

A CONSTELLATION OF ECONOMIC POSSIBILITIES:
LATINX FOOD-BASED DIVERSE COLLABORATIVE ECONOMIES AS CATALYSTS
FOR MORE SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC FUTURES

by

Sara Tornabene

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Approved by:

Dr. Colleen Hammelman

Dr. Heather Smith

Dr. Lorna Rivera

Dr. Nicole Peterson

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ABSTRACT

SARA TORNABENE. A Constellation of Economic Possibilities:
Latinx Food-Based Diverse Collaborative Economies as Catalysts for more Sustainable
Economic Futures. (Under the direction of DR. COLLEEN HAMMELMAN)

Diverse and alternative forms of economies have recently gained increased attention for their potential to transform conceptually and empirically the mainstream economic system. Around the world, scholars have documented the emergence and impact of economic practices that do not necessarily align with the principles and functioning mechanisms of the capitalist system. However, to this date, little is known about the contribution of migrant communities to diverse collaborative economic practices as they increasingly play a significant socio-economic role in the United States. This dissertation research relies on a poststructuralist and postcolonial conceptualization of the economy as a diverse, contested, and situated realm to produce nuanced understandings of diverse economic practices developed by migrant communities in the US and to fill in the gaps of current understandings of diverse economies, ethnic economies, and ethnic foodscapes. This exploratory study relies on a relational comparative case study to investigate three dimensions of Latinx food-based collaborative practices (individual, collective, and contextual) in two urban contexts in the US – Boston (MA) and Charlotte (NC). By relying on a mixed-method approach in each context of study, this dissertation demonstrates the existence of multiple, diverse, and intertwined food-based collaborative networks assembled through the enactment of economic practices and informed by values of solidarity, interdependence, and cooperativism rooted in Latinx individuals' non-static identity, cultural background, and past experiences. It also shows the heterolocal spatial form of food-based collaborative networks in the two contexts of study and the extension of their constitutive relational linkages across non-hierarchical scales. Finally, it demonstrates the mutually constitutive relationships between Latinx

food-based diverse economic practices and the contexts in which they emerge, alongside the important transformative power these practices have for individuals, groups, and the context. Through this research I extend ontological economic value to diverse food-based collaborative economic practices and show how these Latinx communities are already diversifying the economy in highly capitalist contexts, such as the United States, and, more importantly, are already assembling the conditions to develop more sustainable economic scenarios.

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DEDICATION

To

All of the people I met during this journey
who trusted me with their stories.

And all the Latinas who taught me
about courage by sharing their experiences.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES	ix
LIST OF TABLES	x
Chapter 1	1
Latinx Food-Based Diverse Collaborative Economies as Catalysts for more Sustainable Economic Futures: Introduction	1
1.2 Research questions	4
1.3 Significance of the research	6
1.4 Roadmap of the dissertation	8
Chapter 2	10
Review of the Literature Grounding the Research	10
2.2 What is the economy? From ‘ <i>the economy</i> ’ to ‘economic diversity’	11
2.3 On exclusion and power dynamics: post-structural and post-colonial approaches in economic geography	14
2.4 Immigration and immigrant economies in the U.S.	20
2.5 Ethnic economies as assemblages constructing foodscapes	25
Chapter 3	31
Research Design and Methods	31
3.2 Contexts of study	32
3.2.1 Boston Area (Massachusetts)	33
3.2.2 Charlotte area (North Carolina)	39
3.3 Methods, procedures, participants, and practices studied	45
3.3.1 Methods and procedures	46
3.3.2 Participants and practices studied	52
3.3.3 Analysis	62
3.4 Field experience and limitations	68
Chapter 4	72
“Being Latinos is not Only an Empty Label”: Latinx identity and the Enactment of Diverse Economic Realities in Charlotte and Boston	72
4.2 Diverse economies and ethnic economies: from one-world ontology to multiple realities	75
4.3 Enacting the pluriverse: Latinx diverse ways of knowing, being, and doing	80
4.3.1 Ethnoracial categories and material implications for the enactment of multiple realities	81
4.3.2 Challenging standard definitions of economic concepts	93
4.4 Discussion	111
Chapter 5	114

Assembling the Spatiality of Latinx Food-Based Collaborative Foodscapes through Local, Regional, and International Linkages.	114
5.2 Spatial understandings of ethnic economies.....	116
5.3 Socio-spatial relations of Latinx food-based collaborative economic practices	120
5.3.1 Socio-organizational aspects of ethnic economic assemblages	122
5.3.2 Spatial forms of Latinx food-based collaborative economic practices	134
5.4 Discussion	146
Chapter 6.....	150
Latinx food-based diverse economies in context: a relational tale of two migrant destinations	150
6.2 Relational understandings of space, cities, and collaborative practices	151
6.3 Mutually constitutive relationship between economic practices and the context.....	156
6.3.1 Boston and Charlotte as contexts of migrant reception	157
6.3.2 Context influence on practices.....	164
6.3.3 Practices impacts on the context.....	181
6.4 Discussion	197
Chapter 7.....	200
Conclusions.....	200
7.2 Summary of the dissertation.....	202
7.3 Emerging themes.....	204
7.4 Significance of this research.....	208
7.5 Future research	212
List of references.....	213
APPENDIX.....	226

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 3.1	Hispanic spatial distribution by census tract in Boston and adjacent towns (2010 and 2020)	35
Figure 3.2	2018 Per-capita income in US dollars by racial/ethnic group in Boston, Chelsea, Revere, and Everett	37
Figure 3.3	Hispanic spatial distribution by census tract in Charlotte and surrounding municipalities (2010 and 2020)	42
Figure 3.4	2018 Per-capita income in US dollars by racial/ethnic group in Charlotte and Mecklenburg County	44
Figure 3.5	Relationship between research questions, methods, and findings	52
Figure 4.1	Diverse Economies representation of the economy	78
Figure 5.1	Importance score – Boston	131
Figure 5.2	Importance score – Charlotte	132
Figure 5.3	Visual representation of Boston assemblages	136
Figure 5.4	Map of Boston connections outside state boundaries	139
Figure 5.5	Visual representation of Charlotte assemblages	142
Figure 5.6	Map of Charlotte connections outside state boundaries	144
Figure 6.1	Population change by county (2010-2020)	158
Figure 6.2	Boston impact-intentionality diagram	189
Figure 6.3	Charlotte impact-intentionality diagram	192
Figure 6.4	Latinx food-based collaborative economic practices’ transformative potential	196

LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1	Population Characteristics	54
Table 3.2	Citizenship and Length of Residence	54
Table 3.3	Population Origin	54
Table 3.4	List of Codes	63
Table 3.5	Importance Score	65
Table 3.6	Impact Score	66
Table 3.7	Intentionality Score	67
Table 6.1	Reasons to move to the Boston area	160
Table 6.2	Reasons to move to the Charlotte area	161

Chapter 1

Latinx Food-Based Diverse Collaborative Economies as Catalysts for more Sustainable Economic Futures: Introduction

Diverse and alternative forms of economies have recently gained increased attention for their potential to transform conceptually and empirically the mainstream economic system. Around the world, scholars have started documenting the emergence and impact of economic practices that do not necessarily align with the principles and functioning mechanisms of the capitalist system – e.g., growth-at-any-cost mantra, profit-maximization, supply-demand logic, and labor exploitation – and fit the mainstream economic system. These economic practices are already diversifying the economy in highly capitalist societies, like the United States, creating a pluriverse of realities, or as the Zapatistas have expressed it “a world in which many worlds fit” (Loh and Shear, 2022, p. 1210). Ultimately, when informed by values of solidarity, interdependence, and cooperativism, these diverse economic practices emerging in the US can promote more sustainable and equitable pathways, especially for marginalized communities. As Gordon-Nembhard (2014) and Hossein (2017) already showed, Black populations in the Americas have creatively developed innovative forms of economies through solidarity, mutual aid, and cooperativism to resist historical forms of economic and social oppression. These historical and contemporary Black economic practices are still marginalized, silenced, and excluded from the mainstream economic debate. To this date, even less is known about the contribution of migrant communities to diverse collaborative economic practices as they increasingly play a significant socio-economic role in the United States. The study of these economic practices contributes to deepening the understanding of what *actually* composes the economy, dignifies a pluriversal view of the economy (Escobar, 2020), and fosters a discourse of economic diversity (Gibson-Graham,

1996, 2006; Gibson-Graham et al., 2013). In uncovering actual economies, not much is known about the contribution of Latinx¹ communities as they increasingly play a significant socio-economic role in the United States. Given their non-static identities, cultures, and positioning in the new context, migrants undergo an adjusting process that is closely linked to their economic practices (Sweet, 2016). Therefore, economic investigations cannot neglect the complex ways by which migrant communities participate in shaping actual economies. On the contrary, ethnic economies have been the focus of geographic scholarship for decades. This scholarship has investigated spatial forms of ethnic economies in relation to the different waves of immigration characterizing the United States since the beginning of the 20th century. These economic analyses study migrant communities' positioning in the labor market and, in turn, US society, whose constitutive economic relationships are mainly understood by assuming capitalism as the only existing reality. Therefore, they only partially represent the diversity, complexity, and heterogeneity of economic systems and, more importantly, the diversity, complexity, and heterogeneity of ways migrant communities produce and distribute economic value.

This exploratory research is rooted in the diverse economies theoretical framework (Gibson-Graham, 1996, 2006; Gibson-Graham et al., 2013) and in a poststructural and postcolonial understanding of the economy as a diverse, situated, and contested realm. The study presented here fills gaps in the understanding of diverse ethnic economic practices through an exploratory analysis of food-based collaborative economies carried out by Latinx communities in two urban areas in the United States – Boston (MA) and Charlotte (NC). It specifically focuses on Hispanic communities in the US due to their demographic predominance among minority groups (Census Bureau, 2020) and their impact on established and emerging migrant destinations (Singer, 2015).

¹ In this dissertation, I use interchangeably the terms Hispanic, Latinx, and Latino/a (see Section 3.3.2) to indicate Spanish-speaking individuals coming from Latin American countries, the Caribbean, and Mexico.

Additionally, this study explores diverse economic practices by adopting a food lens. Food is not only a basic need, but also the means through which migrant communities maintain their identity, cultural roots, and foodways in new cultural contexts. The adoption of a food lens is instrumental to unravel the webs of connections with which human bodies interact unpredictably through eating, growing, and cooking (Sarmiento, 2017), as well as to uncover the additional level of complexity faced by migrant groups as they participate in the making of day-to-day economic practices. Finally, this exploratory research adopts an ontological and epistemological stance that explicitly challenges capitalocentrism (Gibson-Graham, 1995) and problematizes the existence of a One-World World (Law, 2015). In line with this stance, this study does not define *a priori* the nature of the economic relationships assembled through the enactment of food-based collaborative economic practices, rather, it explores them as they emerge in their complexity and diversity in the two contexts of study.

Through this exploratory analysis, I demonstrate the existence of multiple, diverse, and intertwined food-based collaborative networks assembled through the enactment of economic practices and informed by values of solidarity, interdependence, and cooperativism rooted in Latinx individuals' non-static identity, cultural background, and past experiences. I also demonstrate the heterolocal spatial form of food-based collaborative networks in the two contexts of study and the extension of their constitutive relational linkages across non-hierarchical scales. Finally, I demonstrate the mutually constitutive relationships between Latinx food-based diverse economic practices and the contexts in which they emerge, alongside the important transformative power these practices have for individuals, groups, and the context. Therefore, I conclude by reiterating the importance of extending economic value to diverse economic practices in the

process to envision and build more sustainable economic scenarios that privilege people over profits.

1.2 Research questions

This exploratory research posed and sought answers to the following multifaceted overarching research question: *How are Latinx food-based collaborative economic practices influenced by and influencing different socio-economic and political structures as they emerge in and construct different urban contexts?* In line with a poststructural and postcolonial understanding of the economy as a pluralistic, contested, and situated realm, this research relies on a relational comparative case study approach (Hart, 2002; Roy, 2003; Ward, 2010) to address the overarching research question based on findings emerging from the two urban areas of Charlotte, NC, and Boston, MA. Located in two neighboring geographical regions – northeast and southeast – Boston and Charlotte are both characterized by a rapid expansion of the Latinx community due to the intersection of global forces and local specificities (Frazier and Reisinger, 2006). The greater Boston urban area is an established migrant destination (Singer, 2015) that, in the past 25 years has witnessed a population boom of which the Hispanic community accounts for nearly 92% (Schuster, 2017). In Boston, the Latinx community accounts for 19.5% of the total population (Census, 2020), yet this number is even greater considering that a significant group of Hispanics resides in adjacent municipalities – e.g., Chelsea, MA (Schuster, 2017). Charlotte is an emerging destination with a booming economy that, in the past two decades, has experienced one of the highest growth rates of the foreign-born population (Harden et al., 2015), and whose Hispanic community accounts for 14.6% of the total population (Census, 2020). In both urban areas, Hispanic communities lag behind in economic earnings, are more likely than other groups

to be food-insecure, are affected by economic disparities, and were severely impacted by the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, both urban areas are characterized by more or less formalized and visible networks of support that have constituted an invaluable resource for Latinx communities to navigate, adjust, and survive in these two contexts. The complex interplay of socio-economic multiscalar dynamics and context-related specificities makes these two urban areas illustrative case studies for the investigation of food-based diverse collaborative economies.

In order to seek answers to the multifaceted overarching research question presented above, in both urban areas, this relational comparative case study employs a mixed-method multiscalar approach to address the three following sub-questions:

- (SQ1) *How does the connection between Latinx individuals' positioning, background, experiences, and cultural roots inform food-based collaborative economic practices in a different cultural context?*
- (SQ2) *What are the spatial and organizational characteristics of collaborative food-based economic practices in Boston and Charlotte?*
- (SQ3) *What is the nature of the mutually constitutive relationship between diverse economic practices and the social, political, and economic contexts in which they are rooted?*

These research sub-questions investigate three distinct and overlapping dimensions of the diverse economic practices explored in this study: the individual, the collective, and the contextual dimensions. By addressing the first sub-question (SQ1), I explore the complex links between people's multiple forms of identity, background, past experiences, and the development of food-based collaborative practices in the US. This dimension is seldom acknowledged in standard economic analysis and investigations of diverse and sharing economies in the US (Chapter 4). By

seeking answers to the second sub-question (SQ2), I explore spatial and organizational characteristics of collaborative food-based networks. Specifically, by analyzing practices as assemblages and by adopting a non-capitalist lens, this spatial and organizational analysis seeks nuanced understandings of spatial forms of ethnic economies that are not included in standard spatial analysis of ethnic economies and foodscapes representations (Chapter 5). Finally, by answering the third sub-question (SQ3), I explore the mutually constitutive relationship between practices and the contexts in which they emerge by highlighting the context-related factors influencing the emergence and development of diverse economic practices and, at the same time, the transformative impacts these practices have on the context (Chapter 6).

The mixed-methods multiscalar approach employed in this exploratory research is instrumental to gain an in-depth understanding of these three dimensions and, more generally, of Latinx collaborative economic practices in these two urban areas. The mixed-method research design includes statistical analysis of census data, in-depth interviews, and concept and GIS mapping techniques. Mixing quantitative and qualitative methods allows gaining a deeper understanding of the emergence and development of Latinx collaborative food practices as the result of the mutually constitutive process between (1) individual diasporic identities, (2) collective assemblages constituted around the economic practice, and (3) the urban context.

1.3 Significance of the research

The research presented in this dissertation is significant for its contribution to geographic thought and for the new perspective it opens to inform the work of policymakers, planners, and community organizations. By centering this exploratory analysis on Latinx communities in the United States and the diverse, complex, and transformative ways they produce and distribute

economic value, this research not only constitutes an important intervention into scholarship that conceptualizes the economy as a diverse, contested, and situated realm, but also it extends economic value to migrant groups' economic practices that do not fit the mainstream system. Therefore, it challenges stereotypical, monolithic, capitalist narratives on Latinx communities and reframes them by conferring ontological value to their economic practices. Situating Latinx diverse economic practices within the diverse economies framework allows us to demonstrate the importance of questions of identity, cultural background, and past experiences in the making of diverse economies. This research follows the more recent turn in the diverse economies scholarship that challenges the absence of axes of difference – e.g., race, ethnicity, and gender – and interrogates the role of difference in the emergence and development of diverse economic practices (Bledsoe et al., 2022; Ferreira, 2022; Gordon-Nembhard, 2014; Hossein, 2017; Naylor and Thayer, 2022; Sweet; 2016). Specifically, it extends Sweet's (2016) theoretical intervention to include the enactment of diverse economies in different contexts and interrogate the role of different forms of identity in the emergence and development of Latinx food-based collaborative economies in two contexts in the US.

Additionally, this research relies on the diverse economies theoretical intervention against capitalocentrism (Gibson-Graham, 1995) and problematization of the One-World World ontology (Law, 2015) to make an important intervention in the geographic literature concerned with the analysis of ethnic economies spatial forms. By challenging the assumption of capitalism as an all-encompassing reality, this research inquires about what spatial forms emerge from the analysis of ethnic economic relationships when that assumption is dropped. I start theorizing the spatial forms of diverse ethnic economies emerging and developing in Boston and Charlotte as assemblages in the making whose constitutive economic relations extend across non-nested non-hierarchical

scales at the local, regional, national, and international levels. Additionally, in line with feminist interventions in economic geographies, I call attention to the centrality of the private sphere in the emergence and development of diverse ethnic economies and in the construction of ethnic foodscapes, understood as relational landscapes (Jossart-Marcelli, 2021). Through this research, I also demonstrate the existence of complex entanglements of capitalist and non-capitalist modes of production that, in turn, reveal the impossibility of reducing economic relations to binary divisions such as formal/informal, capitalist/non-capitalist, legal/illegal, or other western dualisms.

I conclude by arguing that in a time when activists and academics push to develop new and more sustainable economic scenarios, Latinx communities in the United States have a lot to teach us in the process of assembling the conditions for the enactment of an ontological politics of the pluriverse.

1.4 Roadmap of the dissertation

The remainder of this dissertation describes the research introduced here as follows. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the scholarship grounding this research. Specifically, it outlines foundational and more recent diverse economies scholarship, ethnic economies scholarship in geography, and assemblage thinking in relation to collaborative forms of economies. Chapter 3 details the research design and includes an exploration of the two contexts of study, a description of methods and procedures employed alongside the population and practices explored in the context of this research. It also provides a reflection on challenges encountered in the field and the limitations of the research design. Chapter 4 unpacks the individual dimension and answers the first sub-question (SQ1) by demonstrating the centrality that diverse ways of being, knowing, and doing rooted in Latinx individuals' past experiences, cultural background, and forms of identity,

have in the emergence and development of diverse economic practices in Boston and Charlotte. Chapter 5 investigates the ‘collective dimension’ of diverse economic practices and addresses the second sub-question (SQ2) by showing how collaborative networks are spatially and organizationally assembled through the mundane enactment of diverse economic practices. Chapter 6 explores the ‘contextual dimension’ and addresses the third sub-question (SQ3) by introducing a two-fold argument that demonstrates the mutually constitutive relationship existing between diverse economic practices and the contexts in which they emerge. Finally, Chapter 7 provides broader reflections and conclusions to the exploration of Latinx food-based collaborative economic practices.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature Grounding the Research

This research is positioned within the economic geography field and builds on (1) post-structural and post-colonial perspectives in economic geography, (2) immigration and ethnic economies literature in the US, and (3) theorization of assemblages and ethnic foodscapes. Economic geography is a large and highly diverse sub-discipline of geography characterized by heterogeneity of approaches to the study of the economy and its socio-spatial implications. This section positions this study within economic geography and provides a rationale for the ontological, epistemological, and methodological stance adopted in this research. Also, it introduces concepts that are instrumental for the exploration of the object of inquiry. The first and second sections situate this research within conceptualizations of the economy developed in economic geography and, specifically, in accordance with poststructural and postcolonial understandings of the economy. Specifically, it highlights the exclusionary and marginalizing effects of monolithic definitions of the economy on practices that do not fit the dominant economic discourse. The third section explores literature on ethnic economies and the positioning of immigrants and ethnic minority groups within the US economy. This section highlights that the adoption of a monolithic capitalist definition of the *economy* as lens to analyze such practices has produced a lack of understanding and stigmatization of economic actions that do not fit this mainstream economic narrative. This argument is particularly relevant considering the contemporary political climate in which economic and ethnic narratives often intersect, perpetuating social exclusion and injustice. The fourth and final sections present the assemblage thinking turn in diverse economies and conceptualization of space and foodscapes in line with this

thinking. This section creates the foundation for the investigation of spatial forms and collaborative relationships presented in this research.

2.2 What is the economy? From ‘*the economy*’ to ‘economic diversity’

In economic geography, the mainstream conceptualization of the economy represents it as a self-driving market-based machine whose internal rules determine the behavior of economic rational actors – such as entrepreneurs, economists, policymakers, and other working people (Pavlovskaya and St Martin, 2014; Plummer, 2000). This definition is rooted in neoclassical and neoliberal economic theories introduced in economic geography within the quantitative theoretical tradition and dominating the field since the 1950s. This tradition fully associates the economy with capitalism – and more recently neoliberal capitalism – and sees it driven by market logic, utilitarian rationality, laws of supply and demand, and a tendency towards equilibrium (Pavlovskaya and St Martin, 2014). Although the systematic focus on the role that *space* plays in shaping economic mechanisms has led economic geographers to challenge some of the neoclassical economic assumptions, the definition of the economy as a totality driven by market logic still stands on solid ground. This solid ground has also resisted criticisms moved by Marxist and feminist geographers. In the Marxian political economy tradition, the *economy* is still conceptualized as a totality but this time defined as the outcome of class relations and exploitative dynamics (Pavlovskaya and St Martin, 2014). Contrary to the quantitative tradition that seeks to understand the world through reductionism by identifying well-defined entities interacting through stable causal relations, Marxist geographers define the world as the outcome of constantly changing relationships between entities that, in turn, change the effect of those interactions (Handerson and Sheppard, 2006). As a consequence, they define *space* in a relational fashion (Harvey, 2006; Swyngedouw, 2000),

challenging the taken-for-granted idea of *space* as a container of socio-spatial relations (Harvey, 2006; Massey, 1992; Smith, 2008).

In general, the Marxist tradition in economic geography has reframed the idea of the *economy* exposing uneven power dynamics and explaining their inseparability from space and time, yet it has in common with the quantitative tradition the systematic exclusion of women's experiences from the conceptualization of the *economy* (Pavlovskaya and St Martin, 2014). In the process of constructing the capitalist economy, some spheres, such as the household, remain excluded and marked as non-economic (Mitchell, 1998). The association between household and female unpaid work rooted in western thinking has produced a lack of gender and female-work perspectives from economic studies. Feminist economic geography and, in turn, feminist definitions of the economy, developed to challenge and address the absence of gender as an explanatory category from economic analyses and to address the implicit biases in gender-blind economic theories offering a partial representation of the complexity of real dynamics (McDowell, 1993a; Monk and Hanson, 1982). Although feminist economic geography develops as a body of knowledge characterized by contestation, contradiction, and simultaneity of competing perspectives held at the same time (McDowell, 1993a), overall, feminist geographers reframe previous conceptualizations of the economy to account for women's role in economic processes (e.g., Dixon and Jones, 2006; Oberhauser, 2000). Drawing on women's experiences, feminist scholars have significantly contributed to the redefinition of basic geographic concepts such as *space* (Massey, 1984, 1992; Rose, 1993) and *nature* (Bondi and Davidson, 2005; Dixon and Jones, 2006), as well as to the deconstruction of essentialist categories such as *gender* and *skill* (Philips and Taylor, 1980) and of the binary way of thinking – e.g., production/reproduction (McDowell, 1993b). It is worth noting that the exploration of women's economic experiences is conducted on

an epistemological ground that counterposes masculinist epistemology, based on universalism, compartmentalization, and objectivity (Rose, 1993), to rely on particularism, relationality, and subjectivity (Dixon and Jones, 2006). Feminism is about a critical vision deriving from a critical positioning in an un-homogeneous gendered social space (Haraway, 1988, p. 589). This epistemological approach not only has led feminist geographers to create room for a multitude of experiences and differences, but also for theorizing difference from the site of the body and the mundane (everyday) (McDowell, 1993a, 1993b). Hence, the conceptualization of the *economy* in the feminist tradition not only includes gender and patriarchy as fundamental economic relations, but also makes it increasingly difficult to theorize a single external economic system (Pavlovskaya and St Martin, 2014).

This brief exploration of economic conceptualizations in three of the major theoretical approaches in economic geography – quantitative, Marxist, and feminist – highlights that there is not a single representation of the economy, rather multiple ones, each of which has the power to confer ontological value to some objects of inquiry and not others. Therefore, defining the capitalist economy as an all-encompassing totality (Law, 2015) means excluding day-to-day economic practices that are not in line with the individualistic, maximizing profit, and growth-at-any-cost capitalist mantras (Gibson-Graham, 1996, 2006; Gibson-Graham et al., 2013) from economic understandings. It is exactly from the project of dislodging forms of economic hegemony and opening room for economic diversity that poststructural and postcolonial approaches in economic geography have flourished.

2.3 On exclusion and power dynamics: post-structural and post-colonial approaches in economic geography

Poststructuralist approaches in economic geography develop from the rejection of the modernist conception of the act of knowing and its separation from the knower and the known: “While knowledge is understood within a modernist frame as singular, cumulative, and neutral, from a poststructural perspective knowledge is multiple, contradictory, and powerful” (Gibson-Graham, 2000, p. 95). In geography, this tradition is partially influenced by feminist perspectives and involves abandoning essentialist ontological stances to demonstrate the processual, heterogeneous, complex, and relational nature of reality (Aitken, 2015; Harrison, 2015). The poststructural systematic questioning of ontologies, essentialism, and ethics not only disrupts hegemonic thinking, but also enables experimentation and creativity, inspiring new geographic and economic imaginaries (Aitken, 2015: 148).

Gibson-Graham (1996; 2000) applies the poststructuralist strategies of deconstruction, genealogy, discourse analysis, and performativity (Butler, 1993) to reframe the conception of the *economy* and capitalism and to confer ontological value to economic diversity. In their seminal book *The end of capitalism (as we knew it)*, Gibson-Graham (1996) starts from the deconstruction of the dominant economic discourse and the narratives that have produced its emergence, persistence, and perception as natural and inevitable. St. Martin et al. (2015) claim that “how we talk about and thus know the economy ensures that some economic practices are made real and dominant while others are relegated to subordinate positions or nonexistence” (p. 19). Ultimately, the deconstruction of the capitalist discourse not only aims to reduce the totalizing and exclusionary power of its mainstream representation, but also aims to confer independent heuristic value to other forms of economies, regardless of their relation with capitalism (Roelvink et al.,

2015). In the poststructural approach, the *economy* is conceived as something that is continuously remade through daily economic actions.

This conceptualization opens new possibilities for the flourishing of diverse perspectives in the economic realm, legitimizing the coexistence of different and, sometimes, contradicting economic practices (among others, Escobar, 2020; Gibson-Graham, 1996; 2006; 2008; Gibson-Graham et al., 2013; Law, 2015; Leyshon et al., 2003; Loh and Shear, 2022). The ontological and epistemological stance outlined here constitutes the starting point of the diverse economies theoretical framework and community of scholars (Gibson-Graham, 2008). The diverse economies research agenda attempts to dismantle the binary way of thinking (capitalist/non-capitalist), enabling scholars to highlight the relations among heterogeneous economic practices, which are seen as all equally relevant, partially fixed, and always under subversion (Gibson-Graham, 1995; 1996). This body of literature draws on political economy and feminist perspectives to develop a weak theory of economics that encourages the exploration of the complex spatialities and temporalities of economic relations that cannot be presumed *a priori* (Gibson-Graham 2006; Gibson-Graham et al., 2013; Law 2015).

However, diverse economies more recent scholarship has started to challenge the absence of axes of difference, such as race and ethnicity, and, more generally, the absence of power analyses from these frameworks (Bledsoe et al., 2022; Ferreira, 2022; Naylor and Thayer, 2022). Bledsoe et al. (2022) call attention to the fact that both capitalism and its alternatives are shaped by racial differences, hence it is not possible to develop understandings of diverse economies without attending to systems of power and violence oppressing some groups in the society. They also challenge the superficial engagement of diverse economies with race and call for a productive engagement with systems of power (Naylor and Thayer, 2022). This lack of meaningful

engagement of the diverse economies scholarship with ethnoracial difference translates also into the absence of migrant communities from the framework. In this sense, Sweet (2016) made an important theoretical intervention by situating migrant Latinas in the diverse economies framework. Yet, a lack of engagement with ethnoracial transnational identities still characterizes this scholarship.

In order to situate migrant communities within the diverse economies framework, this research relies on the important contribution of postcolonial scholarship to theorizations of systems of power dislodging western-centric perspectives. Although postcolonial theories stem from the project of decolonizing western representations of culture and identities, these share with poststructural theories the systematic exposure of exclusionary power dynamics embedded in dominant discourses. Said (1979) in his seminal work *Orientalism* conceptualizes processes of ‘cultural othering’ and identity-formation and, in turn, their material power. In his account of the production of Orientalism as discourse, he exposes the dual nature of this discourse as ‘imaginative’ (representation) and ‘instrumental’ (material power of representations). His work lays the foundation for the development of postcolonial accounts of hierarchical power relations embedded in dominant representations, relegating subjects to more or less powerful positions (Barnett, 2014). Postcolonial research challenges representations of culture and identities developed within western contexts and superimposed on non-western countries that, over time, have created an implicit hierarchy of cultures, identities, knowledges, and places according to which everything is evaluated. This hierarchy is rooted in the Eurocentric conception of a single path of development towards modernization – where the European model represents the final stage of modernization (e.g., Rostow, 1959). Even though the concept of a unilinear path has been widely challenged, this hierarchy implicitly still operates today.

The postcolonial scholarship has highlighted how hierarchical power relations invest every aspect of the discipline from the knowledge production complex (Radcliffe, 1994; Robinson, 2003), the unchallenged transfer of western concepts to other societies (McDowell, 1993b; Mohanty, 1988; Pohlhaus, 2017), the inherent supremacy of western geographical thinking (Sidaway, 2000) to the representations of objects of study – such as third world women (Mohanty, 1988), the economy (Pollard et al., 2011), or global cities and urban areas (Robinson, 2013; Roy, 2016). In short, the postcolonial scholarship in geography has substantially contributed to the spatial understanding of how power operates and operationalizes in various contexts, and to the processual construction and re-construction of identities often considered natural. In particular, the acknowledgment of unbalanced power relations has significant repercussions on the types of analysis conducted in economic geography. In the last decade, postcolonial scholars have started to question basic assumptions behind the nature of capitalism, neoliberalism, globalization, transnational flows of capital and workers and the making and remaking of territorial borders (Pollard et al., 2011). As part of this project, the concept itself of the *economy* has been deconstructed and redefined as plural, contested, and, above all, situated (Pollard et al., 2011, p.3).

The implications of the emerging postcolonial economic scholarship are significant for economic geography (Pollard et al., 2011) and for this research. First, by using a postcolonial approach, heuristic value is given to those economic experiences that usually do not fit in the definition of ‘successful’ modeled on cases from deindustrialized Anglo-American regions, or legitimate forms of economic practices developed in the industrialized world. Second, postcolonial scholars are pointing to the need for acknowledging the interplay between culture and economy and the embeddedness of social and cultural practices in particular sites. Although the basic assumption and rules of economic theorization have not been allowed to be corrupted by culture,

those who practice economics acknowledge that economic actions, from the act of producing and exchanging goods to that of accumulating wealth and satisfying needs, are related to culture (Amin and Thrift, 2007). These two aspects are particularly relevant in the analysis of transnational migrants' economic practices in western countries. Using a postcolonial lens, a focus on international and transnational migration offers the opportunity to challenge cultural and geographic conceptions of 'distance' and 'borders' between North and South, as well as historical ideas of 'development' that can be re-written through migrants' day-to-day stories in new contexts (McIlwaine, 2011). Using a postcolonial lens also implies rethinking imaginary 'borders' in the context of knowledge production. Pohlhaus (2017) argues that the concept of *border* usually signifies knowledge 'limits' and "whether it is possible to "make sense" of such limits in ways that would define the boundaries of what it is we can and cannot know" (p.48). However, she argues that such an approach to knowledge production defines in advance the boundaries of knowledge, leading scholars to disregard systematically any experience or anyone that does not fit within those boundaries (Pohlhaus, 2017, p.48). Drawing on Mohanty's idea of feminism without borders, Pohlhaus (2017) advances a new way of knowing termed *epistemic gathering* that relies on the recognition of fault lines, conflicts differences, and containment that borders represent, and conceives knowing as an action. *Epistemic gathering* entails "the sustained on-the-ground with women who are not similarly situated, which disrupt ingrained habits of attention and develops new ways of acting in concert" (Pohlhaus, 2017, p.49). This definition developed in the context of feminist postcolonial research can be used to inform new understandings of migrants' economic practices in industrialized contexts, which are usually framed within pre-defined economic models developed for the western industrialized world. Additionally, Alcoff (2017) calls for a more radical contestation of foundational categories, such as *women* and *oppression*, avoiding the assumption

that those categories will always operationalize in the same way. Therefore, categories such as *immigrant*, *minority*, and *culture* do not always operationalize in the same way producing the same material effects even for a given sub-group in society. Accepting that categories are not always experienced in the same way implies acknowledging the changing and hybrid nature of identities.

In both poststructural and postcolonial approaches identity is theorized as an incomplete process rather than a fixed category definable based on essential qualities. This theorization becomes even more important when we consider diasporic, ethnic, and cultural identities. Those identities are theorized as an ongoing process, transformed by daily negotiations and interactions of hybridized subjectivities (Mishra and Shirazi, 2010). Stuart Hall (1990, p. 235) claims:

The diaspora experience as I intend it here is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by *hybridity*. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference.

Along the same lines, Bhabha (1991) theorizes the concept of *third space* defined as a hybrid space that allows for new positions to emerge, displacing the histories that constitute it and setting new structures of authority, new political initiatives, and unanticipated forms of agency.

The poststructural and postcolonial contestations of the mainstream market-based definition of the economy not only open the room for re-envisioning economic practices and geographies at multiple scales, but also offers a solid ground to frame pluralist local economies in multicultural and multiethnic cities where processes of identity-formation are an integral part of unanticipated forms of economic agency (e.g., Sweet, 2016). Using poststructural and postcolonial lenses is instrumental in enhancing our understanding of immigrants' and ethnic minorities' economies and unpacking the complexity constituting such practices without limiting the inquiry to what 'fits' within the boundaries defined by a market-based conceptualization of the economy. The exploration of immigrants' and ethnic minorities' economies in the United States from a

poststructural and postcolonial perspective currently represents an understudied area. As the next section shows, theorizations of immigrants' economies and economic practices have focused on positioning those communities in relation to the mainstream labor market – hence, within the mainstream conceptualization of the economy.

2.4 Immigration and immigrant economies in the U.S.

The United States has been long perceived as a land of opportunity for immigrants, yet their presence in the country has raised concerns around immigrants' assimilation and economic impact (Abramitzky and Boustan, 2017). This has become increasingly relevant in the past two decades due to the significant demographic shift in many locales and its visible effects on urban and rural environments. Massey (1995) compares the post-1965 wave of immigration, mainly from Asia and Latin America, with the previous wave of predominantly European origin (1901-1930), finding that the new wave is part of an ongoing flow that still sustains itself and immigrants are entering a highly stratified society characterized by high-income inequality and growing labor market segmentation.

One of the distinctive characteristics of the current wave of immigration has been a visible change in geographic settlement patterns at the national and local scales, influenced by patterns of economic growth in the country (Singer et al., 2008). Alongside the major traditional destinations, such as New York, California, Texas, Florida, and Illinois, that continue to receive an influx of immigrants, new destinations have emerged across the country (Massey, 2008; Singer, 2004, 2015; Singer et al., 2008). By 2014 major- and minor-emerging destinations in the South – e.g., Atlanta, Austin, Charlotte, Nashville, Raleigh, Durham, and Greensboro – housed 11% of the total immigrant population (Singer, 2015). These emerging destinations are all places characterized by

a well-developed or growing low-skill service sector, which constitutes one of the visible effects of economic restructuring dynamics (Massey, 2008). Dynamics of economic restructuring create the initial demand for immigrants in new places and then other dynamics, such as the process of cumulative causation of migration, develop and contribute to explaining the diversification of immigrant destinations within the country (Massey, 1990, 2008; Wright and Ellis, 2016).

Changes in settlement patterns have also affected the local scale, altering urban and rural landscapes. The broader economic restructuring dynamics, geo-political shifts, immigration policies, availability of jobs, investments in inner-city neighborhoods, and gentrification processes have pushed immigrants to settle mainly in suburbs, rather than inner-city areas, where more affordable housing options and a variety of jobs are available (Li, 2009; Singer, 2004; Singer et al., 2008; Smith and Furuseth, 2004). These suburban areas are less spatially segregated by immigrant origin and country than early enclaves (Brown and Chung, 2008; Li, 1998, 2009; Singer, 2004; Singer et al., 2008; Smith and Furuseth, 2004). Although the characteristics of this new wave and, specifically, the increased spatial dispersion may make obsolete the original definition of ethnic enclave (Portes and Manning, 1986) identified in relation to immigrants' specific origins – e.g., Cubans, Italians, or Chinese – it is still possible to identify spatial concentrations of immigrants defined around ethnic categories – e.g., Hispanics – in older and newer destinations (see Chaney, 2010).

Ethnic entrepreneurship has been mainly studied in relation to the condition of spatial concentration in ethnic residential neighborhoods (Wang, 2012). Portes and Jensen (1989) define ethnic economy as a group of businesses owned and operated by members of a single ethnic group. Ethnic economies are seen by some as disadvantaged forms of economic activities marked by a great deal of informal and sometimes illegal activities and by others as a rewarding mechanism

marked by social ties and solidarity among participants, constituting an alternative to the mainstream labor market (Portes and Manning, 1986; Kaplan, 1998). Kaplan and Li (2006, p.5) identify five primary criteria to define ethnic economies: ethnic ownership, employment, customer base, sectoral specialization, and spatial concentration. Although the degree of self-employment varies by ethnic group, on average immigrants tend to be more entrepreneurial out of necessity (Kaplan and Li, 2006). The extensive scholarship on ethnic economies has shown that they are more than just an assemblage of businesses: they represent a system functioning because of the strong connections between owners, employees, and customers. Those connections – which are initially built on the strength of relationships of kinship and friendship and evolve with the arrival of more immigrants (Boyd, 1989; Portes and Zhou, 1993) – provide social support and cultural familiarity for newcomers upon arrival (Ellis, 2006), help to gain access into the US labor market (Granberry and Marcelli, 2007), and/or to start a business and recruit workers (Portes and Zhou, 1993; Rodriguez, 2004).

In line with new geographies of migration, many scholars have started to question theorizations of ethnic economies as spatially bounded phenomena. Newer theorizations see the emergence of ethnoburb, ethnic corridors, and heterolocalism as main conceptualizations of socio-economic and spatial ethnic dynamics. Drawing on empirical analysis in Los Angeles, Li (1998) coins the term *ethnoburb* to indicate the complexity of ethnic suburban systems reflecting global, national, and local dynamics. Ethnoburbs are suburban locations characterized by the prominence of one ethnic group and by both degrees of ethnic assimilation in American society and the maintenance of a distinct ethnic character. McDaniel and Drever (2009) explore the case of a multicultural, suburban, commercial corridor in Alabama, where a variety of ethnicity conflate and assign and international value to the corridor. On the contrary, the model of heterolocalism

developed by Zelinsky and Lee (1998) posits the dispersion of immigrant communities in metropolitan areas – rather than their spatial concentration – and their coalescence around community and commercial spaces. Heterolocalism is an important model to understand connections among ethnic communities living in disparate places that are maintained through transportation and telecommunication technologies (Stewart, 2011; Walker, 2018).

The persistence of socio-economic and community ties is a key aspect underlining explorations of ethnic economies. This form of economies offers service and goods in support of ethnic communities, shows a degree of proximity with ethnic minorities' concentrations in urban areas, and contributes to placemaking activities (Alvarez, 2009; Delgado, 2011; Hoalst-Pullen et al., 2013; Schuch and Wang, 2015). Not everyone agrees with the positive connotation of ethnic social ties. Some scholars have pointed to 'ethnic solidarity' as instrumental for the re-creation of hierarchical exploitative dynamics within the ethnic group producing entrapment effects among employees (Sanders and Nee, 1987), and exploitative attitudes towards local customers pursued in the name of capitalist self-interest (Bonacich, 1993). Regardless of the positive or negative connotation attributed to ethnic economies, this literature uncovers the existence of social ties as an integral part of the socio-economic organization of ethnic groups in the host society.

This brief exploration highlights that almost all the studies focusing on immigrants in the US economy rely on the mainstream definition of the economy as market-based mechanisms associated with capitalism. Even theorizations of ethnic economies rely on a market-based definition, which mainly sees them as alternative capitalist labor markets using the supply-demand mechanisms restricted to ethnic communities. As noted in the previous section, definitions of the economy as a monolithic system have an exclusionary power. As a result, immigrant and ethnic minority economies have only been explored using a capitalist lens and, thus, economic practices

that do not fit the market-based capitalist definition are either partially explored and labeled as informal (Crotty, 2017; Pisani, 2012), or overlooked and marginalized. Fewer are the studies tackling the topic from a political economic, or even postcolonial, perspective. On the one side, political economic analyses have uncovered the complexity of immigrants' experience as flexible bodies in the contemporary forms of capitalism in conjunction with processes of social reproduction and claims to place (for example, Smith and Winders, 2008), deepening our understanding beyond the analysis of immigrants' participation in the labor market. On the other side, as noted in the previous section, these analyses tend to reinforce a binary definition of the economy according to which immigrants are placed either within the 'formal' or the 'informal' sector. The formal-informal binary view has impacted the social perception in powerful ways creating material effects on daily social, economic, and spatial relationships. Flores and Schachter (2018) explore the social construction of illegality rooted in powerful stereotypes that disregard actual documentation statuses and, in turn, associate 'illegality' with some bodies more than others – e.g., young, lower-educated individuals with limited English, or Mexicans, Salvadorans, and to some extent Africans. As Sweet (2016) shows in her analysis of migrant Latinas in the Chicago economy, adopting poststructural and postcolonial lenses enhances our understanding of the variety of economic activities with which migrants engage. She emphasizes that the changing nature of those practices is an outcome of migrants' changing and overlapping identities. Her findings are in line with Hammelman's (2018a; 2018b) analysis of migrant women's coping strategies in response to food insecurity in Washington, DC. In both cases, informal networks built on social relations with family, friends, and neighbors, emerge as a key component of survival strategies in the host society. As Sweet's (2016) and Hammelman's (2018a, 2018b) analyses

prove, it is impossible to capture the complexity of such socio-economic relations using traditional approaches.

2.5 Ethnic economies as assemblages constructing foodscapes

Studies on immigrant communities in the United States show enough empirical evidence of the existence of social ties among members of a given ethnic group, or across ethnic groups, whose extent, impact, and characteristics vary by local context (Wierzbicki, 2004). Using a capitalist lens, theorizations of social networks in relation to ethnic economies mainly focus on the socioeconomic advantages and/or disadvantages that individual members gain as part of the larger group, or on the assimilation trajectories associated with the group in the host society. Therefore, those theorizations only partially shed light on the link between ethnic social ties and the emergence and development of collaborative forms of economic practices that transcend the individual level by employing interdependence and solidarity. The concepts of *interdependence among subjects*, *collaborating*, and *sharing* are emerging as core components of the broader project of re-envisioning the economy that is currently investing several disciplines – e.g., geography and urban planning – as well as practices on the ground. In fact, contemporary social, political, and economic dynamics have raised awareness on the interdependence among subjects and the consequential importance of shifting the economic focus from individual preferences, choices, responsibilities, and freedom to a collective dimension that values the deep interconnections among individuals. Recently, scholars have mainly analyzed this interdependence and forms of economic collaboration through the theoretical lens of community economies in synergy with assemblage thinking.

