Chapter 5
Comparative Notes on the Context of Reception and Immigrant Entrepreneurship in New York City, Washington, DC, El Paso, Barcelona, and Paris

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Abstract The chapter provides a comparison of immigrant businesses in different cities in the United States and Europe. The chapter draws from several projects conducted by the author. It compares small ethnic businesses in various neighborhoods in order to discuss general patterns and specific arrangements between immigrants and the rate and type of ventures that they start. This chapter shows how the way that different city governments and civil society receive and treat immigrants impacts their entrepreneurial behavior. One should be careful when generalizing about the innate business ability or the propensity of a particular race or ethnicity to engage in commerce or entrepreneurship. It also shows how often storefronts do not necessarily map with the majority of people living in a street or neighborhood.

Keywords Immigrant entrepreneurship · Urban revitalization · Ethnic enclaves · Economic survival · Making ends meet

5.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses the following questions: Are some immigrant groups more “entrepreneurial” than others? Why are some immigrants more likely to start businesses than others? Are immigrants with prior business experience more likely to succeed? Do immigrant businesses cause neighborhood revitalization and urban economic growth? What is the relationship between entrepreneurship, legal status, and categorical inequality? The chapter compares vignettes and trends in different cities to talk about general patterns and specific arrangements between immigrants and the type of businesses that they start. It shows how the way that different city governments and civil society receive and treat immigrants impacts their entrepreneurial behavior.

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Can immigrant entrepreneurship be talked about in general terms? Are there differences in entrepreneurial behavior by ethnic groups that could be attributed to their particular cultural practices? My answer to these two questions is a resounding no. Rather than stating a racist notion (as defined by Kendi 2019, p. 81) that a particular racial or ethnic group has a natural or cultural tendency to embark and succeed in business, I argue that immigrant and ethnic entrepreneurial behavior is conditional on the context where immigrants live. Opening a business or starting a company is often weighted against other possible options like being able to get a job or being able to get an education and climb the corporate or professional ladders. Varying opportunities are open to categorical groups at different times and places.

Dolores Trevizo and Mary Lopez co-authored a book on Mexican immigrant entrepreneurs in Los Angeles that examines the social ecology of small-scale ethnic firms in twenty distinct Mexican neighborhoods in Los Angeles. It shows how neighborhood characteristics affect the business outcomes of previously unauthorized Mexican immigrant business owners. They show the clear, but rarely mentioned, fact that poor neighborhoods limit the growth of small businesses within them (Trevizo and Lopez 2018, 15). Nonetheless, small businesses may thrive in distinct types of neighborhoods despite blocked opportunities. They analyze how the rise of the new immigration enforcement interacted with a restructured L.A. economy. They find that increased competition in the low-wage market, along with increased discrimination and immigration enforcement, pushed some Mexican immigrants to turn to entrepreneurship at higher rates in the last 25 years as compared to any other point in their long history as labor migrants. Attaining Legal Permanent Residence allowed many immigrants to start business ventures. The faster they can attain legal status, the better for their entrepreneurial success. They find that “even poor Mexican immigrants whose class backgrounds in Mexico imparted an entrepreneurial disposition can achieve a modicum of business success” (Trevizo and Lopez 2018, 2–3) if their businesses are located in the right neighborhoods. These are important findings for the literature on immigrant entrepreneurship, showing that immigrant outcomes are not tied to ethnicity but rather to the legal and economic environment in which immigrants act.

A classic example of exclusionary contexts shaping ethnic entrepreneurial behavior is the case of many Jewish men getting into moneylending, banking, and currency trade in European cities during the early middle ages, at the time when the Catholic church viewed charging interest as usury and thus sinful, a notion present in parts of Islam today. Vedic law disallowed it, as well as the new and old testaments in passages such as, “Do not charge a fellow Israelite interest” (Mayyasi 2017).

Around the year 800, Emperor Charlemagne made usury illegal in his lands (Mayyasi 2017). Meanwhile, Jews in Venice were segregated into ghettos by law (Hutchison and Haynes 2012; Castañeda 2012). These independent processes combined unexpectedly, because of their marginal status and stigma as non-Christians, some Jews took on trades as merchants, bankers, and moneylenders. This does not mean that only Jews lent money in Medieval Europe. For example, in the years leading to the renaissance, Catholic families like the Medici in Florence became influential bankers (Padgett and Ansell 1993). So, entrepreneurship is not so much
related to “race,” religion, or culture but rather to social position and opportunities available to make a living.

Trust networks are “interpersonal connections, consisting mainly of strong ties, within which people set valued, consequential, long-term resources and enterprises at risk to the malfeasance, mistakes, or failures of others” (Tilly 2005b, p. 12). Research shows how historically, trust networks were vital to conduct local and long-distance lending and borrowing. Co-ethnic and co-religious ties (Tilly 2005b), as well as ties by marriage and commerce, facilitated economic exchanges as well as the accumulation of wealth, information, and power among certain families and associates (Padgett and Ansell 1993). These historical dynamics are still useful to understand immigrant and ethnic minority entrepreneurship and labor participation today.

