

***FROM EXCLUSION TO INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION:  
THE CASE OF LATINO YOUTHS***

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### *Abstract*

In this article, we refer to the structural tendencies that are reflected in the responses by excluded Latinos youths, who range from street children to radical youths (gangs or not) and finally to migrants. The latter faces unusual challenges as a result of being undocumented, forcing them to pursue mobility within a formal system that blocks their way. We review these tendencies through a “positive” lens, focusing mainly on Latinos youths who are using different strategies to fight social exclusion. We aim to raise the paradoxical temporality, which indicates that as we learn and analyze more, we tend to move further away from the possibility of transforming pressing problems in society. This raises the question of how to intervene using more knowledge in the alarming situation of one of the most excluded social groups, the youths--Latino, in this case--and also of how to alert and visualize ways of integration for those youth who migrate and become undocumented.

In this article, we focus on a topic of interest that has been a priority during the last years of our research—that is, integrating two realities of disadvantaged youths, those surviving in the Latino metropolis areas and those who migrated to United States.

By outlining social tendencies, we aim to show the trends that most disadvantaged youths follow within their original countries as a response to their conditions. We know that a small group of excluded youths usually becomes active in formal society, but a significant number of them experience growing exclusion. In the worst case scenarios, the Latino youths end up as street children, living without alternatives. For them, the major means of survival appears to be recycling street trash. They live in very poor conditions and die at an early stage of life--physically or socially--as juvenile prisoners.

The two contrasting social trends are characterized either

- By the youths becoming *informal or illegal workers*,<sup>1</sup> and sometimes joining a gang,
- Or, in contrast, by Latinos youths following the migration model (R. Hernandez 1999)(Lopez-Castro 2007)(Kandel and Massey2002). This model involves the youths going beyond exclusion and border restrictions and reaching their destination in order to enter into an international labor market. The Latino immigrants face daily challenges as a result of being undocumented and they become active workers in a hostile environment. Despite these adverse conditions, there is some evidence of social mobility within a formal system in which their progress is blocked.

In this paper, we present a global argument for discussion, and we will be using some significant indicators to sustain our principal arguments. In addition, we combine different sources of information that will allow us to compare trends in Latin American countries where we have observed similar tendencies. We are referring to social trends that have been observed over time and across different countries.

Different authors in Latin America have done ethnographic work that demonstrates the first tendency we have already mentioned (Sanchez-R 2006), (Sanchez-R, Pedrazzini 1998) (Zubillaga-Cisneros 2001), (Briceño- Leon -Zubillaga 2001) (Briceño-Leon 2006) (Marquez 1999)

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<sup>1</sup> Informal work can be defined by a gradient of activities, from the simple *trampa o mata tigre* to extreme activities related with a criminal economy.

In general, the globalization of society has resulted in the globalization of social problems. Thus social inequalities and exclusion now characterize urban areas around the world. The differences from one country to another are primarily expressed by specific proportions of the population living in poverty and by the relative number of social groups excluded from highly specialized job markets.

In this paper, we attempt to connect the problems faced by youths currently living in the Latin American metropolis with those encountered by the migrant Latino youths in United States, in keeping with the theme of globalization.<sup>2</sup> In today's Information Society (M. Castells 1998), globalization has generated a growing tendency toward social exclusion, which has in turn affected the youngest inhabitants of this world. In Latin America especially, the existing conditions of poverty and social urgency have increased dramatically, excluding youth from the formal mechanisms of society while at the same time generating a perverse attraction to radical actions and the high risk of death (Sanchez and Pedrazzini 1992-1998)(Pedrazzini 2005).

All countries and territories are influenced by this dual logic, owing to the operation of transnational networks and dynamic factors of globalization, which yield social segments and territories that, are segregated in the interior of each country, region, or city. Of course, the relative number of excluded people is a highly variable proportion depending on the region of the world where competition operates (M. Castells 2001). This is the reason why the condition of most Latino youths living in large metropolitan areas is so alarming. In situations of extreme social urgency, declining socioeconomic mobility, and crisis, the situation of children and youths is strongly heading towards exclusion, reinforcing the polarization already mentioned. At the same time, social groups are incorporated within the new technologies of information and their associated mobility ladders are differentiated from the poor who remain excluded and further from integration.

