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Speaking of Home Here and There: Everyday Experiences of Belonging Among Highly Educated Immigrants

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SPEAKING OF HOME HERE AND THERE: EVERYDAY EXPERIENCES OF BELONGING AMONG HIGHLY EDUCATED IMMIGRANTS

THESIS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the
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By

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

SPEAKING OF HOME HERE AND THERE: EVERYDAY EXPERIENCES OF BELONGING AMONG HIGHLY EDUCATED IMMIGRANTS

This thesis explores how highly educated immigrants articulate a sense of belonging upon relocating to the United States, more specifically to the Lexington, KY area. Engaging with feminist political geography as well as migration and cultural studies, I argue that articulations of belonging are framed through transnational attachments, which respectively expand individuals' ability to employ everyday forms of belonging. Expressions and understandings of transnational belonging are framed through in-depth interviews on participants' workplace, relational dynamics, and engagement with the geopolitical discourse on migration. Through these interviews, a broader representation belonging is presented, while questions on highly educated immigrants' privilege and the potential mitigation of anti-immigrant marginalization and bias are explained through the multifarious landscape of transnational belonging, which is further complicated by the particular and intersectional identities of participants.

KEYWORDS: Belonging, Transnational, Highly Educated Immigrants, Privilege, Immigrant, Race

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction

The act of human migration (and immigration) is constant, and rapid economic globalization has created a new class of international mobilized professionals (highly educated immigrants) whose employment may require long-term or permanent relocation. As Batalova and Fix (2017) from the Migration Policy Institute noted, the highly educated immigrant population has rapidly grown in the United States between 2000 to 2015 with the number of immigrant college graduates rising by 90 percent (in contrast to native-born adults at 43 percent) with the more specific findings that one in two recent Asian immigrants were college graduates followed by Latin Americans as the second largest group of highly educated immigrants in the United States (with European immigrants slipping to third place, in terms of skill level). It is critical, then, to expand literature on highly educated immigrants past economic-driven and policy-based conceptions, which are often emphasized in literature on highly educated immigrants. This noted gap seeks to understand highly educated-migrants' everyday, lived experiences. This thesis work attempts to navigate this gap in research by focusing upon articulations of everyday belonging for highly educated immigrants in the United States, specifically in Lexington, Kentucky.

Notably, highly educated immigrants are placed within a paradoxical space upon relocation, for, although they are characterized as desirable due to their educational attainment and economic contributions, they are still othered. The process of othering is often racialized as foreignness is conflated with non-whiteness. So, non-white appearing highly educated immigrants can still experience racism and xenophobia due to continued prejudicial discourse and actions towards a racialized immigrant imaginary leading to

violent events towards immigrants and non-white citizens. These sentiments and events have been stressed in recent years due to the Trump Administrations push for racist policies such as the emphasis on building a border wall between the United States and Mexico and Executive Order 13769, more commonly known as the Muslim Ban, as well as anti-Asian sentiment and hate, which has emerged due to the COVID-19 pandemic. While these events cannot be considered as the basis for racism and xenophobia, they are events that created a space in which these phobic attitudes and behaviors are permissible, even to some extent, encouraged, in public spaces and discourse.

This paradoxical space is further complicated by migration policies and methodologies. Notably, in 2020, a temporary suspension of new work visas barred hundreds of thousands of foreign workers from both seeking employment in and entry into the United States. An extension of the Trump administration's efforts to restrict the admission of non-citizens alterations to H-1B visa regulations specifically targeted highly educated immigrants, particularly in the information and technology sectors (Shear and Jordan, 2020). These alternations to the H-1B visa comprised of two new regulations went into effect in 2020, including: (1) a significant increase in the minimum wage required for H-1B visa holders, and (2) narrowing the job range of H-1B visa holders and constricting the time limit of the visa for subcontracted work to a maximum of one year (decreasing from the previous three year maximum) (Pierce, 2020). The regulatory changes create further socioeconomic disparities between those who are permitted entry as highly educated workers and disrupt the U.S. employment-based immigration stream as these regulations decrease the likelihood of long-term or permanent resettlement by

employment-based immigrants.[1] Furthermore, it should be acknowledged that as highly educated immigrants may enter the United States through various migration methodologies, which may highlight the effect of socioeconomic disparities between groups, although racialization of the immigrant may diminish the role disparities play in terms of experiences of racism and xenophobia.

Following Ehrkamp's (2017) urging for critical geographic scholarship to both expose nativist and punitive approaches to race and immigration law and highlight effective approaches to contest racism and racial exclusion as well as Sheller and Urry's (2006) call for feminist transnational studies to examine the reconstitution of belonging and mobilized place-based identities by immigrants who transverse geopolitical boundaries, belonging will be approached as boundless and multidimensional. Through this approach, belonging becomes dynamic through the simultaneous analysis of the territorial and personal through a "plurality of scales, at which belonging is articulated," as Antonsich (2010) argues for (653). In this light, although discussions of gender are not centered, a feminist geographical approach is engaged with as qualitative methods, specifically in-depth interviews, are used to bring attention to the role of everyday lives, which shifts importance from formal settings to spaces of home and community (Brown & Staeheli, 2003; Staeheli et al., 2004).

[1] It should also be noted that the H-1B visa was not originally structured to function as a primary feeder into U.S. employment-based immigration streams but gained traction in the late 1990's as companies hired contract workers to meet the labor demands created by the Y2K problem. This has ballooned over the past two decades as U.S. employment-based immigration streams are now dependent on the H-1B visas, which is often leads to the obtainment of employment-based green cards (that is ones adjusted from another visa status). Furthermore, this particular visa structure is limited as the IT industry, which account for a noticeable portion of H-1B visas, moved towards "a flexible, project-based labor force, incentivizing employers to outsource their IT work and encouraging the pursuit of a cheaper and more adaptable labor force", which has likely expanded during the COVID-19 pandemic as remote work became both necessary and normal for workers (Pierce, 2020).

This thesis, then, analyzes how highly educated immigrants articulate their sense of belonging in their new locale, specifically in Lexington, Kentucky, and the greater United States. Framing this project with theories from human geography as well as migration and cultural studies, I identify and definite the articulation of belonging to emphasize individuals' everyday experiences by focusing upon how the workplace, relational dynamics, and geopolitical discourse on migration may influence individuals' responses, which the following research question and sub-questions guiding this research:

1. How do highly educated immigrants articulate their sense of belonging in Lexington, Kentucky?
    a. How does the workplace affect highly educated immigrants' sense of belonging?
    b. How do the relational dynamics (i.e., family, friends, co-workers) inform highly educated immigrants' accounts of their sense of belonging?
    c. How do highly educated immigrants position themselves within geopolitical discussions on international migration in the United States and how does this affect their sense of belonging?

Following this Introductory Chapter, in Chapter 2, I will present the conceptual framework and literature that underpins this thesis' argument. Throughout this section, I will weave together scholarship from immigration studies, feminist geographies, critical race theory, and cultural studies to explore the concepts such as the highly educated immigrant; migration for professional necessity; the racialization of non-white immigrants; and belonging, place, and home. This will be followed by Chapter 3 where

the research design research will be explained, including methodology, demographics, and analysis. Chapter 4 examines the empirical findings for this research focusing upon articulations of transnational belonging and the positionality of highly educated immigrants. Finally, the thesis will be concluded in Chapter 5, where the thesis argument will be reiterated with notes on further research.

2. Literature Review & Conceptual Framework

This thesis engages with four primary areas of scholarship to examine the experiences of highly educated immigrants: immigration studies, feminist geographies, critical race theory, and cultural studies. Together these concepts and the scholarship on them provide a foundation for my conceptual framework which follows feminist geographers' emphasis on how everydayness can encapsulate a deeper understanding of the personal, particularly how the personal can become political. Drawing from scholarship from human geography as well as migration and cultural studies, I work to braid knowledge from each discipline into an applicable and integrated framework on understanding how everyday experiences of belonging may be articulated by highly educated immigrants.

Highly Educated Immigrants

To begin, international migration will be defined as "the movement of people from one place to another, more distant place (i.e., not a 'local' move) and their residence there for a certain threshold of time (e.g., 6 months or 1 year)" (King, 2020, 1-2). Through this definition, immigration and international migration will be understood as synonymous and will be used interchangeably as each can be conceptualized as the action of moving from one's country origin or residence to another country where one is not native or not a citizen. To this extent, the characterization and discussion of the immigrant or international migrant will emphasize the complexity of defining and identifying the immigrant or international migrant, particularly as this thesis reframe the highly skilled immigrant as the highly educated international migrant.

This attention to the highly educated international migrant is intentional as this thesis initially attempted to focus upon highly skilled immigrants. While highly skilled immigrants are defined in scholarships as those who internationally immigrant for employment opportunities with tertiary education, whose qualifications are recognized in the destination country and who work abroad in positions suited to their qualification, (Bielewska, 2018; Jaskulowski and Pawlak, 2020), this study follows participants' self-selection. In doing so, it diverges from the general conceptualization of 'highly skilled immigrants' in existing scholarship. These challenges to the definition of highly skilled immigrants presented through participants' self-identification and multifaceted personal experiences necessitated a conceptual movement from the highly skilled immigrant to the highly educated immigrant. While overlaps will be identified in the definition of each respective immigrant, it must be acknowledged that these are two separate concepts since the highly skilled immigrant has a specific framework within immigration literature, which the highly educated immigrant is a conceptualization that emerged throughout the research.

The main differences between the highly skilled immigrant and the highly educated immigrant within this thesis are twofold. First, the highly skilled immigrant specifically relocates for employment opportunities, which they are qualified for. While the highly educated immigrant may also relocate for employment opportunities, they may not immigrate with the qualifications needed for specific work opportunities or with a specific, institution-supported opportunity. Highly educated immigrants may also relocate for other reasons including educational or family-related opportunities. Second, variation in immigration experiences, particularly in age, may be noted for those who identify as

highly educated immigrant, but this variation cannot occur within the conceptualization of the highly skilled immigrant as a highly skilled immigrant must be an adult. Each of these differences is notable within this thesis due to the variation in participants' life experiences, which diverge from the specificities of scholarly conceptualization of the highly skilled immigrant.

Beyond the points of difference, potential overlap between these two concepts can be noted as each is often characterized by their privilege (including employment opportunities, industry benefits, income levels), yet this does not deter from the racialization of the international migrant as non-white and highly skilled immigrants still experience unwelcomed encounters of discrimination and exclusion (Carangio, 2021; Hercog, 2017; Rajendran et al., 2017). Highly educated immigrants, then, are paradoxically positioned since they are critical to the national and global economy, yet, are denied spaces wherein they can define themselves either external to, parallel to, or within the confines of nation-state imaginaries of identity free of consequence, particularly in reference to one's citizenship or external perceptions of ones' citizenship, which can also be read as their perceived and felt sense of belonging (or out-of-placeness).

The paradoxical nature of the highly educated immigrant is further complicated by individual's entry method to the host country as highly educated immigrants who did not enter due to employment opportunities (e.g. asylum seekers, refugees, trailing spouses/partners) may not be situated within the "privileged situations of smooth integration in terms of job success and integration into social networks [which] exist predominantly for people working in multinational corporations" or well-established

institutions (such as hospital and universities), which allocates a degree of independence from particular policies and government agencies of the host country (Hercog, 2017).

This paradoxical space is further complicated by migration policies and methodologies. Notably, in 2020, a temporary suspension of new work visas barred hundreds of thousands of foreign workers from both seeking employment in and entry into the United States. An extension of the Trump administration's efforts to restrict the admission of non-citizens included alterations to H-1B visa regulations specifically targeting highly educated immigrants, particularly in the information and technology sectors (Shear and Jordan, 2020). These alternations to the H-1B visa comprised of two new regulations went into effect in 2020, including: (1) a significant increase in the minimum wage required for H-1B visa holders, and (2) narrowing the job range of H-1B visa holders and constricting the time limit of the visa for subcontracted work to a maximum of one year (decreasing from the previous three year maximum) (Pierce, 2020). These regulatory changes introduce further socioeconomic disparities between those who are permitted entry as highly educated workers and disrupt the U.S. employment-based immigration stream as these regulations decrease the likelihood of long-term or permanent resettlement by employment-based international migrants.[2]

[2] It should also be noted that the H-1B visa was not originally structured to function as a primary feeder into U.S. employment-based immigration streams but gained traction in the late 1990's as companies hired contract workers to meet the labor demands created by the Y2K problem. This has ballooned over the past two decades as U.S. employment-based immigration streams are new dependent on the H-1B visas, which is often leads to the obtainment of employment-based green cards (that is ones adjusted from another visa status). Furthermore, this particular visa structure is limited as the IT industry, which account for a noticeable portion of H-1B visas, moved towards "a flexible, project-based labor force, incentivizing employers to outsource their IT work and encouraging the pursuit of a cheaper and more adaptable labor force", which has likely expanded during the COVID-19 pandemic as remote work became both necessary and normal for workers (Pierce, 2020).

Furthermore, it should be acknowledged that these regulatory changes may highlight the effect of socioeconomic disparities between the wider grouping of highly educated immigrants, as well as the racialization of and bias against particular national or ethnic identities.[3] So, while the position of the highly educated immigrant is certainly experientially varied on an individual level, the role of race and socioeconomic privileges and disparities allow experiences of racism and xenophobia to continue for non-white highly educated immigrants on a larger scale, in this case policy decisions.

International Migration as an Educational and Professional Necessity

As noted by the Pew Research Center, most of the U.S. public supports high-skill immigration—more explicitly 78% Americans supported highly skilled immigration in the Spring 2018 Global Attitudes Survey (Connor & Ruiz, 2019). Moreover, with this increased public support, not only is the United States home to the largest number of college-educated immigrations in the world (14.7 million immigrants ages 25 and older with a postsecondary diploma or college degree), but the share of immigrant workers in the United States with high-skill jobs is on the rise (Bennett, 2020; Connor & Ruiz, 2019). And, although immigrants are still more likely to hold lower-skilled employment in contrast to native-born Americans, a rise high-skilled employment for immigrants

[3] The latter reference to the racialization of nationalities and ethnic identities can be exemplified by the Trump Administration's Executive Order 13769 ("Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States"), which is more commonly referred to as the "Muslim Ban". This executive order effectively suspended entry of immigrants mainly from majority-Muslim countries (Chad, Iran, Somalia, Syria, and Yemen, as well as, North Korea and Venezuela) into the United States for a 90-day period with the intention of indefinite suspension of travel from these countries as well as the use of extreme vetting (Panduranga, 2017). In the succeeding years, the Supreme Court "endorsed the President's power to exercise broad authority in suspending the entry of foreign national groups…But the ruling fell short of granting him the unquestioned power to do so" in *Trump v. Hawaii* (2018) with the executive order ultimately being repelled by President Biden in 2021 (Chishti et al., 2018; also see *Trump v. Hawaii* (n.d.) from Oyez and Biden, J.R. & The White House (2021) for further details included in the references)

across skill sectors has been noted (Bennet, 2020).[4] These changing attitudes and demographics reflect the increasing acceptance of certain immigrant groups and the benefit of mobilized workforces. This mobilized workforce often supersedes national borders in the quest of opportunities that prioritizing personal, professional, and financial growth, therefore, underlining the highly educated international immigrants' motivation for relocating, which is often attached to the educational and professional opportunities offered in non-local places

First, education opportunities that require international migration, specifically postgraduate ones, often hinge on two significant factors: the quality of graduate programs as well as the cost of and potential funding for graduate education. In the first large-scale analysis of international students' decision-making process in respect to studying in the United States, specifically in Michigan, Sarah Nicholls (2018) found that the quality of education and the cost/affordability are the two greatest pull factors—that is factors that encourage international students to relocate for educational obtainment, particularly among graduate students.[5] These findings have also been identified in literature on international student enrollment in Ph.D. programs outside of the United States (Abbas et al., 2021; Anderson & Bhati, 2012; Lee, 2014; Shanka et al., 2006). For example, Abbas el al. (2021) identified academic and financial factors (inclusive of tuition fees, scholarships, living expenses, and travel costs) as the factors with the greatest influence on international student enrollment in Ph.D. programs in the United

[4] Based upon the U.S Department of Labor's Occupational Information Network's 35 detailed job skills, Pew Research Center winnowed those skills into five major categories of job skills: social, fundamental, analytical, managerial, and mechanical (Bennett, 2020).
[5] These can also be understood as plus and minus factors per Everett S. Lee (1966), which eventually developed into the push-pull model in the theory of migration.

