statistics only considers documented migrants and TPS holders. However, site visits, ethnographic observations, and key informants all confirm the presence and participation in the urban fabric of a significant population of undocumented people, invisible immigrants, economic migrants, and victims of

“Currently few Italians live here. From my perspective, the Italians were well suited and integrated, and when they saw the change that was generated when Hispanics entered, they preferred to make community elsewhere and saw the opportunity to lease their properties and do business with that.”

- Geraldine Sosa, East Boston Neighborhood Health Center

forced displacement seeking protection. These groups represent an essential portion of the migrants in East Boston who contribute to social and economic development as well as the intercultural relations in the city.

Map 2. Distribution of Hispanic or Latino population by country of origin per census tract in East Boston, 2015.



By superimposing the land use base on the census tracts, it is observed that the area concentrates a higher proportion of the land dedicated to residential areas, units of two and three families, as well as single-family dwellings. These spaces are mostly owned by Italian-Americans and other multi-generational Americans who rent multi-bedroom units to Central American families, mainly Salvadorans and Guatemalans, including both new arrivals and long-time residents.

As indicated by the ACS, roughly 71% of foreigners in Boston rent the properties in which they reside, while 29% own properties. Salvadorans show that 76.6% rent their homes (37% not rent burdened, and 39.5% rent burdened), while 23.5% own their own houses. Guatemalans show lower housing

tenure, only 12.5% have mortgages, and the remaining 87.5% are tenants. Similarly, Colombians are 83.1% tenants and just 12.9% have acquired their own homes.

“I have always lived in the same place here in East Boston, on Condor Street. I have been there for about 26 years now. When I arrived, I paid \$650 [per month], and after one year they raised the rent to \$700, [and] since then it has not changed. I live in a room with my wife; we share the whole house with two other families. Our landlord is Italian, and he lives there too. He is a good person, but he always finds things to discriminate [against us for].”

- Salvadoran Immigrant, East Boston

The upper part of East Boston, where the neighborhoods of Wood Island and Orient Heights are located, concentrates roughly 4,524 people of Hispanic origin, mainly from Colombia, the Dominican Republic, and some Central Americans, although in lower numbers. This area has maintained the largest concentration of people of non-Hispanic or Latino-origin in East Boston, mainly American and Italian-American families, as well as long-term Italian residents who remain in the area.

The Orient Heights neighborhood is an urban space that resists the changes that are taking place in East Boston, both in demographics and in real estate development. Although Hispanics have contributed to the commercial dynamics of this area through the installation of restaurants, bars, and shops, the neighborhood continues to be have valuable residential and recreational sectors for the local population of white workers.

Despite the resistance of its inhabitants, it is interesting to see the mosaic of commercial ventures that have begun to take shape in this area. For example, at the intersection of Boardman St., Saratoga St., and Bennington St. there is a mixture of commercial interactions showcasing American restaurants and bars that have been there for decades and share the space with Italian restaurants, as well as Latino enterprises such as restaurants and multi-service stores, and Asian businesses. Although up to now it is a mere commercial interaction, this space could create an ambiance for the construction of new social relations in the neighborhood, both among the local inhabitants, as well as immigrants and new arrivals, including the new wave of young professional Americans looking for multiculturalism and low cost of living relative to neighborhoods like Back Bay or the North End.

One of the areas with the highest presence and participation of Hispanics is extended along Meridian Street from Central Square to Maverick Square, with a smaller proportion of non-Hispanics. Like Bennington St., this section of Meridian St. covers the most dynamic economic, commercial, social, and cultural area of Hispanic presence in East Boston.

“Orient Heights is the only remaining neighborhood in East Boston with a large white working-class population. A new local bar, Renegades, established earlier in 2017 is itself analogous to the significant changes taking place in the neighborhood, as well as the natural resistance in the neighborhood to change. Intended to provide a more upscale environment for craft beer enthusiasts and hip young professionals that like to drink their bourbon out of mason jars, the patrons found within are instead the same vanishing class of white Boston laborers who one sees crowded around dying neighborhood haunts like Casey’s (Winter Hill, Somerville), L Street Tavern (South Boston), and The Bus Stop Pub (Allston). Aside from Renegades, some other local businesses remain. In the same square is a Colombian-owned bar Kioskos. Down Boardman St. is a roast beef fast-food joint that has been there for several decades. Woody’s Liquor stands at the top of the square, near the T station.”

- Thomas Lord, Researcher in East Boston

“This used to be an Italian neighborhood. My grandparents built and owned that house—right down there,” pointing to a row of nicely painted, well-kept triple-decker houses running in a line on either side of Saratoga St. towards the Massachusetts Bay. “They were Italian. I still own that house. You come to this neighborhood for the Columbus Day Parade they have every year in October, all of those houses will be flying the American flag from their front decks.... I live in Winthrop. Everyone [white former East Boston residents] lives in Winthrop now.” Many others had also moved to the neighboring suburb of Winthrop, across the bay, despite having a multi-generational connection to Orient Heights.”