Globalization speeds up flows of capital, information, and population. Within this dynamic process, some Latino youths seeking greater opportunity leave behind their origins of violence and strike out on their own upon the most important adventure that life offers them: migration to the north. Others may decide on an immediate exit, which usually means joining informal and illegal economic activities and using violence without negotiation because there is no time for mediation.

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<sup>2</sup> The thoughts presented here are influenced by the work experience and research done with youths and children who live in Latino metropolis as well as those young Latinos who migrated to America.

In my previous work, I have argued that the expression of urban violence is not an isolated act since it is fast becoming part of interconnected activities that traverse all levels of society. Informal and illegal economic activities are generating a multi-plural world in which a perverse criminal economy has compromised different levels of society (Sanchez-R 2006).

The following table indicates the number of murders per 100,000 people in four representative countries in Latin America. In this data, Colombia has double the number of murders than the second groups of countries, Venezuela, San Salvador and Brazil, leaving Mexico with the fewest number of murders. However, if we combine the two types of violence, murders and aggravated assaults, Mexico take the first place, followed by Colombia, Venezuela and then San Salvador.

Table 1 Crime and aggravated assault rate.

1999	Murder/100.000	Aggravated Assault
Brazil	22.98	0.61
Colombia	69.98	93.06
Mexico	14.11	185.01
San Salvador	38.8	63.73
Venezuela	33.2	105.32

Source: From Interpol Crime and Society

<http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/faculty/rwinslow/index.html>

There is no direct correlation between excluded youths and criminal responsibility. However, the majority of murders are concentrated in younger, either as a result of gang conflict or police intervention.

Recent information from the *CICPC<sup>3</sup> Venezuela* shows that irregular groups committed 305 kidnappings in the year 2007. Most of them occurred in Border States with Colombia, Zulia (81), Barinas (37) and Táchira (39). Other newspapers mentioned data from a survey implemented through the popular network, which reported 4375 crimes in the Municipio Sucre-Miranda State<sup>4</sup> where 83.2% of the perpetrators were youths younger than 25 years old and 80% of the crimes were murders. The Venezuelan Observatory of Violence, which refers to

<sup>3</sup> Cuerpo de Investigaciones, Científicas, Penales y criminalísticas. IN Diario El Universal 31 Diciembre 2007

<sup>4</sup> Including the barrios, La Dolorita, Caucaguita, Barrio Unión, José Félix Rivas, Julián Blanco, and San Isidro.

the number of crimes committed in Venezuela in the year 2006, registered 12.237<sup>5</sup>, representing 61% from the total of number of attempts against human security.

In addition, with an average of 10 murders daily, San Salvador appears to be one of the leading countries with crime problems (59 crimes per 100,000 people in 2005). It has been reported that 75% of all homicides in 2005 were committed with firearms. The public data estimates that 55% to 65% of all murders are gang-related (OSAC reports, [Http://www.osac.gov/reports](http://www.osac.gov/reports)).

### *Structural Trends*

As we already mentioned, two dominant trends have emerged among urban Latino youth, both in their countries of origin as well as in the urban destinations in the U. S.

- One tendency is represented by the growing incorporation of young people into the informal and illegal economy of Latin American cities, characterized by daily improvisation and sometimes by violence. This trend links with the growing number of children and youth who live in extreme poverty and are exposed to the risk of misery, violence, and sometimes death.
- The other tendency represents the increased number of youths who decide to go in search of adventure, work and opportunities, and alternatives--at least provisionally--in the urban areas of the United States.

### *Children and youth who are completely excluded without hope of returning home and no future*

In this paper, it is not our intent to dissect the problems of street children and youth. We only seek to make a connection between their undocumented conditions, having no identity and name, and the consequent legal repercussions. This condition condemns them throughout their lives, from a childhood in which they are already illegal because of wandering the streets and lacking a home. From the moment of the street kid's first police record, he is considered guilty of an offense by the legal and repressive system. We are witnessing an incongruity of legality, the impossibility of returning to the nucleus of family origin or integrating into the school system: the condition of a transgressor in the street without documents.