In the diverse economies framework, the interdependence of economic actors – identified as all living entities – represents the ethical premise for the development of new forms of economies, defined as *community economies* (Gibson-Graham et al., 2013, p. xviii). As Gritzas and Kavoulakos (2016, p.923) note, here “the term ‘community’ implies the need to re-socialise economic relations by adopting an ethical approach and recognising the interdependence of subjects and economic practices and going beyond an individualised performance without refusing or eliminating any singularity and individuality.” Gibson-Graham et al. (2013, p. xviii) identifies some important strategies reflecting the ethical collective dimension inspiring community economies: (a) surviving together well and equitably; (b) distributing surplus to enrich social and environmental health; (c) encountering others in ways that support their well-being as well as ours; and (d) caring for our natural and cultural commons. These strategies define a broad ethical approach to the economy that moves away from capitalocentrism (Gibson-Graham, 1995) and problematize capitalism as the only existing reality (Law, 2015). Additionally, this ethical approach to the economy has the potential to transform economic practices occurring in any place and at any geographic scale – from the global to the local – and to escape the dictates of the One-World World ontology (Law, 2015) in order to develop an ontological politics of the pluriverse (Escobar, 2020; Loh and Shear, 2022). In short, as the Zapatistas have expressed it, escaping the existence of a single all-encompassing reality means developing “a world in which many worlds fit” (Loh and Shear, 2022, p. 1210) and freeing the multiple, diverse, realities composing the pluriverse (Escobar, 2020; Law, 2015).

To develop more nuanced understandings of the enactment of multiple ways of being, knowing, and doing embedded in Latinx diverse collaborative economies, this research relies on the more recent relational turn that sees diverse economies as “assemblages or actor-networks of

heterogeneous actors held together by a multiplicity of relations and associations that temporarily stabilize them” (Turker and Murphy, 2019, p. 4). Deleuze and Guattari (1987) have introduced the concept of *assemblage* – translated from the French *agencement* – as a provisional analytical tool to understand the mode of ordering of heterogeneous entities so that they work together (Muller, 2015). Drawing on the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari on assemblages, economic geographers have started to rethink their subjects of inquiry in terms of assemblages of heterogeneous actors (Müller and Schurr, 2016). The focus on relations among entities subverts standard understandings of space relying on proximity-distance or nested relationship of scale (Latour, 1996), to introduce relational conceptualizations of socio-spatial dynamics as co-constructed in space. Doreen Massey (2005, p. 9-12) introduces three important propositions for a relational approach to space. First, space is the product of interrelations and is constituted through interactions at multiple scales. Relations are understood as embedded practices that construct entities and identities, which, in turn, cannot be defined *a priori*. In fact, space does not exist prior to identity/entities and their relations, rather, identity/entities, relations between them, and their spatiality are all co-constitutive. Second, space is the sphere in which distinct trajectories coexist in their plurality and heterogeneity. The very act of recognizing the simultaneous coexistence of different stories and trajectories points to the fallacy of a universal ontology and the existence of a single way of being, knowing, and doing. Third, space is always under construction precisely because it is a product of relations-between, and relations are embedded material practices that need to be carried out.

This relational ontology of space has underpinned urban analysis conceptualizing cities as assemblages of wider and diverse processes and has spurred the emergence of assemblage thinking and the translation of actor-network theories into urban studies (Bosco 2014; Robinson, 2006;

Sarmiento, 2020). A relational approach to urban studies foregrounds analyses that reject hierarchical orders and understand urban contexts as diverse, complex, internally variegated, and relationally connected to one another (Robinson, 2006). To shed light on socio-spatial dynamics, relations, and interdependencies among subjects constituting community economies, Turker and Murphy (2019) have developed a theoretical framework to analyze relationships among heterogeneous economic actors as influenced by resources and constraints forming in relation to context-related specificities and processes of stabilization and destabilization. This extensive perspective on actors and their significance for economic practices helps to expand the analysis of community economies focusing on the web of relations constituting them and on the relations of power that may limit the development of such practices (Sarmiento, 2017; Turker and Murphy, 2019). This research uses a food lens and, therefore, it is particularly concerned with interrogating the construction of ethnic foodscapes as relationally constituted assemblages of tangible and less tangible aspects emerging and interacting in space and time. This conceptualization is in line with the definition of ethnic foodscapes advanced by Jossart-Marcelli (2021):

I use the term *ethnic foodscape* to describe the environments (e.g., kitchens, restaurants, streets, gardens, shops), bodies (e.g., cooks, chefs, immigrants, tourists, foodies, ethnics), objects (e.g., ingredients, carts, cookware, recipes, dishes) as well as ideologies, feelings, and imaginaries (e.g., domesticity, taste, smells, nostalgia, authenticity, exoticism) that work together to link food, place, and people to one or more ethnicities. The ethnic foodscape is therefore relational; it includes tangible elements that can be observed and counted as well as less tangible aspects of how people engage with this food related elements in their daily activities. It foregrounds the everyday lives of “ethnic” people as they navigate the structural constraints of racism in and beyond their neighborhoods by engaging in unique food procurement practices” (p. 29-30)

Her definition aligns with assemblage thinking in its understanding of foodscapes as composed by environments, objects, ideologies, feelings, and imaginaries that work together to link food, place, and people. Specifically, it aligns with assemblage thinking in its simultaneous emphasis on agentic capacities of people engaged in food production, distribution, and consumption, and on structural constraints that exist, but are not immovable or infinite (Jossart-Marcelli, 2021).

Therefore, assemblage thinking and relational conceptualizations of urban space create the foundation to produce more nuanced understandings of ethnic economic practices' relational linkages and impacts on the construction of foodscapes in Charlotte and Boston.

Ultimately, the coalescence of different cultures and ways of living in urban spaces points to the urgency of understanding the economy as composed by everyday actions and as a contested, situated, and diverse realm, in which the diversity of the actors involved is no longer a marginal aspect. It also demonstrates the urgency of acknowledging the symbolic and materials linkages created across geographies through the enactment of diverse ways of being, knowing, and doing. International relational linkages substantiate recent calls advanced by critical Latinx critical geographers for a dialogue between Latinx geographies in the US and Latin American critical geographies (e.g., Carvajal and Ramírez, 2022, August; Zaragocin, 2021). Intimate symbolic and material linkages between Latinx geographies in the US and Latin American geographies emerge by adopting a relational approach that rejects hierarchical orders and understands urban contexts as diverse, complex, internally variegated, and relationally connected to one another (Robinson, 2006). From this perspective migratory flows cease to be unidirectional phenomena – from the global south to the global north – and become entanglements of multiscale dynamics co-constituting geographies in multiple countries. Specifically, relationality enables the conditions for a dialogue between Latinx geographies in the US and Latin American critical geographies (e.g., Zaragocin, 2021; Carvajal and Ramírez, 2022, August) that is key to disassembling colonial borders, geographies, and embodiment of the imprecise (Carvajal and Ramírez, 2022, August) and rethinking the relationships between Latinx identity and place (Muñoz and Ybarra, 2019).

The literature outlined in this chapter constitutes the foundation for the research presented in this dissertation. I draw on this foundation and expand it in Chapter 4, Chapter 5, and Chapter

6 to better frame the main themes emerging from research findings. The additional literature presented in these three chapters further demonstrate how this research builds on a foundation constituted by poststructural and postcolonial understandings of the economy to contribute to literature in diverse economies, ethnic economies, and theorizations of assemblages and foodscapes in critical Latinx geographies.

Chapter 3

Research Design and Methods

In the attempt to foster a discourse of economic diversity in highly industrialized societies and address the overarching research question – *How are Latinx food-based collaborative economic practices influenced by and influencing different socio-economic and political structures as they emerge in and construct different urban contexts?* – this study relies on a mixed-methods, relational comparative approach (Ward, 2010). Rooted in the postcolonial perspective, the comparative relational approach refuses to measure ‘cases’ against a universal yardstick or argue for uniqueness and endless difference (Hart, 2002, pp. 13-14), or identify similarities and differences between two mutually exclusive contexts (Roy, 2003). Rather, it emphasizes how comparisons that use different cities help to (1) pose questions on one another, (2) shed light on one another’s particularities or specificities, and (3) illuminate the whole through the close study of its parts (Hart, 2002; Roy, 2003). Also, case study research produces concrete, in-depth context-based knowledge that, in the study of human affairs, becomes more valuable than predictive theories and universals (Flyvberg, 2006). This is especially relevant for research on marginalized communities, especially those that are usually not represented in secondary data (e.g., Census data) and whose voices are seldom included in economic narratives. This study relies on a comparative relational case study to investigate the emergence and development of Latinx diverse collaborative economies in the Charlotte and Boston urban areas. This research design has allowed the production of in-depth and rich narratives on Latinx diverse collaborative economies, understood here as assemblages in the making with roots in people's past experiences and forms of identity, and as constituted through relational links with geographies at different scales.

The choice of these two urban contexts is instrumental in investigating the interplay of multiscale dynamics interacting with food-based cooperative and collaborative practices. Boston (MA) is an established migrant destination with a long tradition of community organizing, cooperativism, and solidarity economies, whereas Charlotte (NC) is an emerging migrant destination that is still building and expanding its infrastructure for immigrant reception and does not have a strong cooperative tradition (Singer et al., 2008; Singer, 2015). Located in two neighboring geographical regions in the US – northeast and southeast – Boston and Charlotte are both characterized by a rapid increase of Latinx communities due to the interaction between global forces and local specificities (Frazier and Reisinger, 2006). Therefore, in-depth analyses of diverse collaborative practices in these two contexts help to capture in more depth the interplay between the scale of the body and mundane – migrants’ everyday experiences – and the local, national, and international levels.

The remainder of this section introduces the two contexts of study, the research methods employed in each context of study, the population and the practices explored in this research, data analysis, and limitations of the research design.

3.2 Contexts of study

This section introduces the two contexts of study – Boston and Charlotte – offering a broad analysis of the evolution of socio-economic aspects in both contexts, their relationship with the recent influx of Hispanic communities, and relevant characteristics of local contexts. It is worth noting that the trends presented in those descriptions rely on secondary data, hence, only partially capture the real trends in the two contexts (St Martin and Pavlovskaya, 2010). The two contexts of study show similarities and differences that make them strong illustrative cases for this research.

3.2.1 Boston Area (Massachusetts)

Singer (2015) classifies the city of Boston as a major-continuous gateway due to the sustained influx of immigrants it has received over the decades, starting from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with the arrival of English, Irish, and Italian groups (Bluestone and Stevenson, 2000). In the last 25 years, this immigrant influx has been responsible for nearly 90% of the population growth in the city (Schuster, 2017). The origins of the immigrant population reflect broader trends emerging nationally after the enactment of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act: newcomers are no longer from European countries, instead, they come primarily from Asia and Latin America. As a result of this new wave of immigration, at the end of the twentieth century, this area drastically shifted from a white ethnocentric community to a diverse multicultural one (Bluestone and Stevenson, 2000; Edozie et al., 2019; Uriarte, 1991).

The main reasons behind the sustained influx of immigrants in this area are its vibrant economy, higher education opportunities (Schuster and Ciurczak, 2018), and strong connections between immigrants already located in the area and people located in Latin America, or elsewhere in the U.S. The economic prosperity characterizing the Greater Boston area today is rooted in what Bluestone and Stevenson (2000) identify as the ‘triple revolution’ – demographic, industrial, and spatial – that took place between 1980 and 1990 and was produced by the interplay of institutional factors (such as public policy decisions) and market forces. During these two decades, the Boston region moved from a mill-based to a mind-based economy – composed of health care, higher education, microelectronics, defense, financial services, and construction sectors – that filled the void of the collapse of manufacturing and produced a boom in employment rates and household earnings. Bluestone and Stevenson (2000) note that the newly established service industries offered job opportunities both for professionals and for low-skilled workers, attracting immigrants

from both ends of the spectrum – more-educated and less-educated ones. As a consequence, this economic transformation is closely interconnected to a demographic and spatial transformation. By 1990, four cities in the area – Boston, Cambridge, Chelsea, and Lawrence – had a minority population greater than 25% and this population was primarily of Hispanic or Asian origin (Louie, 2005). Additionally, over these two decades, the Boston region acquired a multicentered organizational structure where both the core – the city of Boston – and the surrounding towns played a role in the economy of the region (Bluestone and Stevenson, 2000).

Today, in the city of Boston, the Latinx community accounts for 19.5% of the total population (675,647; Decennial Census, 2020), with even greater numbers residing in adjacent municipalities – e.g., 67.7% in Chelsea (Decennial Census 2020). This trend reflects the overall growth of the Latinx population, which increased from 5% to 12% between 1990 and 2020 (Edozie et al., 2019; Decennial Census, 2020) and concentrated in the eastern part of the state. Figure 3.1 shows the spatial distribution by census tract of the Hispanic population in Boston and surrounding towns. In 2010, in the city of Boston and adjacent municipalities, a few areas distinctly emerge as high-density clusters of Hispanics (more than 40%): East Boston and smaller parts of Roxbury and Jamaica Plain (within the city boundaries) and the municipalities of Chelsea, Revere, and Lynn (outside the city boundaries). However, numerous areas present a concentration of Hispanic population that ranges from 20% to 40%. The map clearly shows a clustering tendency of Hispanics in northern and southern areas of the city as well as northern municipalities. The comparison between the 2010 and 2020 maps demonstrates that over time the population has tended to cluster in and around the census tracts occupied in 2010, but new census tracts and towns have also emerged as Hispanic clusters.

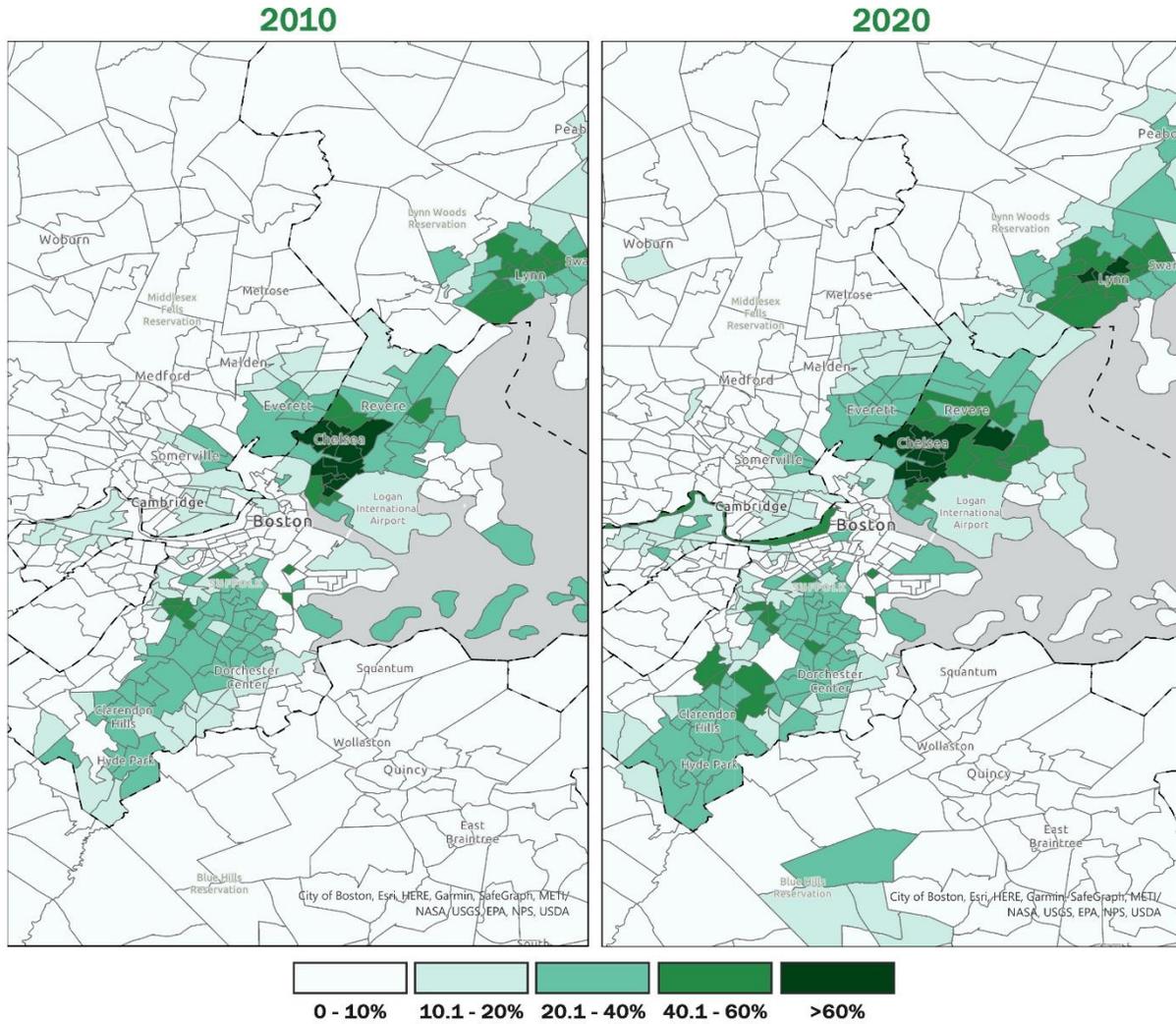


Figure 3.1 – Hispanic spatial distribution by census tract in Boston and adjacent towns (2010 and 2020)
Source: Decennial Census

The Hispanic community in the greater Boston area has experienced dramatic growth in the last 30 years along with inter-group diversity. Before the 1980s, Latinx groups were mainly from Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic, whereas during the 1990s a significant influx of immigrants and refugees from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Colombia has changed the overall makeup of the area’s Hispanic population (Rivera, 2019). In 2017, in Boston, Dominicans constituted 28% of the Hispanic population, followed by Puerto Ricans (27%), and Salvadorans (11%). In Chelsea, the most populous sub-groups in 2017 were Salvadoran (32%),

Honduran (18%), Puerto Rican (17%), and Guatemalan (11%). In Revere, Salvadorans made up 29% of the Hispanic population in town, Colombians 26%, and Puerto Ricans 11%, whereas in Everett, Salvadorans made up more than half of the Hispanic population (57%), followed by Puerto Ricans (15%). This inter-group diversity not only is symptomatic of differences in background, culture, and migration patterns, but also has profound implications for the adjustment process these groups undergo in the Greater Boston area and the consequential socio-economic positioning in the host society.

Despite the Greater Boston area's history as an immigrant destination, its legacy of racial intolerance, inequality, and inter-group tensions still underpin today's spatial segregation and economic inequalities across the region (Bluestone and Stevenson, 2000; Louie, 2005). Findings emerging from the Greater Boston Social Survey (Bluestone and Stevenson, 2000) show that the spatial segregation characterizing Boston at the turn of the twentieth century was determined by the interplay of income inequality and the receiving population's negative attitudes towards newcomers – rooted in a legacy of prejudice and stereotypes. Bluestone and Stevenson (2000: 372) find that the close interconnection of housing and labor markets (defined as the opportunity nexus) is reflected in the ways these markets are segregated by race, ethnicity, and gender. Louie (2005) finds that racial discrimination and inequality are constant features of African Americans' and Hispanics' day-to-day encounters in the Boston region across all settings – housing, workplace, entertainment venues, and so forth. Today's Latinx socio-economic well-being is determined by a combination of sub-group level characteristics (education, background, communities of origin, language proficiency, and so forth) and characteristics of the hosting environment. Schuster and Ciurczak (2018) find that intergenerational upward economic mobility has declined since 1940 and that, although compared to other metropolitan areas Boston

offers more opportunities to move up the income distribution, many still end up earning a lower salary than the one required to compensate for the high cost of living. Among the minority groups, Hispanics rank the lowest in terms of upward mobility in Boston (Schuster and Ciurczak, 2018). The decreased opportunities for upward mobility are aligned with increased income and wealth inequalities. Figure 3.2 shows the per-capita income by race – Whites, Blacks, Asians, and Hispanics – in Boston, Chelsea, Everett, and Revere, highlighting that in the four areas, Hispanics lag behind all of the other racial groups in per-capita earnings.

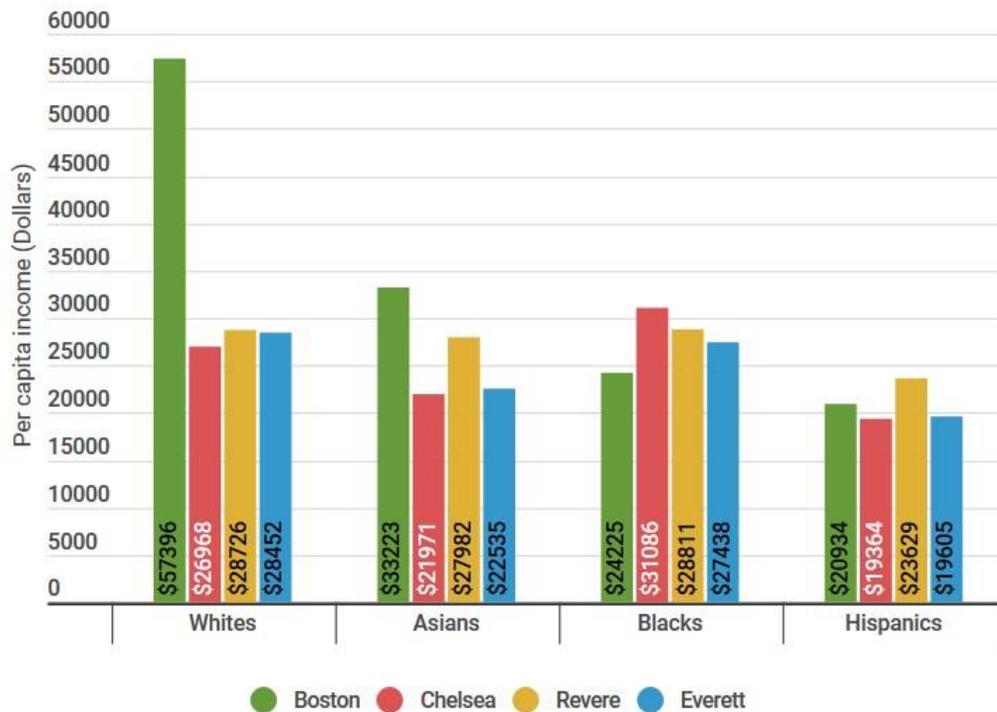


Figure 3.2 – 2018 Per-capita income in US dollars by racial/ethnic group in Boston, Chelsea, Revere, and Everett
 Source: 2018 ACS 5-year estimates

Although the contemporary socio-economic situation is on average better than the one described at the turn of the 21st century (Schuster, 2017), the Hispanic community in the Greater Boston area still faces some significant challenges. These challenges have been significantly exacerbated by the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020 and the consequential

economic recession. Several reports highlight the severity of the social and economic impact of the pandemic on the Latinx population in Boston and, more generally, in Massachusetts. Pre-pandemic unequal conditions such as unstable housing, lower levels of educational attainments, higher levels of unemployment, and food insecurity worsened with the pandemic: during the first wave of Covid-19 Latinx were more likely to lose their jobs, suffer from food insecurity, be excluded from relief programs if undocumented, and fall behind on housing payments than their Black, White, and Asian counterpart (Boston Indicators, 2021, May; Lazar, 2022, March). During the pandemic, Latinx individuals were more likely to be essential workers holding jobs in the food services and health care support fields, use public transportation to go to work, and live in large-sized households (4 or more people). These factors not only contribute to explaining high rates of Covid-19 infection among Latinos, but also are representative of deep structural socio-economic differences characterizing the Boston area (Rivera et al., 2020).

However, the Greater Boston area is also characterized by vibrant grassroots activity that has started to reshape the local economy in more ethical and sustainable ways. Recent studies on the emergence of sharing and solidarity economic activities in this area (Loh and Agyeman, 2019; Loh and Jimenez, 2017; Loh and Shear, 2015, 2022; Shear, 2020) document the existence of transformative practices in minority and migrant communities in the area (e.g., the Center for Cooperative Development and Solidarity, the Boston Ujima Project, and the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative). Several initiatives have emerged to support local communities and mitigate the effects of the pandemic. For example, mutual-aid groups and community fridges sprung up across the city and surrounding areas to support people in need through money, food, and other types of donations. These initiatives were accessible through hotlines, WhatsApp groups, online lists, and maps. The complex interplay between socio-economic context-related

characteristics, grassroots activities, and Hispanic positionings make the Greater Boston area an illustrative case study to explore the emergence and development of diverse collaborative economic practices.

3.2.2 Charlotte area (North Carolina)

Singer (2015) classifies the city of Charlotte as a major-emerging gateway due to the high foreign-born population growth characterizing the city between 1990 and 2020. Contrary to the Boston area, the Charlotte area is among a group of US metros that despite a limited immigrant history is attracting the largest absolute numbers of foreign-born populations (Harden et al., 2015). In an era of contentious national policy debate, these new immigrant destinations are all facing significant difficulties in responding to and incorporating the increasing number of culturally distinct newcomers without being able to rely on a historical social and service-provision infrastructure (Harden et al., 2015). As in the case of Boston, the newcomers are mainly of Hispanic origin and they move to the Charlotte area primarily for economic reasons, quality of life, and strong connections with people already residing in this area.

The economic environment characterizing the city today is rooted in the 1970s, when strong visionary leadership led Charlotte's transformation from a backwater village of the south (Lassiter, 2010) to a "globalizing city" with command-and-control functions at the regional and national levels (Graves and Smith, 2010). The current importance of the city and its global ties appear even more remarkable considering the regional disadvantages deriving from its location (Graves and Smith, 2010). Before the southern railway system was built, in the 1850s, Charlotte was located in the middle of a modest agricultural region with a relatively small and racially balanced population (Goldfield, 2010) of less than 1,065 people (U.S. Census 1940). The

construction of the railroad made Charlotte a regional hub and trade town for cotton growers (Hanchett, 1998). Throughout the first half of the 19th century and beyond, the already acquired solid economic position at the regional level has been complemented by city leaders' incessant promotion of Charlotte at the regional, national, and even international scale, which has aimed at attracting newcomers, companies, and banks, and fostering economic growth (Furuseth et al., 2015; Goldfield, 2010; Hanchett, 2008; Lassiter, 2010). However, it is primarily due to the emergence of finance as one of the most important economic sectors that Charlotte has transformed its mill-based economy into a finance- and service-based one, has overcome the stereotypes associated with southern cities, and has been branded as "international" and a "world-class city with a small-town charm" (Lassiter, 2010, p. 25). The emergence of the financial sector and the more recent diversification of the economy has allowed Charlotte to become a city that offers economic opportunities attracting newcomers from both ends of the spectrum – high-skilled and low-skilled.

Today, Charlotte is considered one of the fastest-growing cities in the United States with a booming economy and a population of 874,579 (Decennial Census, 2020), whose Hispanic share is 14.6%. Since the beginning of the 21st century, the city has experienced an extraordinary influx of both US-born and foreign-born individuals. In 2018, the City of Charlotte planning director declared that nearly 60 people a day move to the city, against the 44 counted in 2016 (Portillo, 2018). Among the racial and ethnic groups composing Mecklenburg county's demographics, between 2010 and 2017, Hispanics experienced the biggest growth (28%), followed by the Black population (22%), and Whites (11%) (Metzler and Off, 2018, June). This upward trend mirrors the one at the State level: between 1990 and 2020, the population with Hispanic origins increased from 1.2% (76,726) (Smith and Furuseth, 2006a) to about 10% (Decennial Census, 2020). North

Carolina is also estimated to have one of the highest undocumented population in the US (Revens and Caro, 2021), therefore Hispanic numbers are likely to be underreported.

If on the one hand, this rapid change has transformed local neighborhoods challenging traditional black-white dichotomies (Singer et al., 2008; Cisneros, 2009), on the other hand, Charlotte's long history of racial segregation has affected Hispanics' location patterns within the city boundaries (Smith and Furuseh, 2004). Figure 3.3 shows the spatial distribution by census tract of the Hispanic population in Charlotte and surrounding municipalities in 2010 and 2020. In particular, in both maps, three areas within the city boundaries emerge as areas with a high percentage of Hispanics: areas along the South Boulevard corridor (south-west) and around the airport, areas along the North Tryon corridor (north-east), and along the Central Avenue corridor (south-east). These three areas not only reflect the new spatial patterns of immigrant settlements discussed in the literature review, but also are characterized by the availability of a large stock of rental housing (Smith and Furuseh, 2004). Smith and Furuseh (2004, p. 228) find that rental housing represents a more affordable, accessible, and less discriminatory option for migrants and provides a less intrusive and socially restrictive environment. The comparison between the 2010 and 2020 maps demonstrates that census tracts in these areas have continued to receive a significant number of Hispanics and that municipalities such as Gastonia, Concord, and Monroe in North Carolina, and Rock Hill in South Carolina have also experienced increasing numbers of Hispanics. Demographic patterns emerging from these maps reinforce Hispanic settlement patterns established in 2000 and, at the same time, show new ones (i.e., the increased number of Hispanics outside the city limits) that are symptomatic of the increased cost of living in the city.

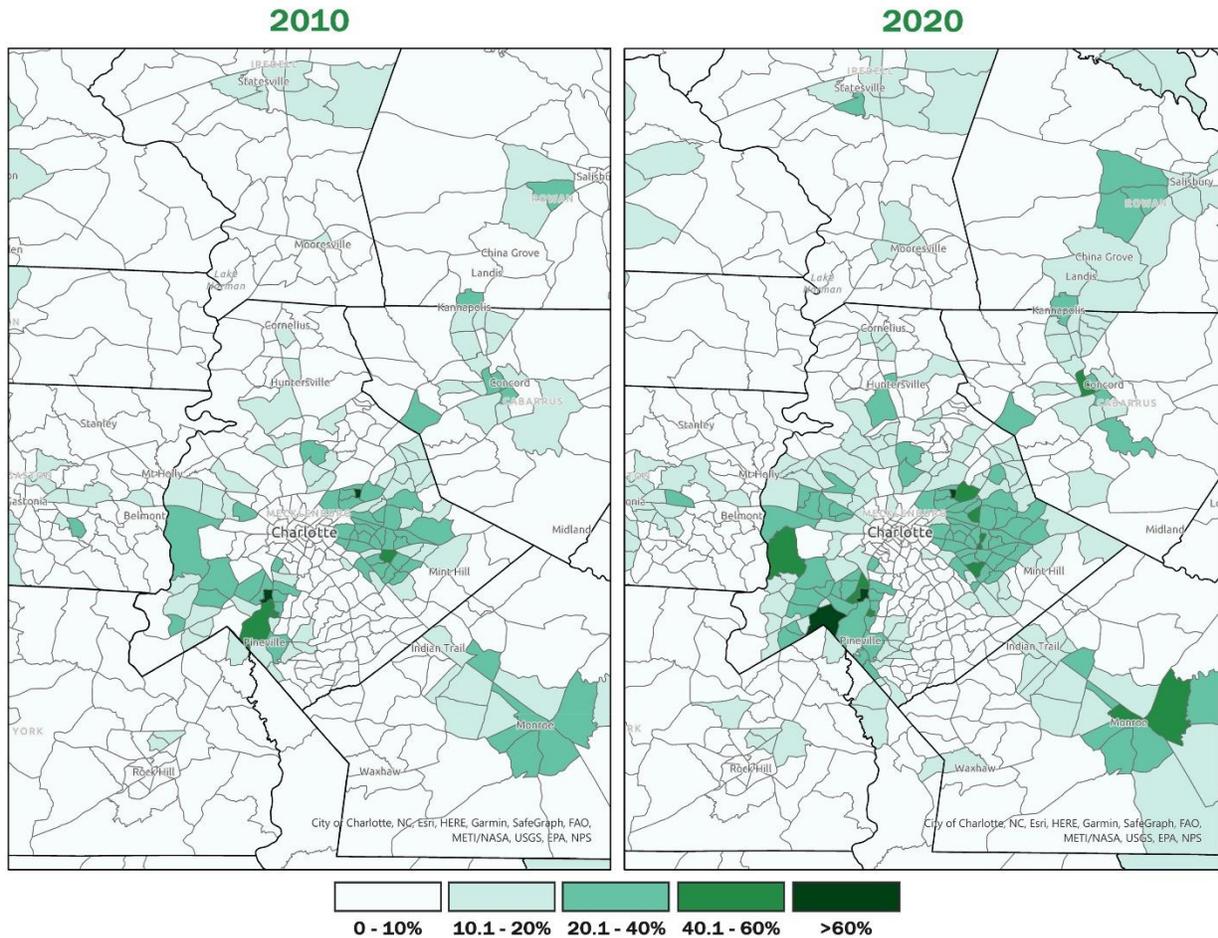


Figure 3.3 – Hispanic spatial distribution by census tract in Charlotte and surrounding municipalities (2010 and 2020). Source: Decennial Census

In the last three decades, the Hispanic population in Charlotte has grown alongside its inter-group diversity. In the 1970s, Charlotte had a small and growing elite group of Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and South Americans (Smith and Furusest, 2006b). By 2000, the Latinx population in the city was significantly bigger and predominantly of Mexican origins. Between 2000 and 2017, this population further diversified: Dominicans (from 1% to 4%), Salvadorans (from 5% to 11%), and Hondurans (from 4% to 12%) present the most dramatic percentage increase in this time frame. The biggest group is still represented by Mexicans, yet, in 2017, their share of the total Hispanic population decreased. As noted previously, this inter-group diversity is symptomatic of increasing

differences in background, culture, migration history, adjustment process, and socio-economic positionings, which are not captured by stereotypical perceptions developed in the hosting environment.

Charlotte has always been portrayed as a welcoming and progressive city able to combine southern traditions with northern progressivism. Since the 1980s, job opportunities and the better quality of life that Charlotte offers in comparison to more traditional immigrant destinations (e.g., Los Angeles and New York) have attracted many Hispanics to the area. However, Charlotte's socio-economic and institutional environments have not always reflected such progressivism and welcoming attitudes. The long history of racial segregation in the city has influenced Latinx settlement patterns, fueled stereotypes, unwelcoming attitudes, and adversary policy decisions – e.g., the implementation of the 287(g) policy (Smith and Furuseth, 2006b; Furuseth et al., 2015). Additionally, the actions undertaken by Charlotte's local government towards the creation of a pro-immigrant city (e.g., the establishment of an Immigrant Integration Task Force) are often limited by the more conservative and anti-immigrant orientation of state legislature (Misra, 2015, December). Ultimately, state and national policies and programs impose top-down rules that often dictate the shape of local programs for immigrants (Furuseth et al., 2015). The fear instilled by social and institutional dynamics has often prevented Hispanics from accessing services and opportunities (Furuseth et al., 2015).

The combination of a difficult social and institutional environment is further complicated by the lack of upward mobility. In 2013, Charlotte was ranked at the bottom of a list of fifty metropolitan areas in terms of upward mobility opportunities (Chetty et al., 2015). Although the findings of the study prompted initiatives to address the issue (e.g., the creation of the Leading On Opportunity Council) the city is still characterized by a lack of upward mobility opportunities as

well as income and wealth inequalities. Figure 3.4 shows per-capita income by race – Whites, Blacks, Asians, and Hispanics – in the City of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County, highlighting that there is no significant difference between the city’s and the county’s trends and that Hispanics lag behind all the other racial groups in per-capita earnings.

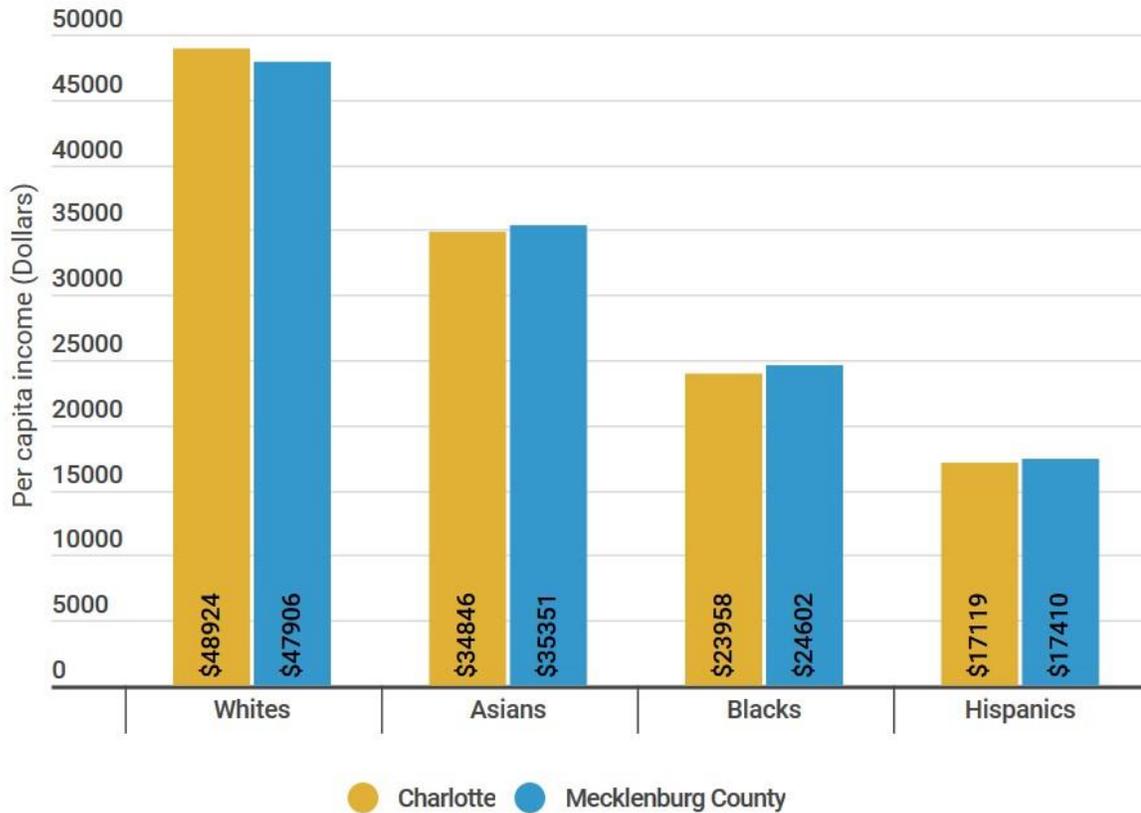


Figure 3.4 – 2018 Per-capita income in US dollars by racial/ethnic group in Charlotte and Mecklenburg County
 Source: 2018 ACS 5-year estimates

Similar to Boston, the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated and made more visible these pre-existing structural inequalities. Findings on the impact of the pandemic in the Charlotte area confirm the disproportionate physical, emotional, and financial impact on Latinx communities: many lost their jobs and/or decreased their household income and, in turn, experienced financial struggles and lack of food access (Revens and Caro, 2021). The high rate of the undocumented population, the lack of trust in institutions, and the fear of being deported have

made it more challenging to assess the extent of Covid-19 impacts on Hispanic communities in the Charlotte area.

Albeit the Hispanic community in Charlotte has faced significant integration challenges due to an uneven and shifting receptivity, grassroots activities and the presence of informal networks of solidarity are emerging as coping strategies for migrant communities. Contrary to Boston, Charlotte does not present documented cases of solidarity or alternative forms of economies. However, extensive conversations with local stakeholders and the emergence of social media groups facilitating discussions on topics and issues faced by Hispanics reveal the existence of informal networks of support. As a response to the pandemic, many initiatives to support local communities and small businesses emerged: food banks increased their days of operations, many churches and organizations started distributing food boxes, and organizations such as the Charlotte Latin American Chamber of Commerce launched new programs (e.g., Community Kitchen Program) to simultaneously support Latinx-owned small food businesses and local struggling communities. The complexity of social, economic, and institutional dynamics whose interplay has shaped Charlotte's environment of reception for Hispanic communities make Charlotte an illustrative case for this research.

3.3 Methods, procedures, participants, and practices studied

This section briefly outlines methods employed in each context of study and describes research procedures, participants, and the categories of practices studied. It also describes how the analysis of data was conducted and introduces four key analyses: importance analysis, impact analysis, intentionality analysis, and transformative power analysis. Finally, I briefly describe the challenges encountered in the field and the limitations of the research design.

3.3.1 Methods and procedures

In each urban area, this research relies on a mixed methods multi-scalar approach including in-depth interviews, mapping techniques (concept maps and GIS), and analysis of secondary data to address the following overarching question: *How are Latinx food-based collaborative economic practices influenced by and influencing different socio-economic and political structures as they emerge in and construct different urban contexts?* A mix of qualitative and quantitative methods allows for the triangulation of results in order to gain depth and credibility (Hemming, 2008). By combining these methods, I provide rich insights into the emergence and development of Latinx food-based collaborative economic practices in the Charlotte and Boston areas and their relational linkages with other geographies at the regional, national, and international scales. Also, by relying on a mixed-method approach I was able to collect spatial stories around everyday collaborative practices from a variety of perspectives, including those not represented in mainstream narratives and standard data.

In order to address the overarching research question, I sought answers to the following three research sub-questions:

(SQ1) *How does the connection between Latinx individuals' positioning, background, experiences, and cultural roots inform food-based collaborative economic practices in a different cultural context?* – By addressing this question, I explore the complex links between people's multiple forms of identity, background, past experiences, and the development of food-based collaborative practices in the US. This dimension is seldom acknowledged in standard economic analysis and investigations of diverse and sharing economies in the U.S.

(Chapter 4)

(SQ2) *What are the spatial and organizational characteristics of collaborative food-based economic practices in Boston and Charlotte?* – By addressing this question, I explore spatial and organizational characteristics of collaborative food-based networks. Specifically, by analyzing practices as assemblages and by adopting a non-capitalist lens, this spatial and organizational analysis seeks nuanced understandings of spatial forms of ethnic economies that are not included in standard spatial analysis of ethnic economies and foodscapes representations (Chapter 5).

(SQ3) *What is the nature of the mutually constitutive relationship between diverse economic practices and the social, political, and economic contexts in which they are rooted?* – By addressing this question, I explore the mutually constitutive relationship between practices and the contexts in which they emerge by highlighting the context-related factors influencing the emergence and development of diverse economic practices and, at the same time, the transformative impacts these practices have on the context (Chapter 6).

These three sub-questions respectively unpack three distinct and overlapping dimensions – individual, collective, and contextual – of the diverse economic practices investigated in this study. As described above, I sought answers to these questions and, in turn, collected a rich and wide array of information by combining in-depth interviews, concept maps, and GIS mapping techniques (Figure 3.5).

In-depth interviews

Qualitative methods are particularly useful to seek rich descriptions and opinions and include marginalized voices (Cope and Elwood, 2009; DiCicco-Bloom, 2006; Schensul and LeCompte, 2012). Specifically, in-depth semi-structured interviews allow for systematic data

collection, eliciting rich descriptions, and capturing variation in informants' responses (Schensul and LeCompte, 2012; Secor, 2010). In the context of this research, in depth-interviews lasted between one and two hours and were conducted either in person in an outdoor setting or virtually (via Zoom), based on participants' preference. During the interviews, I collaborated with five interpreters in the two cities to enhance (1) the quality and clarity of communication with informants, (2) the interpretation of culturally ingrained meanings, and (3) allow informants to be comfortable expressing themselves through verbal and non-verbal communication. The interpreters were bilingual individuals chosen among community members and compensated for their service. In the Boston area, I mainly collaborated with a Latina (a resident in Chelsea), who interpreted the majority of interviews conducted in this area. I also relied on two other women (one community leader and one local resident), who helped me translate two interviews with women in their networks, and a man (a leader in a mutual-aid network), who helped me translate one interview with a man from the same mutual-aid network. In the Charlotte area, I collaborated with a Black young woman who translated all of the interviews conducted in Spanish. The choice of collaborating with interpreters from the same community, the same ethnoracial group, and/or the same gender facilitated the trust-building process with participants and the creation of a safe space in which they felt more comfortable sharing their experiences with me.

Interviews were conducted in Spanish or English, in line with participants' preferences and English proficiency, and audio-recorded to enhance the accuracy of data collection. Interviews were semi-structured and elicited information about the three dimensions unpacked in this study as well as background information (Appendix A). Background questions captured participants' origin, age, tenure in the United States, and current and past occupations.

In-depth interviews elicited rich narratives on the three dimensions investigated: the individual, collective, and contextual dimensions (Figure 3.5). First, during the interviews, I explored connections between migrants' diasporic identities, backgrounds, past experiences, and the development of economic activities centered on food (Chapter 4). Specifically, the interviews focused more explicitly on ethnic and racial forms of identities to address gaps in the diverse economies literature and to minimize the risk of reproducing stereotypical narratives around gendered dynamics in relation to the binary division between formal/informal economy. However, when gendered dynamics emerged in participants' stories, they were included in the analysis of the individual dimension (Chapter 4). Also, I investigated the meanings Latinx participants associated with economic concepts – e.g., work, skill, and cooperation – and the relationship between these meanings and the development of diverse collaborative economic practices (Chapter 4). Second, through in-depth interviews, I elicited information about acts of collaboration and cooperation among people, the organizational structure of the practices, important relational connections between people and places, and spatial aspects of these networks (Chapter 5). Finally, the interviews were instrumental in eliciting rich descriptions of context-related aspects that might enable and/or hinder the emergence and development of these practices, as well as the diverse ways practices impact contexts in which they emerge and develop.

