Disconnected and Online: Privileged Lives of the Transnational Migrants in Mexico City

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ABSTRACT
As global mobility surges, Mexico City has emerged as a favored destination for remote-working professionals due to its unique fusion of cultural allure and economic convenience. This paper explores the interplay between macroeconomic trends and quests for self-actualization among lifestyle migrants, informed by interviews and other fieldwork conducted in Mexico City in early 2023. It unravels the complex interplay of factors shaping attitudes, behaviors, and collective identity among these lifestyle migrants and how their conscious embeddedness dissolves as geographic arbitrage imbues them with new privileges.

KEYWORDS
Digital Nomads; Lifestyle Migrants; Transnational Migration; Mexico City; Socio-Spatial Exclusion; Gentrification; Privilege; Embeddedness

INTRODUCTION

A roster of internet cafés keeps life interesting for David, a thirty-something-year-old from Los Angeles who relocated to Mexico City in mid-2020 at the height of the pandemic. Today, he's at Blend Station in Condesa, with plans to visit a different store of the same chain in Roma Norte in a few days. English menus detail the diverse beverage selection, from various milk types to specialty drinks. The ambient hum of gentle lo-fi beats sets the backdrop, accompanied by the murmur of English conversations rising above the rhythmic clicks of laptops tethered to wall outlets. Baristas, familiar with interacting with foreigners, effortlessly switch to English after a warm "hola" to take orders. David will work here for most of the day before heading to the gym, potentially stopping by Walmart for a quick grocery run. Later, he might meet up with some *"expat buddies"* at a nearby bar.

David is part of the 1.6 million US citizens currently residing in Mexico—a number that has surged in recent years, most notably a 69.9 percent increase in 2022 from 2019.[1] Amidst the rising waves of global mobility, Mexico City has become a sought-after destination for remote-working professionals in their twenties and thirties. Lifestyle migration, as defined by prominent migration scholars Benson and O'Reilly, is the movement of relatively affluent individuals to new destinations in pursuit of a better way of life.[2] Attracted by the city's moderate climate, culinary delights, aesthetic charm, and vibrant culture, coupled with favorable tax policies and proximity to the United States, these white-collar workers are seizing the opportunity to explore new horizons while maintaining their foreign income. Despite the acclaim for the ease of acclimation to a city catering to lifestyles reminiscent of their home countries, concerns are mounting over changes to the city's fabric. Among locals, material impacts of the heating housing market dominate concerns. Housing costs in Mexico City have surged over the past decade, with national house prices rising nearly 12 percent over 2022-2023—the largest annual increase on record, according to the Federal Mortgage Society—while the average sales price of a new home in the United States dropped slightly. Mexico City claims the title of the country's most expensive housing market, with the average apartment price hovering around US$202,000, which is $85,000 above the national average. Upscale districts like Condesa and Polanco, prized for architecture, culture, and culinary scenes, boast some of the city's highest prices, ranging from US$34.37 to US$92.90 per square meter. Last year, the average apartment price in these neighborhoods was around US$600,000, with luxury villas ranging from US$2 million to US$4 million. In Roma Norte, the average residential property price per square meter has surged from $1,500 USD in 2010 to $3,500 in 2023. This surge has made it challenging for many long-time residents to afford to live there, leading to the closure of small businesses due to rising rent, especially in Condesa, Roma Norte, and historic districts. Meanwhile, a 2021 survey of Mexico City residents revealed that 55 percent faced challenges meeting rent or mortgage payments.[3] Almost a third relocated during the pandemic, with 60 percent citing affordability issues as the primary reason. A separate 2020 study highlighted 'alarmingly high' vacancy rates in newly constructed developments, suggesting central housing unit availability was not the primary issue, but rather unaffordability.[4] Meanwhile, city services and commerce are evolving in response to the newcomers. The field of urban geography acknowledges

these trends, but grapples with applying the term 'gentrification' to non-Western contexts.[5] [6] Mexico City, with its proximity and popularity among foreign nationals, demands unique consideration and urgency.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The surge of skilled individuals moving across international borders has sparked significant interest in recent years since the start of the pandemic, which inspired quests for self-actualization and lifestyle change, largely among privileged classes of the Global North. King and Ruiz-Gelices have observed how mobility has been perceived as a vehicle to construct a personal life-course especially evident among young, educated people.[5] As anthropology scholar Hoey puts it, "the choice made of where to live is consciously, intentionally also one about how to live."[6] Ehn argues that this observation is particularly applicable to the years following the pandemic when the world opened up which prompted a desire for change and self-actualization in a time of crisis.[7] In doing so, they may form what psychologist Proshansky termed a place identity, or "those dimensions of self that define the individual's personal identity in relation to the physical environment by means of a complex pattern of conscious and unconscious ideas, feelings, values, goals, preferences, skills, and behavioral tendencies relevant to a specific environment."[8] In the same vein, Savage commented on the ability to attach one's "own biography to their chosen residential location."[9] O'Reilly and Benson have studied this phenomena extensively, from French lifestyle migrants seeking exotic lifestyles in Marrakech, to older Americans moving to Mexico, Costa Rica, and Panama, people from all walks of life now view later life as an opportunity for a fresh start and new adventures in stimulating environments.[2] Accordingly, 'life planning and daily activity' becomes an opportunity for 'self-actualization.'[10] Though they convey various degrees of self-awareness and moral indifference, which Kaddar considers and categorizes,[11] they are unable to escape the "tourist gaze"[12] that Urry assigns to travelers who view foreign places through a lens shaped by their expectations, desires, and cultural background.

Critics like Elliot have scrutinized the individualization thesis, contending that it heavily relies on a rational choice framework while overlooking the emotional and aesthetic impacts propagated by mass media, popular culture, and personal experiences.[13] It also plays down how gender, ethnicity, social class, age and national differences still shape choices and outcomes, which has been studied extensively by Mythen.[14] Finally, it fails to recognize how macroeconomic factors are woven into these lifestyle changes , such as the opportunities spurred by globalization, including the rise of services and the knowledge economy, which Sassen and Castells explore in their exploration of cities and global networks.[15] [16] Neo-liberal governments have gone so far as to reduce barriers to skilled labor mobility by simplifying bureaucratic procedures and immigration laws rather than risk losing foreign investment and skills. Some scholars balance these two sides. Economic sociologists such as Pikettty have long promoted this view of embeddedness in global macroeconomic systems.[17] In migration research, Ong advocates for a balance between the cultural rationale behind migration with individual agency and motivation for capital accumulation.[18] Similarly, Hayes and Zaban point out that perceived motivation in search of a better quality of life often masked desire for geographic arbitrage and economic power in a foreign market.[19]

When considering the emergent lifestyles taken up by these migrants, an important study to consider was conducted on US migrants in Ecuador, in which Hayes considers the socio-spatial exclusion and altered social fabrics that he terms 'gringolandia.'[20] A similar pattern was found in Nicaragua by Rodgers who described 'network-type enclaves' that were formalized by an exclusive fortified network for urban elites, based on the privatization of security and construction of high-speeds roads.[21] In Mexico City, the reputation of being 'nomad friendly' has created a multiplier effect, often intensified by commercial revitalization and urban regeneration programs identified by Delgadillo.[22] Scholars across the board have identified the contribution of foreign workers to rising housing costs and the displacement of residents, resembling typical gentrification patterns seen in the Global North. Derived from Anglo-Saxon theoretical foundations, the term "transnational gentrification" gained renewed relevance amid pandemic-induced international migration patterns.[23] However, its applicability outside the West has been extensively debated due to the complex structural inequalities and power dynamics shaping urban redevelopment in the Global South.