Kingdom and Germany, although it should be noted that other factors such as career and social were rated above financial for international students at the undergraduate and master level. Similarly, in their examination of why students from Taiwan and Indonesia elected not to pursue higher education in Australia, in contrast to the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States, Mazzarol, Savery, and Kemp (1997) identified cost (of applying and living) and quality/reputation of education among the main reasons why students were choosing to study, specifically, in the United States. In addition, ease of access to information and the established populations of international students were also cited as reasons why students from Taiwan and Indonesia chose to study in the United States. While the quality and cost of education abroad are highlighted as key decision-making factors, other important pull factors identified include: university/department reputation, safety/security, socialization (including language), host country's immigration policies, family/friends (including relationships at home and in the host country as well as distance from home), career opportunities post-graduation, and institute/nation marketing efforts (Anderson & Bhati, 2012, Chen, 2007; Mazzarol et al., 1997; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002).

Second, professional ambitions and opportunities provide another basis for international migration. In an increasingly competitive labor market where the supply of qualified candidates surpasses the hiring demand, "mobility is… increasingly considered a career pre-requisite. Such requirements comprise the normalisation of work experiences abroad, a willingness to undertake frequent business trips, and knowledge of foreign languages or intercultural competencies" (Plöger and Kubiak, 2019, 308). This normalization has occurred more noticeably for five groups of labor sectors, as defined

by Mahroum (2002): managers and executives; engineers and technicians; academics and scientists; entrepreneurs; and students. This thesis will focus on two of these groups—academics/scientists and students—and will include medical professionals who could be group in either of the former two groups mentioned, as highly educated immigrants, seeking a medical education or career, must complete residency training to remain in the host country to practice medicine professionally.[6]

It should be noted, though, that, for many highly educated immigrants, their relocation is often temporary, or, at least originally planned to be temporary, particularly for those who are pursuing post-undergraduate academic or professional degrees. Changes to these plans are often located both in the secondary motivation previously discussed, especially career prospects and interpersonal relationship, particularly family, who may have also relocated to the host country, and intimate partners, who may hold residency or citizenship in the host country (at the time of temporary immigration). This aligns with the three categories identified by Alberts & Hazen (2005) as motivating factors for international students when deciding whether to remain in the United States or return to their home countries, which are: professional, societal, and personal. While individual situations vary, particularly surrounding cultural expectations and attachments as well as the home and host country's sociopolitical climates, Alberts & Hazen argue that return migration intentions must be situated with macrolevel political and economic constraints in contrast to microlevel personal decisions. To this extent, when discussing and cumulating the individual accounts of highly educated immigrants, its necessary to understand that, while decisions may appear to be made on the microlevel of the

[6] Mahroum (2002) does not specifically account for this group of mobilized professionals in his work.

personal, they are also made in the greater national and global sociopolitical context (the macrolevel). Therefore, decision-making in reference to migration and settlement, on the micro- and macrolevel, is not mutually exclusive, but intertwined and co-dependent based upon a multitude of factors and circumstances.

International migration, then, can be understood as an educational and professional necessity within a competitive global market, particularly within the realm of academia (academics, scientists, and students), which, importantly, is often complicated by personal relationships and attachments as well as the sociopolitical state of home and host countries. Parallel to the argument put forth by Aihwa Ong (1999) in *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality*, the highly educated immigrant engages with the flexible notions of citizenship and sovereignty discussed by Ong. Highly educated immigrants' passageway is shaped by their own engagement with and accruement of capital and social prestige as they move for educational and professional opportunities, yet the attractiveness of and access to those opportunities is also dictated by the markets, governments, and cultural regimes.

Furthermore Studemeyer (2015) asserts that flexible citizenship should account for the multiple variants that contribute to the purist or use of flexibility citizenships as the "the acquisition and deployment of multiple citizenships are no longer just premeditated acts aimed at creating oases of protection from economic and political uncertainty. Multiple citizenships are used to create options for lifestyle choices, negotiate identity and belonging in transnational and global spaces, and increase convenience in everyday life" (573). To this extent, the highly educated migrant can be

understood to occupy a complex and subjective space, which further complicates their personal, everyday experiences of relocation (pre-, peri-, and post).

Racialization of Immigrants

Although racialized discrimination and violence towards immigrants (or those characterized as immigrants), such as the El Paso Walmart Shooting (2019) and the rising anti-Asian sentiment in the United States (2020-present), is not necessarily a new phenomenon, the modern racialization of the immigrant in the United States has predominately focused on differentiating the non-white person from the American identity and perpetuating the narrative that the non-white person is non-native, foreign, or other. This has manifested in the sociopolitical fixation through mediums such as the greater imaginary and language. Consider Douglas S. Massey (2016) observation of the Southern border security, which, "in the American imagination, [the border between Mexico and the United States] has become a symbolic boundary between the United States and a threatening world," as well as in alienating linguistic identifiers as Laila Lalami (2020) observes, within assimilation(ist) dialogue, those who successfully integrate into American are still defaulted as Other due to the use of the hyphen (e.g. Mexican-Americans, Japanese-America, or Chinese-American), which underlines the power held by descendants of white immigrants as they are referred without the hyphen and simply recognized as American (Massey, 2016, 160). Through these examples, it can be understood that the geopolitical work of boundary maintenance has preoccupied the American imagination and it is through this imagination that the alien social construction of the immigrant begins to emerge.

Therefore, the non-white immigrant is racialized or "made up" in three manners, through: racism, linguistic biases, and cultural racism. This racialization encourages the maintenance and expansion of racism and xenophobia in Western societies, specifically in the United States, leading to the cultivation of racialized implicit conceptions of and biases toward non-white immigrants linking non-whiteness to otherness, foreignness, and non-belonging, regardless of one's self-identification. As Leitner (2012) further clarifies in her research on white residents encounters with new immigrants in a small American town, "the representational process of defining an Other, whether somatically or culturally, is at the center of racialization. It involves racial categorizations based on ascribing physical and cultural differences to individuals and groups, racializing not only the Other but also the self" (830). This process of racialization, then, relies upon the making up of and maintenance of race and foreignness by dominant groups (whiteness plus), to differentiate the other while defining the self.

i. Racialization and Racism

The concept of race relies on the cultivation of social categories and distinctions, which begins with the racialization of the corporeal and phenomic aspects of the human body. This reduction of the visual essentializes perceivable differences within the physical as Omi and Winant (2015) affirm:

> Perceived differences in skin color, physical build, hair texture, the structure of cheek bones, the shape of the nose, or the presence/absence of an epicanthic fold are understood as the manifestation of more profound differences that are situated *within* racially identified persons: differences in such qualities as intelligence, athletic ability, temperament, and sexuality, among other traits (111).

The process of racialization, then, is contingent upon the socio-historical positioning of certain bodies and phenomic characteristics, which is why this process in contrast to social construction can also be understood as the "making up" of people.[7] It is this process of "making up people" through separation begins not only the formation of race through visual differentiation, but also makes oppression and marginalization based upon those differences possible—that is, this process contributes to racism. And, although the "social construction" thesis, prominent in critical race theory, holds that the concepts of race and races do not, in actuality, correspond with any biological or genetic reality, but, that, instead, they are social products which are subjective and fluid, this does not undo the realities of this social constructions of race as the consequences of racism are real and detrimental and, therefore, must be understood as a "social fact" similar to sex, gender, and class (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Omi & Winant, 2015, 129; Ramirez Berg, 2002).

This is explored by Sara Ahmed in *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (2000) as she attempts to push past skin as merely visual by arguing that skin is also tactile in her consideration of strange encounters. Through this argument, she asserts that touch recognizes the familiarity and strangeness of skin, while also acting as the focal point for social differentiation. Touch, or the economies of touch, can be considered as the subjection of others or proximity to as well as the emotions initiated or

[7] Ian Hacking (referenced both by Cresswell, 2006, and Omi & Winant, 2015) proposes "making up people" in order to move away from the banality and self-evident nature of the term social construction. This movement in terminology attempts to distill how "the processes through which discourse is made to act on its objects is more than mere words. Rather, discourses have their own geographies—their brute materialities that act on the bodies of those being constructed" (Cresswell, 2006, 183). As such, discussion of social construction will be understood through this lens to account for the sociohistorical and political slippages and messiness of identity-based social constructions, including, but not limited to, race, ethnicity, and citizenship.

produced by touch, specifically fear. These touches are "read and recognisable through the histories of determination in which such bodies are associated with dirt and danger" allowing for the material construction of the strange and abject body, which is marked as uninhabited, unlivable, and out of place (2000, 50-1). The strange body, then, which must be recognized by the visual and tactile, when encountered by the white, familiar body, underpinning the belongingness of the white body, while dismissing strange bodies perpetuating the economy of xenophobia—that the stranger's body as an impossible object, which allows a withdrawal of intermingling with the stranger—reifying the borders between familiar and strange.

To demonstrate, consider Arizona SB 1070. Passed in 2010, this state anti-illegal immigration law allowed police to demand "papers" (that is federal registration papers demonstrating that the individual resides in the United States legally) for any individual who they suspected to be undocumented. If one was found to be without, they could be lawfully detained and arrested (Newman, 2016; Campbell, 2011; Nill, 2011). Like stop-and-frisk laws implemented in New York City, Arizona SB 1070 is widely considered to be a form of racial profiling, which relies upon the association between a particular corporeal and phenomic aspects, mainly skin color, and the sociopolitical and psychological association of those physical aspects with criminality and illegality (Gómez Cervantes, 2019; Tosh, 2019; Brown, Jones, & Becker, 2018). Although the law was partially repealed due to the supremacy clause following the Supreme Court ruling in *Arizona v. United States*, notably, the provision compelling immigration checks during stops with law enforcement was upheld.

Arizona SB 1070 unmistakably establishes how both visual and tactile perceptions of the body can be exploited to identify, isolate, and reject those considered as others establishing xenophobia's presence in racializing and othering, in this case, Latin* and Hispanic persons.[8] As Andrea Christina Nill (2011), suggests, "[proponents'] discourse ultimately casts both immigrants and Latinos-particularly those of Mexican descent-as a violent pathological threat from the South that demands a heavy-handed response," leading to the demonization and marginalization of Latin* and Hispanic people, which can be read as a form of touch as it acknowledges the public acceptance and tolerance of racial profiling and discrimination (40). The immigrant, specifically the Latin* and Hispanic immigrant, is, then, unwelcomed, and dehumanized due to the social and legal implications of non-belonging and foreignness coupled with the preservation of immigration checks, which can only be initiated by the suspicion that one does not belong—a suspicion that solely relies upon the perception of belonging as contingent upon visual proximity to whiteness.

This process of racialization, through the maintenance and perpetuation of racism, constructs a biased perception of spatial and national belonging. Even though concepts of race and races do not correspond with any biological or genetic reality, they do allocate power to perception, particularly that of the white gaze. This reality of perception, specifically within the United States, is based upon a "system of white-over-color

[8] For this thesis, I have specifically chosen to utilize the phrase Latin* in tandem with Hispanic when discussing individuals who identify as a person of Caribbean, Latin or South American origin or descent. Following Cristobal Salinas, Jr.'s suggestion of Latin*, this phrasing reflects the role of the asterisk in search engines, allowing Latin* to be pluralized and open-ended, that is, "Latin* can consider Latinx, Latiné, Latinu, Latino, Latina, Latina/o, Latin@, Latin, or Latin American. Introducing the * (asterisk) in Latin* is intended to serve as a deliberate intervention—a pause for readers to consider the various ways in which people from Latin American origin and diaspora in the United States may identify" (2020, 164). This phrase may not be comprehensively utilized, specifically in reference to participant interviews or quoted scholarship where this phrase was not part of the original source material.

ascendency", which means that that dominant groups have a vested interest in race and racism as it permits them access to greater material and psychological benefits (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, 8). This is notable for this section as racial projects will be taken into consideration, specifically the interpretations and representations of language and culture along racial lines.[9]

ii. Linguistic and Accent Bias

Language holds notable implication for the immigrant experience, specifically that of belonging. As Caroline B. Brettell (2011) notes in her research on everyday discrimination faced by immigrants, much of the burden of language is placed upon immigrants. More specifically, participants in her study found that there was a "low tolerance in the United States for those who do not speak English, do not speak it well, or speak it with an accent" (277). This experience is dominated by the linguistic hegemony of both English and the Standard American English Accent, which puts forth the expectation of linguistic assimilation of immigrants, while accentuating the superiority and legitimacy of English. Because of this linguistic hegemony, much of the literature on immigrants and language discusses proficiency, particularly how null or low language proficiency is associated with underemployment, poor job performance, poor health outcomes, and increased discrimination (Dustmann & Fabbri, 2003; Esses, 2021; Imai et al., 2019; Mui, 2007; Rivera-Batiz, 1990; Szaflarski & Bauldry, 2019).

[9] Racial projects are defined and discussed by Omi & Winant (2015). In *Racial Formation in the United States*, racial projects are "simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial identity and meanings, and an effort to organize and distribute resources (economic, political, cultural) along particular racial lines" (125). Racial projects are vast in scope and context and examples include restrictive state voting right laws, cops who "stop and frisk", or the decision to wear dreadlocks.

Yet, this focus on macrolevel issues carefully avoids discussing how linguistic power can neglect and devalue the everyday experiences of those who do not speak English, only speak English with limited proficiency, or who speak accented English (or a combination). This is the argument put forth by Patricia Tomic (2013), within a Canadian context, as she asserts that the politics of language is simply a means by which white and English superiority are affirmed, therefore, devaluing the immigrant (or non-white, non-Western) identity—a practice which can be traced through the country's long-standing history of colonialism. Furthermore, she connects the racialization of the immigrant to language. Upon proposing the racialization of Latin American immigrants in Canada—that "no matter how white they had been constructed before immigration—at arrival they become non-white"—Tomic details, as a Latin American immigrant herself, the loss of privilege, particularly that of white and class privilege in Latin America, she experienced moving to Canada—privileges which disappeared instantly upon her arrival (2013, 11). In the example provided, Tomic details stopping by a teashop with a student where her order fell upon perplexed ears:

> Recently one of the students in my class gave me a ride home. We stopped for tea at one of those simulations of British tea-shops that exist in the city where I live. The moment the young waitress heard my request uttered in my accented English, my ESL-ness blocked her ability to understand; she seemed to have become deaf. As I spoke, the expression of her face turned more and more hopeless. After I repeated my request a couple of times while the waitress kept saying "pardon me," "pardon me," my student intervened to "interpret." We did not even look at each other as she interfered; not a single comment about the incident was exchanged between us later. I still wonder if she has thought about this event ever again, or even if she saw the irony in that her professor was at one moment lecturing a class of thirty students on the sociology of education and then, when she was not protected by her credentials, needed an interpreter to buy a cup of tea (2013, 12).