- American-Italian former resident of Orient Heights, East Boston quoted by Thomas Lord, Researcher in East Boston

Along with businesses and Latino ventures, other institutions of the city provide connections between migrants and hosts, including the East Boston Neighborhood Health Center, banks, remittance offices, churches, the East Boston Police Department, the East Boston District Court, CBOs, and other essential services that migrants use in everyday life.

The area around the MBTA blue line Station “Maverick” and bus lines to Revere and Chelsea where a significant number of businesses of Colombians, Salvadorans, and Brazilians have settled, provide the station with a Latin atmosphere. This area concentrates the passage of hundreds of residents and workers of East Boston from all nationalities, as well as local populations and new residents, especially American college students who have arrived in the area in the last five years seeking diversity and relatively affordable rent compared to downtown Boston, but still featuring ease of access to public transit.

Informal commerce is also part of this urban fabric of Maverick Square, with the presence of street

“I am always here, every day that you come, you will always find me here at Maverick Square or Meridian Street. I have many clients, many people who go to work pass by and take their tamales for breakfast or lunch. They are people who appreciate me; they know that I am a hard worker. There are also Americans who buy from me, not many, but there are some. Sad things have happened here, especially with old American ladies, who have discriminated against me for selling tamales and being a migrant. They shout at me and say things that sometimes I do not understand in English. They have mistreated me, but there are always people who defend me since I cannot because I do not know English. However, I’m still here, working hard.”

- Salvadoran Immigrant,
street vendor of tamales, East Boston

vendors of Hispanic origin that add to the daily experience of this lively area.

Areas like the Edge of Boston Inner Harbor and the Logan International Airport, are made up of only nine percent of migrants of Hispanic origin. This corresponds to the boom in real estate development, and the presence of investors focused on high-cost offers accompanied by a housing market in which prices have increased substantially in recent years, ultimately displacing the low income population from these areas.

Indeed, the Land Use Map for 2016 shows that this area is used in greatest proportion for apartment buildings, recently built condominiums, and low-income housing projects, as well as mixed and commercial use. In general, the distribution of the population in this area accounts for a more significant presence of non-Hispanics, mainly Americans, Italian-Americans, and African-Americans.

In the 1910s Jeffries Point and Maverick Square were the largest settlements of Italians in Boston, situated predominantly on Cottage, Summer, Havre, and Decatur Streets. “The area started to grow in 1904 with over 1,400 families that grew to roughly 10,000 residents a decade later,” (Global Boston, 2016). To date, this area is occupied by Americans and Italians who provide a major resistance to demographic changes, especially Hispanics, and are backed by the development of high-cost housing, inaccessible for new migrants.

Along with these aforementioned areas, Jeffries Point remains a predominantly non-Hispanic area which has experienced an influx of young professionals and has been evolving into a mixed-use environment with new residential and open-space development. “Since 2000, almost 300 new residential units have been built, with over 2,000 more either under construction or in the pipeline,” (City of Boston, 2017). Paradoxically, this neighborhood has one of the most crowded public spaces in East Boston: The Piers Park. According to interviews, this park is one of the most important areas for social integration and interaction between host communities and migrants.

Latin American Experiences

Livelihoods and Income

In general, the Central American population in East Boston are hardworking people dedicated mainly to livelihoods activities such as commerce, hotel services, cleaning, restaurants, construction, maintenance, and production. For example, “in Boston, 79% of adult Salvadorans participate in the labor force, a larger share than other Latinos (66%) and non-Latinos (68%),” (BPDA 2017).

According to the ACS and BPDA data, as well as field observations and interviews, the Central American population in East Boston can be described as having a low educational level, with a high proportion having a lower level of education than a high school diploma, and some of whom are illiterate without any type of formal education. Compared with other Hispanics, among Salvadorians approximately 62% of the adult population has not completed high school, and only 15.1% have some higher level educational study. In the case of Colombians, the educational level is varied. However, approximately 40.9% have some college studies, bachelor’s degrees, or higher-level degrees.

East Boston is characterized as an area where most people speak Spanish, including in commercial areas and public spaces, with certain exceptions in commercial or transportation sectors where a higher proportion of workers are Americans or Italian-Americans. In this sense, it is possible to deduce that most Salvadorans, Guatemalans, Hondurans, and Nicaraguans have less English proficiency. Essentially, older migrants who have English as a second language find language-learning to be a constant challenge for their integration because a lack of opportunities or need to practice. Colombians and Dominicans tend to have better English ability compared to Central Americans, although for them, it remains one of the most significant difficulties for

integration. Most Colombians interviewed who speak English well emphasize that language is a barrier to accessing better job and education opportunities. They mentioned that ESL is an investment they must incur to qualify for broader and better work sources.

Salvadorans, Guatemalans, and Colombians have a low share of people living below the poverty line in Boston (23%, 17%, and 22% respectively) while Dominicans (40%) and Mexicans (26%) have a more significant proportion of people who live below the census poverty line.

