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Place Attachment and Habitus in a City and Its Suburbs—The Case of Immigrants in the Merrimack Valley of Massachusetts

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ABSTRACT

Despite the fact that recent studies have shown that suburbia is growing more varied in terms of class and ethnicity, raising issues of belonging and identity, it has rarely focused on immigrants' social (dis-) mobility and effects on place attachment. Using a Bourdieusian perspective regarding people's habitus, this study examines the formation of local identities and place attachment among Latinx immigrants (first and second-generation) from Massachusetts' Merrimack Valley. The study examines how immigrants of various socioeconomic realities express their habitus and adapt it to their urban and suburban communities of residence. The 28 in-depth interviews of the study indicate how the sets of interviewees claimed to feel both at ease in and alienated from their current communities, demonstrating that the habitus was more than just a reflection of the informants' social reality. This reveals how the connection between residential area and habitus emerges locally and is only partial for both groups studied. Habitus in this regard is more than just a particularized variation of the social structure in each sort of settlement. The findings highlight the need to carefully consider the many social class disparities that explain place identity and belonging, as well as their effects on people of minority ethnicity immigrants' assimilation in receiving cultures.

1 | Introduction

Two major forces reshaping modern cities are suburbanization and migration (Keil 2017; WEF World Economic Forum 2017). Despite recent literature documenting that suburbia is becoming more diverse in terms of class and ethnicity (Keil 2017), a global perspective indicates that suburban areas continue to attract people who want to demonstrate their improved social standing (Bacqué et al. 2014; Duncan and Duncan 2004). However, the "spatialization of class," as Savage (2010, p. 115) refers to this process of social differentiation, has shaken people's notions of belonging to the community they live in, or their place attachment (Benson 2014). When certain migrant groups or minorities succeed socially while others in the community fall behind, these outcomes might be more pronounced (Vallejo 2012). In this study, an individual's emotional connection to a specific location is referred to as "place attachment" (Lu et al. 2023) or belonging (Benson 2014). Since scale is a distinguishing feature of place (e.g., house, building, neighborhood, city), it follows that attachment to a particular location might emerge at different geographical scales (Lewicka 2011). While there is extensive literature on immigrants' neighborhood engagement and place attachment, there is limited research on their host city attachment (Lin et al. 2021).

Previous studies have linked belonging to social class (Butler and Robson 2003; Israel 2021). However, evidence indicates that minority immigrants preserve their ethnic identity, despite their exposure to the prevailing culture of the host country (Abutbul Selinger and Shnider 2022). This finding necessitates further investigation into the factors influencing place identity and attachment. Particular attention must be paid to the distinctions between minority immigrants residing in an impoverished host city and immigrants who previously lived there (i.e., as impoverished children), but due to upward social mobility, opted to relocate to more affluent suburbs on the outskirts of the city. The literature frequently neglects to address the distinctions between these two groups of immigrants, particularly concerning the relationship between place attachment—formed by each group in relation to their current and former residences—and their respective class identities. This paper adds to the existing research on this subject. To do so, we examined the residential choices of first and second-generation Latinx immigrants in the city of Lawrence, Massachusetts and its suburbs particularly with regard to their social class and the changes in their social class.

Building on Bourdieu (1985) concept of social space, we show that the choices about settlement revolve around issues such as housing, schooling, and parenthood (Benson 2014). A settlement is regarded as a distinct location with its own interests and conflicts. The analysis of our 28 in-depth interviews indicates that place attachment among immigrants from the same pan-ethnic group varies based on their social class habitus. On one hand, there are lower-class Latinx immigrants who reside in the city of Lawrence. We explore how their sense of place attachment and identity intersect with their social class to shape their perceptions of the city. On the other hand, there are middle-class Latinx immigrants who have moved to some of the city's wealthy suburbs. Here we investigate how their attachment to and identity with the suburb shapes their view of their current place of residence in light of their past place of residence in the city of Lawrence and considering their improved social standing.

Our study contributes to the literature on class mobility and belonging in three distinct ways. First, we push the boundaries of studies that explore the issues of place identity and class distinction. Rather than focusing on the familiar struggles of the White middle class in European–American spatial frameworks (e.g., Bacqué et al. 2015; Israel 2021), we investigate an aspect of pan-ethnicity that has received less attention in urban sociology and population geography—the function of place in shaping class identities. Second, by focusing on the experiences of first and second-generation Latinx migrants in the US we attempt to go beyond the persistent contrasts with class relations among native-born groups. Past research typically focuses on native-born communities in developed countries, their social mobility and sometimes, regional differentiation. Rather than analyzing the well-known examples anew, we concentrate on an understudied segment—the varying social classes of first and second-generation minority immigrants. On one hand, by pointing to the links between the lower and middle classes and their habitus, we challenge the traditional conceptualization of the distinction between cities and their suburbs. On the other hand, examining class mobility within the context of people's migrations broadens the scope of inquiry with regard to residential choice and class identity. Third, contemporary research on place attachment inadequately captures migrants' firsthand perceptions of the city and the mechanisms affecting attachment across multiple scales (Lu et al. 2023). To fill this gap in the literature we analyze the perspectives of minority immigrants who choose to live in a city and those who move to its suburbs.

The paper includes six sections. The second section presents the theoretical underpinnings of the concepts of place attachment and Bourdieusian belonging and migration, and accounts for Latinx suburbanization. The third section deals with the study's conceptual model and methodology. The fourth and fifth sections discuss the findings about belonging among Latinx immigrants in Lawrence and it suburbs. The sixth section is the conclusion.

2 | Theoretical Underpinnings

2.1 | Place Attachment, Mobility, and Bourdieusian Belonging

Geographical studies of place identity and attachment have been ongoing since the late 1980s (Gilmartin 2008). Although the claims of those such as of Diener and Hagen (2022) that this area of study has received little attention seem exaggerated, there does appear to be a dearth of research on the topic of place attachment and identity among city-dwelling first- and second-generation immigrants. Researchers such as Phillips and Robinson (2015) have acknowledged the impact of geographical scale on immigrants' identity. However, in accordance with the Chicago School, most studies have focused on the importance of the neighborhood in this regard (e.g., Kohlbacher et al. 2015). Nevertheless, an increasing amount of literature in population geography has argued about the need to consider the geographical scale when conducting research. For example, using five location scales (i.e., apartment, building, neighborhood, city district, and city), Lewicka (2010) demonstrated that neighborhood attachment differs from city attachment and has a U-shaped relationship with attachment levels. Hidalgo and Hernández (2001) claimed that neighborhood attachment is the weakest. Recently, Lu et al. (2023) noted that, while researchers have compared the intensity of attachment to different location scales, they have usually neglected to investigate the factors that influence attachment in these different scales. Thus, there are few studies of attachment to the city scale, particularly concerning the connection immigrants have with their host city and how place attachment is formed (Hernández et al. 2007; Lin et al. 2021).