Here, the bias of native-English speakers and hegemony of non-accented English can be understood in practice. Like Fanon's assertion discussed in the previous section, even language proficiency cannot prevent one from encountering racialized behavior or from being cast as misplaced, unwelcome, and foreign. Instead, the non-native is forever marked, due to their linguistic formation, to reaffirm to natives that the non-native does not belong. If not by one's skin color, then, one can have their non-belongingness established through language, a necessary human tool, whose use can still be alienable.[10]

These instances demonstrate the attachment of non-whiteness to foreignness, in terms, of linguistic expectation and expression. The lack of native fluency and proficiency situates those perceived as non-native speakers as non-belonging as noted in the provided examples. This furthers the social perceptions of foreignness with non-English speakers or accented English, particularly for those from non-European countries. Moreover, the requirement of language and civic integration entry tests; speech and diction classes; and linguistic proficiency for work and job performances permits the English and the Standard American English Accent to continue as the dominant linguistic form encouraging xenophobic attitudes due to the expectation of linguistic assimilation, which is often made elusive to non-native English speakers by the dominant culture (Bonjour & Duyvendak, 2018; Anzaldúa, 2007; Esses, 2021).[11]

[10] This argument can be further complicated by child development research, such as DeJesus et al. (2019), which found that, regardless of race, young children learn how to prioritize language over race when considering nationality. This study relied on participants ages 5-6 of white and Korean American children in the United States and Korean children in South Korea.

[11] Both Bonjour & Duyvendak (2018) and Esses (2021) discuss the use of language requirements and civic integration in the immigration process (both for entry and permanent residency), while Anzaldúa (2007) details her own experiences being required to take speech classes, which was required for all Chicano students at her university to eliminate their accents (76).

iii. Cultural Racism and Marginalization

The role of culture within process of racialization and racial projects can be developed through Etienne Balibar's concept of neo-racism. Reflecting upon the phenomena of racism without race, which he observed within France, Balibar suggests that, particularly in the case of the immigrant, this new racism, borne in the era of "decolonialization", repositions the dominant features of racism within cultural differences in contrast to biological heredity. Also known as differentialist or cultural racism, this form of racism "does not postulate the superiority of certain groups or people in relation to others but "only" the harmfulness of abolishing frontiers, the incompatibility of life-styles and traditions" (Balibar, 2018, 134). Parallel with previous manifestations of race, culture is, then, understood to be immutable and intangible laying the groundwork for an appropriate version of cultural separation or displacement or further encouraging a new variant of the "White man's burden" due to the demanding necessity of assimilation (Balibar, 2018; Bonjour & Duyvendak, 2018). Notably, while neo-racism moves away from the biological argument of racism, it retains the biological framework to achieve its aim of explaining "the vital importance of cultural closures and traditions for the accumulation of individual aptitudes, and most importantly, the "natural" bases of xenophobia and social aggression" (Balibar, 2018, 138).

To this end, it can be gathered that, although neo-racism acknowledges the movement of discriminatory practices away from the social concept of race, culture is now not simply a substitute for race, but instead is merged with racial perceptions as the attachment of culture dissimilarity in practices will be applied to the corporeal body(ies) of the Other—the immigrant. As Eduardo Bonilla-Silva recognizes in *Racism without*

Racists (2018), the use of cultural racism allows dominant groups to use victim-blaming when "arguing that minorities' standing is a product of their lack of effort, loose family organization, and inappropriate values", which can become ideologically lethal when combined with the "minimization of racism" (6-8). Through his interviews with white respondents, Bonilla-Silva demonstrates how the four frames of color-blind racism—abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism, and the minimization of racism—allow whites to distance and shield themselves from the racial realities, specifically in the United States. The investment in cultural racism, then, allows perpetrators and bystanders to engage in racial boundary maintenance without the messiness of race and racism. Yet, this process continues to characterize the immigrant as the other in a racialized manner.

As Charles Ramírez Berg illustrates in *Latino Images in Film: Stereotypes, Subversion, and Resistance* (2002), the destructive nature of stereotyping, particularly the characterization of the alien in science fiction movies, reflects wider sociopolitical tensions with the other, specifically the Latin* and Hispanic immigrant, who has been conceptualized as foreign and alien. Ramírez Berg offers critiques of two well-known science fiction films: *Blade Runner* and *Aliens*. The former is viewed as a critique itself of neo-nativism. As the imperialist enterprise, the Tyrell Corporation, attempts to profit upon the labor of Replicants, Blade Runner Deckard (Harrison Ford) must act as "the next century's Border Patrolman" as he attempts to maintain the boundaries around sociopolitical and cultural identity between humans and Replicants (2002, 171). Yet, his interactions with Replicants challenge his duties, as Replicants become more human to him (and the viewer), and the exploitation of their persons is further explored. According to Ramírez Berg, *Blade Runner* assesses the cost of nativism and potential need for

alterative spaces with alternate value assessments on being human. Contrastingly, for Ramírez Berg, *Aliens* relies upon the oppositional forms of motherhood presented with Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) representing First World, enlightened, and civilized mothering and the alien representing Third World, primitive mothering. Barring the progressive, feminist narrative, "Aliens demonstrates how extreme—and extremely conservative—measures can become natural in the face of the Alien threat…When it comes down to life and death, progressivism, feminism, and Third Worldism are quickly jettisoned political luxuries" (Ramírez Berg, 2002, 179).

Each of these critiques demonstrates the functionality and pervasiveness of cultural racism. While this oppressive form carefully veers from known and noticeable forms of marginalization and discrimination, it continues to embolden attitudes and actions endorsed by racist and xenophobic systems as Ramírez Berg describes:

> What is important to remember is that in constructing Others, a society defines itself… The SF Alien as immigrant Hispanic reveals a significant amount of stress within the dominant ideology. Cultural tension about immigrants, coupled with psychological guilt and fear, together with doubts about national identity combine to produce, as they have done in other times in our history, xenophobia, isolationism, and nativism. What is different—and what I wish to make us aware of—is the current cinematic shape of that fear: fear that transforms the greaser bandit into a terminating cyborg, the Hispanic harlot into a fertile, black Alien mother, menacingly reproducing monsters down in her lair (2002, 181-2).

This production of xenophobia, isolationism, and nativism relies upon the cultivation of the Other, in this case the Latin* and Hispanic immigrant, through the racialization of the body, language, and culture. And what is more non-human than the alien? This characterization as alien, then, provides the leverage to criticize and ostracize the Other, not due to race, but due to the incompatibility of culture, which, in theory, is meant to be less prejudice and problematic than the

biological arguments put forth. Yet, this position still relies upon essentializing groups in a subjective manner in the interest of those in power, which means maintaining the racial projects—that is they continue to structure everyday realities in the context of racial identities and meanings, which have been systematized in favor of the dominant group.[12]

So, regardless of the vast cultural identities and practices within non-white, European communities, cultural racism ignores this and maintains the out-group's control over social perceptions of marginalized identities. Furthermore, this neglect allows for the perpetuation of assimilationist solutions to decrease the marginalization immigrants may face—that is, if they become more Americanized, they will no longer be so alien—which affirms Bonilla-Silva's claim that cultural racism relies upon victim blaming to uphold institutions and structures that maintain and support the dominant groups.

Material, Social, and Political Belonging: Home and Place

Although scholars have emphasized the lack of continuity and definition to the theory behind belonging (Antonsich, 2010; Mee & Wright, 2006; Staeheli et al., 2004; Wright, 2015; Youkhana, 2015), I begin with two distinct dimensions of the term emerge in Marco Antonsich's analytical framework (2010): place-belongingness and the politics of belonging. The former underscores the emotional that connect the individual to a

[12] The production of xenophobia, isolationism, and nativism can also be read as the dominant groups' reaction towards a symbolic threat (the immigrant or immigration). Utilized in integrated threat theory, symbolic threats, in contrast to realistic threats, occur when in-group members become anxious or fearful of the perceived differences (e.g. morals, values, norms, standards, beliefs, and attitudes) with out-group members leading to the development of stereotypes, biases, and discrimination of the out-group by the in-group, which has been utilized in research on attitudes on immigration and intercultural attitudes (Davidov et al., 2020; McLaren & Johnson, 2007; Murray & Marx, 2013; Schmuck & Matthes, 2014; Stephan et al., 2000).

particular place that embodies the feeling of 'home'. Turning away from the gendered conception of home, home is instead understood to be "a symbolic space of familiarity, comfort, security, and emotional attachment" (Antonsich, 2010, 646). The latter, then, points to the "discourses and practices of socio-spatial inclusion/exclusion" as Crowley (1999) defined it as "the dirty work of boundary maintenance" (30). The politics of belonging, then, has two levels of engagement as it involves the maintenance and production of discursive and material boundaries, while also creating space for boundaries to be contested and challenged by other political entities and agents as claiming belonging is a political act (Anthias, 2009; Trudeau, 2006; Yuval-Davis, 2006).

With scholarship turning its attention towards transnational migration, I concur with Antonsich's argument for the inclusion of both place-belongingness and the politics of belonging yet intend to complicate this duality. This framework on belonging will be spatialized following Mee and Wright's assertion that belonging, commonly referred to as a sense of belonging, is "an inherently geographical concept" since it can refer to or be tied to a place, site, territory, or landscape, particularly references to home (2006, 772). This geographic claim is further bolstered by the turn towards transnational migration, which draws attention to belonging as a mobilizable concept. This is identified by Plöger and Kubiak (2019) in their research on group formation among highly educated immigrants in Manchester, England. Within their work, belonging is conceptualized as a stabilizing function tied to social groups and other collectives, which is constantly being negotiated between the individual and host society. While participants' mobilized professions led them to seek place-belongingness through social group formation,

participants' international mobility engages with the politics of belonging since economic incentives and openings can challenge border maintenance reflecting.

Within frameworks of belonging that focus on mobility, particularly international mobility, it should be acknowledged that place-belongingness can located in various spaces and places. And, although place-belongingness understands home as a symbolic space and, therefore, acknowledges the variety of spaces and territories that can be attached to and encompassed in the concept of home. To this end, discourse on citizenship proves to be useful within this discussion, particularly independent of its legal function. As Staeheli et al. (2004) suggests citizenship "describes the construction and meaning of political subjectivities" which decouples it, citizenship, from the nation state and dominant-group norms (e.g., racist, heterosexual, and male-defined) (7). This thesis allows citizenship to function beyond traditional spaces. This is illustrated through reconceptualizations of citizenship such as emotional citizenship (Ho, 2009), flexible citizenship (Ong, 1999), conditional citizenship (Lalami, 2020), and world citizenship (Nussbaum, 1996, as cited in Ahmed, 2004) create space for forms of citizenship that challenge the single-nation's control of the territorialized concept. Each retooling of citizenship engages with the messiness of belonging revealing the existing grey area within the dichotomy of place-belongingness and the politics of belonging.

In many ways, contemporary literature has utilized belonging to analyze the relationship between the citizen, nation-state, and transnationalism as transnationalism provides space for dynamic, nonbinary formations of belonging that are not solely premised on citizenship or one's relation to the nation-state (Gilmartin, 2008; Clark, 2009; Brubaker, 2010). Here, the membership bestowed by citizenship may not be a

necessary factor for the formation of belonging or home. It is important to acknowledge, though, as Helga Leitner and Patricia Ehrkamp (2006) do, that this conceptualization of citizenship, through the lens of transnationalism, is an extension of privilege since literature on migrant transnationalism has often focused on well-off, professional, and highly mobile immigrants, which belies both the struggle to obtain citizenship and necessity of citizenship to less privileged immigrants as they may require citizenship for multiple reasons including, increased global mobility, familial security, access to economic equity, and ability to participate in the political discourse. This extension of privilege will be further analyzed in the *Empirical Chapter*, specifically whether privilege, particularly educational privilege, can mitigate the challenges of immigrating.

For this framework, citizenship is not a primary focus, but, within migration discourse, will be an important factor particularly in relation to the politics of belonging as it has the capacity to reinforce and disturb the discursive and material boundaries, which citizenship is premised upon. Regardless of the highly educated immigrants' work and citizenship status (that is they may be temporary workers who hold citizenship external to the host nation or permanent workers who may either possess external citizenship and permanent residency, dual citizenship, or citizenship to what was formerly their host nation), how an individual positions their citizenship within their identity and narrative will influence their articulation of belonging, inclusive of the presence of belonging, mixture of belonging here and there, or a lack thereof.

As Lynn Staeheli and Caroline Nagel (2006) discuss, migrant transnationalism challenges how nation-state citizenship operates as well as the shift in assimilation-based expectations. Importantly, they note that "[t]ransnationalism allows people to forge a

sense of belonging and home that is not tied to any single place, but, rather, constructed through connections between `here' and `there'; these connections are the basis of an emerging topography of citizenship" (1603). Through their analysis of home and citizenship for Arab-American activists, Staeheli and Nagel force the dichotomy of belonging presented earlier open by arguing that immigrants negotiate their relations with multiple homes and attachments establishing belonging in "nested scales" (multi-scalar) as they elaborate, "many of our respondents pursued a politics of home and citizenship whose topography transcended localities and nations, even as they were often rooted in the spaces of both. It was a topography that shifted, was open, and was unbounded" (2006, 1614). What this analysis complicates simpler, singular notions of home and belonging further broadening through a transnational lens. As Ehrkamp and Leitner (2006) further assert, transnationalism has resulted in a "new type of immigrant experiences" which is no longer tied to the home country or assimilationist demands of host societies (1593). In contrast, this new immigrant is "embedded in, identify with, and participate in multiple communities, and are not just, nor even primarily, anchored to one national collectivity," so the immigrant identify is not suspended, but reconstructed.

Although not through a transnational lens, the messiness of belonging is noted by bell hooks in *Belonging: A Culture of Place* (2009). Reflecting on her upbringing in the hills of Kentucky, hooks notes the difficulties of growing up in a racist culture that did not provide her space to be, to live. In a quest to find spaces to be to live, hooks left Kentucky and found success as an intellectual and a writer. Yet, during this quest, she encountered nonbelonging both in these new spaces as well as in her old home—her Kentucky roots were noted by those from elsewhere, but with each return visit to

Kentucky she felt changed as if she may not belong. Ultimately, hooks returned to Kentucky explaining:

> My decision to make my home in Kentucky did not emerge from any sentimental assumption that I would find an uncorrupted world in my native place. Rather I knew I would find there living remnants of all that was wonderful in the world of my growing up. During my time away, I would return to Kentucky and feel again a sense belonging that I never felt elsewhere, experiencing unbroken ties to the land, to homefolk, to vernacular speech. Even though I have lived for so many years away from my people, I was fortunate that there was a place and a homefolk for me to return to, that I was welcomed. Coming back to my native place I embrace with true love the reality that 'Kentucky is my fate'—my sublime home (2009, 24)

Though hooks eventually return home may not be the final move for all, her reflections on belonging, home, and, in her case, Kentucky generate belonging as multifaceted. Similarly, to the assertions on transnationalism and belonging, hooks identifies with and as a member of multiple communities and is not solely anchored to one specific collectivity. Interestingly, hooks' personal narrative foregrounds local attachments within the complex landscape of trauma, as she explains, "When I left Kentucky, I hoped to leave behind the pain of these wounds ... It is love that has led me to return home, to the Kentucky hills of my childhood, where I feel the greatest sense of being one with nature, of being free" (2009, 52). Here, belonging is full of conflicts, difficulties, emotions, and personal logics. Through her own story, hooks demonstrates that how people root themselves is rarely singular nor uniform. Through this reflection, we can begin to push past the dichotomy of belonging presented by Antonsich (2010). Again, while the dichotomy of place-belongingness and the politics of belonging is a useful starting point, this thesis attempts to acknowledge that there is space past

this dichotomy in which belonging can be more fully theorized and experienced to acknowledge the contradictory politics of belonging and inclusion.