“I started working from the lowest, simplest level, in a bread factory. I have always been interested in climbing and learning, until one day I became the supervisor of 69 people in the bread factory. I worked 15 years in three different factories. My dream was always to work in an office; I wanted to do something different. It was not my dream to stay in a plant for the rest of my life. One day I heard on the radio a company needed people to sell houses, they were looking for realtors. Then I took the number and called and asked what the requirements were. They told me that I had to have a Real Estate license, so I asked: ‘How can I get it?’ They gave me a website and that same night I signed up for classes. I took the course, and after a few weeks, I took the exam. After two attempts I passed the test, and that is how I started working on this. It has been 14 years. During the first two months, I sold three houses and tripled the salary I had as a supervisor. It has gone well! I have three daughters, they were born here, and I also have a grandchild. I have two houses, and I have another investment. I live a quiet life.”

Salvadoran Immigrant, East Boston

The Hispanic population in East Boston has a median household income of \$50,000. Also, 13% and 17% of Salvadorans and Guatemalans respectively have achieved a middle-class standard of living, although they are below the average among other Latinos (19%) and non-Latinos (46%) in East Boston.

Migrant Integration

“I hope it will be a better place for all of us where we can feel like this is our home. I hope Boston can give us what we deserve as humans and as immigrants.”

- *ESL Student, East Boston*

Individuals involved in the defense and protection of migrants, including community leaders, civil society organizations, governments, and public servants in East Boston identify integration as a set of factors that facilitate the acceptance and successful adaptation of migrants in the community.

The main factors key to integration mentioned by these institutional representatives are: effective access to resources such as information of the migratory regularization process; education for migrant children and students; affordable English programs for speakers of other languages; and, legal advice on the rights of migrant workers. Other indicated aspects of integration include basic services for health and mental care, health insurance, psychological counseling services, job placement, and housing, as well as a healthy inclusion to the social and cultural dynamics of the host society.

However, in reality, the process of integration in the neighborhood has been far from what it would ideally include. In general, most of the people interviewed (including immigrant residents and community leaders) affirm that there is no integration, but they recognize instead a

system of necessary interactions between the host community and migrants that does not go beyond a commercial exchange of services. When voluntary interactions do occur, it tends to be limited to host community members seeking out “attractive,” “spicy,” and “striking” experiences with migrants, who are perceived by host communities as exotic and exciting urban flair.

In contrast to how institutions qualify integration, migrants themselves define integration primarily as a condition where they can move without fear, in which they can freely express themselves without fear of being labeled as a migrant, and where they will not be ashamed to reveal their customs, lifestyle, and traditions in their places of residence.

It is fascinating to see how migrants in East Boston consider integration in a very human and simple sense. To migrants, it is less about formal legal conditions, and more about feeling a part of the community as the result of small daily achievements such as going to the supermarket, using public services, going to the hospital, going to church, working, communicating effectively with others, experiencing real and perceived safety, taking children to school, and doing recreational activities within the neighborhood. Integration for the Hispanic community is also understood as the ability to share and help other newcomers, offering information and support regardless of their nationality and immigration status.

For migrants, the integration process includes a set of challenges that never end. Documentation and regularization, challenges with English as a Second Language (ESL), limited access to work, limited access to education, and discrimination are the main factors mentioned by migrants that impede the path towards integration with host communities.

The issue of being and feeling safe was mentioned several times by migrants, who directly connect the safety factor to their experiences with high levels of risk and violence in their countries of origin. In that sense, they affirm that here in US they are safe from the violence perpetrated by organized crime. However, they identify other

fears, for example of being undocumented or with limited possibilities of obtaining a regular status (ie. having a regular migratory status from a work permit, green card, or citizenship). They even mention discrimination producing fear, an experience they described facing every day.

“Boston is different from [living] in our countries. Here you can walk safely late at night without fear of being robbed or assaulted. In Honduras or El Salvador, even in our own house, we were always afraid because we knew that today or tomorrow the gang members would come to ask for their money and begin to extort the family.”

- Salvadoran Immigrant, East Boston

“Here I escaped from that [insecurity]. My son who was born here will not have to live those situations that I lived with my eldest son, always with the fear that one day the “mareros” [gangsters] would arrive and take him away. Here that does not happen. Other things are scary here, for example, not having papers. People suffer a lot because they are undocumented.”

- Guatemalan Immigrant, East Boston

The sociopolitical context developed during the campaign and election of President Donald Trump, which has generated an atmosphere of fear, uncertainty, and despair both in the migrant population and those who defend their human rights in East Boston. Regrettably, this context has raised the flag of anti-immigrant community members who seek to use this as an opportunity to discriminate and harass the migrant community. This situation has led to the fact that some migrants are reluctant to interact openly with others due to the fear of being identified as undocumented migrants.

Another important factor to integration is the stigmatization experienced by young Central

Americans, mainly linked to gangs in their country of origin.

“The most vulnerable group [Salvadorans, Hondurans, and Guatemalans] is also stigmatized because it is assumed that they can belong to gangs. Evidently, there are cases of transnational organized crime. In East Boston, there have been several operations by the police, the FBI, and the Immigration Department to detain people who have links to gangs. In this sense, our position is very critical. We are not going to defend people who are related to organized crime, but we are also not going to allow a stigma with the populations, especially with the recently arrived young Central Americans.”