Residential mobility and attachment seem to contradict residents' place connection. Mobility limits the creation of social bonds and individual engagement (Altman and Low 1992). However, as mobility is an inherent aspect of human experience, place attachment is invariably prone to change (Gustafson 2001; Tuan 1980). Seeing place attachment as a process rather than a fixed concept (Antonsich 2010; Scannell and Gifford 2010) highlights how individuals' mobility fosters attachments associated with the numerous locales where they

have resided, worked, and visited (Bailey et al. 2021; Gustafson 2014). Migrants might live physically in one place but be emotionally or socially anchored in another (Ralph and Staeheli 2011). Their experiences of belonging are deeply shaped by both emotional ties to places, people, and culture and legal and economic integration. Even when migrants obtain legal status or citizenship, their sense of full social belonging may remain elusive due to cultural barriers, racial exclusion, or identity-based boundaries (Antonsich 2010). Identities are thus hybrid, dynamic, non-fixed or homogeneous. Belonging becomes negotiable (Phillips and Robinson 2015) and involves both continuity and rupture. Migrants maintain their old attachments (Antonsich 2010; Ralph and Staeheli 2011) and/or adapt to new cultural and political environments, spatially entrenched by everyday practices of homemaking, emotional connection, and community participation (Gilmartin 2008). Diener and Hagen (2022) have observed that geographers are in a position to enhance our understanding of place attachment as a process related to location selection.

Here Bourdieusian ideas of belonging allow us to study such aspects of people's identities through their choice of residence (Remennick 2022). Savage et al. (2005) noted that, "... residential space is a key arena in which people define their social position. [O]ne's residence is a crucial, possibly the crucial, identifier of who you are" (p. 207). Places are where people build their social and cultural capital (Ropert and Di Masso 2021; Savage et al. 2018). In contrast, economic capital, accrued via employment and property investments (Benson 2014), enables people to move to culturally desirable neighborhoods and display their social status and identity, meaning their symbolic capital (Simpson et al. 2022). The accumulation of economic, social, and cultural capital has a strong influence on where one lives (Boterman et al. 2018), because the lack of capital "chains one to a place" (Bourdieu 1999, p. 127).

Residential mobilities reveal how identities are constructed geographically (Israel 2021). Thus, a settlement, like any other social field, places people in a social class purely through the recognition of their status by others. This mechanism is referred to as "structuration" (Giddens 1984, p. 376). It explains the mutual influence of social structure and individual behavior, or what is known as habitus in Bourdieusian terms.

A sense of belonging results from the dynamic interaction between one's place of living (i.e., the settlement as a field) and one's habitus (Shani 2021). The habitus is the manifestation of people's internalized economic, cultural, and social capital. People may feel at home in areas where their habitus suit their position in the social space (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p. 128). Nevertheless, individuals may experience feelings of rejection even if such a match is supposedly achieved. They may feel alienated from a place even in places they once called home. Belonging in this regard is a product of both inclusion and exclusion that is subjectively and socially constructed (Antonsich 2010). Migrants' sense of belonging involves personal identification with a place but also hinges on whether others recognize and accept them as members of the community (Ralph and Staeheli 2011). Indeed, middle-class minorities might not feel at home where they live because they face stereotyping and animosity from the established middle class (Bonilla-Silva 2009; Tuan and Shiao 2011). Perceived and actual barriers then marginalize these middle-class minority groups, reinforcing their ethnic identities (Abutbul Selinger and Shnider 2022).

2.2 | Suburbanization and Migrants' Transformation of Habitus

The middle-class flight from urban areas in North America, Europe, and other global contexts is regarded as a move to places that provide people with better circumstances (Lutz and Iannaccone 1978), places that have symbolic attributes consistent with people's self-concept (Sadalla and Sheets 1993), and places that maintain or enhance people's self-esteem (Tajfel 1982). Suburbs and other distinctive enclaves develop when people "have the cultural capital to appreciate the aesthetics... and the financial capital to buy into it" (Zukin 2009, p. 87). These are places where they feel comfortable with their neighbors (Watt 2009), thus establishing homogenous living conditions (Israel 2021; Williamson 2010).

In contrast, scholars have used the term "white flight" to describe the middle class's exit from cities and "disaffiliation" (Atkinson 2006) and sense of "selective belonging" (Watt 2009) to explain how places define both the people who live in them and those who live outside them. Savage et al. (2005) used the term "elective belonging" to denote moral ownership over the places that middle-class actors claim through their ability to choose where to live. This ability gives them a positive identity as members of a group of "people like us" (Hauge and Kolstad 2007; Jackson and Benson 2014).

As a manifestation of a person's habitus, belonging (place attachment) has been theoretically described as being in a state of perpetual motion in which the habitus changes over time and space (Benson 2014; Walker 2011). Tastes and dispositions notwithstanding, individuals' social or spatial trajectories express themselves in their habitus (Walker 2011). People live in places that are "congruent with their lives" (Savage et al. 2005, p. 203). Thus, previous encounters with places shape people's preferences for particular locations (Cho 2021), as well as the meaning that residents of these places ascribe to them (Clark 2009).

Migration research has underscored the point that a shift in habitus may come about as a result of a change in habitat (Oliver and O'Reilly 2010). Material needs and familial and community goals from "back home" affect new immigrants' destinations (Radogna 2019). By emphasizing the ability to enjoy old objects, Bourdieu (1986) demonstrated the continuous importance of the old–new split. This Bourdieusian differentiation helps explain how the concept of habitus as an earlier experience (the old) results in the frequent discomfort that migrants feel in host cultures (the new). It is a mismatch between the habitus of those moving and the field represented by the host society (Marshall and Foster 2002). As a hysteresis, when people's learned habitus remains behind in new settings and environments, it causes discomfort until they re-adapt (Bourdieu 1992). Thus, by studying how first and second-generation migrants' habitus changes in response to new environments, researchers could help devise effective methods for

helping them adjust to new places without discounting the importance of the migrants' culture (Radogna 2019; Schmalzbauer 2014).