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<sup>5</sup> Roberto Briceño León. Observatorio Venezolano de Violencia IN Overseas Security Advisory Council. OSAC. Report/Inform. Feb. 1, 2008

It is evident that the current legislation<sup>6</sup> that is used to solve problems today has overlooked the capacity of integration to the system. Legislation needs to be transformed and rethought, using a new perspective. Past laws implemented to control the children and youths from the streets could have worked as a reformist policy in an era during which numbers were controllable and the problem was marginal; usually, the state assumed and absorbed the problem in certain ways. However, now in the twenty-first century, it is unthinkable to applying the same policy of integration from the old system. It is impossible for the youth to return to the traditional family structure, given that these children and youth are on the street for survival purposes and “by choice.” Returning to school or any other traditional mechanism of integration is practically impossible without identification documents. It is impossible to obtain documents if the parents do not register their children. It is impossible to be registered if there is no father, and the mother does not know how register; therefore, it is better to forget altogether. To treat the problem like an individual or minor one is not feasible because these youths are already social actors of the urban metropolis. There are already 100 million children who live partially or totally on the streets of Latin America.<sup>7</sup> There are now two generations on the street, including boys, girls, adolescents, and young teen mothers with babies. The population of the street is the living and walking misery of the large Latino urban places. A new legislation is needed to allow for the regularization of identities, so that given name and surname can be registered. With an identity, one might dream of a possible incorporation into a formal place in society.<sup>8</sup>

With their dirty metropolitan face and without any identification papers or memory of their roots, which they have no intention of remembering, the Latino migrants change facts by any means so as not to regret anything, are exposed to the elements and society and mistreated. Without established identities, they live the worst as a routine, and when the worst get even worse, they die skinny, malnourished, misunderstood, and toothless (M. Sanchez R 2001).

In Latin America, the problem of the street children is widely related to the poverty in which the majority of the urban population lives, as well as the social inequalities increasing every day. Nevertheless, the official position is set on finding a solution through reform-minded interventions, which made some sense at a time when the problem involved only a few children, or on the ideal thinking that the street child will return to his or her original family.

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<sup>6</sup> The “Ley de Menores.” Consejo Venezolano del Niño.

<sup>7</sup> Mario Cuevas, a Mexican sociologist, gives this date in an essay titled *La Infancia abandonada en América Latina*, presented in May 1991. *El Nacional*. Caracas 13-mayo-1991.

<sup>8</sup> We recommend reconsidering the laws in order to create new possibilities of integrating for everyone who is condemned because they were born and grew up an informal, illegal life--without identity papers or original registration.

In the same approach the child's family is considered to be responsible, without any real understanding that the poor family in *barrrios* is not necessarily like the typical nuclear kind, or that those that survive are actually constantly transforming themselves, adapting to ever worsening conditions.

To continue to intervene with the illusion of a return "home" is in fact an impossible way, which will continue to be a means without results. Holding the poor family responsible for the presence of street kids in Latin America is part of the ideology that poverty itself is to blame for these problems (L. Wacquant [2001])

The policies of intervention that seek to "reform" by "reforming" the child who is living on the streets (as if his existence represents mistaken or errant behavior, or the street kids were "born delinquents") using methods of "assistance" is a nice way of approaching reality; yet it has not solved the problems and far from doing so, it has in fact multiplied them.

We propose an urgent and necessary change in the visualization of the problems, as well as the acceptance that the growing conditions of poverty will lead to a progressive increase in kids on the street, as well as the adult homeless population. In this sense, new ways of integration into society are believed to be urgent, as well as ways that would allow the young population on the street to obtain their right to formal identities and citizenship, two minimum requirements for existence. These youth must be recognized as human being, and as the future of society.

*Youth gangs or "sicarios," as alternative forms of informal and illegal work (sometimes violent)*

In an informal life situation, where tricks and improvisation are a part of the knowledge learned from childhood, along with a nonexistent formal way to get out, most of the youths living in scarce situations get involved in an alternative world, due to an urgent need to not only socialize but also have a long-term job. The school in the corner was a school for his father and his siblings; now it is for him and his buddies. His family is his gang; his work is any form of dealing in robbery, arms, drugs, cars, kidnapping, and murder as a "sicario." He knows that death is by his side, as a companion and shadow, life is right now, and the future is in the present time. These are the generations with no future (Salazar 1999).