- Patricia Montes, Centro Presente

Migrants show enthusiasm in discussing their future plans. Most of them want to stay in Boston, working and growing their families and children, and even aspiring to buy their own house. Many express their intention to become citizens of the United States, while others hope to learn to read and write to later acquire citizenship.

“The most difficult thing for me has been not knowing how to read or write or handle English. I could already have my citizenship, but I cannot because I do not read or write well. Like me, there are many people—men and women—who cannot have their citizenship, with more than 20 years of living and working here. However, with my classes, I know that one day I will succeed. Now I can read and write a little more, and someday I will learn to speak English to apply for my citizenship.”

- Salvadoran Immigrant, East Boston

During a focus group with ESL Hispanic students, most of them expressed their desire to access

higher education: together with the English language, they consider this one of the most critical challenges for successful integration in East Boston. From their perspective, although the best universities are located in Boston, these seem to be inaccessible for the salaries of documented and undocumented migrant youth who dream of becoming professional workers.

Although at the political level there is not broad participation or representation of Hispanic and Latino migrants, there are some advances concerning inclusion and particular mobilizations in favor of concrete actions such as support for DACA and TPS holders, which are promoted in part by CBOs in East Boston.

A compelling observation was mentioned by Celina Barrios, the Immigrant Integration Fellow of the Mayor's Office for Immigrant Advancement, who identified some advances in the area of integration in the neighborhood as follows:

When I worked at the municipal council in 2003, the only Latino elected in the city of Boston was Felix Arroyo, and I worked with him. He is Puerto Rican, and at that time the representative of East Boston was Italian, and all his staff was Italian, so when all the Latinos from East Boston came to our office, we represented the whole city. Then, of course, everyone was welcome. It was interesting that suddenly all those people started coming to the mayor's office because they knew that there was someone who spoke Spanish. The last mayor of that area was Sal LaMattina, another Italian. He had one of his assistants who was Hispanic, and in his office, everyone else were older Italians. He knew he had to hire someone who spoke Spanish. So that is progress that the person who is chosen, even if they are Italian, takes into account that they have to serve a broader community. These last elections, for the first time we are choosing someone that even if they are not Latina [referring to Lydia Edwards, an African-American woman], speaks Spanish and Portuguese and she made her campaign very focused on immigrants, and in their language. She knocked on doors in their language, and she won. It does not mean that

a Latina won, but you can see that there are changes in the community and that people are responding to a pro-immigrant message. Interesting that a very pro-immigrant message won in a very traditional site that historically has chosen Italians. So, I think there is a change; Lydia was not elected precisely by Latinos, the percentage of Latinos who voted is minimal. Of course, Latinos supported her, but she won with the vote of Americans with a more open-mind. It seems to me that these municipal elections showed a movement of more progressive people, more openly betting on immigrants. - Celina Barrios, Immigrant Integration Fellow of Mayor's Office for Immigrant Advancement

While migrants continue to forge their lives and confront their challenges, most of the host community members in East Boston (Americans, Italians, and Italian-Americans) maintain some resistance to integration and have some issues in recognizing the growing diversity. Fortunately, the nuances of integration show that there are also groups of local people interested in welcoming migrants and their families, as well as their traditions and culture, and for advocating for their rights and wellbeing.

"We must understand that integration must be a mutual process in which there is respect for cultural diversity. Respect, and understanding that Latinos will never forget that we have profound connections [to countries of origin]. We love this country deeply, but at the same time, we have that invaluable affection to our countries of origin that will never be erased."

- Frank Ramirez, East Boston Ecumenical Community Council

Migrants are willing to integrate and share with local and host community populations as much as they can, being helpful, friendly, welcome, and kind; however, most of the time they face challenging barriers of language, education, economic level, locational segregation, and discrimination.

Urban Impact & City Transformations

Spaces of Integration and Appropriation

A few decades ago East Boston was an Italian-American neighborhood dedicated to manufacturing but has since become a neighborhood based on a services economy that, together with the growth of Logan International Airport, has boosted real estate investment and stimulated the local economy.

Although East Boston has always been endowed with an immigrant charisma, the presence of Latinos has changed the community life affecting both migrant families and host populations. Social relationship-building in East Boston has materialized in transformations of urban spaces. These changes are a consequence of the process of adaptation, strategies for survival, and needs created by the more than 26,000 Hispanic residents in the neighborhood.

The social, cultural, and economic contributions made by Hispanics have changed the collective imagination about this neighborhood in the city of Boston. Those who seek a Latino culinary experience, those who want to live in a diverse neighborhood, and those looking for a genuine Hispanic community find in East Boston an opportunity to position themselves in direct contact with the Latino culture, its people, its traditions, and its values. The creation of Hispanic enterprises dedicated to providing services to both immigrants and the host populations has impacted the local economy meaningfully. Their contributions are substantial in creating local and family businesses, as well as generating job opportunities for the Latino community.