Identities and attachments may be related to physical space and the ability to move between variegated forms of settlements. Moving to a suburban environment with fewer "third places" (coffee shops, bakeries, and community centers) may reduce group interaction (Lacy 2004). Suburban residents frequently need cars. Therefore, social encounters are scheduled and usually involve like-group members, minimizing the chance of spontaneous interactions with different groups. In contrast, denser urban areas may provide more amenities that enable consistent social contacts across different groups (Souleles 2018).

It is often impossible for people to move, so they try to modify their neighborhoods in their own image (see Benson and Jackson 2013). Living in a neighborhood may result in developing feelings for the place. As Feijten et al. (2008) argued, "Having lived in a place may also change the awareness of and attitudes towards the type of residential environment it offers" (p. 142). Thus, people can engage in place-making actions that create a fit between themselves and their residential location (Benson and Jackson 2013). They emplace themselves (Shani 2021) or claim moral ownership over their places of residence by investing them with positive value (Watt 2009), thus fitting their habitus to their place of residence (Cutts and Widdop 2017).

2.3 | US Latinx Assimilation, Suburbanization, and (Place-)Identity

The Latinx community in the US is the country's largest ethnic minority, accounting for nearly 20% of its population.[1] In comparison to prior studies that focused on the racialization and stigmatization of African Americans by the wealthy White middle class in terms of the divide between cities and suburbs, research on the Latinx community is in its early stages (Lewis-McCoy et al. 2023). Like other (pan-)ethnic groups, first-generation Latinx immigrants initially tended to reside in major metropolitan areas, where they faced segregation and marginalization (Hernandez et al. 2015; Sandoval-Strausz 2019). Nonetheless, research shows that their upward mobility has increased in the past decades (e.g., Bathia et al. 2023; Tran and Valdez 2017). One aspect of this development is evident in the shift towards distinct suburbs (Sandoval-Strausz 2019; Vallejo 2012). This pattern is unsurprising, given the fast-paced transformation of the conventional suburb as a shelter for wealthy White middle-to-upper class people (Lewis-McCoy et al. 2023; Niedt and Christophers 2016). For some Latinx people, suburbanization symbolizes sociocultural integration into American culture (Alba et al. 1999; Carpio et al. 2011; Farrell 2016) that overcomes the racism and exclusion that have prevented wealthier Latinx from moving to wealthier suburbs (Bulut 2018; Carpio et al. 2011). Such moves might raise concerns about identity (Tuttle 2022). For example, Vallejo (2012) demonstrated that working class and lower-middle class Mexican Americans are more likely to identify as Mexican Americans, whereas those in the middle class often identify as White.

Discrepancies in education also create tensions within Latinx groups and jeopardize their cohesiveness (Mallet and Pinto-Coelho 2018). Interestingly, Logan et al. (2002) found that Mexicans and Cubans are more likely to live in ethnically distinct communities in the suburbs of New York City and Los Angeles. Furthermore, these (pan-)ethnic enclaves often have higher incomes and lower poverty rates than city neighborhoods.

Crime associated with immigrants has severely damaged the sense of belonging to a place, despite claims of ownership of the neighborhood (Tuttle 2022). However, owning a business in Latinx neighborhoods leads to a sense of community and a positive self-identity (Betancur and Smith 2016; Grief 2009). Fernández-Kelly (2008) examined the habitus of poor Latinx immigrants, demonstrating how education, remembrance of nation, and ancestry play an important role in children's protective behavior against downward mobility. Others distance themselves from their peer community members, viewing them as an impediment to their own social growth (Lavariega Monforti and Sanchez 2010; Ochoa 2000).

3 | Method

3.1 | Theoretical Setting: Place Attachment and Fitting Habitus to Location of Residence

Figure 1 illustrates our study's framework, which is based on a 3-factor perspective for understanding place attachment (Scannell and Gifford 2010). It acknowledges that belonging (a component of place) is established by the connection between habitus and field (a component of person) and is always in transition (an aspect of process). The location of an individual within a social space is reflected in the various forms and scales of the places to which they are attached. The concept of process pertains to the manner in which a location acquires significance and the subsequent effects on individuals. It develops as a result of significant experiences that are associated with people's personal characteristics and the characteristics of the location. Thus, the process of mobility in Figure 1 refers to the social and spatial transitions that individuals experience. It demonstrates how, at the group level—be it cultural or religious—place attachment imparts analogous symbolic meanings to a location due to the shared history, values, symbols, beliefs, or practices of group members (Gilmartin 2008; Scannell and Gifford 2010).

We maintain that for minority immigrants who reside in a host country, the spatial sense of being poor or moving into the middle class does not reflect a straightforward situation in which they conform to their class status. Rather, the match between first and second-generation migrants and their residence is "locally emergent and only partial" (Shani 2021, p. 19). Thus, minority immigrants are not just a localized variation of the social structure of the places in which they live. They also reflect the changes in tastes and attitudes (habitus) towards the places in which they live, both past and present (Gilmartin 2008). The urban–suburban split and the resulting socioeconomic inequalities provide a framework for studying place attachment and habitus transformation within the context of the migratory projects of a cultural minority.

We also consider two layers: national and metropolitan. The national comprises migrants who assimilate into the host