For the Latino youth, success is sometimes based on the radical rejection of his original poverty, working with fast cash instead of living with a dream of a promising future that was

never attained by past generations, and based on the simple logic that the dream will never arrive.

Two basic structural elements shape the experiences of these Latino youths. On the one hand, the precarious conditions of poverty have obvious effects on children, especially those who were poor during early childhood. On the other hand, both the youth and the adults who raise these children are increasingly experiencing the impact of the global economy when they attempt to find and sustain employment. Both of these factors tend to result in a production of youth and, in turn, adults who are increasingly excluded from the formal employment sector and mainstream culture more generally. For poor youths in the barrios, the underground economy may offer one of the only viable forms of employment.

In other words, the conditions of poverty create a unique “sense of urgency” among youths in the barrios and inner city (Y. Pedrazzini and M. Sanchez R 1992/1998). This sense of urgency gives rise to alternative forms of socialization provided by the street, which substitute for the socialization traditionally provided by the family, school, and community.<sup>9</sup> Traditional schooling becomes increasingly irrelevant when young children, especially boys, see only a few opportunities in the formal sector of the economy and plenty of opportunities in the underground economy. The family can no longer offer boys the skills needed to survive in the conventional world, in part because the adults who raise these children are themselves becoming increasingly disconnected from the economic and social mainstream. Thus, the youths look for role models among their peers, who valorize a set of behaviors and beliefs that undergird a new mechanism for social mobility, often informal work. The Latin American youths from the barrios learn the tricks and trades of the only option they see available to them. On the streets, adolescents are first introduced to the potential attractions of this new form of social mobility, and it is on these streets that they move through adolescence into adulthood.<sup>10</sup>

As Castells (1998) notes, “[t]he process of social exclusion and the insufficiency of remedial policies of social integration lead to a key process of *perverse integration* referred to the labor force in the criminal economy.” If new mechanisms of integration, which are necessarily different from the existing ones, are not created in society, then integration will only happen

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<sup>9</sup> This is true of the young people of poor neighborhoods in Latin America, as well as the youth in the suburbs of European cities and American ghettos.

<sup>10</sup> It is important to mention that by the twelfth century, during the time of the Ancient Regime, there existed other forms of sociability and models of socialization, which were based on affective interchange and sociability outside the conjugal family. These models were displaced during the sixteenth century by a bourgeois model, which was based on the conjugal family, school, and industrial work (Ariès 1993b).

through the informal and illegal sector. In this sense, the opportunities of finding work that is connected to illegal and violent activities will become even stronger since there would be more young people who are excluded from the working age.

*The ones who leave to try out their luck in the North*

Without going into the details of why migration occurs, it is evident that Latino migrant youths often experience exclusion and poverty, both socially and economically, as well as violence in their country of origin. As a result, they envision the American urban space as an ideal place with more opportunities and as an immediate escape from their conditions (Massey, Durand, Malone 2002).

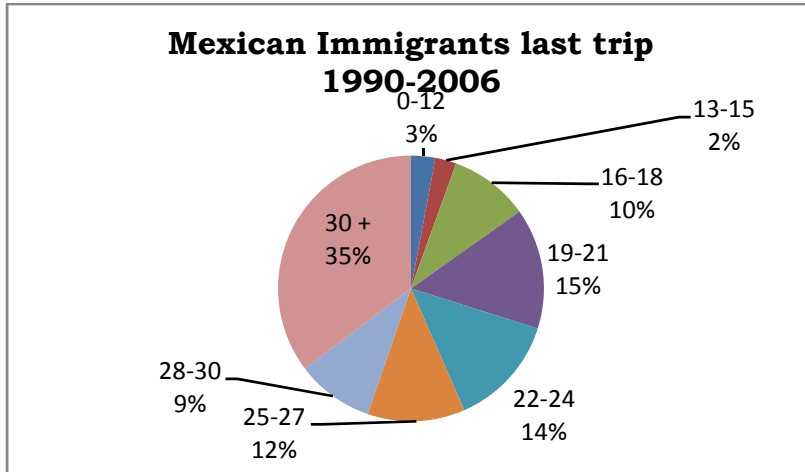
It is not only the expelling forces that explain youth migration to the north. Without denying those forces, we note some other factors of attraction that are playing an important role, including the information age, the values from the north that are wide-reaching, the patterns of success as well as the main interest of leaving, adventure, and being able to make it. Therefore, in the long term, there is also the recognition of success and upward mobility that they will acquire in their countries of origin. As Massey (2007) mentioned in a recent work, "...at the individual level, potential migrants are pushed by hard times, a lack of jobs, or by a shortage of good jobs that provide desired social and economic rewards. The economic pulls attract migrants in ways that complemented the variety of push factors."