This case study identified the integration spaces generated by Hispanics in the neighborhood which play an essential role in the transfer of culture and traditions within the urban context. Although at first glance these integration spaces seem like simplistic places of consumption, these are in fact spaces that allow Hispanics to differentiate themselves from locals and express their own mixtures of identity. Family businesses, especially restaurants, create employment for large families of up to 12 people including fathers, mothers, brothers, children, cousins, and grandchildren. Such is the case of Colombian restaurants like El Punto Rojo, El Penol, El Kiosko, as well as Salvadoran restaurants such as Rinconcito Salvadoreño, La Reina, Pueblo Viejo, and Mexican like Lolly's Bakery.

Hispanic food stores, multi-service stores such as international remittance services and parcel services, as well as beauty salons and travel agencies, all play an essential role in creating jobs at the local level. These businesses, besides providing income and jobs, build an economically-successful foundation of cultural heritage for new generations of Hispanic children born in the United States.

Map 3 shows the integration spaces that have been identified by migrants, community leaders, CBOs, and public servants as key catalysts of integration.

The first set of spaces recognized as areas of integration are the public parks, such as Boston Central Square Park, Piers Park, Bremen Street Community Park, Lombardi Memorial Park, Lo Presti Park, and the East Boston Greenway (listed in order of importance as identified by respondents). These parks represent spaces for interaction due to the simultaneous presence of multiple social actors, including migrants of several

nationalities, local populations, and community leaders of all ages and from all neighborhoods of East Boston.

Two other key public places mentioned are the East Boston Public Library and the East Boston Neighborhood Health Center; both play essential roles at the community level in the development of recreational, intercultural, and public health activities. Some activities mentioned by Hispanics are block parties, the East Boston Farmers Market, migrant celebrations in public spaces like birthdays, and civic events.

“The library could make integration happen, but it is very small. There you can find people from all over, including migrants and many Americans, but there is no real integration through relationship building. It is more to use the services of the library because, in the end, each person is doing their own thing.”

- *Community Leader and Library user,
East Boston*

The murals in the public spaces of East Boston have been mentioned by interviewees as initiatives that enhance integration and diversity, making evident the contribution of migrants to the construction of the city. The City of Boston Mayor’s Office for Immigrant Advancement has impacted the community with the campaign “To Immigrants with Love,” which focuses on Boston’s past and present immigrants, and celebrates all they bring to the city and their neighborhoods as part of a larger effort to better connect immigrants to city services and resources.

Churches are one of the social institutions that cause greater integration in the community, which due to demand from Hispanics offer masses, worship, social events, and pastoral services in Spanish. Churches are vital establishments that help alleviate migratory trauma and support the process of social integration in host communities as people demonstrate shared identity and beliefs

through the faith they profess. Migrants primarily identify the Madonna Queen of the Universe Shrine located in Orient Heights and the Holy Redeemer Church in the vicinity of Maverick Square as key religious institutions facilitative of integration.

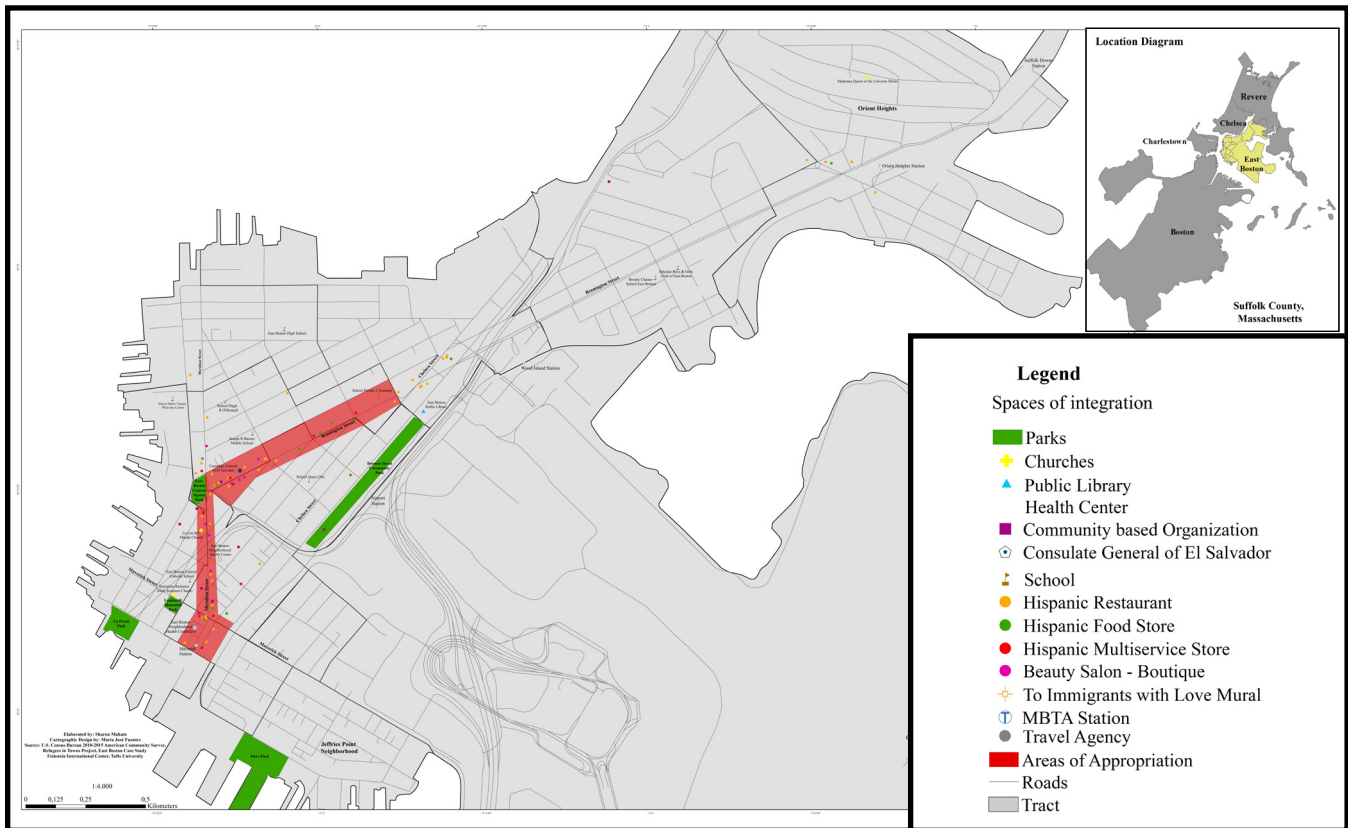
Other places of integration are the numerous CBOs that have significance within the migrant population because they provide legal assistance and psychosocial support, as well as educational programs, most importantly ESL, literacy, and leadership training. CBOs are spaces that support the integration process of the new culture and adaptation to American society, and at the same time advocate at the state and federal level to protect the human rights of migrants. The CBOs most often mentioned by migrants as helpful are Centro Presente, East Boston Ecumenical Community Council, Neighborhood of Affordable Housing (NOAH), Zumix East Boston, and the Boston Centers for Youth and Families (BCYF) Community Center in Paris Street.