This complexity can be further acknowledged through the absence of belonging, which engages with the maintenance of sociopolitical boundaries is often an exclusionary process. Individuals embodied experiences may not recognize belonging in the positive terms. In contrast, the notion of territorialized space, particularly in reference to the nation-state, may create a lack of security and comfort by rejecting or neglecting an individual or group membership on multiple scales, including exclusionary politics and social networks (Trudeau, 2006). Furthermore, exclusion, in a geopolitical sense, should be understood solely as a supplement of the politics of belonging, in contrast to place-belongingness, as the absence of place-belongingness does not culminate in exclusion, but in "a sense of loneliness, isolation, alienation, and displacement" (Antonsich, 2010, 649). This does not mean that the emotional and political are mutually exclusive, but that they should not be conflated with one another—they are instead complementary.

Belonging is a central theme for this thesis as I am most interested in understanding how everyday, lived experiences can inform one's articulation of belonging across transnational spaces. Following feminist geographers' groundwork, the everyday experiences of belonging are to be emphasized as they allow immigrants to articulate their place- and space-based experiences and knowledge beyond the political-economic conceptions, which have often rendered the highly educated migrant as invisible as they are often discussed solely in relation to their economic and political

positioning. Furthermore, this exploration of everyday belongingness (place-based and the politics of) allows the paradoxical nature of the highly educated migrant to be discussed, as Ben Highmore (2002) found, "the everyday offers itself up as a problem, a contradiction, a paradox: both ordinary or extraordinary, self-evident and opaque, known and unknown, obvious and enigmatic" (16, as cited in Skelton, 2017).

Contributions

Through my thesis research, I plan to contribute to the scholarship that pursues a humanist approach towards highly educated immigrants by focusing on and emphasizing everyday, lived experiences. Within this literature, the capitalistic approach, which often positions the highly educated migration as economic capital, is suspended allowing the variety of personal narratives by highly educated immigrants to come to the forefront. By acknowledging belonging as twofold (place-belongingness and the politics of belonging), this research can further alter perceptions of belonging, particularly for immigrants and mobile folks, by inquiring into multi-place belonging further challenging nativist and exclusionary notions of belonging, within geography and the greater social sciences.

Furthermore, by concentrating on highly educated immigrants' lived experiences I plan to contribute to the expansion of academic and political discussions and knowledge on international migration by constructing a fuller understanding of the common experiences of immigrants regardless of circumstances such as socioeconomic class, citizenship status, or motives for immigrating. This includes acknowledging the salience of the immigrant identity, which will challenge past characterizations of the highly educated immigrant. While the highly educated immigrant is often characterized to be one who internationally relocates for employment purposes and who holds the necessary

qualifications for that position, this research revealed the disconnect between this academic definition and the self-identification of participants, many of whom do not fulfill these explicit criteria, but who identify as a highly educated immigrant. Although this in part may be due to a methodological error in recruitment, the introduction of this complication is important for consideration in future research, particularly understanding the potential rift between how academic conceptualizes the highly educated immigrant and how the highly educated immigrant conceptualized themselves.

3. Methods and Analysis

This research utilizes a single methodology—interviews—to grasp the everyday experiences of belonging for highly educated immigrants in the greater Lexington, Kentucky area. This decision to employ a single methodology follows the methodological logic put forth by Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) that qualitative interviews "can be used as a stand-alone method" in an effort yield data of an exploratory or descriptive nature, which is the aim of this thesis research (94-8). Themes derived from the research aims combined with patterns identified through coding interviews will inform the following empirical chapter. This chapter will provide a comprehensive review of the study site selection, research design (including further details on methodology, demographics, and COVID-19 adaptions), and the data analysis.

Study Site

This research project seeks to complicate the conceptualization of the highly educated immigrant by focusing on the everyday, lived experiences of these immigrants in Lexington, Kentucky, contrasting the data and policy driven conceptualizations of the highly educated immigrant, whose criteria often focus on the economic contributions of this foreign-born population. While the state of Kentucky does have a relatively low percentage of foreign-born residents (>4%) compared to other states, the rate of growth for foreign-born residents outpaced the national average from 2010 to 2014 with the state's immigrant population growing by 9% (New American Economy, 2016).

On par with national education attainment rates, 34% of immigrants who reside in Kentucky hold a bachelor's degree or higher (compared to the national rate of 32% for foreign-born and 33% of native-born) and foreign-born Kentucky residents are more

likely to report speaking English "well" or "very well" (76% of immigrants in Kentucky compared to 53% of immigrants in the United States) (Budiman, 2020; Childress, 2020; Flood et al., 2020). So, while the immigrant population in Kentucky may not be comparable in size or scope to other states, these demographic statistics reflect that the state's overall population is, in some manners, reflective of a greater national sample, particularly for highly educated immigrants, who are often defined by their high education attainment and transferable skills (including language proficiency).[13]

Lexington hosts several industries that rely upon external highly educated labor, including a flagship, research university; multiple healthcare centers (e.g., University of Kentucky Healthcare and Baptist Health); and STEM-based industries (e.g., Conduent and Lockheed Martin) (Commerce Lexington Inc. and Kentucky Cabinet for Economic Development, 2020). This reliance on an influx of highly educated immigrants is underlined not only by employment opportunities in these fields and related institutions, but educational opportunities, particularly post-undergraduate ones. Furthermore, Brooking Institute classified Lexington's surrounding metro areas of Cincinnati-Middletown (OH-KY-IN) and Louisville-Jefferson County (KY, IN) as metro areas with a high-skill and balanced-skill population, respectively (Hall et al., 2011, 12).

Therefore, Lexington, and the greater Fayette County area, serves as a feasible and effective study site to recruit study participants for a study engaging with highly educated immigrants' experiences of relocation, belonging, and home, which is why it was selected for this thesis research.

[13] It should be acknowledged that statistics and data may not fully capture the population of highly educated immigrants currently living in Kentucky and the United States as census data does not offer comparable statistics by income or educational attainment within the given foreign-born population.

Research Design

iv. Interviews

Individual interviews were the sole method utilized for this research with the aim of producing descriptive data on belonging and home for highly educated immigrants. This methodology was selected as it provides effective entry point to discussing everyday lived experiences, as Kvale & Brinkman (2005) note, referencing Spradley (1979):

> I want to understand the world from your point of view. I want to know what you know in the way you know it. I want to understand the meaning of your experience, to walk in your shoes, to feel things as you feel them, to explain things as you explain them. Will you become my teacher and help me under- stand? (34)

With this framing, interviews were semi-structured and in-depth allowing for a conversational and fluid dialogue between participant and interviewer, while investing in a degree of predetermined order or structure (Longhurst, 2010; Valentine, 2005). This predetermined structure was drawn from the four questions outlining this thesis research, reiterated below:

1. How do highly educated immigrants articulate their sense of belonging in Lexington, Kentucky?
    a. How does the workplace affect highly educated immigrants' sense of belonging?
    b. How do the relational dynamics (i.e., family, friends, co-workers) inform highly educated immigrants' accounts of their sense of belonging?

c. How do highly educated immigrants position themselves within geopolitical discussions on international migration in the United States and how does this affect their sense of belonging?

For the interviews, a guide, which is included in Appendix 1, was put together to expand on the questions above, although, during interviews, questions were, at times, rephrased to be conversational and open-ended (Valentine, 2005). This guide comprised of a conversational walkthrough of the consent form; introductory and demographic questions; grand tour questions; and extended interview questions. The format for this interview guide reflects the study's focus on belonging, but utilizes indirect questions, in the context of the workplace, relational dynamics, and the sociopolitical landscape, to learn how these contexts factor into everyday experiences of belonging and home for highly educated immigrants. To this end, the interview guide included the thematic and dynamic dimensions encouraged by Valentine (2005) as he states, "A good interview question should contribute thematically to knowledge production and dynamically to promoting a good interview interaction" (131).

Study recruitment relied on the snowball technique (or chain sampling). As noted by Patton (1990), this approach attempts to locate "information rich key informants or critical cases" beginning with soliciting assistance from well-situated people with the aim of accumulating new potential participants through recommendations and word of mouth (176). To recruit participants using this method, I began by reaching out to sub-organizations associated with the industries discussed in *Study Site*. These sub-organizations were identified as groups that may include highly educated immigrants due

to organizational aims and membership criteria. Once potential groups for recruiting were identified, organization leaders were emailed with a request to have recruitment material dispersed to the larger organization. This outreach email contained study information (including a recruitment flyer and the informed consent form), outreach intent, and the researcher's contact information, including the following eligibility criteria:

- Be over 18 years old
- Hold a bachelor's degree or higher
- Employed or resides in the greater Lexington area
- Consider yourself an international migrant
- Moved to Lexington area for employment purposes (including pursuing professional or post-graduate degrees, i.e., Master's and PhD candidates or medical students)
- Be comfortable with one of the following: videorecording, audio-recording, or note-taking

Approximately 13 organizations were contacted, and 12 participants responded to the recruitment email and agreed to be interviewed. All interviews took place between August and October 2021. While most participants selected a virtual modality (by Zoom) for the interview (n=9), others also elected for interviews in-person (n=2) and by phone (n=1). On average, interviews lasted an hour and five minutes with the shortest lasting thirty-two minutes and longest just under two hours. All interviews were recorded with participant consent and each participant was given the opportunity to (1) select their anonymous name, which two participants chose to do, and (2) receive a cleaned version of their transcript, either for their own records or to review, which five participants

requested. Furthermore, because participants volunteered to participate through self-selection, variations occurred between self-identification as a highly skilled immigrant and scholarly conceptualizations of the highly skilled immigrant. For this reason, this study employs the term "highly educated" immigrants, as is detailed in the next section.

v. Sample and Demographics

Purposive, criterion-based sampling is utilized in this research. The project attempts to replicate the demographic data on foreign-born residents in Lexington, Kentucky, more specifically utilizing census data for Fayette County. Based upon the 2019 American Community Survey (ACS), Fayette County, Kentucky is home to approximately 30,981 foreign born individuals.[14,15] Of that population:

- Gender is almost evenly split with 47% identifying as female (53% as male)
- A majority are between the ages of 18 to 54 (73.2% with 44.5% being between the ages 25-44)
- Of those 25 years and over, 40.9% hold a bachelor's degree or higher graduate or professional degree

Reflecting on these demographics, the criteria for participants attempts to mirror the foreign-born population of Lexington. Therefore, participants were required to be of working age, although no limit was put on participants' age; hold at least a bachelor's

[14] Utilizing 5-year estimates

[15] Per the U.S. Census Bureau, the term foreign born refers to "anyone who is not a U.S. citizen at birth. This includes naturalized U.S. citizens, lawful permanent residents (immigrants), temporary migrants (such as foreign students), humanitarian migrants (such as refugees and asylees), and unauthorized migrants" (2019).

degree; and either have their employment or residence based in Lexington, Kentucky, inclusive of the greater Fayette County. No restrictions were made for the sample criteria on the length of stay or residency status of participants, so participants could be naturalized citizens of the United States but could not be native born. One's method of entry to the United States was not limited as previous scholars have noted the limitation of this sort of requirement, which often eclipses the experiences of highly educated immigrants who may have entered through various migration methodologies (e.g., refugee, asylum seeker, or spouse) (see: Weinar and Klekowski von Koppenfels, 2020). This was noted within the thesis sample as a handful of participants who immigrated as children as well as for secondary education opportunities still self-identified as highly educated immigrants.

Demographically, participants' mean age was 40 years old with seven participants identifying as male and five as female. In terms of race, participants self-identified with five identifying as white, four as Asian, one as Black, 1 as more than one race, and one preferred not to answer. Eight identified as ethnically Latin* and Hispanic. Overall, a majority of participants were employed either in the medical or academic field with variation in their position. Country of origin was split between Latin and South America (n=8) and Asia (n=4). On average, participants had been living in the Lexington area for 7 years (median=5). No explicit data on citizenship was requested due the time constraints, which prevented the obtainment of a National Institute of Health (NIH) certification requested by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) if citizenship was to be disclosed or discussed. Further demographic information is located in the Table 1 as well as in the Appendix 2.

TABLE 1

ADDITIONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PARTICIPANTS

CATEGORY	Number of Participants
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	Mexico (4), Brazil (2), India (2), Bolivia (1), Nepal (1), Peru (1), South Korea (1)
PROFESSION[16]	Professor (5), Physician (4), PhD Student (2), Other (3)
LENGTH OF TIME IN LEXINGTON	20 yrs. (1), 17 yrs. (1), 16 yrs. (1), 8 yrs. (1), 7 yrs. (1), 5 yrs. (2), 2 yrs. (1), 1 yr. (2), less than a year (2)

While I worked to ensure that the overall sample is reflective of the gender and industry demographics of Lexington's foreign-born population, parity in participants gender was not achieved (58% male), although it did closely represent ACS statistics (2019), and industry skewed towards postsecondary educators or those with overlapping positions (e.g., medical professionals who also teach). Furthermore, two notable changes were made to participant criteria during recruitment.[17]

First, recruitment criteria were expanded to include graduate and post-graduate students. This decision was made as graduate and post-graduate students can also be understood to be highly educated immigrants. Notably, this entry methodology was common among participants—that is some participants entered the United States as a graduate student and remained due to employment opportunities in the United States once a terminal degree had been obtained. Within the sample, two participants were currently

[16] Note, that some professions overlap due to dual appointments.
[17] Notably, the changes in participant criteria were altered as different interpretations of the eligibility criteria were introduced.

pursuing PhDs and at least four had originally relocated to the United States for graduate and post-graduate educational opportunities, including the completion of medical residencies.

Second, recruitment criteria were expanded to include those who immigrated as children. Although most of the research on highly educated immigrants focuses on adult immigrants, especially those who relocate for employment holding the necessary skills for employment, this conception ignores a non-linear and intersectional approach towards identifying those who distinguish themselves as highly educated and as immigrants. To this end, three participants were enrolled who identified as highly educated immigrants, but who migrated as children.

vi. COVID-19 Adaptions

This research was conducted during an on-going global pandemic. Due to the potential for limited public interaction, the methodology was constructed to be executable virtually and in-person. All participants were provided with three interview modality options: virtually (on Zoom), by phone, or in-person. In-person interviews met safety standards set by university research standards, CDC guidelines, and the needs expressed by the participants, who elected for an in-person interview, including the use of masks and social distancing.

Analysis

The analysis of this research follows the suggested structure by Meghan Cope (2010), in line with principles discussed in previous iterations of *Key Methods in Geography*. These principles include organizing and reducing data into manageable

portions; identifying themes; and paying attention to rigorous interpretations. Due to this thesis research aims and methodology, I proceeded with a content analysis, which relies upon coding. Although coding could be completed with the assistance of computer-aided qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS), for this thesis research, coding was conducted by hand using both descriptive and analytic codes.