In order to represent the importance of the second trend, we will combine different sources of information and compare by age and time of immigration from the relevant countries. For Mexico, which represents the most significant source of Latin American immigrants to United States, we will use data from the Mexican Migration Project.<sup>11</sup> This source provides us with detailed information by last trip to United States. In this case, we are using a sample that has been especially limited to persons who migrated between 1990 and 2006 and were less than 30 years old.

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<sup>11</sup> <http://mmp.opr.princeton.edu/>

Figure 1



Source: Mexican Migration Project data (K. Pren M. Sanchez R)

If we consider the total of 9397 persons who declared a last trip between 1990 and 2006, the Mexican data shows a growing proportion of younger immigrants less than 28 years old. Here we observed that 30 % are represented by youths less than 21 years old, and 35% between 22 and 30 years old. This suggests that international migration has become an alternative way out for Latinos youths.

For the others countries, we used the IMPUMS 2000 data,<sup>12</sup> with the 5 % sample. This data give us details by immigrants groups of age, differentiated by countries.

In the following graphs, we show how younger ages are important for the immigrant's precedent from these countries. Fifty percent of the immigrants from Brazil were between ages 13 and 27 years old, and 18 % of population reported to be younger than 12 years old.

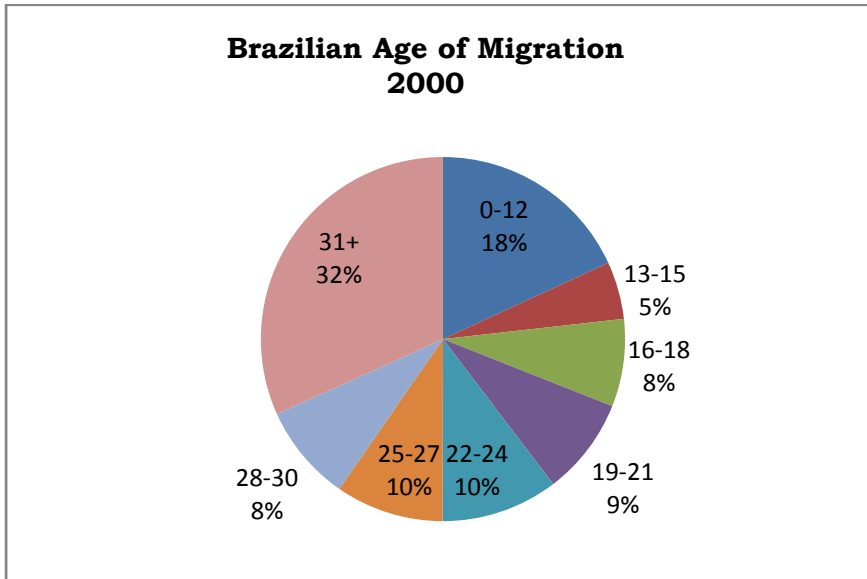
Immigrants from Colombia show similar age compositions, with 33% of the migrant population between the ages of 13 and 27, and 21 % for children younger than 12 years old. Venezuelans immigrants are showing higher proportions in these age groups, with 37% in the age group between 13 and 27 years old and 26 % for children less than 12 years old.

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<sup>12</sup> Use Micro data Series. Census micro data for social and economic research, Minnesota Population Center.