5.2 American Segregation

The forced concentration of Jews into ghettos in urban areas due to discrimination, exploitation, and violence created the old ghettos of Europe. In America today, the concept is often used to describe urban African-American communities. Yet the causes are the same: discrimination, violence, and exploitation in the form of racist policies and practices such as redlining, blockbusting, and racial covenants. Decades of policies producing segregation (Massey and Denton 1993; Massey 2007) have made many people conflate urban spaces with high concentrations of minorities with racial stereotypes. Therefore, creating stigmatized places considered dangerous and undesirable to live in or visit (e.g., see Castañeda 2012).

Some urban thinkers are still influenced by simplifications and popularizations of the Chicago School of Urban Sociology, where racial, ethnic, and urban populations for the most part mapped neatly into neighborhoods in Chicago in the early twentieth century (Park and Burgess [1925] 2019). The human ecological models of the Chicago School of Urban Sociology saw ethnic neighborhoods as fulfilling a particular function (e.g., supplying low-cost labor) within a broader urban ecosystem. In this ecological model, ethnic groups were continually competing for resources and creating spaces where they would dominate. Robert E. Park wrote about “immigrant colonies” in Chicago as “moral regions” determined by the country of origin with their specific values, languages, newspapers, and traditional forms of socialization (Park 1915). These observations resulted in a theoretical, and then methodological, reification of a particular neighborhood as mainly housing one ethnic or racial community (Logan et al. 2011). Thus, many important urban ethnographies describe intra-ethnic relations, sometimes along with conflicts with mainstream society, but keep in the background cohabitation and cooperation with other groups.

Nevertheless, in reality, many diverse and mixed-income neighborhoods challenge this assumption of homogenous communities. In America, this supposed homogeneity is imaginable because of the building and planning of brand new urban and suburban areas, along with a long history of black exclusion and segregation, white
flight, and unequal public school funding mechanisms in place. However, old central areas in cities in Europe and America change more organically and defy any simple objective characterizations.

5.3 Chinatowns and Cuban Ethnic Enclaves

Chinatowns and Urban Enclaves are two other examples of immigrant communities and immigrant business constellations that have had an enormous impact on the literature on immigrant spaces and entrepreneurial activity in the city. One paradigmatic case is that of the Chinatown in American cities, particularly New York’s. In the ideo-typical Chinatown, a small circumscribed area of the central city, where everybody living there is assumed to be Chinese and also where all the businesses and restaurants are believed to be Chinese-owned, employ Chinese workers, and serve Chinese food. Chinatowns are also often touristy areas, and these neighborhoods purposely showcase their Chinese character in the streets. This cultural stamp on space is further reinforced and enacted during parades and cultural celebrations around, for example, the Chinese New Year. Therefore, the public could be justified in thinking of Chinatowns as the primary residence of Chinese immigrants in the city. These public displays would also seem to some as evidence that the Chinese self-segregate and refuse to integrate. However, academic research on Chinatowns paints a more nuanced picture (Zhou 1992). Chinatowns are more like rivers rather than pools; people pass through them (Acolin and Vitiello 2018). The actual individuals living and working in a Chinatown today are different from those ten years ago. As networks switch, they may even come from different parts of China than those coming ten years ago, or even from different parts of Asia (Luk and Phan 2005). As soon as Chinese families make enough money, they move out to the suburbs or to desirable areas in that city. The children and grandchildren of these first-generation immigrants have no problems learning English and adopting American culture. Chinatowns are places of arrival, launch pads into the larger city and country. This general characterization also applies to “Little Italy” neighborhoods. Still, while Italian immigration to the United States has decreased over time, migration from China and other parts of Asia has increased since 1965. Currently, Asians are the fastest-growing ethnic group in the United States (Budiman et al. 2019).

Another influential concept is that of the “ethnic enclave” (Wilson and Portes 1980; Gold 2015; Portes and Manning 2018), which stands for a high concentration of immigrants living in a large urban area demanding and sustaining many immigrant businesses. This model makes a direct connection between immigrant and ethnic residential segregation and immigrant businesses. This ideal type is what Catalan geographer, Pau Serra del Pozo calls a “monoethnic centrality,” where most or all residents and entrepreneurs of a neighborhood have the same ethnic or national origin (Serra del Pozo 2018). However, this seldom happens; in fact, Portes and Shafer (2007) restrict the actual examples of the ethnic enclave to the Cuban enclave of Little Havana in Miami and New York’s Chinatown. Miami is over 66% Hispanic,
so very different dynamics are in place (Portes and Armony 2018) than in cities where
non-Hispanic Whites are the majority. Chinatowns in other cities like Washington, DC are much more diverse than the one in New York City.