Interviews were transcribed using Microsoft Word's transcription service. Each interview was revised twice: first, reading and correcting errors made by the transcription service, and second, reading with the audio recording to clarify words, phrases, and tone, while also taking notes both by using color-coded highlighting (based upon the grand tour questions and keywords) and the "Comments" feature on Microsoft Word. Once that was completed, I grouped together the portions of interviews based upon the color-coded highlighting and reviewed the collected portions while taking note of trends. While some trends were identified pre-transcription, others were identified through the transcription process (by hand coding). See below for an example of color-coding template:

Overarching Topics		
Question	**Keywords**	**Highlight Color**
How do highly educated immigrants articulate their sense of belonging in Lexington, Kentucky?	Belonging, home, place-making, place-belongingness	Yellow
How does the workplace affect highly educated immigrants' sense of belonging?	Workplace, work, job, employment, co-workers	Green
How do the relational dynamics (i.e., family, friends, co-workers) inform highly educated immigrants' accounts of their sense of belonging?	Friends, family, co-workers, partner, connection, connected, communication	Pink
How do highly educated immigrants position themselves within geopolitical discussions on international migration in the United States and how does this affect their sense of belonging?	Politics, government, immigration, migration, liberal, conservative, Trump, Obama, visa, policy	Blue
Sub-Topics		
Identifier	**Keywords**	**Text Color**

Language	Specific languages, speaking, accent, English, understand	Blue
Pandemic	COVID, pandemic, masks, isolation, quarantine	Red
Race	Race, ethnicity, skin/color	Green

From the table, it can be noted that color-coded highlighting focused upon analytic code reflecting the themes of interest to this thesis research, while sub-topics, coded by text color, reflect descriptive codes, which engage with patterns that are directly stated by research subjects (or easily picked up on through the interview dialogue) (Cope, 2010).

While these interviews stand alone, methodologically, in the following chapter, they are put into conversation with one another as well as with texts that reflect similar patterns and experiences, more specifically the following texts: *Borderlands: the new mestiza = La frontera* (2007) by Gloria Anzaldúa, *Conditional citizens: On Belonging in America* (2020) by Laila Lalami, and *Living a Feminist Life* (2017) by Sara Ahmed. Weaving these texts with the interviews allows for nuanced stories to emerge through theoretical and experiential lenses which build on the analytic code developed.

4. Belonging in Lexington

To reiterate, the aim of this thesis is to analyze how highly skilled immigrants articulate their sense of belonging in their new locale. The research was conducted in Lexington, Kentucky. The research questions for this thesis break down the concept of belonging via two avenues: the politics of belonging and place-belongingness. The former produces two levels of engagement: the maintenance and production of discursive and material boundaries, creating space for contesting and challenging of boundaries by other political entities and agents. Such a framework claims that belonging is a political act (Anthias, 2009; Trudeau, 2006; Yuval-Davis, 2006). The latter encompasses the experiential and emotional which can be understood through peoples' social locations and positioning emotional investments and attachments and an evaluation and judgment of these locations and investments (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Drawing on this initial theoretical framework work, the thesis identifies three thematic spaces of belonging and uses them as analytic code: the workplace, relational dynamics, and the political atmosphere.

In addition, in this chapter the theoretical framework for belonging will be expanded past the two avenues explained above. As noted in *Literature Review and Conceptual Framework,* transnationalism challenges notions of belonging that are anchored to specific national collectivities or singular communities, particularly for immigrants. Through the transnational lens, belonging becomes multi-scalar. As Staeheli and Nagel (2006) assert, then, home is no longer a specific or singular place, but, instead, can include multiple points of connection here and there. Through participants' stories, the messiness and elasticity of belonging come into perspective via the foregrounding of

local attachments, including family and livelihoods, and the conceptualization of home across transnational spaces.

This reorientation of belonging through local and transnational spaces is further complicated by the paradoxical placement of highly educated immigrants upon relocation. Like highly skilled immigrants, they are characterized as desirable due to their educational attainment and economic contributions, yet, remained othered, which can lead to prejudicial discourse and actions due to the processes of racialization and alienation. This paradox raises a question of privilege, such as, socioeconomic stability and mobility. More specifically, it asks whether such privileges can alleviate or curb experiences of alienation or marginalization for nonwhite immigrants, particularly highly educated immigrants. Like other immigrant populations, such as Asian Americans and Asian immigrants, privilege cannot be treated as a shielding mechanism, particularly in cases of racialization, as research on Asian Americans has highlighted the simultaneous stereotyping of this group as the perpetual foreigner and the model minority (Mahalingam, 2012; Park et al., 2021; Saito, 1997).

Within this paradox, the conditionality of citizenship and belonging can further flesh out the complexities presented through this paradox. While citizenship can be understood as a formal and legal form of membership with attached rights and responsibilities, within this thesis, citizenship is expanded past the formal and legal definition. Citizenship, in this form, acknowledges the world-building that occurs beyond political boundaries—that is how space is produced and shaped through the everyday experiences and encounters which can encourage (or deter) the development and sustainment of belonging. Conditional citizenship, then, recognizes how hegemonic

structures and processes works to maintain nativist, isolationist, and exclusionary boundaries by attaching belonging to conditions to alienate others, which may reduce the role of privilege in circumventing exclusion. This conditionality, then, cultivates the stranger, or the alien. As Ahmed (2000) argues, the alien is not necessarily that which has not been identified, but that which has been marked as different and beyond human. This is further illustrated by Lalia Lalami's (2020) own reflections on citizenship and belonging in the United States as a naturalized citizen:

> Being a citizen of the United States, I had thought, meant being an equal member of the American family—a spirited group of people of different races, origins, and creeds, bound together by common ideals. As time went by, however, the contradictions between doctrine and reality became harder to ignore. While my life in this country is in most ways happy and fulfilling, it has never been entirely secure or comfortable. Certain facts regularly stand in the way, facts that make of me a conditional citizen. By this I mean that my relationship to the state, observed through exposure to its policies or encounters with its representatives, is affected in all sorts of ways by my being an immigrant, a woman, an Arab, and a Muslim.

As Lalami notes, her relationship to the state and the sociopolitical discourse dispensed and encouraged within this country lead her to experience a lack of security and comfort as a citizen, one which deeply colors how the state and the wider sociopolitical discourse regulate her, as an Arab-Muslim woman. Importantly, Lalami acknowledges that, even with these faults which make her citizenship conditional, she still lives a life that is happy and fulfilling. Even with state or wider sociopolitical discourse attempting to instill non-belonging, belonging is still articulated that is external to the state or sociopolitical exclusion. Here, efforts to regulate and restrict belonging are rebuffed, introducing another axis of the paradox discussed above.

This empirical chapter examines how immigrants' everyday articulations of belonging after relocation challenge a dichotomous concept of belonging through

foregrounded local attachments, including family and livelihoods, and via the conceptualization of home as a means to engage and intertwine with transnational spaces. The simultaneous experience of transnational belonging and local attachments allows for an exploration on how immigrants' everyday experiences contribute to the formation and maintenance of belonging. Within the first section, participants' stories on relocation will be interwoven and explored in order to respond to two questions. First, how do highly educated immigrants articulate a sense of belonging upon relocation? And, second, what role does privilege play in potentially mitigating the challenges of immigration such as, encounters of marginalization or bias, for highly educated immigrants? The following section will further reflect on how transnationalism creates space for multi-scalar conception of belonging and how this approach contributes to answering the second question above.

Through these examinations, the thesis demonstrates that highly educated immigrants challenge fixed and limited understandings of belonging and home. Because of this, they introduce the possibility of multiple belongings, particularly transnational belongings. While exclusionary borders and nativist discourse counter these narratives, it is notable that participants' expressions of home and belonging exclusion rarely highlighted what home is. Instead, participants often highlighted their passion and dedication to their careers and their investment in and love for their family and friends, which ultimately foregrounded the local, while still engaging with the transnational—the here and there.

On Belonging: Here and There

> "When I got to this country, I already had assigned a label and that one is being Hispanic. Until then I did not have a clue about how people were, I guess, classified in this country based on…ethnicity." (Benicio)[18]

The process of being "made up" was common among participants' stories, particularly categorization based upon race and ethnicity. Through their everyday experiences, the process of being "made up" was set in contrast to whiteness.[19] That is, the immigrant is not white because the American is white, and the immigrant cannot be who the American is. Omi and Winant (2015) emphasize this logic in their examination of the United States as a racial despotism. That framing of the American identity, defined as white, with the "negation of racialized "otherness," which includes African, indigenous, Latin American, and Asian folks, places a conditionality or non-belongingness upon nonwhite folks (2015, 131). Benicio, a participant, notes this process, explaining (although it may be unimpressive to others), his experience of the label of Hispanic based upon his ethnicity and country of origin assigned him a role in society:

> "…but it just, it made me think about how your ethnicity, in this case my country of origin, and assign me, I guess, role in this society"

Not only does this use of categorization racially and ethnically identify Benicio, but, as he recognizes, it assigns him a role in society that is already a disadvantage, as he is not white, in the dominant context. His lack of English proficiency intensified this disadvantage. As Benicio acknowledges, upon relocating to the United States, due to his low English proficiency, he was placed in low-skill labor working at an irrigation company. At the time, Benicio forwent the final year of his undergraduate degree

[18] All participant quotes have been edited for clarity and each participant has been anonymized.
[19] Notably, most participants who identified as "Latin*/Hispanic white" expressed a more serious attachment to their ethnic identity than racial identity.

program to support his wife's pursuit of a doctoral degree in the United States. Newly positioned, upon relocation, hegemonic processes that underpin racial divisions in the United States reduced Benicio to what he is not: he is not white, and he does not speak English. This does not mean that Benicio, himself, is deficient. Instead, it elucidates how exclusionary boundary maintenance encourages otherness and alienation through divisive categorization and by limiting opportunities, as Benicio reflects on his experiences working for an irrigation company:

> "…because of my English limitations I had to be kind of placed in the low skilled labor in this. So, then, so one of the things that was quite, I guess, traumatic for me, it was that the American people I interacted with, they treated me like if I were stupid. Like, if I were someone, who in addition to not having the skills to…dig officially, I couldn't understand what they were asking me to do. And so, they thought I was just like someone who's not capable of understanding it. So, it was very, very traumatic to me to be able to be treated that way and so, but interestingly that it was a great motivator for me to learn how to speak English."

Notably, in his recollection, Benicio explains that the trauma caused through his encounters with exclusionary boundaries, which occurred through adverse interpersonal interactions, also produced a motivation to linguistically assimilate. Exclusionary boundaries, therefore, can be conceptualized not only as the process of prohibiting and alienating the other, but also as a process and space for the negotiation of membership and belonging. This space and process produced distance and reinforced otherness, yet also promoted the promise of reducing the distance hegemonic whiteness (the dominant culture) or the possibility of membership, if one engages in assimilationist processes, in this case, engagement in English hegemony.

Yet, while Benicio's engagement could be conceptualized simply as a response to sociopolitical pressure, Benicio should not be objectified—that is, he should not be read

as an object of assimilationist or integrationist discourse, but instead as an active subject who is navigating assimilationist or integrationist boundaries, a space that pressures immigrants to confirm to Western, hegemonic standards. In navigating these exclusionary boundaries, he recognizes that engagement with English hegemony may ultimately benefit him. To this end, Benicio's engagement with hegemonic linguistic standards benefits him, leading him to, overtime, become proficient in English as well as return to complete his undergraduate degree and a doctoral degree.

Although this transition did not occur overnight, this movement from a low-skilled worker in the United States to a high-skilled worker stresses why the accumulation of high-skilled-employment requirements can both be and be perceived as advantageous for those targeted by exclusionary boundaries who must navigate encounters with these restrictive or exclusionary spaces. For Gloria, speaking "perfect" English was a tactic in avoiding isolation (or a feeling of nonbelonging), as she shares:

> "I strived to try to speak the most perfect English that I ever could. I was going to try to speak it better than any American, better than any, I just enunciate and all the things … my friends used to call me a Grammar Nazi and all this stuff 'cause I was a kid that was so anxious and afraid of people questioning our belongingness that I wanted to speak a perfect English and … I would correct my friends and people would get annoyed, but in my mind, I was trying to help them to not be ostracized"

Here, Gloria, who immigrated as a child to the United States, connects speaking English with belonging, more specifically understanding speaking English well as a counter to others questioning her belongingness. Like Benicio, while her efforts to "enunciate and all the things" can be read as a response to the sociopolitical pressure to engage with English hegemony, it should also be framed as Gloria acting to navigate assimilationist or integrationist boundaries—that is, that she, Gloria, is an active subject in contrast to being

the object of sociopolitical pressure. This difference can be noted in her reflections on language. Gloria recognizes that, as an adult, she no longer feels the need to speak perfect English or convince others, too, remarking:

> "… it took me into my adulthood and until really, the last 2-3 years to stop trying to speak a perfect English that is not mine … language was definitely one that, it really it took me being in spaces like this [her workplace] to be able to say, "OK, I can be who I am and I don't have to try to—I'm not a scholar 24/7."

While patterns of racial despotism can permeate everyday life with exclusionary boundaries that shape and reshape belonging, Gloria's reflection explain how she actively worked to push past these exclusionary boundaries and spaces to claim her own space, in a sense, following Gloria Anzaldúa's assertion in her chapter "How to Tame a Wild Tongue", that, "I am my language … I will no longer be made to feel ashamed of existing" (2007, 81). And, while engaging in English hegemony may be beneficial for highly educated immigrants, as Gloria notices, it is not a prerequisite for belonging in all spaces— "I'm not a scholar 24/7". So, while engagement with English hegemony can prove fruitful, particularly within professional spaces or in accessing public services, it does not necessarily increase or strengthen one's perception or feeling of belonging, as Elizabeth recognizes.

Although English is not her first language, relocation as a child supported Elizabeth's development of English fluency to the point where English is her primary language of use. Yet, this fluency (and comfort with the language) did not prevent Elizabeth from experiencing nonbelonging due English hegemony, as she recalls an argument with her college roommates over her dog:

> "…my mom spoke Spanish to [my dog] like all the time, so he really only listened to Spanish commands, so I spoke to him a lot in Spanish. He's also very wild 'cause he is very small. And, so my 2 roommates…they sort of, they said one night they were like, "Well, if you spoke to him in English more, maybe he would understand us," which to me felt very along the lines of "*We* speak English and, so you have to speak English" (Elizabeth) [oral emphasis in italics]

Notably, in reflecting on this incident, Elizabeth shared that, in the immediate aftermath of this encounter, she stopped speaking Spanish. Although Elizabeth expressed that she primarily speaks in English, only using Spanish with family or for school (where she studied Spanish), this encounter left her frustrated mainly because she did not stand up for herself. As she shared, prior to this, she had always believed that if someone was to say something along the lines of, "Speak English," that she would rebuff them, but instead she retreated, which frustrated her.

The interview did not pursue further discussion about her reaction, but her retreat and frustration connect to Anzaldúa's assertion on language, previously referenced, that, "I am my language" (2007, 81). And, although Elizabeth's primary language is English, this encounter forced her to confront the shame that others place upon other parts of her identity as Anzaldúa also asserts, "I will no longer be made to feel ashamed of existing" (2007, 81). While these experiences, as noted by Elizabeth, Gloria, and Benicio, demonstrate how exclusionary boundaries which may instill fear, anxiety, and shame can shape and stifle belonging. But they also push against linguistic and cultural boundaries put forth through racial despotisms.