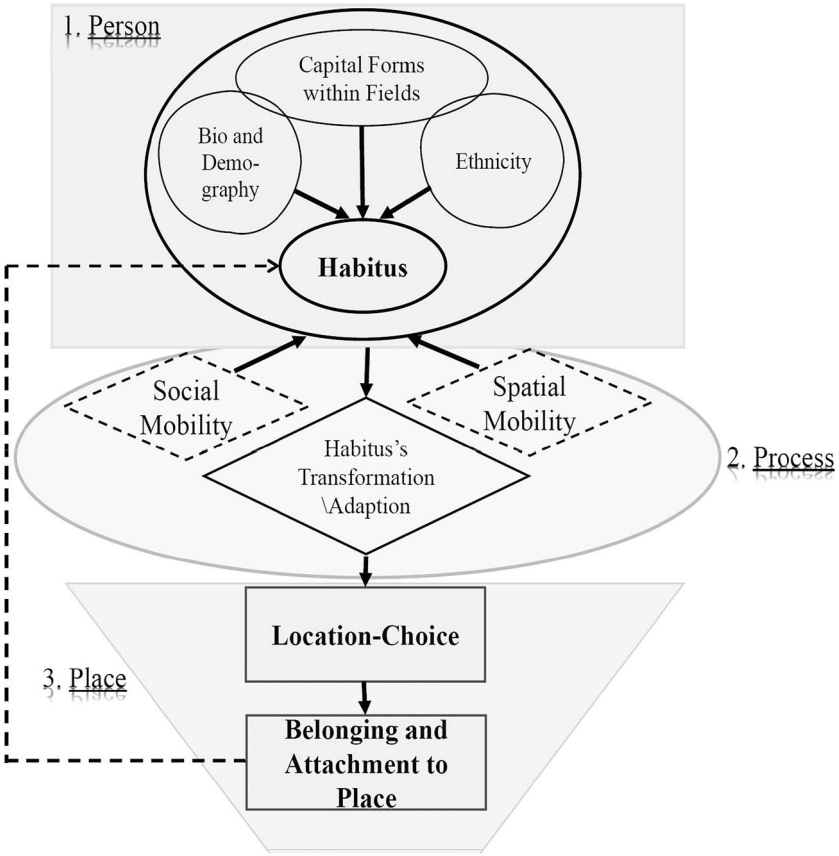

FIGURE 1 | Conceptual framework.

society while acknowledging the significance of their countries of origin. The metropolitan layer refers to migrants from the lower and emerging middle classes in the host country who successfully assimilate into the urban and suburban societies there, while still acknowledging the impact of their original ethnic communities where they initially settled during their migration project. Both layers are useful in understanding and delving into the mechanism of the discomfort that immigrants experience in host societies (Radogna 2019). This discomfort is due to the mismatch between the migrants' habitus acquired in their sending societies and the field represented by the host society, whether at the national or urban–suburban level.

3.2 | The Study's Region

We explored the study's framework using the test case of Latinx immigrants residing in the city of Lawrence, Massachusetts, and its neighboring suburbs (Figure 2).

Lawrence was a prominent industrial hub in the early 20th century. By the middle of the century, it had already begun a rapid economic decline (Cope 1998). Contemporary Lawrence is surrounded by smaller and less densely populated towns, such as Andover, North Andover, Boxford, Dracut, Haverhill, Methuen, and Salem (Appendix B). Today, Lawrence is one of the postindustrial areas known as "forgotten cities" (Hoyt and Leroux 2007) that have been left behind by the global economy. The city's economic crisis coincided with the move of affluent White residents to the suburbs (Barber 2017).

Most Latinx (im)migrants to Lawrence came from Puerto Rico[2] and the Dominican Republic starting in the 1980s (Andors 1999; Barber 2017). As of today, approximately 80% of Lawrence's population is Hispanic or Latino, compared to much lower percentages in the nearby suburbs. These differences have been evident since the 1970s. During this period, the suburbs outside Boston were experiencing "a period of accelerated and almost uninterrupted growth" (MCAD and USCCR 1975), leading to racial divisions, as "virtually none of the new housing stock in Boston's suburbs was made available to minority citizens despite evidence of discrimination in housing" (p. 17).

Lawrence's population has much less wealth than suburban middle-class households; hence, for many Latinx in Lawrence, the suburban ideal remains unattainable. Lawrence's suburbs have strong educational systems and provide efficient government services that ensure public safety (Barber 2017; Borges-Méndez 2007). Conversely, Lawrence's decline prompted many Latinx immigrants to contemplate leaving the city and even returning to their homelands (Andors 1999). This challenging reality makes the greater Lawrence region a good case study for immigrant class identity and belonging in a city and suburbs.

3.3 | Research Methods and the Sample's Characteristics

We conducted 28 semistructured interviews with first- and second-generation Latinx immigrants who arrived in the US