Furthermore, it is important to note that entrepreneurship rates also vary within
ethnic groups. For example,

the original advantage conferred on entrepreneurs by the Cuban enclave did not extend to
post-1980 arrivals… This lack of success was not for lack of trying among recent arrivals…
First, pre-Mariel Cubans were the most entrepreneurial group, with a rate significantly higher
than even non-Hispanic whites. This result accords with the historical role of this group
as builders of the original enclave. Second, Mariel and post-Mariel Cubans were strongly
inclined to follow that route, with self-employment rates not significantly lower than non-
Hispanic whites. However, as just seen, their efforts did not pay off”. (Portes and Armony
2018, 115)

Portes and Armony discuss the importance of local support of “first-mover advan-
tage.” Political refugees from Cuba were welcomed with open arms by Miami and
U.S. laws. Early Cubans were given start-up “character loans” based on their reputa-
tion in Cuba (Portes and Armony 2018, p. 104). As we will see, the success of
ethnic businesses is not determined by an individual entrepreneurial spirit but by
serendipity and a conducive environment.

### 5.4 Methodology

The notes below come from my observations while conducting surveys, interviews,
and ethnographic research on immigration and urban dynamics while living in all
these cities since 2003 (Castañeda 2018a, 2018b, 2019; Castañeda et al. 2014, 2015;
Lachica et al. 2014). Immigrant businesses are but one of the many byproducts
of immigrant life. In order to understand the role that immigrant businesses play
it is useful to put them in the context of larger migration process and dynamics
across whole metropolitan areas. Comparisons across ethnic groups are also useful
to not essentialize certain practices. Placing immigrant entrepreneurship in a broader
context allows seeing what differentiates immigrant entrepreneurs from nonbusiness-
owing migrants. The descriptions provided are not meant to be exhaustive but use
a comparative methodology to identify a few of the dynamics that are either rather
unique to a location or shared across them. All this in order to inform a more general
and nuanced theory about immigrant entrepreneurship.

### 5.5 New York

New York would not be what it is without the waves of outsiders passing through
the city and settling in over hundreds of years (Foner 2013). Like many other global
cities, New York City is a commercial and financial hub, and it is also an immigrant
city. According to the U.S. Census in 2018, 37.2% of New Yorkers are foreign-born (U.S. Census 2019). Only 32% are non-Hispanic whites, which includes Jewish and Middle Eastern people. In other words, 68% of the population is Latin, Black, Asian, etc. But are 68% of businesses minority-owned? No. From the Census, we gather that in 2012, there were 1,050,911 firms in New York City of which, 539,447 were minority-owned, and 483,136 were nonminority-owned firms. In other words, 51% of New York firms are minority-owned. There are essential differences in business size and ethno-racial ownership. Still, this shows the vast importance that immigrants have not only as a cheap labor force and as a highly qualified workforce at the highest scientific and technical skill levels but also as entrepreneurs (see image 1 for a recognition of this by city officials). Another vital role that foreign-born individuals play in cities like New York, London, Paris, Miami, and Vancouver is as investors in businesses and increasingly real state. Global cities are a magnet for migrants and capital from other parts (Sassen 2001; Portes and Armony 2018) (Fig. 5.1).

The Irish, Italian, and Jewish influence in New York is undeniable. There are areas in Brooklyn, Washington Heights, and throughout New Jersey that house orthodox Jewish communities, including businesses selling to those inside and outside the community. There is not an Irish neighborhood identified as such in New York today. How about Italians? The “Little Italy” of Manhattan has been shrinking in the past few decades. In the 1950s, in New Jersey, landscaping companies were owned and

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**Fig. 5.1** A poster in New York City reads “Immigrants Mean Business.” Photo by Castañeda © 2019
staffed by Italians (Tilly 1998). Today some companies are still owned by Italians, but many workers are from Latin America. On the West Coast, these jobs are primarily dominated by people of Mexican-origin. Another example of entrepreneurial and urban succession is Arthur Avenue, the Little Italy of the Bronx, one of the largest Italian neighborhoods in New York. It still has many Italian restaurants, stores, and markets for all budgets. But most of the staff has now become Albanian (Krase 2006; Kosta 2014). Most people from outside the area going out for Italian food there are not aware of this reality and differentiate these businesses with Italian names and decor from the restaurants and stores that are openly Albanian or Mexican.

Social networks, business niche crowding by an immigrant group, and forced segregation produce ethnic stereotypes about the economic role they play in a city (Castañeda 2012, 2018c). In New York, employers in the food, retail, and construction sectors see Mexican workers as reliable, hardworking, docile, and inexpensive. Because of this, they are the go-to population for kitchen staff and busboys, but not necessarily as servers and hosts (Thompson 2007). Therefore, low skilled Mexican and Latin American immigrants arriving in New York City can get low-paying jobs quickly. In contrast, Koreans, Africans, and other immigrants have a much harder time getting hired. Because of this, researchers have found that Koreans are more likely to start small businesses (Min 2008). This pattern is not because Korean immigrants in New York are “naturally” more entrepreneurial than Mexicans, or because they are better at running small grocery stores, but because the bottom of the labor market is largely closed to them. At the same time, Mexican immigrants may be less likely to start businesses for non-Mexican customers because it is easier for them to find a job, which allows them to send remittances home, the reason why many came to New York in the first place (Castañeda 2013). Most immigrants do not migrate to start small business per se but to make a living. If making a living requires entrepreneurship, they will give it a try (Oral History Project 2019).

