



Mobilization in Chicago, March, 2006. In the Spring of 2006, impending legislative proposals in the U.S. Congress prompted the mobilization of street protests and demonstrations in dozens of U.S. cities. One of the earliest was in Chicago, where nearly 300,000 people, including legal as well as undocumented immigrants, protested the harsh provisions of a bill passed by the U.S. House of Representatives that would have, among other things, made it a felony for non-profit and charitable organizations such as churches to provide any assistance to undocumented residents. Five years later, immigration controversies have grown even more hostile in United States politics, and in the lead-up to primary elections, “Republican candidates are competing over who can talk the toughest about illegal immigration ... who will erect the most impenetrable border defense; who will turn off ‘magnets’ like college tuition benefits.” Trip Gabriel (2011). “Comments on Immigration Alienate Some Hispanics.” *New York Times*, October 19. Photographs by Kathe Newman; reproduced with permission.

Immigration in the Metropolis

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An Urban World of Immigration

Only a few months after the immigration demonstrations shown in the images above, the political philosopher Iris Marion Young died from cancer in her home in Hyde Park, on the South Side of Chicago. She was only 57. Her book *Justice and the Politics of Difference* “is a

staple in classrooms around the world.”¹ One of Young’s most memorable one-liners was that the essence of city life is “the being together of strangers.”²

In an urbanizing world with ever-stronger flows of people, capital, and ideas across national borders, Young’s definition is more important than ever. International immigration -- people moving to countries of which they are not native, to live there permanently -- brings millions of strangers together. This “being together of strangers” happens more and more in cities. But immigration has been a defining feature of the urban experience for a very long time.

Today we’ll consider the urban dimensions of immigration. First, we’ll use a few statistics to sketch a map of urban immigration. Second, we’ll consider how and why immigration has become such a focus of debate and controversy, and how an urban perspective helps to resolve significant puzzles. Third, we’ll consider the dominant urban theory -- urban spatial assimilation -- that explains how immigration plays out inside cities. Fourth, we’ll consider the alternatives to assimilation (cultural pluralism and multiculturalism) as well as the alternatives to spatial assimilation (transnational urbanism).

Statistical Snapshots of Immigration

There are about 214 million international immigrants -- approximately 3.1 percent of total world population.

One way to begin exploring the urban aspects of immigration is to consider several estimates of the magnitude of what is involved. Seven key points stand out.

1. The total number of international migrants in the world now stands at 214 million. This is approximately 3.1 percent of the world’s population.³ The estimated growth rate of global immigrants between 1990 and 2000 was 13.5 percent, almost ten times the estimated growth rate for world population (1.4 percent).⁴

2. Most of these migrants are living in cities, and there is little doubt that the futures of immigration and cities are deeply intertwined.⁵

¹ *Chicago Sun-Times* (2006). “U of C Professor Had Passion for Social Justice.” Obituary, August 4. *Chicago Sun-Times*.

² Iris Marion Young (1990). *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 237.

³ International Organisation for Migration (2010). *Facts & Figures, 2010*. Geneva: International Organisation for Migration.

⁴ These estimates include refugees, but not undocumented migrants. United Nations (2003). *International Migration Report, 2002*. New York: United Nations. See also Lisa Benton-Short and Marie D. Price (2005). “Globalization from Below: The Ranking of Global Immigrant Cities.” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 29(4), 945-959.

⁵ United Nations Habitat (2004). *State of the World’s Cities, 2004/2005*. London and New York: United Nations Center on Human Settlements. A broad-brush narrative portrait of globalized immigration flows and cities begins one of the press-release documents for the U.N. report. “They come from Korea with college degrees, but work as greengrocers, or manicurists in New York. They come from China with expertise in manufacturing, but work in Vancouver as machinists or repairmen. They come from Vietnam but are processing fish in Cambodia. They come

3. The United States receives the largest absolute number of immigrants; the U.S. alone receives 37 percent of net world immigration every year.⁶ The next most important destinations are Western Europe (which receives net immigration of about 15 million annually) and the Middle East (13.5 million).number of immigrants, followed by Western and Eastern Europe.⁷

4. In Canada, the foreign-born proportion has reached 19.8 percent, the highest level in seventy-five years and second only to Australia. For the first time, Canada has more foreign-born residents from Asia and the Middle East than from Europe. The top five source countries for immigration between 2001 and 2006 were China, India, the Phillipines, Pakistan, and the United States.⁸

The United States receives 37 percent of the world's net immigration every year.

Canada's foreign-born population share (19.8 percent) is the second-highest in the world, behind only Australia.

5. Immigration in Canada is fundamentally urban. More than nine out of ten immigrants who arrived to Canada in the 1990s were living in a Census Metropolitan Area.⁹ Seven of ten immigrants who arrived between 2001 and 2006 settled in Toronto, Montreal, or Vancouver; this proportion is double the share of Canada's total population living in these metropolitan areas.¹⁰ More than 445,000 immigrants between 1996 and 2001 settled in the Toronto area, comprising fully two-thirds of Ontario's population growth in this period; Ontario's growth accounted for 57 percent of the national

population expansion.¹¹ In the amalgamated City of Toronto, more than half of the entire

from Pakistan but are greengrocers in Rotterdam. They come from Rotterdam but are running flower-growing businesses in Nairobi. They flow through refugee camps, through airport passport controls, through porous borders risking life and limb. They come in search of a better life with better opportunities. They come; but what they find is often not what they expected." United Nations Habitat (2004). *Migrants and Multicultural Cities: Problem or Possibility?* London and New York: United Nations Center on Human Settlements.

⁶ Daniel Dorling, Mark Newman, and Anna Barford (2010). *The Atlas of the Real World: Mapping the Way We Live*. London: Thames & Hudson, p. 33.

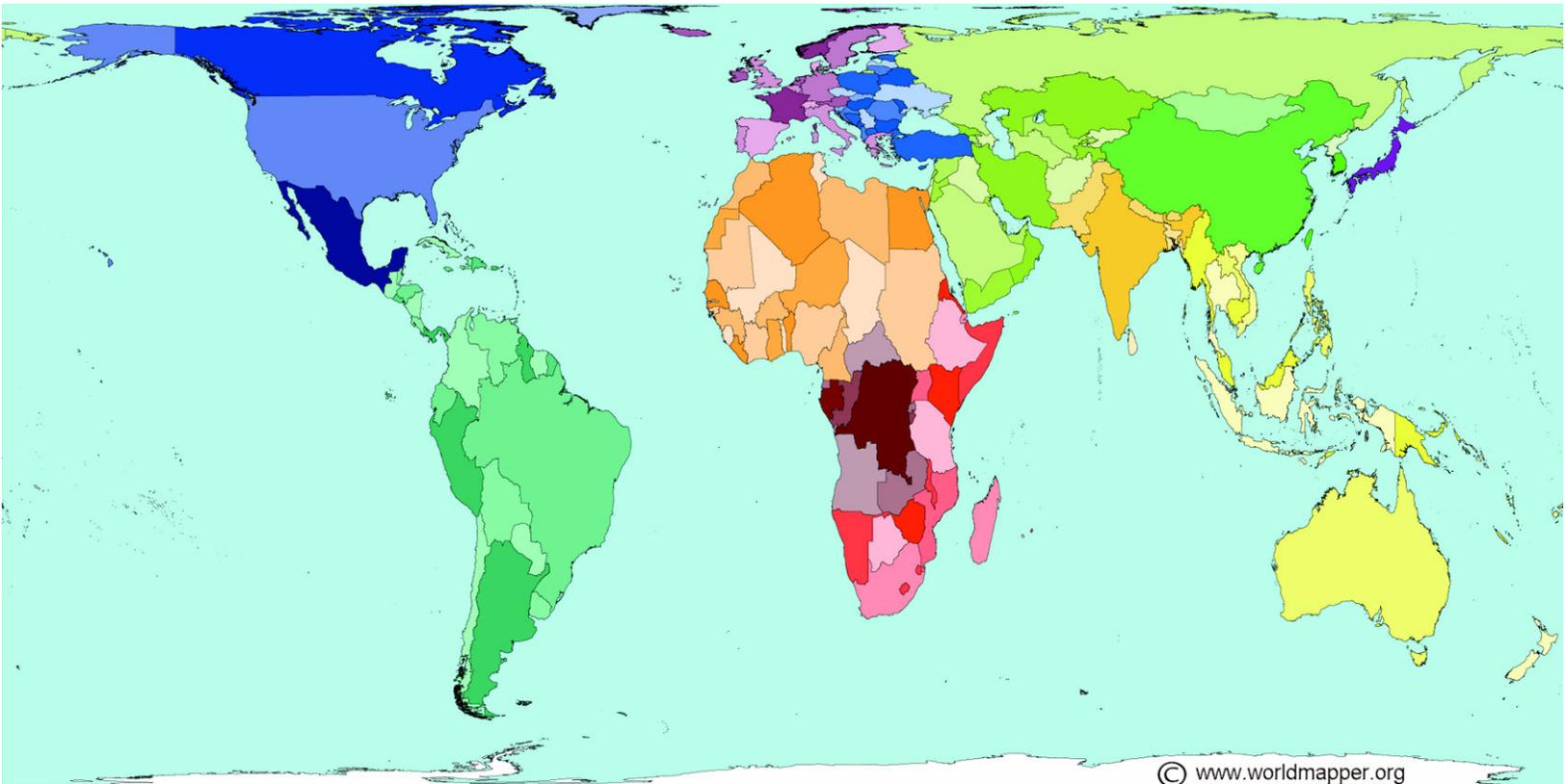
⁷ Dorling et al., *Atlas of the Real World*, p. 33. Also see United Nations Habitat, *State of the World's Cities*, Executive Summary.

⁸ About 22 percent of Australia's population is foreign-born, and only 11 percent of the population in the U.S. is foreign-born. Canada's foreign-born population in 2001 was 5.4 million, and of these, 1.8 million immigrated to Canada between 1991 and 2001. Five years later, the total foreign-born population was 6.19 million. Statistics Canada (2003). *Canada's Ethnocultural Portrait: The Changing Mosaic*. 2001 Census, Analysis Series, Catalogue no. 96F0030XIE2001008. Ottawa: Statistics Canada, Ministry of Industry. Updates for 2006 reported in Shannon Proudfoot (2007). "One in Five Canadian Residents Foreign-Born." *Vancouver Sun*, December 5, A5.

⁹ Statistics Canada, *Canada's Ethnocultural Portrait*, 7.

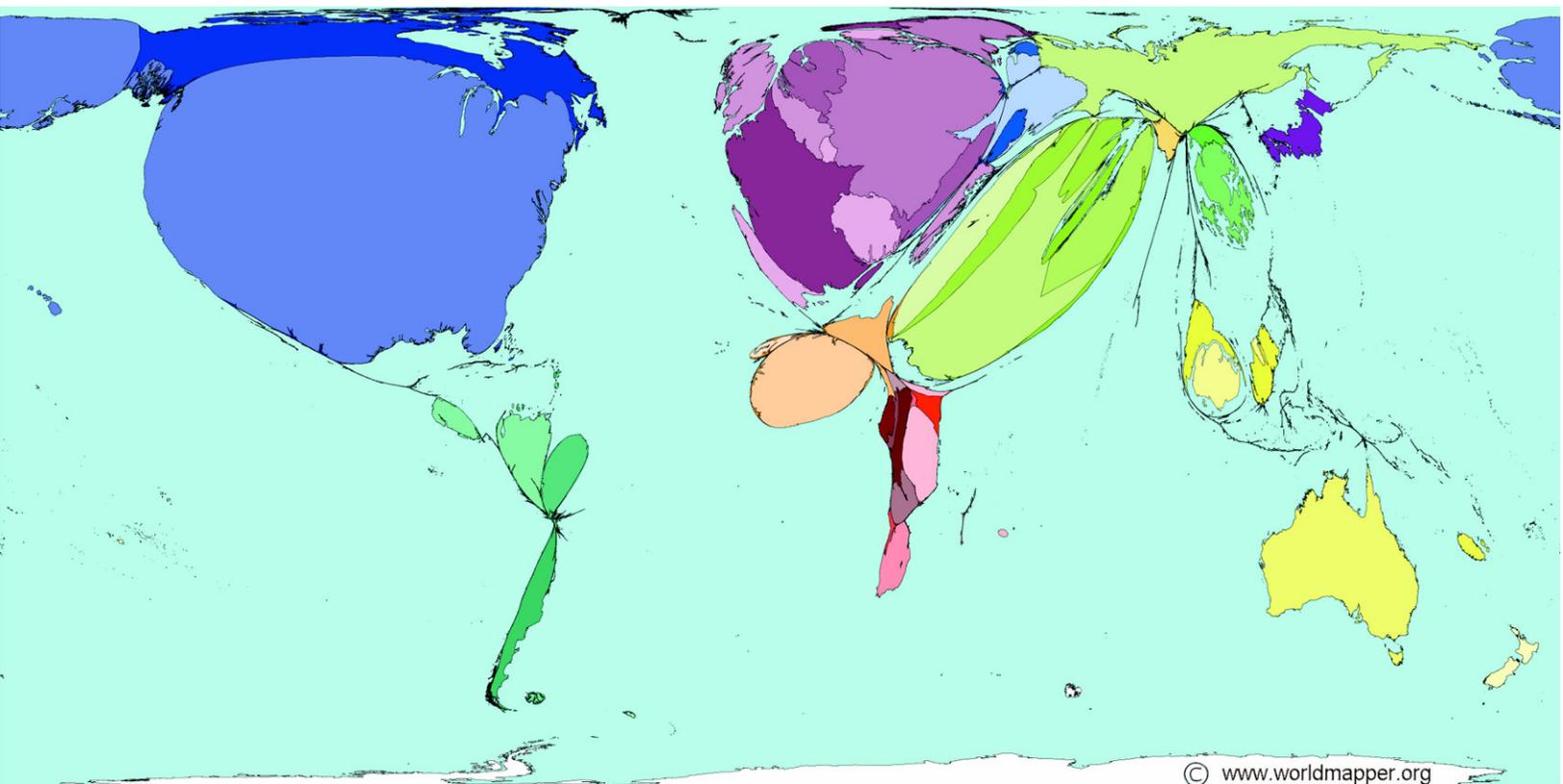
¹⁰ Tina Chui, Kelly Tran, and Helen Mahoux (2007). *Immigration in Canada: A Portrait of the Foreign-Born Population, 2006 Census*. Catalogue No. 97-557XIE. Ottawa: Statistics Canada, p. 5.