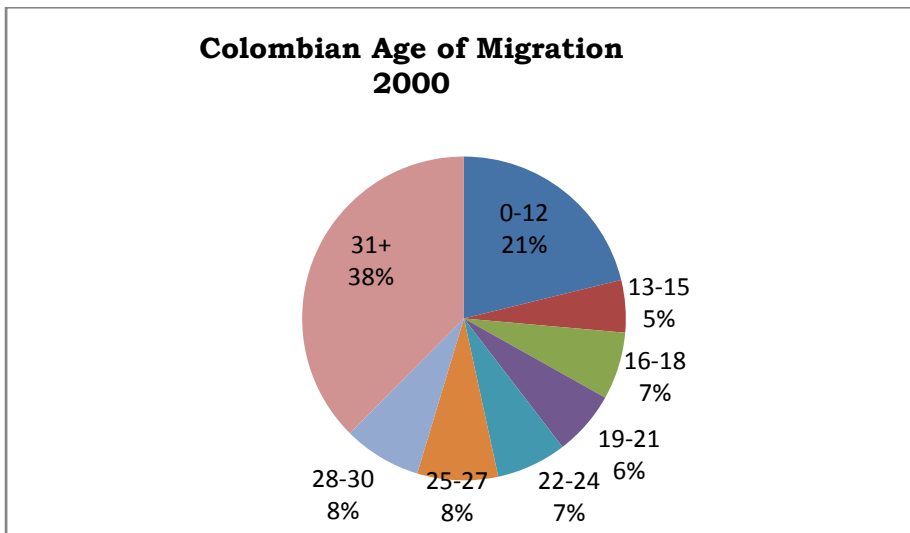
However, the youngest immigrant population appears to be from San Salvador, where 60% of the immigrant population is concentrated in the ages between 13 and 27 years old and 18 % of the population is concentrated in the group of those who are less than 12 years old.

Figure 2



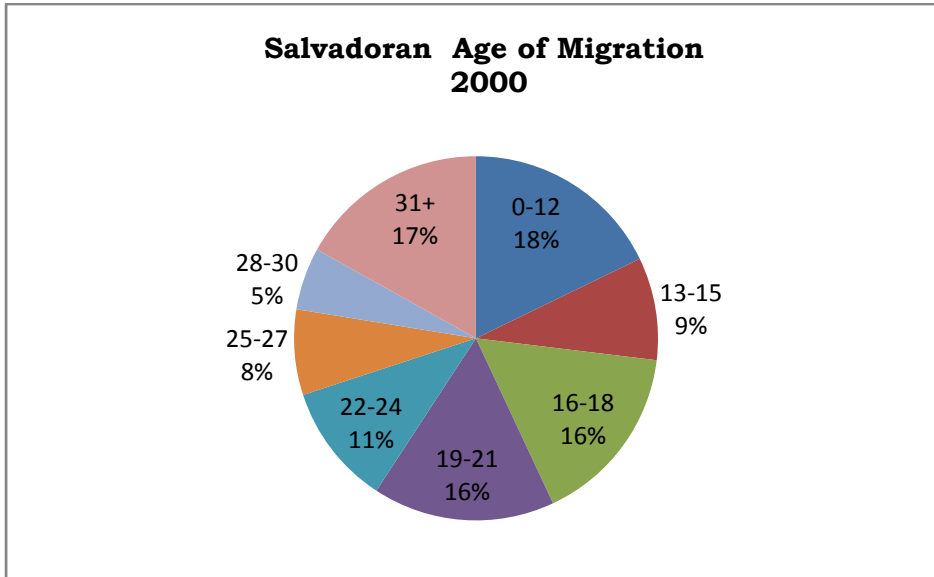
Source: IPUMS USA 2000.( 5 % sample)

