

PERSONAL A/R/TOGRAPHIC NARRATIVES OF CULTURAL DISPLACEMENT:  
IN LATINO AMERICAN IMMIGRANTS LIVING IN CANADA

by

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## ABSTRACT

Immigration is the act of moving to and settling into a new country. It means starting again while leaving many people and things behind. This phenomenon has been embraced, embodied, lived, celebrated and suffered by many people for various reasons throughout history. Factors such as war and political oppression, poor living conditions, economic opportunity and stability are explanations for why people decide to leave their native countries. Therefore, immigration embodies loss of one's culture but at the same time embodies celebration for enhanced opportunities, when arriving and adjusting to the codes of a new system. Understanding cultural displacement as the sensation of being in a third space, of having to re-invent yourself again, adjusting day-by-day to a new culture, this study examines how Latin American immigrants to Canada confront cultural displacement.

Applying autoethnography and photo-elicitation as research methodologies the study sets up conditions for participants to engage and construct meaning together about being away from home. This research analyzes the extent to which Latin American immigrants to Canada negotiate being *in-between* these two spaces (their country of origin and Canada). It does this primarily through the creation of a series of photographs and conversations.

Some of the findings reveal that indeed Latin American immigrants acknowledge that the process of settlement in a foreign land is complicated and it takes time to adjust and understand the culture. At the same time Latin American immigrants admit the

importance of comprehending, cultivating and embracing Canadian culture, in order to merge easily in its communities. Similarly, the findings unfold the way participants created their own version of what it means to be Canadians rather than learning simply from others about its significance. As immigrants, the group I studied kept some features of Latin cultures alive in Canada, in this way, the study presents a new understanding of what is possible while dwelling in the in-between.

## **PREFACE**

My research was approved by UBC Behavioral Research Ethics Board. The Certificate Number of the Ethics Certificate is H11-02105

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I want to extend my gratitude to my friends in Canada and Colombia.



## **DEDICATION**

This study is dedicated to all the immigrants, migrants, refugees and exiles.

**CHAPTER I: PERSONAL A/R/TOGRAPHIC NARRATIVES OF CULTURAL DISPLACEMENT IN  
LATINO AMERICAN IMMIGRANTS LIVING IN CANADA**



**FIGURE 1: 'MIGRANCY JOURNEYS #5' RODRIGUEZ, 2011**

Vancouver, February 10, 2012

Dear reader:

It has been almost 11 years since I left Colombia for the first time in order to get my citizenship in the United States. Although I had a wonderful life in my country and I did not want to leave my home, friends, studies, family or my belongings, I could not lose the opportunity of traveling abroad, where options seemed greater. However, adjusting to language immersion; the lack of a social network; having to live with roommates; trying to grasp how the system works; adjusting to the weather and all of these new challenges were grueling. It was like moving from a state of knowing how everything works from an 'unknown world'.

Since 2001, I have moved back and forth from the United States to Colombia about three times and now I am currently living in Canada, where I started my life again. "Cradled in one culture, sandwiched between two cultures, straddling all three cultures and their value systems, *la mestiza* undergoes a struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war" (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 100). The paradox is that I no longer think about moving back to my home country. Since here in Canada, I have found my home as well.

Through my paintings and photography, I have reflected upon my personal narratives as foreigner, to a point where I understand that I belong not to one country but to many at the same time. I have changed my perspective as migrant, comprehending how special immigrants are.

Hence, the feeling of the in-between, where I am ripped amid the pain caused by being away from the ones I love and by the wellness of a system that protects me and at the same time offers me other opportunities to live and work, is what stimulated me to study what other migrants feel about 'being away from home', when encountering a different culture. Similarly, I wonder how the arts could contribute to their understanding of their experiences as migrants, if they were given the opportunity to create a visual narrative, something that has helped me understand my own experiences.

The act of leaving one's homeland, culture and loved ones and trying to live within a strange land and a different culture under hostile laws is bound to be an emotionally wrenching experience. The story of immigration is not merely one of a physical journey, landing a job, finding a place to live or learning a language. It is also, very much the story of an emotional journey, of fear and worry, loneliness, separation, and hope (Falcon & Rode, 1992, p. 23).

