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**Title:** Latinyorks: identidad cultural y asimilación de los (in)migrantes latinoamericanos en Nueva York  
**Issue Date:** 2015-10-15
Summary

In the social sciences today, studying international migration refers to social groups that develop over one or two territories defined by the state. However, this study also investigates the creation of a third space that exists parallel to and at the same time as the actual spaces. This third space is defined by the social and symbolic resonances that go beyond the subject of the (im)migration, disrupting other subjects that are both (im)migrants and non-(im)migrants, and constructing identities in the space where the subjectivities of both those who emigrate and those who migrate in different directions and for different periods converge.

This doctoral thesis has chosen to approach the processes of (im)migration from the explanatory perspectives of insertion and identity: insertion as a process, and identity as production. Both dimensions are used in this thesis as analytical axes that traverse the life worlds and everyday making of the subjects as (im)migrants. This research is empirically located in areas where Latin American (im)migrants are becoming subjects in a new society. In the new city-destination, the (im)migrants construct their own symbolic, social, civic, and cultural spaces. This research also investigates the actions the subjects take to give meaning to and construct a representation of their (im)migration and stay, whether temporary or permanent, through a transnational lens.

This thesis presents the diverse socio-cultural patterns and transnational imaginary that are reflected in the (re)configuration of the cartography of (im)-migration in New York City from 1960 to 2010. This research has presented empirical material collected from two groups of migrants representative of the Latino population and (im)migrant city: namely, communities from the Dominican Republic and México. These two groups have their own migratory history in New York, and have different migratory generations. Dominican migration started in the 1960s, while Mexican migration has a more recent history. Upon arrival in the city, each of these groups began unique episodes in the history of Latin American immigration to
In this sense, this thesis approaches the insertion of the young Latin American (im)migrants in New York's urban space in three dimensions. The first concerns the geographical space, such as the city, the borough, the neighborhood, the street corner, and public spaces. A second dimension focuses on the social-institutional: school and work as social and economic areas through which migrants are assimilated and build social relationships. The third dimension of study centers around the civic and cultural. These include the church, pilgrimage, march, protest, music, and other organizations and formal and informal demonstrations that give meaning to the symbolic universe of the (im)migrants. From these three dimensions, an identity and a sense of transnational belonging is constructed.

This thesis assembles theoretical and empirical material to provide a comprehensive framework for the comparative study between communities of Latin American (im)migrants in new societies. By way of synthesis, this research seeks to locate different patterns of spatial, social, and cultural assimilation of Dominican and Mexican migrants in the New York context. This thesis presents the strategies that young Latin American (im)migrants use to give sense and meaning to their lives and assimilation in New York City. Characteristics are observed according to their ethnicity from their immigration and assimilation strategies as Latin Americans in different spaces, such as their residence, work, school, as well as civic and cultural locations. It discusses how this new generation of young immigrants builds relationships, strategies, and their own dynamics, both individual and collective, based on their Latin American ethnicity. Finally, this research explores the ethnic identities of young migrants facing the broader insertion process in American society.

The theoretical approach of this thesis focuses on the three-dimensional analysis of inclusion and identity of the (im)migrants into the host society: spatial, social, and civic-cultural. Regarding the methodological strategy, an empirical, qualitative approach is presented based on a tiered perspective, bounded in different phases, moments, and spaces of viewing
the subject. The qualitative empirical approach designed for this thesis allows for knowing and deepening perceptions, symbolic constructions, and social roles of young migrants. This is possible through the use of techniques such as in-depth interviews, observation, and discussion groups. The methodological approach to the sample of respondents uses their national origin (Dominican and Mexican), age (14 to 29 years), and their generational status as an immigrant. The experiences of different generations of immigrants (first, middle, and second) are included in this study. This situation defines their identity, path of assimilation, and transnational imaginary. In other words, the generational status as migrants is key to the perception of a ‘before’ and ‘after’ in the individual’s life and group relationships. This is also important when it comes to access to public and private settings and interpretations of language.

In this context, young immigrant Dominicans and Mexicans in New York appear as makers of new dynamics. Young immigrants establish their own ways and means of expression to conceive of and realize their inclusion, identity, and transnational imaginary. These young people link and exchange specific codes with their peers that facilitate factual, material, or monetary exchanges. But these relationships also allow other types of exchanges that contain information, ideals, knowledge, feelings, emotions, stories, experiences, and perceptions that communicate another way of living in a global world.

The conceptual and methodological design of this study sets out two parallel scenarios of analysis. The first is rooted in the objective dimension of life. The second scenario elaborates on the subjective dimension of life of the (im)migrant. The combination of both scenarios allows us to understand how the narrative of migration is constructed through a strategy or dynamic that follows the subject individually, in the face of the experiences of a group or of others. That is, the phenomenon of migration and the social, labor, and economic aspects of the integration of migrants in the country of arrival, are a social construction.

The ongoing arrival of Latin American immigrants to New York,
specifically Dominicans and Mexicans with a young demographic profile, has created a new cycle of diversification and ethnic substitution inside the city. This has been a territorial, social, political, and cultural reorganization. Therefore, it is important to consider the opportunities for socialization and strategies of dynamic inclusion, both on group and individual levels.