Many contemporary tourist guides and websites advertise East Harlem, also known as El Barrio, as Manhattan’s Mexican town (see Fig. 5.2). While there is a growing number of Mexican businesses in the area, it is wrong to assume that most Mexicans in the New York metropolitan area live in that neighborhood or that most residents in the neighborhood are Mexican or Puerto Rican. As I discuss elsewhere, both claims are wrong empirically (Castañeda et al. 2015; Castañeda 2019, 165–183). Mexicans live and work throughout the New York City metropolitan area. El Barrio is very diverse, and the majority of residents are neither Puerto Rican nor Mexican. According to the 2018 American Community Survey, 46% of East Harlem residents are Hispanic, 27% Black, 16% White, and 7% Asian. Overall, 24.4% of El Barrio residents were born abroad, and 39% of households speak some Spanish, which means that the majority of the residents are US-born and English-speaking (ACS 2018).

Successful Mexican businesspeople exist in New York outside of El Barrio (see Fig. 5.3). For example, Mexicans throughout the metropolitan area own businesses in the garment industry, tortilla manufacturing, import/export businesses, and local newspapers. All of these have been hugely successful, and their impact is palpable in the community and immigrant organizations (Castañeda 2020, forthcoming).
Successful businesspeople in New York City are also the key players in the ethnic leadership in the city, speaking for working-class immigrants and having good relationships with mestizo elites in the New York professional sphere as well with local politicians. Yet, small corner stores, delis, and ethnic restaurants in New York City are often opened by immigrants from relatively humble backgrounds, who had little to no business experience before migrating. The situation is different among recent migrant business communities in El Paso, Texas.

5.6 El Paso

Like previous entrepreneurs who arrived in America as refugees escaping the pogroms in Russia, the holocaust in Germany, dictatorships in Latin America, and a myriad of ethnic and political conflicts around the world, many business owners and professionals fled Ciudad Juarez and northern Mexico in large part due to the rise of insecurity brought about by the armed conflict between state forces and members of narco-trafficking groups (Campbell 2009). The cities of El Paso and Ciudad Juarez have always been connected by international bridges, commerce, people, and culture.
Yet, the current Mexican war against drug cartels is changing the migration and crossing patterns in the border region. The people who can immigrate legally to El Paso are the ones who are bringing investments, new jobs, and opportunities to the city. Other professionals would have been denied asylum, so they had to move without papers. Nevertheless, they brought considerable experience and some cash to buy houses or start small businesses despite a constant fear of deportation (Castañeda 2019). The war against drug cartels is negatively affecting the economy of Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua, but it is indirectly helping the economy of El Paso, Texas. The 2007 recession did not hit El Paso partly because its real estate market was not a bubble and because many Mexican entrepreneurs were moving their families and businesses to El Paso. This was an instance of many times when a considerable number of upper-middle and upper-class Mexicans seek refuge and new opportunities in the United States. They bring important economic resources, entrepreneurial spirit, and business know-how. Unfortunately, migration by manual labor force has attracted more media and academic attention than this equally prevalent case of immigrants involved in businesses who have fortified, refueled, and propelled American growth and innovation for centuries. Yet, local policies matter in hampering or facilitating success. Like other immigrants, immigrant entrepreneurs had to go through a process of adaptation into a new linguistic, legal, and business culture. Indeed, soon after the
expensive construction and set up, many restaurants and businesses had to close due to issues with compliance with local rules and practices, or a difficulty marketing the products and services in a new context.

At the height of the violence in Ciudad Juarez due to the militarization of the drug war, a group calling itself *La Red*, which means “network” in Spanish, appeared in El Paso. *La Red* had the explicit purpose of creating a network of businesspeople to form alliances between recent newcomers from Mexico, who brought capital and expertise in conducting business to the city of El Paso. *La Red* had an active role in the media, claiming that it provided practical help to Mexican businesspeople as well as a political voice and inclusion into El Paso. Its members had been successful in opening several businesses and restaurants that increased product offers and created jobs. This helped El Paso avoid what otherwise would have been significant adverse effects from the 2008 economic crisis.

El Paso is over 80% Hispanic overall. New immigrants do open businesses, but the most established businesses in working-class neighborhoods are owned by U.S.-born Mexican-Americans. Those businesses in middle-class areas are owned by Anglos or by national and transnational chains and companies. The many businesses opened by recent upper-middle-class immigrants with business experience in Mexico contrast with the other types of businesses. These restaurants often replicated popular restaurants in Ciudad Juarez that catered to the middle classes there. However, the cost of living in El Paso, increased immigration enforcement, and trauma-related to either escaping and surviving the drug war resulted in different entertainment practices among middle-class Mexicans in Mexico and the U.S. (Castañeda 2019, pp. 147–163). In the U.S., customers earned in dollars, and the food was relatively cheaper in relation to the minimum wage. Nonetheless, many of the Mexican-Americans or less wealthy Mexicans were not as attracted to these restaurants with upscale Mexican cuisine focused on service with a classist atmosphere. Therefore, many of these businesses made less money than their counterparts in Mexico, struggled to stay open, and closed after losing dozens of thousands of dollars. Some even complained that *La Red* did not provide enough support or even gave wrong information about local regulations while demanding high consultancy fees acting in a predatory fashion. An exception to this trend of closures and reopenings were Mexican businesses focused on northern Mexican fast food (e.g., Tacotote, and Burritos Crisostomo), they had been expanding before the security and economic crises in the El Paso del Norte Region, and they kept the original branches open on the Mexican side of the border.

