Following a long tradition of scholars in the international migration field, Elizabeth Aranda, Sallie Hughes, and Elena Sabogal offer a methodologically rich and theoretically sophisticated study that vividly contextualizes modern processes of migration and immigrant incorporation. In *Making a Life in Multiethnic Miami*, they portray causes and consequences of migration from Latin America and problematize the incorporation of Latino and Caribbean immigrants into the social and economic fabric of Miami, which is the American city with the highest proportion of Spanish-speaking population (63.7 percent) and home to 1.3 million immigrants—equivalent to 51 percent of the population of the city—of whom 93 percent originate from Latin America. Detailed descriptions of immigrants’ accounts through stages of departure, arrival, and settlement, and, in a few cases, return are examined through the concepts of ontological security and translocal social citizenship.

I

The book opens with the story of Alejandra, not a Mexican or Cuban immigrant, but an upper-middle-class Colombian immigrant with a college degree and a successful professional life. Alejandra exemplifies a professional woman in search of higher income and gender emancipation who leaves her family behind. Although Alejandra, like many other immigrants, came to the United States in search of the American Dream, she regrets the consequences of having done so. Through the exploration and interpretation of immigrants’ voices, the authors juxtapose the image of Miami as a safe haven for Latino immigrants in search of greater human security with their exclusionary experiences in the city. Immigrants’ experiences are marked by processes of racialization, occupational segmentation, absence or limits of their legal status, and barriers due to national-origin, class, and gender hierarchies.

The authors introduce two novel analytical elements: subjective self-placements on social ladders and racial structures, and emotions. In the analysis of social mobility and race relations, the authors describe and categorize how immigrants amalgamate and internalize their social positions. The data show how immigrants subjectively use class hierarchies they are confronted with in Miami in combination with class structures from their countries of origin, resulting in a new self-identification in a joint hierarchy—leading to anxiety and contradictions for the majority of immigrants who do not perceive upward mobility. The second novel analytical element is the incorporation of a sense of loss through immigrants’ voiced emotions. Migration inevitably carries the loss of stable and affirmative relationships for immigrants and the loss of their unconscious sense of trust, which the authors conceptualize by using Giddens’s concept of ontological insecurity. Immigration is described then as an ambivalent experience. Immigrants’ new destinations offer economic, physical, and in some instances psychic security at an emotional cost.

In the search for ontological security, immigrants engage in translocal practices to cope with anxiety generated by the ambivalence of their experience and maintain co-presence with their families and communities in their countries of origin by visiting relatives, calling regularly, and consuming homeland media. The authors adopt principles from the literature on transnationalism to analyze transborder practices, the broad concept of citizenship from the feminist perspective, and the local experiences of immigrants in Miami’s familiar cultural landscape to coin the phrase “translocal social citizenship.”

In essence, Making a Life in Multiethnic Miami uncovers—through Latino immigrants’ voices and emotions—the exchange between forms of security and vulnerability embedded in human mobility and analyzes how these are modulated in the most global, Latin city in the Americas.

II

Aranda, Hughes, and Sabogal skillfully navigate the life experiences of a large and diverse sample of immigrants and their processes of economic, social, and political incorporation in a rising global city. Their analysis provides contributions to the fields of international migration, transnational studies, urban sociology, race and ethnic relations, women’s studies, social psychology, and human geography. The book contains nine chapters, which are loosely grouped into three parts: contexts of migration, structural and institutional barriers to immigrants’ integration, and immigrants’ ways of coping. The first three chapters provide a rationale for the theoretical layout and describe the negative effects of neoliberal policies on economic, social, and physical security in Latin America, as well as post-9/11 immigrant policies that have resulted in the criminalization of immigrants. These first three chapters show how the global neoliberal project requires the participation of the state, but in very distinct and contradictory roles: as the promoter of capital flows and as the enforcer of national borders. State actions in the United States and in Latin America and the Caribbean have led to higher levels of insecurity in the region, which results in increased pressures to migrate, growth of the immigrant flow, and greater vulnerability for immigrants.

The second part of the book centers on how class, power, and racial relations and immigrants’ membership and degree of political representation shape immigrants’ strategies and modes of integration. Chapter Four offers an analysis of immigrants’ self-perceptions of social mobility. For many, their perceptions of downward social mobility upon migration, experiences of immobility in a secondary labor market, and, for some, their success stories reveal nuanced variations in the well-known U-pattern of social and economic mobility over time observed by Chiswick and colleagues (2005) when immigrants’ self-perceived social locations are introduced in the analysis.