¹¹ Canadian Press (2002). "Immigrants Drive Province's Growth." *Canadian Press Service, Ottawa*. March 12, 2002.



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Above: Land Area
Below: Net Immigration



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[Previous page.] **The World of Immigration.** One way to use maps to show interesting processes involves the cartogram -- a map that distorts the area of particular territories according to the magnitude of something we wish to study. The top map is a familiar view of the world's countries, with their size obviously proportional to their land area. The map below it distorts the areas according to the net number of people immigrating to each country. Places with net out-migration, such as Mexico, disappear entirely from the map. Note how Hong Kong is almost invisible on the "real" map, but becomes much larger than the rest of China when considering net migration. Source: © Copyright SASI Group, University of Sheffield, reproduced under Creative Commons license for educational use. See also Daniel Dorling, Mark Newman, and Anna Barford (2010). *The Atlas of the Real World: Mapping the Way We Live*. London: Thames & Hudson, p. 16, 33.

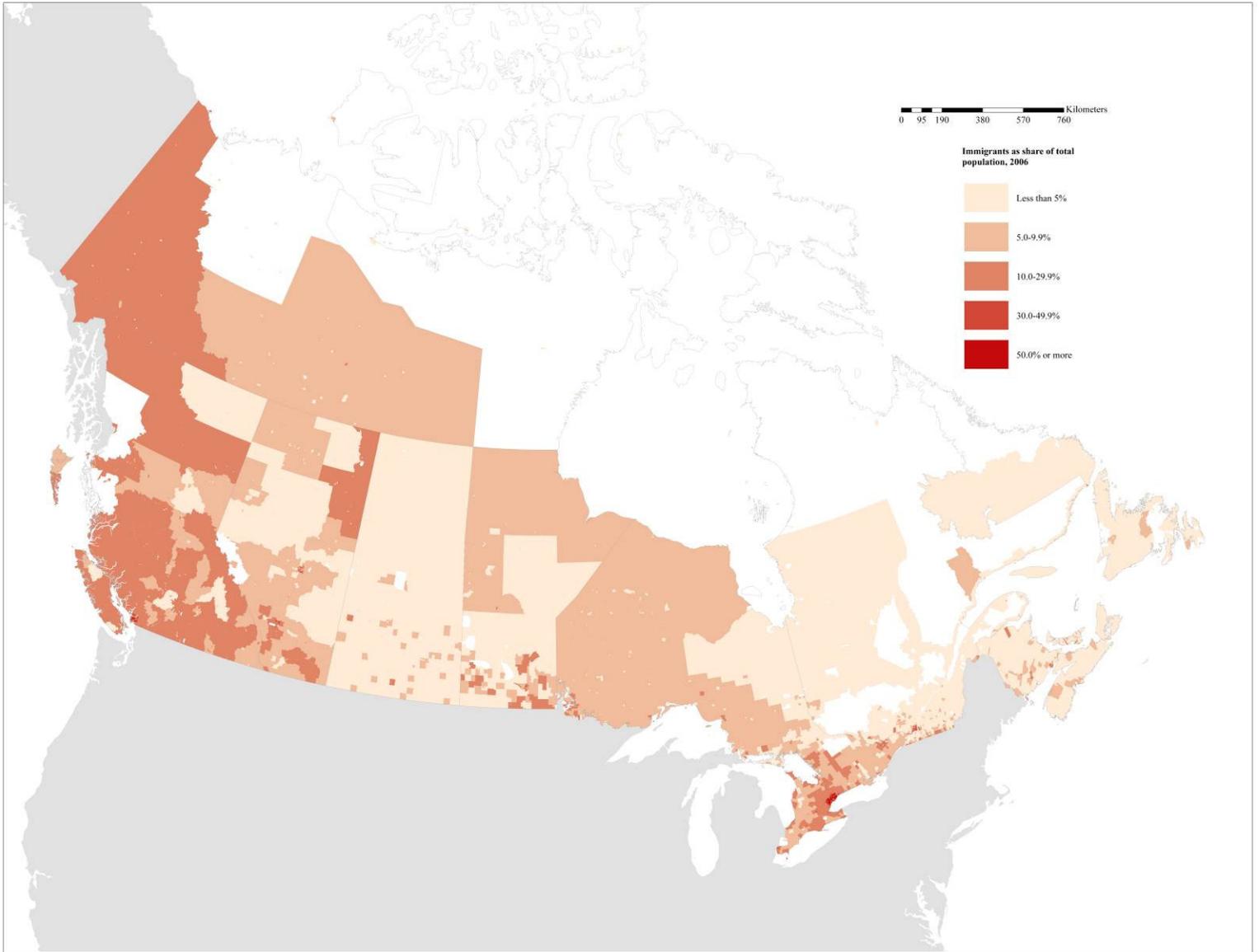
population was born outside Canada.¹² Foreign-born people accounted for almost 40 percent of the Vancouver metropolitan region's population in 2006. Richmond's foreign-born share (57.4 percent) was the highest among all of Canada's municipalities. Just over half of Burnaby's

The share of recent immigrants living in Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver is about twice the share of Canada's total population living in these three metropolitan areas.

population is foreign-born. Suburban Surrey's foreign-born population share (38.3 percent) is lower than Vancouver's (45.6 percent), but Surrey posted the region's fastest gain in the foreign-born population between 2001 and 2006 (30.9 percent).¹³

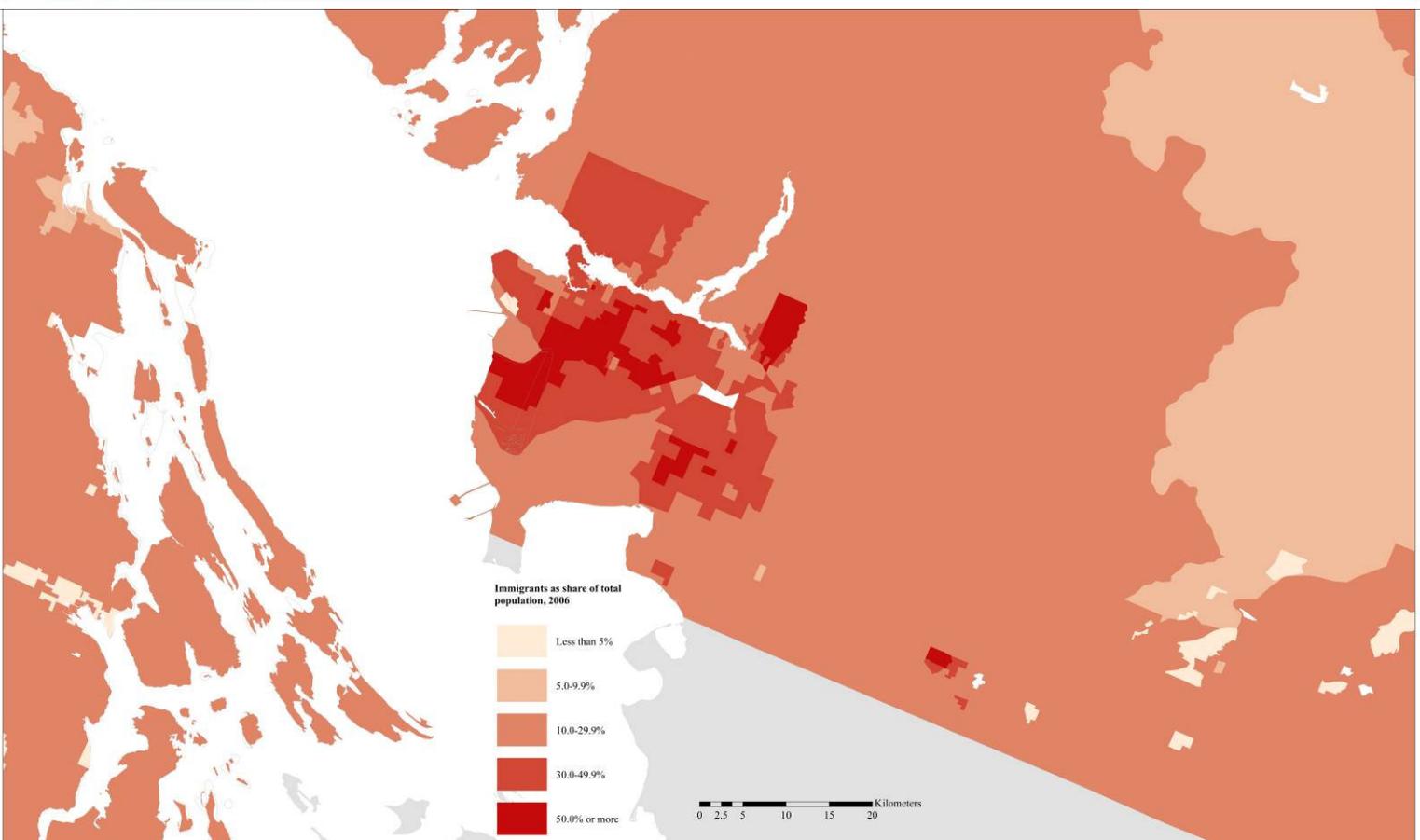
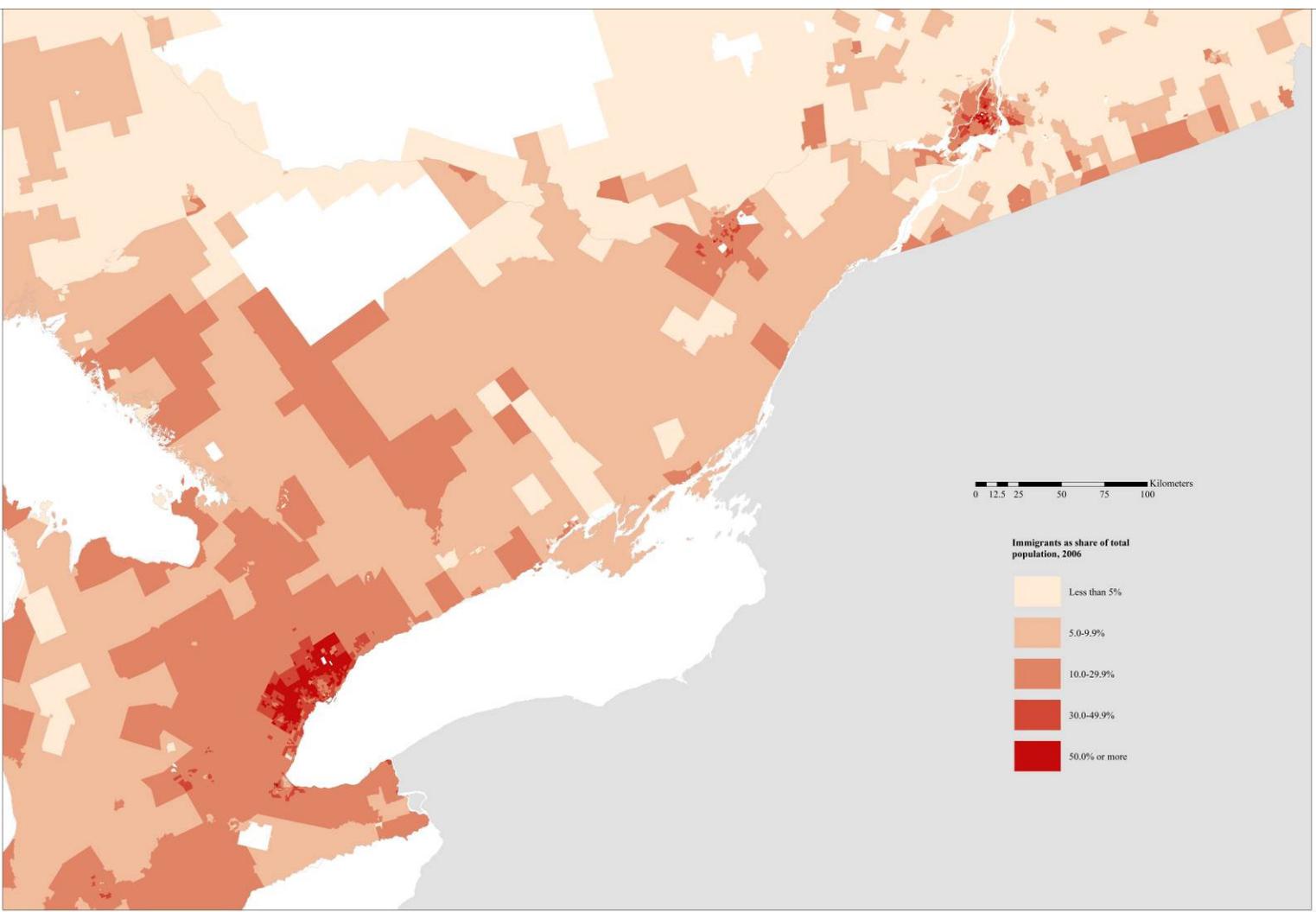
¹² "And the newcomers have come from every part of the world, bringing with them new attitudes, faiths, and ways of living. They bring big, boisterous families and tend to live *en masse*, the opposite of the Canadian-born trend toward smaller families and living alone." *Globe and Mail* (2003). "Portraits of Toronto: The Toronto Experiment." *Globe and Mail*, September 6, M10.