### 5.7 Washington, DC

Along Columbia Pike in Arlington, Virginia, one can find a multitude of immigrant businesses. Within a few miles along this road, one can go from a national monument, the Air Force Memorial, to Ethiopian businesses, followed by large buildings, condos, and then businesses owned by White Americans selling ethnic foods, to Thai restaurants and stores owned by Thai people, to martial arts schools owned
by and employing workers of various nationalities including Koreans, Mongolians, Nepalese, and Brazilians. There are also several Latin businesses mainly owned by Central Americans and catering to both the immigrant and non-immigrant costumers, as well as a popular Mexican restaurant owned by David Villalobos, a Mexican man who used to run a taco truck.

Therefore, this is a diverse area where many 1st or 2nd generation immigrants are patrons of businesses run by and for people from their home countries. They are also clients of locals owned by other immigrants, as well as of U.S. local, chains and franchise businesses that exist in an all-American city close to the Pentagon.

These businesses provide the economic heart of this small area. It is not a dense area when compared to New York, Paris, or Barcelona, but is denser than what one often has in mind when using the word suburban. Immigrant and ethnic businesses cohabit with large national chains, a couple of hipster joints, old Irish-run Irish bars, Korean liquor stores, large grocery chains, and franchise gas stations. Many places cater to the general population. Others are mainly hangouts of regulars and rarely visited by others. Many have multiethnic clientele, but others mainly serve a particular diaspora. For example, an Ethiopian restaurant and café is a place where Ethiopian people come together often. One can see taxicabs next to luxury cars parked outside. Inside, one can see owners, waiters, and staff warmly welcoming and saluting the costumers with big smiles and frequent hugs and kisses. People chat for a relatively long time and catch up with life. It is clear that people know and support each other. This immigrant business, in addition to playing the role of selling food and coffee, also plays the role of creating and sustaining social capital and creating community in the full sense of the term (Collins 2010). It creates community among immigrants from both Ethiopia and Eritrea living in Arlington and the greater Washington area. The place serves a close-by residential immigrant concentration. It also brings people living across the region in contact with each other as they consume high-quality home food and buy nostalgic products to remind them of their homeland. This is a business like the ones formed in ethnic enclaves to cater to the diaspora and satisfy its culinary and cultural needs. However, Ethiopians are not the majority in the surrounding area. While there is a considerable number of them, they live in highly diverse neighborhoods throughout the region. Businesses like this are clustered in different parts of the Washington metropolitan area, some further north in Arlington, some closer to Alexandria, Virginia, others in Maryland.

An interesting effect of the strong diversity and relative lack of density in Arlington, Virginia, is shown when members of certain communities patronize the stores and restaurants of other countries and cultures. For instance, Ethiopian and Eritrean immigrants abroad looking for spicy food to cook often go to Middle Eastern stores to buy spices, and to Indian restaurants to eat food closer to the way they eat. But in the DC metropolitan area, these diasporas can go to restaurants that sell their home foods. There are a couple of strip malls in Arlington that are full of Ethiopian businesses catering to this group. People from Montgomery County, Maryland, will travel to the area to eat and talk to others from their home country in their native language. Furthermore, not only do these communities patronize the business of other communities, but the communities meld and mix. The bakery and café next door in
this small strip mall complex is mainly frequented by Ethiopians and staffed by them too, but many of the people working inside the bakery are from Latin America. The contact is so frequent that some of the Ethiopian staff now speak Spanish.

Like the Ethiopian diaspora in the Washington region, Salvadorans have businesses in the area that also work as information hubs for some Salvadorans and other Latinos. But this does not mean that all Latinos, or Salvadorans in the area, patronize a particular business or are even aware of all of them. The Arlington Business District is happy to showcase how their support for an immigrant business made a small Mexican restaurant, District Taco, into a growing and thriving local chain restaurant. Osiris Hoil, a Mexican immigrant from Yucatan, was laid off from his job during the Recession and partnered with his neighbor Marc Wallace to start a food truck, which has since grown into a 13-location restaurant chain throughout the DC metro area and Pennsylvania (District Taco 2020). Hoil’s success is due to his entrepreneurial spirit and also the surrounding communities’ support and embrace of his restaurant offerings.