Furthermore, the rich qualitative data incorporated in the analysis allows the reader to observe how immigrants’ subjective notions of class and class belonging in Latin America and their experiences in Miami’s labor market shape immigrants’ self-esteem and social security in an economically bifurcated context that “caters to the rich and disadvantages the poor and middle classes” (p. 112). The authors identified variables associated with subjective upward mobility as well as barriers for social mobility. Those in search of educational opportunities, those of rural origin, and women are more likely to perceive upward mobility. For women, and particularly for women from rural origins, migration is an opportunity for emancipation, work outside the home, increased education, and a new lifestyle. The labor incorporation of professionals from Latin America is limited due to language barriers, difficulties in the transference of professional credentials or acknowledgement of past labor experience, and lack of or limited legal status. Many immigrants with college degrees and professional experience occupy contradictory class locations (one according to their human capital and another according to their current income and occupation). Moreover, those who experienced working conditions of exploitation, declines in occupational status, and loss of control over their work life expressed enhanced social and psychic insecurity as a result of migration.
Although immigrants’ sense of security is primarily shaped by their experiences in the labor market, the lack of voice and political representation for non-Cuban Latino immigrants in Miami is a source of insecurity that erodes their sense of belonging. The Cuban model of political incorporation—based on automatic legal status and government financial support, ethnic solidarity, spatial concentration, interest in domestic policy for the exile community, and possession of key positions in the political arena—reinforces and reproduces differences due to national origin, race, class, and gender. As Cubans symbolically represent Latinos in Miami, only limited political channels remain for emergent policies that can benefit other immigrant groups. With the exception of Haitians, no other Latino or Caribbean national origin group has successfully incorporated into South Florida politics. Unfortunately, the Nicaraguan community is geographically dispersed and has low rates of naturalization; Colombians are divided along political lines; Mexicans are polarized by their class and ethnic origins; and the Venezuelan community, although growing rapidly, is still in the process of establishing itself in the local political landscape.

As in the analysis of social mobility, the analysis of race in multiracial Miami is informed by a combination of immigrants’ understandings of racial hierarchies derived from their countries of origin, usually associated with class and indigenous roots, and the U.S. racial structure. The authors identified, as has been observed in other studies, variations of the traditional black and white color line (Lee and Bean 2010). These new categories conflate national origin, class, race, and legal status (p. 212) and reinforce institutional racism—evidenced in their analysis of the Cuban-Haitian divide. Cubans experience privilege as “honorary whites,” and blackness is denigrated (p. 228). Although the pro-immigrant environment created by Cubans can be welcoming for young immigrants (Steck and Steck 2009), according to the authors, these emerging racial categories are experienced among immigrants through diverse forms of discrimination-provoking anxieties of being perceived in “suspicious ways,” which can be identified as an additional source of immigrants’ psychic insecurity.

The last part of the book contains the analysis of immigrants’ responses to sources of their ontological insecurity in Miami and how Miami’s cultural context and geographical location facilitate their simultaneous engagement in translocal and placemaking practices. Immigrants who have lived in other areas of the United States perceive Miami as a culturally familiar and inclusive environment. The use of Spanish or Creole is the most important cultural element in the achievement of immigrants’ goals and is also perceived as a source of comfort. However, the analysis of Spanish use suggests that the use of a common language cannot overcome differences in national origin (p. 301). Culturally disadvantaged immigrants tend to seek membership in their conational group and find the racial and ethnic hierarchies exclusionary. Stereotypes, accents, meanings of words, and even humor styles in Spanish media dominated by Cuban and Mexican companies reinforced their subordinate status. The critical analysis of racial hierarchies, immigrant social integration, and identity formation leads to a paradox: even in Miami, “a Latino foreign city” to many Americans, home of the Cuban enclave—where Spanish use is predominant and Latinos hold economic and political power—a pan-ethnic Latino community is not identified; what prevail are intra- and interethnic hierarchies that are rooted in social structures of origin and destination and shaped by state policies. This paradox opens new questions on the formation of ethnic solidarity and pan-ethnic consciousness among immigrants from regional blocs concentrated in global cities.

III

Several books have contributed to the place-specific literature on Miami and the social make-up of the city. Making a Life in Multiracial Miami is an important addition to this literature. Chronologically, City on the Edge (Portes and Steck 1993) offers an account of the rise of Miami as an important urban center, identifies the elements contributing to the emergence and sustainability of the Cuban enclave, and compares how other
racial (African Americans) and immigrant
groups (Haitians and Nicaraguans) fared in
the city in the 1980s and were confronted
with the changing landscape resulting from
the Mariel boatlift and the Liberty City riots.
In *Miami: Mistress of the Americas*, Jan Nijman
(2011) describes the transformation of Miami
from one the most inaccessible parts of the
country to the first hemispheric city—the
most centrally connected city in the Americas:
post-industrial, global, multicultural, segre-
gated, and transient. *Making a Life in Multieth-
nic Miami* explores immigrant livelihoods
in a rising global city, challenges the role of
the Cuban enclave in the contemporary
Latino immigrant community, and critically
assesses the neoliberal and racial projects
of the state as a numerous and increasingly
diverse flow of Latino immigrants arrive in
the city and make it their home.
In short, Aranda, Hughes, and Sabogal
offer a conceptually sophisticated and rich
analysis of immigration in a segregated,
unique, and rising global city; they provide
new methods for the inclusion of emotions
and subjective perceptions needed in the
literature on international migration; and
they pave the way for the incorporation of
more nuanced analysis on the confluence of class, racial, and ethnic rivalries and legal
status in urban areas with high concentra-
tions of immigrants.

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