¹³ Chui et al., *Immigration in Canada*, p. 35. For an earlier assessment, see Matthew Ramsey (2003). "Adults Born Abroad: Number of First-Generation Canadians is Twice the National Average." *The Vancouver Sun*, September 30.



Immigrants in Canada. In the areas with the darkest shade of red, immigrants comprise more than half the local population. *Data Source:* Statistics Canada (2008). *Cumulative Profile of Census Tracts and Census Subdivisions, 2006 Census of Population and Housing.* Ottawa: Statistics Canada. Map prepared by Elvin Wyly, using database compiled by Anna Glasmacher and Markus Moos, School of Planning, University of Waterloo.

[Next page.] **The Metropolitan Concentration of Immigrants in Canada.** The maps show immigrant shares of total population by Census Subdivision and (within metropolitan areas) census tract, for the Montreal-Toronto corridor (top), and British Columbia's Lower Mainland (bottom). In the areas with the darkest shade of red, immigrants comprise more than half the local population. *Data Source:* Statistics Canada (2008). *Cumulative Profile of Census Tracts and Census Subdivisions, 2006 Census of Population and Housing.* Ottawa: Statistics Canada. Map prepared by Elvin Wyly, using database compiled by Anna Glasmacher and Markus Moos, School of Planning, University of Waterloo.



6. Immigration in the United States is similarly concentrated. Fully one-quarter of all immigrants in the U.S. reside in Los Angeles, New York, or Chicago; the proportion rises to one-third if we add the metropolitan areas of Miami, Houston, Orange County, and Washington, DC. Combined, these seven metropolitan areas are home to more than 11.7 million foreign-born residents.¹⁴

And yet although contemporary immigration is focused on the largest metropolitan regions, when we measure the impacts at the local scale, some of the most dramatic transformations are taking place in small towns and rural areas that were bypassed by previous arrivals. The highest percentage *changes* in foreign-born populations are in small towns and rural areas, even though the absolute numbers may still be small. Consider a journalist's portrayal of Pearson, Georgia:

“Then Mexican immigrants started streaming in. Lured in the 1990s by abundant agricultural work and new manufacturing jobs, the newcomers landed in a town with one traffic light, no tortillas in the supermarket and residents who stared openly at foreigners in a county that saw its last wave of immigrants in the 1850s.”¹⁵

7. Immigration has always been a reflection of international relations, but amidst contemporary globalization, it may very well be creating a new kind of world urban system. Consider the meaning of the word itself. To immigrate -- a term derived from the Latin words *immigrare* and *immigratus* -- is “to enter a country of which one is not a native, in order to live in it permanently.”¹⁶ But since industrialization and urbanization began to reinforce one another in the nineteenth century -- a time when the modern configuration of countries and nation-state boundaries was just coming into view -- immigration played a crucial role in the changes that we would now describe as globalization. The diffusion of the industrial revolution across the

If all the world's immigrants were to be considered a separate country, this nation-state would be the world's fifth most populous country.

European continent, for example, changed the relations between agriculture and industry, and led many rural people to leave the farms and go to the cities -- increasingly, cities in North America.

Unfortunately, most data on immigration are collected by and about *countries*. This is ironic, since immigration is a key factor that defines what a nation-state is. If all the world's international migrants were to be considered a separate country, this nation-state would be the world's fifth most populous country.¹⁷

¹⁴ Audrey Singer (2003). *At Home in the Nation's Capital: Immigrant Trends in Metropolitan Washington*. Washington, DC: Brookings Greater Washington Research Program.

¹⁵ Rachel L. Swarns (2006). “In Georgia, Newest Immigrants Unsettle an Old Sense of Place.” *New York Times*, August 4, A1, A17. Quote from p. A1.

¹⁶ Bernard S. Cayne, ed. (1990). *The New Lexicon Webster's Encyclopedic Dictionary of the English Language*. New York: Lexicon Publications, p. 484.

¹⁷ International Organization for Migration, *Facts & Figures*.

The World's Top 25 Immigrant Cities

Rank	City	Year of data	Total Population	Foreign-born Population	Percent Foreign-born
1	Dubai	2002	857,233	702,931	82.0
2	Miami	2000	2,253,362	1,147,765	50.9
3	Amsterdam	2002	735,328	347,634	47.3
4	Toronto	2001	4,647,960	2,091,100	45.0
5	Muscat	2000	661,000	294,881	44.6
6	Vancouver	2001	1,967,475	767,715	39.0
7	Auckland	2001	367,737	143,417	39.0
8	Geneva	2002	427,700	164,118	38.4
9	Mecca	1996	4,467,670	1,686,595	37.8
10	TheHague	1995	441,595	161,509	36.6
11	LosAngeles	2000	9,519,338	3,449,444	36.2
12	TelAviv	2002	2,075,500	747,400	36.0
13	Kiev	1992	2,616,000	941,760	36.0
14	Medina	2000	5,448,773	1,893,213	34.8
15	NewYork	2000	9,314,235	3,139,647	33.7
16	SanFrancisco	2000	1,731,183	554,819	32.1
17	Riyadh	2000	4,730,330	1,477,601	31.2
18	Perth	2001	1,336,239	422,547	31.6
19	Sydney	2001	3,961,451	1,235,908	31.2
20	Jerusalem	2002	678,300	208,700	30.8
21	Melbourne	2001	3,367,169	960,145	28.5
22	Frankfurt	2000	650,705	181,184	27.8
23	Tbilisi	1999	1,339,105	370,932	27.7
24	London	2001	7,172,091	1,940,390	27.1
25	Brussels	2002	978,384	260,040	26.6

Source: Lisa Benton-Short and Marie D. Price (2005). "Globalization from Below: The Ranking of Global Immigrant Cities." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 29(4), 945-959, table from p. 953.

It is difficult to obtain comparable information about foreign-born residents of cities. But sometimes it can be done, if you sift through many different kinds of governmental sources and make appropriate adjustments. For several years, Lisa Benton-Short and Marie Price have led an

Measured by the proportion foreign-born, the top five cities in the "immigration world system" are Dubai, Miami, Amsterdam, Toronto, and Muscat.

effort to develop comparative statistics on immigration and urbanization in different countries. One of their databases allow a ranking of large cities worldwide according to the foreign-born percentage of their populations. The most important thing to note about this ranking is how different it is from the usual roster of "global cities" or "world cities." On measures of corporate and financial control, most experts agree that the top of the world-city hierarchy is occupied by three cities: London, Tokyo, and New York. But the picture shifts when we consider immigration. London and New York certainly do have many foreign-born residents --

more than 3 million in New York, almost 2 million in London. But immigration accounts for a far smaller share of population in these places than we would expect, given all the attention devoted to their roles in economic globalization. The case of Tokyo is even more fascinating: Tokyo is certainly a world city. But it is ranked 92 in Benton-Short and Price's database, with only 2.4 percent foreign-born.

Economic globalization does not necessarily highlight the same cities as social and cultural globalization. If the world economy is measured in terms of financial flows or corporate headquarters, then London, Tokyo, and New York are on top. But measured in terms of the proportion foreign-born, the top five cities in the immigration world urban system are Dubai, Miami, Amsterdam, Toronto, and Muscat.¹⁸

Immigration Debates

These dry, abstract statistics conceal a great deal of contemporary public discussion, policy discourse, and political conflict on a daily basis. Immigration topics appear regularly in the headlines in the Canadian press. A small sample might include

- a. Individual stories of refugees optimistic about a new life but worried about the high cost of living;¹⁹
- b. Editorials challenging “employment equity champions” who are said to be promoting preferential treatment for immigrants, especially visible minorities, in hiring practices;²⁰
- c. Concerns about the effect of “visible minority enclaves,” which proliferated from six in 1981 to 142 in 1996, on neighborhood incomes and unemployment rates;²¹
- d. Stories of professionals immigrating only to find their credentials unrecognized in the marketplace, such as a Pakistani lawyer who was the director of legal affairs at the University of Peshawar and was eventually forced to accept a job as a warehouse loader at a grocery store;²²

¹⁸ Muscat is a city on the Gulf of Oman, with one of the best harbors on the eastern side of the Arabian Peninsula.

¹⁹ Debra Black (2004). “A Very Beautiful New Life for Us: Refugees Rejoice at Sparse Home But High Prices Worry Them.” *Toronto Star*, August 4.

²⁰ An October, 2003 editorial in the *Ottawa Citizen* describes recent changes in the Ottawa Police Service, which has “been trying hard in recent months and years to hire minority recruits” and women. “But the employment equity champions want much more. They want a huge survey done of all city staff to see if employees will self-identify themselves as members of minority groups -- women, aboriginal, disabled, visible minority, gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered -- and here we start treading in silly territory.” *The Ottawa Citizen* (2003). “Hire Staff on Merit.” Editorial Page, *The Ottawa Citizen*, October 16.

²¹ Andrew Duffy (2003). “Life Can Be Tough in Big-City Enclaves: Troubling Rates of Unemployment, Poverty Found.” *Toronto Star*, September 13. Three-quarters of the nation’s visible-minority enclaves are Chinese, primarily located in Toronto and Vancouver. “Visible-minority neighbourhoods tended to have higher unemployment and lower incomes than other census areas even in Chinese neighbourhoods where a relatively high proportion of people had university educations,” and “Black neighbourhoods in Toronto and Montreal suffered significantly higher rates of unemployment and poverty. One Black-dominated enclave in Montreal reported an unemployment rate of 35.8 percent and a low-income rate of 76.4 percent.”

²² “He quickly learned the unwritten rules of the shop floor. The immigrants got heavier loads and shorter shifts than their Canadian counterparts. They were accused of being supporters of Osama bin Laden and Saddam Hussein. When they complained, they were told to go back where they came from. ‘You could feel the hatred,’ Ali said. “There may be a Charter of Rights, but it wasn’t reflected in our experience.” Carol Goar (2004). “Turned Away from Every Door.” *Toronto Star*, April 21. Six out of ten immigrants switch their field after arriving in Canada, and many well-paid, well-educated professionals wind up accepting much lower paid positions in services, sales, or

e. Contentious disputes over the causes and consequences of an “underground of illegal immigrants” in Toronto and other cities;²³ and

f. Debates over the reasons why today’s cohort of recent immigrants is earning less, after adjusting for inflation, than the immigrants of a generation ago.²⁴

This last issue has been among the most prominent debates to cross the lines between academic inquiry, public policy, and popular discussion. William Watson, an economist at McGill University, reviewed a study showing that half the increase in income inequality in Canada in recent years was attributable to immigration. Watson reviewed other studies documenting that the time it takes immigrants to “catch up” to the earnings of native-born Canadians is shortening at an encouraging pace, and concluded that

“most of the news is great: At worst, globalization, global capitalism, the corporate agenda -- call it what you will -- is responsible for just half the increase in inequality observed in the early 1990s. And although the people we allow into our country start off far behind average in the labour market, they catch up very quickly.”

Watson’s essay appears in the right-of-center *National Post*, and so his next sentence is not surprising: “Now if only we could get more of them to vote Conservative.”²⁵ Watson’s wishes were granted in the federal election of 2011, in which the Liberal Party’s traditional advantage in immigrant-rich electoral ridings seemed to evaporate; the general consensus is that recent immigrants to Canada voted for the Conservatives -- or split votes between the left-leaning parties -- in about the same pattern as more long-established Canadian citizens.

We can make a few preliminary observations on the tenor of these sorts of debates.

First, popular discussion usually comes with references to apparently simple dichotomies -- us/them, we/they, ours/theirs -- that are, upon close inspection, meaningless or dangerous. The danger in these dichotomies is that what appear to be simple, unproblematic *categories* are

manufacturing. Nicholas Keung (2003). “Job Search Frustrates Newcomers: StatsCan Study Shows Many Have to Work Outside Their Fields.” *Toronto Star*, September 5.

²³ “While critics argue that people living and working here without legal status are exploiting our system and mocking those who wait years to immigrate legitimately, advocates charge our society exploits the labour of people willing to toil for less than minimum wage and without legal protection.” Maureen Murray (2003). “Lives in the Shadows: ‘You Are Always Looking Over Your Shoulder,’ Worker Says.” *Toronto Star*, September 2.

²⁴ Oliver Moore (2003). “Recent Immigrants Earning Less.” *Globe and Mail*, October 8. A Statistics Canada study showed that, after adjusting for inflation, male immigrants who had arrived between 1975 and 1979 earned an average of \$40,600 in 1980; those who arrived between 1995 and 1999 earned only an average of \$37,900 in 2000, for a seven-percent reduction (mirroring a seven-percent increase in the earnings potential of native-born Canadian men). Earnings of immigrant women rose during this period, but not as fast as that for native-born Canadian women (13 percent versus 19 percent).