The discussion now explores the perceptions and experiences of these lifestyle migrants in early 2023. First, I argue that though disguised in appeals to lifestyle preferences, economic geographic arbitrage was central in deciding to migrate, although the desire to travel and self-discover was also significant. Secondly, the paper explores their experiences in Mexico City. Upon settlement, they tended to congregate in similar areas of the city and limit interactions to fellow migrants where their lack of Spanish was not a constraining factor, and they could build collective knowledge about taxation and immigration policies that facilitate this lifestyle. While macro-economic factors were front of mind when deciding to move, the desire for self-actualization became more significant and overrode conscious embeddedness in favor of quests for self-actualization and geographic arbitrage.

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Overview

After obtaining approval from the Institutional Review Board for human research, I conducted 23 semi-structured interviews from January through May of 2023, which were sourced via private chats on WhatsApp and Facebook. I put out two

advertisement blasts on each platform to source interviews and schedule meetings, which took place both in-person and over Zoom. Two were removed due to their upbringing in Mexico. The cohort was majority male (16 vs 6), which was largely attributable to sampling methods and accessibility of interview subjects. Most were millennials or of the Boomer Generation. The most frequent country of origin was the US, along with other predominantly white, industrialized, rich countries like the UK and Australia, but there were also two from India and one from Taiwan. Other than those three, the subjects were majority white (13), and then the remaining five were people of color from the US. The names included in have been invented, although their characters, demographic descriptions and circumstances are consistent with my interview subjects.

Note on Sampling Methods:
This research was conducted in compliance with ethical standards and protocols for research involving human subjects. All participants provided informed consent prior to participating in the study, and their privacy and confidentiality were protected throughout the data collection and analysis process. In order to attract more respondents and humanize my request, I included a public profile picture with my Facebook post. Many of my early respondents were single older white men.[33] Secondary research suggests that this is partly a reflection of the demographics of my subject group, but regardless; my approach to attracting interview candidates affected responses. When meeting and conversing with my subjects, I was careful not to disclose any personal information that could expose me to unnecessary. When I conducted in-person interviews, I ensured that our meetings took place in public, busy locations. In an attempt to diversify my interviews, another group I reached out to was the women-only WhatsApp forum "Hermanas"—a branch of an online community of 400+ women spread across 40 cities that self-describes as a "global feminine movement, contributing to female evolution" that is a "resource for connection and communication with like-minded women, and a collaborate ecosystem of high-quality content." While walking around districts in Mexico City known for their large populations of American expats—Roma Norte, Polanco, Condesa—I approached strangers with American accents and quickly asserted whether they fit the interview profile that I was seeking. My inevitable bias towards 'approachable looking' individuals is laden with my personal bias, which I will attempt to address by including comparative demographic data about my chosen. As a researcher, my background as a privileged individual from the Global North shaped my perspectives and interactions in Mexico City, prompting critical reflection on power dynamics and biases. Historical colonization patterns between Mexico and the US have left lasting cultural and economic disparities, influencing community dynamics and my own positionality as a white researcher and mobile agent. I kept this in mind as I conducted interviews and opted to focus on lifestyle migrants, rather than formalized interviews with locals, to minimize power imbalances and avoid extractive practices.

A Note on Language
For the purpose of this thesis, I will also use the term 'gentrification' to characterize urban effects, recognizing its imperfections but deeming it useful for conveying concepts to an Anglo-American audience. I will also mostly refer to my subject group as 'migrants' unless I am discussing the work of another scholar who uses a specific term. Though there is a resounding preference for elevated classifications labels like 'expat' in my own research, as well as that of scholars Kunz[24] and Cranston,[25] I aim to encompass the diverse categories of remote workers, expats and digital nomads with varying degrees of mobility. Moreover, I want to avoid false elevation or validation above any other type of migrant. The term 'migrant' is politically charged and often used derogatorily. However, the reality is that my subject group is engaged in the same action: moving across international borders. Migration must be considered from a global angle that includes the forms of privileged migration like nomadism. Instead of compartmentalizing these domains, it's valuable to consider the assumptions and inquiries that gain relevance within migration studies when we broaden the scope of "migration" to encompass diverse manifestations of privileged transnationalism.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

"What brings you to Mexico City?": The Urge to Migrate
The *"itch to go somewhere"* was a common theme among migrants was a recurring sentiment that was perhaps unsurprising given the timing of these interviews three years after a global pandemic which upended ways of living and kickstarted the remote work boom. This perspective should be immediately noted as a privileged one, which suggests that the pandemic represented an opportunity for change, rather than a period of financial insecurity or danger as it did for the majority of the world. Certainly, numerous interviewees implied that shifts in their existential perspectives fueled a longing for relocation. The translocation of lifestyle migrants was largely shaped by individual choice, rather than structural necessity, though some individuals openly talked about dissatisfaction with their prior socio-economic status in their country of origin. The temporary unique appeal of Mexico City—attributed in part to its lenient travel restrictions, specifically, the country's decision not to close borders to international air travel—became a key factor in their considerations. If this were the sole reason, one might expect this trend to be short-lived. However, the prevalence of responses that referred to pandemic-induced changes in the workplace that facilitated remote work suggest that the pandemic accelerated ongoing long-term institutional changes that facilitated such migrant flows.[15] Even for those who did not reference the pandemic, changes to their personal and professional lives were implied to support or incentivize translocation. Flexible work arrangements demonstrate how mobility is both premised and shaped by ability.