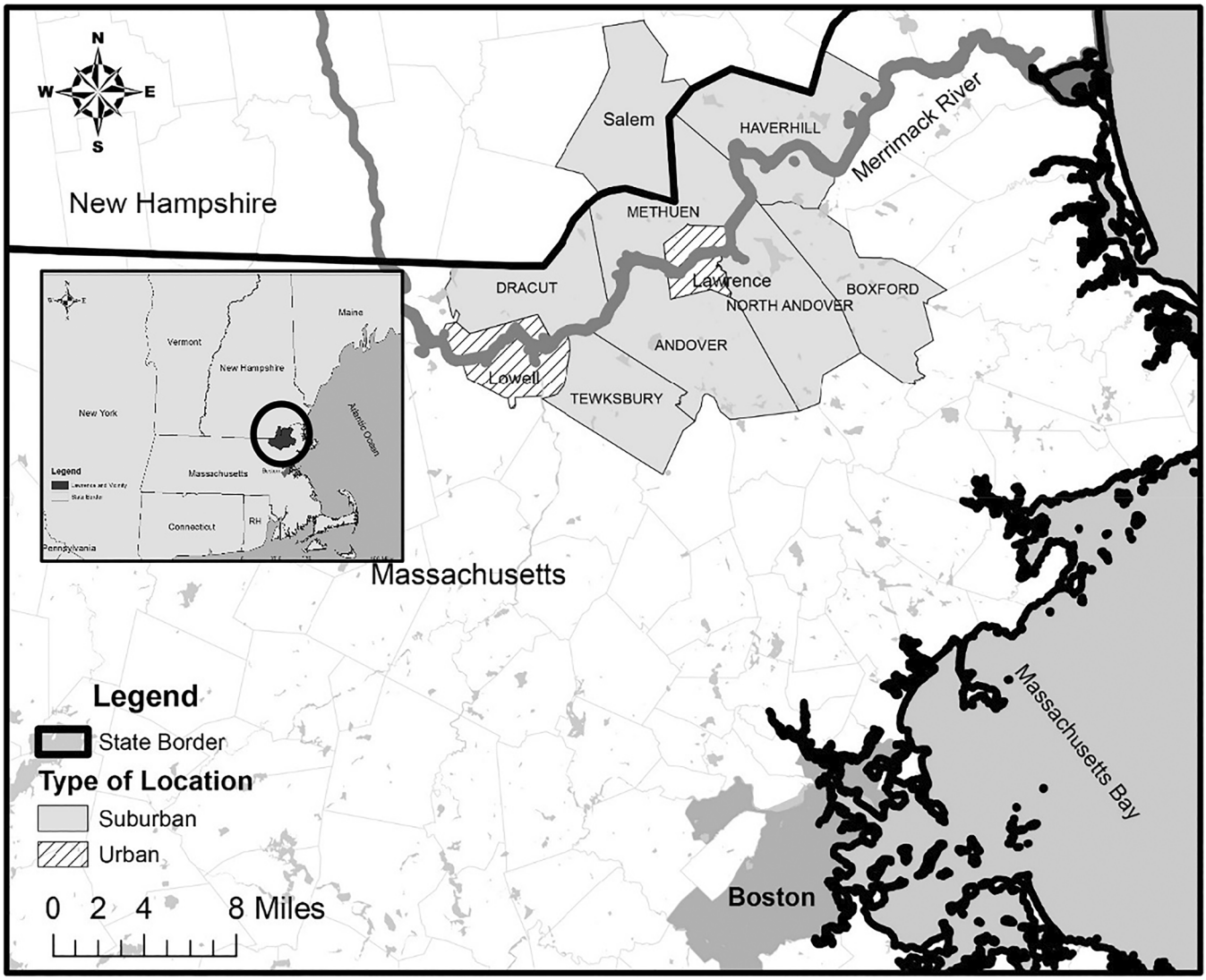

FIGURE 2 | Research area, Merrimack Valley Massachusetts.

from 1975 onwards. The participants were recruited in 2017 with the help of local stakeholders in the Merrimack Valley region of Massachusetts. We based our interviews on a questionnaire asking about the participants' background, their cultural capital and economic status, housing biography, everyday life, and where they would like to live (see interview protocol in Appendix C). With this information, it was possible to evaluate the significance of the participants' residence histories and embodied experiences during their migration.

Interviews involve some renarrating of events. Nevertheless, they provide a sense of the participants' experiences and the cultural factors that guided their actions and decisions (Lamont and Swidler 2014; Small 2017). Proceeding with caution, the interviews were audiotaped, transcribed, and analyzed using ethnographic and qualitative methods to shed light on how the fit between habitus and field is created, reconstructed, transformed, and maintained among first and second-generation Latinx immigrants. The analysis follows the methods and inductive approaches of interpretive investigations that theorize using qualitative data (Elwood et al. 2015; McKian 2010). Extracts from the interview transcripts are incorporated into the text to represent the narratives, and illustrate the participants' perspectives and interactions (Pain 2008).

Appendix A lists all interviewees anonymously. The Lawrence-based informants who represent the urban environment in which Latinx immigrants first settled were first-generation immigrants who stated at the outset of the interview that they could not afford to move to one of the surrounding suburban communities. We sampled an additional 16 participants, mostly first-generation immigrants, in the city's surrounding suburbs. They represented those who could afford to leave the impoverished city for a different nearby but distinct community. Seven suburban informants were descendants of first-generation immigrants. Given that most of our first-generation suburban informants arrived in the US as young children, one could argue that their immigration experiences may parallel those of second-generation immigrants. Thus, the juxtaposition between the city of Lawrence and the suburbs primarily contrasts immigrants born outside the US residing in Lawrence with immigrants in the suburbs who have spent all or most of their lives in the United States. As a result, their immigration experiences derive primarily from their parents.

We chose the participants based on their self-identification as Latinx immigrants who lived in the region. As such, our sample might be a bit biased and less representative. Nevertheless, the conclusions drawn from the data provided are supported by sufficiency and consistency.

4 | Trajectories of Dual Belonging Among Latinx in Lawrence

4.1 | Distress and Belonging

Our findings demonstrate that first-generation immigrants who were often separated from their ancestral families, home communities, and cultural identity still viewed Lawrence as a desirable place to live. For example, Eti[3], an expert in coaching in her early forties who was born in the Dominican Republic (Person in Figure 1) and resides in Lawrence due to a medical condition, describes how:

> *even though I was new, ... people.... hooked me up with services that they could provide ... for the first time in my life I felt like I was not a number in the United States.... and that people cared. And you know just jumping from one place to another in Lawrence you could feel like ..., you count. Here, you matter.*

By identifying herself and the other residents of Lawrence as members of a community that "cares and counts me as a person," Eti structured her perspective of herself and the others' perceptions of her, as individuals that lack a sense of individualistic meritocracy (the factor perspective of Process in Figure 1). Even though she was previously unfamiliar with Lawrence, Eti gained a nuanced sense of place. Her place identity is mediated by her sense that her setting provides her with a strong sense of community (Place in Figure 1). Eti's experience supports Vallejo (2012) findings that people from underprivileged backgrounds are more likely to have a strong sense of community and help their economically challenged Latinx relatives.

In a similar vein, Paula, a 52-year-old first-generation immigrant from South America who has limited financial means (Person in Figure 1) describes the beneficial social identity that Lawrence gives her:

> *I love Lawrence. I love it and wouldn't go anywhere else. This is my home. Why do I love it? Because Lawrence welcomed me with open arms when I arrived.... And the people here love me. ... I feel very loved, you know, very happy.*

Paula's claim to belonging is the result of her immigration experience of arriving first in Texas, and discovering that she was:

> *... left undocumented. ... But my dignity, my values don't have a price. They are not negotiable. So, when I saw something that my principles were truly in danger, I decided to change plans immediately...I decide to continue moving forward... Lawrence has allowed me to have my business...*

Paula's migration trajectories became a reference point for both her identity and her morality in the US. Her habitus may have changed as a result of her migration and change in habitat, as she acclimated to her new surroundings and adapted to her new circumstances (Process in Figure 1). For instance, she stresses how life in Lawrence is also characterized by a lack of morals and the potential for crime, claiming that Lawrence has "a double life. In the daytime, people work, it's quiet. But at around 8 or 9 at night, this all turns. It's sad, but it's the truth."