Gentrification is happening in South Arlington. As real estate prices keep increasing, some immigrants and working-class people have left for cheaper areas further away from DC. But the rental of relatively low-cost housing continues for many, and the immigrants who bought their houses years ago do not have plans or a need to leave the community. This makes the city rather diverse both in terms of race, ethnicity, and citizenship status but also social class, with many upper-middle-class whites, along with many working-class immigrants, and a few in between living next to each other. Nonetheless, the cost of living keeps increasing. While some displaced businesses have been able to go from taco trucks and informal shops to larger restaurants (see image 4), other businesses may close (Fig. 5.4).

In DC, like in El Paso and many other American cities, nail salons are often owned and operated by Vietnamese immigrants (Kang 2010). This is not something related to Vietnamese culture, but it is probably the result of a few successful early Vietnamese entrepreneurs in this sector who then helped others in their network to start similar businesses. An example of what I call business cloning (Castañeda 2013), with the advantage that these businesses are spread across urban areas, therefore not directly competing with each other. Indeed according to a documentary maker Adele Free Pham (Garcia-Navarro 2010), in 1975, following the end of the Vietnam War, actress Tippi Hedren was helping a group of twenty Vietnamese women refugees getting settled in the United States. After they showed interest in her nails, she and her manicurist Dusty Coots taught them how to do nails as it was done in Beverly Hills. As they say, the rest is history.

5.8 Barcelona

Barcelona has become an important destination for international migrants in recent decades (Castañeda 2018b). Internal and international migration have been vital to keeping the Catalan economy as one of the strongest in the Iberian Peninsula. As
Catalan human geographer Pau Serra del Pozo has documented amply, immigrants from Pakistan, China, the Philippines, and Morocco have taken vacant storefronts and revitalized central urban neighborhoods that faced economic difficulties for years, and in which many local businesses had closed their doors (Serra del Pozo 2006). He talks about how groups of immigrant businesses in Spain are sometimes given the derisive name of “commercial ghettos” (see Fig. 5.5). Contrary to narratives that portray migrants as burdens on local and national economies, migrants bring revenue into otherwise vacant commercial spaces (Serra del Pozo 2018, p. 166). There are some “ethnic-business association[s]” in Catalonia that aim to integrate immigrant businesses with native ones, but it is hard to measure how programs like these affect relationships between the groups (2017, p. 162).

Serra also writes about how, throughout the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona (MAB), “immigrant concentrations do not follow the monoethnic rationale: foreign residents of a single citizenship rarely accounted for more than 50% of the total number of residents in the MAB census tracts in 2012. Nor are all businesses in any neighborhood in the MAB owned by foreigners of the same citizenship or ethnic background” (Serra del Pozo 2018, p. 143). No area in Barcelona was populated by either Spanish, Catalan, or foreign-born people exclusively. Thus, there is always diversity, even in neighborhoods that are perceived as primarily inhabited by a particular ethnicity.
By looking at the relationship between foreign residents and the number of locutorios, places to make inexpensive long-distance calls, in Barcelona, Serra del Pozo finds that these “multiethnic centralities are associated with a large multiethnic population in a neighborhood (about one-third and one-half of the total population) to which ethnic entrepreneurs have to supply products and specific services” (2018, p. 157). The question of whether foreign-owned businesses influence the concentration of ethnicities is complicated. Serra del Pozo finds there to be “a positive correlation between the number of foreign residents and the number of businesses owned by foreign entrepreneurs” (2018, p. 163), but other variables such as housing that is affordable to foreign residents should be taken into account. For example, the increase in rents, and the spread of mobile phones and data service over Wi-Fi may soon drive many locutorios and internet cafes out of business.

Chinese owners have dominated the 1-dollar shops locally called bazares. In Spain, the stereotypes associated with Asians are opposite from those in America and Canada, where they are seen as hardworking, disciplined, and good students (Portes et al. 2016). There is some tension between businesses owned by locals and Chinese immigrants in some areas of Barcelona with a long tradition of cloth manufacturing where some companies owned by Spanish individuals are still operating.

An exciting twist is how particular trust networks of Pakistanis from Punjab, who often previously worked and started businesses in Sri Lanka and other places around
the world, now dominate the tourist gift shops of Barcelona as well as many of the
traditional restaurants in tourist areas including along the famous La Rambla and
close to La Sagrada Familia. South Asian immigrants have started a new market in
Spanish streets that of offering single beers and six-packs in the streets. This practice
has now extended to other European cities, including Paris.

Mexican restaurants have been in vogue in the last years (see Fig. 5.6). Moroccan
fast food places in the Raval are popular mainly with North African visitors and immi-
grants (see Fig. 5.7). This short discussion of some immigrant entrepreneurial activity
in Barcelona further illustrates the nuance and variation in immigrant businesses and
entrepreneurship across cities.

5.9 Paris

Many people associate immigration to Paris with the banlieues, which are neighbor-
hoods outside the city center that have historically housed the working class coming
from other parts of France and the world to work in the industries located in the city
(Castañeda 2012). Yet, the reality is that immigrants live, work, and have businesses
across Paris, and not just in these areas.

In contrast to ethnic restaurants in New York or other global cities in Paris, many
“whole in the wall” restaurants owned by immigrants and serving ethnic food are
less likely to be patronized by the French. Instead, they cater mainly to that ethnic
group, same with stores selling foods and products from other countries.