This research also relied on information emerging from informal conversations and 17 in-depth interviews conducted during a background research phase (Summer and Fall 2019) with stakeholders, local leaders, and representatives of local organizations in the two urban contexts. These exploratory interviews lasted between 30 minutes and 1 hour and focused on the role of these organizations and the diverse economies landscape in Boston and Charlotte. As mentioned below, these conversations were also instrumental in creating a list of contacts on which I relied

during the data collection phase for this dissertation. Information emerging from these interviews contributed to producing background knowledge regarding the individual (Chapter 4) and contextual (Chapter 6) dimensions of diverse collaborative economies.

Concept and GIS mapping techniques

The combination of concept and GIS mapping tools contributed to deepening understandings of socio-spatial and organizational relationships as well as subjective experiences and emotions associated with the unfolding of everyday activities in space and time (Soini, 2001). The use of these tools contributed to exploring multi-faceted meanings that were difficult to elicit otherwise. Concept maps help to visually represent concepts and ideas, as well as the relationship among them (Soini, 2001). In the context of this research, concept maps are used to schematically visualize collaborative networks assembled through each food-based practice. Therefore, they were used to capture assemblages of actors, places, and foodstuffs, and the nature of relationships among them. These maps were developed during in-depth interviews with participants and constituted the base for network analyses. Questions around the practice – e.g., location, type, and organizational and frequency aspects, etc. – led to descriptions of the center of the practice represented as a circle at the center of the concept map. Questions around connections between the center and nodes – e.g., sources of food, type of sources, frequency, accessibility, distribution, sharing locations, type of collaboration with others – led to the description of nodes in the network, represented in the same concept map as circles connected to the center. Therefore, for each practice explored, concept maps provide a visual conceptual representation of the network assembled through the practices and some key information annotated right next to each circle (e.g. name, location, type, relationship with the center, frequency, etc.). Through these prompts (see

Appendix), informants were asked to schematically reflect (Gold and Coaffee, 1998) on the complex web of tangible and less tangible connections constituting the economic practice and their spatial linkages within and beyond urban areas. Information emerging from the participants' stories and visual representations of those stories contribute to addressing the second and third sub-questions (Figure 3.5).

Based on the spatial information collected during in-depth interviews and discussions around concept maps, I developed GIS maps that locate diverse collaborative networks in space and visualize relationships among centers and nodes. These maps visually represent ethnic economic practices' spatial forms in the two contexts of study and their linkages at different scales – urban, regional, national, and international. GIS mapping techniques are extensively employed by quantitative geographers, and increasingly by qualitative geographers. In fact, in the past two decades, an increasing number of geographers have developed efforts to integrate qualitative data into GIS analysis to represent non-cartographic information – e.g., emotions, mental maps, photographs, and narratives (Cope and Elwood, 2009). The adoption of GIS mapping techniques has allowed for the spatial representation of collaborative networks and the association of qualitative information to each of the nodes represented – e.g., the type of relationships among nodes and material things exchanged, the type and importance of each node, and information on the type of practices. The scale of representation was not defined *a priori*. In line with the ontological and epistemological stance assumed in this research, the nature of relationships among actors, objects, and environments was not pre-defined before entering the field and, in turn, the exploration of socio-spatial dynamics did not rely on a pre-defined scale of representation. Rather, this was defined for each context of study after the geospatial representation of the networks. The descriptions emerging from informants' reflections while drawing the concept and sketch maps

captured the networks of connection among individuals, the nature of collaborations, the existence of sharing practices, the time and spatial components of those connections, and the individual stories that determine the emergence of those connections, rather than others.

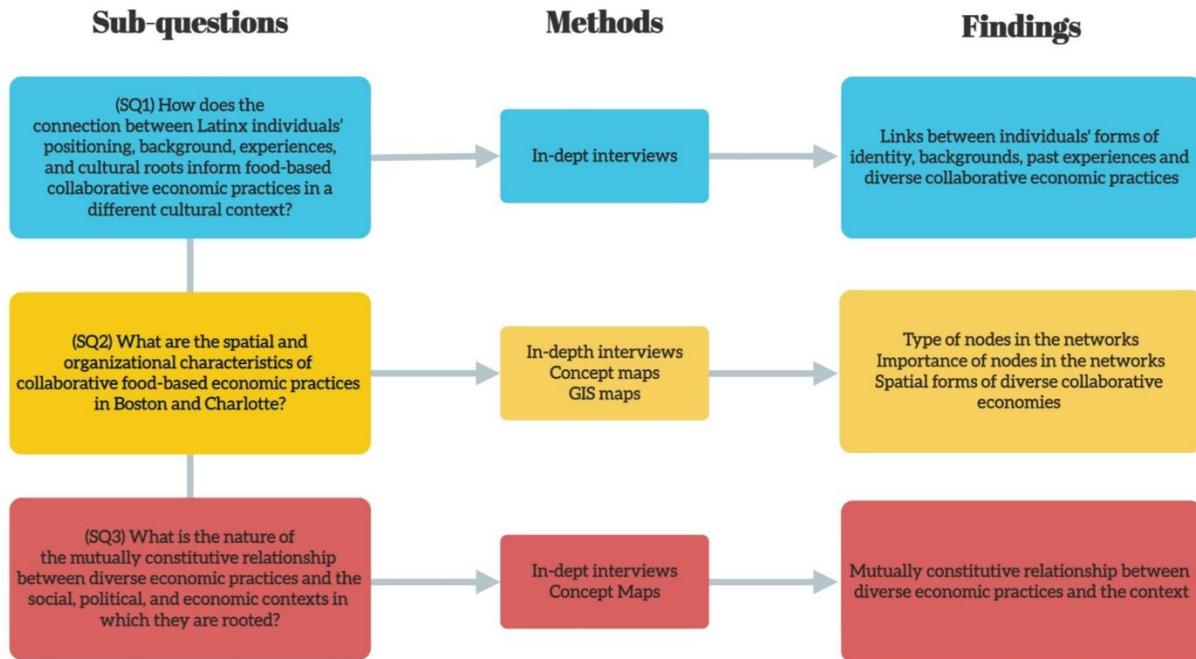


Figure 3.5 – Relationship between research questions, methods, and findings

3.3.2 Participants and practices studied

I recruited participants by relying on connections developed in both contexts of study during a background research phase (Summer and Fall 2019). This network of connections was further expanded during the first stages of data collection (Summer and Fall 2020) by reaching out to several community organizations in areas with a high concentration of Latinx communities. The recruitment of participants mediated by local stakeholders, community leaders, and representatives of organizations has increased my ability to develop trusted connections with Latinx participants

and conduct in-depth interviews. I relied on a snowball sampling technique to recruit as many participants as needed to reach ‘saturation’.

I interviewed 45 adults of Latin American origin or heritage – 23 in the Boston area and 22 in the Charlotte area. For practical reasons, this study restricted participation to individuals originating from Spanish-speaking countries in Latin America and speaking Spanish and/or English. Throughout the dissertation, I will refer to participants by using interchangeably the terms Hispanic, Latinx, and Latino/a. As explained in Chapter 4, there is a wide range of contested and overlapping meanings associated with these terms in media, academic, and political discourse. In using these terms interchangeably, I recognize the socially constructed nature of these categories and their power in the processes of social/racial organization and construction of North American societies. I followed participants’ interchangeable use of these terms (Chapter 4) to underscore the contested nature of these terms from the perspective of participants.

The two main criteria used for the selection of individuals were: (1) Latinx individuals engaged in economic practices centered on food – growing, producing, sharing, cooking, and so forth – and (2) individuals collaborating or cooperating with others through the enactment of the practice. In the context of this study, collaboration assumes multiple connotations ranging from more or less formalized and stable cooperative partnerships to informal, temporary, or occasional collaborations among individuals (Chapter 4). Participants in both urban areas are mainly women and some men of various ages, origins, and lengths of stay in the US and in both urban areas. The majority of participants’ age is comprised between 31-40 years old or more than 50 years old (Table 3.1). The majority of participants have been in the United States a length of time between 11 and 25 years (Table 3.2) and, as explained in greater detail in Chapter 6, they are mostly foreign-born women who arrived in the United States to join people they knew, such as family members,

friends, or acquaintances. Specifically, 29 individuals arrived directly from their country of origin to the urban areas of Charlotte and Boston, whereas some others settled in other states first – 10 individuals in Charlotte and 6 in Boston. Among the other places in which people settled before moving to Charlotte and Boston, several are more traditional Latinx destinations in the country:

	Number of Participants	Gender		Age			
		Male	Female	18-30	31-40	41-50	>50
Boston	23	4	19	3	12	3	5
Charlotte	22	1	21	2	5	6	9
Total	45	5	40	5	17	9	14

	Citizenship at birth		Length of residence in the US* (years)				Length of residence in the urban area studied** (years)			
	US-born	Foreign-born	<5	5-10	11-25	>25	<5	5-10	11-25	>25
Boston	7	16	1	4	9	4	1	6	10	6
Charlotte	2	20	2	4	9	5	5	4	12	1
Total	9	36	3	8	18	9	6	10	22	7

*Numbers refer to all foreign-born individuals, and two individuals – one Puerto Rican and one Peruvian – who are US-born but spent different lengths of time in the US.
 **Numbers refer to all individuals – both foreign-born and US-born.

	Country of Origin		
	Boston	Charlotte	Total
Bolivia	0	1	1
Colombia	5	2	7
Dominican Republic	2	0	2
Ecuador	1	3	4
El Salvador	7	2	9
Guatemala	2	1	3
Honduras	0	1	1
Mexico	2	9	11
Puerto Rico	2	0	2
Venezuela	0	2	2

Los Angeles and other parts of California, New York City and different parts around it like New Jersey, and Miami. Other places emerging from participants' responses were Colorado, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, Washington D.C., and the Durham/Raleigh area. Participants are also of different origins. In Boston, the bigger groups of participants were coming from El Salvador (7 individuals) and Colombia (5 individuals), whereas in Charlotte the biggest group was from Mexico (9 individuals). The remaining individuals were from various countries in the Caribbean, Central America, and South America (Table 3.3). This aspect reflects the increased inter-group diversity characterizing both cities.

Several Latinx interviewed combine diverse economic practices with other full-time or part-time occupations. Some individuals work for food businesses or run them, some others work for non-profit organizations or collaborate with them. Some are nannies, graphic designers, chefs, students, and directors of regional branches of companies, or work for supermarkets, cleaning companies, and cafeterias. Also, as already explored by Sweet (2016) in the case of Latinas in Chicago, these occupations are intimately intertwined with diverse food practices and, in the majority of these cases, it is not possible to completely separate “more formal” occupations from diverse economic practices. This aspect demonstrates the problematic and false formal-informal binary division that characterizes our understanding of the economy and labor markets. This binary division not only fails in precisely characterizing what is considered *formal* and what is considered *informal*, but also does not capture the diversity of economic practices people carry out on a daily basis and that contribute to economic systems. The analysis of diverse practices brings to light the problematic effects of assuming western dualisms as universal criteria structuring the existent reality. The reinforcement of these binary divisions mainly contributes to stigmatizing groups and their behavior in US society (Chapter 4).

This research explores a total of 49 diverse economic practices. The discrepancy between the number of interviews (45) and the number of practices explored (49) derives from two factors: first, in some cases, I was able to interview more than one individual engaged in the same food-based collaborative practice; and second, I discovered that some Latinx individuals carry out more than one food-based economic practice on a day-to-day basis. Hence, when possible, I explored all of them. The diverse economic practices studied are categorized as follows:

Food sharing

Food-sharing practices involve Latinx individuals who collaborate with others to regularly or occasionally share foodstuffs or cooked meals. This research explored a total of 18 food-sharing practices – 9 in the Boston area and 9 in the Charlotte area – that create an assemblage of people and places at the neighborhood, city, regional, and sometimes international scale (Chapter 5). More than any other type of practice explored in this research, networks of people sharing food are continuously changing in nature due to variations in individuals' habits, relationships with others, and financial situations – at the individual, family, and/or household levels. The center of these food-sharing networks is always located in the private space of the home, where the food is prepared and/or shared, and, only occasionally in kitchens at churches people frequent. In both urban areas, people mainly cook alone and then share with others (6 in Charlotte and 5 in Boston), or they cook with other family members often involving children and then share with others (2 in Charlotte and 3 in Boston), or they cook with friends and share among themselves (1 in Charlotte and 1 in Boston). The majority of sharing relationships among people are mutual. Stronger mutual relationships are often established when people share with family members, extended family, non-blood-related family, close friends, and sometimes neighbors. Whereas weaker sharing

relationships are established among individuals who have known each other for a short period of time or who meet occasionally through community activities and programs. People interviewed in both Boston and Charlotte share primarily within the household with members of the family, extended family, and/or roommates, or across households with relatives and friends not necessarily living in the same neighborhood. People also share with neighbors, at work, and at church, or with people they encounter participating in programs or supporting groups (e.g., programs for Latina mothers or English classes).

Gardening and food sharing

Gardening practices encompass urban agricultural actions carried out by individuals or groups at community or cooperative gardens or interstitial private spaces, such as driveways, patios, balconies, and backyards. All the gardening practices studied in the context of this research also involve a sharing component. Latinx individuals share vegetables and herbs, or cooked meals using ingredients from the garden. This research explores a total of 9 gardening practices – 3 in the Charlotte area and 6 in the Boston area. The discrepancy in number reflects a stark contrast between these two contexts: Boston has a longstanding tradition of land protection through land trust systems. Non-profit organizations (e.g., The Trustees of Reservation, The Boston Food Forest Coalition, and GreenRoots) have fought to protect the land from development and city growth, and, today, they own or manage parcels of land across the city where multiple community gardens and urban farms are located. Community gardens and urban farms, as well as the educational programs that take place in these spaces, are means to fight environmental injustices and lack of access to fresh organic food. On the contrary, in the Charlotte area there is not a comparable local government system that protects land from urban development and, ultimately, promotes urban

agriculture practices. Urban agriculture as a means to address social inequalities and lack of access to fresh organic food is something that has been explored only recently. Coalitions among different organizations (e.g., Carolina Farm Trust, 100 Gardens, Seeds of Change, and the West Boulevard Neighborhood Coalition) have emerged more clearly in the past five years, especially with the economic recession and price increases prompted by the Covid-19 pandemic. Smaller agricultural experiments have existed for a long time throughout the city in schools and churches. Yet access to these places has often been restricted rather than opened to the community at large. Similarly, Mecklenburg County manages several community gardens in Parks and Recreation spaces that are not always seen as accessible to everyone. Therefore, the practices studied in Charlotte are located in private backyards and mainly involve cooperation among family members and close friends. Only one practice takes place in a cooperative garden developed on a church property that relies on cooperation among members of the church. On the contrary, in Boston, the 6 gardening practices explored are equally emerging in private spaces (backyards, driveways, and balconies) and community and cooperative gardens. The practices taking place in private spaces involve cooperation among family members, friends, and roommates, whereas practices emerging in community and cooperative gardens expand collaborative relationships to include members of organizations, neighbors, and local residents.

Food coops and collaboratives

Food coops and collaboratives explored in this research involve stable cooperation among two or more individuals, who cook together to share and/or donate food to help others. I unpacked a total of 8 family-based food cooperatives and collaboratives, 4 in the Charlotte area and 4 in the Boston area. The Boston area has a long tradition of solidarity, social, and cooperative economic

movements. This tradition enables the existence of a network of organizations whose aim is to foster an economic ecosystem founded on values of solidarity and interdependence. Three of the four food-based cooperative practices explored in the Boston area are intertwined with projects carried out by a local non-profit cooperative organization that was born to address the effects of racial capitalism on Latinx communities. This Latinx non-profit operates as an umbrella organization for other Latinx cooperatives formed through cooperative training. The training is informed by knowledge directly connected to people's past cooperative experiences in countries in Latin America and promotes a solidarity approach to the economy. Therefore, the three food cooperatives connected to this non-profit organization are directly informed by such an approach to the economy and are composed of people who had cooperative experiences in their countries of origin, were exposed to the cooperative training, and/or participated in the activities promoted by the organization. The four family-based food collaboratives explored in Charlotte show a horizontal cooperative structure but were not as strongly informed by cooperative principles and values as the ones unpacked in the Boston area. Also, people operating in Charlotte referred to their practices as food collaboratives and not food cooperatives. The majority of these cooperatives and collaboratives in both cities operate out of private homes due to a lack of access to commercial kitchens. Commercial kitchens exist in both urban areas, but they can be quite expensive for smaller-scale or occasional operations.

Healthy Lifestyle

This category encompasses different practices that rely on food to promote a healthier lifestyle for Latinx communities. These practices include nutrition and cooking classes, radio programs, and support groups that introduce Latinx individuals to healthier food choices, food

conservation practices, and Hispanic recipes reinterpreted to accommodate different needs (e.g., diabetes, celiac disease, and so on). Healthy lifestyle practices attempt to challenge health disparities by creating the conditions for Latinx to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to start making small changes in their lifestyle in the United States. These practices involve the transfer of important skills and tools to Latinx individuals to help them switch to a lifestyle rooted in health prevention. Health disparities characterize both urban areas and disproportionately impact Black and Brown communities. These communities live at the intersection of multiple and overlapping systems of inequality and often do not have the capacity, resources, and knowledge to challenge and change these systems. This research explores 6 practices in total – 5 located in Charlotte and 1 in Boston. The majority of these practices are mediated or supported by organizations working at the intersection between wellness and prevention and invest to maintain cooking programs and classes free for participants. On the contrary, programs lacking funding and resources coming from organizations often function under monetary compensation and, hence limit the participation to those individuals who can afford to participate.

Collecting, organizing, and distributing food donations

This category encompasses various individuals that collaborate with others to extend food access by interacting with the complex system of food donations: some individuals collect food and bring it to food pantries, some individuals help organize food boxes, and some others collect food from individuals and food pantries, reorganize it in smaller boxes, and deliver it to others in need. When donations are directly exchanged between individuals, these acts are often reciprocated with cooked meals or other food donations. In the context of this research, I explored 4 practices related to networks of people collecting, organizing, and distributing food donations, 2

in the Charlotte area and 2 in the Boston area. All 4 practices existed before the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic yet, as discussed below, intensified with it. The analysis of this type of practices shows how individual and collective forms of agency contribute to counteracting the effects of food insecurity in both urban areas by using an approach of interdependence and solidarity among subjects. In 2019, Mecklenburg County (NC) estimated that 15% of households were food insecure (Charlotte Mecklenburg Food Policy Council, 2020). Similarly, the Mayor's Office of Food Access in the city of Boston estimated that 15% of the households were food insecure in 2018 (2021, May). These numbers grew due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Other practices from Charlotte

The exploration of food-based collaborative economic practices in Charlotte led to unpacking four practices that belonged to categories not explored in the Boston area. Three of these practices revolve around Latinx restaurants in the Charlotte area whose owners implement various strategies to support local communities, from more traditional food and monetary donations to more transformative practices such as sharing restaurant space for community meetings and/or workshops in support of women of color's entrepreneurship. The fourth practice is carried out by a non-profit organization with a strong food-based charity mission. One of the programs of the organization involves the empowerment of homeless individuals in Charlotte, who are trained in the kitchen of the organization to find jobs in restaurants around the region and, in turn, transition out of homelessness. These practices are committed to supporting others in the community and creating opportunities for them, but their existence is tied to the survival of the businesses enabling such practices or to donations supporting the non-profit programs. Although these practices are intimately tied to more traditional hierarchical business structures, they are

informed by values of solidarity, interdependence, and cooperativism and contribute to reshaping capitalist narratives around non-economic subjects.

3.3.3 Analysis

To analyze data collected during conversations with participants, I transcribed, translated, and coded the interviews, and identified emerging themes regarding the three dimensions explored in this study – individual, collective, and contextual. I used a grounded theory approach, originally developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), according to which the researcher develops theories from rigorous analyses of empirical data and engages in simultaneous data collection and analysis (Charmaz and Belgrave, 2019; Heath and Cowley, 2004). The simultaneity of those phases allows researchers to continuously collect, examine, and reflect on emerging patterns through an iterative, comparative, and interactive process that starts with inductive data (Charmaz and Belgrave, 2019). This approach enhances the inclusion of stories of those left out of mainstream narratives, maintaining the flexibility required to adjust and refine the major conceptual categories initially employed in the research (Charmaz and Belgrave, 2019). In line with this approach, I started engaging in reflection and analysis of emerging themes during the data collection phase and continued throughout the entire research process. The concurrent reflection on broader themes and data collection has allowed me to be open to unexpected information emerging during conversations with participants, to be flexible and include follow-up questions when needed, and to inquire about nuances of what I saw as emerging themes while I was still collecting data. Also, an iterative engagement with the data collected has helped me to reflect with greater depth on emerging themes during a second analysis phase carried out after data collection. During this phase, I further reorganized, modified, and extended the initial list of 23 codes identified *a priori* by drawing on relevant literature and interviews conducted during a background phase of the

research. Eventually, I developed a list of 26 codes included in Table 5.4. Interview transcriptions were coded using NVivo qualitative analysis software.

Individual dimension	Collective/Network dimension	Contextual dimension
Acquisition of skills	Access/Transportation	Contribution to the economy
Connection between past and economic practice	Organizational aspects	Discriminatory/welcoming encounters
Connection with country of origin	Relationships between individuals/places	Effects of Covid-19
Identity aspects	Origin/end of the practice	Immigrant receptivity and support
Meanings of collaboration/cooperation	Reasons to collaborate/cooperate with others	Impact (practices)
Meanings of work	Relevance of nodes	Informal networks of support
Occupation	Spatial linkages	Intentionality – resisting capitalism
Other relevant places		Physical landscape
Reasons to leave countries of origin		Places people tend to avoid
Reasons to move to the Boston/Charlotte areas		Political dimension

Participants’ background information was systematically organized in excel spreadsheets to facilitate statistical analysis and comparisons between the two contexts of study. Also, this organization made background data readily available during reflections and analyses of emerging themes on the connections between Latinx individuals’ past and current diverse practices, spatial understandings of economic practices, and relationships with the context. For each practice, emerging narratives were also woven with spatial data and organized in Excel spreadsheets linking quantitative and qualitative information to each node of the networks assembled through the enactment of the practice. This step allowed me to systematically organize data collected in order to perform spatial analyses on the extension or concentration of networks, the connections between centers and nodes, and, more generally, to develop visual representations of collaborative networks in ArcGIS Pro. These analyses led to reflections on spatially relational patterns emerging in the two contexts of study and in geographies at the regional, national, and international levels (Chapter

5). Quantitative and qualitative data organized by practice was also compiled into excel spreadsheets by urban areas based on which several analyses were performed to understand: (1) types of nodes in each network (e.g., organizations, individuals, food businesses, etc.) and their location (local, national, or international); (2) the number of nodes for each network; (3) types of collaborations emerging (e.g., input, output, mutual, formal/informal agreements and/or partnerships, and stable/temporary collaborations); (4) importance of the nodes in each network; (5) impact, intentionality, and transformative potential scores. Specifically, among the analyses performed, three were particularly relevant: (1) the analysis of nodes' degree of importance (Chapter 5); (2) the analysis of economic practices' degrees of impact and intentionality (Chapter 6); and (3) the analysis of economic practices' transformative potential (Chapter 6). The next three sections provide a brief overview of these three analyses alongside definitions of the scores used.

Importance score

By drawing on conversations around concept maps developed during in-depth interviews, I assigned a degree of importance to each node composing the networks assembled through the enactment of the practices. The degree of importance was assessed on a 5-point scale considering the role of each node in relation to the functioning of the practice. Specifically, a score from 1 to 5 was assigned to each node by evaluating its degree of substitution: the higher the possibility of replacing the node with a similar one while maintaining the same relationship established between the node and the center, the lower the degree of importance (score 1); vice versa, the lower the possibility of replacing the node while preserving the type of relationship established with the center, the higher the degree of importance (score 5). Table 5.5 describe each degree of importance.

Score 1	The node can be easily replaced by another one while preserving the same type of relationship	Similar foods, seeds, space, and economic support can be found elsewhere (several alternatives are available) at similar prices, equally accessible, and under similar conditions (e.g., requirements to get food donations are identical, interpersonal relationships can be replicated with other individuals, similar conditions can be recreated elsewhere)
Score 2	The node can be replaced by another one but the relationship with the node might be altered	Similar foods, seeds, space, and economic support can be found elsewhere (alternatives are available) but their prices are higher, or they are not equally accessible, or other conditions are different (e.g., requirements to get food donations, interpersonal relationships cannot be exactly replicated with other individuals, similar conditions cannot be exactly recreated elsewhere)
Score 3	The node can be replaced with some difficulties and the relationship with the node cannot be preserved	Similar foods, seeds, space, and economic support are not easy to find elsewhere (a handful of options are available) and their prices are higher, or they are not equally accessible, or other conditions are different (e.g., requirements to get food donations are not identical, interpersonal relationships can be replicated with difficulties, similar conditions can be recreated elsewhere with difficulties)
Score 4	The node can hardly be replaced by another one while preserving the same type of relationship	Similar foods, seeds, space, and economic support can hardly be found elsewhere, and when it is possible to find them elsewhere, these are more expensive and not easily accessible, and the relationship with the node cannot be preserved (e.g. requirements to get food donations are different, interpersonal relationships cannot be replicated with other individuals, similar conditions cannot be recreated elsewhere)
Score 5	The node cannot be replaced by another one while preserving the same type of relationship	Similar foods, seeds, space, and economic support cannot be found anywhere else

Impact score

The impact score is evaluated for each practice based on the narratives emerging from in-depth interviews with informants. I assigned the impact score to each practice based on a 5-point scale in which score 1 represents the lowest impact and score 5 represents the highest impact. Specifically, the impact score identifies the degree of tangible and/or intangible impact that the practice has on people, communities, and the context. Table 5.6 describe each degree of importance.

Table 3.6 – Impact Score		
Score 1	Very low impact	The practice creates tangible benefits (food, services, programs, etc.) for organizations that could continue to operate without the impact of the practice, or for individuals under monetary compensation
Score 2	Low impact	The practice creates tangible benefits for organizations (food, services, programs, etc.) or for other individuals, and these benefits could not necessarily be created otherwise
Score 3	Medium impact	The practice creates tangible and intangible benefits for organizations or individuals, and these benefits could not necessarily be created otherwise
Score 4	High impact	The practice creates tangible (food, services, programs, etc.) and intangible benefits (e.g., maintenance of foodways, etc.) for organizations and individuals and creates a system of support for individuals that cannot be easily produced otherwise.
Score 5	Very high impact	The practice creates tangible (food, services, programs, etc.) and intangible benefits (e.g., maintenance of foodways, etc.) for organizations and individuals that cannot be easily produced otherwise. It creates a system of support for individuals and empowers them by transferring important skills.

Intentionality Score

The intentionality score is evaluated for each practice based on the narratives emerging from in-depth interviews with informants. I assessed each practice’s intentionality score based on a 5-point scale in which score 1 represents the lowest degree of intentionality and score 5 represents the highest. I assigned a score to each practice based on how explicitly the practice is informed by non-capitalist values of solidarity, interdependence, and cooperativism, how explicitly it aims to challenge capitalist relations and the effects of capitalism on Latinx communities, and how explicitly it promotes a different economic vision. The lower the intentionality score, the lower the ability of the practice to challenge capitalist relations (score 1); vice versa the higher the score, the

higher the ability of the practice to challenge capitalist relations (score 5). Table 5.7 describe each degree of intentionality.

Score 1	The practice does not show any explicit reference to anti-capitalist values and it does not challenge capitalist relations, but it creates space for self-help.
Score 2	The practice does not show any explicit reference to anti-capitalist values and it barely challenges capitalist relations, but it creates space for self-help and occasional cooperation/mutual exchange.
Score 3	The practice is implicitly informed by anti-capitalist values and challenges capitalist relations by creating space for self-help, cooperation/mutual exchange, and occasional empowerment.
Score 4	The practice is explicitly informed by non-capitalist/anti-capitalist values and aims at addressing the effects of racial capitalism such as labor exploitation, profit accumulation over people’s well-being, and so on.
Score 5	The practice is explicitly informed by non-capitalist/anti-capitalist values, aims at addressing the effects of racial capitalism such as labor exploitation, profit accumulation, etc., and advances a different economic model.

Transformative power

The transformative power evaluates the ability of each economic practice to produce change in the local context. The transformative power is calculated as the sum of the importance score and the intentionality score, hence it ranges from a score of 2 and a score of 10. The transformative power is defined based on both the impact and the intentionality of each practice because, as unpacked in Chapter 6, impact on reality can occur even through non-intentional actions. In fact, as demonstrated throughout the dissertation, diverse economic practices already produce several impacts on people, groups, and the context even when their day-to-day actions are not intentionally developed to challenge capitalist relations. However, as explained in this dissertation, intentionality is a key element to assembling the conditions for the enactment of diverse ways of beings, doing, and knowing and, in turn, effectively challenging the one-world

ontology (Law, 2015) and developing an ontological politics of the pluriverse (Loh and Shear, 2022). As discussed in Chapter 6, practices present different degrees of transformative power and are variously positioned along the transformative power spectrum. This analysis provides an entry point to develop concrete strategies in support of practices and to maximize their transformative potential.

Finally, in the context of this dissertation, the analysis of emerging themes has aimed to produce an in-depth and nuanced understanding of diverse economic practices as inherently spatial phenomena. This research design was developed assuming the inseparability of spatial and social aspects constituting phenomena: the materialization of phenomena in space and time is intimately connected to the evolution of social dynamics in different geographies and, vice versa, the entanglement of dynamics materializing in given geographies influence the evolution of social dynamics.

3.4 Field experience and limitations

This section discusses the various limitation I encountered throughout the research process. First, my positionality has represented a strength as well as a weakness based on the perception of the people with whom I interacted. Being an international student coming from a culture that shares similarities with Latin American has allowed me to be perceived as a ‘semi-insider’. I came to realize that my appearance, accent, and sharing similar experiences with some Hispanic individuals have facilitated the creation of trusted relationships more easily. At the same time, my limited Spanish proficiency (especially in speaking) has created some obstacles in the process of

relationship-building, outreach, and interview organization logistics that required additional time and, sometimes, creativity to be navigated. In navigating these challenges, I was mindful of consistently creating space for clear and transparent communications with Latinx individuals to not jeopardize a trust-building process. Some of these challenges were minimized (1) by building mutually beneficial relationships with Hispanic stakeholders, community leaders, and representatives of local organizations, (2) through daily reflections on fieldwork events, and (3) through responsiveness, consideration, and respect for the situations encountered during fieldwork.

Studying underrepresented and often marginalized communities posits challenges not only around trust and relationship-building with individuals, but also around available data. In fact, in the United States, there is a lack of similar studies exploring diverse economic practices as multiscalar phenomena intertwined with migration patterns, and a lack of relevant secondary data. Therefore, primary data collection constitutes a key component of this research design. Yet, relying on snowballing sampling techniques posits some challenges in the selection of the population studied. This sampling technique might produce a sample of informants that is not representative of the studied population. To minimize this issue, I relied on a diverse array of stakeholders, members of local organizations and institutions, and informants' referrals. However, the outbreak of Covid-19 has drastically limited the ability of local leaders to help me throughout the process given the uncertain, overwhelming, and exhausting conditions they were experiencing in pivoting their efforts to better help local populations. This situation has limited local organizations' responses to my request for collaboration and help, especially in those cases in which I approached them for the first time after the outbreak of the pandemic. Ultimately, these conditions have affected the outcome of the snowballing sampling technique by limiting the study

of diverse economic practices to those located mainly in some geographic areas (e.g., Chelsea, MA) and not others (e.g., Cambridge, MA, and Somerville, MA).

The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in the two contexts of study right before the data collection phase has created additional unexpected challenges that required an adjustment of the research design as well as additional time to complete the research. The original research design included a participant observation component to triangulate understandings of relationships among individuals and places as enacted on a day-to-day basis. The pandemic not only limited the opportunities to engage in person with participants, but also drastically reduced the collaborative encounters assembled through the enactment of each practice. Therefore, even the replacement of the participant observation component with diaries and daily descriptions of activities carried out by participants presented several challenges. The most important ones related to the limited number of collaborative activities people could document and the additional burden represented by these research activities for Latinx individuals who were contracting the virus at higher rates, losing their jobs, and facing significant fear in dealing with an uncertain situation. This lack of additional information was minimized by spending additional time during in-depth interviews and concept map creation discussing the structure of the practices pre-Covid-19, and in depth-descriptions of the unfolding of the practice on a day-to-day basis, and over time. Covid-19 also presented a new set of challenges deriving from conducting qualitative research in person while reproducing safe conditions for everyone – myself, interpreters, and participants. In Boston, several participants asked to conduct the interviews in person. As a consequence, the organization of the interview required additional time to sort out logistic aspects, such as finding outdoor spaces where the distance between individuals and good-quality audio recordings could be ensured.

Finally, the small number of interviews allows for an in-depth analysis of emerging themes, but not strong generalizations. However, this study does not attempt to provide a ‘strong theory’ on migrants’ collaborative economies, rather it aims to develop a ‘weak’ grounded theory (Gibson-Graham; 2006; 2014; Gibson-Graham and Dombroski, 2020; Sarmiento, 2020) that illuminates the interplay of multi-scalar relational dynamics constituting migrants’ collaborative economies. As explained in the conclusions of this dissertation (Chapter 7), this analysis offers relevant insights for planners and policymakers to develop innovative strategies of community development relying on assets already existing in local contexts. It also challenges binary ways of thinking and opens room to create diverse and more sustainable economic scenarios.

Chapter 4

“Being Latinos is not Only an Empty Label”: Latinx identity and the Enactment of Diverse Economic Realities in Charlotte and Boston

This chapter uses a diverse economy and solidarity economy framework to call attention to the fractures and disjuncture characterizing the capitalist and neoliberal view of the economy and, more generally, the society, and to theorize about the multiple ways of being, enacted by Latinx individuals engaging in diverse economic practices. Law (2015), in his paper titled *What’s Wrong with a One-World World?*, challenges the idea of a single all-encompassing reality that was worked up in the North, embedded in Northern practices, reproduced and re-enacted in those practices, and then transported in the South and imposed on other nations. The capitalist and neoliberal views of the economy perfectly reflect and reproduce the existence of a single all-encompassing reality and, in turn, exclude multiple non-capitalist realities enacted every day. Shifting to a fractiverse (Law, 2015) or a pluriverse (Escobar, 2020) means acknowledging the existence of different realities produced as the “effects of contingent and heterogeneous enactments, performances or sets of relations” (Law, 2015, p. 127).

The existence of one-world metaphysics is, for example, evident in the ethnic economy scholarship in which analyses of ethnic groups’ economic performances in the United States are founded on the premise that the economy is an all-encompassing system based on the logic of market exchange, constant growth, capital accumulation, progress, and development. Hence, ethnic groups’ economic performances are exclusively assessed using these standards and compared with US-born individuals. This pervasive view, also known as capitalocentrism (Gibson-Graham, 1995), dictates the existence of a singular way of being, knowing, and doing to which everything should conform and, in turn, relegates non-conforming ways of being, knowing,

and doing to the realm of mere beliefs or to the non-economic sphere. Ultimately, this single all-encompassing view barely tolerates non-capitalist practices or, most of the time, silences and relegates them to the sphere of non-existence. As explained in the literature review grounding this research (Chapter 2), the diverse economies framework has provided the foundation for a theoretical intervention that brings to light fractures undermining capitalism coherence and provides space to dignify actually existing heterogeneous economic practices. Building on the entry point created by the diverse economy theoretical intervention, Loh and Shear (2022) stress the urgency of building an ontological politics: one that is not “about economy qua economy at all, but about imagining, building, fighting for, and defending the conditions from which we can realize and embrace our interdependence with other people, beings, and planetary life systems.” (p. 1209).

This research follows the urge to inquire about the practices that do not fit the One-World World and that have the potential to create the ground to build an ontological politics by enacting multiple-world realities and escaping the one-size fits all approach. Specifically, this study is concerned with those practices that enact different realities in the Global North where resistance coming from a One-World World view is even stronger. Inspired by Law’s (2015) call to free up fractiversal realities, this chapter starts by recognizing an ontological value to the different ways of being, knowing, and doing enacted by Latinx food-based diverse economic practices in Charlotte and Boston. The incorporation of migrant communities into the diverse and solidarity economies frameworks also contributes to recent scholarship interrogating the absence of axes of difference, such as race and ethnicity, and, more generally, the absence of power analyses from these frameworks (Bledsoe et al., 2022; Ferreira, 2022; Naylor and Thayer, 2022). Bledsoe et al. (2022) call attention to the fact that both capitalism and its alternatives are shaped by racial

differences. Following their claim, in this chapter, I argue that the inquiry about practices that multiply realities and enact different ways of being, knowing, and doing must be concerned with questions of identity, cultural background, and positioning in a new context. Attending to these differences, overlapping identities, and systems of power, it is necessary to fully unpack the enactment of multiple realities and supersede binary ways of thinking.

This chapter contributes to the inquiry of multiple ways of being, knowing, and doing by exploring the intimate relationship between Latinx individuals and the type of economic practices they activate in Boston and Charlotte. By addressing the following research question, *How does the connection between Latinx individuals' positioning, background, experiences, and cultural roots inform food-based collaborative economic practices in a different cultural context?*, this chapter lays the ground to theorize about the pluriverse – a world where many worlds fit (Escobar, 2020) – starting from the marginal positions that Latinx immigrants often occupy in Charlotte and Boston. These positions are simultaneously places of resistance against the capitalist system and fertile soils for building and enacting an ontological politics of the pluriverse. The remainder of this chapter shows that Latinx individuals, in both Boston and Charlotte, engage in food-based economic practices that are imbued with principles of interdependence and solidarity, which are put into practice more or less intentionally (Chapter 6). I start this chapter by briefly outlining the diverse economies framework and the contribution that such an approach can bring to ethnic economy scholarship. I continue by examining empirical data on how Latinx groups in Boston and Charlotte interpret and experience superimposed ethnoracial categories of Latinx/Hispanic and how they challenge these stereotypical and monolithic representations of identity. I then analyze the meanings they associate with economic concepts such as work, collaboration, cooperation, and skills to show how these meanings cannot be fully ascribed to the realm of capitalism. Rather,

meanings emerging from empirical data challenge the all-encompassing capitalist conceptualization of the economy and show the enactment of multiple and overlapping ways of being, knowing, and doing. I conclude by arguing that the analysis of the relational links between ethnic identities and the development of diverse economic practices is key to escaping the one-world all-encompassing capitalist ontology and assembling the conditions for the enactment of an ontological politics of the pluriverse.

4.2 Diverse economies and ethnic economies: from one-world ontology to multiple realities

As introduced in Chapter 2, the diverse economies framework adopts an anti-essentialist and feminist view to reframe the economy, dismantle capitalocentrism, and create room for economic diversity. The concept of capitalocentrism was introduced for the first time by Gibson-Graham in 1995 to indicate the kind of mainstream economic discourses that relegate non-capitalist economic practices to an inferior position identifying them as insufficient or lacking essential qualities to be valued as economic. The relation between non-capitalism and capitalism is often represented in an essentialist binary way: capitalism is the term in the binary defined as positive, whereas non-capitalism is presented as the lacking and negative term whose exclusion is instrumental to define the positive term (Gibson-Graham, 2000). This binary has profound discursive and material implications on people, places, and the economy. Practices such as sharing and/or exchanging goods, or even practices founded to increase the well-being of a community rather than a few individuals, are considered as pre-dating capitalism and modernity. Hence, there is no place for them in a neoliberal capitalist system and these must be suppressed in the name of progress. As a consequence, non-capitalist ways of being, knowing, and doing are expected to be found in and belong to specific places such as, for example, the ‘so-called’ third world countries

considered underdeveloped, or in the household, the place of women and economic reproduction (Gibson-Graham, 1995). This association not only marginalizes and devalues certain economic practices, but also excludes specific spaces from the realm of production and relegates subjects who participate in these spaces to an inferior position of non-existence (St. Martin et al., 2015).

Economic subjects relegated to this position of non-existence around the world often belong to minority groups that have been historically segregated, marginalized, excluded, or exploited in the capitalist system, and to migrant groups coming from the so-called underdeveloped countries. A closer look at the economic system in the United States reveals that this binary conceptualization of the economy is intimately intertwined with questions of ethnicity, race, and immigration to the extent that the contraposition between capitalist and non-capitalist often translates into other economic binaries, such as formal-informal and legal-illegal. Specifically, the social construction of illegality or informality is rooted in powerful stereotypes mainly associated with specific bodies more than others, such as immigrant bodies (Flores and Schachter, 2018). This association contributes to silence the significance of other forms of immigrant labor for the functioning of US food systems (Agyeman and Giacalone, 2020; Omi and Winant, 1994) and for the construction of migrant foodscapes (Jossart-Marcelli, 2021), as well as the diversity of economic practices migrant communities activate.

Through the analysis of a variety of economic practices, the diverse economies scholarship has shown that the line between capitalist and non-capitalist, hence formal-informal and legal-illegal, is often blurred (Gibson-Graham, 1996, 2000; Gibson-Graham et al., 2013; Roelvink et al., 2015). This reflection suggests that the economic reality we experience on a day-to-day basis is more nuanced and complex than the economic reality represented in the mainstream debate. In their representation of the economy as an iceberg (Figure 4.1), diverse economies scholars clarify

that only the tip of the iceberg represents what we currently value as economic in the mainstream economic system. Yet, everything that falls under the water line not only is part of the system and supports practices above the water line, but also allows us to picture how diverse the economy is in reality and how difficult it is to reduce it to practices that only rely on capitalist relations. This analytical approach pushes us to consider what happens to the mainstream conceptualization of the economy if we consider that “more hours of labor (over the life course of individuals) are spent in non-capitalist activity” (Gibson-Graham, 1995, p. 277), and that the reality is actually shaped by an assemblage of practices, values, and relations beyond capitalism (Law, 2015; Loh and Shear, 2022). This perspective on the economy creates room to see openings, freedom, and possibility, and helps us transcend the world as a place of domination and oppression (Gibson-Graham, 2008, p. 619).

However, to transcend the all-encompassing one-world ontology (Law, 2015) enacted through capitalism and sustain pluriversal realities (Loh and Shear, 2022), it is necessary to unpack the unequal effects of overlapping systems of power on different groups in society and how these unequal effects are linked to the emergence and development of alternative forms of economies. Still, much of the literature on diverse economies does not attend to the centrality of axes of difference, such as ethnicity and race among others, in the development of non-capitalist practices. Given the prominence that ethnicity and race have in structuring social relations in North American societies and, more specifically, in the reproduction of capitalist relations, when exploring non-capitalist practices, it is necessary to recognize the unique effects that capitalism has on Indigenous, Black, and Brown communities (Bledsoe et al., 2022). Among the handful of studies that analyze diverse and solidarity economies using an ethnoracial lens (for example, Bledsoe et al., 2022; Ferreira, 2022; Hossein, 2017; Naylor and Thayer, 2022; Nembhard, 2014),



Figure 4.1 – Diverse Economies representation of the economy
 Source: Gibson-Graham et al. (2013, p. 11). Take back the economy.

very few focus on immigrant communities (Sweet, 2016). Yet, as Sweet (2016) notes, because of their non-static identities, cultures, and positioning in the new context, migrants undergo an adjusting process that is closely linked to their economic practices. Studies on cooperative economies (e.g., Nembhard, 2014) and social economies (e.g., Hossein, 2017) have already shown not only that Black populations in the Americas have creatively developed innovative forms of economies through solidarity, mutual-aid, and cooperativism to resist historical forms of economic and social oppression, but also that these practices are closely intertwined with identity aspects and people's positioning in the society. These historical and contemporary Black economic

practices are still marginalized, silenced, and excluded from the mainstream economic debate. A similar treatment is reserved for migrant communities' diverse economic practices that are already changing contexts and economic systems and enacting an ontological politics of the pluriverse.