Other factors contributed to Mexico City's unique appeal during this time and otherwise, although of the interviews conducted as part of this study, only three moved before the pandemic. Given the small sample size, this should not be understood as an accurate representation of the transnational migrant population in Mexico City, but it does gesture at a trend. Upon first glance, motivations for moving to Mexico City can be grouped into two camps: economic and 'quality of life narratives.' Alan, a migrant in his mid-twenties working in tech who had been in Mexico City for eight months, gleefully explained the economic pull factors that had motivated his move: *"Mexico is cheap, everything is cheap: rent, food, drink."* Almost without exception, every respondent gave similar reasons, with many like Alan listing it as their primary motivation, echoing Recchi's arguments for the economic motivations. Others made direct comparisons to other major cities, such as New York or San Francisco, wherein they emphasized the appeal of the relatively low cost of living. In their assessments, interviewees included goods (food and alcohol), services (Uber and domestic labor), and rent. One or two referenced the perceived flexibility of foreign tax systems, specifically the US's foreign earned income exclusion that allows qualifying taxpayers to exclude a portion of their foreign earned income from taxable income. The perceived affordability, it was revealed, was often the reason individuals chose to extend their stay indefinitely. Colby, for example, had originally intended to stay in Mexico City for half a year, but was still there almost two years later. He explained his continued presence: *"Because it's so cheap, it's very easy for me to stay."*

Others were less upfront about their fiscal motivations and hastened to clarify that they did not consider economic factors to be the most significant aspect of their choice. Some sought to contradict this previously held assumption with complaints that the city was more expensive than they had originally anticipated; others expressed discontent over the local wages and prices, especially when they were perceived as above market rates. Jim, a financial services professional from Florida, described a *"gringo rent differential,"* and complained that *"it's still fucking expensive relative to what the locals are paying."* Meanwhile, some individuals pushed back on the perception that remote workers were all wealthy, a point that reflects research showing the heterogeneity among skilled migrants from Iredale and Vertovec.[26] [27] Tanya, an African American college student, and Gio, a Philippines expat, emphasized the range of prices in the city, and suggested that they often felt the need to make compromises due to their perceived low socio-economic background in the context of their country of origin. However, when asked to hypothesize why others might move to Mexico City, there was consensus that cost was the most important factor.

Though all interviewees gave at least some mention to economic factors, most quickly moved on to discussing other motivations that can be grouped into the bucket 'quality of life' category. Factors relating to work optimization, such as internet reliability, convenient positioning with respect to the US—specifically common time zones and proximity—were frequently mentioned. Many emphasized the convenience of being able to move quickly between the countries, with the implication that they took frequent back and forth trips for both professional and social purposes.

> *"It's kind of the closest place outside of the US except for Canada, right? Four hours to L.A., three hours and change to Miami, five to New York. So you know, it's so easy for us to hop in and out of the US"* (Colby, March 2023).

Other livability factors included the climate, food, walkability, amenities, and nebulous references to culture, though there was a consistent tension between economic motivations for migration and other socio-cultural factors. Most interviewees emphasized that economic factors were only a small part of their decision to move to Mexico, and that they were secondary to other 'quality of life' factors. However, upon closer examination we see that many of these 'quality of life' motivations are made possible by newly gained economic privilege via geographic arbitrage, which has been commented on by Hayes and Zaban.[19] Based on an analysis of 557 global cities, Mexico City ranks 341st on the cost-of-living index. For migrants moving from countries with a stronger currency, the relative weakness of the Mexican peso, combined with the low-cost of labor power, goods and services in Mexico facilitated an elevated standard of living that would have previously been out of range due to economic status.

Manifestations of this were particularly apparent when it came to leisure activities such as interstate travel, enjoyment of high-quality restaurants, and frequent use of services that facilitate easy passage within the city such as Uber. It can be inferred that many of these benefits were previously inaccessible due to their previously held socio-economic status. Moreover, just as Hoey found that lower costs of living allowed older American adults in Ecuador to live up to certain aging ideals that were culturally important to them, the desirability of more expensive experiential amenities speak to the desire for holistic well-being. balance between personal and professional lives, and in-person experiences following the pandemic.[6] The consistent implication was that such manifestations would not have been possible in their countries of origin due to cost barriers. However, it should be noted that migrants from countries without the extreme exchange rate differential placed noticeably less emphasis on economic factors. Gio from Manila, Philippines expressed uncertainty about whether it would be *"practical financially"* to become a permanent resident in Mexico City because his money was held in Philippine pesos. Migrants from countries with weaker currencies were much less likely to describe Mexico City as entirely low-cost, even if they did not explicitly discuss currency or exchange rates. According to Sanjay from India, Mexico City was *"not too much expensive, not too much cheap—it's in the middle."* Considering this

caveat, therefore, we can conclude that fulfilling Hoey's theory of potentiality and living out *"the Beverly Hills of Mexico"* (Henry, February 2023), so to speak, implies the capital power to do so.

In their assessments of what made Mexico City desirable, many migrants invoked comparisons to other cities. The loci for these comparisons spanned Europe, Asia, Canada and the US, although mentions of these cities were not necessarily grounded in their current reality or personal encounters. Instead, many individuals were drawing comparisons based on their conceptualized notions of these destinations, having never actually visited them, and so may be interpreted as references to the nebulous category of an imagined 'abroad.' The overall vagueness and lack of deep knowledge of the city prior to moving indicated an imagined Mexico City that serves to contrast their experiences in their country of origin. This sentiment is encapsulated in the comment, *"I like to say Mexico City was my favorite city in the Americas that I'd never been to"* (Steve, March 2023). The findings echo Benson's work on imaginaries in lifestyle migration,[28] in which she argues that to demonstrate that migration is revealing of imaginings that often result in a mismatch between expectations and lived experiences. Such was the impression given that these lifestyle migrants' plans were not rooted in research or experience, but rather hyper-individualized fantasy. That said, some implied that their choice of Mexico City over the comparison city was due to a decline in their countries of origin. Individuals from the US specifically recalled the *"political bullshit"* (Jim, February 2023) and described Mexico City as a *"step away."* Often, lifestyle migrants reported being *"inspired"* by friends or online acquaintances who had made the move and being comforted by the endorsement of online communities over amenities such as internet access and security. A few respondents included a romantic partner in their explanations, others listed family. The implication was that the presence of 'in-group' members in Mexico City served as a proxy vetting process by confirming the veracity of Mexico City's reputation for offering an enhanced quality of life. A multiplier effect thus seems likely, given the frequency of responses that mentioned personal contacts that pre-existed their move. Mexico City was compared to Beverly Hills, the West Village (New York), Amsterdam, and Taipei City. Americans often noted traces of European influences in the city, specifically Roma Norte and Condesa, with Eleanor even remarking, *"culturally, it's so European!"* (April 2023). However, the majority of comparisons were contrasts, vague references to 'culture,' and expressions of dissatisfaction with their home region. Individualism was a common critique from those who came from the US, with several stating that they were *"kind of over that environment"* (Alan, February 2023). Factors such as the cost of living, *"political bullshit"* (Jim, February 2023), and other signs of previously attractive areas in the US *"going really downhill."* (David, February 2023) were also mentioned. Encapsulating these sentiments, Tanya stated *"I can't be picky if I want to leave America"* (Tanya, April 2023).