People may think that Faubourg-Saint-Denis is the heart of the South Asian
Diaspora in Paris because of the large number of Desi (Southeast Asian) immi-
grant businesses (see Figs. 5.8, 5.9 and 5.10). The reality is that despite a large
number of storefronts of this type, most residents of the area are not Southeast
Asians, and most Southeast Asians do not live in that particular neighborhood. So,
while they may travel there to work, consume, or socialize, the neighborhood is not
an ethnic enclave or ghetto. The majority of Southeast Asians there are not from
India, nor English speakers as many Parisians may have guessed when thinking of
former British colonies. Many of the Desi people in the area are from Sri Lanka and
particularly of the Tamil ethnicity.

This is the same way in which some people exaggerate the concentration of North
African residents in the neighborhood of Barbès because of the number of Algerian
restaurants and stores, even though most North Africans live throughout the Parisian
metropolitan area. It is true that some neighborhoods are so expensive, for example,
those next to the Champs Elysees, that they are only affordable by transnational
corporations, the wealthy Parisians, embassies, as well as rich foreigners who invest
their money in buying houses and apartments in trendy neighborhoods of global
cities. Indeed, a key type of immigrant entrepreneurship across the cities discussed
in this chapter as well as in London or Vancouver is those helping foreigners with
the paperwork to buy real state and open bank accounts in these cities.
Fig. 5.6 Professional Mexican immigrants own and work in Mezcalería El Pachuco in downtown Barcelona. When I visited in 2017 and 2018 it was a meeting point for local progressive youth, as well as professional Mexican, Italian, and American expats. Castañeda © 2017
Other Parisian neighborhoods have more working-class residents and thus more minorities, while some are gentrifying like those neighborhoods around Place de la République or Bastille. A well-known and relatively celebrated multicultural diversity is present in Belle-Ville, a traditional working-class neighborhood in the east of Paris. In the last decades, Belle-Ville has been the home and location of businesses owned by Muslim North Africans, Chinese, and Jewish populations that live close to each other along with local students and residents. Diversity is a reality of any city despite the framings of city branding campaigns, tourist guidebooks, and media representations.

5.10 Cross-Case Discussion

Initially, immigrant groups will settle in particular destinations because of historical influences such as colonialism or labor recruitment. Migration literature has established the importance of chain migration, family reunification, and social networks in fostering migration between particular sites (Aguilera 2003; Massey et al. 1993; Massey 1990; Tilly and Brown 1967). This cumulative concentration of people from the same hometown in the same cities and neighborhoods often results in
Fig. 5.8  Store in Faubourg-Saint-Denis. As the picture shows despite a large number of Tamil and Southeast Asian businesses and products, the population in the area is very diverse. Castañeda © 2019

centrations in niche jobs, occupations, and worksites (Massey et al. 1987; Tilly 1998, 2005a). However, this does not mean there is a desire to self-segregate or a lack of desire to integrate into mainstream institutions. Nor does it mean that this residential and occupational segregation will continue forever. Concentration is just a step in the early arrival and integration of a particular group in a city. Settled immigrants and their children become local ethnics, and depending on local dynamics, they may become racialized by others for generations, or they may merge with native populations and eventually disappear as a distinct ethnic group. Some of their ethnic foods and practices will become those of the mainstream.

A few commonalities appear from these brief discussions of the immigrant entrepreneurial landscapes in each of these cities:

1. Neighborhood diversity is much more common than homogeneity.
2. There is nothing intrinsic to a group being better at business than another. While Chinese immigrants may be successful entrepreneurs and achieve social mobility in America, that is not always the case in Spain (Portes et al. 2016). While Pakistanis and South Asian first-generation immigrants may have been
Parisian authorities sometimes discourage ethnic clothing stores to be close to each other, but it is easier to get permits to sell music; therefore many businesses have “music” or “music label” in their ethnic names while they sell many more products beyond ethnic music CDs. Castañeda © 2019
Fig. 5.10 African-owned business Pala Pala Music in Barbès/Goutte d’Or, 18ème Arrondissement Paris. This photo was taken with permission by Castañeda © 2019
seen primarily as working-class in the United Kingdom, in Barcelona (Serra del Pozo 2018) and New York (Chaudhary 2017), many are highly successful entrepreneurs. While Mexicans are largely seen as cheap and unskilled labor in New York, in Barcelona, they are largely professionals and treated as individuals (Castañeda 2018b). But appearances deceive, most immigrant and refugee flows included people from different class backgrounds and education levels. The stereotypes attributed to these groups tend to do more with average class and education levels than—as commonly justified—with religion, culture, or race.

3. While walking is key to understanding urban dynamics and can be used as a method to understand a city (Brown and Shortell 2015; Castañeda et al. 2015; Helmreich 2015). Yet, without any other data and historical context, walking can also lead to many misreadings about the social dynamics of a city and particularly about the residential composition of a particular neighborhood. When walking in an ethnic area, one sees business signs and minorities in the street may stand out, but unless one talks to local people, workers, and business owners, one cannot be sure that the store signs match the population.