Figure 3



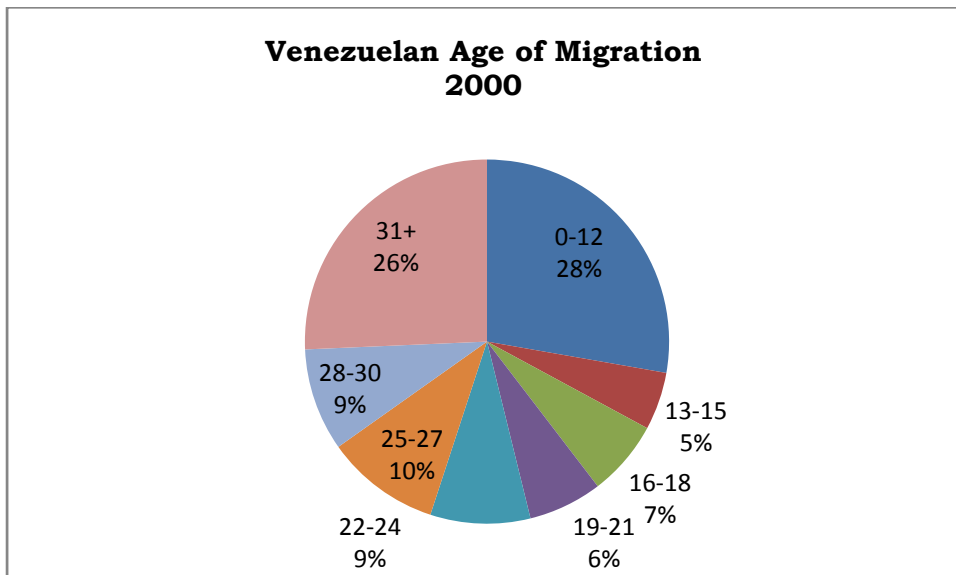
Source: IPUMS USA 2000. 5% sample

Figure 4



Source : IPUMS USA 2000. 5% sample

Figure 5



Source: IPUMS USA 2000. 5% sample

Although the data that we referred to previously consisted of the second structural trend that we presented in this article, it still requires in-depth and detailed future research and evaluation, with the inclusion of variables related to socioeconomic status and years of education, both of which would allow differentiating between immigrants.

Below, we will consider some important aspects of our current research.<sup>13</sup>

*The notion of informal knowledge as a part of human capital that each young migrant brings with him or her*

This kind of knowledge is learned while socializing in the barrio and usually gained during the “learning by doing” process within an informal world, both in economic and social relations. This is a combination of human and social capital. Here social capital is understood as a process that facilitates access to benefits, not as a concrete object appropriated by individuals or a network (P. Fernandez Kelly 1995). These learned abilities and skills (“detreza”) are part of the human capital acquired and highly used by the migrant youth to become used in one way or another to a new job.

*From the Latino metropolis, this is non-functional by nature, with suppression and services in crisis, to the functional American city.*

The young Latino migrant arrives in the great American city with an important knowledge he previously gained. He was born and raised in a world of informality and improvisation where adventure is common; for the youth, improvisation is also the basis of support; tricks and inventiveness as well as everything under a cultural knowledge bring beneficial advantages in the labor force when applied in an urban functional world.<sup>14</sup>

*Connections and solidarity networks*

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<sup>13</sup> Douglas Massey and Magaly Sanchez R. *Transnational Identities and Behavior: An Ethnographic Comparison of First and Second Generation Latino Immigrants*. RSF. Princeton

<sup>14</sup> The youth, who starts as a dishwasher in a restaurant and in less than a year becomes a chef assistant, is able to do that as a result of his abilities to solve small tasks by improvising spontaneously without previous request. In the same way, consider the youth who starts moving cars in a parking lot and ends up as the owner’s personal assistant with important tasks such as cashing check or making deposits in the bank.

For the Latino youth, solidarity and social connections are often ways of life that are adopted during early childhood. His place in the urban barrio, where he was born and grew up, is the result of the solidarity of many people. It starts with the invasion of a land and then to the construction and stabilization of housing. The knowledge of a social network and solidarity connections become incorporated in the process of socialization and growth (Flores 2005).

The help and identification with another *similar* in the street, as well as the cultural background of improvisation that he brings with him from the Latino metropolis, become, upon his arrival, an important capital that overcomes the difficulty of mobilization in a new city where symbolism and signs are in a completely unknown language. Even though all of these factors are obstacles, they do not prevent the youths from progressing in their jobs.