Paula's experience demonstrates how the fit between the habitus and the environment (Place in Figure 1), as well as the social context, is often only partial and always locally emergent (Shani 2021; Walker 2011). Paula's reservations are also evident in Sofia's testimony, a 44-year-old, first-generation Puerto Rican immigrant. Sofia is unemployed (Person in Figure 1), and engages in community activities, which lead her to:

> *... pretty much dislike a lot of places [in Lawrence, authors' addition] and by that, I mean right now we are doing this thing where every weekend we clean the park. And last week we picked out a park in West Street and we picked out a hundred needles, and it's very sad.*

Regardless of how she may be feeling, Lawrence gives Sofia a positive identity:

> *I can't see myself elsewhere... I just cannot leave. Like no matter how chaotic the city is, there is always so much passion. You'll find it if you look there's so many people willing to help each other.*

Like Sofia, Lawrencians' "love of necessity" conforms to the limitations imposed by their objective attributes (Bourdieu 2005), and explains the dual stance in their testimonies: a sense of attachment and belonging, but also repulsion (Place in Figure 1). For Sofia and Paula, living in Lawrence is not simply a place for people like them. Their enthusiasm for Lawrence as a place to live contradicts what Ær⊘ (2006) claimed about the "innate disposition of place," according to which one's residence is a matter of convention and tradition. However, it is "a function of the situation" (Michelson 1977, p. 362). To put it another way, it does not meet their long-term residential aims completely (Process in Figure 1), but it is sufficient for the time being. This attitude could lead to a sense of belonging (Place in Figure 1) that is founded on denial (Taylor and Moghaddam 1994). In this regard, some of the participants narrowed their sense of community membership to how others saw them. Some of them, like Bianca, a 37-year-old educator from the Dominican Republic who emigrated to the US in the mid-1990s (Process in Figure 1), clearly distinguishes between those who are from "within" and those who are from "outside" of Lawrence:

> *I consider Lawrence to be a city where the rest of the communities like to marginalize us. But in reality, we aren't so marginalized... even though the press only publishes bad stuff, we have a lot of good things to praise here in Lawrence (Place in Figure 1).*

Similarly, Fabiana, a 48-year-old single mother and second-generation Dominican immigrant (Person in Figure 1), recalled her time spent in the city when she was a resident there:

> *People like to say so many things out there, so many bad things about Lawrence. But you know, it's like wherever you go, wherever city you go, it has its bad parts, and you know that's how Lawrence is, it has its good parts, and it has its bad parts and you know you can't just judge the city because of a neighborhood that's not too good.*

Bianca and Fabiana frame their membership in the city's community through how outsiders see Lawrence. Although Fabiana acknowledges the drawbacks of the city, she describes how her attachment to Lawrence is divided. She transforms the critiques that others make of the city into symbolic capital. She acknowledges and legitimizes the criticism of outsiders as beliefs that those who oppose the Latinx community have about it (Process in Figure 1).

This approach is symptomatic of the verification process for lower-class Latinx claims of community membership. It helps Fabiana and Bianca value the city in ways that are consistent with who they are socially and geographically to avoid a sense of alienation. In other words, they adapt their habitus to a place, while avoiding immediate concerns about belonging (see Benson 2011).

4.2 | Migration and Housing Trajectories That Fit Where One Lives to One's Habitus

Residential, social, and geographic trajectories are related, underscoring the spatial context of the migrants' social standing (Process in Figure 1). For example, Camila, a 44-year-old first-generation Puerto Rican immigrant, typifies this distinction between Lawrence's people and her native community:

> *Here in Lawrence a lot of people volunteer in organizations and activities...it's like too much. But in Puerto Rico ... we have the same but not this big. Like here. In Puerto Rico ... it's not common to have a lot of organizations like here.*

Camila emphasizes her past residential experiences, highlighting how the difference between this community and where she grew up establishes a connection with Lawrence (Process in Figure 1). It is possible that she is starting to feel at ease in her new surroundings. Her claim of belonging to Lawrence is strengthened by her recollection of her previous life in Puerto Rico. The ability to feel attached to a place through a community provides Camila with a positive identity in the midst of a challenging living environment (Place in Figure 1). It enables her and the other participants to manage and mitigate the distress they experience. Doing so seems to indicate that the experience of migrating is ongoing, leading her to modify her habitus as a result of her reaction to her altered surroundings (Benson 2014). Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992, p. 19) called these attempts to fit the place and the habitus together a "pre-reflexive, infra-conscious mastery" of the field. They are attempts to construct the community in which one lives in one's own image (i.e., to make it fit with their habitus, as in the case of Sofia or Paula), or to be active in the community (as in the case of Camila).

It is possible for people's sense of belonging in response to shifts in the social space they occupy or the position they hold within the social field of a particular location (Benson and Jackson 2013). Consider the case of Sara, who was born into a well-educated, middle-class family in a South American country (Person in Figure 1). She feels grateful to Lawrence when recalling how she:

> *... was so happy like I was able to have friends [in Lawrence, authors' addition] ..., just by going out and talking for people. And I don't see that in other communities. ... it's really a rich community. So, I like Lawrence a lot.*

Sara is a recent immigrant to the US, a new mother, and the only other members of her family in the country are her husband and his family (Process in Figure 1). This situation reinforces the local community's role in her place belonging and suggests that Lawrence is particularly beneficial as an immigrant ethnic enclave. Indeed, immigrant and Latinx enclaves in the US have strong protective and social networks (Portes and Manning 2013). Consistent with broader patterns of Latinidad in the nation (e.g., Viruell-Fuentes et al. 2013), Sara could easily cultivate social connections within the ethnic enclave of Lawrence. Like Camila, the community helped Sara avoid social isolation. However, she also explains that, although hailing from a middle-class family, she spent her youth in:

> *...one of the most dangerous cities in the world... I grew up in one of the most dangerous neighborhoods... the youth in those neighborhoods are recruited to be on drugs.*

Sara describes her past residential experience to compare and contrast her previous and current residences. The immorality of both locations helped her maintain her social position without conscious effort and with the same pre-reflexive, subconscious mastery that Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) described. However, these efforts to alter her habitus to conform to her changed physical and social circumstances (Process in Figure 1) ultimately proved futile, because Sara wanted to leave the city (Place in Figure 1). This change occurred at the same time that her social status in the United States was beginning to shift. Being married provided her with economic security, making her habitus feel incompatible with Lawrence, as a social field (Person in Figure 1). Consequently, Sara expressed her desire to relocate to a suburb:

> *...We are looking alternatives, more in the countryside ... like living in a... suburb...., but still close to the community because we really like it.*

Even though Sara considers herself part of the Lawrence community, she maintains her sense of self-worth by pursuing a housing path that is reflective of her class identity. By doing so, she effectively avoids preventable adversities linked to specific disadvantages of the city, including perilous circumstances and insufficient

educational opportunities for her daughter. Sara's change indicates how her habitus is evolving (Process in Figure 1). However, as the statements made by former residents of Lawrence whom we interviewed indicated, the desire to resolve the disparity between the field (i.e., housing and the community) and the habitus is insufficient. Those who try to do so by moving to the suburbs face other challenges.

