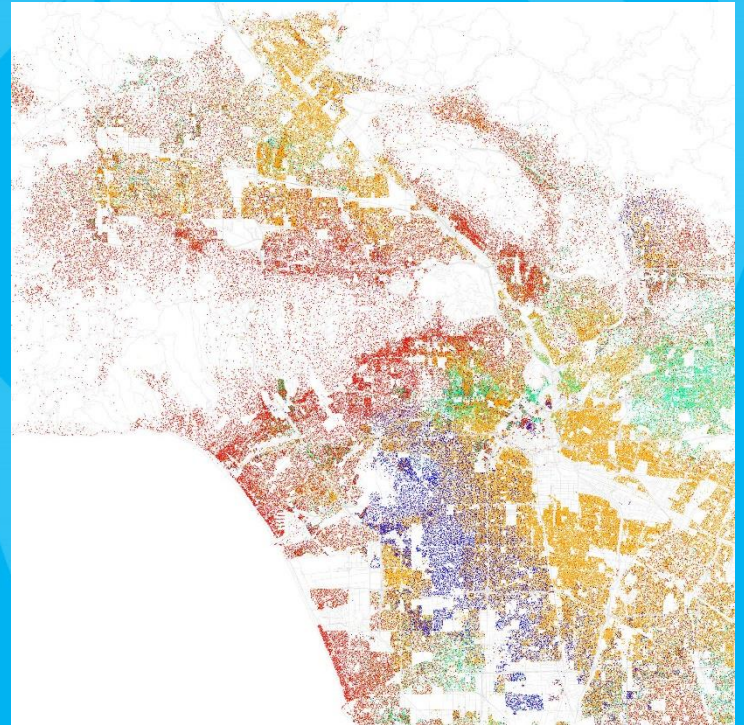


No. 22, October 2020

## Pondering the role of place, while staying in place

As the new – mostly online – academic year begins at the University of Warsaw, we choose to make the best of it. The CMR UW Migration Seminars will be held as Webinars, with a truly global list of speakers addressing us from Poland, Europe, the US and New Zealand. You are also most welcome to join from anywhere. The full list of guests and titles can be found [here](#).

On October 12, our first speaker will be prof. Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, who is Florence Everline Professor of Sociology at the University of Southern California. She will speak about the role of place, nature and masculinities in integrating migrants. Read a sneak preview of her lecture in this issue of CMR Spotlight. The stream of the webinar will be available [here](#).



Source: Eric Fischer, Flickr



**CENTRE OF  
MIGRATION  
RESEARCH**

## Immigrant Integration in 2020: What can a focus on Place, Nature and Masculinities tell us?

Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo

What is the global Zeitgeist in 2020? It is defined by three simultaneous, unprecedented crises: Climate Catastrophe, the novel Coronavirus Pandemic, and Struggles for Belonging amidst legacies of exclusion. Around the globe decades of capitalist extraction and over-consumption have yielded extreme climate change, now causing catastrophic hurricanes, floods, droughts, water scarcity, deep heat waves and massive fire complexes. Climate refugees and migrations are predicted to escalate in coming years. As I write this in September 2020, we count 30 million Covid-19 cases and nearly 1 million deaths attributable to the virus, and public health experts, immunologists and the World Health Organization cannot yet confidently predict when an effective vaccine will eradicate the virus. And the rise of Black Lives Matters protest in the United States and Europe, and the deep political polarizations witnessed in many nations are at the heart of the matter, struggles over the right to determine who belongs, and who may be subject to exclusion and disposability.

No one in the social sciences could have predicted 2020, and individually and collectively, we are still doing the work of surviving and trying to make sense of it all. The social sciences have always had low predictability power. The promise of social science is not in forecasting

predictions, but in empirically charting social change and contributing explanation and interpretation. Turning attention to immigrant integration, I suggest that our well-established paradigms—Assimilation, Transnationalism, and mechanisms of Exclusions—are each useful in their own ways, but at the same time, each one obfuscates important quotidian experiences and life projects of migrants and refugees.