Migrant communities' positioning in the U.S. economy and challenges faced in the mainstream labor market are topics at the center of the scholarship on ethnic economies. Yet, although this interdisciplinary scholarship pays attention to issues of race and ethnicity, it reinforces the existence of a single all-encompassing economic reality and related dualisms, such as capitalist/non-capitalist and formal/informal. Within this scholarship it is possible to identify two main focuses: the first one explores ethnic minorities' performance in the mainstream labor market (for example, Abramitzky and Boustan, 2017; Bulow and Summers, 1986; Catanzarite and Trimble, 2008; Donado et al., 2008; Ellis et al, 2007; Fernandez and Su, 2004; Hangan, 2004; Hernández-León, 2004; Liu, 2013; Lowell and Gerova; 2004; Lusia and Bauder, 2010; Massey, 2008; Massey et al., 1994; Massey et al., 2016; Morrison, 1990; Villarreal and Tamborini, 2018); whereas, the second one unpacks the emergence of ethnic economic markets as an alternative to the mainstream one (for example, Alvarez, 2009; Delgado, 2011; Ellis, 2006; Granberry and Marcelli, 2007; Hoalst-Pullen et al., 2013; Kaplan, 1998, 2006; Kaplan and Li, 2006; Portes and Jensen, 1989; Portes and Manning, 1986; Portes and Zhou, 1993; Rodriguez, 2004; Schuch and Wang, 2015; Waldinger, 1993; Wang, 2012). In this scholarship, ethnic communities' performance and success are measured against the yardstick of the capitalist economy, and related definitions of success are often shaped by western experiences. In these analyses, solidarity and collaboration, when present, are seen as tools for immigrants to ultimately succeed economically and/or as a manifestation of reactive solidarity due to marginalization and segregation (for example, Alberts, 2005; Sanders and Nee, 1987). A narrow focus on a neoliberal capitalist

economic system obstructs the ability of these analyses to unpack and understand other types of economic relations that are not centered on waged labor, market exchanges, and exploitative dynamics, and co-exist with mainstream forms of ethnic economies (Gibson-Graham, 2008; Law, 2011; Loh and Shear, 2022).

In response to a lack of theorization of ethnic economies as sites to enact multiple and diverse realities, this research demonstrates how the economic relations these communities establish individually and collectively are more complex and nuanced than those encompassed by the capitalist model and are intimately interconnected with different forms of identities and positioning in the society. Specifically, this chapter pushes the boundaries of both standard economic analyses and diverse economies analyses by unpacking how race and ethnicity are experienced, economic concepts – e.g., skills, working, collaborating, etc. – are interpreted and embodied, and how these are linked to the emergence and development of diverse economic practices. These considerations are particularly relevant in highly capitalist societies, such as the U.S. that have always been destinations for immigrant communities. In particular, the post-1965 immigration wave mostly originating from countries in Latin America and Asia has produced more culturally fragmented urban and rural areas (Massey, 1995). These culturally fragmented environments signal the visibility of a diversity of cultures coexisting in the same places and the existence of complex relational dynamics that inform migrants' identity formation processes and positionings in the new contexts that do not necessarily follow traditional assimilation patterns.

4.3 Enacting the pluriverse: Latinx diverse ways of knowing, being, and doing

This section relies on 62 in-depth interviews with informants and community leaders in Boston and Charlotte to unpack the diverse ways of being, knowing, and doing enacted by Latinx

individuals through food-based collaborative economic practices. Through the analysis of empirical data, I show how race and ethnicity, and economic concepts – i.e., work, collaboration and cooperation, and skills – are interpreted and experienced on a day-to-day basis by Latinx immigrants and first-generation US-born individuals in Charlotte and Boston, and how these experiences are informed by both individuals’ past and experiences in the U.S. By unpacking these overlapping, contested, and multiple meanings, this research rejects an interpretation of race, ethnicity, and the economy as homogeneous categories that can be described and represented by a single universalizing narrative. This rejection is based on the recognition that every identity (or unity) is itself a plurality, constituted and compromised by contradiction, otherness, and difference from itself (Gibson-Graham, 1995, p. 275). As Bhabha (1991) claims,

The assumption that at some level all forms of cultural diversity may be understood on the basis of a particular universal concept, whether it be ‘human being’, ‘class’ or ‘race’, can be both very dangerous and very limiting in trying to understand the ways in which cultural practices construct their own systems of meaning and social organisation. (p. 209)

Findings on the diversity of meanings, experiences, and forms of resistance to universal conceptualizations of ethnoracial categories and the economy emerging from the two contexts of study help to theorize about the mutually constitutive relationship between individuals, their food-based economic practices, and the contexts of investigation.

4.3.1 Ethnoracial categories and material implications for the enactment of multiple realities

In the United States, the terms Latino/Latinx/Hispanic have acquired centrality in the political, academic, and media debate of the past few decades due to the increased number of Latin American populations residing in the country. Although these terms are not officially treated as racial categories in the US Census, many scholars have recognized that these function in reality as

racial categories with important effects on these populations residing in the Americas (Jossart-Marcelli, 2021; Marcus, 2020; Omi and Winant, 2012; Pulido and Pastor, 2013). Yet, little attention has been paid to the relational links between top-down definitions of ethnoracial categories and Latinx communities' day-to-day experiences in the United States. On the one hand, the way these categories are constructed, understood, and interpreted in mainstream debates influences political discourse, local experiences of reception, stereotypes formation, day-to-day experiences, and, ultimately, the place of Latinx groups in the ethnoracial composition of the U.S. Additionally, histories of spatial, racial, and economic segregation in urban contexts compound with a dominant Black and White racial classification making more complex the ways immigrants navigate these categories, find their place in US society, and enact diverse ways of being, knowing, and doing. On the other hand, little is known about Latinx immigrants' and first-generation US-born's interpretation and familiarization with these ethnoracial categories and, more importantly, how these categories are experienced daily in relation to people's background, past experiences, and racial identities in sending countries. Yet, all these aspects are relevant in the adjusting process people undergo in the new context and the type of economic practices they develop (Sweet, 2016). Hence, unpacking these aspects means not only challenging homogenous and problematic constructions of Latino/Hispanic identity (Marcus, 2020), but also understanding the enactment of different ways of being, knowing, and doing directly informing diverse economic practices.

The Hispanic/Latino ethnoracial category encompasses a multitude of individuals with different ethnicity, geographical origin, background, and migration experiences. However, the reduction of this diversity into an all-encompassing monolithic representation is in line with the one-world ontology discussed by Law (2015). Specifically, this ontology pervades every aspect of life devaluing and neglecting the existence of different ways of being, knowing, and doing. In both

Charlotte and Boston urban areas, the reproduction of a single stereotypical narrative defines what people should look like, how they should behave, and what type of position they should occupy in U.S. society. Findings emerging from this research regarding the multiple meanings Latinx individuals associate with ethnoracial categories, day-to-day experiences and encounters, and contestations of stereotypes, illustrate tensions arising from the gap between the homogeneous representation of Hispanic/Latino communities and the diversity of cultures and identities present in the US. Ultimately, these findings signal the existence of multiple realities that cannot be reconciled within a one-world ontology.

Latinx individuals both from Charlotte and Boston noted that being Latino, Latina, or Hispanic, is something that they often discover when they cross the border into the US. Getting accustomed to being identified as Latino/a or Hispanic takes time and it is a process of discovery. On the one hand, the encounter with this new identity is also an encounter with a set of meanings and stereotypes defined by others and associated with what it means to be Hispanic or Latino/a. On the other hand, in trying to make sense of this new identity, immigrants associate their own meanings to these labels adding complexity to representations of self and others (Oboler, 1992) and, in turn, to ways of being, knowing, and doing enacted in the new context. When asked about meanings associated with the Hispanic-Latino/a labels, one of the participants' first reactions was trying to define the difference between the terms Hispanic and Latino/a. In line with what Lopez et al. found (2021, September), some people from both Charlotte and Boston draw a sharp distinction between the two terms identifying the term Hispanic with people from Spain or from Spanish-speaking countries in Latin America, and Latinx with all the people coming from Latin America regardless the language spoken. The next quotes illustrate these points.

Well, at the beginning, it was a little bizarre, because Latina is a term that was created in the United States. So, I had no idea that I was a Latina when I was in Peru, right? And then when we were in Canada, [...] that's when I learned the term... I was like, "Okay, well, that's what we're called!" (Boston, Female, Food Sharing + Gardening and Food Sharing)

Hispanic, I think people who speak Spanish and Latinos... I mean, it's... it's not the same? I think so... it's the same. I think Latinos is from Latin America, right? and Latin America, for example, we speak Spanish... Portuguese... In Brazil... they don't speak Spanish, they speak Portuguese. And Hispanics are who speak Spanish, and Latinos who are living in Latin America. That's... I think this is a good answer... (Charlotte, Female, Healthy Lifestyle)

In general, these labels are not universally embraced, very often are used interchangeably, and both flatten diversity with respect to identity. In the stories shared by participants from both Charlotte and Boston, uncertainty and contradictions emerge signaling a non-linear process of making sense of this superimposed category that becomes part of one's racial identity only when borders are crossed.

Although countries in Latin America have a rich history of ethnic composition, in the U.S., being Hispanic/Latino is predominantly associated with being from a Spanish-speaking country. Yet, this identification not only excludes Latin American countries that were conquered by other European populations and are part of Latin America, but also flattens ethnic and racial diversity characterizing each country. As a young woman from Boston explained "In El Salvador, we have Mayas, Incas... We were all Indigenous. There was no white race, we were all Indigenous. And then the Spanish came, they invaded us, and that's how we became *mestiz*." (Boston, Female, Food Sharing + Cooperative Gardening).

Marcus (2020) notes that the Spanish language is one of the major aspects in the formation of an oversimplified Latino/Hispanic pan-ethnic identity and that this is reproduced through the mainstream political, academic, and media discourse, which assumes the homogeneity of this category and seldom challenges its legitimacy. The dominance of a Spanish-centric lens is also evident in the U.S. Census Bureau's definition of Hispanic or Latino, "A person of Cuban,

Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race.” (Census Bureau, 2020), or in the definition of Hispanics introduced by U.S. Congress in 1976, people “who identify themselves as being of Spanish-speaking background and trace their origin or descent from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Central and South America, and other Spanish-speaking countries” (Lopez et al., 2021, September). As described in detail by one interview participant, this view completely ignores the diversity of languages, cultures, and heritage of the population coming from North, Central, and South America.

I grew up with people using Hispanic more, which is related to Spanish-speaking countries, the history of Columbus, and being colonized by the Spanish. And I've also heard it interchangeably with Latino, as [coming from] Latin America. Again, related to the spoken language of Spanish. [...] But I feel like it's a very narrowly considered label for these [indigenous or native] communities and that Spanish is the only language people speak if they live in these countries... But that's not true! The same way, we don't all practice the same religion, or we have even different histories of our ancestors in these countries. So, I'm thinking more right now about the communities that would technically be part of Latin America because of location and geography, but aren't necessarily considered as being part of that label because they speak indigenous language, or they're from an indigenous community. I also think it's one label for so many different countries and different experiences. And it's very American, or just like Western, to lump everyone together. Just like [being] Black, even though Blacks, historically here have very different experiences from the Caribbeans and Africans. [...] It's just very funny how we have to be lumped under one label when it's obviously more complex and nuanced. (Boston, Female, Gardening and Food Sharing)

Indigenous groups and populations from Dutch-, English-, French-, and Portuguese-speaking countries become invisible in this representation and are excluded from it. Equating Latin America to Spanish language and Hispanic/Latino racial identity means erasing many experiences and excluding several groups from the mainstream representation and Latin American geography (Marcus, 2020). As the previous quote explains, oversimplifying diversity and erasing groups from mainstream representations is part of the day-to-day experience of many individuals in the U.S. regardless of their location.

Stereotypical representations of Latinos

People interviewed in both Boston and Charlotte similarly conveyed the difficulty of reconciling the complexity of their identities and experiences with the mainstream one-size fits all representation of the Latino/Hispanic racial identity in the US. This difficulty is exacerbated by the existence of a stereotypical image of Latinx's physical appearance, behavior, level of education, social status, and language proficiency that has common traits not only in Boston and Charlotte, but also at the national level (Gonzalez, 2019). The strong similarities emerging from people's comments regarding stereotypes illustrate the pervasive power of a monolithic narrative that is reproduced through social and political discourse at the national level and invests in every aspect of people's lives at the local level. Almost all informants in both Charlotte and Boston stated that being Latino or Hispanic is equated to being of Mexican origins.

Even though I have been here for 30 years, it is very difficult. Because I think here, they tend to put you in a box. If you speak Spanish, you're Latino/Hispanic... And, of course, if you are Latino... you are Mexican! (Boston, Female, Gardening and Food Sharing)

American people think that Hispanic people all are from Mexico. I mean, they don't know we have different places. [...] I say "Okay, I'm Latina, but from Colombia". I mean, I start teaching them how many places... how different places there are in Latin America. But I think Latino is not only just one race... it is different cultures. Mexican is different from Colombia, Colombia is different from Brazil... [...] I'm not from Mexico. I mean, I don't have anything against them [Mexicans]. But they [Americans] believe that people from Mexico are no good. I mean, the culture is different. You know what I mean? (Charlotte, Female, Healthy Lifestyle)

These two quotes illustrate the identification of Mexicans as representative of the entire ethnoracial category. They also show that this identification is emerging in conversations with participants from Charlotte, which is an urban area characterized by a strong influx of Mexicans, and from Boston, which, contrary to Charlotte, has never been characterized by a strong Mexican presence (Chapter 3.1)

The association of a specific group, in this case, Mexicans, as representative of the Hispanic/Latino category has some significant implications. First, it perpetuates the existence of a single narrative of the migration experience, disregarding the diversity of cultural backgrounds, racial and national identities, and social status in sending countries. Second, it ignores the increasing diversity of people migrating from Latin America, hence trends in US migration. Although Mexicans constitute the biggest group, representing 60% of the Hispanic/Latino category (Census Bureau, 2020) and the most represented in the academic, media, and political discourse, recent migration patterns are increasing intergroup diversity. In fact, in recent years, migration from countries in Central America has intensified bringing this regional subgroup to be the third largest Hispanic group (10%) after Mexicans and Puerto Ricans (Census Bureau, 2020). Third, it erases existing diversity within the Mexican group perpetuating a monolithic representation of Mexican identities. Participants explained that equating Latinx to Mexicans often means perpetuating existing stereotypes and extending them as characterizing features of the entire Hispanic/Latino category. As two research participants explained, these stereotypes relate to several aspects of life and paint a specific image regarding physical characteristics, position in the labor market, social and legal status, educational attainment, language proficiency, family size, income level, and reliance on social services.

A lot of people too expect you to look a certain way, when you say you're Mexican, they have this image in their head. And so, when I tell people, I'm Mexican-American, they're like, surprised, because they think, you know, I should have a darker complexion. But there's people that are a lot lighter than me that have... like my mom, she has blond hair and hazel green eyes. (Charlotte, Female, Food Sharing)

I think it depends where you are in the US. If we were on the west coast, people would associate stereotypes much more with like Mexican-Americans, Chicanos, because there's such a big community there. And then in New England, especially Boston, we have a lot of Dominicans, Puerto Ricans... But I do think the Mexican identity is very big in the US and strongly associated with the Latino community. But certainly, I think a big one [stereotype] is assuming you're or your whole family is undocumented, lower class, and specifically, very working-class jobs, that we don't speak English, big families, live in poverty, use a lot of social services... Those are the ones

[stereotypes] I think are associated a lot with the Latino community. (Boston, Female, Gardening and Food Sharing)

This stereotypical image of short, small, brown people with darker complexion who are undocumented, uneducated, have working-class jobs, have big families living in one rented household, have lower social status and income, do not speak English, live in poverty, and rely on social services, is a powerful one that has been traditionally associated to Mexicans and recently extended to represent the entire Latino/Hispanic category. This representation is so powerful that people who do not reflect this stereotypical image because of their fairer skin complexion, higher social status, and educational attainment, or simply because they do not speak Spanish, are often confronted with interactions that deny their Latino/Hispanic heritage and identity. The following quote illustrates this point:

They [Americans] always tell me you don't look like that Mexican. They are used to see like, short people, browner skin than mine... [...] But it's like, "yeah, I'm Mexican. My husband is white and tall". And they are like "You're not Mexican". And, for example, they always think that you're working in the construction, or picking vegetables here, or working at McDonald's, or something like that. They always put you in that box if you say that you are from Mexico. (Charlotte, Female, Food Sharing + Gardening and Food Sharing)

Taken together, the quotes presented so far highlight the pervasive power that this monolithic representation has on day-to-day interactions and their ability to silence some forms of identity.

The process of identity formation for Latinx communities is not only a non-static, incomplete, and ongoing process that is continuously informed by experiences and interactions with others (Golash-Boza, 2006, Pulido and Pastor, 2013), but it is also characterized by an internalized tension between externally defined and self-defined identities. As Oboler (1992) explains, this internalized identity-tension is also evident in the construction of Latino/a as "others" by the same individuals who are identified or self-identify as Latino/Hispanic. The following quote

illustrates this point by referring to the existence of a “regular Latino” in relation to which the educated Latino in leadership positions constitutes an exception.

In my case, I mean, I'm not a regular Latino, I went to college, I went to grad school. In my case, it was great because there are not many people.... Like me... I mean... (Boston, Male, Healthy Lifestyle)

This contraposition between the “regular Latino” and its counterpart highlights simultaneously the internalization of the stereotypical image discussed above and the action of distancing from it by someone who occupies a privileged position in US society. This is only one instance of the multiple strategies of resistance employed by people interviewed in both Boston and Charlotte to reject and contest this all-encompassing superimposed identity.

Resistance strategies reveal the coexistence of multiple, overlapping, and sometimes contradictory ways of being. For instance, a Puerto Rican woman living in the Boston area keeps her daughters engaged in different social activities to fight the teen-pregnancy stereotype and a young woman from Charlotte describes her mother’s practice of dyeing her hair black to conform to the Latinx stereotype. The tension between conforming to and resisting a superimposed image becomes even more evident for first-generation US-born individuals.

You know... here I'm considered Latina and when I go to Dominican Republic, I'm considered American. So... I feel like first generations have to learn to find their identity, right? [...] And so, you sometimes feel like you don't fit in anywhere. Right? (Boston, Female, Family Food Coop)

As this quote illustrates, first-generation US-born individuals are often perceived as the “others” wherever they go, making more difficult for them to develop a sense of belonging both in the US and in their countries of origin.

In the stories that informants shared, it is possible to identify coping mechanisms developed as a way to survive in the U.S. when their identities and cultural traits clash with dominant ones. People from both Boston and Charlotte described detachment from discriminatory situations,

code-switching, maintaining a low profile, and building connections under a shared identity as key strategies to create space in a not always welcoming environment. More importantly, engaging with food emerges as a key strategy to affirm diversity within the Hispanic/Latino shared identity and resist monolithic stereotypical representations.

Challenging monolithic representations through food.

Many scholars have investigated the complex links between food and diasporic identities. Food is a means to develop connections for survival (Marte, 2011), and to connect people to their cultural background and land of origin (Hall, 1992). These aspects emerge from the stories of people interviewed in this study in both Boston and Charlotte. Yet, their stories also reveal how through the enactment of diverse food practices, Latinx individuals contribute to diversifying narratives on Hispanic/Latino identities and countries of origin, challenging the legitimacy of standard definitions of economic concepts, and creating connections and networks in the new context. Many of the women interviewed in both cities teach others about the cultural and culinary diversity in Latin America and their own culture and customs by cooking and sharing food and/or recipes with others or by developing ethnic food enterprises. They also challenge stereotypical narratives of Latin American countries that emphasize only negative aspects:

For me the most important thing is to share our flavors with people and that the people here know something good about Venezuela, not just the suffering that we go through... [...] there are a lot of things that I feel proud of, and I feel proud to be able to share these things through the food. Sharing food is a special way to share your culture. [...] Our food is food made with love like the food a mother prepares for her children. (Charlotte, Female, Business supporting the community)

Through the development of diverse food practices, many of the Latinas interviewed create space for themselves to share important aspects of their own identity and origins with others and maintain a connection with their roots. As Marte (2011) finds in the case of Dominicans in New York,

engaging with food becomes a way to create connections among individuals, survival networks, and a local sense of place. Food becomes the means “to stitch the self in place” (Hall, 1992) and nurture comfort and familiarity in a new and unfamiliar context. The process of “suturing” mentioned by Marte (2011, p. 24) is illustrated in the answer of this woman from Charlotte who speaks about the significance of reproducing culinary traditions from her own country in her daily life in Charlotte: “Oh very important! Because it links us back to where we are, where we are from, it kind of keeps us connected. Yeah, food is a way of staying connected” (Charlotte, Female, Food Sharing).

Food represents an important piece of transnational identities that allows immigrants to simultaneously connect with their past and ground themselves in the new context: people interviewed shared that engaging with food is the most immediate way to connect with their cultural roots, past experiences, and memories developed in their countries of origin while affirming their identity and cultural difference in the new context where these aspects often get silenced by the existence of a single stereotypical narrative around Hispanic/Latino identities. As the next quote shows, reproducing culinary traditions in the new context is also a way to establish connections, develop collaborations with others in the new context, and create networks connecting people and places (Chapter 5).

I think baking is a way we can keep in touch with people. [...] I think it is a way that I can show the people where is my country, and how is my food... explain to them all my ingredients and all the roots... [...] For example, I have Facebook Live every Thursday and I cook like healthy cooking and then I share every kind of foods not only for my country. So that's a way I think that I can show here that food is a way to get people involved with you... (Charlotte, Female, Family Food Coop + Healthy Lifestyle)

At the same time, the emergence of these networks of cooperation and collaboration is intimately tied to identity aspects not only because these develop around food and food practices, but also because connecting with others emerges in this study as a significant part of Hispanic/Latino

identities. Several informants from Boston and Charlotte have connected the significance of practices such as cooking and eating together, sharing food, and using food to share love and welcome others into their houses or, in the new context, to being Hispanic/Latino. Specifically, gathering around food and sharing recipes, stories, and cultural traditions are ways to create a sense of community in unfamiliar places. Through collective practices, these traditions are transmitted not only from one generation to the other in extended families, but also to the community at large. For instance, the development of a family-based cooperative bakery in a mainly immigrant neighborhood in Boston becomes a way to keep the extended family together and to support the surrounding community and anyone who needs food and/or a job.

The relationship between individuals and their food traditions has deep roots in the stories, memories, and experiences developed in their home countries and is variously reproduced and reconstructed through the development of diverse economic practices. In fact, not all practices tend to reproduce food traditions and recipes exactly as inherited. Rather, some of them, as in the case of the healthy lifestyle type of practices (see Chapter 3.3), in both Boston and Charlotte, reinterpret Latin American food recipes and traditions to promote a healthier lifestyle and address widespread issues affecting Latinx populations in the U.S. – e.g., diabetes and cancer. A woman from Charlotte illustrates this point:

No, usually we ask them to make it more cultural proficiency I would say. [...] We compare carbs and sweet and everything on different brands so we can choose the healthier ones. And it is based on our typical consumption. We have [cancer] survivors from Mexico, Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, El Salvador everywhere south, and Honduras. So, the idea is trying to work with them [...] and what they cook in the house. (Charlotte, Female, Food Sharing + Healthy Lifestyle)

Ultimately, through the enactment of food-based diverse economic practices, Latinx individuals from both urban areas are able to maintain a deep connection with their past, cultural background, various forms of identity, food traditions, and so on, create networks of survival, and enact multiple

realities. As the next section shows, the diverse ways of being, knowing, and doing enacted through these food-based collaborative practices also challenge the universal monolithic definition of economic concepts such as work, cooperation and collaboration, and skills.

4.3.2 Challenging standard definitions of economic concepts

Although it is currently accepted that mainstream economic-geographical scholarship has mainly emerged from the experiences of Anglo-American regions and perspectives, there is also a tacit acceptance that it should continue to do so (Pollard et al., 2009). This theorizing from one dominant perspective systematically excludes the economic perspectives emerging from non-Anglo-American regions and/or experiences and reproduces the existence of a One-World World ontology (Law, 2015). Additionally, given the magnitude of migratory flows into Anglo-American regions, excluding non-Anglo-American economic experiences from economic-geographical theorizations ultimately means producing a scholarship that is no longer truly representative of economic systems in any region. Feminist scholars have already demonstrated that economic definitions can be neither monolithic nor universal. When accounting for axes of difference such as gender and race/ethnicity, a multitude of changing meanings emerge around the same concepts. For instance, what it means to work varies by culture, tradition, experience, and identity (Sweet, 2016; Sweet et al., 2012). These multiple and changing meanings inform the ways people produce and exchange value and the diversity of economic practices that coexist alongside and often blend with capitalist ones.

This section unpacks the different meanings associated with economic concepts such as work, cooperation, and skills emerging from the conversations with informants in Charlotte and Boston and how these meanings relate to their identities and past. It also demonstrates how

definitions of economic concepts not only vary, but also do not always adhere to standard western definitions. Hence, these often escape the one-world all-encompassing ontology and substantiate the existence of multiple realities.

Conceptualizations of work

When asked about what “work” and/or “working” meant to them, about half of the informants in both Boston and Charlotte connected the action of “working” to being paid by someone or, more generally, earning money. Therefore, their answers, as illustrated in the next two quotes, reflect the mainstream perspective that sees work as an action that implies a monetary transaction.

Doing something and getting paid for it. Right now, I am working folding laundry or doing house chores, but no one's paying me for it. (Boston, Female, Family Food Coop)

What working means to me? Well, working it's like a passion that you have to do something and also if they pay you to do that, that's a plus. It's amazing if you get paid for loving what you're doing. So, it's maintaining your mind and body doing something. That's for me working and of course, it's a living. So, you make money, and that's good. (Charlotte, Female, Restaurant Supporting the Community)

Yet, the link between working and earning money is almost always connected to other aspects of daily life: earning money is essential to pay the bills, pay for transportation, buy food, and support the family.

Ultimately, being paid emerges as a requirement to survive in the US and, sometimes, to support family members in sending countries. Yet, from the conversations with Latinx individuals in Boston and Charlotte, it becomes clear that what it means to work also assumes broader meanings that cannot be exclusively ascribed to the realm of waged labor, monetary transactions, and market exchanges. Rather, what it means to work includes other spheres of daily life and,

ultimately, ways of being, knowing, and doing that become essential to its conceptualization. The people interviewed in both urban areas see work as a means to achieve different goals that do not coincide with making profits and/or accumulating wealth. The next quote illustrate this point:

What working means? It means a bless, you know, means food, means take care of my family, means God, means life, I can wake up every single day and feel myself alive. Instead of going into work, I'm going to make a difference today [...] so all of that means to me, working. (Charlotte, Male, Charity Food Programs)

Specifically, this quote illustrates the multiple and overlapping meanings that this man from Charlotte associates with work. His words are aligned with the meanings that other informants assigned to work: working becomes the means to increasing knowledge, learning new skills, having a dignifying life or having a purpose, helping others, and creating networks of survival. These meanings are rooted in people's past experiences, background, upbringing, and so on. For instance, in the case of this man from Charlotte, his definition of work is directly linked to his experience of being homeless and food deprived for several years when he was young, and his migration history in Canada and the US. These past experiences not only have informed his way to approach work, re-orienting it from an individual practice to support himself to a collective practice able to help others, but also constituted the foundation for the development of a non-profit organization aimed at fighting hunger and homelessness in several areas in the Americas. Therefore, these additional meanings emerging from conceptualizations of work coexist and blend with more standard meanings, such as the need of working to survive in the new context.

Another important meaning associated with work, emerging specifically from interviews with Latinas in Boston and Charlotte was *independence*. In fact, four Latinas from Boston and nine in Charlotte explicitly conceptualized work as a means to gain independence or be independent. For some of them, independence is having a job in line with what they “studied and fought for so many years” (Boston, Female, Family Food Coop) in their countries of origin and in the US. Being

independent is also a way to affirm their gendered identity and challenge stereotypical fixed gender roles. On the one hand, in reclaiming their independence as women, Latinas create opportunities for themselves in the new cultural context, where the intersection of their multiple identities as immigrant women often subjugates them to disadvantaged and exploited positions. On the other hand, in creating or seeking opportunities for themselves Latinas often challenge fixed gender roles directly connected with cultural contexts in their sending countries. The following quote illustrates the importance that independence has in the life of this woman from Charlotte who developed two enterprises in collaboration with other women.

I'm going to say as a woman... for me is very important, you know, because independence is all for me. So, this is the principal reason why I wanted to get a job or to do my own business, because I'm a woman... I'm an individual person. So, you know, [working] it is everything for me. I don't like to depend on my husband.... that's the principal reason.... I don't have any problem with that, but for me, [being independent] it's so important.... (Charlotte, Female, Family Food Collaborative + Healthy Lifestyle)

In Latinas' stories and experiences, work emerges not only as an important part of their lives in the new urban context, but also as a means that allowed them to transition from the life they had in their countries of origin and their new, and often safer, life in the US.

It means a lot, I don't know how to describe that, but it means a lot! I mean... because I didn't want the life that I had in my country. I didn't like it... you know... I just decided to work hard to get my daughters out of there. And that's why, for me is very important. (Charlotte, Female, Restaurant supporting the community)

In these cases, working assumes an additional meaning tied to independence: it is the action that allows Latinas to change life, support other family members, and often help others migrating to and adjusting in the same urban context.

Complex, changing, and overlapping meanings associated with the concept of work blur the boundaries between paid work, volunteer work, and work compensated in alternative ways. Many of the people interviewed referred to work as an action compensated and/or reciprocated by

others not exclusively with money, but also through services or mutual exchanges. For instance, some referred to having the patio cleaned up by a neighbor in exchange for a cooked meal or to receiving vegetables in exchange for work done in a cooperative garden. Others referred to the satisfaction and the personal growth originating from helping others as compensation for their work.

So work is a physical and mental action that someone undertakes, and people work not only for, you know, monetary incentives, but for other incentives as well. [...] I, myself, volunteer and work and I also serve in the church. And I don't get compensated monetarily for this work, but when I help people what I receive is my spirit being fed or my spirit growing. (Charlotte, Female, Collecting and distributing food donations + Food sharing)

In identifying economic actions compensated in different ways, Latinx individuals referred to a set of various practices and sporadic actions carried out in the past in their sending countries. This link between the present and past signals a process of knowledge, agency, and cooperative work ethic transfer from the previous context to the new one. This transfer ultimately contributes to diversifying local economic systems according to principles of solidarity and interdependence and signifies the coexistence of multiple realities not necessarily conforming to the capitalist one-world view. A woman from Boston illustrates this point:

For me it would be to look for resources and do actions for a benefit ... for the benefit of several people, not just one ... For example, in Colombia I was also part of the Community Action Boards [...] A Community Action Board is a non-profit association where one works in the community looking for benefits, for resources at the departmental or municipal level... [...] to improve the streets, to improve schools, for the improvement of residential places and, for example help the most vulnerable people with food, often with school transportation, so that the most vulnerable had benefits. (Boston, Female, Family Food Coop)

Taken together, these conceptualizations of work substantiate the idea that people produce and exchange value in more diverse and complex ways than the ones currently valued by the mainstream neoliberal capitalist economic system. This is even more evident when we analyze

collective economic practices that acknowledge interdependence among subjects and privilege collective well-being over individualism.

Conceptualizations of cooperative and collaborative work

In the past decades, activists, practitioners, and scholars have pushed for, researched, and identified strategies to build more sustainable economic scenarios that privilege people and the planet over profit and growth. Specifically, activists, practitioners, and scholars adopting approaches such as diverse economies, solidarity economies, and cooperative economies, among others, have been at the forefront of the fight to change and innovate the economy in the US. Yet, the practical and theoretical debate surrounding cooperative, solidarity, and diverse economies does not frequently acknowledge cooperative and collaborative practices that are not formalized into an official business structure or that are activated by subjects who are not fully aware of the cooperative nature and transformative potential of their actions. Additionally, little is said about practices that involve alternative forms of compensation beyond monetary transactions. The emphasis on coops or alternative economic practices as formalized business structures excludes these temporary forms or informal practices of cooperation and collaboration that are inspired by principles of interdependence, solidarity, and more balanced ways of living than extractive, exploitative, and commodifying ones. Through the exploration of meanings associated with collaborative and cooperative work this section shows that principles of interdependence, solidarity, and more balanced ways of being are imbued in Latinx conceptualizations of collaborative and cooperative work that are often associated with temporary, less intentional (Chapter 6), and less structured diverse economic practices, such as the ones explored in this research. Yet, even in cases where people engage in diverse economies with a lower level of

awareness regarding their transformative potential, we can identify the enactment of different ways of being, knowing, and doing that constitute a solid ground for the construction of an ontological politics of the pluriverse.

Some conceptualizations of cooperation and collaboration are directly intertwined with definitions of work, including alternatively compensated work, and illustrate the mindset underpinning the collaborative practices explored in this study. Cooperating and collaborating with others means approaching work in a different way than traditional capitalist definitions of work: collaborative or cooperative work “means helping others.” (Boston, Female, Cooperative gardening + Food Sharing), rather than competing against or exploiting them. “Help”, “helping others”, or similar wording, are the words that informants used most frequently in both Boston and Charlotte – respectively 14 and 13 informants – to define the concepts of collaboration and cooperation in relation to work. In fact, as the next two quotes illustrate, conceptualizations of cooperative and collaborative work emerging from this study acknowledge interdependence among subjects and directly inform actions that, more or less intentionally, leverage interconnections among individuals to foster an environment of collaboration and support, rather than competition and individualism.

Community, I think that's what it means. It's just coming together with those around you and kind of working with their points of view, seeing how they see the world and, also, bringing in the way you see the world, and kind of seeing the bigger picture. (Charlotte, Female, Food sharing)

Yeah, but the most important thing for me is: work is something that makes a difference in other people's lives and it gives you the chance to be independent because of whatever you earn for that work. (Boston, Female, Gardening and Food Sharing)

These aspects supersede the importance of “working” as traditionally defined: people’s collective well-being becomes more important than producing profit. Consequentially, the organizational structures of these collaborative practices are more horizontal than hierarchical.

Collaboration and cooperation become crucial for many Latinx immigrants to adjust, navigate, and survive in a new cultural context. This conceptualization of reciprocal cooperation and collaboration is reflected in a wide array of economic practices from formalized coops and food enterprises to day-to-day actions such as food sharing and collaborative childcare across both urban areas. These collaborative and cooperative actions often flourish in situations where alternative ways of payment are employed. Hence, according to capitalist conceptualizations of the economy, these are not considered as constituting the economy. Yet, as the next quote illustrates, these actions help women to fulfill daily needs, create networks of support, and to face challenges that arise. Therefore, as next quote explains, these actions become a fundamental part of the overall household economy, especially in situations characterized by a lack of resources.

Any work I do for anyone but not expecting to get paid back in money. For example, I clean my friends' apartments because they need help... I help with that, and they don't pay me because they cannot do it, but they compensate me by reciprocating the favor, taking care of my kids, or doing other things, giving me food... [...] we're supporting each other with time or labor, but not using money, using resources or labor in a different reciprocal way. (Boston, Female, Family Food Coop)

These practices not only have an economic value and help to construct and diversify local economic systems in urban areas, but also produce other effects such as creating communities and networks of support. Ultimately, they contribute to building other economic scenarios founded on interdependence and create room for minorities to enact different ways of being, knowing, and doing. Conceptualizations of collaborative and cooperative work emerging from this research are centered around the idea that knowledge and skills can be shared or used to help others, create community, redistribute resources, and share benefits. The next quote illustrates this point:

I collaborate with the neighbors, sometimes I get a box of food and I will distribute it to the neighbors. Cooperating is helping someone.... collaborating with some food or whatever I can. (Boston, Female, Food Sharing + Collaborative gardening and food sharing)

Collaborating and cooperating with others means also reframing the idea of economic success. As postcolonial scholars have demonstrated (for instance, Pollard et al., 2011), many economic concepts are molded on what is considered successful cases in the western world and on western theories. Yet, as next quote illustrates, *success* can also acquire different meanings.

I would say that this is a great opportunity when one has collaboration, you're able to use the best of yourself and able to use the best of others. And there's a greater opportunity to grow, to be more successful when you know how to work in collaboration with others for a common goal. [...] Well basically, Latinos, here, help each other a lot, they support each other a lot. So, I've actually been helping my friend for four years, a friend who works a lot. [...] And furthermore, for COVID whenever I have friends who are actually sick, [...] it's not uncommon that I'll go ahead and bring them something to help them through those times, just so that they can eat and have something for a couple of days. (Charlotte, Female, Food Sharing)

As this quote shows, the act of collaborating with others becomes an opportunity for personal growth and success in the new context. Additionally, networks created around cooperation and collaboration constitute a crucial resource for survival, especially in times of crisis, such as the one created by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The collective dimension emerging from conceptualizations of work is translated into action and reflected in the organizational structure of networks of collaboration and cooperation and, hence, in how these networks produce and distribute value. The following quote captures an example of the distribution of value based on the needs of the members of a food coop born in Boston under the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic (Summer 2020) as a source of primary or additional revenue for its members and a way to fight social isolation. The small revenue produced by the food coop was distributed unequally to satisfy the needs of its members.

We gave the majority of the money to my uncle and my aunt because they weren't working at the time. They had no source of income. So, they got what we actually made. (Boston, Female, Family Food Coop)

Similarly, this woman speaks about the benefits of collaborative business structures as well as the difficulties of collective decision-making processes.

I feel like when it's several people, you kind of get to decide as a whole. And when you look back into different types of businesses, these sometimes are usually the best, because it's not like "Okay, this one person is making the decisions for everyone". Everyone's making a decision as a team. [...] I feel that when it comes to collaborative businesses like these, they're good and I like them, but everyone needs to be on the same page. (Boston, Female, Family Food Coop)

These examples illustrate the intimate link between collaborative and/or cooperative conceptualizations of work and the organizational structure of food-based cooperative economic practices explored in this research. The terms collaboration and cooperation were often used by the majority of informants interchangeably and defined by relying on the same ideas summarized in this section. People relied more on the term cooperation when they had a strong cooperative background. When economic practices are rooted in conceptualizations of work that cannot be exclusively ascribed to the realm of capitalism, they can become sites to enact different ways of being, knowing, and doing that, in turn, produce collective benefits for groups and communities.

Roots of collaborative and cooperative practices

These conceptualizations of collaboration and cooperation have deep roots in people's upbringing, cultural background, and past experiences in sending countries. Values of solidarity and interdependence are often transmitted from one generation to the other. Many informants shared that their views on meanings associated with cooperation and collaboration were inspired by their parents, grandparents, and other family members' actions and teachings.

Since I was little, my parents taught me to help others and collaborate with others because you never know if one day you are the one who needs help from others. [...] I try to help these people as much as I can, and I try to collaborate as much as I can. (Boston, Male, Occasional Food Sharing)

We didn't call it activism, but she [mother] always helped people who didn't have basic things that they needed in life, like food or clothes and she taught us to do the same. (Charlotte, Female, Collaborative Cooking and Selling)

Some others shared that these teachings were specifically linked to life-changing experiences such as starvation, homelessness, lack of resources, and natural disasters – e.g., devastating storms. These events, compounded with a widespread shortage of resources experienced by many of the people interviewed in this study, have deeply affected the ways they have cooperated and collaborated with others in their countries of origin and in the US, especially during the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic. A woman from Boston illustrates this point:

It is something that I experienced in my house many times in Guatemala, in a situation that was created by the tropical storm Mitch... that really marked my life. I remember that my dad would take us in the car, I was maybe about 9 years old, and he would take us to help people check their belongings and we helped giving food to people who were really in a disastrous state. [...] When I see those situations, as well as those that are happening now [Covid-related], I remember what my dad did, and he still practices it, and I practice it. (Boston, Female, Family Food Coop)

This quote illustrates how past experiences of solidarity and interdependence that took place in Latin America continue to inform what people do today on a day-to-day basis in the US.

The roots of collaborative and cooperative orientations to economic practices can also be traced to how people experienced the societal characteristics of their sending countries. For example, a woman from Boston referred to the South American culture as a “collectivist culture” as opposed to the North American – Canadian and US – one that she defined as a more “individualistic culture” (Boston, Female, Gardening and Food sharing + Food Sharing). Hence, her lifestyle is founded on a teamwork approach that involves family members, neighbors, friends, and other people at the community garden she frequents. This predisposition towards working in cooperation with others and helping others in several aspects of day-to-day life especially emerges in those individuals from both Charlotte and Boston who have directly or indirectly experienced hardships and lack of resources growing up. From these past experiences, they learned that cooperating is the only means to survive, create opportunities for themselves, and redistribute

resources. For instance, this is illustrated in the explanation that a woman from Boston gives about the difference between cooperatives in Colombia and in the US.

How it's different is that cooperativism in our country is born out of the need of people with no means of doing things, coming together and trying to do things themselves, because they realize that if they don't do it, nobody's going to do it. So here in the United States, how I see cooperatives is that people with means put money together and decide to do it in a cooperative. So, they start things already with capital, they already have money to invest in something, and they decide to do it in a cooperative way. But in my experience cooperativism comes from the need.. it is a way of survival. It is a totally different mindset, we're going to come together because it's the only way we can survive this crisis or we can survive this challenge. This is about the well-being of people that are involved in the cooperative. (Boston, Female, Gardening and Food Sharing)

Cooperation and collaboration as “a way of survival” is shared by other people interviewed in Boston and Charlotte who had experiences where cooperativism made the difference between life and death and, hence, has deeply affected the ways they survive on a day-to-day basis in those urban areas. A young woman from Charlotte, whose collaborative economic practice revolves around collecting food donations and redistributing the food to people in need, claimed “Society has always progressed because people help each other out. Like in Ecuador, when there is no food, people help each other out” (Charlotte, Female, Collecting, Organizing, and Distributing Food Donations). This experience of food sharing and cooperativism in Ecuador combined with the collaborative network of food distribution activated by family members in the US have informed the ways she has helped others to access food before and during the pandemic. Similarly, a man from Boston shared his own experience of collaboration and cooperation as the only means of surviving in the Ecuadorian jungles when his family and a few others decided to settle there before anybody else. For him “collaboration is bringing our basic skills to offer to the group to build something bigger or larger than we are as individuals” (Boston, Male, Food Sharing). In some cases, the predisposition towards helping others can also be informed by the opposite experience, one of abandonment and deprivation. This is the experience of both a man and a woman from

Charlotte who used their skills and connections in several cities in the US to respectively establish programs to fight hunger and train the homeless and allow them to transition out of poverty, and guarantee food banks access to those who struggle. Contrary to other Latinx individuals, they experienced a lack of help and starvation respectively in Ecuador and El Salvador. From these experiences, they both developed a similar sentiment captured by this quote: “I learned to share even though I don’t have anything, I learned to give and to share” (Charlotte, Female, Distributing Food Donations).

Experiences of cooperativism and collaboration in Latin American countries compound with other experiences in the US and the challenges people face in the new context. The unique positioning of Latinx immigrants in both established migrant destinations, such as Boston, and emerging migrant destination, such as Charlotte, often influence predisposition towards solidarity and collaboration. Similar cases have been documented by scholars such as Jessica Gordon-Nembhard (2004, 2014) in relation to African-American groups’ struggle for resources and empowerment in the US since the end of slavery. As highlighted in the next quote, daily struggles and context-related aspects can create opportunities in which cooperativism and mutual-aid knowledge developed in other contexts is used to create new collaborative actions.

I think a lot of immigrant communities grow up this way, just being part of mutual-aid, and, for a lot of people, this is a very new concept. But I would say most poor communities, and immigrant communities have been practicing mutual aid their whole lives, because it’s very hard to survive on your own. You need to support each other financially, with childcare, with like translating, with housing... everyone, in some way, has had to rely big time on other people. This interdependence happens to get through challenges, all the time. So, this is very normal for me. [...] So, I’m already dispositioned to operate like this... (Boston, Female, Gardening and food sharing)

As this quote illustrates, collaborative actions based on interdependence, mutual aid, and solidarity are part of the survival strategies employed on a day-to-day basis by migrant communities in new contexts in the US.

Latinx individuals interviewed for this study in both Boston and Charlotte mainly define collaboration and cooperation as mutual relationships among subjects that do not necessarily involve monetary payments but allow people to receive help to adjust, navigate, and survive in the new context. This relational conceptualization is either already part of people's identity when they cross the border or instilled into them when they grow up in the US exposed to more or less formalized cooperative and collaborative actions. Because of their positioning in the US context, collaborative and cooperative knowledge keeps surfacing due to context-related day-to-day challenges that become the opportunity to establish relationships founded more or less intentionally on principles of interdependence among subjects and mutual aid (see Chapter 6). Hence, knowledge formed through previous experiences in other places continues to inform current actions people carry daily in Charlotte and Boston. These actions not only have an economic value that is often overlooked because it does not adhere to mainstream conceptualizations of economy, but also, if acknowledged and valued, have the potential to contribute to an economic transformation that actualizes what Loh and Shear (2022) define as an ontological politics of the pluriverse.

The analysis of the roots of collaborative and cooperative practices also reveals the existence of a number of skills people acquire by cooperating with others. As the next section shows this process of acquisition of skills does not always stem from formal education or training programs. Rather, cooperative and collaborative experiences in other places or in the US constitute the ground for acquiring skills that are often employed on a day-to-day basis in many economic practices.