The clustering of public sites of integration and the permanent establishment of migrants in the urban fabric have generated spaces of appropriation in East Boston. These spaces represent the creation of a social identity based on cultural transfer to the host community. Each individual contributes their own cultural and social background to the resignification and construction of a new neighborhood in response to their adaptation strategies and commitments to American society. Map 3 shows the Areas of Appropriation extended in Bennington Street, Meridian Street, and Maverick Square.

Transnational Presence of Migrants

Remittances play a central role in the national economies of the Northern Triangle of Central America, with migrants in the US supporting their families and foreign local economies of those who remain in their countries of origin. All the migrants interviewed for this case study affirm

Map 3. Spaces of integration and areas of appropriation generated by the Hispanic or Latino population in East Boston Neighborhood, 2015.



that they send remittances to their countries, particularly to parents and siblings. Even those who already reunified their family unit in East Boston continue to send money to other members of the extended family and friends. As described by the Consul General of El Salvador in Boston, most of the remittances sent out of the country are “responsible remittances,” which means that the majority of the total financial transfer is used to invest in production and micro-enterprises of families in communities of origin.

The newcomers (particularly young Colombians, Nicaraguans, and Guatemalans) see remittances as a relief in their migratory process and express—despite the challenges they faced every day—feeling glad and useful because they can support their families.

Currently, the booming trade linkages based on nostalgic products is growing from the local economy in East Boston. There is a high demand

“I have lived in East Boston all my life; it is already 30 years. I brought my wife and my children to Boston, and since I arrived here, I have never stopped sending money. First, I sent money to my wife. When she arrived here, we kept sending money to El Salvador to my mother and to my mother-in-law and one of our children who stayed with her. At that time, every month we sent a hundred dollars, and nowadays we still send [money].”

- Salvadoran Immigrant, East Boston

for traditional products of Central America in the neighborhood, creating an expanding market with a high investment potential. The market of buying and selling nostalgic goods and services contributes significantly to migrants and their families both in East Boston and in their

communities of origin through the creation of micro and small enterprises. There are cases of entrepreneurs in the neighborhood who have seen their income increasing and businesses growing due to the importation and distribution of goods from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Colombia, and Peru to East Boston.

“Here in East Boston, you can find everything, even Costa Rican products if you want. There are many stores that have all the Latin products, either for cooking or ready-made. There are tamales, pupusas, baleadas, bandeja paisa, everything! Also, many fresh products such as beans, cheese, green bananas, spices, fruits, and vegetables. Everything is fresh, and there are many options for places to buy. We go often to the Pueblo Viejo restaurant to eat pupusas with my son who likes them a lot. Even though he was born here, he has learned to eat like us.”

- *Guatemalan Immigrant, East Boston*

Besides these financial flows and economic growth opportunities, young Latin Americans also make a significant contribution to knowledge production for development, social innovation, entrepreneurship, social activism, leadership, and multiculturalism in Boston. Through interviews with community leaders and key informants, several young Central American leaders were identified who have impacted the Latino community through the creation of campaigns and legal advocacy at the local and state level. These people are second generation migrants of Latino origin born in the United States: students and young professionals who have graduated from local schools and have gone on to lead the communities impacting the lives of other young people and their families. As mentioned by the Consul General of El Salvador in East Boston, local firms today employ many talented Latinos taking advantage of their knowledge and abilities, but also their cultural values, social connectivity to minority groups, and individual courage.