²⁵ William Watson (2003). “The Good News About Immigration.” *National Post*, November 6.

actually *processes*: the concept of “we” is invested with meaning only by giving meaning to “they.” At one point are recent immigrants no longer considered “them,” and instead considered “us”? Who gets to decide?²⁶

Recurrent themes in mainstream discussions of immigration:

1. *Popular discussions use what appear to be simple categories (us/them, we/they) that are in fact ongoing social processes.*

2. *There is a remarkable historical continuity in mainstream anxieties that today’s immigrants are different from those in previous generations.*

3. *Mainstream debates are obsessed with a “cost-benefit” approach that ignores the spatial unevenness of the process.*

majority of the fiscal costs of immigrants are borne by the localities that provide education, health care, and general municipal services. Yet the majority of the fiscal benefits are received through income tax payments and Social Security payments to the federal treasury. Thus, there is a strong spatial mismatch between the costs and benefits of immigration.”²⁸

Second, there is a remarkable historical continuity in how immigration is discussed. In each generation, there are concerns with whether there is too much immigration, or whether there are fundamental differences between today’s immigrants and previous arrivals. And if a large share of today’s immigrants arrive with fewer economic resources than native-born residents, then public discussion will involve assertions that today’s immigrants are somehow different, or less willing to assimilate, or more prone to various sorts of misbehavior. Particularly in Western Europe and the United States, today’s controversies over immigration are remarkably similar to the anxieties and conflicts of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.²⁷

Third, many of these discussions are bound up with an ongoing search for the elusive final balance sheet of immigration: on balance, does immigration harm or help the economy? The simple answer is that immigration provides substantial *aggregate* net benefits after considering all of the ‘costs.’ The more complicated answer involves recognizing that these aggregate gains involve adjustment shocks for some groups and some places. Immigration creates a significant spatial mismatch:

“Consensus seems to be nearing that immigrants are a net fiscal benefit on the whole, but with one major discrepancy. The

²⁶ This does not mean we should avoid these words entirely -- clear communication becomes quite difficult once we take apart every single word we’re using (and how was it that I just used that word?). But it is important to consider carefully our assumptions.

²⁷ See, for example, Howard Zinn (2003). *A People’s History of the United States*. New York: Harper Collins, pp. 265-267.

²⁸ Dowell Myers (1999). “Upward Mobility in Space and Time: Lessons from Immigration.” In James W. Hughes and Joseph J. Seneca, editors, *America’s Demographic Tapestry: Baseline for the New Millennium*. New

Moreover, the entire balance sheet simply cannot be calculated at a simple point in time: it depends on alternative projections and definitions of costs and benefits for at least a generation into the future -- projections that are at once altered by shifts in public policy, and by trajectories in immigrant earnings as influenced by discrimination along the lines of race, ethnicity, and gender.

In the United States, understanding the heavily economic flavor of the debate requires that we consider the work of George Borjas, a prominent labor economist who has studied changes in the skill and earnings of different cohorts of arrivals. Examining data from ten-year intervals between 1940 and 1980, Borjas found that

The spatial mismatch of immigration economics: the economic benefits are diffused throughout a nation's economy. The costs tend to be concentrated at the local, urban level. If public policy fails to resolve this mismatch, immigration is likely to unleash major political conflict.

“almost all the measures of skills or labor market success available in the data document a steady deterioration in the skills and labor market performance of successive immigrant waves over the postwar period, with this trend accelerating since 1960. More important, this study suggests that a single factor, the changing national origin mix of the immigrant flow, is almost entirely responsible for this trend.”²⁹

In more recent work Borjas has gone even further, suggesting that most public discourse around immigration focuses on *symptoms*, and ignores the fundamental importance of *who the immigrants are*:

“It matters if the immigrants might need social services or if they might instead contribute to the funding of the programs in the welfare state. It matters if the immigrants compete with disadvantaged workers in the labor market and take their jobs away, or if the immigrants do jobs that natives do not particularly want and would go unfilled in the immigrants' absence. It matters if the immigrants ‘spark’ the creative juices in particular industries, or if they simply replicate the talents of the native work force. And, finally, it matters if the immigrants will want to adapt to the social, economic, and political environment of the United States, or if they will fight to maintain their language and culture for several generations.”³⁰

Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 135-157, quote from p. 154. The broader lesson to be drawn from this debate is that searching for categorical answers to these kinds of questions is exceedingly hazardous (even if sometimes necessary). Some people benefit, some people lose, and here the word “people” includes today’s immigrants, prior arrivals, native-born majority-group members, and native-born minorities.

²⁹ George J. Borjas (1992). “National Origin and the Skills of Immigrants in the Postwar Period.” In George J. Borjas and Richard B. Freeman, editors, *Immigration and the Work Force: Economic Consequences for the United States and Source Areas*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 17-47, quote on p. 19

³⁰ George Borjas (1999). *Heaven's Door: Immigration Policy and the American Economy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 4-5.

This line of thinking takes George Borjas troublingly close to the ideas of the influential conservative historian and political scientist Samuel Huntington, of “Clash of Civilizations” fame, who has suggested that the entire American identity and culture is being undermined by the ascendance of multiculturalism and the refusal of Hispanic immigrants to assimilate.³¹ The logic is also central to a series of papers by the demographer William Frey, who observed a decade ago that immigration ‘gateways’ -- those receiving the vast majority of international immigrants -- were also seeing the departure of relatively unskilled non-Hispanic whites to other cities. The contrast between international and domestic migration streams led Frey to draw parallels to a long-established literature documenting the “white flight” from cities to suburbs in the 1960s and 1970s, and he began to use the term “demographic balkanization” to describe a spatial stratification of the population by ethnicity, immigrant status, and race.³²

Two thirds of immigrants to Canada are admitted through the “economic” class -- most as skilled, highly-educated professionals.

The Canadian case offers sharp differences from the U.S. experience. Canada’s admissions policies are, in certain respects, a mirror images of those in the U.S. Two-thirds of Canada’s immigrants are admitted through the economic class -- the vast majority as skilled workers who have to meet specified qualifications, educational credentials, and labor market experience or potential. One quarter of immigrants are admitted as family class immigrants, and one out of twelve are admitted as refugees.³³ In the United States, the share admitted as refugees is almost identical, but the balance between family-class and economic preferences is reversed: immediate relatives of U.S. citizens and other family-sponsored

provisions account for two-thirds of all persons granted legal permanent resident status. Employment-based preferences account for only 15 percent.³⁴

These national policy choices make an enormous difference in projections of the net contributions of immigrants to urban and national economies, as measured by income and income taxes paid, minus consumption of various social services. In Canada, the assumptions

³¹ Samuel P. Huntington (2004). *Who Are We? The Challenges to America’s National Identity*. New York: Simon & Schuster. Huntington also expressed concerns about the “de-nationalization” of the economic elite, in a line of thinking that spreads out Reich’s ideas on the “secession of the successful” to a global scale. Yet the vast majority of press coverage of Huntington’s book has focused on his concerns about Hispanic immigration.

³² Frey has published more than a dozen works on this topic, but one of the more readable summaries is William H. Frey (1999). “Immigration and Demographic Balkanization: Toward One America or Two?” In James W. Hughes and Joseph J. Seneca, editors, *America’s Demographic Tapestry: Baseline for the New Millennium*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 78-97. Frey’s work has inspired great controversy as well as a cottage industry of related empirical and policy-oriented research. For an interesting recent spin-off, consider Audrey Singer’s suggestion of six distinct types of immigrant gateways. Audrey Singer (2004). *The Rise of New Immigrant Gateways*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy.

³³ Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2009). *Annual Report to Parliament on Immigration*. Ottawa: Citizenship and Immigration Canada, p. 10.

³⁴ U.S. Bureau of the Census (2010). *Statistical Abstract of the United States*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce, p. 61.

used to make these projections tend to be much more optimistic than in the U.S.: recent immigrants to Canada are believed to have a much better chance of “catching up” to the earnings of Canadian-born workers.³⁵ Canada also has been more proactive in using immigration policy

The isolationist paradox: members of the dominant native-born majority who fear the costs of immigration will make their fears come true if they discriminate against immigrants.

to attract business entrepreneurs and investors: the Federal business class category accounts for about a tenth of all economic-class immigrants.

Nevertheless, it is impossible to obtain a perfect, unquestioned answer to the “balance sheet” question -- because the entire approach relies on projections of future earnings and social service needs. As the saying goes, predictions are hazardous, especially those concerning the future. The projections will change if, for example, discrimination or other factors interfere. If discrimination reduces the earnings of immigrants, then their tax contributions

will fall, worsening the cost-benefit ratio and making immigration look less successful. We might call this the **isolationist paradox**. In societies where negative attitudes towards immigrants become widespread, members of the dominant native-born majority will make their own fears come true if they discriminate against immigrants.

Urban Spatial Assimilation

How does immigration play out inside the metropolis, in different city and suburban neighborhoods? One prominent urbanist asks, “Are new immigrants following the pattern of earlier immigrants, assimilating as they climb the ladder of economic success?”³⁶ This simple metaphor -- climbing the ladder of success in a new society -- has been a recurrent theme in discussions of immigration for many years. It is at the heart of an influential theory known as **urban spatial assimilation**.

“Assimilation” comes from the Latin *assimilatus*, which means “to make like.” Assimilation means “to become absorbed into a society,” with the implication that most of the differences one arrives with will gradually disappear.³⁷ Urban spatial assimilation simply adds a geographical dimension to the process:

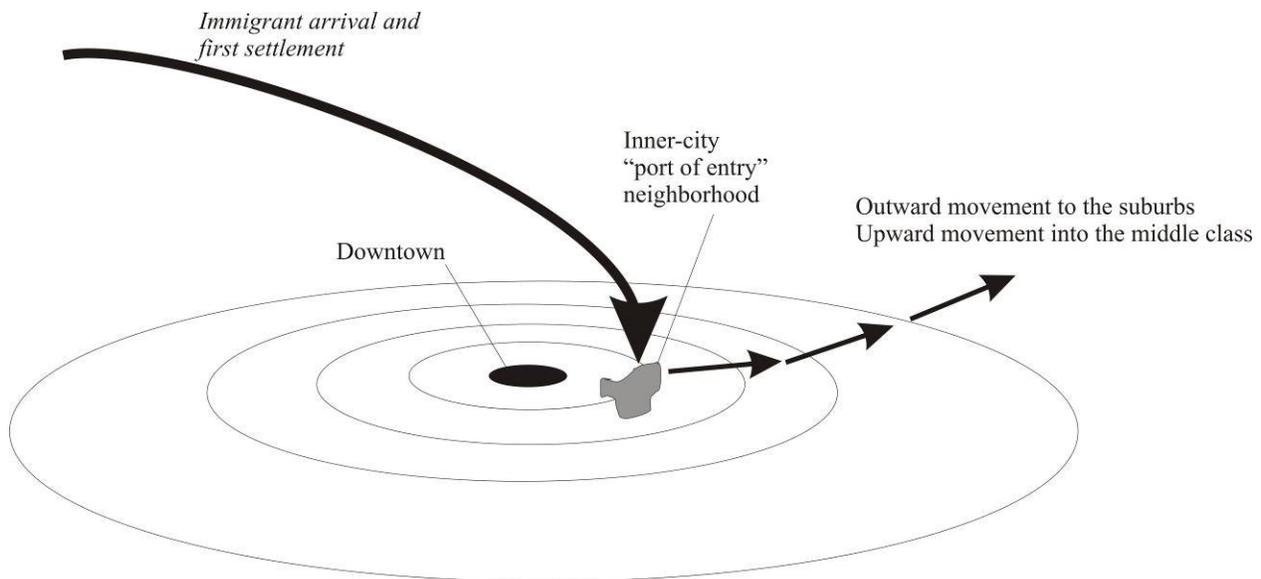
³⁵ Don J. DeVoretz (2004). *Immigration Policy: Methods of Economic Assessment*. Working Paper 04-13. Vancouver: Research on Immigration and Integration in the Metropolis. Available at <http://www.riim.net>. DeVoretz points out that the United States policy response to pessimistic projections was not to slash immigration levels, which would be the logical step if economic cost-benefit analysis were the criterion, but to begin excluding immigrants from various entitlements in education, health care, welfare assistance, and other social services. This move is illogical from a strictly economic standpoint, and implies either that policymakers do not believe that discrimination and other factors impeding immigrants’ catch-up will ever really change; or that policymakers are willing to continue to service the needs of employers and industries reliant on low-wage immigration, but are not willing to provide the funds for social services that these workers and their families will need.

³⁶ E. Barbara Phillips (1996). *City Lights: Urban-Suburban Life in the Global Society*. New York: Oxford University Press, p. 220.

³⁷ Cayne, *New Lexicon*, p. 56.