Acquiring skills: formal education and life experience

The one-world capitalist ontology mainly values economic skills that are officially acquired through a formal training, such as on-the-job training or educational degrees. This discounts and relegates to an inferior position those skills acquired through daily experiences and that cannot be necessarily documented through formal training and/or education process. Additionally, theories of segmented assimilation (Alba and Nee, 1997; Massey and Denton, 1985; Portes and Zhou, 1993) have contributed to assessing immigrants' economic performance in the US based on their level of formal education, type of occupation, and income. This approach to assessing economic performances reinforces standard binary divisions between skilled and unskilled labor, formal and informal economy, and, in turn, the stigma around who are the uneducated and educated groups. This stigma applies to Latinx communities in the United States as well. Noe-Bustamante (2020, May) estimated that, among immigrants, individuals coming from Mexico and Central America are more likely to have lower educational attainments (less than a high school diploma). Yet, this type of statistics paints a partial picture of migrant communities: one that adheres to standard conceptualizations of the economy. Moving towards an ontological politics of the economy (Loh and Shear, 2022) requires building the ground for a politics that advances the conditions to practice deep relationality, interdependence, and multiple ways of being (Escobar, 2020). In short, a politics that enables a pluriverse: a world where many worlds fit (Escobar, 2020). This shift requires extending economic value not only to diverse cooperative economic practices, but also to the actors activating them and the skills they rely on. As the deep roots of diverse economic practices activated in Boston and Charlotte are entrenched in people's past experiences and cultural backgrounds, so are the ways people acquire knowledge and skills. This exploration is necessary

to show that there is no single path to acquiring valuable skills and that the ways by which people acquire economic skills are equally valuable to enact an ontological politics of the pluriverse.

In the case of the food-based collaborative and cooperative practices explored in this research, the skills involved vary with the type of practices. Yet, one common aspect is that Latinx individuals interviewed in both Boston and Charlotte acquired skills in multiple and overlapping ways: through past experiences, via social media, tv programs, or the internet, and through informal or formal training and education. For instance, all informants learned something from family members, friends, and/or other people with whom they interacted. Both in Charlotte and Boston, Latinx involved in networks of food sharing traced the acquisition of their cooking skills and sharing practices to their mothers, grandmothers, aunts, and, sometimes, fathers and grandfathers.

So, I started watching my mom how to cook. When I was very young, I would kind of help her a little bit with small little tasks. And so, I learned a lot of about flavor and a lot of different dishes through her. (Charlotte, Female, Food Sharing)

The majority of Latinx individuals who engage in networks of cooking and sharing in both Boston and Charlotte are women: out of eight people in Boston and nine in Charlotte, only two people interviewed were men. During the conversations with women involved in food-sharing practices, the action of learning how to cook was often connected with the idea that the transmission of cooking skills from one generation of women to the other was necessary to prepare them for married life.

In the context of this research, the difference emerging between male and female individuals was that men mainly learned how to cook out of passion, and women did mainly out of a real or perceived need to fulfill a specific societal role. If on the one hand, as already documented by feminist scholars, this aspect reflects the reproduction of a gendered division of

roles in the household; on the other hand, this might be seen as an opportunity to acquire skills useful to activate diverse economic practices in a new context and gain independence. In fact, some women cook and share or sell their meals to produce extra revenue for the family, fulfill household needs, and create and maintain networks of support. Some others have leveraged their cooking skills to start more formal enterprises, such as restaurants, food coops, and collaborative catering and bakeries. As next quote illustrates, these economic practices, in turn, have served as an environment for others to learn cooking skills as well as other skills – organizational, administrative, and so on.

With my grandmother... just sitting in the cake room and watching the lady that helped my grandmother decorate, she would be with the pipe, and, you know, turning the cake and decorating and she would do it all fast, and it would take her like 15 minutes to decorate a cake. And I'd just be sitting there looking at it for so long, for so many years. And I didn't... I didn't start decorating cakes until I was about 26 maybe 27. But when I did, I picked it up much faster because I was already watching all the techniques. I had years of watching experience. (Boston, Female, Family Food Coop)

The experience and skills acquired through the participation in these collaborative economic practices are not relevant only for these practices, but also are employed in other day-to-day activities.

Similarly, people engaging in gardening activities acquired these skills from a variety of sources: original knowledge is often acquired by being involved or watching family members engaging in similar practices in countries of origin, and then complemented with information collected from the internet and/or training. As next quote illustrates, sessions of training are often more informal teaching sessions at community gardens where people share their knowledge and skills with others to establish more fruitful relations of cooperation.

Yes, well, since childhood there in the yard one always grows things and everything, so I had an idea of what to do... [...] Here, we learned little by little. Before there was a person responsible for

teaching us everything, how to plant tomatoes, how to harvest things, everything... (Boston, Female, Cooperative Gardening)

Therefore, in the case of cooperative gardens, these sharing sessions often happen much more organically during working and bonding sessions so that participants simultaneously acquire skills, develop a network of support, spend time outdoors in contact with nature, and receive fresh and organic produce in exchange for their work.

For some individuals, both in Charlotte and Boston, an important place to acquire skills is their formal place of work. These places sometimes constitute the only venue for learning skills that later become central to the development of other economic practices. This is, for example, the case of a chef from Charlotte who learned how to cook in California, by working in the kitchens of several restaurants rather than attending formal training programs. After coming to Charlotte, he founded a bakery and a restaurant to produce profits to sustain cooperative programs, coordinated through his non-profit organization, in support of communities in several locations within and outside the US.

The first job that I that I had was washing dishes and pots. But, I'm that type of person that if you put me to wash dishes and pots, I'm gonna run to you and say teach me how to cut, you know, teach me how to prep. So, it's exactly what I did... [...] soon enough, I became a cook and I learn every single station. [...] So that is the way I became a chef and now is in my heart... (Charlotte, Male, Charity Food Programs)

This is also the case of two Latinos from Boston, whose cooking skills acquired in the kitchen of the restaurant in which they work became the opportunity to develop a family-based food coop during the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic. In turn, the family coop was a means for members of the extended family to acquire cooking, organizational, and communication skills.

In some cases, skills acquired more informally are complemented by formal training and education. Three women in Charlotte pursued or are pursuing formal nutrition training to teach others about healthy nutrition and disease prevention, whereas six women in Boston are part of

cooperative training to form food coops in line with relational, interdependence, and solidarity standards. The various ways through which people acquire skills used to develop collaborative and cooperative practices do not discount in any way the importance of formal education and training. Rather, exploring the wide range of ways through which people acquire valuable skills that help them to adjust, navigate, survive, and thrive in a new context means working towards building a pluriverse that values multiple ways of being, knowing, and doing, and building a world that fits many worlds. The stories of Latinx individuals engaged in diverse collaborative economic practices in Boston and Charlotte reveal how a capitalist mindset is deeply imbued in day-to-day ways of living to the extent that unconsciously we automatically tend to discount, devalue, and marginalize what is considered non-economic actors' contribution to the economy. As the next quote illustrates, the importance given to formal education, especially when this relates to a trusted and valued institution in the country, supersedes any other economic skill, idea, or solidarity relation that might be present in the same space.

I have a friend, she's from Venezuela, she was trying to learn something, and she didn't have money to go to school here in Boston. So, I told her, why you don't tell this other person, she can teach you that skill, right? [...] I think that [this other person] she's very well educated here in Boston, went to Harvard and all of that.. So, and my friend, she just finished high school and she feels like, she didn't have anything to offer. [...] I think that there are so many cases like that. And, just like you say, they have a lot to offer... But then what my friend was seeing was, you know, Harvard degree, she knows everything, what can I offer? (Boston, Male, Food Sharing)

4.4 Discussion

In this chapter, I have argued that the analysis of conceptualizations of ethnoracial categories and economic concepts such as work, collaboration and cooperation, and skills is key to understanding multiple ways of being, knowing, and doing enacted through diverse collaborative and cooperative economic practices. This research investigates the mutually

constitutive relationships between individuals, collaborative and cooperative food practices, and the contexts in which these practices emerge and develop. Specifically, this chapter has focused on the “individual dimension” – investigating mutually constitutive relationships between Latinx individuals and economic practices – to demonstrate how the development of Latinx food-based economic practices in Boston and Charlotte must be understood as a situated, heterogenous, relational, and contingent phenomenon intimately linked with people’s past experiences, cultural background, and identity. By unpacking these links, I have shown how in both urban areas the wide array of meanings people associate with being Hispanic/Latino and with economic concepts such as work, collaboration and cooperation, and skills, are already imbued with values of solidarity, autonomy, and cooperation as well as relations of interdependence. I have also shown how these meanings and values inform the development of food-based diverse economic practices in Charlotte and Boston. As Loh and Shear (2022) have demonstrated, the enactment of diverse relational economies founded on these values is a necessary step towards the enactment of an ontological politics of the pluriverse. In line with their theoretical and ontological claim, I have argued that Latinx communities already enact diverse ways of being, knowing, and doing, challenging the One-World World (Law, 2015) capitalist ontology.

This chapter relies on feminist and postcolonial theorizations of everyday diverse economic practices carried out by Latinx groups in the urban areas of Charlotte and Boston to contribute to ethnic economies and diverse economies scholarships. On the one hand, the analysis presented in this chapter has challenged standard and dominant understandings of ethnic economies by unpacking forms of resistance enacted through diverse economic practices. On the other hand, it has pushed the boundaries of diverse economies theorizations by investigating the intimate links between ethnic identities and the enactment of diverse and solidarity economies. The ethnic

economy scholarship is founded on the premise of a one-world all-encompassing ontology that confers value exclusively to economic practices, actors, and skills that conform to the dictates of capitalism. In this chapter, I have demonstrated that what it means to work not only varies with people's identity, background, past experiences, and positioning in the new context, but also encompasses a variety of meanings that cannot be ascribed to the capitalist realm. Conceptualizing the economy as a diverse, situated, and contested realm is fundamental to theorizing about ethnic economies without assuming capitalism as the only existing reality. In this sense, the diverse economies scholarship has provided a strong foundation to reframe the economy as the assemblage of practices enacting multiple economic realities. However, only recently this scholarship has started to attend to axes of difference such as race and ethnicity, and, still, very little is known about migrant communities' contribution to the enactment of diverse economic realities. Through the relational analysis of Latinx experiences in Boston and Charlotte, I have shown not only that ethnic communities already contribute to the construction of diverse economies, but also that they rely on experiential knowledge that is intimately intertwined with multiple aspects of their identity. Therefore, analyses concerning the emergence and development of diverse economic practices in the Global North, especially those enacted by ethnic minorities, must attend to questions of identity, axes of difference, and knowledge formation and transfer from one context to the other. Unpacking these aspects opens room to understand how to assemble, advance, and sustain the conditions that enable ethnic minorities and migrant communities to remake themselves with autonomy, dignity, and solidarity, and flourish in contexts dominated by capitalism.

Chapter 5

Assembling the Spatiality of Latinx Food-Based Collaborative Foodscapes through Local, Regional, and International Linkages.

This chapter draws on the theorization of diverse ways of being, knowing, and doing enacted in Boston and Charlotte through food-based collaborative economic practices introduced in Chapter 4 to investigate the spatial implications of such practices for the construction of foodscapes. Geographers and other scholars have theorized about ethnic economies' spatial forms for decades, drawing on empirical patterns emerging from the diverse waves of migration in the United States. Multiscalar economic, political, and social dynamics have produced over time a shift in the geography of migration at the international, national, and local levels pushing scholars to question the descriptive and explanatory power of previous theorizations of ethnic geographies. Therefore, as immigrant settlement patterns started to become more suburban, theorizations of ethnic enclaves have been progressively substituted by new theorizations of ethnoburbs (Li, 2009) and heterolocalism (Zelinsky and Lee, 1998).

These socio-spatial theorizations of ethnic economies and, for the most part, more recent ethnic economic analyses in geography rely on an ontological assumption that posits the existence of a single all-encompassing reality produced and reproduced by capitalist multiscalar dynamics. In line with this ontological stance, the primary focus is on understanding immigrants' socio-spatial and economic assimilation, or segregation, in the US capitalist society. Hence, the capitalist market becomes the implicit or explicit bar against which a wide range of immigrants' economic practices and individuals' positioning in society are assessed. Everything that does not fit this powerful lens is either constructed as its antithesis – e.g., the informal economy – or is silenced and, hence, stripped of its economic value. As previously mentioned, this research builds on

Gibson-Graham's (1995) rejection of capitalocentrism and Law's (2015) problematization of the One-World World ontology to extend ontological and economic value to Latinx food-based collaborative economies and inquire about their potential to enact multiple-world realities. The ontological view underpinning this dissertation sees the economy as a diverse, situated, and contested realm. Drawing on Loh and Shear's (2022) work, I have argued that this ontological stance is fundamental to theorizing about ethnic economic practices without assuming capitalism as the only existing reality and to assembling the conditions for the advancement of an ontological politics of the pluriverse.

This chapter contributes to understandings of ethnic economies by exploring the socio-spatial implications of Latinx food-based collaborative practices and the ways these assemble foodscapes in the two contexts of study. By addressing the following research question, *What are the spatial and organizational characteristics of collaborative food-based economic practices in Boston and Charlotte?*, this chapter lays the ground to theorize about the nature of diverse ethnic economies assemblages, their spatial forms, and the ways they contribute to shaping foodscapes in different localities. In the context of this research, the conceptualization of ethnic foodscapes adopted follows the one advanced by Jossart-Marcelli (2021). Her conceptualization constitutes a useful analytic lens to unpack the assemblage of subjects, objects, and other tangible and less tangible elements that are connected through the enactment of day-to-day activities and, in turn, construct foodscapes. The remainder of this chapter analyzes the organizational and spatial characteristics of the 49 food-based collaborative economic practices explored in Charlotte and Boston. I start by briefly outlining theorizations of ethnic economies' spatial forms and their underpinning assumptions and by introducing synergies between foodscapes and assemblage thinking as useful analytical lenses to theorize about the materialization of collaborative networks

in space. I then analyze the organizational structure and, more specifically, the type of nodes assembled through the enactment of diverse ethnic economies, their relevance, and the spatial form of these networks. I conclude by arguing that conceptualizing the economy as the site of diverse, contested, and situated relations of production and exchanges is a necessary step to interrogating socio-spatial and organizational characteristics of food-based practices that are otherwise invisible or partially understood in standard theorizations of ethnic economies. Ultimately, I argue that theorizing diverse ethnic economies as assemblages contributes to deepening understandings of foodscapes as relationally constructed landscapes influenced by multiscalar dynamics impacting different geographies.

5.2 Spatial understandings of ethnic economies

As introduced in Chapter 2, Portes and Jensen (1989) define the *ethnic economy* as a group of businesses owned and operated by members of a single ethnic group that encompass a wide range of economic activities (Kaplan, 1998). These have often been portrayed in a binary way either as disadvantaged economic activities involving informality and illegality or as a rewarding mechanism constituting an alternative labor market (Kaplan, 1998; Portes and Manning, 1986). Also, ethnic economies have been mainly studied in relation to spatial concentration and/or segregation of ethnic communities (Wang, 2012). The strict relationship traced by ethnic economic studies between immigrant social positioning in American society and their spatial location in urban and/or suburban areas rests upon the theorization of ethnic assimilation as a process with both social and spatial components (Massey, 1985; Walker, 2018). Therefore, ethnic enclaves (Portes and Manning, 1986) were defined by both their spatial features – concentration of an ethnic group in a restricted urban area – and economic characteristics – functioning economic systems

characterized by strong connections between owners, employees, and customers. On the contrary, degrees of dispersion outside ethnic enclaves were seen as a sign of assimilation in American society.

The changing spatial migration patterns at the national and local levels have resulted in more suburban settlement patterns, less segregated by immigrants' origins (Brown and Chung, 2008; Li, 1998; 2009; Singer, 2004; Singer et al., 2008; Smith and Furuseth, 2004). Consequently, new theorizations of migrant communities' location patterns and economic activities have emerged. For instance, Li (1998; 2009) coined the term *ethnoburbs* to identify suburban locations characterized by the prominence of one ethnic group and by both degrees of ethnic assimilation in American society and the maintenance of a distinct ethnic character. On the contrary, the model of *heterolocalism* developed by Zelinsky and Lee (1998) posits the dispersion of immigrant communities in metropolitan areas – rather than their spatial concentration – and their coalescence around community and commercial spaces. *Heterolocalism* is an important model to understand connections among ethnic communities living in disparate places that are maintained through transportation and telecommunication technologies (Stewart, 2011; Walker, 2018). It is relevant in changing urban areas undergoing processes of urban restructuring and urban change, which, in turn, are increasingly becoming unaffordable for some ethnic groups forcing them to relocate elsewhere. Yet, the diversity of effects that multiscalar dynamics have on urban metropolitan areas across the country reduces the ability of each of these models alone to explain complex geographies (Walker, 2018).

These theorizations of social, spatial, and economic behavior of migrant communities assume the existence of a single economic reality defined by capitalist relations of supply-demand, economic growth, monetary exchange, profit accumulation, and so on. Hence, they provide a

partial understanding of the complexity of ethnic economies' socio-spatial relations. This assumption pre-defines the nature of relations among economic subjects and, in turn, restricts the analysis of ethnic economies to social, spatial, and economic relations that produce and reproduce capitalism. This view does not allow for a nuanced exploration of ethnic practices as they emerge in their complexity and diversity. By restricting the analysis only to capitalist modes of production and exchanges, we lose sight of the diversity of economic practices composing the economy (see the previous chapter for Gibson-Graham's representation of the economy as an iceberg) as well as the system of interconnected relations between capitalist and non-capitalist forms of production and exchanges. As a consequence, little is known about spatial forms of ethnic economies understood as an assemblage of diverse economic relations enacted by economic actors that produce, determine, and distribute value in different ways – e.g., networks of food sharing or urban agricultural activities. In this regard, assemblage thinking represents a useful lens to analyze diverse ethnic economies.

Assemblage thinking, originally developed by Deleuze and Guattari (1987), is widely employed in geographical scholarship and it has become a familiar part of the lexicon of contemporary socio-spatial theory (Anderson and McFarlane, 2011). Assemblages refer to the composition of a multiplicity of heterogeneous elements and the relations and processes that allow them to come together, align, and give way to the contingent emergence of socioeconomic entities (Turker and Murphy, 2019). This analytic framework foregrounds a non-dualistic and processual way of thinking that emphasizes contingent, dynamic, and alterable flows of relationships over time and space, and that refuses to grant *a priori* explanatory power to particular actors or political economic and social structures (Sarmiento, 2020). In short, assemblage thinking relies on a type of 'weak theory' (see for example Gibson-Graham; 2006; 2014; and Gibson-Graham and

Dombroski, 2020) that “does not know too much of the world in advance of tracing connections” (Sarmiento, 2020, p. 487). John Law (2009) recognizes the centrality of performativity and enactment in the production of economic realities by claiming that actors, objects, space, rules of conduct and so on “assemble and together enact a set of practices that make a more or less precarious reality” (p. 151). Therefore, it is not possible to understand the emergence and development of diverse economic practices without analyzing the complex, and often unstable and contradictory, relations between elements in the assemblage.

Theorizing diverse ethnic economies as assemblages has the advantage to explore complex economic relations beyond strictly capitalist ones and develop better and more nuanced understandings of ethnic economic practices emerging and developing in new and traditional destinations in the country. A processual and relational approach that does not assume capitalism as the only economic reality allows us to include in the analysis spaces – e.g., the house – and actors – e.g., housewives and unemployed or homeless individuals – that are usually excluded *a priori* from economic analyses because they are identified as not contributing to capitalist production. The analysis of diverse economic practices as assemblages, presented in this chapter and the next one, demonstrates that these actors and spaces not only are part of economic production processes, but also diversify the economy by producing and distributing value in multiple and diverse ways. From a socio-spatial standpoint, assemblage thinking allows us to understand ethnic economies as a set of complex relational linkages that extend in space beyond urban and suburban localities, challenging understandings of nested hierarchies of space and scale.

Specifically, this research focuses on diverse ethnic economies’ socio-spatial relations mediated by food. A focus on food and food systems is instrumental to unravel relational linkages and webs of connections with which human bodies interact unpredictably through eating, growing,

and cooking (Sarmiento, 2017). It is also instrumental to uncover the additional level of material and symbolic complexity embedded in socio-spatial assemblages enacted through day-to-day economic practices. Therefore, this chapter interrogates diverse ethnic economies' socio-spatial relations as they emerge and contribute to shaping foodscapes in Boston and Charlotte. In the context of this research, ethnic foodscapes are defined as relationally constituted assemblages of tangible and less tangible aspects emerging and interacting in space and time. This conceptualization is in line with the one advanced by Jossart-Marcelli (2021, pp. 29-30), which aligns with assemblage thinking in its understanding of foodscapes as composed by environments, objects, ideologies, feelings, and imaginaries that work together to link food, place, and people. Specifically, it aligns with assemblage thinking in its simultaneous emphasis on agentic capacities of people engaged in food production, distribution, and consumption, and on the existence of structural constraints that exist, but are not immovable or infinite (Jossart-Marcelli, 2021, p. 33). By theorizing diverse ethnic economic practices as assemblages and interrogating their contribution to foodscapes formation in Boston and Charlotte, this chapter pays particular attention to the connections between the public and private spheres and between sites of ethnic food production and other places that are not usually included in analysis of ethnic foodscapes.

5.3 Socio-spatial relations of Latinx food-based collaborative economic practices

This section relies on 45 in-depth interviews with participants in the Boston and Charlotte urban areas, 49 concept maps – one for each practice – representing the assemblage of actors and other entities connected through the enactment of each practice, and 49 geographic maps – one for each practice – that locate these assemblages in space. The maps were developed by employing mapping activities during in-depth interviews with informants and then refined at a second stage

by weaving together other socio-spatial information emerging from the interviews. In the contexts of this research, I explored a total of 49 diverse food-based collaborative economic practices, 22 in Boston and 27 in Charlotte. The mismatch between the number of interviews and the number of practices studied derives from the involvement of some participants in more than one food-based collaborative economic practice. These practices fall into different categories (Chapter 3.2): food sharing (18 practices), gardening and food sharing (9 practices), food coops and collaboratives (8 practices); healthy lifestyle (6 practices), collecting, organizing, and distributing food donations (4 practices), food businesses supporting the community (3 practices), food charity program (1 practice).

The use of different types of maps, geographic and conceptual, is instrumental to capture the complex entanglement of tangible – e.g., places of production and distribution – and less tangible aspects constituting the assemblages – e.g., virtual spaces and relationships that could not be mapped geographically. Also, geographic maps help to visualize non-nested linkages across regional, national, and international geographies. These analyses taken together provide more nuanced understandings of socio-spatial aspects of ethnic economies and foodscapes. Through the analysis of socio-spatial data emerging from the interviews and concept and geographic maps, the next two sections show: (1) the diversity of actors that are assembled through the enactment of food-based collaborative practices, the importance of places and actors in the assemblages, and connections among the private and public sphere; and (2) spatial forms of assemblages, connections among different assemblages, and spatial linkages beyond localities.

5.3.1 Socio-organizational aspects of ethnic economic assemblages

The analysis of the 49 food-based collaborative networks reveals that each practice is constituted by a center where the core activities of the assemblage take place and by a range of nodes that are connected to the center through the enactment of the practice. The analysis of the nodes shows a wide range and diversity of actors and places assembled through each practice regardless of the type of practice examined.

Centers

The majority of the practices explored in this research are centered in the private spaces of homes – 18 practices in Boston and 20 in Charlotte. This is the case of several food-sharing practices and food cooperatives relying on the home as a space to prepare and often share food with others, and gardening practices emerging in backyards, driveways, patios, and balconies. It is also the case of some practices that collect food donations from individuals and/or food pantries but rely on the private space of the home to reorganize the food before distributing it to others, as well as the case of healthy lifestyle practices that rely on the private space of the kitchen and social media to teach cooking and nutrition skills and/or share meal preparations. Therefore, in both cities, the private sphere emerges as a key environment for the development of diverse ethnic economic practices. The private space of home, and often the kitchen, is a site of economic production and a space for encounters. Scholarship on foodscapes tend to focus on the public sphere as a more visible and accessible environment to study how race and ethnicity are negotiated around food production and consumption and how these dynamics shape the urban landscape. Drawing on Jossart-Marcelli's (2021) and other feminist scholars (for example McDowell, 1993; Monk and Hanson, 1982), I argue that the exploration of diverse ethnic economies as assemblages

not only reiterates that the separation between the public and private sphere into sites of production and reproduction is a problematic and false dichotomy, but also demonstrates the existence of complex relationships between these two spheres.

The analysis of diverse ethnic economies shows the importance of the private space of the home as a site of economic production, where economic value is negotiated, produced, and distributed in diverse ways (Sweet, 2016). For instance, the food cooperatives and collaboratives studied in Boston and some of those studied in Charlotte are centered in the private space of the home and are carried out by two or more individuals who collaborate to decide what to cook, how to cook it, and/or how to distribute it. In this case, economic value, understood as a set of monetary and/or non-monetary benefits provided by the enactment of the practice to economic actors, is produced through the maintenance of foodways, the production of additional revenue, and by economic empowerment of subjects often excluded from economic narratives. This also holds true for practices such as food sharing or urban agriculture taking place in private spaces. In these cases, economic value is created by producing/cooking and sharing food. In fact, among the benefits these actions produce, they contribute to the maintenance of foodways, negotiation of ethnic identities, and household financial stability. As explained in Chapter 4, several Latinx individuals in Boston and Charlotte rely on their past experiences to engage in food-based collaborative practices and challenge stereotypical and monolithic narratives around their identity. Ultimately, these practices turn the home into a site of collaborative economic production and a space where strong collaborative relationships and encounters between various ethnicities take place. Negotiations around ethnic non-static identities are carried out by maintaining foodways and other traditions in the new context and through reciprocal acts of food-sharing. A great deal of sharing usually takes place in the private sphere of homes. Hence, encounters in private spaces become

part of larger systems of food encounters that continuously influence and, at the same time, challenge the construction of ethnic foodscapes as monolithic racialized spaces.

Although residential sites constitute the majority of the centers of diverse ethnic practices, other places emerge as well. In Boston places like churches are centers for practices of collecting, organizing, and distributing food donations, whereas community and cooperative gardens become centers for gardening practices. In Charlotte, the analysis of centers reveals a wider range of types: churches are sites for cooperative gardens; organizations are centers for food-based charity programs; community centers and radio stations become centers for healthy lifestyle practices; and, more importantly, restaurant kitchens become sites for networks of collaboration benefiting multiple individuals. As unpacked below, when practices are centered at institutions, such as churches, or run by organizations, Latinx individuals might not have full control over decision-making processes and, in turn, power asymmetries might emerge.

Nodes

The variety of places emerging from the analysis of the centers is also reflected in the type of nodes that compose networks assembled around each practice in both urban areas. Scholarship on ethnic foodscapes often focuses on food businesses as key sites for the production and reproduction of dynamics shaping landscapes. More recent scholarship (e.g., Jossart-Marcelli, 2021) has started to analyze foodscapes as produced by entanglements of dynamics, practices, and actors – from food businesses and restaurant workers to home, informal, and alternative food practices. In line with this approach, the analysis of diverse ethnic economies presented in this chapter starts to tackle the diversity of actors, places, and relations that shape ethnic foodscapes in

Charlotte and Boston by enabling the emergence and development of ethnic practices. In both Boston and Charlotte, diverse ethnic practices connect a wide range of individuals such as family members, friends, and clients – e.g., clients of food cooperatives and collaboratives, healthy lifestyle practices, and food businesses. As unpacked in the next section, these individuals are located in different areas of the two urban contexts, their surrounding municipalities, or other places in the country and internationally. The relationships established among individuals are often mutually beneficial and include the exchange of foodstuff or cooked meals, with or without monetary payments. These connections occur with different frequencies – weekly, monthly, or sporadically – based on the type of practices and the relationships among individuals. For instance, in both cities, people involved in food sharing, gardening, food coops and collaboratives, and distribution of food donations have more frequent collaborative relationships with people in the same household, family members, friends, and neighbors. These individuals are mostly located closer to the center of the practice in the Boston area, but not in the Charlotte area (see next section). Therefore, strong relationships among individuals are not necessarily established based on spatial proximity.

Relationships among individuals also reinforce the importance of the private sphere of the home. In fact, Latinx individuals in both Boston and Charlotte establish mutual relationships with the center of the practice and, in turn, create linkages among different households. In Boston, 42 individuals and their homes are connected as nodes of networks assembled around diverse ethnic practices (e.g., gardening, food sharing, and food collaborative practices). Additionally, if we include clients of food coops and collaboratives, who often buy and consume food in their households, the number goes up to 65 households. Similarly, in Charlotte, I counted 51 individuals (and their homes) connected as nodes of diverse economic networks (e.g., gardening, food sharing,

and food collaboratives). Including clients of food collaboratives and restaurants who usually consume food in the private space of their homes, or people who engage in healthy lifestyle practices by reproducing healthy recipes in their kitchens, brings the number up to 93 households. These numbers not only reinforce the importance of the private sphere of the home in the development of diverse ethnic economies, but also gives us a sense of the intricate web of relationships that is largely invisible, yet important to the construction of foodscapes in both urban areas.

Diverse ethnic practices heavily rely on businesses and other spaces from which they source ingredients, food, and other materials – e.g., seeds and soil – to sustain these practices. The analysis of the type of nodes assembled around each practice reveals that the food businesses on which Latinx rely to source ingredients are not necessarily Hispanic ones. In fact, in both cities market stores, grocery stores, and supermarkets that mostly cater to Hispanic communities are only a part of the type of food businesses assembled around the enactment of these practices. Ethnic businesses emerging in these networks are small market stores (7 in Boston and 12 in Charlotte), grocery stores, international stores, and supermarkets (18 in Boston and 24 in Charlotte), and take-out restaurants producing key fresh elements for Hispanic recipes, such as tortillas (4 in Charlotte). Among ethnic stores, participants interviewed mainly rely on grocery stores and supermarkets offering a good variety of Hispanic ingredients at good prices: Market Basket and Stop and Compare in Boston and Compare Foods in Charlotte emerge as the most frequently mentioned across practices. However, alongside these places, many other “non-ethnic” sites emerge as relevant for the maintenance of these collaborative practices. In Boston, “non-ethnic” grocery stores and supermarkets such as Stop&Shop, Whole Foods, America’s Food Basket, and Save a

Lot offer a variety of ingredients at good prices, and/or availability of specific things – for example, seeds sold at Whole Foods – and some selection of Hispanic ingredients.

In Charlotte, the network analysis highlights the relevance of “non-ethnic” grocery stores offering good quality ingredients, often organic, at good prices, and, to some extent, Hispanic ingredients. Therefore, places such as Walmart (mentioned 14 times) or Harris Teeter (mentioned 9 times), Aldi, Publix, Food Lion, and Whole Foods are frequently mentioned stores on which Latinx individuals rely to sustain their practices. In Charlotte, and to some extent in Boston, wholesale and warehouse stores that often require a membership, such as Restaurant Depot, US Chef Store, Costco, BJ’s, and Sam’s Club, emerge as relevant sources of food not only for practices that cook large quantities of food to sell – food cooperatives, food collaboratives, and restaurants supporting the community – but also for some food sharing practices that rely on these stores to buy bulk items at cheaper prices. Participants interviewed in this study share the memberships with people in their networks to expand access to these stores.

In short, the variety of ingredients, quality, and food prices are three key factors driving Latinx choices around sources of food. These factors lead Latinx individuals to privilege more often “non-ethnic” sources than “ethnic ones”, even though “ethnic” stores remain important sources of culturally appropriate ingredients and food items. Among the “non-ethnic” stores on which Latinx rely to sustain their practices, there are also online stores. In both Charlotte and Boston, several people rely on Amazon to source key ingredients (e.g., vanilla extract and spices) or gardening materials (e.g., seeds and plant kits) that can be delivered to their place of residence in a short period of time. Additionally, social media groups and other virtual spaces emerge as environments to share knowledge and/or coordinate sharing activities. Ultimately, this analysis highlights the relevance of “non-ethnic” and virtual spaces and stores for the maintenance of

diverse ethnic economic practices and, in turn, the maintenance of foodways and the construction of foodscapes. These physical and virtual spaces are rarely investigated in connection to ethnic foodscapes. Yet, the analysis of diverse networks in both Boston and Charlotte reveals their relevance in the system of relationships shaping foodscapes.

Another key aspect emerging from this network analysis is that Latinx individuals do not only source food and other relevant materials from businesses. Rather, exchanges with other individuals and through networks of mutual aid, food pantries, community gardens, urban farms, and greenhouses are alternative sources for the maintenance of these networks. Specifically, community and cooperative gardens emerge as key sites to obtain fresh, organic, and high-quality food in exchange for labor. These are often run by community organizations, churches, and/or schools and are open either to everyone or, in the case of gardens established on churches' and schools' properties, only to people who frequent these spaces on a regular basis. Often these nodes are sites for knowledge and skills sharing among individuals and, in turn, sustain other practices connected to those spaces. For instance, this is the case of a cooperative garden in Chelsea that is the center for an urban agriculture practice, but also the source of fresh and organic vegetables that are used in two food-sharing practices explored in this study. This example illustrates how some places are simultaneously centers and nodes for different collaborative practices, hence they connect different networks and contribute to constructing foodscapes in several ways. These connections point to the already existing and complex entanglement of relationships shaping ethnic foodscapes in both urban areas. This complex entanglement of relationships reveals that “non-ethnic” spaces or other sites, such as food banks or community gardens, are important parts of ethnic foodscapes assembled through the enactment of diverse collaborative practices.

Importance of nodes and degree of substitution

Among the different types of nodes constituting diverse collaborative networks, some emerge as more important than others. The importance of the nodes has been evaluated for each network based on a degree of substitution: the importance score assessed on a 5-point scale measures the degree to which a node can be replaced with a similar one while guaranteeing the maintenance of the same type of relationship with the center and, in turn, the stability of the network (see Section 3.3.3). The lower the substitution rate, the higher the importance of the node: score 1 indicates the lowest degree of importance and the highest degree of substitution, whereas score 5 indicates the maximum degree of importance and lowest degree of substitution. This analysis is important to understand what types of nodes are key for the functioning of networks assembled around diverse economic practices and to develop strategies to sustain these practices. It also foregrounds an analysis of diverse collaborative practices as assemblages that attends to the danger of a “flat ontology” (Kinkaid, 2020), which often conceals social and symbolic differences. Additionally, claiming that nodes have different degrees of importance in the emergence and development of diverse economic practices opens room to inquire about potential unbalances of power reproduced and/or challenged through the enactment of the practices.

In both Boston and Charlotte, there are no nodes with the lowest importance score, hence, nodes assembled around the enactment of diverse economic practices cannot be easily replaced with other nodes while maintaining the same type of relationship with the center. In Boston, nodes with lower degrees of importance (score 2 and 3) are mainly supermarkets, grocery stores, and home improvement stores that can potentially be replaced by similar ones, or even by the same type of store located elsewhere, yet the relationship with the center will most likely be altered. In fact, the replacement of these nodes brings up challenges of access to similar places located

elsewhere and, in turn, access to transportation (Figure 5.1). Therefore, even nodes that seem to be easily replaceable by others, might acquire higher importance for their location in places impacted by gentrification, urban change, and segregation, or for individuals who struggle to access food, seeds, and other materials. Similarly, to these two degrees of importance belong places such as food pantries, organizations, and local institutions where people go weekly or monthly to receive food donations but still constitute important sources of food for the overall network. Figure 5.1 also shows the presence of groups of individuals that exchange food, plant, or seeds less frequently or occasionally, and online stores and social media groups that respectively provide services and goods or facilitate exchanges of plants, seeds, and knowledge. These types of nodes cannot necessarily be replaced without altering the relationship with the center.

Higher degrees of importance (scores 4 and 5) see a dominance of strong and frequent relationships between the center and individuals who provide food, labor, knowledge, skills, and support to the practices studied. These relationships are often mutual, support the functioning of all types of practices studied, and can hardly be replaced by other ones while guaranteeing the stability of the network. Similarly, ethnic small stores and grocery stores offering a variety of food and Hispanic ingredients at cheaper prices emerge as neighborhood staples and important sources of food. These nodes are not easily replaceable by others. Therefore, their potential vulnerability in the face of urban change and gentrification processes affecting commercial landscapes has a significant influence on the stability of collaborative networks (see Chapter 6). Community organizations also emerge as important nodes for the existence of some community and cooperative gardening practices and food cooperatives. In fact, community organizations enable the emergence and development of these practices by providing and maintaining the space where



Figure 5.1 - Importance score – Boston

gardens are located or by providing cooperative training for individuals. Yet, as unpacked in greater detail in the next chapter, food-based collaborative practices mediated by community organizations are often characterized by unbalances of power that see Latinx individuals excluded from or not in full control of decision-making processes. These examples show that community organizations are important nodes that might enable as well as hinder the functioning of collaborative networks assembled around diverse practices. These power imbalances demonstrate some of the risks deriving from the assumption of a flat ontology of assemblages and open room to identify empowerment strategies to support actors and their practices and, in turn, ensure the stability of collaborative networks over time.

In Charlotte, lower degrees of importance (score 2 and 3 – Figure 5.2) see a dominance of “non-ethnic” grocery stores and supermarkets such as Walmart, Aldi, Publix, and so on, on which people rely to source food at cheaper prices. These places have a lower degree of importance in

source food occasionally or temporarily during challenging times, such as the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Higher degrees of importance (scores 4 and 5) see the dominance of food businesses and individuals that support the development of diverse economic practices as important sources of food, seeds, gardening materials, labor, knowledge, skills, and support. These food businesses are both “ethnic” and “non-ethnic” ones and people rely on them as important sources of food daily, weekly, or less frequently but as sources of key ingredients and/or foodstuff required for the development of the practice. Therefore, in these cases, replacing these types of nodes is not only more difficult, but also does not guarantee the stability of these networks. Similarly, individuals in these two categories constitute key nodes for the support of the practices by frequently sharing food, collaborating in the cooking activities of food collaboratives, sending important ingredients from countries in Latin America, or helping with the maintenance of urban agricultural practices. Similar to findings emerging from the Boston analysis, in Charlotte, community organizations and churches have higher degrees of importance. The community organizations emerging here support the existence of diverse practices either indirectly by providing training, food-sharing opportunities, financial support to businesses that, in turn, support Latinx communities, and connections among individuals, or directly by managing community centers and clinics that constitute important sites for cooking and nutrition classes, redistribution of food donations, and sharing practices.

This network analysis underscores that different degrees of importance can be associated with similar nodes – e.g., supermarkets – based on the network analyzed. Therefore, it demonstrates that even networks assembled around similar practices are structured through a complex system of relationships that cannot be defined *a priori* and varies by practice.

Additionally, as unpacked in the next chapter, these are not static assemblages. Rather, they are assemblages in the making, evolving over time. Yet, although the analyses presented in this chapter and throughout the dissertation represent a synchronic snapshot of these diverse economic assemblages at a given time, they are relevant to identifying commonalities across different practices. Specifically, identifying important nodes across practices, analyzing differences, and assessing potential power unbalances are crucial steps to develop concrete strategies in support of these practices.

5.3.2 Spatial forms of Latinx food-based collaborative economic practices

In the Boston area, the 22 practices studied corresponded to 114 relevant nodes that could be easily geolocated (see Figure 5.3), 60 relevant areas (mainly municipalities and neighborhoods), 6 online nodes (e.g., online stores), and 3 points located outside national boundaries. The spatial representation of the nodes assembled through the enactment of each practice, and the location of relevant areas mentioned by participants, are aligned with patterns of Hispanic distribution in the greater Boston area (Chapter 3.2). Relevant places and individuals connected through the enactment of each practice not only fall within local areas with a relatively high concentration of Latinx communities, but also are contained in space. Figure 5.3 represents the distribution of points located within the state boundaries. Specifically, it shows that these nodes are concentrated in Boston and adjacent municipalities – e.g., Chelsea. Also, the majority of these nodes fall within a 2-mile or 5-mile radius from the center of the practice. For each practice, participants also mentioned relevant areas where other individuals engaged in these networks are located. Chelsea emerges as the most frequently mentioned area (24 times) not only by people engaging in food-

based practices centered in Chelsea, but also by individuals engaging in practices centered in Lynn, East Boston, and Cambridge. Other relevant areas are East Boston (mentioned 7 times) and Revere (mentioned 5 times). These places host clients of food cooperative and collaborative businesses and other individuals engaging in food-sharing networks, such as friends and family members. The few practices that connect centers with nodes or areas located at a greater distance than 5 miles are food-sharing practices that rely on ethnic ingredients – not necessarily Hispanic – accessible only at specific stores located in other areas or food pantries and individuals located in adjacent municipalities, gardening practices that source plants and seeds from a few community projects located in other parts of the city, and food coops and collaboratives that connect with clients in other areas.

The analysis of nodes and relevant areas mentioned for each practice reveals that these networks are hyper-local, hence they rely on sources of food and places of distribution and/or sharing close to the center of the practice. As explored in greater detail in Chapter 6, the location of these nodes is influenced by context-related aspects, such as the type of urban landscape, modes of transportation, and dynamics of urban change. As documented in studies exploring ethnic economies in connection with residential patterns that show spatial clustering, and in theorizations of collaborative and sharing economies, higher urban densities tend to favor the emergence of close-knit social ties that often constitute the precondition for the development of collaborative economic practices. Therefore, these assemblages tend to connect actors and places that are mainly co-located within the same neighborhood and/or the same municipality. Reaching areas outside the 2- or 5-mile radius also depends on the availability of transportation. The Boston area is characterized by a public transportation system that connects areas in the city and surrounding municipalities making them more accessible for those who do not own a car. Yet, relying on public

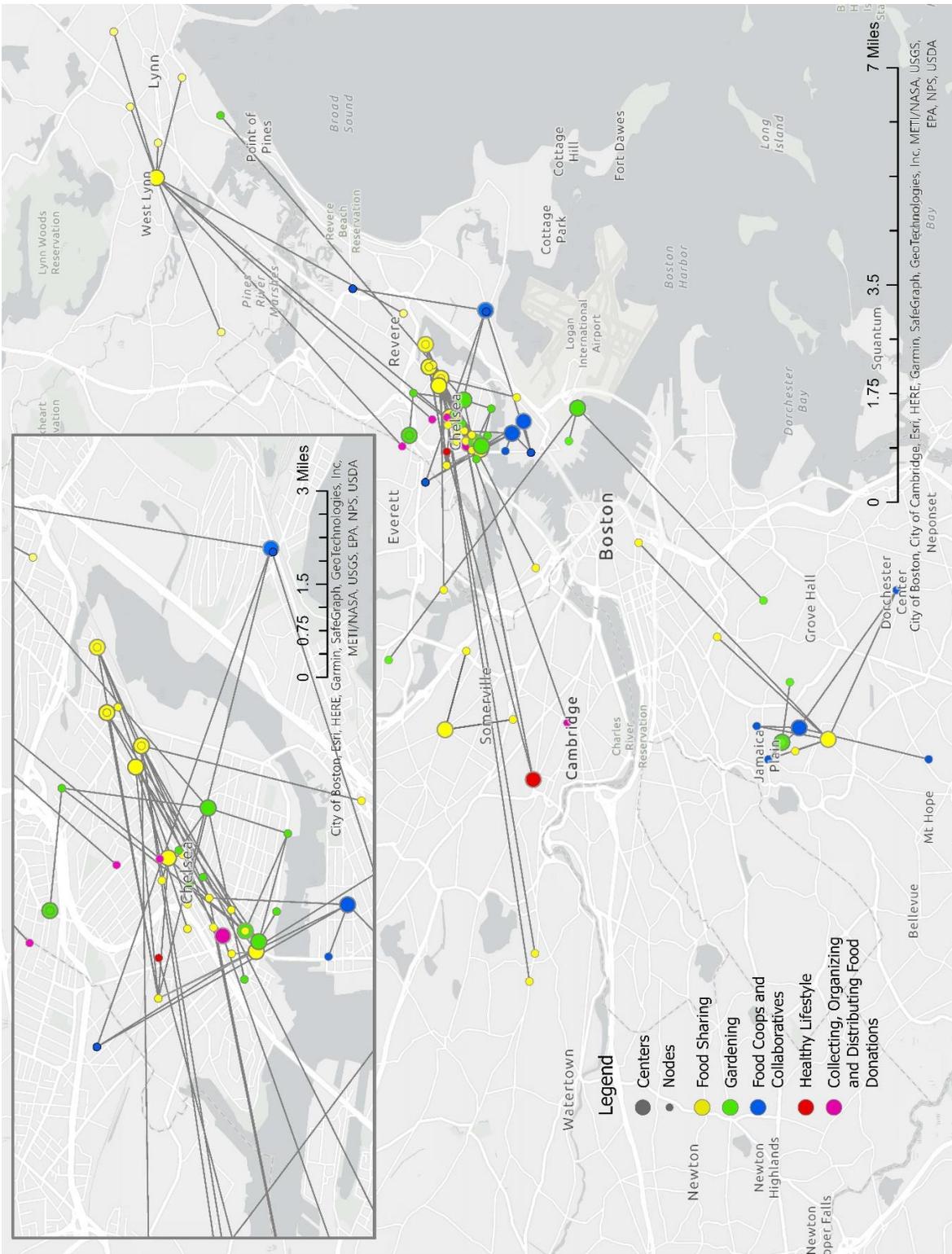


Figure 5.3 – Visual representation of Boston assemblages

transportation might become a burden for those who experience financial hardship. In the Boston area, just a handful of the people interviewed owned a car and/or relied on driving to access relevant places on a day-to-day basis. Hence, the spatial form of some networks is influenced by access to transportation and/or places connected through mass transit systems. These context-related aspects taken together contribute to explaining the emergence of mainly hyper-local networks relying on disparate places accessible by walking, by bike, or by bus and metro, to source and share food. It also shows the importance of diverse food sources, such as community gardens and food banks, whose existence might be jeopardized by processes of gentrification and urban change impacting local areas.