These negative characterizations could be seen as a form of escapism, not exclusive to Mexico City as a destination, and diminishing of arguments that its cultural characteristics presented significant pulls to these lifestyle migrants. However, dismissing references to 'culture' would be overly simplistic and misleading. While there are undoubtedly economic factors which contribute towards this migration trend,[29] they need to be understood within the context of the other considerations which influence individual relocation, such as mentions of culture and lifestyle. Many interviewees explicitly pointed to individualism in the US as motivating their move, suggesting that Mexico City symbolized a departure from this cultural norm, for which there has been growing distaste among young millenials since the pandemic re-invoked the need for collective responsibility. Nevertheless, few provided detailed accounts of any collectivist experiences of lifestyle choices since their arrival, mirroring the lack of perceptible cultural change in the US despite the vocal criticism of individualistic capitalism. While motivations may have been rooted in macro-economic realities and desire for an escape from the hyper-individualism of the US, upon arrival personal fantasies and interests took precedent as they grew in privilege and the returns of mutualism diminished.

The overarching impression that these migrants sought to construct a new life was accompanied by the desire for a new identity, enabled by their decision to move abroad alone and unmarried. Most expressed an expectation that physical relocation would bring about more than just a change in address; rather, they hoped to form a place identity, as Proshansky describes,[8] defined by the activities and lifestyles made newly available to them due to socio-economic opportunities. With diminished importance placed on categories of occupation or nationality, these individuals construct identities through the consumption of leisure goods, services. They strive to live out this imagined identity through their behaviors and the relationships they pursue with others. This desire for an imagined lifestyle was particularly evident among those individuals who mentioned a desire for a romantic partner as one of the reasons for moving. For Kevin, a man in his forties who had lived in Mexico City for just under a year, the change in location unleashed a broad spectrum of new hopes:

> *"Maybe I can find a wife or an apartment. I've been single for a long time now and I haven't really had the time to think about it, but now if the cards are right, money is comfortable, and everything is in my favor, why not?"* (Kevin, April 2023).

The quest for a romantic partner was a common theme in my interviews but cannot be generalized given the limitations of my sampling methodologies. Numerous men suggested a noticeable increase in their appeal to romantic or sexual partners upon relocating to Mexico City compared to their home countries. A few pointed to height as a factor—the average height of a Mexican is 172cm, compared with 175.3cm in the US—, insinuating that standing among Mexican locals made them appear taller

and, consequently, more attractive. Additionally, several men subtly alluded to their newfound relative prosperity and crucially, perceived prosperity as white foreigners among Mexican locals, which elevated their social status, particularly in the realm of dating. Notably, individuals who remarked on their enhanced romantic appeal tended to be of European descent or lighter skin tone. Colorism is deeply rooted in Mexico, manifesting in socioeconomic disparities associated with lighter skin tones.[28] This deeply rooted issue reflects and perpetuates historical legacies and societal attitudes, which create self-fulfilling associations between lighter skin with privilege. The migration of newcomers with lighter skin further reinforces such colorism, which continues to mold social dynamics and shapes opportunities in Mexican society. However, their understanding of this shift often lacked nuance and leaned toward self-aggrandizement, echoing work done on sex tourism that has seen extensive study in Southeast Asia[29], South America[30] and Africa.[31]

Migration for these migrants was more than a change in location. They developed a fantasy of an imagined life that would be afforded by residence in Mexico City where their process of self-actualization could take effect. Nevertheless, the individualistic drive for a higher quality of life is inseparable from the underlying desire for geographic arbitrage, economic leverage within a foreign market, and reaction to macroeconomic trends that lend a more privileged existence in foreign markets.[19]

"Right at Home": Occupying the City

As post-migration routines developed, patterns emerged in the spaces the migrants occupied, the communities they joined, their proficiency in the Spanish language, and their immigration and taxation statuses. These inquiries delve into the behavioral patterns of migrants and offer insight into their integration into the intricate fabric of Mexico City's socio-economic landscape. The narratives that unfolded from these discussions provide insights into the multifaceted impact of these mobile agents on the city, shedding light on the dynamics of their interactions within its diverse societal and economic spheres. Echoing the patterns observed by Hayes and Rogers, each interviewee disclosed residing in four central neighborhoods, Condesa, Polanco, Santa Fe, and Roma Norte, which are among the most affluent neighborhoods in Mexico City. Consequently, the majority of Airbnbs were concentrated in this region. Nearly all participants made remarks about the 'livability' of their chosen neighborhood, either implicitly or explicitly comparing it to their home country. They often highlighted the abundance of parks, restaurants, and shopping districts. Some praised the *"sophistication"* (Eleanor, April 2023) of the residents, noting they were *"different from the rest"* (Colby, March 2023), while others contrasted these areas with what they described as "ghetto areas" (Gio, March 2023). In these neighborhoods, a sense of belonging prevailed, with few expressing feelings of being out of place; instead, many reported feeling *"right at home"* (David, February 2023).

Perceived safety was another common topic. As Low points out, perceptions of safety and crime can differ based on factors such as race, class, and nationality, but that privileged foreigners often gravitate towards affluent neighborhoods or gated communities in urban areas, where they may feel a sense of familiarity and security akin to their home countries.[32] These areas typically offer amenities such as high-quality housing, private security, and access to exclusive facilities. Many migrants expressed concerns about residing in neighborhoods without a significant presence of other foreigners, viewing them as potentially risky areas associated with Mexico's reputation for cartel violence and drug-related issues. According to interview subjects, Condesa and the other listed neighborhoods were *"away from danger."* One interview subject explicitly linked the prevalence of foreigners to safety:

> *"Polanco is a good place, so is Condensa, Colonia, Roma Norte. These are the good places, I've heard. Polanco-Condensa is the safest place because many foreigners are there. I saw there are people at almost every time in the night and police are patrolling. So I think it's a safe place, many foreigners are there"* (Gio, March 2023).