The narratives presented here enable the articulation and discernment of the heterogeneous voices of young migrants in New York City, young people who construct ad hoc identifications. These narratives help realize the imaginaries that serve (im)migrants, functioning as a toolbox to organize or make sense of the objects, actions, and feelings of the day. To be an (im)migrant and young gives an opportunity to design an ad hoc identity at a cultural crossroads, using familiar aesthetics as well as cosmopolitan and hybrid practices. The migrant subjectivity begins with a discomfort that leads to the initiative for mobility, and once arrived in the new environment, gives way to a sense of disillusionment and dislocation. Finally, the (im)migrant enters a process of re-signification of forms of expression, socializing, and being.

This book presents empirical evidence and a theoretical discussion to get to know the current situation and the different forms of assimilation among young Latinos in New York. Forms are defined by the globalization of migration and the impact of neo-liberal immigration policies.

The United States is experiencing a moment in which ethnic minorities are changing the ethnic and racial 'limits' of native society. The middle and upper classes are increasingly diverse; education and affirmative action make a degree of democratic incorporation possible. The material collected in this investigation observes the impact of school and civic promotion programs among ethnic minorities in New York.

As this study shows, both Dominican (im)migrants and Mexican Americans are aware of the social, cultural, and political differences between each other, but also their similarities. The latter makes them strategic partners in the field of negotiating and trading in New York City. Whether through marginal or cultural ways, the day to day use of their collective power in
social, economic, and political actions, makes them aware of being subjects with rights. Their status as a minority defines their position and relationship of comfort or discomfort against the native, exposing the distance that can exist between the ethnic group and the host society. This process is visible today, as discussed in this thesis, in the construction and re-articulation of ghettos in Manhattan, and the symbolic construction of the city from the names of its streets to the social and ethnic groups that inhabit them.

New immigrants are creating not only more ethnic enclaves, but also poly-ethnic neighborhoods in New York. The Latin American diaspora lives and recreates discourses on the present and the past, before and after the arrival in the new society. Thus, latinyorks undertake adaptive dynamics to construct themselves, their expressions, and culture. Each multicultural geography generates a language which poses a transnational imaginary. In this imaginary, New York, the Dominican Republic, and México are fused into a whole that defines their individual and collective, social and political identity. Daily they negotiate their multiple belongings in many scenarios: the community, the nation, the host country, the neighborhood, their particular enclave, the workplace, school, and family. Hence latinyorks live a transplanted everyday reality that is self-negotiated, partial, and subjective, in the United States and Latin America at the same time.

Layered on top of the individual and social imagination is a new transnational imaginary that works to bring together the past, the present, and lived experience, as well as the forgotten and what is to come. The transnational nature of migrant identity provides an interpretative framework to make sense of the integration of migrants and the elements that are presented every day, from one place to another. In the end, transnationalism represents for latinyorks a necessary anti-nostalgic capital in order to live in this inter-space or in-betweenness.

At the same time, young Latin Americans face ongoing tensions with and limits to their assimilation. The first has to do with their legal status as undocumented immigrants. Previous generations of Latin American immigrants in the twentieth century still had access to the American dream
and some degree of social and political emancipation. Today, however, young people live in a context of legal, social, and economic instability in the neoliberal twenty-first century New York that produces exclusion and marginalization. Neoliberal America reproduces the (im)migrant slum, a Third World anchored in global cities that are populated in part by undocumented immigrants living on the lowest rung of the social ladder. For new immigrants, immigration is increasingly risky; uncertainty and insecurity become factors that define the present and the future for years, perhaps decades.

From a comparative perspective, neither the Dominican (im)migrants nor the established Mexicans in New York City have achieved what previous (im)migrants (Italian, German, Russian, Jewish) achieved in terms of their sociocultural position. The image of Latin American immigration in this context is still strongly associated with the logic of hyphenation, segregation, and illegality.

However, although it might seem a contradiction, this thesis shows that latinyorks do not construct their expectations and aspirations according to the image of the native, traditional or orthodox Anglo-Saxon. The Latin American young do not want to become WASPs, nor necessarily live in an American suburb. Their identity and dreams have their foundations in the society of origin and the immediate receiving society. This may well come about via an attachment to or sense of belonging with the ghetto, the particular enclave, or neighborhood.

The thesis is organized into six chapters. The first chapter presents the theoretical framework and the research problem, which defines and lays out the debate on the immigration process in the United States and New York City. Chapter two describes the historical context of Latin American migration in New York, which incorporates the social history collected during the fieldwork. The third chapter describes and analyzes the strategies and tools for the creation and production of migrant identity in New York. Chapter four focuses on the symbolic construction of the urban geography of the migrant and the formation of neighborhoods or ghettos in Manhattan. The fifth chapter focuses on education and work in the assimilation of young people, where
differences are observed between generations and migration profiles. The last chapter analyzes the degree of civic and cultural integration of young immigrants from their own narratives about their identity and transnational character. At the end of the thesis the conclusions of the research are elaborated on, in order to understand how the construction of identity and the social role of Latin American migrants in New York are developed.

Latinos in the United States are often spoken of as though they constitute a homogeneous group, with only enough room for Puerto Ricans, Salvadorans, Mexicans, and Bolivians. This view neglects the fact that Latin America is itself an area of ethnic diversity, even within each nation. This research attempts to generate a discussion about the meaning of being Latino and advance understanding of the peculiarities that inhabit this broad concept. All this comes from a territorial, social, cultural, and political perspective—inside and outside of Latin America.