Although mainly hyper-local, these networks connect places and individuals also located outside the neighborhood scale or immediate surroundings. Hence, the relationships created through these networks contribute to shaping material and symbolic aspects of foodscapes in different areas. For instance, ingredients sourced from a grocery store, community or private garden, food pantry, or from friends and family members become central in food-based practices located elsewhere. In turn, cooked meals shared with other individuals outside the neighborhood scale contribute to shaping foodscapes with which they interact constituting a source of food. This reflection extends to all types of practices investigated in this study. Therefore, assemblage thinking allows us to understand local foodscapes as systems of relations that often exceed the neighborhood scale. In fact, the existence of food businesses or community gardens in a given area enables the existence of collaborative food-based practices that might be centered elsewhere, and, vice versa, the existence of these practices supports food businesses not necessarily located in the same neighborhood or even municipality as the practice. For instance, this is the case of a food-sharing practice centered in Chelsea and carried out by a Latina who sources food from several

places – e.g., community garden, grocery stores, bakeries, neighbors, and friends – that are located not only in Chelsea, but also in other municipalities such as Charlestown, Everett, East Boston, and Belmont. It is also the case of a healthy lifestyle practice based in Cambridge that promotes food nutrition and cooking programs for Latinos and targets places with a high percentage of Hispanics like Chelsea and Revere. Therefore, analyzing foodscapes as assemblages of actors and places allows us to unpack connections and relationships that would be overlooked with analysis bounded at the neighborhood scale.

Three of the practices analyzed in the Boston area connect individuals and places located outside the state and national boundaries (Figure 5.4). This is for example the case of a food collaborative bakery centered in Jamaica Plain and having clients across different states in the US – New Hampshire, Florida, New York, New Jersey, Rhode Island, and Tennessee – and maintaining connections with the country of origin, Dominican Republic, to source some ingredients for the collaborative bakery, such as vanilla and other flavorings and sugar flowers. The distribution of network nodes outside the state boundaries is influenced by two main factors. The first one is represented by the ongoing dynamics of urban change affecting the neighborhood in which the practice is centered. These dynamics have progressively disassembled a close-knit Dominican community that originally settled in the Jamaica Plain and Egleston Square neighborhoods and favored gentrification processes. Displaced people, however, maintained connections with the collaborative bakery as they moved out of the neighborhood. As the heterolocalism model posits, these individuals continue to coalesce around this collaborative bakery operated out of a Latina's house, which over the decades has become an institution in the neighborhood by providing culturally appropriate food for Latinx communities in the Boston area and beyond. Additionally, people buying from this collaborative and sharing food with others at

work and/or during events or special occasions contributed to expanding the number of nodes in the network and their locations across the Boston area and outside its boundaries. Therefore, with the movement of people, networks that are originally bounded in space tend to grow and expand, increasingly showing a hybrid structure that is both bounded in space and heterolocal. The second aspect is constituted by the maintenance of strong relationships with geographies, actors, and other entities (e.g., businesses) in Latin America. These connections are maintained by three collaborative practices in the Boston area that regularly source ingredients, food, seeds, and knowledge relevant to the development of these practices, and send food products in exchange.

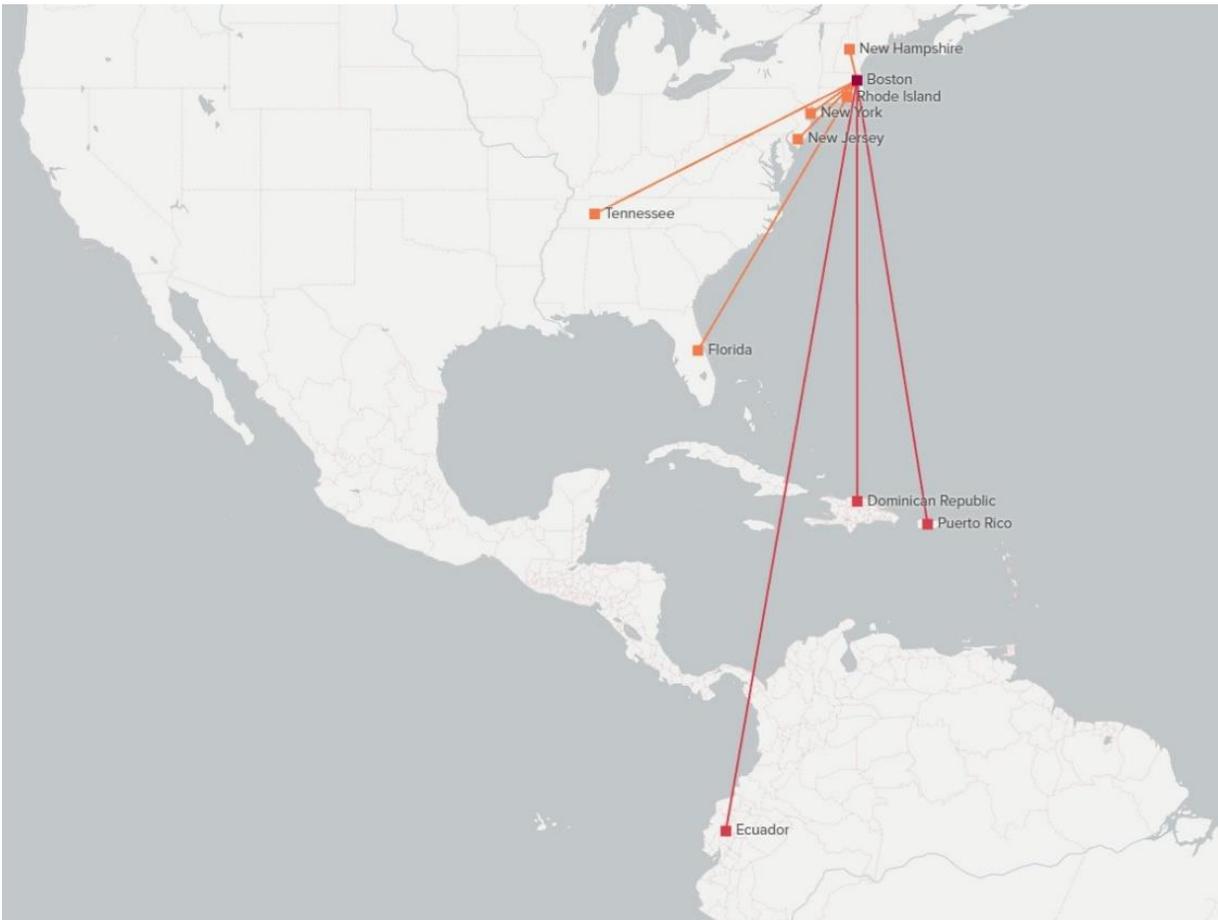


Figure 5.4 - Map of Boston connections outside state boundaries

The existence of these connections pushes the boundaries of our understanding of ethnic economic practices as economic phenomena mainly shaped by dynamics unfolding and materializing at the local level – i.e., where the practices take place – and opens room to posit questions about relationships between foodscapes in different regions. Ultimately, through these practices, Latinx not only maintain symbolic connections by reproducing foodways and traditions in the new context (Chapter 4), but also create material connections between geographies across the US and in Latin America.

In the Charlotte area, the 27 practices studied corresponded to 231 relevant nodes that could be easily geolocated (see Figure 5.5), 85 relevant areas (mainly municipalities in North Carolina), 12 online nodes (e.g., online stores) – and 14 points located outside national boundaries (see Figure 5.6). The spatial representation of the nodes assembled through the enactment of each practice, and the location of relevant areas mentioned by participants, are aligned with patterns of Hispanic distribution within the Charlotte boundaries (Chapter 3.2), but also spread across adjacent municipalities with a lower concentration of Hispanics, such as Davidson (5.4%) and Huntersville (9.7%) (Census, 2020). Relevant places and individuals connected through the enactment of each practice mostly fall within areas with a relatively high concentration of Latinx communities, but, contrary to the Boston area, these networks are not hyper-local and contained within these areas. Figure 5.5 represents the distribution of points located within the state boundaries. Specifically, it shows that these nodes are mainly concentrated in Charlotte, but also scattered across adjacent municipalities. Also, the majority of these nodes are located at a 15-mile or greater distance from the center of the practice. Only in three cases, the geolocated nodes are contained within a 5-mile radius from the center of the practice. These three networks are assembled around two food-sharing practices and one food collaborative whose Latinas tend to minimize the number and distance of

trips to source and share food due to transportation challenges. As already mentioned, the structure of urban landscapes and, consequently, reliance on transportation to access, share, and distribute food are key context-related aspects influencing the emergence and development of food-based collaborative practices. As it emerges from this spatial analysis, these context-related aspects also influence the extension of networks in space, the location of their nodes, and the number of relevant nodes.

For each practice, participants also mentioned relevant areas from where they source food or where other individuals engaged in these networks are located. Charlotte emerges as the most frequently mentioned area (29 times) not only by people engaging in food-based practices centered within the Charlotte boundaries, but also by individuals engaging in practices centered in Davidson, Huntersville, Pineville, Waxhaw, Concord, and Kannapolis. Other relevant areas are Gastonia (mentioned 6 times) and Concord and Huntersville (mentioned 5 times). Gastonia hosts individuals that receive food from restaurants supporting the community, participate in food-based health training programs, or partake in networks of food sharing by establishing mutual relationships with others. Connections in Concord mainly develop around food exchanges involving vegetables and herbs from private gardens, food donations from food banks, and cooked meals. Huntersville emerges as an important area hosting people engaged in food sharing practices, receiving food donations, and supporting food collaboratives by buying their food. Several other areas were mentioned during the interviews with participants. The location of these areas ranged from Charlotte's immediate surroundings – e.g., Pineville, Waxhaw, Harrisburg, Kannapolis, Matthews, Mint Hill, Monroe, Mooresville, and so on – to locations several miles away from Charlotte – e.g., Chapel Hill, NC, and Myrtle Beach, SC. This aspect is in line with more scattered settlement

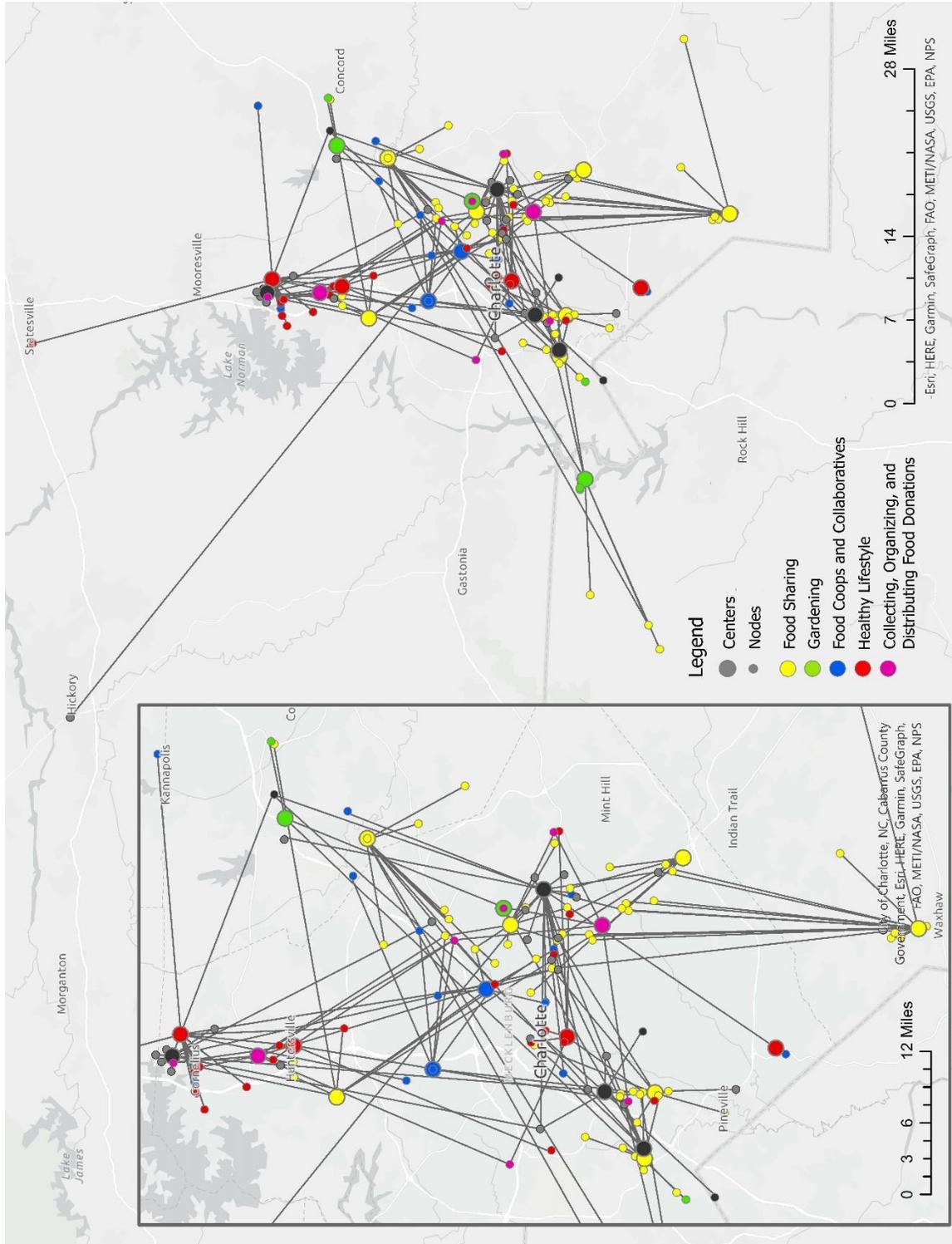


Figure 5.5 – Visual representation of Charlotte assemblages

patterns and movements of Hispanic populations across urban areas characterizing this region, as well as a higher reliance on private modes of transportation and, in turn, higher mobility.

Contrary to the spatial forms emerging from the analysis in Boston, networks assembled around diverse economic practices are not clustered in space. Rather, the number of nodes in each network and their disparate locations suggest a more heterolocal nature. The greater distance among different nodes is mostly in line with demographic patterns and the type of urban landscape. Although historically Hispanic settlement patterns favored areas in the city located along three important commercial corridors – South Blvd, Central Avenue, and North Tryon corridors – more recent trends show that communities are spreading across the urban area as well as moving to different and more affordable municipalities around Charlotte – e.g., Gastonia, Pineville, and Kannapolis. This aspect combined with higher access to private means of transportation not only contributes to explaining the emergence of networks that are centered in different areas (Figure 5.5), but also the emergence of nodes that exceed neighborhood and, often, municipality boundaries. Contrary to Boston, where networks studied do not include more than 14 nodes, in Charlotte, several networks contained 10-15 nodes and up to 26. In many cases, Latinx that engaged in food-sharing practices, food collaboratives, and cooking classes relied on multiple sources of food, from small *tiendas* and market stores to supermarkets and department stores, such as Walmart, not necessarily located in the proximity of the center of the practice and mainly accessed by driving. In fact, the greater accessibility to private means of transportation allows individuals to re-orient their shopping decisions based on food quality and prices, as well as the availability of specific ingredients. Higher mobility also allows Latinx individuals to connect with others in disparate locations, from residential places to community organizations and churches scattered across the urban area.

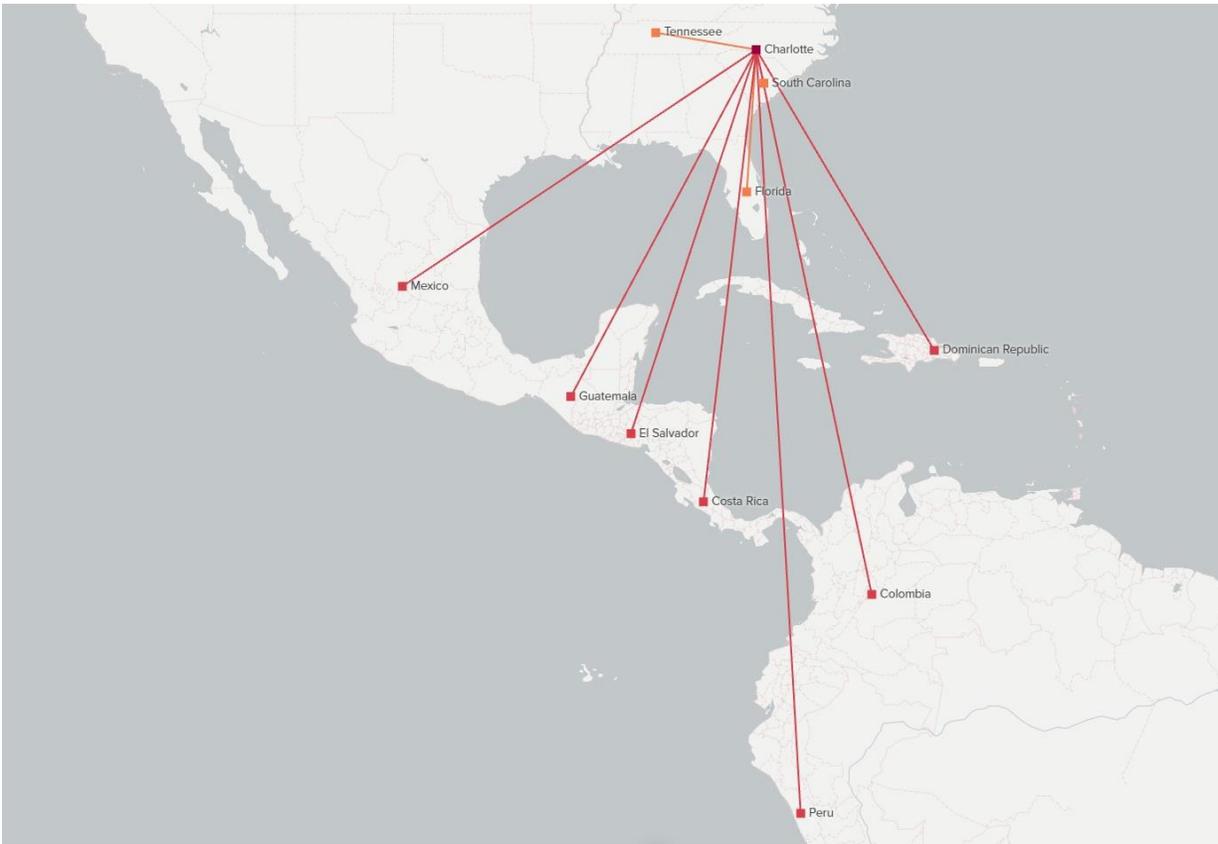


Figure 5.6 - Map of Charlotte connections outside state boundaries

The strong heterolocal nature emerging from the spatial analysis of networks assembled through the enactment of diverse collaborative economies in Charlotte is also reflected in the emergence of connections across state and national boundaries (Figure 5.6). Two food collaboratives mentioned connections with clients in areas in South Carolina and Tennessee. Also, a restaurant in Charlotte, supporting Latinx communities through food and money donations, sources specific ingredients needed to prepare Colombian and Venezuelan recipes from food suppliers based in Florida. Similarly, several were connections with geographies in Latin America. Among the 14 international connections enabled by food-based collaborative practices, seven were with Mexican geographies. Mexico emerges as a place from where people source food items that

cannot be found in the Charlotte area – e.g., *machaca*, *pozole*, *coyote*, and so on – through family members traveling or shipping food, or from markets located in these countries. These ingredients or food items are then shared with others in Charlotte or used in the preparation of Hispanic recipes consumed by others. Other international connections with geographies in Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, and Guatemala are also established around the movement of foodstuffs across national borders or knowledge exchanges that, in turn, are used or inform the enactment of ethnic economic practices emerging in the Charlotte area.

From a spatial standpoint, analyzing ethnic economies as assemblages of actors and places materializing in time and space highlights the complex system of connections created across different non-hierarchical scales – neighborhood, urban, regional, national, and international – through the enactment of each practice. This complex system of connections reveals relationships among foodscapes in different geographies. In fact, ethnic foodscapes, understood here as the assemblage of environments, bodies, objects (e.g., ingredients, recipes, and dishes) as well as ideologies, feelings, and imaginaries that work together to link food, place, and people (Jossart-Marcelli, 2021), are shaped by multiscale dynamics materializing in the localities object of inquiry and, at the same time, by multiscale dynamics affecting other areas linked in the assemblages. For instance, urban change affecting national and/or international geographies from where people source foodstuffs carrying material and symbolic value for the existence of the economic practice has an impact on the organization of the practice and the reproduction of foodways and foodscapes in new contexts. Therefore, pre-defining a scale of inquiry without interrogating systems of relationships among actors, food, and places produces partial understandings of foodscapes. Specifically, this spatial analysis conducted through the lens of assemblage thinking underscores the heterolocal nature of foodscapes assembled around diverse ethnic economic practices in

Boston and Charlotte. This heterolocal nature could not be captured by traditional geographic analysis bounded in space.

5.4 Discussion

In this chapter, I rely on assemblage thinking and relational conceptualizations of foodscapes to analyze socio-spatial and organizational aspects of diverse ethnic economic practices, without assuming capitalism as the only economic reality. Rather, by conceptualizing the economy as a diverse, situated, and contested realm, I argue that assemblage thinking offers a useful lens to theorize about complex spatial forms of ethnic economic practices whose constitutive relationships link geographies at multiple non-nested scales. I also argue that it provides key insights into relationships between private and public sites of economic production, the variety of “ethnic” and “non-ethnic” actors, objects, and environments assembled through the enactment of diverse economic practices, and their importance for the maintenance of these practices. Additionally, theorizing diverse ethnic economies as assemblages allows us to deepen the understanding of the materialization of collaborative relationships in space and the influence of context-related aspects on the spatial formation of these relationships.

The analysis presented in this chapter underscores the performative nature of the diverse ethnic networks. Relationships between actors, places, and objects are assembled in various ways through the enactment of diverse practices and, hence, do not exist prior to, or as separate from, the enactment of these practices (Law, 2009). The nature of assemblages and their constitutive relationship not only cannot be defined *a priori*, but also, as demonstrated in this chapter, vary with practices and over time. Therefore, in-depth analyses that combine different methods of

inquiry – e.g., different mapping techniques – and focus on ethnic economies as they emerge in their complexity and diversity are necessary to grasp the complex set of relationships shaping foodscapes. The network analysis presented in this chapter reveals the importance of “non-ethnic” nodes, such as food businesses, food pantries, community gardens, and community organizations, for the development and maintenance of collaborative economic practices. These places are usually not included in the analysis of ethnic economies and ethnic foodscape, yet they constitute important sources of food, seeds, materials, and spaces for connections, and construct foodscapes beyond local neighborhoods. Identifying important nodes is a crucial step to develop strategies in support of diverse ethnic practices.

Connections between sites of non-capitalist economic production – e.g., the private space of the home – and capitalist production – e.g., supermarket chains – also illustrate the fallacy of the binary capitalist/non-capitalist division. In fact, through the enactment of diverse collaborative practices, Latinx individuals diversify the economy by connecting systems that produce and distribute economic value in diverse ways. By drawing on Latinx participants’ conceptualizations of economic concepts presented in the previous chapter, economic value is understood here as a set of monetary and/or non-monetary benefits provided by the enactment of the practice to economic actors. Hence, diverse ethnic practices explored in this research produce and distribute value in mainly non-capitalist ways that prioritize community well-being over individual gain, maximization of profit, and labor exploitation. Yet, they also rely on capitalist systems of production and distribution to survive. Ultimately, the binary separation between capitalist/non-capitalist spheres, hence formal/informal and legal/illegal, is problematic as it conceals the actual diversity of the economy and perpetuates the one-world ontology.

The analysis advanced here also contributes to feminist economic analyses challenging the separation between the public sphere as the primary site of economic production and the private sphere as the primary site of reproduction. Core activities in support of the existence of diverse collaborative practices take place in the private space of homes and transform it into an important site of collaborative economic production. In rejecting western dualisms and in drawing connections among diverse nodes, this research does not attempt to claim that differences among nodes and unbalances of power do not exist and affect assemblages. Rather, these are an intrinsic part of how relationships among nodes develop from both organizational and spatial standpoints. Also, as mentioned throughout the chapter, relations of power surface more or less explicitly in the analysis of the practices. Attending to these differences means recognizing the danger of a flat ontology that often underpins assemblage analyses and opening spaces for intervention in support of the development of an ontological politics of the pluriverse.

Finally, rejecting the existence of capitalism as an all-encompassing reality allows us to analyze ethnic economic practices as they emerge and develop in their spatial diversity and complexity. The spatial analysis presented in this chapter reveals that when we account for entanglements of both capitalist and non-capitalist relations constituting these assemblages, ethnic economies present a hybrid spatial form – clustered and heterolocal – depending on context-related dynamics. However, practices rooted in both urban areas present linkages that extend beyond the local level and reach the regional, national, and international levels. These linkages demonstrate not only the existence of relational connections between different geographies, foodscapes, and multiscale dynamics affecting different places, but also the non-nested hierarchical nature of these scales. Therefore, hyper-local networks can be connected with geographies in Latin America without interacting with the regional and national scales. This aspect also illustrates the

impossibility to define a priori the scale of analysis when investigating diverse collaborative practices.

Finally, these international relational linkages substantiate recent calls advanced by critical Latinx geographers for a dialogue between Latinx geographies in the US and Latin American critical geographies (e.g., Carvajal and Ramírez, 2022, August; Zaragocin, 2021). Dialogues around the linkages between these geographies contribute to disassembling colonial borders and understanding the reproduction of non-capitalist practices as embedded parts of larger assemblages that are not bounded within national borders. Specifically, dialogues around relational linkages across non-nested scales are key to deepening socio-spatial understandings of mutually constitutive relationships across geographies and dismantling the one-world ontology. The mutually constitutive relationships between diverse collaborative economic practices and the two contexts of study are explored in the next chapter.

Chapter 6

Latinx food-based diverse economies in context: a relational tale of two migrant destinations

This chapter relies on relational theorizations of space and place to demonstrate mutually constitutive relationships between Latinx food-based diverse economic practices and the contexts in which these emerge. The analysis of Latinx food-based collaborative practices as embedded, relational, and co-constitutive of contexts presented in this chapter challenges conceptualizations of space, spatiality of relations, and phenomena as separated and ordered through hierarchical and nested relations of space and scale. The fallacious separation between subjects and objects and the hierarchical ordering of identities, entities, and relations are manifestations of western dualisms underpinning the One-World World ontology (Law, 2015). In this chapter, I follow Loh and Shear's (2022, p. 1219) suggestions on how to approach the analysis and enactment of diverse and solidarity economies in order to evade the dictates of the one-world ontology, and to explore Latinx food-based collaborative practices as assemblages in the making whose relationships are reproduced in particular times, places, and concrete circumstances. For this reason, collaborative practices cannot be analyzed in the abstract, rather they have to be understood as the encounter of multiple and entangled political, cultural, and economic projects and histories that emerge in and construct different urban contexts.

In this chapter, I demonstrate how assemblages in the making stand in a mutually constitutive relationship with the contexts in which they emerge, by addressing the following question *What is the nature of the mutually constitutive relationship between diverse economic practices and the social, political, and economic contexts in which they are rooted?* To address this question, I present a two-fold argument: on the one hand, I show how multiscale dynamics

can hinder or spur the emergence and development of collaborative practices; on the other hand, I show how individual and collective agency exercised through the enactment of these practices transform contexts by relying on solidarity and interdependence. Ultimately, this chapter demonstrates how already existing diverse Latinx collaborative practices produce, more or less intentionally, transformative tangible and intangible impacts on individuals, groups, and the context.

This argument unfolds through the remainder of this chapter as follows. I start by grounding the analysis presented in the literature that conceptualizes space, and specifically urban space, as a relational, complex, and internally variegated entity co-constructed by an entanglement of multiscale dynamics. I then proceed to briefly sketch the contour of migrant contexts of reception in which diverse economic practices emerge and analyze systems of resources and constraints for each category of practices studied. I also highlight the diverse array of tangible and intangible benefits practices produce in the context. Finally, I conclude with an analysis of the intentionality informing each practice's ability to challenge capitalist relations and I reflect on the power that each practice has to transform the contexts in which it emerges.

6.2 Relational understandings of space, cities, and collaborative practices

As introduced in the previous chapter (Chapter 5), assemblage thinking relies on a relational conceptualization of realities that sees actors, objects, and environments as co-constituted through relational connections. This view is not always embraced in geographic literature and is especially absent in theorizations of ethnic economies. Economic geographers have relied on different conceptualizations of space based on the epistemological and ontological orientations adopted to understand economic landscapes. For many, *space* is a 'thing in itself'

(Harvey, 2006, p. 271), the ‘container’ or ‘field’ of human activity and patterns characterizing socio-economic phenomena (Pavlovskaya and St Martin, 2014; Plummer, 2000). In short, in these conceptualizations, *space* is unrelated to the phenomena studied (Smith, 2008). These orientations are expressions of western dualisms assuming separation between subject and object and reinforcing the existence of one, singular, and objective reality that pre-exists interrelations between entities (Loh and Shear, 2022).

Western dualisms also underpin conceptualizations of scale assuming hierarchical orders and translating into the dominance of the global over the local. Specifically, the emergence of the global scale as an analytical lens is almost entirely associated with the phenomenon of globalization and, in turn, with capital flows. The nexus of global scale-globalization-capitalism confers power to the global and assumes the subordination of a powerless local dimension (Gibson-Graham, 2002). In such representations, localities are not always entirely passive, rather, they interact in processes of transformation producing heterogeneous landscapes of globalization. A hierarchical conceptualization of space reproducing the dominance of the global scale over the local one rests on a few problematic assumptions: (1) the global dominance is untransformed in the interaction between the global and the local (Gibson-Graham, 2002, p. 27); (2) the global is a pervasive dimension that defines and confines the local in its totality; therefore, (3) nothing exists outside entities and subjectivities that reproduce globalization and capitalism. As a consequence, embedded practices and the socio-spatial relations they create are analyzed for their role in processes of capitalist reproduction or confined to a place of non-existence.

A unidimensional and hierarchical view of space and scale has also pervaded urban studies at the turn of the 21st century. Studies of globalization have focused on understanding the role of cities in relation to capital and human circulation associated with globalization. In this context,

relations among world-cities are placed in a hierarchical order in relation to the economic power they exercise to control circulations at the global level (Sassen, 2005). This hierarchical order establishes some cities as exemplars and some as imitators, emphasizes development and economic growth as key strategies for cities to move to the top of the hierarchy, and relegates poorer cities to a different theoretical world dominated by the concern of development (Robinson, 2006, p. 94). As Robinson (2006) notes, this hierarchical order keeps some urban areas ‘off the map’ and pushes ‘global cities’ to encourage policies fostering globalizing segments of the economy and neglecting the diversity of urban life and urban economies.

Postcolonial and feminist geographers, among others, have challenged and rejected conceptualizations of *space* and *spatiality of social relations* as fixed, essential, and reducible to considerations of distance and hierarchy of scales (Bosco, 2014; Latour, 1996). They contrast this conceptualization of space by employing a relational interpretation that sees geographies as “the result of interrelated processes rather than the product of precise geometries or homogeneous consideration of societies” (Bosco, 2014, p. 158). Doreen Massey (2005, p. 9-12) introduces three important propositions for a relational approach to space. In her relational conceptualization, *space* is a “product of relations (first proposition) and for that to be so there must be multiplicity (second proposition)” (p.11), and it “can never be a completed simultaneity in which all interconnections have been established, and in which everywhere is already linked with everywhere else” (third proposition) (p. 11). She claims that space “is the simultaneity of stories-so-far” (Massey, 2005, p. 9) and never is a closed system. This spatial perspective resonates with Gibson-Graham’s (1995) rejection of the inexorability of capitalocentrism, as it creates room for genuine openness to the future. It also challenges frameworks of progress, development, and modernization that rest upon a trajectory of the future that is already known and leaves no room for alterity.

This relational ontology of space has underpinned urban analysis conceptualizing cities as assemblages of wider and diverse processes and has spurred the emergence of assemblage thinking and the translation of actor-network theories into urban studies (Bosco 2014; Robinson, 2006; Sarmiento, 2020). A relational approach to urban studies foregrounds analyses that reject hierarchical orders and understand urban contexts as diverse, complex, internally variegated, and relationally connected to one another (Robinson, 2006). Such an approach creates room to investigate what happens when migratory flows are not analyzed as unidirectional phenomena – from the global south to the global north – but as relational links co-constituting geographies in multiple countries, or what happens when economic practices are understood as embedded parts of assemblages that construct geographies and transform contexts. Specifically, as Latinx critical geographers have recently claimed, relationality enables the conditions for a dialogue between Latinx geographies in the US and Latin American critical geographies (e.g., Zaragocin, 2021; Carvajal and Ramírez, 2022, August). This dialogue is key to disassembling colonial borders, geographies, and embodiment of the imprecise (Carvajal and Ramírez, 2022, August) and rethinking the relationships between Latinx identity and place (Muñoz and Ybarra, 2019). As Carvajal and Ramírez (2022, August, p. 6) note, investigating the relational links between Latinx geographies and Latin American geographies contributes to (1) unsettling tropes about migrants and the places they live in the US, (2) understanding the complexity of the socio-political conditions and relational vulnerabilities of people of color in North America, and (3) paying attention to the everyday lives of Latinx people and migrants. The arguments presented in the previous chapters illustrate the symbolic and material connection across Latinx geographies in the US and Latin American geographies.

Applying assemblage thinking to theorize Latinx geographies and their construction through the enactment of diverse practices does not imply adopting a naïve and optimistic vision in which these groups are freed from systemic oppression. Rather, it recognizes imbalances of power without depriving some subjects of their ability to affect multiscale dynamics and changing contexts. In fact, a focus on assemblages allows us to identify relations of power that may limit the development of such practices and constrain subjectivities (Sarmiento, 2017; Turker and Murphy, 2019). Economic geographers, among others, have relied on assemblage thinking and actor-network theories to attend to dynamics of power in the realm of diverse economies and analyze systems of resources and constraints influencing assemblages (Bosco, 2014; Sarmiento, 2017; 2020; Turker and Murphy, 2019).

This research relies on a relational ontology and assemblage thinking to unpack multiscale socio-spatial implications of food-based Latinx collaborative economic practices. It does so to demonstrate that the local is the site of powerful collaborative dynamics that are already changing contexts; diverse collaborative practices can also be found in highly capitalist societies and global cities and contribute to diversifying and co-constitute their character; and migration processes and the enactment of diverse ways of knowing, being, and doing in multiple sites co-construct geographies and disassemble borders. Specifically, this chapter focuses on the mutually constitutive relationships between practices and contexts to (a) reinforce the persistence of sharing, cooperation, and interdependence in current neoliberal capitalist societies, (b) unpack systems of resources and constraints influencing the emergence and development of those practices in the two contexts of study, and (c) analyze the diverse ways these practices are already transforming contexts. These considerations are particularly relevant in relation to globalizing cities, understood here as sites “set within geographies of social relations (economic, cultural, political)” (Massey,

2011, p. 4). The arguments presented throughout this dissertation and, more specifically, in this chapter produces more nuanced understandings of cities economic diversity and complexity and to underscores migrant communities' important contribution of to the construction of diverse economic ecosystems founded on values of interdependence, cooperation, and solidarity.

6.3 Mutually constitutive relationship between economic practices and the context

A relational ontology allows us to understand the two contexts of study as constituted through the entanglement of their past histories, political, economic, and social dynamics, and day-to-day practices taking place in these contexts. Multiscalar dynamics shaping local institutional contexts contribute to defining a system of resources and constraints that affects the emergence and development of collaborative economic practices. At the same time, these practices impact local contexts and contribute to reshaping them. This section relies on empirical findings emerging from 45 interviews with individuals engaged in food-based collaborative practices and 17 community leaders in the Charlotte and Boston areas. The argument presented in this chapter is two-fold. I start by briefly introducing the key context-aspects affecting the emergence and development of diverse economic practices. I then proceed by presenting the key ways by which practices impact contexts and the degree of intentionality informing these impacts. I finally conclude discussing practices' overall transformative potential as an important analysis to create room for interventions in support of these practices.

6.3.1 Boston and Charlotte as contexts of migrant reception

Both Boston and Charlotte market themselves as welcoming global cities. The local government website promotes Boston as “a welcoming, global city where residents, visitors, talent, and business thrive”, and as a city with international ties across the world. Similarly, Charlotte has been celebrated as an “international” and a “world-class city with a small-town charm” (Lassiter, 2010, p. 25) and a great place for business. In the past three decades, both urban areas have witnessed population growth and fostered economic expansion, urban restructuring, and extensive urban redevelopment to become more attractive to newcomers and, in turn, compete at the global and national levels with other metropolitan areas. These ongoing dynamics in both urban areas have produced an increased cost of living, a lack of affordable housing, and a concentration of investments and redevelopment strategies in areas populated by ethnic minorities. Hence, both urban contexts are increasingly becoming unaffordable and unwelcoming for many.

At the national level, Boston and Charlotte are among the metropolitan areas that attract US- and foreign-born newcomers (Figure 6.1). Specifically, in the past three decades, they have experienced a sustained influx of Hispanic individuals incoming from countries in Latin America and other states in the US. As introduced in Chapter 3, the increased presence of Hispanics in the Boston and Charlotte urban areas reflects a broader change in the geography of migration in the United States determined by the complex interplay of several dynamics (Massey, 2008): (1) immigration laws and policies aimed at reinforcing border control and criminalization of undocumented persons (e.g., 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA)); (2) economic opportunities in industries emerging in new destinations (e.g., construction and food processing); and (3) quality-of-life factors (e.g., lower cost of living). The enactment of IRCA and the increased border control in traditional destination states in the southwest have produced a shift of illegal

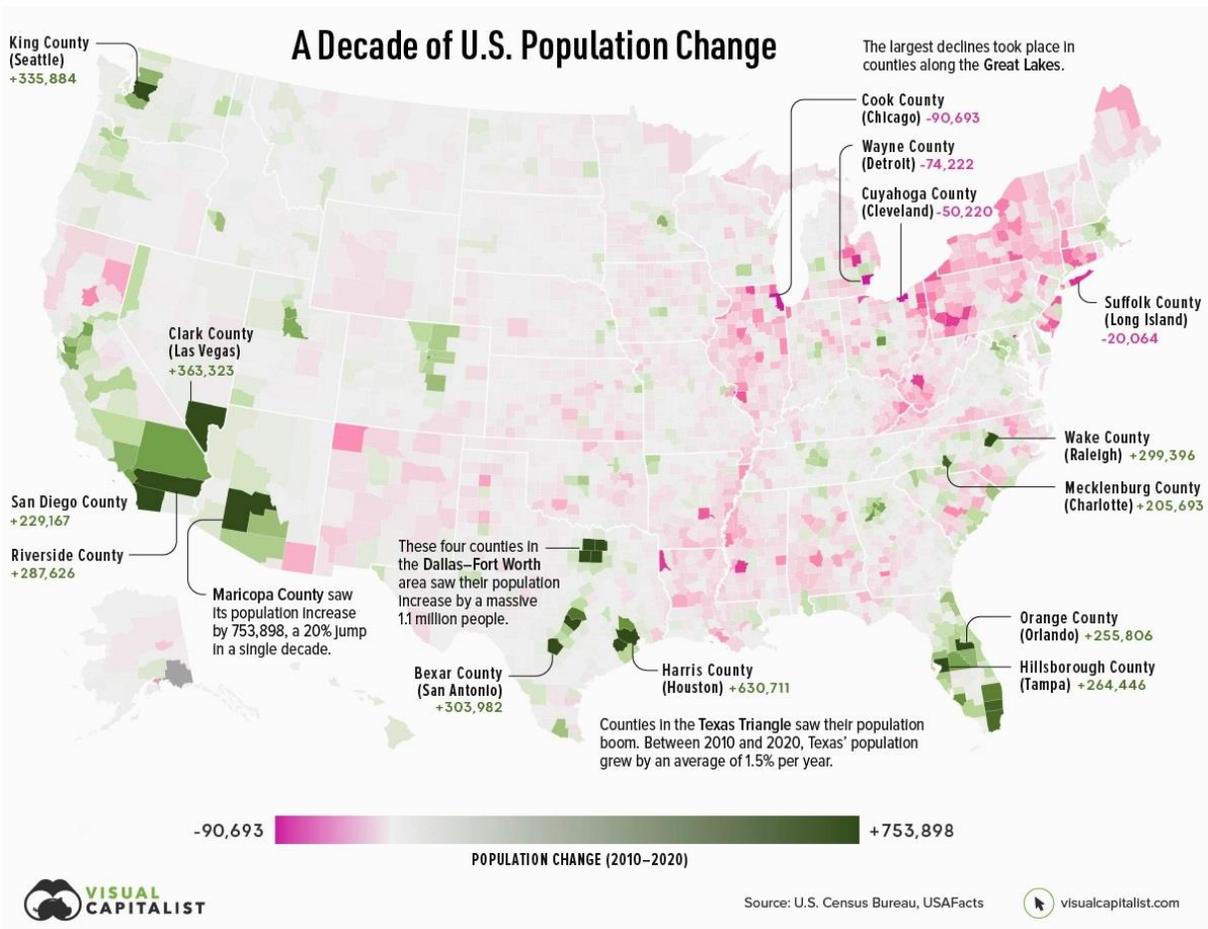


Figure 6.1 - Population change by county (2010-2020)

Source: Routley and Ang (2022, June). Mapped: A Decade of Population Growth and Decline in U.S. Counties.

border crossing towards the southeastern part of the US (Ellis et al., 2016). Additionally, the growing economies of Sunbelt cities and surrounding rural areas combined with a lower cost of living have attracted Hispanic migration at much higher rates (Parrado and Kandel, 2008). Therefore, places such as Charlotte, Atlanta, and Washington D.C. emerge as newer destinations in the country and complement more traditional immigrant destinations, such as Boston, which continue to receive a sustained influx of newcomers.

The existence of economic opportunities for newcomers is often identified as the primary reason for people to migrate to certain destinations and not others. Yet, this explanation is seldom

the only “pull” factor for people undertaking the journey. A secondary explanation behind Hispanic migratory patterns across the country refers to a phenomenon called cumulative causation of migration (Massey, 1985; Massey and Capoferro, 2008; Wright and Ellis, 2016). This posits the presence of a group of people originating from the same city and/or country as one of the causes behind a sustained influx of migration. Immigrants define it as *la cadena* (the chain), which specifically refers to the existence of a network that helps others to face the migration process by sharing information and sometimes offering economic support. The emergence of these networks provides us with much more than just an explanation for migratory flows. It highlights the existence of social, economic, and spatial relational links between Latinx geographies in the United States and Latin American geographies.

The presence of other people in a specific destination is the main reason identified by participants in this study for moving to the Boston area. The majority (12 participants) of the foreign-born Latinx interviewed (17 participants) arrived in the greater Boston area directly from their countries of origin. They chose this urban area for multiple reasons (Table 6.1), yet the main one is the presence of other people participants knew in the area – i.e., family members, friends, and/or acquaintances. Specifically, four women mentioned a strong connection between their hometowns, or parents’ and grandparents’ hometowns, and the Boston area. Two women talked about the existence of a “mini Don Matías” (Boston, Female, Family Food Coop) in East Boston. *Mini Don Matías* is a Colombian community originally from a small town in Colombia called Don Matías, who emigrated to the Boston area based “on word of mouth, from the community” (Boston, Female, Gardening and Food Sharing). Similarly, two women talked about a direct connection between a small town in the Dominican Republic, called Baní, and the Jamaica Plain and Egleston

Square neighborhoods in Boston. As the next quote illustrates, these connections are more than just spatial:

The town that my grandmother’s from is called Bani and it’s south of the Dominican Republic. And so, when they migrated here, they all kind of settled in Jamaica Plain and Egleston Square. [...] So, people who had businesses over there and came over here opened up businesses here. Families who were friends in Dominican Republic continued their friendships here. (Boston, Female, Family Food Coop)

The existence of these networks of connections is crucial not only during the selection of the destination and the migration process, but also for the development of placemaking activities, networks of support, and diverse economic practices in the new context.

