



Reports

Journal Articles

Books

Blogs

Working Papers

Other
Publications



Gringolandia: Lifestyle Migration Under Late Capitalism was written by Matthew Hayes, Associate Professor of Sociology at St. Thomas University and published in 2018 by Minnesota University Press. The book explores global inequality through the 'lifestyle' migration of North Americans to the UNESCO heritage city of Cuenca, in the Ecuadorian highlands.

Gringolandia has gained a lot of traction over the last three years, both inside and outside academic circles. I spoke with Matthew Hayes recently about the conceptual tenets of the book and the impacts of some of the addressed migration processes.

RB: What is your book all about? What can you tell us, the readers?

MH: The book is about global inequality. What I'm looking at is the experience of North Americans who are migrating from Canada and the United States to Ecuador. Migration is organized in very unequal ways, but many of the forces that influence South to North migration are also important in North to South migration, especially economic inequalities and transformations in global capitalism. I started my research in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis. Americans moving to Ecuador are moving for economic reasons. When you ask people about why it is they're relocating, they often say: "Well, you know, we can afford a better quality of life." This was why most moved.

RB: Interesting indeed. But why should we specifically care about this?

MH: Well, I think that we should care about it because of how migration is being politicized. We should care about it because it is one way North Americans are trying to maintain material standards of living, especially in retirement, in spite of changes that are reducing economic security for many. We should care about it also because it has an effect in terms of increasing inequalities in the receiving communities.

RB: Can you talk more about that? What are the real material impacts of this kind of migration on places like Cuenca?

MH: The Ecuadorian government has tried to attract thousands of higher-income people to Cuenca, which, as a UNESCO World Heritage City, is a key asset for the government's attempt to increase tourism revenues. But those higher incomes have material affects in lower-income cities. One of the impacts that has most impressed me was how certain squares, in the historic district of Cuenca, were transformed. In the Andes, there are two types of squares—there's the Plaza de Armas, which is the main square that concentrates economic, religious and political power, and Cuenca has one of those in the center of the city—Parque Calderon. The Cathedral is there, the municipal government is there, the prefecture is there, there are some important families that own large historic buildings there. And

want to 'reclaim' as spaces for elite consumption. Plaza San Francisco was the center of popular circulations in the city—a space for everyone. And the recent renovation that's been done there potentially shifts that. It also displaced a third of the vendors. It remains to be seen whether it will continue to be a popular social space for people going forward.

RB: Is there a better way to do North-South migration, then? Is there a way to do it ethically?

MH: Well I suppose if people are relocating and thinking about how they could do it ethically, that might be a step in the right direction. But this is not really my focus, because the problem is structural and much bigger than what any one individual can be expected to tackle. My focus is on thinking about what this says about a closely integrated yet unequal global society of multiple migrations.

Americans identify with the economic benefits they get from moving to Ecuador. They want to live a better quality of life for less. They might not necessarily be privileged or have an economic advantage in North America, but even with an average social security monthly cheque of \$1400.00, that's twice the average income in Cuenca and it makes a big difference in terms of the local economy.

RB: Your book is written very differently from the regular migration book. I'm referring to the pictures, the ethnographic information... it seems that you enter some sort of cultural space. Could you talk a little bit about your approach?

MH: Yeah, I thought the best angle was to start with the people who are moving, to tell their stories, and to complicate them. For the most part, people were coming from different backgrounds, they had different motivations, but a large majority were migrating for economic reasons, to improve their material standard of living.

This exists in direct relation to migration of Latin Americans to the US and Canada, to fill low-skill and low-income jobs. These jobs support particular types of social relations from which many middle-class North Americans benefit. The people moving from the United States, a higher income country, to a lower income country in Latin America, are bringing economic resources that transform the place that they're moving to. Who benefits from these migrations? In both instances, Latin Americans from lower latitudes of the global division of labour end up in service roles, and there is a racial pattern to who does the work, and who appropriates, or benefits from it.

RB: One last question, where do you place the idea of whiteness in this transnational nexus?

MH: Most of the North Americans relocating to Cuenca are white, or would be read as white in Cuenca. They don't think of themselves as being migrants. They think of themselves oftentimes as being tourists, expats, or gringos, which is a reference to their racial difference. How do these distinctions index global hierarchies inherited from a colonial past? These hierarchies are reproduced in migration

Raluca Bejan is Assistant Professor in the School of Social Work at Dalhousie University, Halifax, Canada

COMPAS, School of Anthropology, University of Oxford, 58 Banbury Road, Oxford, OX2 6QS

T. +44 (0)1865 274 711
E. info@compas.ox.ac.uk

[Privacy](#) | [Terms & Conditions](#) | [Copyrights](#) | [Accessibility](#)



**Subscribe to
our newsletter**

(opens MailChimp in new window)

©2021 University of Oxford
Managed by REDBOT