As Valentine, et al. (2008) recognize, language is a situated practice that is interactional and, therefore, structures everyday spaces. Echoing Cresswell (1996), immigrants occupy a space of contestation (cited in Valentine, 2008, 337). In their "new environments," or spaces that demand assimilation, their linguistic competencies do not always match the norms or expectations of said spaces, therefore, casting immigrants as nonbelonging. Yet, marginalized communities may counter these demands and, yet maintain their own spaces and practices "such as language, building in effect particular solidarities, giving meaning to particular spaces and impacting individuals' self-identities" (Valentine et al., 2008, 377).

In their interviews, both Benicio and Gloria note their experiences in and with counter space and practice via engagement with non-English speaking and multi-lingual communities. This, they report, provided them with a sense of purpose and belonging. For Benicio, while his engagement with the Hispanic community decreased as he relocated to Lexington during the pandemic, prior to his relocation he had worked as a bilingual union organizer and assisted with developing a Hispanic community-based organization, which provided him with a sense of purpose and belonging, as he explains:

> … the fact that I came here the way I came, it shouldn't be a reason for me to stay away from [other laborers and union workers], not to think about their reality and particularly it made me reflect on the fact that I should be part of the process of achieving change.

Here, Benicio articulates his belonging through community connections, particularly community connections that engage with the Hispanic folks and organizations. This articulation of belonging as connected to national or cultural ties was

common among participants, as Rahul, who immigrated for further medical training, notes, “Here in Lexington, we have a group of Nepali friends. So, we sort of support each other as friends and more like family even though they're not family.” Expanding, Rahul explained that he and his wife’s friendships with other Nepali people, who he considers as family, allow them to celebrate holidays and pass traditions onto their children. Through this, he and his family can participate in and celebrate traditional holidays with a larger group investing in cultural practices by combining homes through holiday-oriented place-making practices. This form of home and belonging in diaspora reflects how transnational ties continue regardless of material or physical space or proximity as Blunt (2007) outlines, those living within diaspora—through lived experiences and spatial imaginaries—must navigate the production of space between home and the homeland through home-making practices, which reinforces belonging as transnational and multi-scalar.

Diasporic forms of home and belonging can further be conceptualized through the emphasis upon language. According to Mavroudi’s (2020) nuanced approach to language and diaspora, using the example of Greeks in Australia, while homeland language can be a critical component to diasporic belonging, strategic uses of language will be formed overtime, particularly generationally, to navigate multiple identities and belonging. This position is echoed by Gloria as she recalled, “In fact, my parents would correct us, so we wouldn't be ostracized in Spanish because we were speaking Spanglish. We weren’t in Mexico. We weren't practicing Spanish with other people other than our parents.” This sentiment is reinforced by Tomic (2013) who notes that the maintenance of language and culture resists colonial practices, detailing, “…by making Spanish the spoken language of

the home—the language of family, nostalgia, translation, and interpretation—, they challenge the colonizing practices embedded in the dominant culture" (17).

Returning to the stories on language shared by Benicio, Gloria, and Elizabeth, engagement in English hegemony as a bi- or multi-lingual person may contest the dominant position of English, again, not only pushing against the linguistic and cultural boundaries put forth through racial despotisms, but also challenging the notion that immigrants must live within spaces dictated by exclusionary boundaries. These contested spaces can provide diasporic communities opportunities for multiple homes and attachments to be drawn to a singular material space connecting personal and individualized manners, and community ties, particularly those of nationality, ethnicity, and culture.

Diasporic communities, though, were not the only nor the primary space where belonging was formed or maintained for all participants. After relocating to Lexington to enroll in graduate school, Francisco established a sense of belonging through local communities. Besides his graduate program, he explains how the local gay community is a space that welcomed him, fostering a sense of belonging and community:

> "…they really have like a sense of community like we do like a bunch of activities together like we have like a book club; we have like running club; we started like our kickball league. So that was like very fun and usually like, when we are going out, like, we always met like a great number of people so that was very nice. Here in Lexington, I really feel that the gay community is very like united, and they are pretty much like very give the sense of community. Very welcome."

Francisco's articulation of belonging through the local gay community broadens the thesis focus on racialization to acknowledge the intersectional nature of belonging and personhood. This can dispel homogenous notions of belonging for immigrants, which

further casts belonging as multi-scalar and transnational. As Anthias (2012) explains, recognizing the migrant as belonging to particularly ethnic groups predisposes them to a particular subjectivity. If these self-fulfilling predispositions are indulged, "We then cannot recognise the crosscutting influence of other dimensions of their location, such as how ethnic categorisations, which produce the idea of ethnic groups cross cut with gender, generation, class, political values, experience, opportunities and very importantly agency," which further ignores how people may connect and engage in terms of social categories and relations besides ethnic ones, such as, class, gender, sexuality, age, life stage, political beliefs, interests, and trans-ethnically (Anthias, 2012, 104-5).

Pushing past homogenous notions of belonging also allows for chance interactions, which can inform articulations of belonging. Mateo, who immigrated to the United States as a child and relocated to Lexington for a job offer, detailed how a flame war on Twitter led to an unlikely friendship. Angry with one another's tweets during the George Floyd protests, Mateo and his to-be-friend, a police officer, ultimately deescalated their fight by meeting for coffee, as Mateo further shares:

> … we talked and realized that like we have very different political views and very different worldview, but we also were like people just trying to survive people with families. Well, I had a, you know, uh, starting family and he had a baby and, we both sort of wanted something good to happen and something good to come out of this whole situation … we talk often, and we meet often, and we discuss kind of our feelings and our emotions and our jobs and what we're thinking and talking about and that's been good. But yeah, he's about the only person that I can think of outside of my department that I consider a friend.

While this experience is specific to Mateo, like Francisco, this story, again, expands belonging to include chance and context. That is, as Mateo further explained, the pandemic heavily impacted his ability to socialize and form

connections with communities external to his work. His meeting with police officer from his flame war was a chance interaction that began in a digital space and moved to a material space. While Francisco's engagement with and attachment to the local gay community more broadly pushes back against homogeneous notions of immigrant belonging, both Francisco and Mateo's stories suggest that articulations of belonging for immigrants can and do exist outside of national, ethnic, and diasporic communities.

For highly educated immigrants, the workplace also provide space to articulate belonging, particularly foregrounding local attachments and fostering interpersonal relationships. This is not to say that other immigrant groups or individuals do not articulate belonging through the workplace, but instead returns to the question of whether privilege, such as access to higher skilled employment, can mitigate experiences of marginalization and prejudice that immigrants, particularly nonwhite immigrants, may face, which may in turn, sway articulations of belonging and home.

Participants like Mateo identify their workplace, in his case his department, as an important point of connection. Elaborating, he shared:

> "They've [my co-workers] been wonderful, and, when I was sick, they did a whole like meal train for us so that we didn't have to cook, and one person brought a different meal every day for like 2 weeks. When COVID hit and my wife got pregnant during COVID, my colleagues threw us like this virtual baby shower and they've been checking up on us and they've been really, really good. I don't know how I would have done this without them honestly."

For Mateo, the workplace offers not only a place of social connection but also social support. Having relocated during the pandemic, Mateo recognizes how

important the people in his department are for himself and his family, particularly as he could not visit his family (or have his family visit) for a prolonged period due to travel restrictions and quarantines. The pandemic further restricted Mateo and his wife from preparing for and sharing the celebration of their son, as they were unable to attend parenting classes or bond with other local to-be-parents and could not travel to introduce their son to family and friends both due to travel restrictions and the fear of becoming sick or infecting loved ones. In this context, the social support, such as the virtual baby shower thrown by Mateo's department, further illustrate how important the workplace can be as a space of social connection and support, particularly during difficult times.

This advantage of the workplace is also noted by Francisco:

> "It's a graduate group, so that's united all the graduate students and we do happy hours; we do seminars; scientific seminars in the department. We have like different type of like activities that we are responsible for it. So, I felt that like very good, especially like when I moved here like it was a pandemic."

Like Mateo, Francisco had relocated for his graduate program during the pandemic and had been unable to travel home or for research purposes since he began his program, although, at the time of the interview, he was hopeful that he could return home both for research and personal purposes. Even with these barriers, Francisco emphasized how social events and mentorships within his department allowed him to foster strong relationships to rebuff experiences of isolation introduced by the pandemic.

Access to social networks can be seen as one of the privileges for highly educated immigrants in the workplace. In many ways, this engagement allows highly educated immigrants to eclipse some of the conditionality experienced by other non-white, non-

western immigrants. That is, acceptance to graduate school programs, residencies, and other forms of employment, provide certain forms of membership even before migration takes place, for those who immigrate as adults. As Mateo and Francisco recognized, this form of membership, which can translate into a community, can be important for developing connections to a relocated place particularly during a crisis. It should be noted the prevalence of access to these forms of membership and community within an academic setting. In this case, academic and departmental structures can offer a starting point upon which to make connections, which can increase feelings of belonging by foregrounding local communities and attachment while diminishing feelings that occur in its absence such as loneliness and displacement.

Yet, privilege in the workplace for highly educated immigrants can become complex as the paradoxical placement and experiences of the highly educated immigrant are highlighted. Rahul, a medical doctor, who immigrated to the United States for further medical training, shared his personal experience with the unfortunately well-documented request heard by people of color in the medical field, "I want to see a white doctor" (Paul-Emile et al., 2016; Reynolds et al., 2015; Selby et al., 1999):

> "'Oh, I don't want to see a brown doctor. I want to see a white doctor,' right? We do get that once in a while. So, in clinic, I think was two occasions that there was a guy with a Confederate hat, and I was talking to him, and he said, "I don't want to see you. I want a white doctor," right? Well, the choice was simple: it was either me, me, or me. So, I told him straight. I said, "It's either me or—there's no other doctor who does what I do." And I guess he quietened down a little bit, uh, had to have a little chat, and, after that, I did his procedure. When he came back to follow up, eh, it was alright."

Markedly, unlike Benicio and his low-skilled work at an irrigation company, earlier detailed, Rahul's position as a medical doctor elevates his status to the white patient as his, Rahul's, services are indispensable. Even if the patient wants a white doctor, in this case, it is not possible to meet the request and provide the necessary medical service. Here socioeconomic privilege can provide a buffer to racist encounters, which may not be available to those in more disposable positions, which Rahul acknowledged, stating, "…as a physician, it's easier because they see you for what you do for them, and most people are grateful." In this context, the buffer provided by one's positionality reaffirms other scholarship, which proport that highly educated immigrants possess privileges in contrast to other immigrant groups (Cresswell, 2006; Hercog, 2017; Webb and Lahiri-Roy, 2019). Yet, even with this buffer and elevated socioeconomic status, it cannot be denied that racialized encounters still occur. Rahul's position as a doctor does not protect him from racist requests and, therefore, the barriers of racialized forms of exclusion remain.

Ana, who had recently relocated due to an academic job offer, also notes these barriers. Although Ana speaks English fluently, to the point of receiving well-intentioned, yet still problematic compliments on her fluency, she observed how problematic this attitude was in the workplace, stating:

> "…I've had actually a colleague saying to me that was a great thing, that I could speak the language [English] so well, because then the Dean wouldn't be worried because the Dean… was very skeptical about hiring foreigners because he was afraid that the students would complain. They couldn't understand the lectures. So, I know it's supposed to be a compliment, but it is weird. You know, it's really weird because—so, my work is worth more than my colleague, who I know is brilliant, because he speaks English and accent?"

Here, Ana speaks not only of the exclusionary nature of boundaries, but also of the conditionality attached. Her ability to communicate through not only the dominant language, but to do so without an accent acceptance, prefaces her entry into an academic institution. This response reinforces acceptance of an immigrant as American, but only on the condition that they appear and act American. In contrast, others within their institution find themselves in a precarious position due to their accent or lack of desired English proficiency, which identifies them as foreign and non-belonging through English hegemony, including the rejection of non-Western accented English.

Within these stories, whiteness (read: American, English, Western) is insidious. Yancy (2015) stresses whiteness as a site of concealment where even with good intentions such as the compliments paid towards Ana, reveal the insidious and pervasive nature of whiteness. Even if unconscious, this proliferation of whiteness as functions as a form of racial despotism in the United States, producing spaces proactively prepared to deny that which is out of the ordinary—the other, in this case, the immigrant. This space of whiteness creates the exclusionary boundaries and barriers that have been discussed above, specifically in terms of the racialization of encounters both in everyday life and in the workplace, which rebuffs the perception of highly skilled and highly educated immigrants as privileged. Even though highly educated immigrants may be defined through specific educational and socioeconomic privileges, as Nagel (2009) highlights, "[assimilation] is located in the micropolitics of everyday social interactions" (404).

Turning to the micropolitics of everyday social interactions, participants acknowledged how certain sociopolitical contexts created spaces of hostility emphasizing the nonwhite immigrants' nonbelonging. Recent events such as the Trump

Administration's immigration policies and COVID-19 expanded anti-immigrant sentiment to previously privileged groups such as highly educated immigrants, whose privilege stems from their elevated socioeconomic status, and Asian and Asian Americans, who have been branded as the "model minority" historically. This is not to say that anti-immigrant sentiment caused by these events did not harm those without notable historical or socioeconomic privilege or to say that those in positions of privilege may not have experienced xenophobic rhetoric or encounters prior to these events. But it is a fresh reminder how embedded racism and xenophobia are within the United States, both structurally and interpersonally, to the point where no non-white-perceived body is free of encounters with racism and xenophobia, even if endowed with certain privileges due to specific historical or socioeconomic positioning.

As Rahul recalls, days after Donald Trump's election in 2016:

> I was going to the mall with my kid. And there were four girls, two guys who were walking and the girl pointed to us and said, "Look Mexican." And I, I just lost it. I just lost it, so I went to confront them, and my kid pulled me back and said, "Dad, don't do it." And my answer to him was, "If you think if, you know, you're right, never back away."

Such an encounter with others in the mall, outside of his professional space, reduced Rahul, in some ways, to his appearance through the objectification and strangerfication of his body. At work, his position as a doctor allowed him to subvert the racist discourse directed at him by a patient, but, within this context, he is stripped of his professional privilege. Importantly, the lack of professional privilege within this situation does not preclude him from challenging the objectification and strangerfication of his body or the indication that racialized bodies do not belong. While this incident reiterates how every day experiences are

embedded with the larger sociopolitical discourse, in this case reflecting the anti-Latin*, anti-Hispanic, and anti-immigrant sentiment touted by Donald Trump during his presidential campaign, it also provides space to consider how challenges or contestation directed towards racist and prejudicial sociopolitical discourse may also be an articulation of belonging—a rejection of nonbelonging.

Hye-jin describes a similar experience during COVID-19. Originally from South Korea, Hye-jin moved to the United States temporarily to pursue a PhD, but her relocation transitioned into a long-term, if not permanent, stay, as she has remained in the United States for employment, which transformed into a fulfilling career. Throughout her relocation, Hye-jin shared that she felt very lucky for her experiences, as she noted, "I always surrounded by all good people." Yet, during COVID-19, she began to encounter anti-Asian sentiment:

> "…then during this COVID—so that's why I never thought that I was treated badly [because of my strong social network]—but during the pandemic I felt really bad … I feel really threatened by the outskirts. When I was wearing masks, people yelled at me. When I was taking my son to the playgrounds, the Hispanic guys yelled at us, you know, the Chinese virus or something. So, I experienced several, this hatred from outside of my network. I felt bad. I was starting to worry about him [her son]."

These encounters are a reminder that every day social interactions are not limited to the people or communities in which people feel safe. As Hye-jin recognizes, her experience with being treated badly is not with those within her social network, but external to the communities she engages with—similarly to Rahul.