The young migrant of urban Latino origin usually has acquired capital, which is the result of processes that have existed from the formation of the urban in the original country. The historical precedent--capitalized history in collective memory--comes from the rural-urban migration when the migrant arrives in the great capital completely unprotected. Precedent connections and networks allow the migrants inclusion through invasions and construction of homes on private or public (*ejidal*) lands.

The original adaptation to a hostile and difficult environment and permanent improvisation to social urgency define the beginnings of the Latino's urban knowledge of the metropolis. The child, young person, or adult acquires and utilizes this socialization and learned skill from the moment he or she arrives in a new place.<sup>15</sup> From the beginning, any young Latino migrant in an American metropolis will have an acquired social capital that will allow him to move easily in an urban place where effectiveness dominates chaos. From place of daily improvisation, insecurity, and insufficiency, the young migrant moves into an urban space of practicability, services, opportunities, offers, and work. Whether an identity status is in order or not does not appear to be important. In any event, this is a common aspect of the new paradox of transnational identity and migration.

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<sup>15</sup> We refer to the barrios in large urban areas in Latin America where self-construction, the search for services, security, and informal jobs, and tricks and innovation are essential resources (the idea of social capital formation in urban terms).

### *The Latino Identity as a Transnational Identity*

With globalization, transnational dimensions that go beyond borders, countries, regions, and even localities become important. Transnational identities challenge older historical notions of territory and national boundaries – indeed, they question the national identities per se, yet at the same time, they re-situate national identities toward other identities.

Within the past years, a new transnational Latino identity has emerged in the United States. Instead of invalidating the specific national identity, this new identity intensifies the ethnic values as well as cultural, social, and political aspects. A Latino identity, which does not consider group and color differences from country to country, gives added strength to solidarity and aid networks, magnifies values as well as cultural and ethnic elements, and helps the young migrant to integrate and develop more networks. In some cases, networks arise from local initiatives in the migrants' countries of origin, or through formal or informal international organizations such as churches. New identities are being perceived; they are built connections of transnational networks that are based on essential idea of the merging ethnicities. As a result, new common transnational arena is discovered. To identify oneself as Latino means evoking a past full of oppression that is generally found in Latino nations, an origin of exclusion, corruption of power, a full range of cultural elements of music and dance, and pride from being part of and representing an ethnic group that reinforces a mixed origin (Massey and Sanchez-R 2006).

In our ongoing research, we are interested in how the transnational Latino identity strengthens or weakens over several generations. We do not believe that the transnational Latino identity is conflicting with work and social integration; however, it is facing and transforming the traditional process and concepts of assimilation in one way or the other.

### *The situation of undocumented Latino youth*

Previously, we presented factors in the arrival of undocumented Latino youth such as their urban places, homes, and other collective and working needs. It is not our purpose to glorify or generalize such working conditions; however, in the best scenario, the young Latino would face a situation in which he is a good worker and sometimes a student with potential, capacity, and aptitude; he would cover working schedules of more than forty hours per week, paying dues and taxes that would be directly subtracted from his check by his manager, without any social protection because of his undocumented status. This worker is contributing to the economy with his work and his human capital, which he acquired from within the informal sector. However, he does not enjoy the privileges of minimum social protection that the system

offers to other workers and citizens. Likewise, as an urban resident, he pays regularly for the services he receives such as his rent and some other social services. We suggest that the system should find a way to adapt and accommodate the young undocumented migrants in order to facilitate their long-term integration into society (Massey, Durand, Malone 2002).

*As a conclusion remark*

Before concluding, we would like to refer to the radical option as a possible path used by immigrant Latino youths. If the current exclusion conditions are not transformed and the mechanisms of integration remain void, we could find a reproduction of the original situation in the long term. It would result in either a mobilized clash, or in the worst-case scenario, a radical tendency toward violence and illegal activities as a way out.

Therefore, in the worst-case scenario, the Latino immigrant youth and the new Latino generations in the United States, who are undocumented and persecuted, would experience exclusion and discrimination from the traditional institutions of the society--and they would respond perhaps, like those experiencing disadvantages and exclusion in the Latino metropolis.

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