The outcome has been urban fragmentation and segregation, echoing the network-type enclaves in Managua Nicaragua identified by Rodgers.[42] Specifically, the neighborhoods of Roma Norte, Condesa, and Polanco have gained reputations for being predominantly occupied by foreigners. Initiatives such as renovations in public spaces, infrastructure investment, and policy changes aimed at attracting foreign investment have further intensified this effect.[43] Local taco stands and bodegas, once owned by locals, have transformed into yoga studios and cafes in response to shifting demographics and preferences. Even in shared physical spaces, lifestyle migrants in foreign countries actively seek out a community of like-minded individuals to foster a sense of identification.[44] These communities are often formed through online forums and meet-up groups, with online travel communities leading to offline interactions. Building on cue utilization theory, social balance theory, and uncertainty reduction theory, Kunz and Seshadri illustrate how individual reputation, online communication, and perceived similarity among travelers promote in-group socialization, mediated by trust and sympathy.[45] The majority of interviewees described their social circles as primarily composed of migrants *"who were in the same boat."* Shared life experiences and an *"open-minded culture"* formed the essential foundations of these friendships. Despite this commonality, many expressed an appreciation for the diversity within the expat community, welcoming individuals from various high-income, predominantly white countries such as France, the Netherlands, Australia, and the United States. Some individuals expressed a particular affinity for in-group members from ethnic minority backgrounds, and it was clear that the pursuit of community was necessarily an active process that rewarded extraversion.[35] Many

interviewees reported utilizing apps and websites to find meet-up groups for fellow expats. These groups typically convened at bars or restaurants weekly, providing a platform for individuals to exchange life stories and offer recommendations for newcomers to the city. Some groups were more specific, organized around shared interests like hiking, while others carried an element of exclusivity, such as the Emerging Young Entrepreneur Society. Being in a foreign country can inspire in-group bias as estranged individuals gravitate towards familiar language and customs to create a sense of home. However, for some, the inclination to stick with the in-group was motivated by a fear of *"being taken advantage of"* and a perceived vulnerability in an unfamiliar environment. This fear persisted even within online forums of like-minded individuals, as expressed by one individual: *"I have to protect myself… Who would know who the real expats are?"*

While not everyone actively avoided interpersonal relationships with local Mexicans, the implication was that such connections were challenging to establish organically. Interactions were predominantly limited to service providers such as taxi drivers, caterers, and vendors. Language barriers were certainly a factor, yet there appeared to be little interest in bridging this divide. However, there were a few deviations from this trend. Two expats expressed reluctance towards Americans, citing their perceived focus on work and *"venture deals"* (Alan, February 2023). It was suggested that these individuals spent more time with locals, but the negative framing suggested that this preference was driven by aversion to Americans rather than an active interest in the local community. Both expats had arrived with partners from their country of origin, which may have diminished their motivation to seek out familiarity. Another departure from the pattern was observed in the realm of dating, where some migrants shared experiences of romantically pursuing local Mexican women through dating apps. Others who had not encountered such situations expressed interest in the prospect. In many cases, this romantic pursuit served as the sole context for their social engagement with local Mexicans, and some mentioned making friends through these romantic connections. The exclusive focus on romantic relationships with Mexican women implies that migrants perceived themselves as distinctly separate from the local community, and their particular interest may even be interpreted as an offshoot of sex tourism that has been studied in various international contexts.[31-33] Beyond romantic intentions, the majority of interview subjects expressed positive valent views, though perhaps verging on condescending and flattening, characterizing them as *"kind and helpful"* (Lily, May 2023). A common theme was the admiration for their work ethic, succinctly captured by one respondent: *"They're hustlers. They work so hard. Like, they live to work. You can see everyone trying to stay afloat, try and make it work because the government doesn't give them anything"* (Alan, February 2023). Others commended their *"service-oriented"* (Henry, February 2023) culture and hospitality, with Alan noting that it was *"almost to the point of obsequiousness."* He further elaborated on his perception of what he considered an overly reverential attitude towards Americans: money. Alan suggested that the uniquely American tipping culture motivated extravagant displays of service. The transactional interactions between lifestyle migrants and local Mexicans, often limited to service providers and characterized by positive yet utilitarian perspectives, cast an added shadow on the depth of cultural exchange and integration.

Language functions as a pivotal mediator in social interactions, and the majority of my interview subjects acknowledged having only a limited grasp of Spanish, often described as *"poco."* While English has permeated certain areas of Mexico City, it is crucial to recognize that merely 12 percent of the population speaks this language, widely considered a global lingua franca. The prevalence of monolingualism contributes to the perception that these migrants exist within an isolated social bubble. However, interview responses suggest that this is not the sole factor; migrants expressed a proactive motivation to connect with *"like"* individuals (Jim, 2023). When queried about their proficiency in the local language, responses fell into three broad categories: none, some, and fluency. Among those with no Spanish proficiency, respondents implied reliance on translation apps for day-to-day communication— *"Google translate gets me pretty far"* (Colby, March 2023)—sense of isolation from local populations, except for interactions in restaurants and grocery stores where language knowledge would be beneficial. Nevertheless, some mentioned using translation tools when communicating with services like Uber: *"when I need to communicate with the Uber driver, I just use a translator"* (Henry, February 2023). Individuals with basic knowledge recalled college classes but described their proficiency as *"rocky"* (David, February 2023) or *"like a six or seven-year-old"* (Colby, March 2023), asserting that it was nevertheless sufficient. A few noted growing up in a Spanish-speaking household, retaining complete fluency. More interesting, however, was the desire to learn amongst non-fluent speakers. For some there was *"no need"* (Jim, February 2023) because *"[locals] just assume I speak English just because I'm white."* Many expressed their appreciation for this option, describing what they perceived as *"openness"* as a *"confidence boost."* For most, learning Spanish was not a priority, often taking the backseat to more pressing matters like work. Motivation was a limiting factor: *"It depends on my mood. When I first came out, yes, I was going to practice Spanish all the time. And now that I know some Spanish, I'm just like. I'm tired of learning, can we speak English please? If you know someone will speak English then that's fine"* (Eric, April 2023). Yet some did express interest in improving their Spanish and did so, mostly through casual conversations at social places around the city. Others had language apps like Duolingo or even went as far as paying for classes with remote tutors. Still, prioritization remained an issue:

> *"I'm doing Duolingo and teaching myself stuff when I see words that I don't understand and trying to go over stuff for a few hours a day. But I would love to take a class at a university. UNAM has really good Spanish classes that are super expensive, but once I find a job, that's my first priority."* (Tanya, April 2023).

Despite the language barrier and the upheaval of relocating to a new country, many lifestyle migrants discovered that their change in location did not significantly alter their lifestyle and routine. They were able to recreate their previous way of life within their chosen neighborhoods of the city. As Eleanor put it:

> *"My life is still very familiar in a lot of ways. I go to Pilates, I interact with a lot of Americans, we'll get coffee. It feels really normal in a lot of ways"* (Eleanor, April 2023).

Part of this adaptation was facilitated by the accessibility of familiar multinational companies, including Uber, Walmart, and Amazon, which seamlessly transitioned from their countries of origin. Some interview subjects noted a perception that certain prices were higher, likely in response to the increasing spending power in neighborhoods with high numbers of transnational migrants, but they appreciated the convenience of having access to familiar products and modes of commerce:

> *"I just go to the Super Walmart because it's super close and I can tell it's catering to the foreigners"* (Alan, 2023).