“in-migrating groups initially settle in inner-city enclaves, typically in disadvantaged areas. As their individual members experience social mobility and acculturation, they usually leave these enclaves in search of more residential amenities. Since amenities are generally concentrated in neighborhoods where the majority group is dominant, this search generally implies entry into majority-group areas.”³⁸

This model relies on several important assumptions, and we’ll consider these a bit later. But for now it’s worth noting that these assumptions were valid in cities across the world’s primary immigrant destinations in Canada, the United States, and Western Europe after the Second World War ended in 1945. As a consequence, as the urban social sciences developed in the twentieth century, experts who studied immigration in cities of the Global North uncovered a growing body of evidence that supported a powerful and generalizable theory. Urban spatial assimilation became the dominant way of looking at immigration in cities.³⁹



“Classical” Urban Spatial Assimilation. Immigrants arrive poor, settle in an inner-city port-of-entry, and then work their way out to the suburbs -- and up into the middle class -- over time. Source: Graphic by Elvin Wyly.

Scores of studies tested the proposition by first noting wide inter-group differences in, say, household income, among various immigrant groups; these groups’ incomes were typically compared in benchmark fashion to the incomes of non-Hispanic whites; then the next step was to determine how spatially segregated various immigrant groups were in relation to non-Hispanic whites. The general consensus from this literature, based on repeated studies in a wide variety of cities in the U.S., Canada, and Western Europe, was that immigrant groups with higher average

³⁸ Richard D. Alba, John R. Logan, and Brian J. Stults (2000). “The Changing Neighborhood Contexts of the Immigrant Metropolis.” *Social Forces* 79(2), 587-621, quote on p. 589.

³⁹ The most comprehensive synthesis of the early years of this literature is Douglas Massey (1985). “Ethnic Residential Segregation: A Theoretical Synthesis and Empirical Review.” *Sociology and Social Research* 69, 315-350.

incomes tended to be less spatially segregated, therefore supporting the theory of spatial assimilation.

Unfortunately, most of these studies suffered from a serious methodological error -- the use of average neighborhood and group characteristics to infer *individual* outcomes -- and so in recent years there has been an effort to provide more rigorous tests for the hypotheses of spatial

From the 1950s until recently, urban spatial assimilation -- the idea that new immigrants settle in inner-city enclaves, then work their way "up and out" to majority-group neighborhoods -- was the dominant way of studying immigration in cities.

assimilation. James Allen and Eugene Turner, who have done extensive work on ethnic settlement patterns in Los Angeles, analyzed a variety of individual characteristics for ethnic groups in concentrated, dispersed, and highly dispersed residential contexts.⁴⁰ They find strong support for the model -- immigrants living in concentrated settlement areas almost always have much lower incomes than those who are in highly dispersed contexts. But they do find exceptions.⁴¹ They conclude:

"ethnic concentrations are no longer exclusively located in older centralized areas, and the areal differentiation of relative assimilation is often weaker than that implied

by the model of spatial assimilation. Nevertheless, changes in the characteristics of immigrants and a radically expanded metropolitan geography over the last half century have not invalidated the general spatial pattern of relative assimilation that once characterized European immigrants and their children."⁴²

Similarly, Alba and Logan have recently devised more refined ways of measuring what they call "locational attainment," in which individual and household attributes are used to predict the kind of neighborhood various immigrants are able to achieve. They have also been able to evaluate changes over time. Alba and his colleagues conclude:

"From the perspective of spatial-assimilation theory, the results of our analysis appear somewhat paradoxical. Cross-sectionally, they strongly uphold the major spatial-assimilation hypotheses, in that socioeconomic status, assimilation level, and suburban residence are all strongly linked to residence in neighborhoods of

⁴⁰ James P. Allen and Eugene Turner (1996). "Spatial Patterns of Immigrant Assimilation." *Professional Geographer* 48(2), 140-155.

⁴¹ On the one hand, they find very small differences in the earnings of immigrant Mexicans in concentrated, dispersed, and highly dispersed zones. On the other hand, Japanese completely contradict the model: immigrants living in concentrated areas have higher incomes and educational attainment than their peers in dispersed and highly dispersed zones. Allen and Turner attribute this finding to "the presence in the highly dispersed zone of long-established Japanese families with origins in farming, and ... Japanese corporate managers living temporarily in a [zone] of especially high income within the concentrated zone..." In this zone, "many of the foreign-born are Japanese nationals who manage the Southern California operations of Japanese corporations and have frequently chosen homes on the Palos Verdes Peninsula and in nearby Torrance." Allen and Turner, "Spatial Patterns," 152.

⁴² Allen and Turner, "Spatial Patterns," 154.

greater affluence and with more non-Hispanic whites. ... Yet, when we view matters longitudinally, it appears that large-scale immigration modifies the operation of spatial assimilation. ... While suburban middle- and upper-income Asians and Hispanics still tend to live in neighborhoods where non-Hispanic whites are in the majority, in some regions this majority appears precarious, and further immigration seems almost certain to produce more neighborhoods where minorities live more with other minorities than with whites.”⁴³

What this means is that the simple, smooth process of “classical” urban spatial assimilation is becoming more complex. Urban spatial assimilation remains useful as a way of thinking about how immigration plays out in the metropolis under certain conditions. But it is now clear that the “classical” up-and-out trajectory is one of several possibilities in how the assimilation process plays out across space. First, as noted by the sociologist Alejandro Portes, some communities may see a process of **segmented assimilation**. While immigrants may work their way up and out into the mainstream, their children may face exclusion, discrimination, or limited educational or work opportunities in the inner-city port-of-entry neighborhoods where newly-arrived families often settle. Teenagers in the second generation of immigrants, therefore, may endure downward mobility even as their families finally achieve middle-class success.⁴⁴ Second, immigrants may bypass the inner-city port-of-entry neighborhood, and settle in suburban immigrant communities. The British geographer Ceri Peach once called this process “parachuted plurality,” with the diversity of new arrivals landing from distant parts of the globe into particular suburban concentrations.

Immigration, seen from a very strange Angle

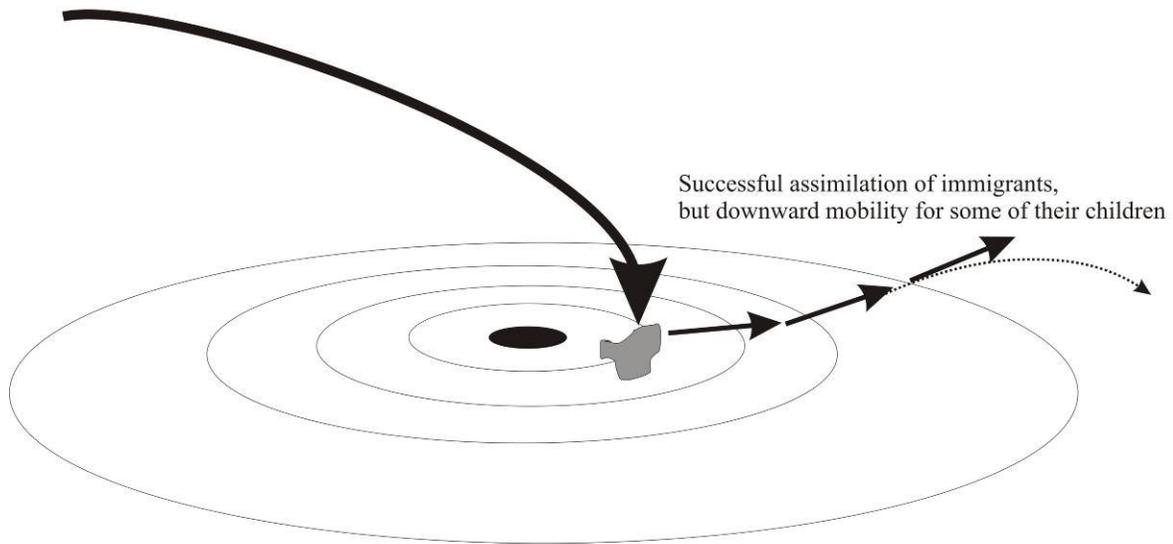
“So that’s what we want is a secure and sovereign nation and, you know, I don’t know that all of you are Latino. Some of you look a little more Asian to me. I don’t know that,’ Ms. Angle said. **‘What we know, what we know about ourselves is that we are a melting pot in this country.** My grandchildren are evidence of that. I’m evidence of that. I’ve been called the first Asian legislator in our Nevada State Assembly.’

Ms. Angle is White. A spokesperson for the Angle campaign could not be reached for comment.”

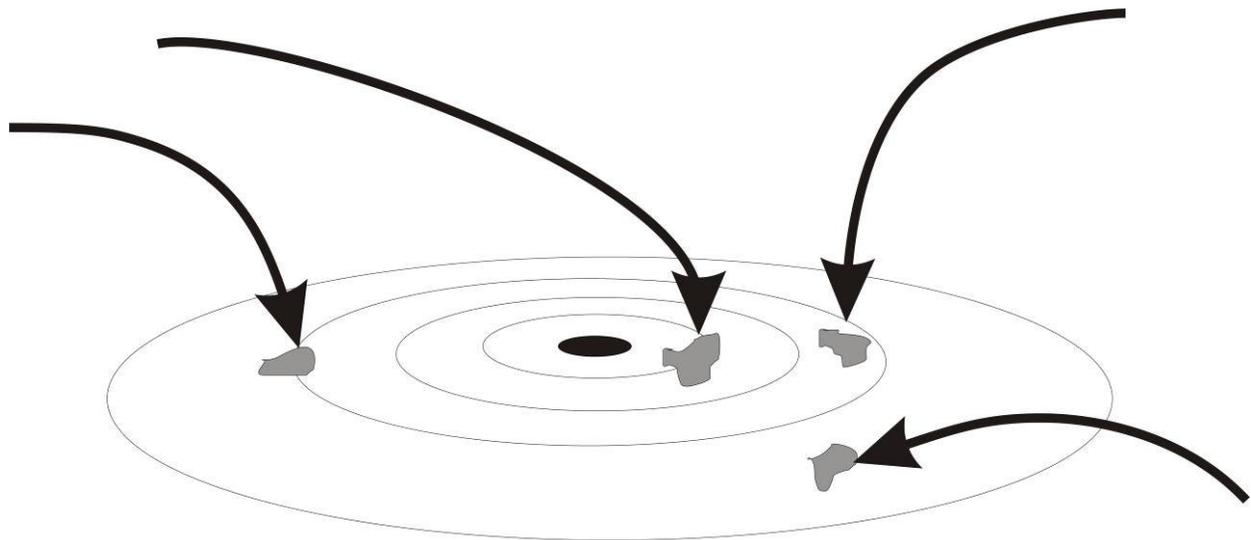
-- Sharon Angle, Republican candidate for U.S. Senate (Nevada), speaking to the Hispanic Student Union at Rancho High School near Las Vegas. Michael D. Shear (2010). “Angle Says Students ‘Look Asian.’” *New York Times*, The Caucus, October 18.

⁴³ Alba, Logan, and Stults, “Neighborhood Contexts,” 616-617.

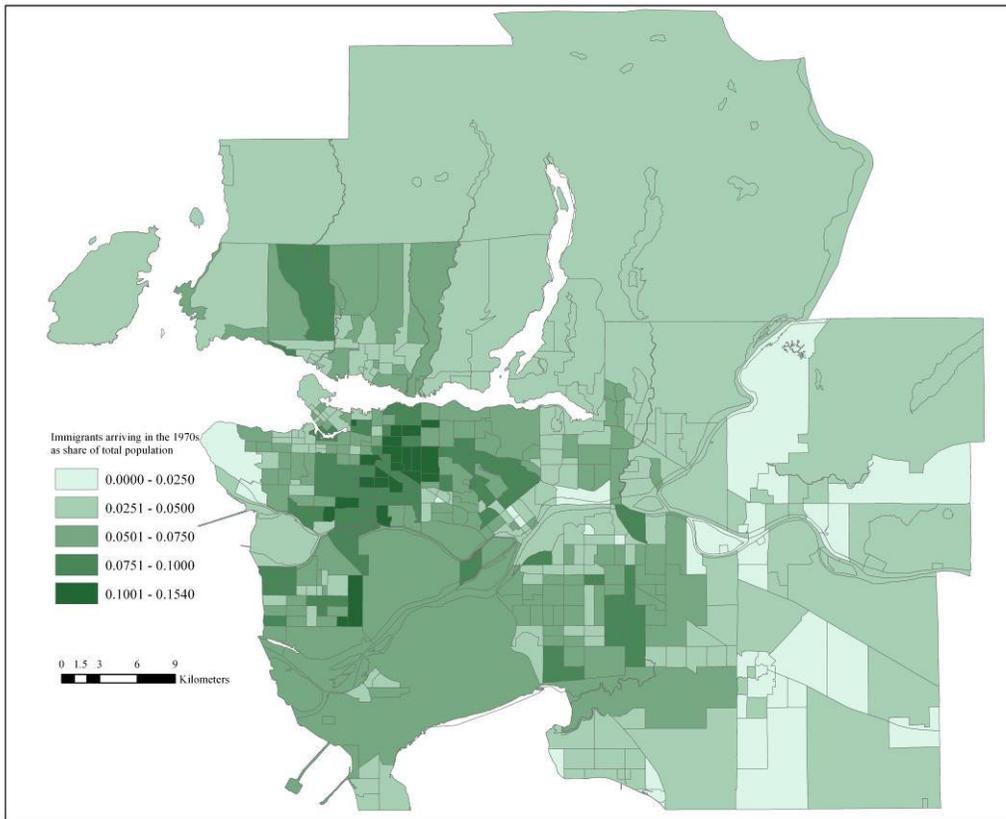
⁴⁴ See Alejandro Portes, Patricia Fernandez-Kelly, and William Haller (2005). “Segmented Assimilation on the Ground: The New Second Generation in Early Adulthood.” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 28(6), 1000-1040.