REASONS	NUMBER OF PEOPLE
Significant others, family, and friends, already in the area	12
For work or to find a job	3
Quality of life	1
Get an education	1
NA (first generation US-born, born and raised in Boston)	2
No data (people who did not answer the question)	4

In Charlotte, the majority (12 participants) of the foreign-born Latinx interviewed (20 participants) arrived directly from their countries of origin and chose Charlotte for several reasons (Table 6.3). Among the 22 people interviewed, 11 participants referred to the presence of family members, friends, and/or acquaintances they knew in the Charlotte area. The existence of these networks of people makes information about a given place more accessible to others and helps those who relocate from countries in Latin America or from other states to settle and navigate the new environment more easily. In line with explanations offered in literature (e.g., Ellis et al., 2016), several participants referred to a better quality of life among the reasons to move to Charlotte. The

next three quotes specifically illustrate the decision to relocate to the Charlotte area for its better quality of life made by Latinx individuals already familiar with the US and living in other states.

It's more comfortable economically, it's cheaper. Especially since we came from New York because the rent that we paid there was so much more than here... (Charlotte, Female, Cooking and Selling Food)

I moved to Charlotte because I had three teenagers at the time, and I wanted to move because the environment in California was no good to grow kids, to grow teenagers (Charlotte, Female, Gardening and Food Sharing + Healthy Lifestyle + Cooperative Gardening)

We used to live in Jersey City and North Bergen, those are cities very polluted, so my daughter was having health problems and the doctor said you have to move to a place that is more open, more green. So, we came to North Carolina, we came to Charlotte, we liked it. (Charlotte, Female, Restaurant Supporting the Community)

North Carolina and, more specifically, the Charlotte area emerges as a new destination for Hispanic communities not only for economic opportunities, but also for its quality of life that includes aspects such as natural amenities, housing quality, and friendly people. People discover these aspects either by researching about the area or because they already know someone living there.

REASONS	NUMBER OF PEOPLE
Significant others, family, and friends, already in the area	11*
Quality of life	8*
For work or to find a job	3
Get an education	1
No data	2
*Three people mentioned both reasons	

The analysis of these reasons reveals that the existence of networks that facilitate the journey and settlement process in the new context constitutes an important factor in the decision to migrate. When relying on these networks, the choice of destinations in the US is limited to those places in which people have connections. Hence, considerations on the context of reception become

secondary, even though the existence of discriminatory laws or hostile environments makes Latinx lives more complicated in the new context.

At the national level, the state of Massachusetts and the greater Boston area emerge among the more welcoming places for newcomers. From an institutional standpoint, Boston is a sanctuary city, which limits the cooperation of local institutions with federal immigration enforcement agencies and is characterized by a strong presence of organizations advocating for immigrants' rights. The greater Boston area saw the emergence of a sanctuary movement during the 1980s and, since then, several cities and towns acquired the designation of sanctuary place – Cambridge in 1985, Chelsea in 2007, and Boston in 2014 (Global Boston, NA). On the contrary, North Carolina and Mecklenburg County emerge among hostile destinations characterized by more unwelcoming attitudes and adversary policy decisions – e.g., the implementation of the 287(g) policy between 2006 and 2018 (Furuseth et al., 2015; Smith and Furuseth, 2006b). Specifically, between 2018 and 2020, ICE conducted several raids in Charlotte fostering a climate of fear even after the implementation of the 287(g)-policy ended. Several of these raids targeted businesses and local areas with high concentrations of immigrants, producing significant socio-economic impacts.

There were two specific places in Charlotte, one was Central Avenue, ICE vans were parked hiding behind apartments, behind shopping strips... So, a lot of the small businesses through Central Avenue suffered a lot because of that. The businesses were open, but a lot of people were not going. And a part of South Blvd between Tyvola and going down... Yeah, the trucks used to hide there early in the morning or around noon, when people would go to eat somewhere, or in the afternoon when they're returning home. So, a lot of people try to avoid that area because of ICE. (Charlotte, Female, Business Supporting the Community)

However, Charlotte's local government has also challenged the more conservative and anti-immigrant orientation of state legislature (Misra, 2015, December) and undertaken actions towards the creation of a pro-immigrant city (e.g., the establishment of an Immigrant Integration Task Force and the introduction of a community ID).

In the Charlotte area, and to some extent also in the Boston area, fear instilled by social and political climates has often prevented Hispanic communities from accessing services and opportunities. Specifically, this research was conducted under the Trump presidency whose attitude towards immigration was mainly antagonistic to the extent that the existence of major immigration programs was threatened – e.g., DACA, TPS, humanitarian protection, public charge programs, and rules (Boston Indicators, 2019, June). The political climate created under his presidency has fostered hostile attitudes towards immigrants in many places across the country, even the more welcoming locations, and, in turn, has produced a widespread sense of fear affecting Latinx day-to-day experiences in both urban contexts.

So more than anything President Trump in connection with Hispanic people and with immigration, and with El Salvador, in particular. We were going around, we were living with a great fear... even of the police (Charlotte, Female, Food Sharing)

Yes, because I have a lot of family with TPS, which is a temporary worker program. The current president wants to stop the program ... My husband has TPS, I am waiting for me or my son ... but if I were to get it... the permit says it's only for one year and two months. If the president cancels it, it can no longer be renewed, and we will have to go...(Boston, Female, Food Sharing)

The stories shared by participants in this study highlight that, even in more welcoming institutional contexts, Latinx mundane experiences can be characterized by discriminatory encounters, and that, vice versa, in more hostile institutional contexts, encounters can also be welcoming. In this regard, the presence of community organizations and a variety of services available to immigrants, alongside networks of support established in both cities, contribute to shaping the contexts of reception and immigrant experiences. Moreover, the existence of solidarity economies and cooperative networks enhances the construction of places of belonging for immigrants and directly supports the development of collaborative practices.

These considerations taken together illustrate Houston's (2019, p. 564) argument around sanctuary cities: "sanctuary is a process, rather than a place designation". I extend her claim to

argue that regardless of the place designation – sanctuary or hostile – urban areas are constructed and reconstructed through a process that involves assemblages of actors’ operating, often in contradictory ways, at multiple scales. The ways cities market themselves at the global and national level and the type of policies they embrace and foster at the local level contribute to determining opportunities, resources, and constraints affecting Latinx individuals and their practices. At the same time, individuals continuously interact with systems of resources and constraints in these contexts and reshape them through their engagement in collaborative food-based practices.

6.3.2 Context influence on practices

This section outlines key context-related aspects shaping the emergence, development, and stability of diverse economic practices, such as characteristics of the urban landscape, and challenges arising around transportation and access to resources. It also highlights the impact on practices of broader multiscale dynamics such as urban change and gentrification, imbalances of power, and the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Urban landscape, transportation, and access

The type of urban landscape emerges as a key context-related aspect influencing systems of resources and constraints and, in turn, diverse economic practices. Specifically, the type of density characterizing urban areas is strictly linked to challenges around transportation and, in turn, access to sources of food, materials, and other things needed to support the economic practice. In the Boston area, higher urban densities often favor closeness among people and, in turn, facilitate

the development of networks of trust and support, especially in areas with a high concentration of Latinx communities. These networks, in turn, become an important condition that enables the emergence of diverse economic practices, such as food-sharing, food collaboratives, and practices of collecting, organizing, and distributing food donations. For instance, Chelsea (MA) is an illustrative example of the development of close-knit relationships among residents. As several women reported, “Chelsea is a very tight community” (Boston, Female, Food Sharing + Cooperative Gardening and Food Sharing) and “[...] with the neighbors, with the people that we know, or those that we do not know, we were always able to help each other” (Boston, Female, Collecting, Organizing, and Distributing Food Donations).

On the contrary, lower urban densities, such as the ones characterizing the Charlotte area, make the emergence of similar dynamics at the neighborhood level more challenging. In these areas, people are forced to drive everywhere not only to buy food and ingredients but often to connect with others. For instance, only two women from Charlotte mentioned that they occasionally share food with neighbors and that these acts are seldom reciprocated. By reflecting on the relational comparison of different urban areas, it is possible to identify patterns that not only illustrate the mutually constitutive relationships occurring between practices and contexts, but also challenge conceptualizations of space as containers of human interactions.

Physical characteristics of urban landscapes also influence the availability of important resources needed to develop and maintain some economic practices. For instance, the availability of land and/or space to host gardening containers, seeds, and other materials, as well as water or other resources. In the Boston area, given the higher urban density and the housing situation of many Latinx individuals – often sharing the household with several people or family members – space is not always available, and needed materials might not be accessible to everyone. Therefore,

community and cooperative gardens constitute an invaluable resource for Latinx individuals who want to grow fresh organic food. Yet, because of the urban density and the skyrocketing financial pressure to develop the land, there is not a lot of space that can be dedicated to such practices. Much of the land available at the ground level in the Boston area belongs to private owners who could not be interested in activating the space for urban agricultural practices (Saha and Eckelman, 2017). Additionally, the type of soil and its characteristics are other important aspects influencing the development of gardening practices. Former industrial sites redeveloped for residential purposes are often contaminated and disproportionately populated by minority communities (Douglas et al., 2012). A woman from East Boston, after a few years of planting and harvesting the food growing in her backyard, sent a soil sample for testing and realized the soil was polluted. Hence, she had to shift to an elevated system with beds that required additional investments to be built and maintained.

On the contrary, in the Charlotte area, because of the type of lower-density landscape, urban agricultural practices could potentially rely on larger spaces compared to similar private practices in Boston. However, Charlotte is characterized by a lack of coordinated approaches to urban agriculture that expands access to minority communities residing in the area. Lower urban densities and greater availability of space (e.g., backyards) in the Charlotte area have produced a lower demand for such coordinated urban agricultural approaches (Hammelman, 2022). However, these context related characteristics often conceal unequal access to needed resources. In fact, Latinx families are more likely to reside in rental units hosted in apartment complexes, which represents a barrier to the development of urban agricultural practices. Hence, lower urban densities and the potential availability of space do not always translate into favorable conditions spurring the emergence of such practices led by minority groups. A lack of governance structure

that protects the land from city growth and devotes it to public use makes the development of community and cooperative gardens more challenging. Finally, issues such as financial challenges, access to resources to start and maintain a garden, access to viable space, and lack of urban agricultural knowledge and skills might constitute additional obstacles preventing Latinx individuals from investing in such practices on their properties. The analysis of diverse economic practices in Charlotte and Boston points to the existence of power relations that materialize at different scales and impact the emergence and development of these practices in different and non-predictable ways.

Transportation constitutes another key element influencing the emergence and development of networks assembled through the enactment of diverse economic practices. As mentioned before, access to transportation is strictly interconnected to the type of urban landscape. In the Boston area, higher urban densities favor the existence of a more developed and efficient public transportation system, whereas in Charlotte people mainly own a car and rarely rely on public transportation. Among the 23 people interviewed in Boston, only seven mentioned having a car in the household and all of them mentioned walking, biking, or relying on public transportation to connect with people and places in their networks. Very few women mentioned occasionally using car sharing services to come back from grocery shopping. On the contrary, among the 22 people interviewed in Charlotte, only one woman was using Charlotte's transportation system to go grocery shopping. The other participants either owned a car that they used on a day-to-day basis or waited for their husbands to come back from work to go grocery shopping or connect with others. Also, in Charlotte people rarely walk to buy or share food, they only do it occasionally when the destination is in close proximity. Hence, access to private means of transportation is especially relevant in the Charlotte area where "The transportation system is

not very good, and you can't really get around if you don't have a car.” (Charlotte, Female, Food Sharing + Collecting, Organizing, and Distributing Food Donations).

The type of urban landscape and, in turn, transportation access are context-related aspects that not only influence the emergence and development of all food-based economic practices explored in this research, but also shape their spatial forms (Chapter 5). For instance, the distance between the center of the practice and sources of food (e.g., food businesses, food pantries, community gardens, and so on), or other nodes in the network, is shorter or longer based on the means of transportation available to people. As a Latina from Charlotte explains, in lower-density urban landscapes relying on public transportation to access food can be a time-consuming action that needs to be accounted for in the development of the practice: “So I end up taking the light rail and two buses to get there. [...] [It takes me] two hours to get there and two hours to return, but if my husband takes me within an hour I get there and I get back” (Charlotte, Female, Food Collaborative). When people own a car, the relationship between the center of the network and sources of food, areas of distribution, and/or other relevant sites is less defined by proximity. In the Charlotte area especially, the main criteria used by Latinx individuals to select food sources are food prices and food quality more than proximity, even though assemblages of places are still relatively contained in space (Chapter 5) to lower transportation costs and time consumed for each trip.

Transportation and access to food go hand in hand. Access to food impacts all the practices studied in this research. For instance, Latinx individuals carrying out food-sharing practices that rely on culturally appropriate Hispanic products that are not necessarily sold everywhere face the additional obstacle to travel across greater distances to source them. As the next two quotes explain, this is particularly relevant in the Charlotte area, whose food landscape has just recently

changed and Hispanic product availability has increased alongside the growth of Latinx groups in the area.

Yeah, actually Charlotte has changed so much since when I first came. I remember you couldn't find something as simple as tortillas in the supermarket. (Charlotte, Female, Food Sharing)

Finding Mexican things was hard. You didn't find a lot of things that nowadays you'll find pretty accessible in any Hispanic store that you go to... But back then, 2009 to 2011, it was so hard. My daughter was born in 2011 and I do remember my mom bringing a lot of spices [from Mexico]. (Charlotte, Female, Food Sharing + Gardening and Food Sharing)

Although the situation has improved over time, for some people living outside the city boundaries, accessing Hispanic ingredients regularly is still a challenge. People displaced into municipalities with lower rates of Hispanic groups, or people living in predominantly White neighborhoods, often have to drive longer to find Hispanic products or rely on small stores selling products at higher prices. None of the people interviewed in the Boston area discussed similar difficulties. The difference between the two urban areas can be linked to the concentration of stores selling Hispanic products in the areas where diverse economic networks were centered – especially food-sharing practices – and in the relatively higher accessibility and walkability of these areas.

Access to food impacts also less conventional food sources such as food pantries and organizations donating food, which in turn influence the development and maintenance of food-based networks relying on these places. Food pantries and other organizations providing food are not always easily accessible. Both in lower and higher urban density areas, people need to rely on transportation to reach food providers and carry the food back to their homes. Relying on transportation might constitute an additional burden on people's budgets or a source of fear and anxiety: undocumented people often avoid driving beyond essential day-to-day trips for fear of being stopped by the police. Women with kids often struggle to access food pantries because of the long lines compounded by the inability to leave their children with someone else. Standing in

long lines is also made more complicated by the winter weather, especially in the New England region.

Physical access to food pantries is also challenged by other aspects such as fear and skepticism towards institutions. In both urban areas, food pantries or other federal and local government-sponsored services often record information about individuals that might prevent many to access them for fear of consequences deriving from sharing such information or using such services. For instance, in the Charlotte area, before the pandemic, service providers were collecting proof of address, ID numbers, and social security numbers of people who wanted to access these services. Fear related to qualifying for such services and challenges in understanding the system compound with the already widespread fear of being reported to the authorities. As the next quote illustrates, many Latinx individuals in Charlotte are convinced that seeking help equates to an increased likelihood of being deported or exposing family members to deportation.

There's a lady whose husband is always telling her, "Nobody's going to help you because you are an immigrant, and you are not legal in this place. So, don't go anywhere because if you go, they are going to deport you or send you back to your country". So, they are afraid to go and find help because their husbands are always telling them things like that. (Charlotte, Female, Food Coop + Healthy Lifestyle)

Therefore, Latinx individuals' fear compounds with issues of food insecurity characterizing both urban areas and difficulties to access food pantries and government benefits. As noted before, the lower urban density characterizing the Charlotte area forces people to drive everywhere, often for long distances, limiting possibilities to access food pantries or align their schedules to the available food pantries' schedules. In the Boston area, many rely on public transportation to access food pantries, which can constitute an additional financial burden on household economies for low-income and food-insecure individuals, as well as a time-consuming task. In many cases, people often resort to their networks of support to receive help and food. This is the case of two women

in Charlotte who collect food donations from food pantries, re-organize the content in smaller boxes, keep some for themselves, and share the rest with other people in their network who have limited access to food.

In general, the type of landscape, access to means of transportation, and access to other resources illustrate the influence of these aspects on the development of diverse collaborative practices. This analysis also shows how relationships between similar practices and contexts materialize in different ways in different contexts, hence their relations cannot be defined *a priori*.

Urban change and gentrification

Collaborative relations among individuals and connections between individuals and places can be altered by dynamics of urban change and gentrification reshaping demographic and commercial compositions of local contexts. Processes of urban change are ongoing dynamics in both contexts of study and are affecting neighborhoods where ethnic minorities reside by displacing poorer communities or by altering ethnic commercial landscapes. When dynamics of urban change impact commercial landscapes, they might deprive Latinx communities of businesses that are important food sources. When these stores close, assemblages determined by food-sharing networks must change as well. This is, for instance, the case of a Latino grocery store in the heart of Jamaica Plain, a neighborhood in the south part of Boston, that has been affected by what Anguelovski (2015) defines as green gentrification.

In the same place where we have now Whole Foods, it was this other supermarket called Hi-Lo. So, that place was a Latino supermarket. People from all over the city came to buy here. In the past, I just used to walk or bike there... [it was] very close by and I could find all the food there that I needed. But they closed it of course. So, what makes me think is that, of course gentrification and how is coming to this place... [...] So, there are some stores, like this, very important for communities, and the government or the local government should help, or find a way to maintain

these stores. And when we lost this store here, Latinos started leaving faster, because they felt that you know "oh Whole Foods is coming. Oh, that's the end, this is over! And the rent is going up and there is no food that you can walk to get it". Now, you have to go to Chelsea, you have to go to East Boston, to get the food. (Boston, Male, Food Sharing)

Dynamics of urban change that affect commercial landscapes force people to identify new sources of food elsewhere, which might not be accessible to everyone or are not similar to previous sources in terms of availability of products, prices, distance, and so on (Chapter 5).

Proximity to places from which people source food or to which people deliver food and share food with others are impacted by phenomena of urban change and gentrification. In Boston, the Jamaica Plain and Egleston Square neighborhoods underwent significant urban change that pushed out Latinx communities and transformed commercial landscapes. As the next quote explains, food coops and collaboratives that prioritize people's well-being over profits and rely on the support of surrounding communities are affected by changes in the commercial and demographic compositions of neighborhoods to the extent that their existence can become uncertain.

The neighborhood has also changed a lot. You know, there's not a lot of Dominicans living in Jamaica Plain anymore. Most of the people that were going to my grandmother's house weren't from JP at all anymore. You know, gentrification changes everything. And I don't know if a business like my grandmother's would survive in this era. So... it's still a good business to have... [...] whether it's at home or if you're doing a collaborative in your house... I know that there are other parts of Boston where businesses like this exist... a lot of people in Chelsea have this kind of collaborative out of their house, where they're all cooking and they're all helping each other. And I just don't know if Jamaica Plain itself would be a good place for that anymore, only because the culture has changed and shifted so much... (Boston, Female, Food Cooperative)

While urban change and gentrification processes affect neighborhoods, communities, and the existence of diverse economic practices, collaborative relationships assembled through the enactment of these practices often adjust to these dynamics by changing their spatial forms and expanding previously spatially concentrated networks to include regional, national, and international linkages (Chapter 5).

When dynamics of change push people out of their neighborhoods, some of the collaborative relationships and connections constituting diverse economic networks are altered or stop existing, whereas, some others, such as food-sharing practices, tend to be reproduced in the new locations. Building new networks in new contexts or expanding previous ones is an illustrative example of the interaction between individual and collective forms of agency developing at the local scale and multiscale dynamics. In this interaction, Latinx individuals react to multiscale dynamics often by reproducing acts of solidarity, interdependence, and mutual aid, whose spatiality cannot be understood as fixed and reducible to considerations of distance or hierarchy of scale. Also, some Latinx groups react to these dynamics of change by developing more intentional economic strategies that aim to address several of the impacts produced by racial capitalism on ethnic minorities. This is the case of networks of connections established among diverse economic practices developing in the East Boston neighborhood, which, in the past two decades, has experienced significant urban change and financial redevelopment pressure. The neighborhood hosts the largest share of the Hispanic population within Boston's municipal boundaries – 50.4% of residents identify as Hispanic (Boston Planning and Development Agency, 2020). With the current wave of investments and the skyrocketing prices of properties, Latinx individuals struggle to remain in the area. In this context, the development of family food coops and collaboratives becomes a means for many to build the capacity to remain in the area. The food coops studied in East Boston are the outcome of a solidarity cooperative training carried out by a non-profit cooperative organization that challenges the effects of racial capitalism on Latinx communities by promoting an ecosystem economic vision founded on values of interdependence, solidarity, and cooperativism (Section 3.3.2). The coops connected to this non-profit organization are already creating a diverse economic ecosystem and increasing the capacity of these groups to resist

displacement. As already noted, these are illustrative examples of how collective forms of agency impact the context and tackle the effects of multiscale dynamics.

Power imbalances

As mentioned in the previous chapter, this research foregrounds an analysis of diverse collaborative practices as assemblages that attends to the danger of a “flat ontology” (Kinkaid, 2020), which often conceals social and symbolic differences within assemblages. Relying on relational conceptualizations of space and assemblages, this study does not flatten or ignore systems of racial inequalities to which Latinx communities are subjected in the US. Rather, it starts to interrogate how racial and power inequalities and differences surface in networks assembled through the enactment of diverse economic practices and how they influence the emergence, development, and stability of these practices. In this study, power imbalances often surface, more or less explicitly, in diverse economic practices mediated by non-profit organizations – e.g., gardening and healthy lifestyle practices.

In the Boston area, non-profit organizations with food and/or environmental justice missions are usually at the forefront of the fight to convert vacant or underutilized land or to protect existing land devoted to urban agricultural purposes. These organizations usually promote programs that help the emergence of collaborative and cooperative gardening practices. However, in these cases, Latinx individuals do not have full control over decision-making processes. The following quote illustrates tensions between the main caretaker of a community garden and the organizations sponsoring its development around the garden’s organizational structure.

So, at the beginning, they wanted to rent it to other people, so the people have the bed for themselves and pay something to the organization. And then I didn’t agree with them... but I built it myself,

and I want people to come out here and ask me, “Hey, can I have some tomato or whatever you got there?” And then I want to feel happy to call them here “yeah come inside and get whatever!” But if it’s like that... if people ask me, I cannot give it [food] to them because the bed belongs to somebody else, to everyone who rents it... [...] I know, it’s not my land, but when I asked for the land to be donated was for this reason, it wasn’t to deal with money. [...] when I did this [the garden], this was to share... (Boston, Male, Community Garden)

This man’s willingness to create a community space and share the products of the garden with everybody clashed with the organization’s intention to create a small stream of revenue to sustain the garden. Eventually, the garden was developed as a community space open to everyone. Similarly, the next quote illustrates changes made to the structure of the operations of a cooperative garden by the organization running it, following the outbreak of Covid-19. During Summer 2020, this space was closed to volunteers, and the food harvested was donated to a local food pantry in Chelsea and, in turn, distributed once per week to families in need. Hence, the garden suddenly shifted from a space where Latinas, and their families, harvested food in exchange for their labor to an inaccessible space to many.

I feel that the previous concept when people came and harvested what they needed was better ... A clear example of that is the man who came in today who only needed chili peppers and good tomatoes... So, this is the concept that I would like to follow here at the farm, that people come here, maybe work that day for their food, maybe they help us water or pull some herbs and then take what they need ... When someone takes the harvest after their work, everything is valued a little more than when you have it ready or even when they come to just collect it. But then the church thing happened and right now this is the way it is working. (Boston, Female, Cooperative Gardening and Food Sharing)

Although the widespread need to access fresh and organic food has spurred the development of collaborative and cooperative urban gardening practices, context-related aspects such as limited control over decision-making processes often reduce the likelihood for diverse economic practices to survive over time and for Latinx individuals to continue to engage with them.

Similarly, in the Charlotte area, the survival of healthy lifestyle programs promoted at community centers through the support of local organizations can be jeopardized by imbalances

of power. For instance, this is the case of a community center in the Charlotte area that was offering a variety of wellness services, including food-based ones, such as cooking classes and referrals to food banks.

I don't see them doing this in other places. That's why we asked them... why they want to close [the community center] because, I mean, this is the only place... I mean they say sometimes it's because it is the same people who are coming, one or two people who are different every time. They think that every time we should have different people, but people who are coming to the class, they come several times. I mean, that's what we want because in one class you are not going to learn everything... But they have another vision. I think they need people go and just register to the clinic. That's what they wanted. But the Latino people, they don't like to go to the doctor, they don't want to be registered in any of the free clinics. (Charlotte, Female, Healthy Lifestyle)

Once again, when practices are mediated by organizations, power imbalances often emerge and highlight existent disconnections between organization needs and community needs. This lack of participation in decision-making is detrimental for Latinx individuals and exacerbates skepticism towards institutions. In fact, the development of food-based practices centered around wellness contributes to creating safe spaces for Latinx communities by engaging them through activities that are more relevant and relatable on a day-to-day basis (e.g., cooking classes). When these practices are carried out by other Latinx individuals, they also contribute to establishing and strengthening relationships of trust among individuals and, in turn, creating more stable networks of support. In the long term, this has important impacts on the connections between Latinos and the health system in the US. Many Latinx individuals in both urban areas avoid clinics and hospitals due to a widespread lack of trust towards services and places that record personal information, a lack of knowledge regarding the functioning of the health system in the US, and experiences of discrimination at clinics and hospitals.

These few examples illustrate how imbalances of power, in this case participation in decision-making, can destabilize economic practices to the extent that some might stop existing. Therefore, in networks assembled through the enactment of diverse practices, not all the nodes

have the same agentic capacity. Understanding power imbalances constitutes an entry point to assemble the conditions for diverse economic practices to flourish and communities to remake themselves.

Covid-19 pandemic

Among the multiscalar dynamics influencing food-based diverse collaborative economies, this research cannot ignore the far-reaching impact of the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Covid-19 pandemic has significantly altered people's day-to-day activities, social relations, and modes of interactions. Specifically, because of the reduced possibility of connecting and spending time with others, and the fear of contracting Covid-19, several food sharing practices stopped completely or reduced the number and frequency of food exchanges. Food-sharing practices that were not drastically altered by the pandemic were those whose sharing component took place mainly within the same household or with people in close proximity. Some of the food sharing practices in both urban areas slowly started again during the summer of 2020 with different characteristics: during an initial period, people gathered, cooked, and shared food in outdoor spaces, such as parks.

Latinx individuals in both urban areas developed strategies to cope with the effects of the pandemic and, in some cases, this led to the emergence of new food-based collaborative practices. For instance, in Boston, a young Latina mother who used to work as a nanny, lost her job at the beginning of the pandemic and started to cooperate with her roommate as a survival strategy.

With the pandemic, my income was affected. So, he is working and, to be honest, the man does not like to cook much. So that's what makes him buy food and I cook it. That helps me because I don't have the money to buy it, but he doesn't want to cook. So, we help each other. It's a form of mutual

aid. He helps me and I help him and so we share food. (Boston, Female, Food Sharing + Cooperative gardening and Food Sharing)

Similarly, three other Latinas (one in Boston and two in Charlotte), started to cook and share food with people affected by the pandemic, especially those who contracted the virus. This emerging practice, spurred by the pandemic, in some cases expanded previous networks of food sharing by including new individuals. In some others, it has strengthened mutual aid relationships between people who were already sharing food. In general, across both urban areas, Covid-19 has had a complex set of effects on food-sharing networks: in some cases, it reduced the sharing frequency or the number of ties and network extensions, whereas in other cases it has spurred new relationships based on solidarity, mutual aid, and interdependence.

The outbreak of Covid-19 has also impacted urban agricultural practices, especially those carried out in the community and cooperative gardens, by limiting access to those spaces. This was particularly true for urban gardening practices in Chelsea (MA), which became a Covid-19 hotspot in Massachusetts. At the same time, the need to access fresh food in the Latinx community has increased. The main caretaker for one of the gardens in Chelsea recalled receiving phone calls from people asking him to deliver vegetables and herbs to their house. On the contrary, the pandemic has not significantly impacted urban gardening practices taking place on private properties: these practices in both urban areas continued to exist and function more than they did before. A woman from Chelsea started sharing more produce from her garden with others “because people need more” (Boston, Female, Gardening and Food Sharing), and another from East Boston invited people from her network to harvest vegetables and herbs from her backyard.

The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic has also affected food collaborative practices by reducing the profits made by Latinas and by making their working conditions more challenging.

As a woman from Charlotte explained, the shift to virtual activities and the increased food prices and shortages affected her ability to cook and sell food:

It affected us a lot because the kids are at home now and it's more work for me. At the same time in which I'm starting to cook, they're [my kids] going to school. And so, when I'm cooking, I still have to keep an eye on them, especially the little one who's five as they're beginning their classes. And also, I find that some of the products are now more expensive as well... (Charlotte, Female, Food Collaborative)

Among the food-based collaborative practices explored in this research, food collaboratives are the most vulnerable to food price fluctuations. These practices usually rely on a fixed menu whose ingredients are sometimes sourced from places or companies that import them from Latin America and/or from people sending them. The pandemic has prompted a global crisis and the consequential enactment of policies – e.g., border closures – producing shortages of ingredients and price increases and, in turn, challenging the survival of these practices.

The outbreak of the pandemic has also created the conditions for the emergence of practices that did not exist before. As one Latina interviewed claimed: “opportunities come out of crises” (Boston, Female, Food Cooperative). This is the case of three family-based food coops activated during the pandemic in East Boston with the support of the non-profit organization running the cooperative training (Section 3.3.2). These cooperative projects were activated to help people through times of social isolation and support their household economies.

It was nice just being able to be with my family all day, but not have it to be boring! I feel like we all did stupid things too... we all laughed around, we listen to music... It was just a really nice bonding experience and I'm glad that... obviously Covid sucked! But if it weren't for Covid, I wouldn't have been able to do that. (Boston, Female, Food Cooperative)

They [organization] got someone to cook for those families. My family did not get sick, thank God, but we did not have a job, we did not have how to bring the money we needed to the house to eat and everything... So, they did it [starting the food-based cooperative project], and they also did it with others, it was to keep us busy and... [...] we felt super good because we knew that in one way or another, we were helping people and they were getting food for free. (Boston, Female, Food Cooperative)

Ultimately, these food cooperatives and collaboratives have produced a wide range of benefits from fostering a cooperative mentality based on interdependence and solidarity to empowering people by creating individual and collective capacity to resist the effects of racial capitalism. These tangible and intangible benefits were particularly important under the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The remaining type of practices were also impacted by Covid-19 as well. For instance, healthy lifestyle practices either stopped for a lack of resources or had difficulties in shifting to virtual programs: “For nutrition classes you can't cook, you can't do a cooking demo and taste... you cannot taste virtually, you know, some program would be better in person, but we will switch some to the virtual...” (Charlotte, Female, Healthy Lifestyle + Food Sharing). The Covid-19 pandemic has also exacerbated health disparities among Latinx groups, increasing the need for programs addressing health and wellness from a holistic standpoint, and the need to access food making more informal networks of collection, organization, and distribution of food donation even more important. A Latina in Charlotte who distributes food boxes to people in need multiplied her trips during the week and sourced boxes from multiple pantries. These practices affect local contexts by extending opportunities for food access to marginalized individuals and by expanding and/or strengthening networks of solidarity and support, which constitute an invaluable resource in times of crisis, such as the one produced by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Diverse economic practices are embedded parts of complex systems of relations that continuously evolve alongside the contexts in which they emerge. Context and practices co-evolution is the product of relational linkages in the making determined by the co-existence of plurality and heterogeneity in contexts with different histories, political, cultural, and economic

projects. As outlined in this section, context-related aspects determined by the complex interactions of multiscalar dynamics influence the emergence, development, and stability of diverse economic practices. Among the context-related systems of resources and constraints emerging from this research, the most impactful ones are characteristics of the physical urban landscape – e.g., urban density – availability of means of transportation, and access to resources, alongside broader dynamics of urban change, gentrification, power imbalances surfacing in collaborative networks, and the far-reaching impacts produced by the Covid-19 pandemic. However, as this section started to highlight, networks assembled through the enactment of diverse economic practices are not powerless entities. Rather, these adjust, often survive, and impact local contexts by reshaping systems of constraints.

6.3.3 Practices impacts on the context

This section draws on the relational conceptualization of space and assemblages to demonstrate how through the enactment of diverse collaborative economic practices, Latinx groups, more or less intentionally, impact and transform contexts. Hence, I demonstrate how the localities are not powerless dimensions, rather they interact with multiscalar dynamics altering and changing them. Key beneficial impacts on individuals, groups, and environments produced through the enactment of diverse collaborative economic practices include (1) the reproduction and maintenance of foodways, traditions, and connections with cultural roots in the new context; (2) the development of networks of support and safety-nets enabling knowledge exchanges and subjects' empowerment; and (3) the enactment of new economic scenarios based on interdependence and solidarity, privileging people's well-being over profits, and reframing

capitalist narratives around economic subjects. As it emerges below, these key impacts are intimately intertwined to each other.

First, diverse economic practices allow Latinx individuals to maintain a strong connection with their cultural roots. This connection is reproduced through maintaining foodways, reproducing traditions, and engaging in similar diverse practices in the new context. Foodways and traditions are reproduced in different ways through, for example, food-sharing, urban agriculture, and the development of food coops and collaboratives. Connections with the past are maintained symbolically through cooking and sharing food as a means to promote richness and differences of cultural identities and, as shown in Chapter 4, to challenge stereotypical representations of Latinx ethnoracial identities. Yet, these connections are also maintained through material exchanges of food, seeds, and knowledge across geographies, which directly support the development and maintenance of diverse economic practices. Through the material and symbolic maintenance of foodways, Latinx individuals survive better in the new context, link disparate geographies, and construct diverse foodscapes.

Second, the enactment of diverse economic practices fosters the development of networks of support that enables the survival of communities in times of crisis, knowledge exchanges, and subjects' empowerment. In fact, all diverse practices explored in this study facilitate strong connections among individuals and, in turn, expand and strengthen networks of support. These networks constituted a crucial resource during the first wave of the pandemic in Boston, where mutual aid groups of neighbors organized to support each other with money, food, and transportation, and helped people to survive in a time in which many lost their jobs and/or were unable to work. Although less organized, social ties in Charlotte were leveraged by individuals to face the effects of Covid-19. Also, through these networks, Latinx individuals share knowledge

and skills. For instance, urban gardening practices become means for people to teach, learn, and share valuable and transferrable skills, socialize and/or work in cooperation with others, spend time in contact with nature and away from often overcrowded households, and maintain a connection with their past. Many of these benefits are created by the collaborative nature of these practices and impact different generations of Latinx individuals.

It was a way to teach my kid how to grow vegetables [...] and I also wanted my son to grow up eating vegetables. And I want him to see how vegetable actually grow. I don't want him to go to a supermarket and "oh, they are ready!", you know... I want him to know that there is a process for every vegetable he has, so he can value food more. And I think the other mothers were doing the same thing. Now, we were helping, but at the same time, we were teaching our kids how to cut the onions, so they will grow back again. (Boston, Female, Food Sharing + Cooperative Gardening and Food Sharing)

Practices such as urban agriculture also offer spaces for encounters strengthening relations constituting networks of support. Community and cooperative gardens are places where different families can come together to grow food and/or teach younger generations about the origin of vegetables and herbs, and cultural roots. Even urban gardening activities taking place on private properties involve collaborations with younger generations and other adults.

Ultimately, diverse economic practices enable an exchange of knowledge often rooted in past experiences and, hence, the maintenance of Latinx foodways, the discovery of foodways embedded in family histories, and/or the development of new ones. When knowledge and skills exchanges are involved, diverse economic practices empower people by supporting them and creating space for them to adjust, navigate, and remake life in the new context. For instance, by improving health-related aspects of people's life, healthy lifestyle practices allow people and their families to survive better in local contexts, share knowledge acquired with others, and, in some cases, develop other food-based economic practices. For instance, the following quote illustrates the overall impact created by a nutrition program for cancer survivors. The woman supporting the

implementation of this practice was a beneficiary of a similar program in the past. This transformative experience prompted her to share the same knowledge with others and support them through challenging times.

If you're healthy, you're able to produce, you're able to work. If you detect your cancer late, it's going to impact your finance... [...] If you'll find your cancer late that will impact your health, you won't be able to work, you are not going to be able to produce in the same way. Same happen when your cancer comes back. My goal is to reduce the cancer comeback in the survivors group. I want to have everyone healthy and when you have cancer, you have fears that the cancer come back and that affects your depression, your emotions, you don't want to work, or do you don't have energy, or you have a lot of anxiety, or you don't eat well also... and that will impact your, I would say production... (Charlotte, Female, Healthy Lifestyle + Food Sharing)

The intertwined set of tangible and intangible benefits produced by fostering networks of support ultimately contribute to socio-economic dynamics in local contexts. Therefore, these practices' impact is not limited to short-term benefits. Rather, they might produce a domino effect by impacting people's lives and spurring the emergence of other collaborative practices. This set of benefits becomes even more evident when we consider that Latinx individuals often engage in several diverse economic practices beyond food-based ones.

Third, food-based diverse collaborative economic practices also impact individuals, groups, and the context by contributing to the economy of a place. As illustrated in the following quote, the economy is understood here as a relational broader realm centered around people's well-being more than monetary transactions:

When people are helping each other out with food, it creates the opportunity for people to get through a crisis. [...] The economy involves everything. Having healthy people and help each other to allow people to have access to food definitely helps and I believe it contributes to the economy. (Charlotte, Female, Food Sharing + Collecting, Organizing, Distributing Food Donations)

Interestingly, when specifically asked about the potential impact of their practice on local economies, many Latinx residents interviewed in both urban areas referred to the contribution to

their household economy, some others referred to the consequential contribution to other household economies, and very few reflected on the potential impact on local economies.

The recurring reference in their answers to money and taxes paid when buying gardening materials or food highlights the internalization of a conceptualization of the economy that is more associated with monetary transactions and less with other benefits. However, these other benefits were discussed by all informants during the interviews. For instance, by engaging in gardening activities, Latinx individuals produce a wide variety of economic, social, and environmental benefits for individuals, communities, and places: they contribute to the stability of household economies by diversifying sources of food and saving money that can be reinvested in other activities, counteract a lack of access to fresh, high-quality, and affordable food, protect outdoor spaces from cities' growth by reclaiming land. These benefits impact not only those households that can grow food, but also the others that receive food from them. As explained in the next section, by intentionally practicing values of solidarity, cooperativism, and interdependence, some of these collaborative practices are already transforming the economy in line with a vision centered on people's well-being, rather than profits. For instance, some food cooperatives and collaboratives are diversifying the economy, by implementing a more sustainable economic vision and creating a conducive environment for acquiring knowledge and skills.

My grandmother shared her skills with everybody. A lot of people came to my grandmother's house when they needed work, when they needed to eat, when they just got here from Dominican Republic and weren't settled in... [...] That's why she cooked for so many people, there was always extra food. There were always leftovers. And she's known for, like feeding people. (Boston, Female, Food Collaborative)

As this quote illustrates, the acquisition of knowledge and skills is rarely an isolated effect. Rather, it is often intertwined with other benefits, such as recreating and maintaining foodways and

developing new and expanding existing networks of support by strengthening family and community relations.

The difference between a capitalist business structure and these cooperative practices lays not only in the existence of collaborations among individuals and a concerted decision-making process, but also in the general objective to produce an equal level of stability and benefits for everyone involved in the economic practice. Food coops and collaboratives contribute to producing the conditions enabling the enactment of different ways of being, knowing, and doing in the new cultural context. In the enactment of these practices, establishing and nurturing relations of solidarity and support is more important than making profits when selling food.

Finally, some diverse economic practices challenge capitalist narratives regarding what are considered non-economic subjects. For instance, one program in Charlotte fights homelessness by training people in the kitchen of a non-profit organization to find jobs in restaurants around the region and transition out of the street. This program reframes the narrative around homeless people and other marginalized groups, offers a concrete possibility for marginalized individuals to transition out of poverty, and tackles the widespread issue of homelessness in transformative and empowering ways. Through this diverse economic practice, the owner of the non-profit also exposes and challenges structural inequalities, such as the expensive nature of the education system or training programs.

By empowering marginalized subjects, diverse economic practices start to reframe capitalist narratives that systematically stigmatize women of color, homeless individuals, ex-prisoners, cancer survivors, and so on, deeming them incapable to contribute to our societies. Instead, the analysis of Latinx food-based diverse economic practices shows that they produce a wide range of socio-economic impacts for individuals, groups, and the contexts in which they

emerge. However, these impacts are not always produced to intentionally challenge capitalist relations.

Transformative potential of food-based collaborative practices

The analysis presented in the previous section shows the diverse ways by which Latinx food-based collaborative and cooperative practices produce an impact on these urban areas in relation to a set of context-related constraints and resources, as well as other factors that stabilize or destabilize their functioning in certain times and places. Yet, these practices show a different degree of intentionality in producing change in the context in which they emerge. In this research, I define as *intentionality* the ability of food-based collaborative and cooperative practices to purposefully challenge and/or address capitalist relations through collaboration and interdependence. The analysis of the degree of intentionality is instrumental to understanding the potential that these practices have to transform economies towards an ontological politics of the pluriverse. Escaping the One-World World ontology (Law, 2015) requires an intentional engagement with capitalist hierarchical systems of power that pre-define socioeconomic relations and, in turn, exclude and marginalize different ways of being, doing, and knowing. Even when economic practices intentionally challenge capitalist relations through solidarity and interdependence, the risk of cooptation or reproduction of universal ontologies is real (Loh and Shear, 2002).

In presenting the analysis of Latinx food-based collaborative practices' degree of intentionality and transformative power, I must offer a quick caveat first. This analysis stems from the acknowledgment that structural change is not produced in a vacuum, and it requires an

understanding of the ways by which universal ontologies reproduce themselves, coopt plurality, and marginalize diversity. Hence, if the enactment of diverse ways of being, knowing, and doing does not attend to entanglements of power characterizing the contexts in which it takes place, it constitutes a necessary but not sufficient requirement to assemble and advance the conditions for a pluriversal economic orientation. Yet, this does not devalue in any way the wide variety of valuable impacts produced by Latinx food-based practices in the Boston and Charlotte urban areas discussed in the previous section. Rather, by combining practices' degrees of intentionality and impacts on local contexts, I argue that it is possible to critically reflect on the overall potential that these practices have to transform places and on the ways by which they can be intentionally supported to amplify this power.

To assess food-based collaborative practices' transformative potential, I combine the degree of intentionality with the impact of each practice (see section 3.3.3). The impact of each practice is assessed on a 5-point scale based on its ability to create tangible and/or intangible benefits for individuals and/or organizations, networks of support, and empowerment (see section 3.3.3). Similarly, the degree of intentionality of each practice is assessed on a 5-point scale based on how explicitly (1) it is imbued with non-capitalist or anti-capitalist values (e.g. interdependence and solidarity) and challenges capitalist relations by creating space for self-help or cooperation; (2) it aims at addressing the effects of racial capitalism (such as labor exploitation, gentrification, and so on); and (3) it advances a diverse economic vision (see section 3.3.3).