Assimilation, Transnationalism and Exclusion paradigms have all made important and relevant contributions to our understanding of immigrant integration, but a perspective focused on Immigrant Home-making and belonging is now emerging as an alternative perspective. Immigrant Home-making offers a subject-centered perspective, one that emphasizes migrant interactions with place as an alternative to the focus on transnational flows, mobility and circuits. It allows us to see processes of re-territorialization and place-making, emphasizing feelings and emotions of belonging, and subjective sense of connection. While it does not deny the urgency prompted by regimes of deportation and detention, underscored by those researching mechanisms of Exclusion, an immigrant home-making perspective allows us to see different modalities in which people make claims to home. And it is firmly anchored in recognition of how intersectional inequalities

undergird these processes. Below I describe in brief how this framework helped to structure a co-authored, multi-methods study focused on demographic transformations of historically African American neighborhoods of South Los Angeles, where the majority of residents are now Latino.

Our study examines the complex ways in which Latino immigrants root themselves in a particular place, while navigating the terrain of U.S. racism, social hierarchies and relationships with African American neighbors. So much of the immigration scholarship in the assimilationist paradigm focuses on racialized immigrant newcomers in relation to the white mainstream, often comparing educational and income indicators, but given the realities of residential and occupational segregation, contact between these groups is often very limited. Our study's point of departure decenters whiteness in order to focus on how Latino immigrants and their children make new homes for themselves in South LA, paying particular attention to their evolving relations with African American neighbors and examining the consequences for civic engagement, identity formation and the ways in which the city is inhabited. One of the important ways in which that occurs is in relation to plant nature, in city parks and gardens.

Sociology, with few exceptions, has remained a very place-less discipline. Outside of the subfields of rural sociology and environmental studies, we ignore nature. We tend to focus on groups, interactions, institutions, social indicators of income, education or status---as though these could occur in a vacuum. In fact, these occur in particular places, as our colleagues in geography and urban studies have

emphasized. One of the lessons is the importance of looking at the materiality of the local environment and how that may anchor belonging and settlement. Alternatively, the local built environment and naturescapes may work against belonging. Immigration scholars are increasingly recognizing that immigrant integration occurs in particular geographic places, informed not only by the present but also by prior engagements and future aspirations.

In several studies with Mexican and Central American immigrants in densely packed urban areas of Los Angeles, I've witnessed the power of place and plant nature as fulcrums of immigrant homemaking. In Watts, Latino immigrant men with intersectional social locations imbued with masculine privilege and social marginality, find solace and connection with plant nature in gardens. Cultivating an array of food crops in urban community gardens becomes a vehicle for not only transforming the urban landscape into new homeland-scapes, but also a way of building webs of daily social relations that support food sustenance, sociability, social capital, leisure and claims to the city. And importantly, the ways this unfolds is raced and gendered.

Climate crisis, Covid-19 and crises of legitimacy and belonging now structure life around the globe. As we move forward in studies of international migration and immigrant integration, our task will be to understand how these global processes manifest on the ground. A focus on immigrant homemaking is fundamentally about belonging, a project with new challenges in the current global configuration.



©SAR

## Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo

The Florence Everline Professor of Sociology at the University of Southern California, and author of *Paradise Transplanted: Migration and the Making of California Gardens* (2014) and co-author with Manuel Pastor of the forthcoming book, *South Central Dreams: Finding Home and Building Community in South Los Angeles* (2021).

---

Suggested citation: Hondagneu-Sotelo, P. 2020, Immigrant Integration in 2020: What can a focus on Place, Nature and Masculinities tell us?, *CMR Spotlight*, 22, 2-4

---

---

The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors. They do not reflect the opinions or views of the CMR or its members.  
Editors of CMR Spotlight: Michał Nowosielski, Dominika Pszczółkowska

© 2020 Centre of Migration Research

---



CENTRE OF  
MIGRATION  
RESEARCH

Pasteura street 7  
02-093 Warsaw  
Tel/fax +48 22 55 46 770  
e-mail: [migration.cmr@uw.edu.pl](mailto:migration.cmr@uw.edu.pl)  
[www.migracje.uw.edu.pl/en/](http://www.migracje.uw.edu.pl/en/)