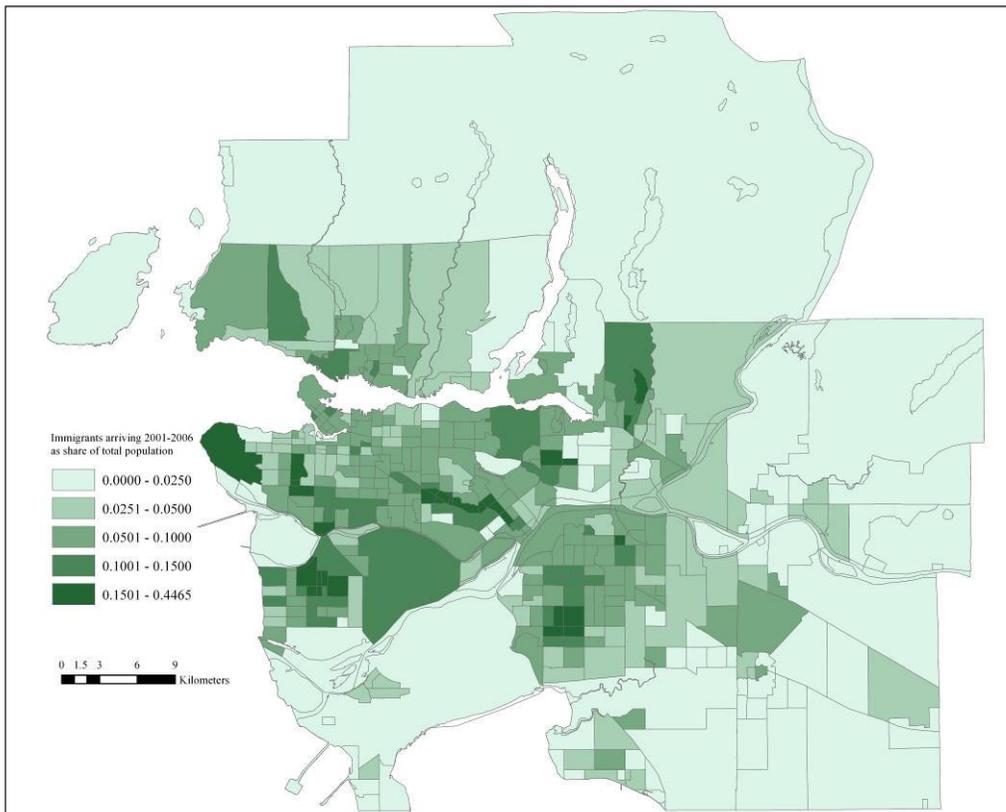
Spatial Assimilation: The “Segmented Assimilation” Model. *Source:* Graphic by Elvin Wyly.



Spatial Assimilation: The “Parachuted Plurality” Model. *Source:* Graphic by Elvin Wyly.



Immigrants in the Vancouver Metropolitan Area, 2006. The map above shows immigrants who arrived in Canada in the 1970s, as a share of neighborhood population. Note that we're looking at a snapshot in 2006: individuals and families may well have settled in other neighborhoods and moved, perhaps multiple times, from the 1970s until the time in 2006 when they filled out the census form in the locations as shown on this map. Even so, the inner-urban pattern of the 1970s arrival cohort is clear. By contrast, immigrants who arrived between 2001 and 2006 (below) settled across a much wider range of city and suburban neighborhoods. Map by Elvin Wyly, based on data from Statistics Canada (2008). *Cumulative Profile for Census Tracts, 2006 Census of Population and Housing*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.



Beyond Assimilation: Pluralism, Multiculturalism, and Transnational Urbanism

In recent years, the assimilation framework has been destabilized in multiple ways. On the one hand, Canada and Australia have turned away from their traditional histories of assimilation, and Canada became the only country to adopt a formal Multiculturalism Act with specific Constitutional rights of **multiculturalism**. Multiculturalism is an ideology and state policy that seeks to govern and manage political differences to ensure “the coexistence of culturally diverse populations” through official “respect for cultural difference and ... support for the maintenance of old-world cultures.”⁴⁵ Multiculturalism is something of a compromise between the enforced sameness of assimilation and the greater freedoms of cultural pluralism, which involves “allowing migrants to retain their cultural traditions and live separately from mainstream society.”⁴⁶ Multiculturalism is not absolute in the range of cultural traditions and differences that will be respected, permitted, and encouraged. As a state project, multiculturalism is inherently political, and changes with the level of support amongst various constituencies. Indeed, several countries that adopted selected multicultural policies in the late twentieth century -- the Netherlands, Sweden, the United Kingdom -- are now in the midst of a reversal:

“In the aftermath of terrorist incidents and several episodes of social unrest, those European countries that adopted multiculturalism appear to be reconsidering that decision, and may be returning to assimilation as a means of integration. ... These debates have been highly charged, and critics of the return to assimilation have argued that it reflects an Islamophobic agenda.”⁴⁷

‘Multikulti’ Under Attack

“Germany’s attempt to create a multicultural society has failed completely, Chancellor Angela Merkel said at the weekend, calling on the country’s immigrants to learn German and adopt Christian values. Merkel weighed in for the first time in a blistering debate sparked by a central bank board member saying the country was being made ‘more stupid’ by poorly educated and unproductive Muslim migrants. ‘Multikulti,’ the concept that ‘we are now living side by side and are happy about it,’ does not work, Merkel told a meeting of younger members of her conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU) party.... ‘This approach has failed, totally,’ she said, adding that immigrants should integrate and adopt Germany’s culture and values.”

Audrey Kauffman (2010). “Plans for Multicultural Country Have Failed, Chancellor Admits.” *The Vancouver Sun*, October 18. B8.

⁴⁵ David Ley (2009). “Multiculturalism.” In Derek Gregory, Ron Johnston, Geraldine Pratt, Michael J. Watts, and Sarah Whatmore, eds., *The Dictionary of Human Geography*, Fifth Edition. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 480-481, quote from p. 480.

⁴⁶ Daniel Hiebert (2009). “Assimilation.” In Derek Gregory, Ron Johnston, Geraldine Pratt, Michael J. Watts, and Sarah Whatmore, eds., *The Dictionary of Human Geography*, Fifth Edition. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 38-39, quote from p. 38.

⁴⁷ Hiebert, “Assimilation,” p. 39.

Canadian Exceptionalism?

Canada seems to have achieved a remarkable and unique balance with its multiculturalism policies. By the end of the twentieth century,

“Everywhere, it seemed, immigrants were treated with growing suspicion, with asylum seekers and Muslims receiving particularly negative attention. Canada has been an exception to this nearly universal trend, which is remarkable. ... There is no Canadian counterpart to the antagonistic, anti-immigration movements elsewhere. ... the political constituency for this view is meagre.”⁴⁸

This success story, however, has bittersweet consequences. Canada’s emphasis on skilled

Canada’s immigration policy poaches human capital investments made by other societies.

Skilled immigrants’ foreign credentials and work experience are often not recognized by Canadian employers, forcing professionals to accept low-level service jobs. One scholar calls this syndrome “brain abuse.”

degree or a Ph.D.”⁵⁰

workers and other economic-class immigrants can be viewed as a brilliant decision: most immigrants arrive as middle-class professionals, and are therefore much less likely to be stigmatized compared to the working-class and poor arrivals that dominate public debates in Europe and the United States. But Canada’s entry policies worsen the “brain drain” afflicting the Global South: *admitting skilled, highly-educated workers early on in their careers is, in essence, poaching the enormous investments in education and human capital made by another society.* Canadian immigration policy now “emphasizes the admission of ... immigrants from around the world as self-financed, ‘just-in-time’ sources of skilled labor, advanced technology, and entrepreneurial capital.”⁴⁹ Moreover, Canada’s admissions policies do not resolve all the problems with employer practices, labor market discrimination, and the failure to recognize foreign credentials. These problems lead to a great deal of wasted human capital:

“The iconic figure is the overqualified cab driver or restaurant worker, usually with an engineering

This is a serious problem, and cannot be dismissed as a temporary or natural adjustment process. Instead, there is evidence that “the nonrecognition of foreign credentials and dismissal of foreign

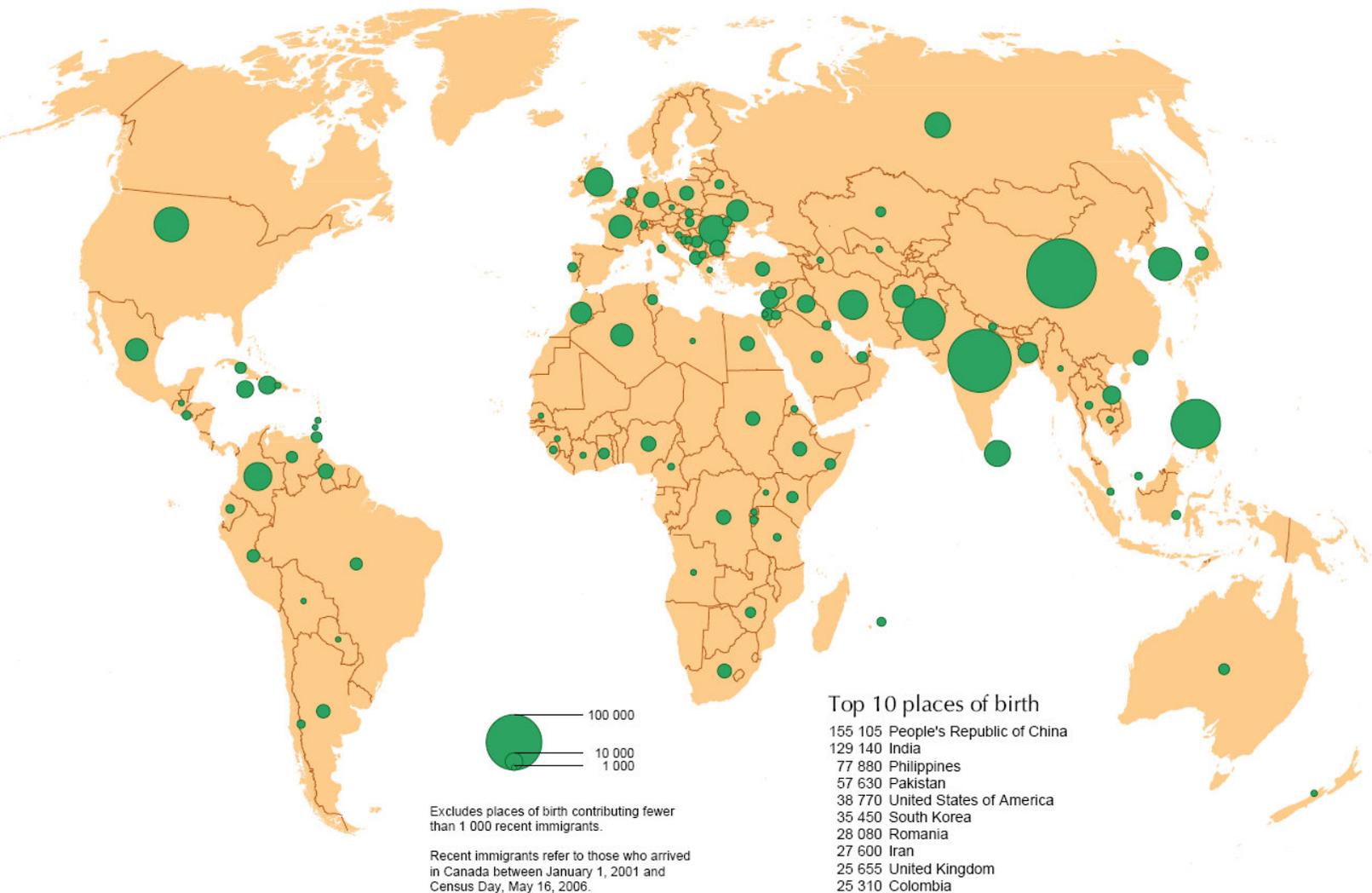
⁴⁸ Dan Hiebert (2006). “Winning, Losing, and Still Playing the Game: The Political Economy of Immigration in Canada.” *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie* 97(1), 38-48, quote from p. 39.

⁴⁹ Alan B. Simmons (1996). “Economic Globalization and Immigration Policy: Canada Compared to Europe.” Paper presented at “Organizing Diversity: Migration Policy and Practice.” Bergen Dal, The Netherlands, quote from p. 1.

⁵⁰ Hiebert, “Winning, Losing,” p. 41.

World

Place of birth of recent immigrants to Canada, 2006



A World of Immigration to Canada. Source: Statistics Canada (2007). *Place of Birth of Recent Immigrants to Canada, 2006*. Ottawa: Geography Division, Statistics Canada. Non-commercial reproduction by permission from Statistics Canada.

The Canadian immigration paradox: the success of public support for immigration depends partly on the failures of the labor market to provide opportunities to new immigrants.

work experience systematically excludes immigrants from the upper segments of the labour market.”⁵¹ This is a syndrome that Harald Bauder calls “brain abuse.”