5 | The Mismatch Between Social and Spatial Identities Among Latinx Immigrants in Suburbs

5.1 | Place Attachment—Continuity and Durability

Examining the participants' explanations about their residential choices and trajectories reveals that references to class recognition and distinction are intricately interwoven with local meanings and patterns of ethnicity and shared communal fate. For instance, Matthew, a prosperous businessman in his late 50s and a first-generation immigrant from the Dominican Republic (Person in Figure 1), has lived most of his life in the US. He currently lives in Haverhill. Matthew remains deeply attached to Lawrence, even though he left the city many years ago:

> *A lot of people don't like this city [Lawrence, authors' addition]. ... I understand all that, but here is where I make money, here is where I know there are a lot of good people, a lot of people.*

Gabriela, a US-born psychologist in her mid-30s, who is the second generation of Dominican parents (Person in Figure 1) and resides in Andover, relates a story similar to that of Matthew:

Lawrence is my hometown, though I tell everyone I'm from Lawrence, that I grew up in Lawrence. ... I relate to people in Lawrence. This is what I look like; these are my people.

These passages explicitly state why Gabriela and Matthew consider Lawrence to be their "home," the place where they grew up as members of an ethnic minority (Place, Figure 1). Similarly, Alma, a 41-year-old, second-generation child of Puerto Rican parents resides in Methuen, but maintains that:

> *I am a Lawrence girl. This is where I grew up. This is where my friends are. This is where my mother raised me. I have a connection to Lawrence, and it's never going to break.*

The majority of the suburban informants emphasize that Lawrence is their childhood home, where they grew up as the children of impoverished members of an ethnic minority (Place in Figure 1). While living in the suburbs appears to reflect their socioeconomic profile as middle-class families (Person in Figure 1), it appears to contradict their self-perception of being a "Latinx Lawrencian" (Process in Figure 1). Camilo, a 43-year-old Puerto Rican who immigrated to the US 40 years ago, emphasizes that although residing in Haverhill, he is not:

> *... going to live in Lawrence, and I really am attached still to the city... my heart and most of what I know is here.*

Matthew, Gabriela, Alma and Camilo's assertion of belonging to Lawrence's ethnic minority community is an example of how a person's habitus evolves (Process in Figure 1). First-generation Latinx immigrants who once resided in Lawrence and then relocated to the suburbs continue to have a strong feeling of belonging to this city because of the strong social identity that Lawrence continues to provide them (Place in Figure 1). Class origin and social mobility may contribute to this sense of continuity. Lower-class people feel more responsibility to disadvantaged community members than higher-class people (Vallejo 2012). In our study, residential trajectories show that the claim of belonging to a previous place of residence endures across time and serves as a reference point for the participants' geo identities. For example, first-generation Dominican immigrant Ricardo, in his early 40s, feels at home in Lawrence even though he currently lives in Salem, New Hampshire:

> *I don't have an emotional connection to Salem where I happen to live now; my emotional connections are to Lawrence. This is where my American story started where I found support and other people to get me where I am. I have nothing against Salem, I just don't have a personal connection there....*

Interestingly, Ricardo and the other participants indicate that they lack the knowledge necessary to have a sense of belonging to their current place of residence, the suburb. Their social and spatial identities as members of an ethnic minority are mismatched (Process in Figure 1), raising doubts about their sense of belonging (Place in Figure 1). They have been able to obtain academic educations and senior managerial positions (Person in Figure 1. See Appendix A). However, with regard to their emotional connections, their habitus contradicts their change in social class. They subtly express their dissatisfaction with the suburban lifestyle, particularly in comparison to Lawrence's teeming pan-ethnic enclave, where they can find people "like themselves"—members of the Latinx minority. Although this sentiment primarily describes first-generation immigrants, it is also evident in our second-generation immigrants. We might attribute the fact that they did not overtly mention it in the interviews to the suburban lifestyle's association with more individualistic (White) moral values.

5.2 | Parenthood, Belonging, and Community Involvement

The suburban informants understand that the act of moving to a suburb is as an emerging logic of practice (Bourdieu 1992), meaning a practice of their habitus that relates to their becoming middle-class individuals and parents (Process in Figure 1). For example, Gabriela states that, "Andover is my children's town, not my town." When becoming parents (Person in Figure 1), ex-Lawrencian Latinx seem to develop a more nuanced understanding of the elements that comprise their community as an ethnic minority. Not only do they have an emotional attachment to Lawrence (Place in Figure 1), but they also must ensure that their social mobility and related achievements are passed down to the next generation (Process

in Figure 1). Rafael fits this description; he is well-educated, originally from South America (Person in Figure 1), and now resides in North Andover, where he works in the finance industry. He describes how they:

> *... were living in Lawrence, and we had a nice, modest colonial home ... And that has always been a desirable place. ... But our son was born, and we had a very small backyard. Tiny. And he liked to run around, ... and we said, "you know, we need a bigger place." So, I started looking in Methuen, started looking in southern New Hampshire.*

Such statements indicate how middle-class Latinx mentally construct a metropolitan habitus (Butler and Robson 2003), a sense of region with various meanings of social class (Process in Figure 1). This understanding begins with the search for other places to live, provided that they have the financial resources to do so. The Latinx participants look at Lawrence and the area around it through the prism of affluence and family life (Person in Figure 1). Rafael describes how his son is going to:

> *... Phillips Academy in Andover, and my daughter goes to another private school .... They're expensive, but the job has allowed me to provide that for them... I always thought about giving a good education to the next generation, that are my children, so I move to Andover. ... the important thing was moving the kids, my children, to Andover for a better education.*

Despite extolling the virtues of suburban living, for Rafael it nonetheless leads to internal strife, as it does for Gabriela, who says that:

> *I don't include myself in Andover's circle of parents. I think it's extremely difficult—so Andover parents are very snobby. When they see me, they don't see an American, they see someone of culture. So, they ask me where I'm from often.*

For Gabriela, her evolving middle-class habitus marks the transition from her original class to her current identity (Process in Figure 1). Her current identity and the social standing of her family are compatible with the suburb, but her self-identification as a "Latinx Lawrencian" is incompatible with it. Similarly, Ricardo explains (Place in Figure 1).