4. New immigrants often move into low-income neighborhoods with high levels of crime because rent is lower than in other areas. The immigrant revitalization theory argues that neighborhoods with high immigrant populations experience economic revitalization and a reduction in violent crime (Martinez et al. 2010). Vélez (2009) analyzed data from 786 census tracts in Chicago, homicide rates, and recent immigrant concentration from 1993 to 1995 and found that immigrants revitalize neighborhoods by developing strong ties to families, clergy, social service providers, and officials, allowing them to generate social control. They help “reinvigorate an ethnic enclave economy” (p. 327), providing social capital for the residents through creating businesses. Velez finds that immigration “reinvigorates local economic opportunity structures and social networks” and revitalizes the neighborhood (p. 325) and that the arrival of new immigrants in an area with concentrated disadvantage reduces the number of homicides in those areas. Much other research shows how increased immigration does not increase crime but actually may reduce it (Castañeda and Chiappetta 2020). Immigrants are not just good for the economy of the city by allowing for continued growth (Castañeda 2018c), but they also open businesses offering new foods, products, services, and experiences, as well as revitalizing struggling neighborhoods and making them safer by providing further economic activity and population density (Çaglar and Glick Schiller 2018; Serra del Pozo 2018).

One can sometimes make anecdotal, geospatial, or statistical correlations between immigrant groups and particular business niches, sectors, or neighborhoods. Nonetheless, these findings are more often the result of happenstance and historical precedents, rather than the unavoidable division of labor through objective characteristics of a particular categorical group or network (Castañeda 2018a).
5.11 Conclusions

I will now provide preliminary answers to the questions that opened the chapter:

*Are some immigrant groups more “entrepreneurial” than others?*

No, entrepreneurship is not part of any culture or religious group at large. The same ethnic group may have different entrepreneurial behavior in different countries or cities. Small businesses can help each other grow, so trust networks can lead a specific subset of an immigrant or ethno-racial minority community to be successful in a particular profession or business niche. Stereotypes about that group may arise from that concentration. However, these specializations in specific products or activities are the result of social networks, opportunity hoarding, and exclusion rather than of cultural or intrinsic characteristics.

*Why are some immigrants more likely to start businesses than others?*

There is no biological tendency for entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship is not about having a strong work ethic, more discipline, or better values. Circumstantial conditions lead some to employment, freelancing, homecare, or running a business. For every successful business, there is at least another one that did not succeed (Hannan and Freeman 1989; Aldrich 2009).

*Are immigrants with prior business experience more likely to succeed?*

The research from Los Angeles seems to indicate this (Trevizo and Lopez 2018). Some of the most successful entrepreneurs in New York, El Paso, and Barcelona, had previous business experience in their countries of origin. A few large successful companies started by immigrants attract the attention of journalists and scholars, but most businesses are small and shortlived. Overall, very few micro-business and restaurant owners had a business degree, much less an MBA. The majority of small business owners had no prior business experience and just jumped at an opportunity.

*Do immigrant businesses cause neighborhood revitalization and urban economic growth?*

Yes, an increase in immigrants, means an increase in population, an increase in income, and an increase in consumer demand. Small community businesses offer goods and services for immigrants, including basic goods as well as products familiar to them. Population increase is fundamental for economic growth in capitalist systems. When populations reproduce below replacement rates, migration is the only way to maintain or increase population-size. This repopulation revitalizes neighborhoods that previously had high vacancy-rates and boarded-up houses and storefronts.
What is the relationship between entrepreneurship, legal status, and categorical inequality?

Many undocumented people are entrepreneurs, but having papers and legal certainty helps with business plans and securing loans beyond trust networks and ethnic enclaves. Groups that are susceptible to deportation, police brutality, larceny, or expropriation will often lose the wealth created by savings and successful business in favor of the majority group. Thereby, reproducing categorical inequalities where minority business exits in a less secure environment that those owned by citizens of the majority group. Historically this is particularly true for businesses owned by African-Americans. Thus, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic may be larger for small immigrant and minority-owned businesses than for those with access to banks, lawyers, and lobbyists.

Can immigrant entrepreneurship be talked about in general terms?

No, there are many local nuances and particularities that shape the degree of entrepreneurial activity that immigrants can engage with. Comparative research allows us to see what is unique about a particular market or metropolitan area. The capital and the strength of social networks of a particular group will impact its ability to start, patronize, and sustain businesses. The way that different city governments and civil society receive and treat immigrants also impacts their entrepreneurial behavior.

In conclusion, immigrant businesses are relevant because—by their nature—they are self-sustaining. They support the livelihoods of the families owning them and their employees. Therefore, they provide avenues for integration and social mobility for new residents and citizens who otherwise could have been unemployed or struggling in low-paying jobs (Agius Vallejo 2012). Unfortunately, not all immigrants—or citizens for that matter—can be business owners, so it is unrealistic to expect or demand this behavior for all immigrant groups or individuals.

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