The result is a Canadian paradox. Public opinion regarding immigration in Canada is “among the most favourable in the world,” even as recent immigrant cohorts have fared more poorly than their counterparts twenty or thirty years ago, and even as the qualifications of immigrants have increased substantially. The paradox, suggested by Dan Hiebert, is that the success in maintaining broad public support for immigration is directly related to the failures of the labor market:

⁵¹ Harald Bauder (2003). “Brain Abuse, or, The Devaluation of Immigrant Labour in Canada.” *Antipode* 35(4), 699-717, quote from p. 699.

“the weak economic position of immigrants -- particularly the fact that they do not compete against the Canadian-born in privileged segments of the labour market -- is an important ingredient in the favourable view of immigration.”⁵²

Alternatives to Urban Spatial Assimilation

When we shift our focus from the broad societal debates over multiculturalism to the settlement patterns inside cities, we also find a great de-stabilization of the old framework, urban spatial assimilation. Recall that simple definition of the process:

“in-migrating groups initially settle in inner-city enclaves, typically in disadvantaged areas. As their individual members experience social mobility and acculturation, they usually leave these enclaves in search of more residential amenities. Since amenities are generally concentrated in neighborhoods where the majority group is dominant, this search generally implies entry into majority-group areas.”⁵³

Consider the main assumptions of this model:

1. Immigrants arrive with few resources, or face other constraints that lead them to settle in disadvantaged areas.
2. Disadvantaged areas are more likely to be found in the inner city,
3. Better residential amenities are more likely to be found in majority-group areas, far from inner-city enclaves.

These assumptions are still valid in many cities in Canada, the United States, and Western Europe. But in a growing number of very large and diverse cities -- especially Toronto and Vancouver -- these assumptions no longer make any sense. Sustained high levels of immigration over the past generation have altered the meaning of “majority group” in many neighborhoods (undermining assumption 3), central city redevelopment has brought considerable wealth to the inner city (assumption 2), and national immigration policy has brought immigrants with higher levels of human capital or even financial capital (assumption 1). It has become clear that the assumptions of spatial assimilation theory are historically and geographically contingent.

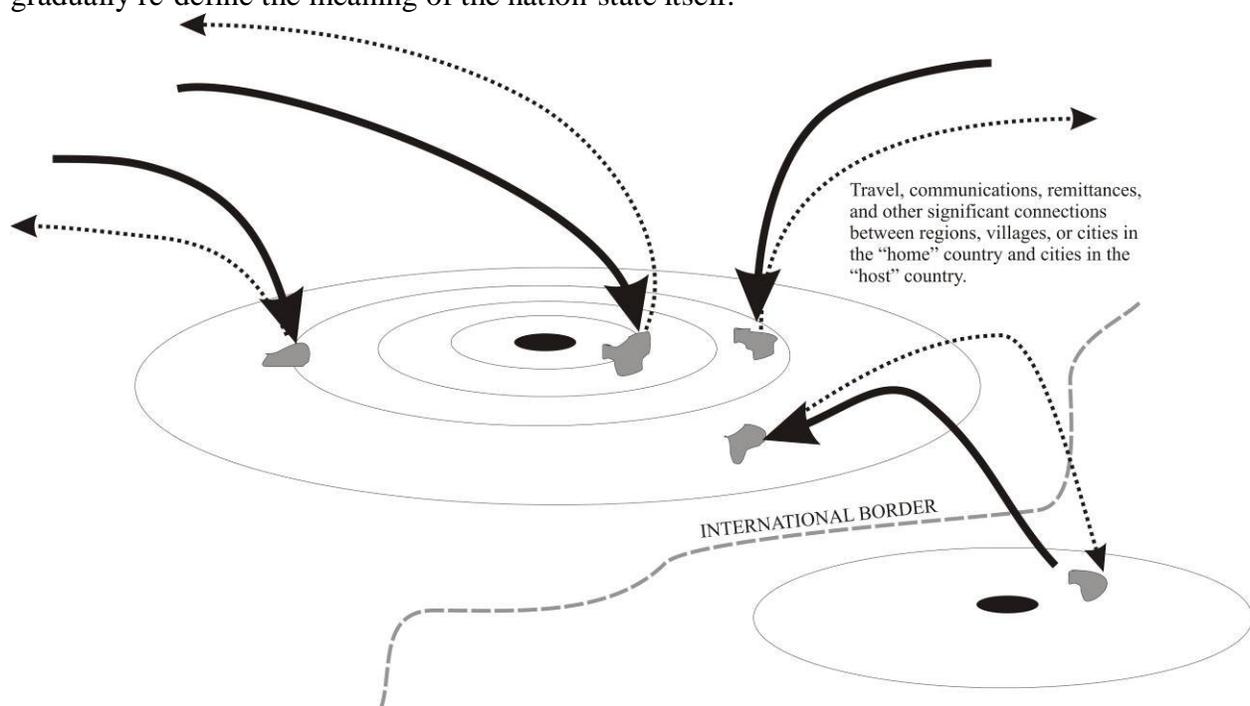
In cities where the assumptions of spatial assimilation no longer hold, the approach of **transnational urbanism** has become more influential. Transnational urbanism is a theory that emphasizes the changing relations between what happens at the local level in cities, and processes that cross international borders. Scholars who work in this area prefer to use the word “transnational” rather than “global,” because over the years, “globalization” has been described in ways that are vague, all-encompassing, diffuse, non-specific, and world-spanning. In reality, however, most “global” processes are actually quite localized -- just in ways that connect

⁵² Hiebert, “Winning, Losing,” p. 38.

⁵³ Richard D. Alba, John R. Logan, and Brian J. Stults (2000). “The Changing Neighborhood Contexts of the Immigrant Metropolis.” *Social Forces* 79(2), 587-621, quote on p. 589.

regions, cities, and neighborhoods in different nation-states. Transnational urbanism is the study of these very specific, very localized urban processes that cross international borders.

As applied to immigration, transnational urbanism rejects the idea of, say, studying immigrant neighborhoods in one city, while vaguely referring to immigrants' home countries as part of a distant, "global" influence. Instead, transnational urbanism would involve looking at the specific urban and regional processes and networks that link particular neighborhoods and cities across international boundaries. It also involves the study of people who spend a significant part of their lives transnationally -- maintaining strong ties or traveling regularly between cities in different countries. The approach also explores how transnational practices change the experiences and perceptions of majority-group people in cities in the "destination" country that receives immigrants. In large cities receiving lots of immigrants, the cumulative effects of transnational practices can create distinctly new kinds of urban spaces. These new spaces can gradually re-define the meaning of the nation-state itself.⁵⁴

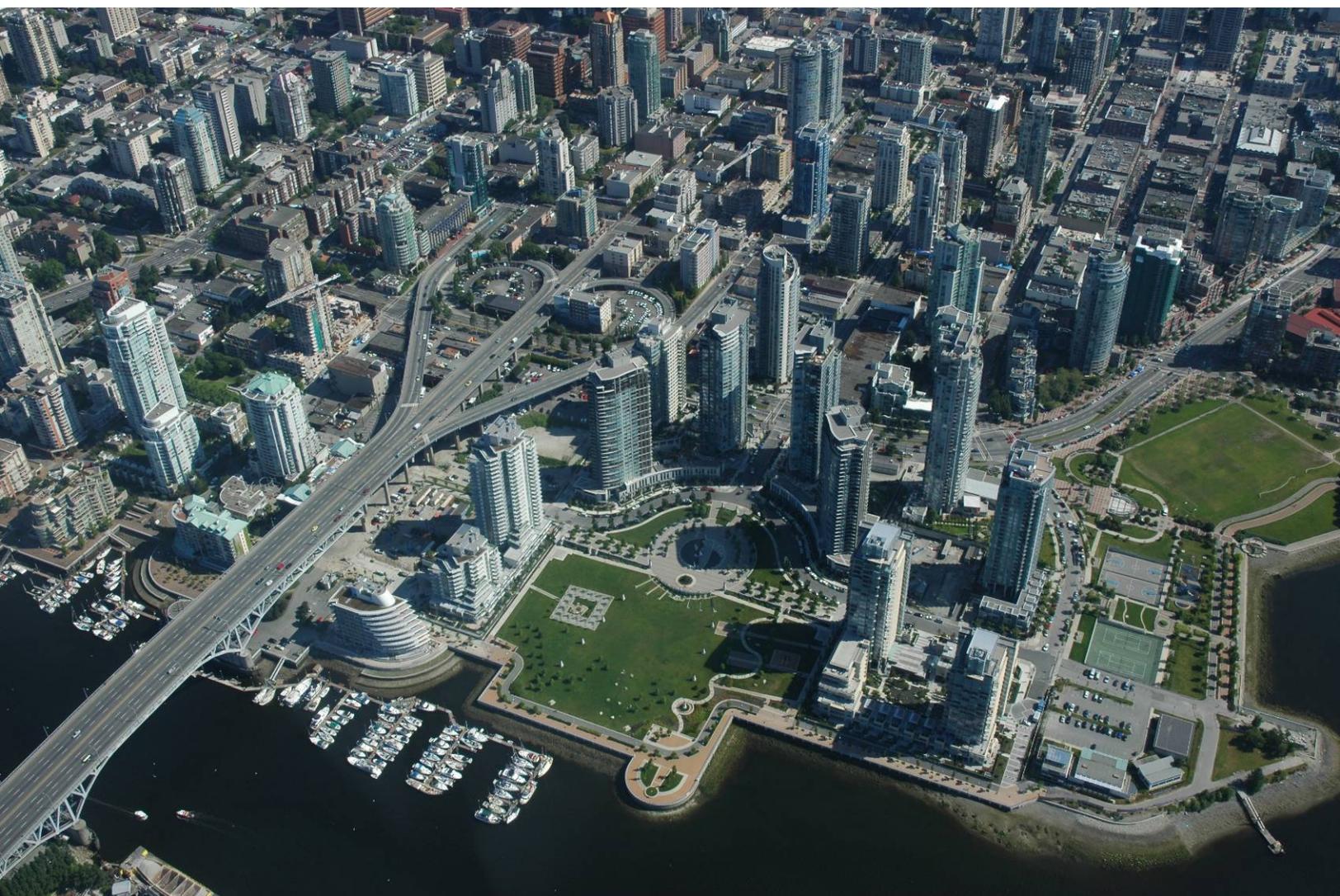


Spatial Assimilation: the Transnational Urbanism model. *Source:* Graphic by Elvin Wyly. In the past, immigration was a comparatively permanent move across a long distance -- and it was usually rather difficult for migrants to maintain significant connections to their home countries, cities, or neighborhoods. In the past generation, it has become much easier to maintain significant connections, thanks to advances in communications technologies, reductions in the costs of international air travel, and the policies taken by some governments to encourage remittances or voting by their emigrants. As a consequence, many immigrants experience cities as transnational processes -- maintaining strong connections to particular regions, cities or neighborhoods while frequently crossing international borders.

⁵⁴ Michael Peter Smith (2001). *Transnational Urbanism: Locating Globalization*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Let's consider five examples of how transnational urbanism allows us to understand things where urban spatial assimilation doesn't seem to work.

First, consider the case of Chinese immigrants to Vancouver. Through the first two thirds of the twentieth century, conditions generally conformed to the assumptions of the model, and Chinatown could be understood as the primary 'port of entry' neighborhood for Vancouver.⁵⁵ Many Chinese immigrants started out poor, faced discrimination in housing and jobs, and typically settled in or close to Chinatown. Over time, they worked their way up the socioeconomic ladder and out into wealthier neighborhoods in the city and surrounding suburbs - following the path of classical spatial assimilation. But with changes in Canadian immigration policy in the 1960s, and growing economic integration between Canada and China, things changed a great deal in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In particular, a large number of people moved from to Vancouver in the years approaching the 1997 transfer of sovereignty of Hong



Transnational Urbanism Under Construction: Concord Pacific Place, June 2006 (Elvin Wyly).

⁵⁵ Wing Chung Ng (1999). *The Chinese in Vancouver, 1945-1980*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.

Kong. Many arrivals had significant financial resources, and responded to a series of policies created by the Province of British Columbia and Canada's federal government designed to attract investment capital from Hong Kong and elsewhere. Ever since the 1990s, Vancouver has become something of an inversion of the usual assumptions of spatial assimilation theory, with new arrivals having *more* resources than (many of) the members of the 'majority group.' While public discussion and policy debate elsewhere in Canada and the United States focused on the dangers that immigrants' declining earnings would push them into the poverty of an urban "underclass," in Vancouver the controversy involved anxieties of a wealthy immigrant "overclass."⁵⁶ The number of immigrants from Hong Kong to British Columbia shot up from fewer than 2,000 annually in the early 1980s to more than 10,000 in 1993, and then more than 15,000 in 1994. Local controversy erupted when a luxury condominium development in Vancouver was offered for sale in Hong Kong, with no corresponding advertising in Vancouver. And a significant part of the urban fabric was being remade in a vivid expression of transnational urbanism -- the \$3 billion Concord Pacific Place development, led by Victor Li, the son of Hong Kong billionaire Li Ka-Shing. The development of Concord Pacific Place illustrated how "flows of immigrants and capital linking both sides of the Pacific are transforming Vancouver's social structure, turning it into a relatively welcoming and 'open' Western city for elite Asian investors."⁵⁷

Even so, wealth does not come without its problems. Immigrants entering Canada through the business-class program are required to have substantial wealth, and to make large investments to create businesses and hire workers. But there are enormous cross-national differences in business practices, market demand, regulations, and taxation. All of these stark contrasts lead to a high rate of business failures. In many cases, families admitted through the business-class category become what have been called "astronaut" families. The businessman husband returns to (for example) Hong Kong to work, returning to Canada every few months to visit his wife and children in Vancouver. Yet "the astronaut option is a difficult one. Women can get lonely and depressed at the burden of managing a family in an unfamiliar culture. Men can become disconnected from their families. Affairs occur; marriages break up; children become unruly."⁵⁸

These transnational urban linkages also change how previous generations of immigrants -- especially European-origin Canadians who do not see themselves as immigrants -- understand their city or their neighborhoods. With rising immigration in the late 1990s, significant controversy ensued when many Chinese families bought homes in Vancouver's wealthy neighborhoods and began replacing older, historic structures with much larger buildings that were soon described as unattractive "Monster Houses." The Monster House controversy brought out many tensions, and more than a bit of racism. In her important book *Crossing the Neoliberal Line*, Katharyne Mitchell describes her interviews with a white community leader, who saw herself as a "defender of the rights and values of the white upper-middle class women being evicted from their Kerrisdale walk-up apartments."⁵⁹ Annie told Katharyne:

⁵⁶ See David Ley (1999). "Myths and Meanings of Immigration and the Metropolis." *Canadian Geographer* 43(1), 2-19.