> *I finally gave in when we were having the twins, I said we could still consider Lawrence but start looking in a broader area... It was a shame because I still have a loyalty to Lawrence even though I don't live here...*

Ricardo feels ashamed and embarrassed because of the lack of fit between his habitus and his residence (Process in Figure 1). He thus emphasizes the shared nature of this sense of location. On one hand, one's current location indicates social mobility. On the other hand, residential trajectories reveal the ambivalence people feel when they become aware that their existing residential settings are in conflict with their habitus. Ricardo seems to be emplacing himself (Shani 2021), meaning he is giving a new meaning to his suburban life (Place in Figure 1), which represents his residential trajectory. Ricardo solves his predicament by channeling his offspring's future trajectories through his future residential trajectories: "I think that eventually when the kids get out and go to college, we will move to Lawrence." This statement indicates how for Ricardo, keeping his emotional relatedness with the ethnic community in Lawrence helps him accept the local meaning of the suburban environment as a place that "I happen to live in" (Process in Figure 1). It is a compromise, as in the case of Gabriela, whose husband's dissatisfaction with Lawrence's aesthetics and lack of morality, and sense that city life is impure drove them to leave Lawrence:

> *At the time, my children were not going to use the public school in Lawrence, so I was like, "Well, we can live in Lawrence with my mom, and try to save money", and he said no, that he wanted to ... use the money to buy something in Andover.*

This choice also applies to Ricardo, whose academic wife is not from Lawrence. She presented a compelling argument against the couple's decision to continue living in Lawrence:

> *My wife was open to moving to nicer neighborhoods, quote end quote more affluent areas [in Lawrence, authors' addition]... we encountered quite a few vandalism instances in Lawrence that made it honestly just really annoying; our cars broken into and our windows broken; and my wife just say why don't we live in a better community.*

> *Even when people leave Lawrence for the suburbs, in many cases they still remain involved in the community. For example, Alma is involved in Lawrence's Latinx community, though she lives in Methuen:... I do a lot of community work through the bank that I work at. I would do you know events, sponsorships with the, if the bank sponsors a program... the bank encourages their branch managers to be involved in something within our community. So, it's important for the bank that we are involved; they're a community-based bank.*

Alma's agency (community service) as a mission carried out within her line of work (banking; Person in Figure 1) mediates the seeming consistency between her current economic situation (affluent) and domicile (suburb; Process in Figure 1). Similarly, Luna, in her forties, born in the US to Dominican Republic immigrant parents, teaches school in Lawrence, although residing in Methuen. She reflects on the significance of her work for the community from which she originated:

> *I've been thinking to leave my current job, but I don't know if I would. I have been offered a job several, many, times at ... a very elite Catholic school, but I have my issues with leaving students that need people that look like them to teach them to work in a community... So,*

there is a lot of guilt with leaving my job, which I have not been enjoying it for a few years now.

Luna exemplifies how living in Lawrence leads to the formation of a feeling of place that relies on the time spent there among "people like us" (Feijten et al. 2008). Leaving Lawrence and moving to the suburb of Methuen created an incompatibility between her middle-class habitus and her new place of residence. For example, she cannot reconcile her White middle-class suburban colleagues' animosity toward Lawrence and her affection for the city:

I've always gone to Catholic Church, so, I used to go to church at St. Patrick's. Then, I stopped going to church at St. Patrick's because like I've said, we've always been very committed to Lawrence and the priest seemed to have some issues with Lawrence. I started feeling very negative about my community and Lawrence, and I found a relationship between what the priest was saying and how I was feeling so I stopped going to this church and I have been searching for another church since.

Luna's attachment as a second-generation Latinx (Person in Figure 1) may be due to the benefits of the network that her parents allowed her to cultivate, as Osypuk et al. (2010) demonstrated. This network may have passed down from their generation, enhancing Luna's sense of belonging, even though her habitus no longer fits with the pan-ethnic enclave in Lawrence (Process in Figure 1).

6 | Conclusion

Place is a key driver in the formation and maintenance of identity (Cutts and Widdop 2017). Our study is consistent with the research in population geography that looks at the scale of localities when analyzing immigrants' place attachment. By embracing a Boudieusian approach, our investigation improves our understanding of how place attachment is formed and changed. Our findings demonstrate how living initially in an impoverished city affects immigrants' place attachment and class identity even after they have become more upwardly mobile and left the city for the more affluent suburbs. Our results show that the match between residential area and habitus is only partial for both those who remained in Lawrence and those who left it.

Thus, neither group of Latinx we interviewed corresponds to Bourdieu's perspective of "fish in water" who are "made for the water and the water is made for them" (in Lahire 2011, p. 45, with reference to Bourdieu). Our participants indicated that they are more than simply a localized variant of the social structure in each type of settlement where they lived at the time of the study. In addition, their habitus was not merely a reflection of their social reality.

While occupying different social positions and residing in various sorts of communities, (ex-) Lawrencians may have similar attachment characteristics. However, they are also connected to other patterns and meanings of belonging to this place. It is thus clear that understanding the preferences of Lawrencian and ex-Lawrencian Latinx as reflecting solely or mainly their class disposition ignores the role of local and group meanings.

The idiosyncrasies of our Latinx case notwithstanding, our findings could be useful for studies conducted in other geographical and cultural contexts. First, the class affiliation and evolution of members of minority ethnicities become increasingly significant in an era of ever-increasing mobility, whether it be international or national (Stock 2024). It influences their location choices and mobility trajectories within diverse neighborhoods, settlements, and communities in a host country (Bathia et al. 2023; Singh 2024). In various national contexts, these trajectories underscore the processual nature of belonging, which is shaped by the volatility between habitus and field. The memory of or difference between one's former and present place of residence can contribute to one's current attachment, one that is ingrained in life-place paths and experienced in residential mobility paths (Bailey et al. 2016).

Second, as mobility—both spatial and social—constitutes a fundamental aspect of immigration and assimilation into a host society, applicable to both the first generation of immigrants and subsequent generations, the experiences of Latinx immigrants from Massachusetts' Merrimack Valley should not be regarded as *sui generis*, irrespective of America's geopolitical and geoeconomic context. Our findings highlight the need to carefully consider the many social class disparities that explain place identity and belonging, as well as their effects on immigrants' assimilation in receiving cultures. Specifically, given that such mechanisms vary across geo-cultural contexts, we expect they would lend themselves to different manifestations of immigrants' habitus and, consequently, variations in place making.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Endnotes

[1] https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/RHI725221

[2] In the US, Puerto Ricans are migrants, not immigrants. Due to the pan-ethnic nature of the research sample and for convenience, we will refer to Puerto Rican participants as immigrants.

[3] All of the names of the study's interviewees are pseudonyms.

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section.