Cases such as Mario Paredes, an activist and lawyer, and Jennifer Hernandez, an Immigrant Rights Organizer, who have been part of the CBO Centro Presente represent the leadership of young people with Central American heritage who continue to work hard and impact local dynamics. There are other cases of Latinos under the age of 30 who are pursuing masters, doctoral, and postgraduate studies at universities like Harvard and MIT, making contributions to the production of knowledge with social and scientific investigations linking with Latin American countries. There are numerous cases of Colombian, Chilean, Costa Rican, Nicaraguan, Salvadoran, Guatemalan, and Mexican professional researchers.

The academy plays a predominant role in the development of inclusive cities. Universities can engage proactively in strengthening the capacities of the migrant community. For example, training to improve chains of entrepreneurship and allow traders and their families to acquire tools for starting and running sustainable local businesses. On the other hand, ESL will always be a challenge for migrants, and in that sense, the commitment of universities to support language learning and accept ESL students—particularly low-income students—could change the lives of thousands of people. Finally, it is essential that the academy support and strengthen advocacy actions and leadership programs promoted by CBOs to jointly encourage effective integration and the struggle for the rights of migrants.

The expansion of knowledge through culture and traditions plays a fundamental role in the integration process of second and third generation migrants, but also the integration process of host communities. Cultural initiatives promote the creativity and entrepreneurship of Latinos, and open opportunities for host institutions to take advantage of migrant talent and traditions. A very good example is the Veronica Robles Cultural Center (VROCC), which seeks to promote Latin American dance and culture as an engine for stronger communities and economic growth of aspiring and professional artists and arts entrepreneurs in East Boston.

In this sense, both the host communities and countries of origin are benefiting thanks to the professionalization of Latin Americans that are having an impact on the community, academia, and private research.

Development, Social Preservation, and Displacement in East Boston

Gentrification is occurring in East Boston similarly to other areas of Boston such as South Boston, the North End, Jamaica Plain, and Dorchester. The romantic perspective of the neighborhood “quietly away from the city but inside of it” and urban renewal is attracting American “yuppie” tenants who are characterized as being young, professional, and higher median earners who can afford East Boston’s renovated housing market at the waterfront. In turn, Hispanics have been facing a wave of new investors who are pushing out low- and moderate-income migrant residents from the neighborhood, as well as long-term residents and older tenants who have been living in East Boston for decades.

As a result, in East Boston real estate values have risen rapidly, and in the last five years rents have increased by 22.5%, affecting migrant families and local businesses. Although a significant displacement of Latinos has not yet occurred, the areas in front of Boston Harbor and around LoPresti Park, Piers Park, and Jeffries Point are experiencing dramatic and accelerated changes in the neighborhood, making it practically impossible for Latinos to have access to housing in these areas.

When asked about the changes in the area, interviewees immediately react regarding the housing market, the incremental rise of rent prices, and their experiences with young American newcomers. They show concern about the future of East Boston and wonder how they will face the increase in rents considering they are struggling to cover the current rates. Interviewees mentioned

that they have heard of cases or know people who had to move out of East Boston, particularly to places like Revere, Chelsea, Everett, and Lynn. Also, Latino entrepreneurs are worried about the displacement of people out of the community and how it would affect the demand for services and products in the future.

“From my experience, I would say East Boston is changing because of housing development; the demographics are changing and are going to change more. In a few years, you won’t see many Latinos in the area, just because there is new development that is pushing people out. Investors are coming in and buying different properties. And people from here are not buying because it is not affordable. People are pretty much displaced from East Boston because the prices are starting to rise, and I mean it is no good for that specific demographic [Hispanics]. For example, right across my office there is a new building with 200 units and the apartments’ rent is more than 3,000 dollars, if not little bit more, it depends. It’s something that someone like my clients cannot afford. So, you see throughout the area peoples’ rents are increasing, the investors are purchasing buildings and decorating, renovating, and turning them to condominiums. There is a lot of that, and we see there are a lot of people who have been forced to move to Chelsea, but in Chelsea that is happening as well. Revere is very expensive as well, so, the new place I would say that people are focusing is Lynn, even though the prices are skyrocketing, they are still much more affordable comparing with East Boston. The issues there are transportation, [even though] there is a commuter rail in Lynn and even though there are buses, it is not the same convenience as here that you can take buses on Maverick or Orient Heights and just take the train to the city. The commuter rail makes it different. The people are definitely moving out.”

- Jaselia Gratini, *Neighborhood of Affordable Housing (NOAH), East Boston*

A public servant of the Neighborhood Health Center mentioned: “In ten more years I see this as a Back Bay, unattainable for Hispanics, but always very diverse. This situation will affect our work and our programs aimed at the migrant population, as well as the social organizations that are present in the neighborhood. The population will change, and our services will have to readjust as well.”

East Boston also has people whose interest is the social preservation of the neighborhood, particularly individuals motivated to stay in an intercultural space amidst new arrivals and old-timers. However, the expansion of real estate development along with the influx of mobile communities of students and highly qualified professionals coupled with newly restrictive anti-immigrant policies will determine the future of East Boston.