Returning to the examination of the stranger, in the *Literature Review & Conceptual Framework*, this objectification and strangerfication of nonwhite immigrant bodies—through the examples of Rahul and Hye-jin—further illustrates the paradox of

highly educated immigrants. Again, in *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (2000), Ahmed asserts that conceptualizing the stranger beyond skin and, instead, through the tactile, touches and encounters makes the stranger legible, so the boundary between the familiar and the strange can be reified. In other words, as Rahul and Hye-jin both encountered, "strangers are not simply those we do not recognize but those we recognize as strangers, not only those you do not know but those you should not know" (Ahmed, 2017, 32).

Ahmed's recollections of an interaction with the police at a young age furthers the relationship between the strange and familiar, exclusionary boundaries, and how context can change encounters with each. In *Living a Feminist Life* (2017), Ahmed recounts being stopped by police officers investigating a series of burglaries in the area while walking home from school. To initiate the encounter, one officer asks, "Are you Aboriginal?" Another officer jests, "Or is it just a suntan?" In reflecting on this encounter, Ahmed yields two important conclusions. First, that context matters. She delves into this by comparing her experiences with the police at school, who are friendly and taught her to fear strangers, wherein the bodies addressed were assumed to be white and female, in need of protection. In contrast, her second encounter demonstrated that she embodied the dangerous stranger which others needed protection from. In the second encounter, she is racialized, as Ahmed notes, "My stranger memory taught me that the 'could be anyone' points to some bodies more than others. You are stopped because they think you are Aboriginal; you are allowed to start up again when you pass as white" (2017, 34).

Secondly, as noted in the previous quote, perception of race is critical in how encounters play out. Perception is key to Ahmed's acknowledgement of passing as passing relies on people not reading the other as the stranger. To pass is to relocate oneself as familiar (or unobtrusive), to move away from being an identifiable stranger and, to some peoples' benefit, to engage in polite racism as polite racism relies on the presumption of whiteness as it is more polite to assume one is white. Within Ahmed's own encounter, she is able to pass as white once she informs police officers that she is not aboriginal, as they will now assume it is "just a suntan" and that she, Ahmed, "acquires her color in the way other Australians do: her color is not a stain on her being; her color is not foreign; her color is even an expression of national character, of what we do in our leisure time" (2017, 118).

Both the Trump Administration and COVID-19 intensified the existing boundaries between the strange and the familiar further exposing the paradoxical space of highly educated immigrants. Within the micropolitics of everyday social interactions, perception and context are key. That is, they can dictate how the nonwhite body is read and reacted to. For example, Ahmed's "could be anyone" logic is put into in action for Hye-jin during the pandemic. While Hye-jin attests being lucky in her relocation due to a reliable social network, which she characterizes as "good", the public's stranger memory during COVID-19 has highlighted the Asian body, her body, as more dangerous than others, in a manner, which is not familiar in public contemporary memory.[20] That is,

[20] The history of discrimination against Asians in the United States, specifically the Chinese, is noted by Cresswell (2006) in his examination of on good and bad immigrants in the early 20th century during the Chinese exclusion act. Although this history may not be noted within current public memory, it should be recognized that this discrimination is not necessarily a new but had subsided in newsworthy ways in recent years prior to COVID-19.

while anyone *could be* sick, the Asian body is more likely to be infected and contagious due to tracing the disease's emergence to China. Therefore, the perceived Asian body is not only publicly recognized as a threat and as a contaminant, but also as a source of blame. In this context, Hye-jin's privilege as a highly educated immigrant is suspended as her person is racialized and denoted as non-belonging and threatening.

This oscillation between privilege and conditionality unveils a more complex landscape in which highly educated immigrants articulate their sense of belonging further within a paradoxical space. Notably, participants push back against this political climate not only through their actions but through their articulation of belonging in everyday spaces. While their belonging may be contested by others forcing them to navigate exclusionary and racist interactions and encounters, in many ways, they refuse the conditionality placed upon them. That is, they refused to be objects within a sociopolitical discourse that attempts to objectify them instead acting as autonomous subjects, which has been noted in many participants stories. Transnational belonging and personhood provide space that defies restrictive sociopolitical boundaries and discourse as belonging and personhood are not specifically tide to a singular place or entity, such as nation.

Staeheli and Nagel's (2006) three key elements on conceptualizing the topography of home, also detailed in the *Literature Review and Conceptual Framework,* clarify the transnational conception of belonging and personhood:

1. The material, physical space
2. The power relationships and cultural practices that locate people in specific places thus extending beyond the physical home to connect potentially distant places

3. The recognition of multiple homes that may intersect and exist simultaneously at different scales

To this extent, they describe home in various ways and with two components which aligned with transnational conception of belonging and home surfaced through discussions of livelihoods and family. While other aspects of belonging such as language and broader communities were identified as factors that contributed to trinational conception of home and belonging, these components foregrounded the intricacy of transnational belonging, racialization, and privilege (or the conditionality of privilege). Through these elements, livelihoods and family, participants articulated how investments in work, particularly work that engaged with their passions, as well as human connections and relational dynamics, particularly those associated with partners and family, created spaces in which the landscape of belonging for highly educated immigrants is complicated by the paradoxical nature of highly educated immigrants and the spaces they occupy and employ.

Hye-jin, for example, discussed the difficulties she faced within her first few years after relocating to Kentucky. Initially, she had been invested in returning home to South Korea, but she was unable to find employment opportunities in her desired field, so she accepted a job offer in Lexington. By the time a desirable position opened in South Korea, Hye-jin was no longer interested, as she had already begun the process of professionally establishing herself in the United States and had applied for U.S.-based grants. To this end, she shared that it had been difficult to make friends in Lexington, as those she connected with were transient and did not often stay in Lexington for long. Yet over time, her experiences changed due to three events: obtaining tenure, getting married,

and having her son. While the awarding of tenure reduced her work-related stress, both her husband and son pushed her to expand her social networks as she shared two insights:

> "But anyway, after I met my husband, I need friends for my husband because I knew—my husband had a temporary position as he came here. So, but it was a part-time, so he couldn't really feel that he belongs to Lexington, so I had to meet friends to make friends for my husband"

> "So, my kid started his kindergarten program in a public school system, so I had to learn more and more. So anyway, I join in the PTA and see how it goes. So, I'm now more open to community engagement. So anyway, so family change me and my network a lot."

Yet, even with the expansion of her social network and established career, Hye-jin still expressed strong ties to South Korea through her family and friends as well as her Korean academic network, even sharing that her decision to relocate to the United States more permanently was a difficult transition. She said, "I felt bad that time I felt like and I, you know, abandoned the country that I was growing up." Even though she has a material home as well as important relationships based in Lexington, Hye-jin's experiences illustrate how belonging can connect both here and there, pushing forward the cogency of home as plural and multi-scalar. Again, while she has a physical home in Lexington where her husband and son reside, her sense of belonging is not solely tied to these local attachments, but she also maintains a sense of belonging enmeshed with her social, academic, and nostalgic attachments in and to South Korea.

This is further complicated by her desire to leave Lexington. Colored by her experiences during the pandemic, as previously discussed, Hye-jin expressed interest in relocating again to a more diverse city, explicitly citing her son and his upbringing as motivations for why she and her family would relocate:

> "I value and I appreciate all the supports that I received from my friends and network, but still system-wise, it's not really the place where I wanna educate my boy and maybe he may think something else, but now I cannot ask whether you want to live here or there. But I want to bring him in a place where he could have more diverse experiences…[and] more diverse city that he can enjoy."

While she has previously engaged in aspects typical of the highly educated immigrant, which highlights the privilege associated with her academic and professional pursuits, her attachments to South Korea as well as her encounters with prejudice and marginalization, have caused concern around how the homogeneous environment of Lexington, Kentucky may impact her son. Here, Hye-jin's articulation of belonging extends past her own person to her son. That is, her investment in her current material and physical space may be waning as sociopolitical power relations have marked her and, in turn, her son as others, challenging her transnational attachments and identity.

Moreover, returning to Anthias (2012), Hye-jin's interest in relocating could also be attributed to other influences such as her life stage or her social and political beliefs. As the mother to pre-school aged son, she may be focused on securing her son a culturally inclusive and diverse schooling experiences, which may not be readily available in Lexington, as she expresses interest in exposing her son to "more diverse experiences." This could also be influenced by her encounters during the pandemic. In addition to the experiences of fear and marginalization directed at her, she noted concerns for local public health, such as a lack of masking in her son's daycare before she withdrew him.

This articulation of belonging through family, specifically children, was echoed by other participants such as Rahul, who noted the difficulties which his children face:

> "Also, culturally like the kids' parents tend to hang out together. So, when we don't hang out with other, we don't have the opportunity to hang out with these other parents, our kids get sort of sidetracked, sidelined. And sometimes our kids will feel like they're not in the circle…I think it's sometimes harder for kids to grow up than for us to start as adults."

Rahul's concerns center around his children's minority identities and experiences of marginalization in a homogenous city, as he suggests, "…where you do feel racism is, I think, it's in school." From his children questioning why they don't have "peach color skin" and "blonde hair" to others approaching them in Spanish, these encounters have compelled his wife to consider moving to a larger multicultural, metropolis, like Hye-jin. Yet, as their children have gotten older, he says, they remain in Lexington, since even with these concerns, his children have attachments to Lexington such as friends, neighbors, and their schools and he and his wife have a robust social network and job security. So, Lexington is, in many ways, home for Rahul and his family.

But Lexington is not his only home, as he clarifies, "Home is Nepal. Uh, but Lexington is our home in the United States." With this perspective, Rahul articulates a transnational form of belonging connecting the here and there. As he further elaborates, while his family continues to celebrate Nepali holidays, such as Dussehra and Tihar, with local friends, they also participate in American holidays such as Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's:

> …even though we're Hindus, I don't want to deprive my kids of all the festivity in the US. So, Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year. We celebrate everything. We have a Christmas tree in the house even though we're not

> Christians but having a Catholic school background and I want to make sure that the kids understand Nepali culture, but they also are not alienated from the American culture.

Here, a new transnational space is generated through celebratory practices of engaging in festivities from here and there within a local material space forming new meanings that both attach people to multiple places and evoke a sense of belonging and attachment. Notably, within this new space not only are transnational ties highlighted, but the articulation of belonging is tied to people, including family, friends, and community. It should be further noted that in some cases, including a previous quote by Rahul, the boundaries between family, friends, and community can overlap and interlock.

Articulations of belonging as transnational varied, though, particularly attachments to material and physical spaces. For Diya, who recently immigrated to pursue a graduate degree, Lexington can never be home, as she stated, “I don't think [Lexington] would ever feel like home. Like, I really like it here. I think it's very nice. But I don't think anywhere in US could also feel at home.” While her material space is currently located in Lexington, it is notable that the power relations and cultural practices needed to for her to locate home in Lexington are not available. Diya points out two specific relationships absent from the physical space of Lexington: her family and research interests as grounded invested in India. But her articulation of belonging in Lexington can still be understood through a transnational lens in two ways.

First, her research interests and academic study link India with the United States as she maintains an investment interest in India while pursuing training in the United States connecting the here and there. Second, while family is cited as a reason to return to India, she also recognizes that her sister, who also relocated to the United States for

graduate school and remained for employment, is likely to remain, as she has found secure employment and has settled down with a partner in the United States. Here, it is possible to suggest that Diya's conception of family will include the material space of the United States so long as her sister remains.

Julian, who had relocated to Lexington for a job, offered a parallel articulation of belonging. Home, for Julian, is still in Peru and, while he recognizes a sense of comfort living in the United States, he does not feel connected to specific material or physical spaces here particularly, maintaining, "I have attachment to my family and to the field I study, but, uh, I don't generate attachments to institutions or to our or specific cities or states." Like Diya, his attachments are articulated through family and his livelihood, the field he studies, but, again, not to material or physical spaces. Belonging then is articulated through relational dynamics, particularly with his family, and a commitment to work but not the workplace itself. A transnational expression of belonging could be located both in the material or cultural space of Peru, as Julian still identifies this nation and physical location as home, but he may also expand transnational articulations of belonging about how power relationships such as familial relationships may yet cultivate a more nebulous and nonphysical conception of home and belonging.

By contrast, Diego, who immigrated to the United States through an educational exchange program, paid closer attention to the material in his articulation on belonging. As he defined home, he recognized that Lexington is home, in large part, due to his children who consider Lexington home. He noted, "Yes, [Lexington] has become our home and there are several things: our house, the physical structure, right? Well, the house that has become our home … the center point to where our kids gravitate." While

not necessarily a transnational approach to home and belonging, Diego reiterates the role of a physical material space in defining home and articulating a sense of belonging. Notably, for him and his family, the material structure of the home has gained personal meaning as it is the center point for the family, a space that of centering for his children.

Thus, articulations of home and belonging are embedded within local attachments and across transnational spaces. Through their stories, participants highlighted how belonging can be produced and maintained at various scales, which at times, may contradict the politics of inclusion and exclusion. As belonging is reoriented as multi-scalar, the paradoxical placement of the highly educated immigrant becomes clearer. Articulating belonging in these landscapes make evident how prejudicial discourse and actions can challenge the privilege attributed to highly educated migrants, such as their educational attainment and economic contributions. While they may occupy beneficial space, as noted by participants, the highly educated immigrant is still subjected to prejudicial discourse and actions due to processes of racialization and alienation. And as noted above, racializing encounters within the everyday as well as in the context of two crises, the Trump Administration and COVID-19 intensified the existing conditions countering the privilege often conferred upon highly educated immigrants.

Yet, within the micropolitics of everyday social interactions, participants voiced and acted upon their own articulations of belonging by creating new spaces, which foregrounded local attachments and connected the material to the transnational. Through these spaces and conceptualizations, the highly educated immigrant challenged fixed and limited understandings of home and belonging and expanded articulations and expressions of belonging to include both the here and there, the transnational. This

included challenges of both the privilege and conditionality attached to the highly skilled immigrant, as participants notably pushed back against exclusionary or restrictive notions of belonging navigating new pathways.

Reflecting on Articulations of Belonging(s) and Privilege

Navigating and negotiating articulations of belonging within a paradoxical space led Tim to multiple, personal articulations of home and belonging. To that extent, reflecting on participant stories presents specific looks on home and belonging which are important in that they complicate notions of belonging for some highly educated immigrant, yet cannot be extend to all of them. This acknowledgement discourages generalizations or casual arguments based upon the results of this thesis research. But, in this space, I provide reflections on how participants articulations of belonging can be further understood as transnational and multi-scalar exploring why this conceptualization of belonging is important for this thesis as well as how it contributes in responding to the question: can the privilege attached to the highly educated immigrant mitigate the challenges faced by immigrants?

In this empirical chapter, I have attempted to move past the dichotomy of belonging, such as place belongingness and the politics of belonging as discussed in the *Literature Review and Conceptual Framework*, and toward a conceptualization that embraces the complexities and ambivalences of home and belonging. Participants shared the production, maintenance, changing, and challenging of their ideas of home and belonging throughout an individual's life. Gloria's reflections on language and Hye-jin's relocation narratives provide instances of these experiences that are heterogeneous and particular.