The emergence of businesses which *"cater almost exclusively to Western expats"* (Eric, April 2023) was also brought up. Cultural gentrification of retail has been studied in other international contexts, such as shopping centers in Istanbul seeking to cater to international travelers,[36] retail shops in Palma,[37] and the Shenzhen Overseas Chinese Town (OCT) community in China.[38] One example mentioned in interviews was Nurish, a meal-prep service that offers familiar items like Mac n' Cheese. By contrast, local markets presented an unpredictable, potentially uncomfortable scenario, in which non-Spanish speaking migrants felt disadvantaged by their inability to communicate or barter. While some interview subjects proudly discussed their dexterity in these circumstances, others expressed distaste or anxiety about such modes of commerce. The implications of these unifocal social attitudes and the physical separation of social groups in cities are closely linked to social network segregation. Spatial segregation in Mexico City predates the arrival of these migrants; indigenous communities have historically been confined to denser urban spaces, often characterized by higher crime rates and lacking 'healthy' amenities such as large parks. There has been a consistent trend of seeking safety in similarity, extending beyond nationality or life experience to a perceived safety in socio-economic and racial homogeneity. As noted by Giglia, "living in segregated residential spaces in Mexico City is a complex social process that results not only from the fear of crime but also as a way to escape urban disorder and to establish islands of social homogeneity."[39] That said, not all were content with the distribution. Some chose to diplomatically label the tendency to congregate as *"interesting,"* while others expressed negativity: *"They're all going the same fucking places, the same fucking restaurants, the same high-quality bars… It's the same shit"* (Jim, February 2023).

Responses to inquiries about 'challenges' further underscored the divide between the migrants and locals. Encounters with poverty and housing were unavoidably viewed through the lens of the privileged 'tourist gaze,' as conceptualized by sociologist John Urry. The fact that their exposure to hardship was confined to observing others endure it highlights the profound disparity in how they perceive and engage with the city: what one group endures, the other observes. This divide also shapes the identity of Mexico City—a city that promises differential experiences for migrants and locals. These perspectives materialize in spending patterns that favor American multinational corporations like Walmart over local tenditas, and Ubers over traditional taxi services. Airbnbs and acclaimed 'best restaurants' are spatially concentrated in affluent areas like Polanco, Condesa, and Roma Norte. Benson and O'Reilly underscore the profound impact of privileged identities in shaping and being shaped by their environment.[2] Despite this constructed experience, the sense of belonging is not necessarily diminished, as evident in one migrant's affirmation of feeling *"right at home"* (David, February 2023). Such seamless adjustment is distinctive to these migrants, as my interviews revealed that typical barriers like housing and immigration were overcome through passport and economic privilege. Their presence faced no challenges from anxieties or legal authorities, enabling their perception of a welcoming *"nomad paradise"* (Colby, March 2023). This contrasts sharply with the experiences of other migrants who encounter harsh treatment at borders, such as the US-Mexico border, endure overcrowded and unsanitary detention facilities, and struggle to secure employment and housing upon reaching their destination. Drawing on Proshansky's environmental psychology[8] and Savage's concept of 'elective belonging,'[9] we can interpret such comfort as a manifestation of power, and adaptability as a performance—both essential elements in, as Savage puts it, '[attaching] [one's] own biography to their chosen residential location.'"

Not Always a "Nomad Paradise": Logistics & Challenges

As migrants settled and adapted to life in Mexico City, they encountered challenges, which encompassed a spectrum of concerns ranging from environmental issues to bureaucratic complexities related to taxation, property, immigration, and residency. As they navigate their way through a new country, these migrants confront and adapt to the idiosyncrasies and administrative intricacies that significantly shape their experiences. Pollution, discomforting proximity to poverty, immigration statuses, taxation, and property-related decisions emerged from the interviews as prescient themes. Understanding these intricacies can help inform policies and initiatives aimed at enhancing their integration and overall well-being in their new adopted home.

Despite Mexico City's positive reputation and glowing reviews on countless tourist websites, a prevalent grievance among the expat population was the severe pollution. The country has long grappled with poor air quality and while measures have been taken to mitigate pollution, Greenpeace estimates that PM2.5 air pollution contributed to as many as 15,000 premature deaths in Mexico City in 2020. Six interview subjects expressed concerns about the pollution, noting its impact on their daily routines, with one stating, *"the pollution here is to the point where my throat is burning when I'm on a morning run"* (Eric, April 2023). Others mentioned acid rain, emphasizing the vulnerability of newcomers unaware of the risks: *"The locals will get out of the rain because they know the acid rain will destroy their hair, and that if they drink it or it gets in their mouth, it's a problem. But the expats don't really realize the effects of acid rain and the pollution in Mexico City"* (Lily, May 2023). A final comparison was drawn to Vietnam, specifically the presence of Agent Orange, a chemical herbicide and defoliant used by the US military in herbicidal warfare: *"Air, water, air, water, food is a problem. You go to Vietnam and Agent Orange runoff is in all the food, and you're eating it"* (Jim, February 2023). This comparison speaks to the intensity of their concerns and reflects a disconnected understanding of historical and sociopolitical contexts in both countries. Pollution proves to be an inescapable issue, and it is one of the few problems that privilege cannot shield these migrants from. Every resident of Mexico City breathes the same air, sharing the experience in more-or-less equal measure. The same cannot be said for poverty, a theme that surfaced in numerous interviews. Migrants expressed surprise and distaste for the visible poverty in the city, despite their insulation. Adam, an IT technician, remarked, *"I was a little bit taken aback by the poverty on the street."* Yet, in the same breath, Adam conveyed a sense of price discrimination based on his origin: *"For an American paying $2,000 in Mexico City versus $3,500 in New York, it's a steal, but it's still expensive relative to what the locals are paying"* (Adam, February 2023). Similarly, Suzanne, an online content creator, shared her sentiments about the cost of living and the resulting poverty: *"The price of a cocktail here is way more than it was two years ago. The cost of living, the amount of poverty has risen"* (Suzanne, May 2023). While neither poverty was a direct personal concern for Suzanne nor Adam, its peripheral presence was pronounced enough to warrant mention. Their juxtaposed comments about rent and cocktails underscored their alienation from the experiences of others in the city and, perhaps, their limited social conscientiousness toward those of a different social class.

Other perceived challenges revealed a varying degree of self-awareness, particularly within the broader geopolitical context of migration from Mexico into the US. Krysten openly admitted, *"it was a little hard finding an apartment because I don't have any paperwork that lets me be here officially,"* (April, 2023). The tourist visa referenced is the authorization granted to citizens from the US, Canada, and other high-income nations, allowing them to stay in Mexico without a visa for 180 days as a Visitante (visitor). The immigration system is computerized, and no paperwork is required prior to arrival. Still visa runs—leaving the country every few months and returning with a new tourist status—remain a popular method for foreigners to live in Mexico. Alternative avenues include applying for a temporary resident visa, which is valid for up to four years and allows individuals to obtain a driver's license, open a bank account, enroll in the IMSS national healthcare plan, and access medical services through the free INSABI healthcare system. For those seeking employment in Mexico, an employer must request a temporary resident visa with a work permit.