⁵⁷ Kris Olds (1993). "Globalization and Urban Change: Tales From Vancouver via Hong Kong." *Urban Geography* 19(4), 360-385, quote from p. 378.

⁵⁸ David Ley (2011). *Millionaire Migrants*. West Sussex: Wiley/Blackwell, p. 105.

⁵⁹ Katharyne Mitchell (2006). *Crossing the Neoliberal Line*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, p. 176.

“It isn’t that we’re against the people coming from Hong Kong, but ... this is not a social issue. They’re trying to make it into a social issue and they point fingers at anybody who complains about this investment, and they say you’re racist. Racism is a social issue, it is not a financial issue. This is two different arguments we’re dealing with here. We’re talking about *our* country not having the control, or not willing to have the control to put *our* population, the *Canadians*, in control of their own land. They are bartering our land in order to get all those billions of dollars from another country in investment to stimulate the economy ... and of course it makes the government look glowing in their balance sheet. And the city.”⁶⁰

As so often happens in real urban life, lots of things are mixed together here: concerns over immigration, the style of houses in the neighborhood, and differences involving race and ethnicity. There is also the appeal to ideas of “us” and “them,” equating “our” nation with the “Canadians,” ignoring the fact that thousands of people from Hong Kong did in fact quickly become Canadian citizens. And because of this tense, confusing mixture,

“businesspeople and state representatives who benefited from international investment and real-estate development were able to point to the visible racism ... and proclaim *all* neighborhood slow-growth movements as fundamentally racist in nature.”⁶¹

Second, there has been a great deal of research on the case of Cubans in Miami, who constitute an influential immigrant group whose success has much to do with their refusal to assimilate. Portes and Rumbaut are among leading sociologists working on this topic; they view the ethnic “enclave economy” as an important phenomenon that undermines traditional notions of spatial assimilation.⁶² Although dense concentrations of urban ethnic entrepreneurs often involve some degree of exploitation -- new immigrants working for “co-ethnics” for long hours and low wages -- this is by no means universal. “Cubans relied on the kinship bonds” associated with tightly bounded solidarity, enforceable trust, and other social processes, “and on the traditional sexual division of labor to accumulate resources for launching independent businesses. As heads of households and of firms, men probably benefited more from the process; but women have also gained from relatively higher earnings in the enclave and from sharing in the collective economic advancement of their families. ... enclave enterprise is not the product of isolated individual achievement, but rather one deeply embedded in the social networks of the ethnic community and the family.”⁶³ Portes later clarified his thinking in an exchange on how to define enclaves:

⁶⁰ Mitchell, *Crossing*, p. 177.

⁶¹ Mitchell, *Crossing*, p. 178.

⁶² In conventional sociological work, immigrant *enclaves* are seen as the product of discrimination, constraint, and hostility by the host society; but with changes in immigrant selectivity, segregation by choice is often said to produce enduring ethnic *communities*. For a review of this line of thinking and its application to the case of Toronto’s visible minority populations, see John Myles and Feng Hou (2004). “Changing Colours: Spatial Assimilation and New Racial Minority Immigrants.” *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 29(1), 29-58. They find evidence that Chinese settlement patterns conform well to the ethnic community model, while South Asians and Blacks seem to conform to the immigrant enclave model of traditional spatial assimilation theory.

⁶³ Alejandro Portes and Leif Jensen (1989). “The Enclave and the Entrants: Patterns of Ethnic Enterprise in Miami Before and After Mariel.” *American Sociological Review* 54, 929-949, quote from p. 947.

“The enclave hypothesis never claimed that perennial confinement within an ethnic community would be the road to economic parity” with the dominant, majority population. “The hypothesis simply stated that, for newly arrived immigrants, participation in a pre-existing economy can have positive economic consequences, including a greater opportunity for self-employment. This positive adaptation, in particular among immigrant entrepreneurs, creates the basis for a more successful integration of later generations into American society.”⁶⁴

Third, it has long been recognized that African-Americans do not conform well to the predictions of the spatial assimilation model. Spatial assimilation predicts that since African Americans have had many generations to adapt to the ‘dominant society’ of White America, they should be more integrated, higher up the economic ladder, and thus more spatially assimilated, than more recent immigrant arrivals. And yet this is not the case. Deep-seated tensions between Whites and African Americans have been regarded as something that took the most pure, raw form in America: One of the most influential and interdisciplinary works in this area is titled: “An American Dilemma.” The failure of spatial assimilation to account for the experience of African Americans continues to generate heated debate.⁶⁵

Fourth, sustained high levels of immigration can re-define key political aspects of a city’s growth. Ivan Light, a prominent sociologist at UCLA, has shown how the idea of the city as a “growth machine”⁶⁶ -- an alliance of different industries and elites that are bound together by their mutual vested interest in promoting population growth and property development -- has been fundamentally transformed by recent immigration. In Los Angeles, the traditional white Anglo growth machine began to stall in the 1970s and 1980s, in the face of opposition from the environmental movement and residents frustrated with traffic jams and three-hour commutes as the metropolitan region began to reach what some saw as the outer horizontal limit for expansion. But Light noted that the literature showed that immigrants sometimes “join urban growth machines *as realtors* (not as developers),” as illustrated by the work of Carlos Teixeira on Portuguese real estate brokers in Toronto, and Pradip Kuthari on South Asians (Gujarati Indians) in Edison, New Jersey; “ethnic real estate interests can take over a stagnant city’s

⁶⁴ Alejandro Portes and Leif Jensen (1996). “What’s an Ethnic Enclave? The Case for Conceptual Clarity.” *American Sociological Review* 61, 768-771.

⁶⁵ Hostility boiled over in Los Angeles in 1992 after several years of severe economic dislocation, police brutality, and frustration over the acquittal of White police officers who had been videotaped beating a Black motorist, Rodney King. “Relations between Korean shopkeepers and their African American, Chicano, and other Latino clients in Los Angeles exploded, ending in the destruction of more than 2,500 Korean-owned stores during the Rodney King riots.” Phillips, *City Lights*, p. 219. See also Cornel West (1999), “On Black-Brown Relations.” *The Cornel West Reader*. New York: Basic Civitas Books, 499-513. This is a reprint of a famous 1996 conversation which begins with the deceptively simple question, “Cornel, are you a black man?” The responses and discussions of that question and its implications generated intense controversy. More recently, a National Public Radio poll, conducted with the support of the Kaiser Family Foundation and the Kennedy School of Government, highlighted some striking differences in views of immigration by African Americans and Non-Immigrant Whites. The Tavis Smiley Show (2004). *Non-Immigrant Whites and African Americans*. Audio of Broadcast October 11, 2004. Available at <http://www.npr.org/news/specials/polls/2004/immigration/>

⁶⁶ This model was offered by Logan and Molotch, and discussed in some of the work Phillips cites on page 107. We will consider this model in more detail later in the course.

inactive growth machine and reactivate it.”⁶⁷ Light provides rich, detailed case studies of immigrant ‘place entrepreneurs’ that shape the environment of residential choices for other immigrants -- providing a powerful alternative to the explanations offered by spatial assimilation theory. Frederic Hsieh, who came from China to work as a city engineer but went into real estate instead, moved into Monterey Park at age 27 in 1972; after several years of promoting Monterey Park in Hong Kong and China as “the Chinese Beverly Hills,” Hsieh began to meet with considerable success, and by the late 1970s and 1980s his alliance with a group of Chinese business firms had gained substantial control over the local Chamber of Commerce.⁶⁸ Hi-Duk Lee, a restaurateur who opened the first Korean establishment in the mid-Wilshire district, was Director of the Koreatown Development Association, which from the start had ties to capital and expertise from local developers, realtors, and Korean banks. “Korean banks, using Korean money, finance Korean business in Los Angeles, including real estate investment. Koreatown was built without American banks and without American entrepreneurs.”⁶⁹ As Light emphasizes, the opportunities for suburbanization envisioned in the “leaderless” model of spatial assimilation were created by specific alliances and even particular individuals: The riots of the early 1990s dimmed the prospects of Koreatown as a residential enclave; but Korean investment in Koreatown commercial properties actually increased after 1992, while Edward Cho, a multimillionaire developer, spearheaded development in Garden Grove. “The development of suburban Korean areas created a socio-economic ladder for Korean immigrants to climb upon arrival in Los Angeles.”⁷⁰ Light’s case studies suggest that spatial assimilation can be revived only if *we pay careful attention to who is involved in creating the opportunities and constraints that form the backdrop for immigrants’ adaptation*. But the broader implications of his work deal with the need to pay careful attention to where immigrants are maintaining social ties, access to capital and other resources, and the decisions undertaken by entrepreneurs in various cities. One of the most compelling case studies that illustrates these points is Kris Olds’ work on the redevelopment of the north shore of False Creek.⁷¹

Fifth, there has been considerable interest in the complexities inside the category “immigrant.” Referring to “immigrants,” en masse, as is common in popular discussions over economic costs and benefits, is exceedingly dangerous. Describing variations among groups coming from different countries in different time periods is better, but still tends to ignore considerable variations in the complex societies from which migrants come. Ivan Light is also well known for his idea of “internal ethnicity,” which he offered as a corrective to some of the overgeneralizations that plagued the debates on immigrant enclave economies. He provides a case study of four separate ethno-religious subgroups among Iranian immigrants to Los Angeles, and emphasizes that “the ethnic economy is ethnic, and ethnic boundaries are always problematic. Ethnic boundaries structure ethnic economies. When it exists, internal ethnicity fragments an ethnic economy, leaving only attenuated linkages to connect the separate segments. The case of Iranians” -- which he summarized as “there were four Iranian ethnic economies in Los Angeles, not one” -- “certainly shows that mechanical and thoughtless application of the

⁶⁷ Ivan Light (2002). “Immigrant Place Entrepreneurs in Los Angeles, 1970-99.” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 26(2), 215-228, quotes from p. 216, 217.

⁶⁸ Light, “Immigrant Place Entrepreneurs,” pp. 219-220.

⁶⁹ Light, “Immigrant Place Entrepreneurs,” p. 222.

⁷⁰ Light, “Immigrant Place Entrepreneurs,” p. 223.

⁷¹ Kris Olds (1998). “Globalization and Urban Change: Tales from Vancouver Via Hong Kong.” *Urban Geography* 19(4), 360-385.

concept of 'ethnic economy' risks error if it overlooks internal ethnicity."⁷² The implications of this kind of inquiry are enormous, and in the years since Light proposed this simple idea, the engagement with theories of identity has dramatically reshaped inquiry on immigration.

Conclusions

Immigration remains at the center of urban theory, urban policy, and urban discourse. Economic issues remain a central point of contention, along with the social and cultural politics of 'assimilation' and fears of "Balkanization" due to immigrants who seek to hold on to their distinctive identities, social networks, or cultural values. As David Ley emphasizes, context matters: the American policy concern over offsetting flows of international and domestic migrants, he suggests, is in part a reflection of particular kinds of politics -- and there are dangers in generalizing from this context to different situations (such as Canada or Australia).⁷³ Nevertheless, generalization does remain important for theory and policy, and so the enterprise continues with caution, rigor, and sensitivity to variations in urban processes and the distinctive fortunes of particular cities. Spatial assimilation, the dominant view of immigrant adaptation to North American urban life for half a century, is still an important component of mainstream thought. It does provide an accurate description of demographic and economic trends *when certain conditions and assumptions apply*. These assumptions were valid in the U.S. and Canada until the last decade of the twentieth century. Now, the assumptions are shifting rapidly -- although they persist in the U.S. much more so than in Canada. Where the assumptions of spatial assimilation have been entirely repealed, new, transnational urban research has emerged to document the "coming together of strangers" in the greater complexity and dynamism of large, diverse, immigrant metropolises.

⁷² Ivan Light, George Sabagh, Mehdi Bozorgmehr, and Claudia Der-Martirosian (1993). "Internal Ethnicity in the Ethnic Economy." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 16(4), 581-597. p. 593

⁷³ David Ley (2003). *Offsetting Immigration and Domestic Migration in Gateway Cities: Canadian and Australian Reflections on an 'American Dilemma.'* Working Paper No. 03-03. Vancouver: Research on Immigration and Integration in the Metropolis. Available at <http://www.riim.net>