Government and Civil Society Responses to Migrants in East Boston

East Boston contains a valuable platform of social, legal, and psychosocial support services that have been fundamental in the development and adaptation of migrants and their families. For example, the Mayor’s Office for Immigrant Advancement promotes and implements initiatives for municipal-level integration. Its current priorities are focused on 1) Implementing the 2016 “Ordinance establishing Language and Communications Access for city services,” which ensure that city services are accessible and equally attainable to all people in the City of Boston regardless of linguistic barriers of physical impairment (City of Boston, 2016); 2) Technical assessment for the creation of Municipal Identifications for people who do not qualify for state identification or a passport; 3) Collaboration with other municipal departments for the adequate inclusion of the migrant population in their services, campaigns, and programs; 4) Outreach and community engagement, based on working with grassroots organizations and

institutions to efficiently disseminate information about city services through the creation of community forums, an annual city-wide citizenship clinic, legal consultations at City Hall, large-scale legal consultation clinics for migrants, Immigrant Information Corners at Boston Public Libraries, and Your Rights community presentations for residents.

In addition to these government activities, the political advocacy carried out by civil society has been fundamental for the protection of people threatened by their migrant status. Organizations like Centro Presente have been working diligently at the state level to defend TPS and DACA.

In the context of the arrival of a significant number of young American professionals in the neighborhood and to advance effective integration, CBOs such as the East Boston Ecumenical Community Council (EBECC) are interested in implementing a two-way integration strategy. Although at the moment this strategy is still an unstructured idea, it aims to invite newcomers to get involved in social programming for immigrants as teachers and facilitators in programs like ESL, leadership, legal advice, citizenship, and as students of Latin arts, music, and Spanish programs. This initiative will take advantage of the young American professionals’ background, and knowledge, and at the same time offer them a proactive experience in direct contact with the migrant community.

Conclusion

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

East Boston represents one of the most diverse neighborhoods in the city of Boston. Its demographic composition shows a rich representation of multiple foreign-born nationalities that contribute substantially to an open neighborhood that has not only welcomed Latin American migrants but also Caribbean, Asian, and African migrants in recent years.

The Hispanic community has significantly transformed the urban space and the local economy of the area. Their presence has opened up goods and services that meet the needs of a foreign community, but also bring an attractive range of new options and experiences to the local population, and to new arrivals interested in the energy and charm of a diverse neighborhood.

East Boston is the home of thousands of foreign-born migrants, but also is home to second and third generation residents who were born in the United States and have grown their families through hard work and dedication. Hispanic immigrants from East Boston are not just newcomers; they are young people and American children who belong to their school, their park, their neighborhood, their country, but also their long transnational and multigenerational origins.

The Future of East Boston

The political context in the last year has begun to change the concerns of migrants who are afraid, insecure, and hopeless about their future under the Temporary Protected Status and Dreamers Act (DREAM - Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors). This has adversely affected the immigrant community that sees its migratory trajectory punished by an anti-immigrant

and xenophobic government that cannot look at the contributions, development, and social innovations made by thousands of Dreamers and hardworking people, much less the promise of a third generation of children in coming years who will continue to contribute to development, professionalization, and entrepreneurship.

Development is a human right, and as gentrification of the neighborhood is taking place, decision makers will have to balance public policies to achieve economic growth and land development, but also respect the needs of minority groups, low-income, and middle-income residents. True integration—beyond just superficial interaction in urban, social, political, cultural, and economic spaces—can only be achieved when the barriers to understanding are opened, and host populations are educated and involved in the changing composition of the space in which they live.

Throughout my research for this project, among those I interviewed—from community leaders, to activists, rights defenders, newly arrived migrants, and those who, despite more than three decades of living in Boston do not speak English—consistently patted me on the back to continue standing up for dignity and the integrity of migrants and refugees. Each step of this journey showed me the construction and deconstruction of a space lived in and appropriated by Latin Americans. These are brave people who, over time, have adapted the social fabric and have established themselves in East Boston despite the exclusionary intentions of some American host community members who have opted to leave the neighborhood and separate from the Latin enclave.

Three generations since the passing of TPS protections, it is heartbreaking to see how thousands of TPS holders, including many in East Boston, are being pressured to leave their families, take their American children to unknown places

with high rates of violence, or assume an irregular migration status in a country that has become their home. In my experience working with Latin American immigrants I can say that almost all migrants want to return to their places of origin: with few exceptions though, facing the reality that their country of origin is still burning, immigrants choose to stay in East Boston. Very few of the migrants interviewed plan to return and build their own homes in El Salvador or Guatemala knowing the risks involved in return to these countries.

Whether they stay or they go, all migrants in East Boston maintain their love for their country of origin. No matter how integrated they become in East Boston, or how much newfound love and appreciation they develop for the United States, they will always have a love and sense of belonging with their homeland. Integration is not just adapting to life in the United States, but rather an ongoing experience of being pulled in multiple directions: both longing for one's first home and making a new home in Boston.

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About the Author

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Refugees in Towns is a project of the Feinstein International Center. More information on the project, including more case study reports, is available at <https://www.refugeesintowns.org/>

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