The majority of interview subjects were visitors without visas, expressing positivity about the ease of entering and leaving the country. One even described it as a *"nomad paradise"* (Colby, March 2023). Others elaborated on the lifestyle that facilitates such ease: *"I never stay 180 days. Let's say maybe three months, four months...And you'll hear a lot of controversy on that,"* (Eric, April 2023). Most did not have residency, and many believed that applying for it would be unnecessary: *"I don't even have residency here. I don't need to set up bank accounts. I may be buying property, but I don't need any of that,"* (Henry, February 2023). While a few expressed interest in starting the process, Madeline provided an exception as someone who had successfully seen the residency process through:

> *"Yes, so I do have residency. I will say it probably took me two visits, just because there's a backlog from Covid and everything… I do think that it's really important for expats who plan on making Mexico home to become legal within the city. It is giving us so much. And just to be cognizant of the fact that for many people, the roles are reversed. They're not able to travel as really to the states or Europe or whatever as we are. I just think it's the right thing to do, to be legal within the country as well. Other people don't have the luxury. I have friends who are from Mexico that have been waiting for their visa appointment to go to the States just for vacation for a year now. So it's just another way to recognize our privilege and be respectful for the community that we're entering." (Madeline, 2023).*

This level of self-awareness proved to be uncommon among the migrants. Even when they did not intentionally attempt to exploit loopholes and privilege, their ignorance about the process indicated an ability to navigate a complex immigration system without the anxiety of being held accountable for a misstep or oversight. This privileged confusion also extended to taxation. The vast majority of interview subjects were not taxed in Mexico due to their employment overseas. Most expressed some degree of confusion about their tax status: *"I pay taxes in the US, and I think I'm still considered a tourist here. I still need to go back to the States from time to time. That's my understanding"* (Jim, February 2023). However, Eleanor reported paying taxes in Mexico and emphasized the *"privilege we have to be here, especially coming from first and second world countries that have stronger passports."* Others took the opposite

approach, expressing neither confusion nor a sense of obligation to contribute but instead exhibited confidence in their eligibility for certain tax loopholes between countries.

> *"Are you familiar with FEIE or foreign earned income exclusion? That's one of the huge advantages to being here. I'm essentially paid to be out of the country. If I'm going to spend 330 days outside of the United States, then I can basically save $20,000 on the first $107,000 of income. I pay some tax, but I'm not paying huge amounts. I do business in the US. Overall that was the reason why we chose Mexico. And the way that the taxation works is if the physical location of your entity or your business is in the United States, you pay tax in the US. That's how Mexico looks at it. The US looks at it with the FEI. You pay tax on where you're physically located, or at least you can leverage those exemptions based on your physical presence."* (Jim, February 2023).

The issue of wealthy individuals exploiting tax systems by maneuvering between borders has garnered attention in academic literature. Scholars have documented various strategies employed by affluent taxpayers to minimize their tax liabilities, including the use of legal loopholes such as the foreign earned income exclusion (FEIE). High-net-worth individuals have been shown to strategically structure their income to qualify for the FEIE, allowing them to exclude a portion of their foreign earnings from U.S. taxation.[40] Top earners have been found to be disproportionately likely to engage in tax avoidance strategies, exacerbating wealth disparities within and across countries.

The concerns raised by these migrants underscore their privileged position, predominantly manifested in logistical inconveniences. While taxation and immigration presented personal challenges for some, they enjoyed the luxury of not being overly burdened by such concerns. Mobility was understood as a right, not a privilege, and their freedom of movement was part and parcel of their quest for self-actualization as a 'global citizen.' Yet while their individual freedoms were inextricably linked to the macro-geopolitical privilege stamped on their passports, their considerations fell short of grasping the bigger picture.

Emerging Identities

Interview subjects had varying degrees of awareness about their impact on the city. For a select few seeking to be *"very intentional as expats"* (Madeline, April 2023), positionality was front of mind:

> "*Regardless of the place of origin, I think it's really important with all the impacts that we can have on a place… And that goes beyond just learning Spanish. It's about trying to pay local prices for housing, being cognizant of your presence, being open to learning new customs, and really trying to acclimate versus just kind of using the city as your playground. Gentrification is a global issue. It's not gonna stop. But I do think we can be intentional about how we spend our time and our money and how we foster community within the city.*" (Madeline, April 2023).

Others held a contrasting view, contending that their presence in Mexico City was a positive contribution to the local economy. As Jim emphasized, *"I do nothing but infuse dollars and contribute to this economy."* This disagreement often unfolded in online group discussions, sparking debates about the social responsibilities of digital nomads. When it came to the issue of gentrification, opinions were divided. Some were firm in their belief that the city has "*changed for the better"* since its earlier status as *"truly kind of third world"* (Henry, February 2023). Frequently, these migrants cited improvements in safety and the increased availability of convenient services as reasons supporting their perspective:

> *"Before Uber, it was sketchy to call a taxi off the street cause you would get kidnapped and they would go to the ATM and would rob you of all your money. But since Uber, it has made the whole city a lot safer"* (David, February 2023).

However, these positive sentiments were tempered by concerns about the ongoing transformations evident in the city. Even David conceded that the city had *"become a lot more expensive for locals."* Many expressed apprehensions about continuously rising prices: *"the influx of expats has increased substantially, and you see that mainly in the real estate market. It's crazy—the demand for apartments right now"* (Alan, February 2023). Others went a step further by recognizing the broader cultural shift that entailed negative consequences for local populations:

> *"In restaurant settings, people don't even attempt to speak Spanish. It's straight away English. They automatically assume that everyone speaks English… You see baristas start to speak English automatically just because that's kind of what they're used to. Now, the price of a cocktail here is way more than it was two years ago. The price of living, the amount of poverty has risen… people can't afford to live where they have lived their whole life, which is the epitome of gentrification,"* (Suzanne, May 2023).

Suzanne wExperiences of gentrification were influenced by positionality, encompassing both past and present perspectives. Tanya, a Black college student, discussed the misalignment of her understanding of 'gentrification,' typically associated with the influx of white individuals into communities of color.

> "*Even my existence here as a Black woman, that's gentrification. It's hard to come to terms with it because I think people lack that self-reflection. I was trying to shield myself or make an excuse for it. To an extent it is a little bit different, but it's not my mere existence here as an American, but benefiting from a cheaper economy it's the same thing. It's the same.*" (Tanya, April 2023).