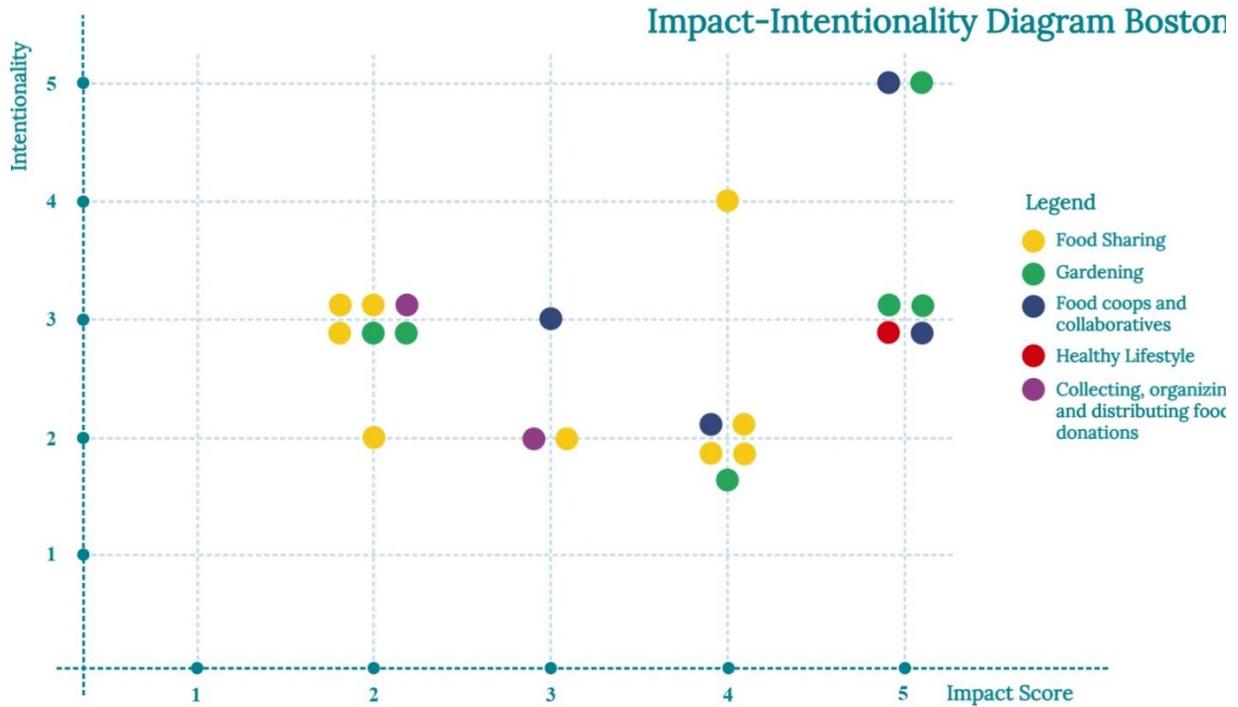


Figure 6.2 - Boston impact-intentionality diagram

In the Boston area, I analyzed a total of 22 food-based economic practices, which are variously positioned in the diagram with no clear linear relation between practices’ impact and degree of intentionality. As the impact-intentionality diagram for Boston shows in Figure 6.2, 68% of practices impact local contexts by producing tangible and intangible benefits – e.g., strengthening relationships among individuals and increasing satisfaction, joy, and sense of purpose – for other individuals or organizations (score 3), creating networks of support (score 4), and empowering others by transferring valuable skills (score 5). Food sharing practices falling in this category are more stable, involve frequent relations among subjects within the same household and among different ones, and are activated to establish strong reciprocal relationships among several individuals. Food cooperative practices involve frequent and stable relationships among

people within the same household and solidarity acts. Solidarity is often reflected in food donations and/or lower selling prices for the surrounding communities in times of economic hardship. Latinx involved in other practices, such as gardening and collecting, organizing, and distributing food donations, amplify their impact by sharing outdoor space and food with those who do not have access or have limited access to them. These practices are also characterized by strong and stable collaborative relationships with several subjects.

The impact-intentionality diagram also shows six practices with very high impact (impact score 5) and medium to high degrees of intentionality. These practices involve the transfer of important skills and subject empowerment alongside the establishment of strong networks of support often leveraged in times of crisis or economic hardship. For instance, this is the case of a cooperative garden teaching urban agricultural skills to participants, or cooking classes training Latinx to read nutritional labels and transform Hispanic recipes to prevent the emergence of health problems – e.g., cardiovascular issues or diabetes. Therefore, practices falling in the impact range from 3 to 5 rely on food to produce several interconnected tangible and intangible benefits for existing networks of people and, in turn, show a medium to high transformative potential (Figure 6.4).

Figure 6.2 also shows three clusters of three or more practices around low and high impact scores and low to medium degrees of intentionality. Specifically, it shows that 32% of the practices impact the local context by producing tangible benefits for other individuals or organizations that cannot be necessarily produced otherwise (impact score 2) – e.g., food, gardening space, or extra revenue. These are sporadic food sharing practices often limited by economic resources, gardening practices taking place in small private interstitial spaces with a small production of vegetables and herbs, or food donation boxing practices for a food pantry. The collaborations established in these

cases are mostly sporadic and/or informed by a personal need more than being strongly inspired by solidarity and interdependence. However, they produce spaces for self-help, occasional cooperation, and mutual exchange by bringing people together and strengthening already existing relationships.

When analyzing the degree of intentionality in the diagram, it emerges that 86% of practices in Boston do not intentionally challenge or barely challenge capitalist relations (intentionality scores 2-3). In this case, although these collaborative practices produce a wide range of more or less impactful benefits for local contexts, they are not driven by an intentional reflection on how to leverage resources and address constraints to intentionally contribute to the construction of diverse economic ecosystems. On the contrary, 14% of Boston practices present a high degree of intentionality (scores 4-5), hence are explicitly informed by non-capitalist values of solidarity, cooperation, and interdependence. These practices often leverage these values to empower others or indirectly address some of the effects of racial capitalism such as individualism, marginalization, health issues, labor exploitation, lack of jobs, gentrification, and so on. This is, for example, the case of a food sharing practice that investigates the history, origins, and traditions of recipes and people involved in the practice to challenge capitalist homogenizing forces reducing people's identities to consumers with similar tastes.

The capitalist system wants you to undo your identity, to make you similar to each one in this country... the goal is to be exactly the same, like a mass production in series. [...] And then they can do whatever they want because they can sell you anything, they can tailor to one population that is a similar homogeneous population, right? So, I see food as a way to fight the capitalist system too because then you have identity and, if you have identity, nobody can break you down (Boston, Male, Food Sharing)

This is also the case of a family food coop and a gardening and food sharing practice, both embodying strong values of solidarity, interdependence, and cooperation. Latinx activating these practices were already attuned to these values. Yet, these values were enhanced through

cooperative training that, by increasing Latinx awareness regarding the local effects of racial capitalism, it has built the capacity to challenge displacement process. Ultimately, the practices with a 4 and 5 degree of intentionality show an explicit reference to challenging capitalism and creating a more sustainable economic system centered around people and not profit.

Charlotte

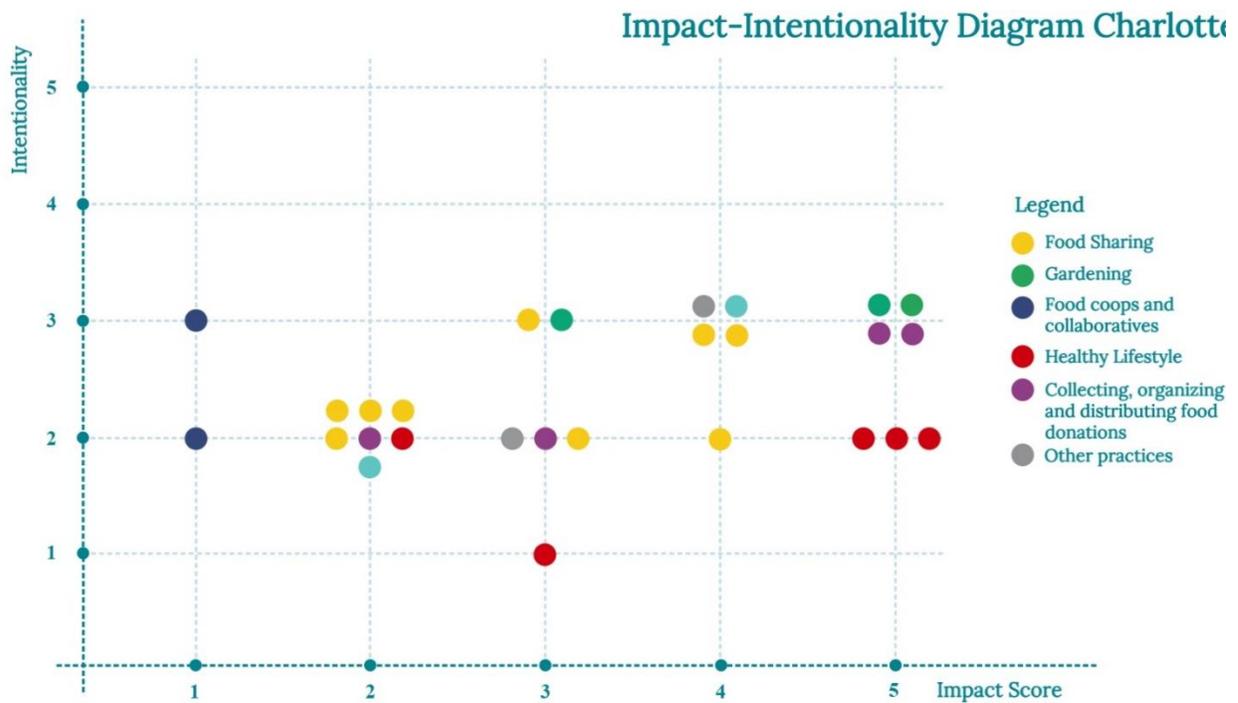


Figure 6.3 - Charlotte impact-intentionality diagram

In the Charlotte area, I analyzed a total of 27 food-based economic practices. Similar to Boston, the food-based collaborative practices in Charlotte are variously positioned in the diagram with no clear linear relation between practices’ impact and degree of intentionality (Figure 6.3). In this case, practices are even more scattered: the impact ranges from 1 to 5 covering the entire diagram, whereas the degree of intentionality is mainly contained between 2 and 3. In the figure,

67% of practices impact local contexts by producing tangible and intangible benefits for other individuals or organizations (score 3), creating networks of support (score 4), and empowering others by transferring valuable skills (score 5). Practices falling in this impact range present similar characteristics to the ones identified in Boston for the same range. For instance, food sharing practices are characterized by more stable networks, involve frequent relations among subjects within the same household and across different households, and are intentionally activated to establish and maintain strong relationships among several individuals. These relationships are informed by mutual aid and solidarity values and, in a few cases, a strong sense of belonging to a community. Also, these practices intentionally aim at expanding food access for vulnerable or sick individuals. The food collaboratives falling in this range involve frequent and stable relationships of cooperation within the same household as well as solidarity acts of food donations for individuals in need.

The remaining practices are also defined by strong and stable collaborative relationships and an implicit sense of interdependence among several subjects. The diagram also shows seven practices with a very high impact, but low to medium degree of intentionality. Three of these are healthy lifestyle practices that empower subjects by transferring valuable skills such as recognizing good-quality ingredients, cooking healthier versions of Hispanic recipes, understanding nutritional values, and having a more active lifestyle. The individuals engaged in these networks are Hispanics who are committed to health prevention, cancer survivors or suffer from other diseases (e.g., diabetes), or simply like to learn about improving their lifestyle. The remaining four practices show a strong, but implicit, commitment to cooperativism, interdependence, and solidarity. Overall, practices falling in the impact range from 3 to 5 rely on food to produce several interconnected

tangible and intangible benefits for existing networks of people and, the majority of them, show a medium to high transformative potential (Figure 6.4).

Also, Figure 6.3 shows five clusters of three or more practices around low, medium, and high impact scores and low to medium degrees of intentionality, and only one big cluster of more than five practices with low impact and low degree of intentionality. Overall, 33% of the practices explored in the Charlotte area impact the local context by producing tangible benefits for people – e.g., food, recipes, and strategies to eat healthily – sometimes under monetary compensation. Practices such as food sharing, food collaboratives, and the food business supporting the community are characterized by occasional collaboration often limited by economic constraints. Similar to practices in Boston, the collaborations established in these cases are mostly sporadic and/or informed by a personal need more than being strongly inspired by solidarity and interdependence. Nonetheless, they create spaces for self-help, occasional collaboration, and mutual exchange by bringing people together and strengthening existing relationships. Overall, these practices show lower degrees of transformative potential (Figure 6.4).

By analyzing the degree of intentionality, it emerges that 59% of practices in Charlotte barely challenge capitalist relations (intentionality score 2). Although these collaborative practices produce a wide range of tangible and intangible benefits for local contexts, they are not driven by an intentional reflection on how to leverage already existing assets and address context-based constraints to purposefully contribute to the construction of diverse economic ecosystems. Additionally, 41% of the practices studied in Charlotte do not go beyond a medium degree of intentionality, hence, they are only implicitly informed by non-capitalist values and principles of solidarity, interdependence, and collaboration. Practices that have simultaneously a medium degree of intentionality (intentionality score 3) and a very high impact (impact score 5) rely on

these values to empower others by transferring important skills or providing them with resources to develop their own food-based economic practices. However, since these actions of empowerment are only implicitly informed by interdependence and solidarity, this aspect reduces the potential of creating a diverse economic ecosystem.

Practices transformative potential

From this analysis emerges that, in both urban areas, collaborative economic practices that are already transforming local contexts do not necessarily challenge capitalist relations. This aspect constrains the ability of these practices to detach from dominant ways of being, knowing, and doing and from a singular vision of the economic system. At the same time, defining practices' transformative potential by combining both their impact and degree of intentionality means recognizing the value of already existing worlds that are enacted by Latinx communities on a day-to-day basis. Moreover, this type of analysis is instrumental to conceptualize practices' transformative power on contexts as something evolving and not fixed and as something that can be enhanced by amplifying resources and reducing constraints, and by attending to power imbalances. The impact-intentionality diagrams analyzed above show that the same type of practices can have different degrees of transformative potential based on the relational links between practices and contexts, the impacts they produce, and their degree of intentionality.

As Figure 6.4 shows, when adding practices' impact and intentionality scores, we obtain a spectrum of practices variously positioned. This spectrum constitutes an analytical tool to identify spaces for intervention and to assemble and enhance the conditions to amplify practices' transformative potential to the highest degree. Practices with the lowest potential are limited by

Transformative Potential

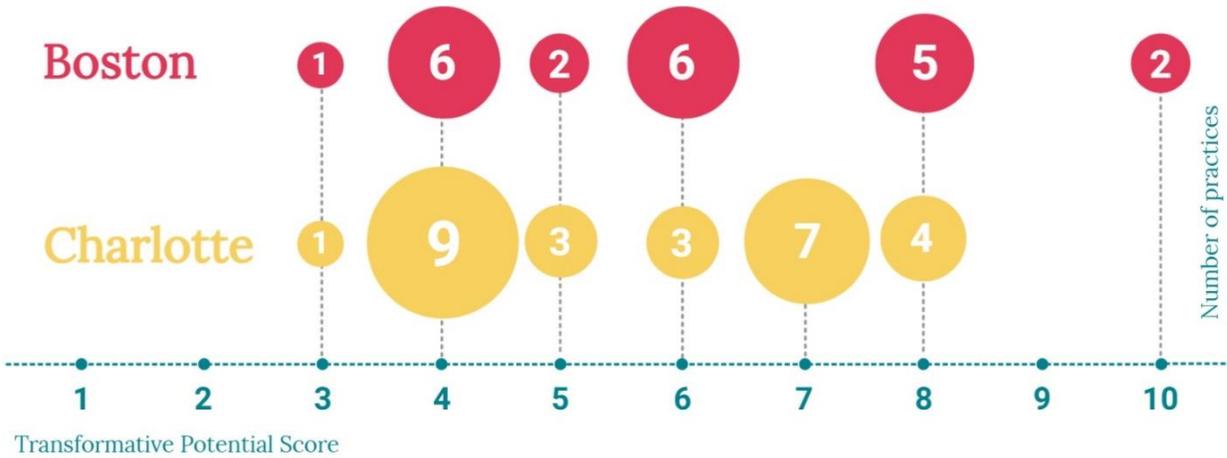


Figure 6.4 – Latinx food-based collaborative economic practices’ transformative potential

structural power imbalances, such as limited availability of resources, marginalization, health issues, and uncertainty in legal status. Practices with the highest transformative power are activated by individuals that, on the one hand, continuously reflect on the materialization of capitalist entanglements of power and engage others in the same process; and on the other hand, find ways to build practices challenging these power entanglements and advance a diverse vision of the economy centered on people’s well-being. Finally, advancing the conditions for practices to move across the spectrum towards the highest degrees of transformative potential requires an intentional enactment of different ways of being, knowing, and doing informed by values beyond the One-World World ontology.

6.4 Discussion

In this chapter, I rely on a relational ontology to argue that Latinx food-based collaborative economic practices are constructed by and construct economic, cultural, and social contexts in which they emerge. On the one hand, urban contexts are understood as the product of relational dynamics embracing multiple scales and as complex and diverse entities where multiplicity coexists. Migration patterns, urban restructuring, capital flows, and political, economic, and social climates conflate and materialize differently in established and newer immigrant destinations across the country defining the character of contexts of reception for migrant communities. Contexts of reception are never static nor complete, but continuously reconstructed by relational interactions of diverse, ongoing, and changing dynamics. This perspective creates room for opportunities and challenges the inexorability of capitalism. On the other hand, migrant communities in general, and Latinx communities in particular, are not passively subjected to systems of power and oppression determined by the relational interaction of multiscale dynamics. Rather, they interact with these dynamics transforming them. As I have argued throughout the dissertation, Latinx groups cross borders, often bringing with them knowledge, cultural traditions, and values of solidarity, cooperativism, and interdependence that become key in the new contexts and are passed through generations. Embedded knowledge alongside networks of support allows people to adjust, navigate, and survive in the new context, and often develop diverse collaborative practices. These practices are influenced by systems of resources and constraints stabilizing and/or destabilizing them, such as the type of urban landscape, access to transportation and other resources, dynamics of urban change, imbalances of power, and the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, or fostering the emergence of new practices. At the same time, Latinx individuals react

and adjust to the effects of context-related aspects that materialize differently in different migrant destinations and, in turn, contribute to shaping these urban contexts.

The relations between individuals, practices, and the context are continuously evolving and cannot be defined a priori, yet understanding their embedded characteristics means being able to identify spaces of intervention to amplify practices' transformative power. The analysis proposed in this chapter offers a snapshot of the wide variety of impacts produced by these practices in specific places at specific points in time. In fact, the different types of practices explored in this research co-construct contexts by transforming subjects, groups, and the context itself. At the individual level, through the development of food-based practices, Latinx maintain and recreate symbolic, material, and physical connections between Latinx geographies and geographies in Latin America. They do so by (1) maintaining and reproducing foodways, traditions, and connections with cultural roots in the new context; (2) developing networks of support and safety-nets that enable knowledge exchanges and subjects' empowerment; (3) by enacting new economic scenarios based on interdependence and solidarity, privileging people's well-being over profits, and reframing capitalist narratives around economic subjects.

At the collective level, Latinx rely on food to establish and expand networks of support that become crucial in times of crisis. These networks are often informed by solidarity, cooperativism, and, more importantly, interdependence. They are implicitly, or explicitly, driven by an orientation that leverages collective forms of agency to survive well together and create more equitable outcomes. The collective dimension reinforces the value of sharing, collaboration, and cooperation as key economic actions for the development of more sustainable and diverse economic ecosystems. The urban context itself is continually transformed through the enactment of diverse food-based economic practices. These practices diversify the economy, develop creative

solutions that start to challenge more structural problems, and assemble the conditions for the enactment of diverse ways of being, doing, and knowing. In short, collaborative and cooperative practices contribute to the construction of the city as a sharing space.

The analysis presented in this chapter ultimately challenges theorizations that assume migrant communities are powerless subjects, unless they successfully participate in the making of the capitalist economy, and locality is a powerless scale. These perspectives reinforce the existence of an all-encompassing reality and the persistence of One-World World ontology, and, in turn, silence transformative practices activated by Latinx communities. At the same time, through the development of impact-intentionality and transformative power analyses, I demonstrate that it is important to exercise some caution. As Loh and Shear (2022) have already noted, escaping the one-world ontology requires attending to already existing worlds and the entanglements of power co-constituting them. Therefore, the analysis of practices' intentionality and transformative power aims to start a dialogue on ways to support and enhance practices' transformative potential toward the creation of diverse economic ecosystems based on solidarity and interdependence. In this sense, relational investigations of practices in different urban areas allow us to learn from the diverse ways by which assemblages emerge, are stabilized, and assert their power in different contexts, under different and similar conditions, at different points in time. Learning from already existing worlds is important not only to identify potentially beneficial resources to support these practices in their contexts, but also to assemble more intentionally the conditions for new ones to emerge.

Chapter 7

Conclusions

This research relied on a relational comparative case study rooted in feminist postcolonial and poststructural perspectives and employing a mixed-method approach to seek answers to the overarching research question: *How are Latinx food-based collaborative economic practices influenced by and influencing different socio-economic and political structures as they emerge in and construct different urban contexts?* I sought answers to this multifaceted question by relying on in-depth interviews and concept and GIS mapping techniques in two contexts of study: Boston, MA, and Charlotte, NC. The employment of these methods was instrumental to address three sub-questions focusing on three distinct but overlapping dimensions of Latinx food-based diverse economic practices – individual, collective, and contextual.

The multifaceted answers found in this research and introduced in the previous chapters can be synthesized as follows. First, Latinx food-based diverse economic practices can be understood as networks of actors, objects, and environments assembled together through the enactment of diverse economic practices informed by values of solidarity and interdependence rooted in people's past experiences, backgrounds, and forms of identity. Through the in-depth analysis of axes of difference – primarily race and ethnicity – in relation to diverse economic practices, answers to my research questions demonstrate the centrality of Latinx individuals' forms of identity, past experiences, and cultural backgrounds in the emergence and development of diverse economic practices in the US (Chapter 4). These practices already enact, more or less intentionally, on a day-to-day basis a multiple worlds reality and escape the one-size fits all approach.

Second, theorizing diverse ethnic economic practices as assemblages reveals the importance of relational linkages connecting different non-nested scales and co-constructing socio-political and economic systems in different geographies (Chapter 5). Diverse worlds created in the United States are relationally linked to geographies at the regional, national, and international levels by assuming simultaneously spatially-bounded and heterolocal forms.

Third, the emergence and development of diverse food-based economic practices are influenced by context-related aspects and, vice versa, diverse practices influence the contexts in which they emerge and develop. Answers to my research questions substantiate theoretical interventions that challenge representations of the local scale as a powerless local dimension defined and confined by a powerful global dimension. As demonstrated in Chapter 6, Latinx diverse economic practices emerging in local contexts transform them by producing several impacts on other individuals, groups, and geographies. These answers emerge when capitalocentrism (Gibson-Graham, 1995) and the One-World World ontology (Law, 2015) are challenged and cease to be assumed as the only existing reality, and, in turn, the economy is understood as a diverse, situated, and contested realm constituted by multiplicity, heterogeneity, and plurality.

Ultimately, I conclude that the ontological and epistemological stance adopted in this research is instrumental to (a) conferring economic value to the enactment of diverse ways of being, knowing, and doing embodied by Latinx diverse economic practices assembled in different contexts and (b) identifying them as agents of transformation from which practitioners, policymakers, activists, and academics should learn in envisioning and building more sustainable economic scenarios. These economic scenarios should be built on an ontological politics that is about “imagining, building, fighting for, and defending the conditions from which we can realize

and embrace our interdependence with other people, beings, and planetary life systems” (Loh and Shear, 2022, p. 1209). Latinx diverse economic practices are already preparing the ground for the construction of more sustainable economic scenarios and an ontological politics. They are doing so by challenging in different, multiple, and, sometimes, contradictory ways capitalist relations and, ultimately, by demonstrating that capitalism is not an infinite and immutable system. This conclusion constitutes the synthesis of findings presented throughout the dissertation, key themes emerging, and the significance of the research.

7.2 Summary of the dissertation

To provide an in-depth exploratory analysis of Latinx food-based economic practices and their individual, collective, and contextual dimensions, this research brings together several bodies of scholarship to illuminate this understudied topic. Specifically, I started by relying on foundational and more recent diverse economies scholarship to argue in Chapter 4 the centrality that diverse ways of being, knowing, and doing rooted in Latinx individuals’ past experiences, cultural background, and forms of identity, have in the emergence and development of diverse economic practices in Boston and Charlotte. By interrogating the scale of the body, I demonstrate how Latinx individuals challenge similar stereotypical and monolithic understandings of ethnoracial categories emerging across geographies by relying on collaborations established around food. I also demonstrate how they challenge standard mainstream understandings of economic concepts – i.e., work, skills, and collaboration and cooperation – by foregrounding a plurality of meanings that, in turn, inform the emergence and development of diverse economic practices.

The theorization of diverse ways of being, knowing, and doing as enacted through diverse economic practices is the foundation for the network and spatial analyses presented in Chapter 5. In Chapter 5, I rely on assemblage thinking and relational conceptualizations of foodscapes to show how collaborative networks are spatially and organizationally assembled through the mundane enactment of diverse economic practices. Specifically, through the analysis of these networks, I demonstrate the importance of ethnic and non-ethnic food businesses, non-conventional food sources – i.e., food pantries and community gardens – and community organizations for the maintenance of diverse economic practices and, in turn, for the construction of ethnic foodscapes. I also demonstrate the centrality of the private space of the home as a site of economic production in the diverse ethnic networks studied in the Charlotte and Boston urban areas. The analysis of these networks also highlights the interconnected nature of systems of capitalist and non-capitalist production and, in turn, challenges the problematic and false binary divisions – i.e., capitalist/non-capitalist, formal/informal, and legal/illegal – characterizing standard understandings of the economy. Finally, by relying on assemblage thinking and theorizations of spatial forms of ethnic economies, in Chapter 5, I demonstrate the hybrid spatial forms of diverse networks as simultaneously spatially clustered and heterolocal in Boston, and more heterolocal in Charlotte, and the significant implications for theorizations of ethnic foodscapes. Networks assembled through the enactment of diverse economic practices connect geographies across different non-nested scales and, hence, are influenced by multiscale dynamics impacting these geographies.

Finally, in Chapter 6, I rely on relational conceptualizations of socio-spatial characteristics of diverse ethnic economic assemblages introduced in Chapter 5 to further theorize the relational co-construction of space and practices. By relying on relational conceptualizations of space and,

more specifically, urban space, in Chapter 6, I present a two-fold argument to demonstrate the mutually constitutive relationship existing between diverse economic practices and the contexts in which they emerge. On the one hand, I unpack the set of context-related constraints and resources that influence the emergence, development, and stability of diverse economic networks understood as assemblage in the making. These aspects are determined by relational interactions between multiscale dynamics such as migration patterns, urban restructuring, capital flows, and political, economic, and social climates that conflate and materialize in space and time defining the character of contexts of reception for migrant communities. On the other hand, I demonstrate the important impacts produced by diverse economic practices on individuals, groups, and contexts – maintenance of foodways, establishment of networks of support, and advancement of a different economic vision. I also underscore the importance of assessing the transformative power of diverse economic practices as determined by the interaction of the impacts produced and the degree of intentionality with which these practices challenge capitalist relations. The evaluation of practices’ transformative power opens room for interventions in support of existing practices and to assemble the conditions to develop an ontological politics of the pluriverse. These chapters taken together demonstrate the multifaceted nature of Latinx food-based diverse economic practices as assemblages in the making whose constitutive relationship cannot be determined prior to their enactment.

7.3 Emerging themes

Several themes emerged from this research, but three emerged in particular as overarching and significant: (1) the emergence and development of Latinx diverse collaborative economic practices in the United States is strictly linked to Latinx individuals’ identity, past experiences,

and cultural background; (2) these practices can be understood as assemblages in the making that connect geographies across different non-nested scales; and (3) these practices transform local contexts and challenge power imbalances produced by capitalist relations.

First, Latinx identities are mostly represented through stereotypical, monolithic, social and economic narratives in media, political, and academic realms. Through findings emerging from participants' perspectives, I show how they challenge these narratives by conferring a variety of meanings to, too-often narrowly interpreted, economic concepts. By replacing the dominant understanding of economic concepts with participants' marginalized perspectives, I show the plurality, heterogeneity, and multiplicity that stereotypical economic and social narratives conceal. Latinx multifaced, incomplete, transnational, and non-static identities are intimately related to the emergence and development of diverse collaborative economic practices already transforming local contexts. Therefore, by drawing on feminist scholarship, I have argued that the analysis of the individual dimension constitutes an important entry point to unravel this social and economic diversity and theorize about the role that axes of differences – in this case, race and ethnicity – have in the enactment of diverse economic practices in racial systems in the United States. In introducing this perspective, the intent of this research was not only to understand the intimate link between Latinx identities and the development of diverse economic practices as embedded in US society and ethnoracial systems, but also to understand them as indirectly but closely embedded in other cultural, economic, and social systems rooted in countries in Latin America. Therefore, this study of diverse economic practices enacted by transnational identities demonstrates the importance of adopting an economic and spatial lens that allows for understanding economic actors, economic identities, and economic relations as co-constructed across complex, non-nested, socio-spatial and cultural geographies. The emergence of this theme opens rooms to further

investigate the complex intersection of race and ethnicity with other axes of difference (e.g., gender) in the context of diverse collaborative economies. Although this study engages more explicitly with race and ethnicity, gendered dynamics have surfaced throughout the analysis of participants' stories. For instance, interpretations of economic concepts (e.g., work) have revealed gendered perspectives. Therefore, further investigation into the ways gendered is interpreted, experienced, and embodied on a day-to-day basis in the countries of origin and the United States can provide additional insights regarding the development of diverse collaborative economic practices.

The second overarching theme emerging from this research revealed the nature of diverse collaborative economic practices as assemblages in the making constituted through relational linkages across non-nested geographic scales. The analysis of the networks assembled through the enactment of diverse economic practices allows us to identify important nodes for the reproduction and stability of such practices without bounding the analysis *a priori* to specific scales and/or geographic boundaries. A network analysis that does not define a priori the type of socio-spatial relationship emerging between actors, objects, and contexts creates room to understand complex socio-spatial relationships that would be invisible to analyses adopting a pre-defined spatial lens of inquiry. In fact, the exploration of social and economic relations through a relational comparative case study provides important insights into the different materialization of similar economic relations developed through practices falling in the same category in the two contexts of study. Additionally, it underscores the complexity of relational linkages constructing local contexts and exceeding local boundaries to extend to geographies at the regional, national, and international scales. Therefore, the study of diverse economic realities in Charlotte and Boston substantiates relational theorizations of space by demonstrating that local contexts cannot be understood as static

or complete, but rather, as continuously reconstructed by relational interactions of diverse, ongoing, and changing dynamics. These aspects prompt questions about how to define economic landscapes, ethnic economies, and foodscapes when their constitutive socio-spatial relations extend across non-nested scales.

Finally, the third overarching theme emerging from this research reveals the existence of a mutually constitutive relationship between diverse collaborative economic practices and the contexts in which they emerge. By attending to the danger of a flat ontology assumed by assemblage thinking, through my analysis, I demonstrate the impact of some key context-related factors on diverse economic practices and the emergence of power imbalances in networks assembled through the enactment of these practices. At the same time, I draw on important theoretical interventions that refuse to assume the existence of an all-encompassing reality. This ontological stance has allowed me to unpack the important impacts that diverse collaborative economic practices produce more or less intentionally on individuals, groups, and the context. This analysis constitutes the first necessary step to challenge theorizations that assume the powerlessness of localities and ethnic minorities' agency in the face of global, powerful, multiscale dynamics reproducing systems of inequalities and marginalizing these groups. By recognizing the important impacts produced by the enactment of diverse ways of being, knowing, and doing in Boston and Charlotte, this research opens room for interventions in support of these practices and the creation of more sustainable economic ecosystems that assemble the conditions to enact an ontological politics of the pluriverse and allow communities to remake themselves.

Ultimately, the three overarching themes emerging from this dissertation research constitute a starting point to dismantle colonial boundaries, trace relational links across

geographies, and understand the plurality and diversity of the economy through marginalized perspectives usually excluded from western ontologies.

7.4 Significance of this research

This research is significant for the important contributions to geographic thought and, especially scholarship in diverse economies, ethnic economies in 21st century immigrant gateways, and food studies. By calling attention to the emergence and development of diverse ethnic economic practices in different urban contexts within the United States, it provides a more nuanced understanding of ethnic diverse economies as complex relational assemblages in the making, linking different geographies across non-nested hierarchical scales. In doing so, it contributes to scholarship on diverse economies by exploring the role of transnational identities as they pertain to the emergence and development of diverse economic practices in different contexts. This study aligns with more recent scholarship in this field that has started to challenge the absence of axes of difference and interrogate imbalances of power surfacing when those differences are considered (Bledsoe et al., 2022; Ferreira, 2022; Gordon-Nembhard, 2014; Hossein, 2017; Naylor and Thayer, 2022; Sweet, 2016). Specifically, this research contributes to scholarship on diverse economies by following the important intervention made by Sweet (2016) to place migrant Latinas within this framework. I extend her analysis to include the enactment of diverse economies in different contexts and interrogate the role of different forms of identity in the emergence and development of diverse economies in the US. Additionally, by drawing on synergies between diverse economies and assemblage thinking (for example, Sarmiento, 2017, 2020; Turker and Murphy, 2019), this research explicitly engages with relational conceptualizations of space to theorize about diverse ethnic economies' spatial forms and construction of landscapes. Finally, through analysis of

practices' impact, intentionality, and transformative power, I contribute to this scholarship by understanding the different ways diverse economic practices transform contexts and the potential ways they can be supported to assemble the conditions for an ontological politics of the pluriverse (Escobar, 2020; Law, 2015; Loh and Shear, 2022).

This research builds on the foundation created by the diverse economies framework that brings to light fractures undermining capitalism coherence and provides space to dignify existing heterogeneous economic practices in order to contribute to ethnic economic scholarship in geography. Specifically, this study challenges the underlining assumption of ethnic economic studies that assumes capitalism is an all-encompassing reality and, in turn, unpacks diverse economic practices as embedded in entanglements of capitalist and non-capitalist modes of production. Understandings of these complex entanglements underscore the impossibility of reducing economic relations to binary divisions such as formal/informal, capitalist/non-capitalist, legal/illegal, or other western dualisms. Hence, this research contributes to this scholarship by theorizing ethnic economic practices as networks materializing in space and time and constituted by relational linkages extending across non-nested geographies. This theorization opens room to create a dialogue around spatial forms of ethnic assemblages and methodological approaches to study them in 21st century immigrant gateways in the United States. More broadly, an in-depth analysis unpacking complex entanglements of multiscale dynamics, context-related aspects and specificities (i.e., regional and local), and diverse practices emerging in these contexts is key to challenging potential monolithic theorizations of immigrant destinations across the US. In fact, a relational comparison between an emerging immigrant destination and a more established one reveals similarities and differences that are specifically tied to the ways multiscale dynamics interact with regional and local characteristics and, in turn, materialize in space and time. It also

reveals the importance of context specificities (e.g., migrant settlement patterns, urban landscape, transportation, and so on) in the development of ethnic economic practices and their spatial and organizational characteristics. Therefore, relational comparative analyses help to theorize socio-economic dynamics in 21st century migrant destinations across the country without assuming homogenous characteristics for each type of migrant destination (e.g. emerging, traditional, etc.) and, more importantly, without assuming a hierarchical order of these localities along a scale that presumes a unilinear path of evolution from “emerging” to “established”.

This research also contributes to food studies by examining the construction of migrant foodscapes through the enactment of diverse ways of being, knowing, and doing. Specifically, it follows Jossart-Marcelli’s (2021) relational conceptualization of ethnic foodscapes and extends it to demonstrate the existence of complex relations between “ethnic” and “non-ethnic”, public and private, and visible and less visible key sites that contribute to forming relationships shaping foodscapes in different geographies. By demonstrating the prevalence of heterolocal connections and economic relations influencing the construction of foodscapes, especially in lower-density urban contexts, this study opens room to a dialogue that attends to the importance of linkages across geographies in the conceptualization of foodscapes.

Finally, this research produces nuanced understandings of day-to-day economic practices developed by Latinx communities in a new cultural context. These understandings are significant given the lack of data on migrant communities’ day-to-day economic practices, acts of solidarity and cooperativism, and networks of support created. As demonstrated throughout the dissertation, these practices and the networks assembled around these practices are invaluable resources for migrant communities to survive, navigate, and adjust to the new context, while maintaining strong relationships with their foodways, traditions, and cultural roots. By giving ontological value to

diverse economic practices enacted by Latinx individuals, it is possible to start reframing capitalist narratives around marginalized subjects deemed as non-economic actors. In fact, challenging the existence of capitalism as the only economic reality means also acknowledging the day-to-day contribution of these groups to societies in North America. In a time when activists and academics push to develop new and more sustainable economic scenarios, I build on Loh and Shear's claim to "learn from the worlds that are already existing beyond OWW [One-World World]" (2022, p. 1219) to argue that the different ways of being, knowing, and doing enacted by several Latinx individuals in Boston and Charlotte have a lot to teach us in the process of assembling the conditions for the enactment of an ontological politics of the pluriverse.

This research is also significant for its contribution to the work of non-academic communities fighting on a day-to-day basis to build more dignifying and sustainable economic scenarios, and policymakers for the support they can offer to those practices. Through this dissertation work, I carefully uncover the existence of assets in the community specifically tied to migrants' cultural backgrounds, past experiences, and forms of identities. I also unpack context-related aspects that influence the emergence and development of diverse economic practices. These findings constitute an entry point to develop concrete strategies in support of these types of practices and the creation of more sustainable economic ecosystems. This research can be used by policymakers in different ways. For example, it provides evidence that successful and stable economic practices can be activated by subjects who are usually identified as economically non-active (e.g., housewives, homeless individuals, etc.), hence this evidence can be used to reframe narratives around marginalized individuals, provide more adequate workforce development programs, and/or channel funding and identify resources needed to support, stabilize, and expand collaborative practices. Empowering these communities by supporting their economic practices is

key to diversifying the economy, constructing more resilient economic systems, and providing opportunities for upward mobility and collective well-being.

7.5 Future research

This exploratory study constitutes the ground for the development of future research that further unpacks the emergence of migrant communities' diverse economies in different contexts and identifies concrete strategies to connect already existing practices to form more resilient economic ecosystems and sustain the development of new practices informed by solidarity, interdependence, and cooperativism. This study is embedded in my broader personal and academic path that has always been concerned with engaged research and the relationships between theory and practice: how practice informs theory and, vice versa, how we develop theories that are useful, actionable, and support marginalized communities. Specifically, I have always been interested in community-engaged research that is able to contribute to the advancement of both academic and non-academic communities. Specifically, the strong feminist and postcolonial approach I bring to this research, alongside a commitment to theorizing from the margins by including marginalized voices, is instrumental to keep inquiring into practices excluded from mainstream, standard, western representations of the economy and transform dominant understandings. Research into this topic should also aim at developing concrete strategies that support current practices, create new ones, and develop diverse ecosystems. A systemic vision of the economy increases the capacity of ethnic minorities to resist systems of oppression deepening social inequalities. Within this systemic vision, I am particularly interested in the development of migrant foodscapes as determined by the assemblages of powerful and less powerful dynamics. In this context, I am concerned with understanding how can we intentionally connect diverse food-based practices to create more sustainable and resilient ethnic foodscapes and ecosystems.

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APPENDIX

INTERVIEW SCRIPT

Individual dimension

1. What is your age?
2. What is your country of origin?
3. When did you leave your country of origin?
4. Why did you come to the United States and, specifically, to Charlotte/Boston area?
5. For how long have you been in Charlotte/Boston area?
6. What is/are your current occupation/s?
- 6a. What was/were your occupation/s before leaving your country of origin?
7. What does *working* mean to you? If you have to explain what counts as *working*, what would that be? Can you give me some examples?
- 7a. What does *cooperation/collaboration* mean to you?
8. Can you tell me all the things that you do that revolve around food and involve collaboration with others?
9. Do you use food/recipes/traditions from your own country?
- 9b. Is it important for you to incorporate your traditions in your work and life in the United States? Why?
10. From where did you gain the knowledge you use for growing/cooking/preparing/distributing food?
- 10a. Is this knowledge/are these abilities connected in any way with your roots (e.g. life experiences, family, etc.)? If yes, how?
11. In the United States words such as Hispanic/Latino/Latina are usually used to identify people coming from countries in the Caribbean, Central America, South America, and Mexico, or US-born who share these countries' heritage. What does that mean for you?
- 11a. Does this 'label' influence your day-to-day basis?

Collective and spatial dimension

The next set of questions I am going to ask you explores the relationships with other people and places that are important for your daily economic activities. Some of the questions I will ask you will contribute to the creation of two maps, one concept map and one sketch map.

Concept map directions

The creation of this map will visualize the connections and relationships that take place to support your economic practice. I will ask you some questions that will help you think about the daily activities associated with your economic practice (e.g. places you go to buy food or foodstuff required, or to distribute food, etc.), and the other people you, or your collaborators, interact with through these daily actions. Together, we will progressively map the places and the people you interact with by placing them in a piece of paper and connecting them to one another. I will help you throughout the process and you do not need to worry about your drawing skills. No drawing skills are required for this task. In the end, we will have a visual representation of the connections between people and places related to your economic practice.

Sketch map directions and questions

While we map the relationships among subjects and places in the concept map, I will also help you to locate those in a base map of the neighborhood and the city area. We will identify and circle the places that are important for you and your collaborators in relation to the daily activities required by your economic practices (grocery stores, community centers, etc.), and the places you tend to avoid. This map will give us an idea about the spatial distribution of your activities in the neighborhood and the urban area, and the reasons behind this spatial distribution.

1. Do you collaborate with someone else to grow/cook/prepare/distribute food? (concept map)
 - 1a. If yes, how many other people are involved? Who are them? (concept map)
2. What is the nature of this collaboration? Is it formalized (e.g. business partnership) or is it an informal arrangement?
3. How did you know/meet the people you currently collaborate with?
 - 3a. For how long have you known them?
4. When did you decide to start collaborating with them? What motivated you to collaborate?

5. Can you tell me more about the development of your economic activity? When and how did the idea of developing this specific economic practice using food come about and how it evolved over time?
- 5a. Where does it mainly take place? (sketch map)
6. Can you tell me more about the roles of each one of the people involved? (concept map)
- 6a. How were those roles decided?
7. Where do you source your food/materials/things needed from? (concept map)
- 7a. Where or how far away are they located? (sketch map)
- 7c. How often do you access these places (daily, weekly, monthly)?
- 7d. How do you access these places? (sketch map)
8. How do you distribute/sell your final products?
- 8a. Besides the people you collaborate with every day to grow/cook/distribute food, do you collaborate with other people/vendors to distribute/sell your final products? If yes, how? (concept map)
- 8b. How do you know/did you meet these other people?
- 8c. Where or how far away are they located? (sketch map)
- 8d. How often do you meet them/distribute your products (daily, weekly, monthly)?
- 8e. How do you access people/places of distribution? (sketch map)
9. Is there any other place in the neighborhood/urban area important for your economic practice? If yes, what are those places (e.g. community centers, organizations, churches, etc.)?
- 9a. Where are those places located? (sketch map)
- 9b. Why these places are important?
10. Are there places you and your collaborators tend to avoid? If yes, why?
- 10a. Where are those places located? (sketch map)
- 10b. Are there people/places at the national or international scale that are important for your economic practice?
- 10c. Is there any other place that comes to your mind that we should add to the map?
11. How do you think collaborating with other people influences you personally?
- 11a. What are some benefits and/or limitations?

12. Do you offer support to other people through your economic practice (e.g. economic support to other economic activities, sharing goods with other people, donating food, selling food at cheaper rates, etc.)? If yes, how? Why?

13. Do you maintain any relationship with your region of origin through your economic activity (e.g. remittances, shipping food/foodstuff, etc.)? If yes, how? Why?

14. How has Covid-19 impacted what you do?

14a. How do you feel about it?

Contextual dimension

1. Do you think Charlotte/Boston is a good context to develop an economic practice such as yours? Why?

2. Do you think that would be different in a different context?

3. Would you define Charlotte/Boston as a welcoming place? Why?

4. Have you, or any of your collaborators, experienced discrimination, violence, or fear in carrying out the daily actions required to sustain the economic activity? If yes, would you like to share with me some of those episodes?

4a. How have these episodes influenced you personally and/or your economic activity?

5. How does the current political climate influence you and your economic activity on a day-to-day basis, if it does?

6. Do you think your economic activity contributes to the economy in Boston/Charlotte? If yes, how?

7. Are there any specific policies/programs in Charlotte/Boston that have been important for the development of your economic activity?

7a. Have you participated in any of these programs? If yes, which one?

8. What are your aspirations for the future? What would you like to do?

9. Is there anything else I should know?

10. Could you suggest other people I can talk to?

*Based on informants' responses, the researcher will ask follow-up questions.