Belonging can be conceptualized as strategic as Gilmartin, Wood, and O'Callaghan (2018) suggest, through their examination of belonging and mobility during Brexit and the Trump Administration, that although "national identities are always the products of history and politics, not merely cultural practices, beliefs, or ideologies … [so] it is more accurate to say that [current political frameworks of belonging] are the result of stitching together the available pieces in a strategic fashion" (2018, 62). But, as Yuval-Davis (2006) asserts, it can also be emotional. Constructions of belonging reflect "emotional investments" and "desire for attachment" which can be tied to relational dynamics, as Ho (2009) notes in her research on Singaporean transplants in London: "The family thus acts as the primary unit of emotional investment and attachment tying Singaporean transmigrants to the country" (Ho, 795; Yuval-Davis, 202). And, as this thesis considers, belonging can exist in multiplicity.

Transnational conceptions of belonging provide an opening to belonging as multi-scalar, as anywhere and everywhere, as local, or beyond, as here or there. Participants demonstrated various expressions of transnational belonging. Through language, community, livelihoods, and family belonging was articulated with the local foregrounded but with transnational ties abandoned to connect the local to spaces, cultures, and people beyond. Notably, these transnational practices were not fixed nor linear, but continuously negotiated and renegotiated, such as Benicio's progression from a low skilled irrigation worker to a college professor, which involved a return to school to complete a previously unfinished undergraduate degree.

Furthermore, engagement with belonging through a transnational lens contributes to push back of the idea of the migrant as homogeneous, as participants engaged with and

invested in communities outside of their national, ethnic, or cultural communities, defying the assumption of migrants' cultural predispositions, as suggested by Anthias (2012). This push back further aligns with Ehrkamp's (2005) proposal that "Transnational practices contribute to heterogeneity and struggles between conflicting identities and groups that are (re-)negotiated in the local place," therefore, enabling transnational ties and multiple attachments to enable local attachments (361).

So, how does engagement in belonging as transnational contribute to understanding highly educated immigrants' privilege and whether it can negate the challenges faced by immigrants? On one hand, access to the benefits of being highly educated, such as educational attainment and socioeconomic stability and mobility, did negate some of the challenges faced by immigrants such as limited mobility, both physical and economic. As some participants noted, their relocation provided them with socioeconomic stability and membership into certain communities, such as academic or work-based networks. This type of privilege can eclipse certain anxieties around finances as well as provide access to established and well-connected local social networks. On the other hand, most participants recognized that racialization and racialized encounters could not be avoided. In this context, the privilege associated with highly educated immigrants did not preclude participants from racist encounters. Incidents shared by participants, such as, Benicio, Elizabeth, Rahul, and Hye-jin, reiterate how in the micropolitics of the everyday are embedded within a larger sociopolitical discourse, which can mean that highly educated immigrants will still encounter anti-immigrant sentiment, regardless of their privilege.

While these experiences illustrate that highly educated immigrants' privilege does not negate the challenges faced by immigrants in totality, it can be said that an investment in transnational belongings and attachment to multiple spaces can allow an articulation of belonging that rebuffs exclusionary or racist discourse or boundaries since participants' experiences of belonging are not solely attached to the material or sociopolitical spaces of marginalization, including a singular nation-state. Although explicit connection to the United States as home was not a position taken by all participants, they did identify various manifestations of home. These identifications of home harkened back to national and cultural ties and were embedded in emotional investments, particularly those connected to friends and family. This personal dimension of belonging reminds us that belonging does not need to be confined to formal spaces. Likewise, transnational belonging contests this. As Wright (2015) explores more-than-human belonging through weak ties, she makes an important observation, noting that, "To practise belonging, to reimagine it, to co-become with other people, things and places, is an expression of hope in the present" (404). While this thesis does not engage in a more-than-human approach, Wright's assertion echoes participants' articulations of home and belonging, which while particular, are not unilateral. Instead, participants' articulation and practice of belonging were interconnected and multitudinous. Transnational belonging allowed participants both to harness their privilege and contest the conditionality of their position.

5. Conclusion

This thesis works to establish how articulations of belonging are produced and maintained throughout highly educated immigrants' everyday lives. Within this exploration, articulations of belonging are recognized as heterogenous and as transnational. This approach provides space in which to further understand the positionality of the highly educated immigrant, including the function of privilege. This approach supports movement toward a complex conceptualization of highly educated immigrants through a transnational and feminist lens, which locates the highly educated immigrant and their articulations of belonging within their everyday life, while also acknowledging that belonging can be sketched across and through spaces.

Through participants' articulation of belonging, the paradoxical space of the highly educated immigrant is established and reaffirmed. And, while highly educated immigrants can benefit from some aspects of their privilege, this privilege was unable to alleviate every challenge faced during the process of immigrating, other issues, particularly racialization. Still, the paradoxical landscape of the highly educated immigrant was more fully colored through their engagement with transnational belongings, which foregrounded the local, while drawing home across and through multiple spaces.

Turning to Ang's *On Not Speaking Chinese: Living Between Asia and the West* (2001), I want to further suggest that this paradoxical space is not only a transnational space, but one of hybridity. Now, hybridity has been employed in a multitude of manners, some which have been controversial or overly simplistic. Yet, for Ang, hybridity, which

is also understood as together-in-difference, incorporates both conceptions of fusion, friction, and the likes in tandem with "heterogeneity, diversity and multiplicity" (200).

To this end, then, highly educated immigrants frequently interact with spaces of hybridity and together-in-difference, challenging and restructuring spaces that may push them into essentialized notions of self, as Ang astutely articulates:

> We live in the paradoxical situation, then, that hybridity is still seen as a problem or an anomaly despite the fact that it is everywhere, because it is identity that has been privileged as the naturalized principle for social order. Therefore, it is the very preoccupation with demarcating the line between 'Chinese' and 'non-Chinese', 'Asian' and 'Western' … that I have wanted to problematize in this book. Against such essentializing moves, I wish to holdup the non-Chinese-speaking figure of the banana – 'yellow outside, white inside' – to stress the porousness of identities and, more importantly, the fact that they evolve and take shape through multiple interrelationships with myriad, differently positioned others. These interrelationships, whether economic, political, professional, cultural or personal, are never power-free, but they cannot be avoided, they have to be continually negotiated and engaged with somehow. More, these interrelationships are by definition constitutive of contemporary social life. This, of course, is what togetherness-in-difference is all about: it is about co-existence in a single world. (200)

Similarly, this thesis has attempted to push against essentialist notions of the highly educated immigrants, particularly the non-white and non-Western person. Therefore, the self in everyday life presented by participants is one who is not fragmented by experiences and encounters with exclusionary and uncomfortable spaces, but instead one who learns how to negotiate and engage with those awkward spaces to shape space in the needed or desired ways. This is not a passive engagement or objectification, but instead is an intersectional engagement established in everyday life—through living—as Ang notes above, these spaces are continually negotiated and define the contemporary social life

through the interrelationships and dynamics further contributing to articulations of belonging.

Before fully concluding, I want to turn towards three notable paths for future research which were identified through this thesis research. First, expansion of who is considered an immigrant should be considered. Research on highly skilled immigrants has been noticeably absent from discourse on immigration in the United States as a majority of immigrant and immigration scholarship focuses on refugees and labor immigrants. This absence is further located in a lack of human-focused research on highly skilled and highly educated immigrants, as available literature on this group of immigrants in the United States instead often focuses on their economic and labor standing and profitability centering issues such as the race for talent or the brain gain, waste, and drain.

This thesis attempts to contribute to the scholarship on highly skilled and highly educated immigrants that focuses on every day, lived experiences, which has largely been conducted in Europe and Australia. Through this work, I hope to challenge singular and fixed perceptions of the immigrant (or immigrants) pushing past objectifying conceptualizations. Although highly skilled and highly educated immigrants do, in some ways, benefit from the privilege of their positionality, further focusing research on lived experiences and everyday encounters within the micropolitics of host nations may push for a reorientation of privilege's role, particularly class and socioeconomic privilege, in alleviating racism or other forms of discrimination and marginalization targeted at immigrant groups.

Second, the use of self-selectivity in this thesis exposed disparities between self-identification and scholarship on highly skilled immigrants. As noted through the thesis, I found this demographic group to be very messy. This messiness was noted in contrast to attempts at clean categorization within existing scholarship on highly skilled immigrants (Bielewska, 2018; Jaskulowski and Pawlak, 2020; Plöger and Kubiak, 2018). Following the logic provided by other scholars, this thesis research initially limited the messiness to immigrants' methods of entry. Yet, throughout the interviews, it became clearer that the salience of the immigrant identity noted by participants did not align with prior definitions of the highly skilled immigrants. While the decision was made to adjust the thesis scope by identifying participants as highly educated immigrants in contrast to highly skilled immigrants, the question arose on how the immigrant should be defined.

Moreover, within this thesis, while skill level and socioeconomic positioning became flexible concepts or identity markers, participant's identities as immigrants were fixed—that is, immigrant was the noun and highly educated the adjective. So, while the literature on highly skilled immigrants is definite in its conceptualization, participants within this thesis pushed back on how the highly skilled immigrant is defined when the opportunity to self-select is presented. To this end, it may be interesting in future research to consider how this conflict between participant identification and research definitions can elucidate more nuanced approaches (or complementary conceptualizations) to acknowledge alternate articulations of the highly skilled immigrant in everyday encounters and experiences.

Finally, this research hopes to contribute to the continued scholarship on multiple and transnational belongings, both in forms and attachments, which should work from an

intersectional approach acknowledging the complexities of life. As noted through this thesis, belonging is understood as transnational, that is, it can be articulated through multiple factors as well as in multiple locations and through multiple scales. Although nation-states may be less inclined to formally recognize multiple belongings, personal attachments and endeavors persist. As noted by Gilmartin, Wood, and O'Callaghan (2018) in *Borders, Mobility, and Belonging in the Era of Brexit and Trump*:

> Belonging and attachment to place are not only a state of being, but always a state of becoming, most visible in the adaptations of those who acquire a new sense of belonging in a new place. These ideas, attachments and identities are durable, but never fully stable or secure. They are always vulnerable to competing claims, at multiple scales. (61)

The heterogeneity of immigrant belonging, and intersectionality of immigrant identities and experiences should be further addressed through a transnational lens. Literature on immigrant experience should consider or continue approaching and migrants and immigrant experiences as diverse and open ended. This approach pushes back against essentializing notions of the immigrant or reliance on predisposed conceptualizations, which may conflate identity with culture and nationality. As this thesis attempts to, participants who identify as immigrants should not be confined to national or ethnic patterns or practices, particularly in reference to the articulations of belonging and home. Approaching the immigrant and immigrant experiences, then, as transnational and intersectional can only create space for nuances in future research.

Furthermore, in relation to the paths detailed above, while this thesis work towards unraveling the complex relationship between belonging, race, perception, and privilege, complications arose in interviews with participants who identified as Latin* and Hispanic. The main problem identified was understanding the categorization of

Latin* and Hispanic persons as white, which often contrasted with participants' notions of self-identification. This was particularly distinguished in discussions on language and encounters with exclusionary boundaries, for, although, Latin* and Hispanic folks are demographically categorized as white, many experiences and stories shared by Latin* and Hispanic participants countered this categorization. While fields such as Chicana/o studies and ethnic studies may provide scholarship to address these issues more acutely within both theoretical and empirical works, following Pulido's call (2018), geography must address its neglect of discussions on the stickiness of race and ethnicity within a settler colonial state. Notably, Pulido's progress report carefully warns that the whiteness of the discipline may not allow this to be a universal call due to the loaded ethical and political nature of white people studying conflict on racially marginalized groups. Yet, even with these restraints, this thesis concurs with Pulido, that there is a desperate need within geography to consider the gaps present on studies of and approaches to studying race.

An essential, but slippery concept, belonging provides a vast space in which to unpack human experiences in relations to that which we encounter and form attachments to or with. Even with its slipperiness, belonging is something each of us understands, even, if it is a struggle to articulate it, especially, as our relation to belonging undergoes transformations. Yet, as the participants in this study elucidate, belonging is a double-edged sword, when expanded, as it can not only aid us in identify formation and place-making but can also inform us of when we are unwanted or unwelcome. Yet, through this thesis, this narrative is expanded as transnational conceptions of home and belonging call for a multi-scalar and multi-place approach to articulations of belonging. Furthermore,

thesis attempts to encourage a more in-depth exploration of both the directionality and positionality of research on belonging and immigrant experiences, which takes into consideration how participants define themselves. I do hope this research has done just that, or, at the least, moved towards that aim full of possibilities.

Appendix

Appendix 1: Interview Guide

Introductory Questions

1. Study Approval
    - **a.** Are you comfortable being recorded on Zoom?
        - i. If not, is note taking ok?
    - b. Do you have a preferred anonymous name to be used in research?
        - i. All names will be anonymous regardless and identifiers will be redacted
2. Demographic Information
    - a. Gender:
    - b. Age:
    - c. Race:
    - d. Ethnicity:
    - e. Country of Origin:
    - f. Highest Degree:
    - g. Occupation and Industry:
    - h. What is the reason you moved to Lexington?
    - i. How long have you lived in Lexington?
3. Ice Breaker
    - a. Can you take a minute or two and tell me more about yourself?

Grand Tour Questions

1. Would you walk me through your experience of moving to Lexington/the US?
2. From your experience, can you tell me about your transition to a new workplace?
3. How has your relocation affected your social relationships (i.e., family, friends, co-workers)?
4. During your time in Lexington, how have you interacted with the political discourse on international migration? Has it affected you? If so, how?
    1. Rephrasing: Have you found Lexington/the United States to be a welcoming place for newcomers? If so, why? What places/people/organizations make it feel welcoming. If not, could you describe what makes Lexington not welcoming?

Extended Interview Questions

2. Would you walk me through your experience of relocating to Lexington?
    - a. Would you tell me about your decision to move to Lexington?
    - b. Tell me what it was like when you first moved to Lexington.
    - c. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences relocating to Lexington?
3. From your experience, can you tell me about your transition to a new workplace?
    - a. What attracted you to your job in Lexington?
    - b. Did your workplace help you settle into Lexington? If so, how?

    c. Is there anything else you think is important for me to know about your experiences in a new workplace?
4. How has your relocation affected your social relationships (i.e., family, friends, co-workers)?
    a. What is it like maintaining relationships/forming new ones?
    b. How have you maintained relationships in previous places of residence?
        i. Is this a priority to you? If so, why? If not, why not?
    c. What else would you like to tell me about your social relationships (prior to relocating and after relocating)?
5. Have you found Lexington/the United States to be a welcoming place for newcomers? If so, why? What places/people/organizations make it feel welcoming. If not, could you describe what makes Lexington not welcoming?
    a. What was your impression of the United States and/or Lexington before you relocated?
        i. Has it changed since you relocated? If so, how? If not, why not?
    b. Do you keep up to date on US? What about global politics?
    c. What do you think about the immigrant rhetoric in the US?
    d. How, as an immigrant, did you experience the Trump administration?
        i. Did being an immigrant effect this experience or not?
    e. Is there anything else you would like to tell me on whether you felt welcomed as a newcomer?
6. Do you feel that Lexington has become your home?
    a. What makes it home? (Or why is it not your home)?

Concluding Questions

1. Is there anything that we have not discussed that you would like to return to or that we may not have covered?
2. Do you have any questions for me or about the research?
3. Would you like to be provided a version of your transcript to review?

Appendix 2: Participant Demographics

Participant Demographics (N=12)	Number of Participants
Age	
<30	3
30-50	6
>50	3
Gender	
Female	5
Male	7
Race	
White	5
Black	1
Asian	4
More than 1 race	1
Prefer not to answer	1
Ethnicity	
Latin/Hispanic	8
Not Latin/Hispanic	4
Time in Lexington	
Less than a year	2
1-10 years	7
More than 10 years	3

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