Tanya's side-gig was in the world of online influencers, where she posted romanticized images and videos promoting Mexico City as an ideal destination for remote living and work. Her social media feed depicted a vibrant rotation of cafes, parks, and clubs in the Polanco-Condesa areas, typically in the company of her expat community. The exuberant lifestyle she advocated surpassed even Tanya's own, but even further removed from the everyday reality experienced by the majority of the city's residents. Theoretical awareness appeared disconnected from her daily life choices. According to Kaddar's schema that analyzes gentrifiers by their sense of efficacy and interest in remedying the negative outcomes of gentrification,[11] most migrants fell into the 'Shrugger' category; morally indifferent with a feeling that even if they tried, they could do little to help the situation. Tanya's following statement, *"That's really sad, but it's hard... it's one of these global economic situations"* encapsulates this attitude. There were two noticeable 'Agonizers' who expressed a high degree of moral discomfort at the perceived outcomes of gentrification, but still scored low in efficacy or perceived ability to remedy the situation. There was a distinct demographic distinction between these groups. Those who saw their presence as morally neutral or even a boost for the economy were predominantly white men like Jim and Colby. Meanwhile, the two 'Agonizers' were both women of color who offered an in-depth discussion of her feelings over positionality in Mexico City. Personal experience, education, social consciousness, allyship, and engagement in open dialogues about privilege may have contributed to this greater recognition of unequal power dynamics at play. It also reinforced the importance of consistently needing to revise definitions of gentrification to fit shifting power dynamics in a globalized world. The significance of race and gender identities are contextual; taking on the transnational migrant identity invokes a new privilege that may not have been held as a Black woman in North America. Yet the neighborhood change and involuntary displacement was, in the case of this interview subject, a familiar pattern. Hence, the awareness persisted.

This variation in opinion unfolded within Reddit discussions, specifically under the thread titled *"How do you guys deal with people saying we are colonialists/parasites ruining local communities etc.?"*[41] The predominant responses derided the notion, with certain contributors dismissing the arguments as confined to online forums for *"fat purple-haired liberal white chicks"* and contending that *"people [in Mexico] [are] begging for the same tourism levels pre-Covid."* Some commenters expressed sympathy toward the question, acknowledging issues like rising rents in Mexico City caused by foreigners and responded to the naysayers:

> *" Foreigners have been moving into Mexico City and driving rents significantly higher, causing the locals to be unable to afford their rents anymore. They are moving farther out and in turn causing the rents farther out to be significantly higher. A lot of it has to do with expats living the high life instead of the average local."*

However, the ensuing dialogue revealed defensive responses, exemplified by vitriolic retorts such as, *"I suppose you'd be looking to point the finger at some gringo on his laptop in Starbucks making $40K a year."* While defensiveness is perhaps to be expected, the extent of self-awareness should not be overstated; cognition of positionality is undermined by the distortions of the 'tourist gaze' that undercuts any conception of objectivity.[12] As Tanya's social media page suggests, awareness is not necessarily paired with lived consciousness. Cognizance of macro-economic systems that motivated migration did not continue upon arrival when their positionality shifted from perceived disadvantage to hyper-privilege in a foreign market.

CONCLUSION

"Do yourself a favor and remote work in Mexico City—it is truly magical ✨" – Twitter thread, February 16th, 2021.

The now-deleted tweet from a migrant from Austin, TX is among a litany of recommendations peppering the Internet that extolling Mexico City as an ideal hub for remote work. It became the eye of a brief Twitter storm that reflected the tensions between affluent migrants and Mexican locals. The *"magical"* characterization was of particular annoyance, but it carried an ironic accuracy. Though migrants' motivations for moving were tied up in macro-economic factors, desire for self-actualization took precedence leading up and especially upon arrival when awareness of positionality and embeddedness fell away. Existing scholarship has mainly focused on the impacts of these migrants, alongside some work on their perceptions and motivations. My research delineates migrants' engagement with macro-economic motivations, which in large part incentivizes their location but falls away upon arrival when their positionality transitions from feeling disadvantaged to grappling privilege or failing to do so.

Further exploration is required to understand the nuances of how these viewpoints, attitudes, and aspirations manifest, shaping their new environment. To achieve this, a more in-depth investigation is necessary. Firstly, a thorough analysis of migrants' distinct spending patterns is crucial, considering whether their familiarity with multinational corporations influences their preference for entities like 7-Eleven Inc., Uber Technologies, Inc., and Walmart Inc. Understanding these spending behaviors would illuminate where the economic capital of the expatriate community in Mexico concentrates and its potential impact on local

commerce. Secondly, exploring the divergent experiences between white people and people of color in the context of lifestyle migration warrants further investigation. Particularly noteworthy is the scarcity of scholarly attention devoted to non-white lifestyle migrants. Understanding how race intersects with migration decision-making is crucial, exemplified by initiatives like Ghana's efforts to attract African American "digital nomads," where motivations for relocation intertwine with perceptions of US racism and African identity. Whether similar dynamics manifest among lifestyle migrants in Mexico City remains unexplored, presenting an opportunity for future studies to delve into these complex and understudied intersections. Thirdly, my interviews uncovered an unforeseen attitude among male migrants towards local women, suggesting potential negative repercussions and the emergence of new avenues for exploitation. Addressing this issue requires further comprehensive research to comprehend its dynamics and implement protective measures through stringent policies, education initiatives, and the empowerment of Mexican women. Lastly, investigating how the increasing awareness of transnational gentrification manifests in self-regulated or government-regulated behavior is essential for understanding its implications and devising appropriate policy responses. These areas present exciting opportunities for future research, allowing for a deeper understanding of the dynamics of transnationalism and its broader societal ramifications.

In the ever-evolving landscape of mobility and globalization, the case study of digital nomadism in Mexico City unveils unique insights into the intersection of transnational gentrification, geographic arbitrage, and lifestyle choices amongst individuals and groups. While digital nomadism promises liberation from traditional workplace constraints, it also reflects and perpetuates existing power structures of white supremacy, misogyny, and settler colonialism. Mexico City was, for many migrants, a backdrop for self-actualization. We must balance the macro-socio-economic trends that drove migration with individual motivations to understand why it has become a hub for these lifestyle migrants and how their attitudes manifest upon settlement.

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PRESS SUMMARY:

Amid ever-increasing global mobility for privileged classes, Mexico City has become a popular destination for remote-working professionals. Based on 23 interviews conducted in early 2023, this paper examines the interaction between macroeconomic trends and the pursuit of self-fulfillment among lifestyle migrants. It explores the complex factors influencing their attitudes, behaviors, and collective identity and how their deliberate integration into the local environment diminishes as geographic arbitrage brings new advantages.