## **I.I IMMIGRATION**

Immigration is the act of coming and settling into a new country. The word "immigration" comes from the Latin word *immigratus*, which, in its past participle *immigrare*, means to remove. Remove means to eliminate oneself from; it is a degree of figurative distance and separation. The etymology of the word *migrare* is *mei*, which signifies change, and change lead us to words like *shift*, *transfer*, *depart*, *take away*, *go away* and *move*. These words also take us to the notion of diaspora, of *being away* from what is yours, from what is known, from where you belong, from your roots, your family and your friends. "Immigration" has been embraced, embodied, celebrated and suffered by many people, including me.

Why people have migrated and continue to migrate throughout history, vary between negative push factors like war and political oppression, poor living conditions, environmental problems, economical stability and perspectives to positive pull factors like adventure, economic alternatives and educational advancement. Immigration embodies notions of loss of one's culture, when arriving and adjusting to the codes of a new system. For many people, the struggle to create a home in a 'new' country, and the oscillation between a past, 'there', and

present, 'here', have become ways of existence. Displacement challenges and raises questions regarding one's roots, affiliations, loyalty and belonging (Purru, 2003, p. 3). Hence, immigration is taken as a learning journey, which make us inquire about issues of home, belonging, displacement and an 'in-betweenness'.

Between the years of 1980 to 2000 the number of international migrants in the world passed from 100 million to 175 million, increasing to a rhythm of 2.8% per year, more than any other period since 1960. However, it was not the mobility of the population that contributed to this increase, but the appearance of new independent States with the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Without this change, the number of international migrants in 2000 would have been 27 million lower (Blanco & Zlotnik, 2006, p. 35).

I wonder if all these immigrants remember their homes and families on a daily basis. I wonder what they encounter that makes them feel foreign. I wonder how they cope with their past and present. I wonder how they feel about being 'aliens'? Like others having or living in more than one culture, we get multiple, often opposing messages. The coming together of two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference causes *un choque*, a cultural collision (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 100).

In 2006, according to the census, Canada recorded its highest levels of immigration in 75 years, showing that 19.8 percent of the Canadian residents had been born somewhere outside of Canada. Also, Statistics Canada discovered that there were almost 250,000 Latin Americans in Canada in 2001, and by 2006 the number had grown to over 527,000. McLaren and Johnson (2007) argue that immigrants may need to reconstruct anew their social identities and

sometimes have to face a less than warm, not to say downright hostile, welcome from their new country of settlement. Many of us removed ourselves from our own homes and countries, in order to find better opportunities and alternative paths.

When I migrated, I had to confront the typical situation foreigners' generally face, such as acculturation, loneliness, adapting to the weather, learning the politics and regulations of the system and many other hurdles. Although I loved Colombia, my country, and I had everything there, I left to take advantage of the options a 'green card' and a new system was offering me. This process was not easy; it was absolutely painful and challenging to leave my family behind and adapt to a new environment. It is a history that is continually being decomposed and recomposed in the interlacing between what we have inherited and where we are (Chambers, 1994, p. 15). The phenomenon of immigration and diaspora brings the notion of the *in-between*, of liminality and hybridity, Ahmed, Castañeda, Fortier and Sheller (2003) called this place one of "incommensurate doubleness" (p. 33), where you are no longer from here or there and you have to re-invent yourself again, developing multiple identities and layers.

Despite the growing amount of literature in United States, there is a need to generate new knowledge with Hispanic immigrants in Canada. Little is understood about the personal experiences Latin American adults face when living abroad and their experiences of re-location and acculturation in Canada. Particularly, this study aims to examine Latin American immigrants' process of adjustment and sense of belonging while being away from their countries of origin and their families. I will prompt immigrants to examine the extent to which they experience migration as an opportunity for learning. Finally I will analyze to what

level the creation and sharing of visual narratives suggests other kinds of information about the phenomena of immigration.

## I.2 THE ROOTS OF THE RESEARCH

In my personal experience as foreigner, I find myself struggling most of the time with feelings of guilt and sorrow. For this reason, in an a/r/tographic research project in 2010, I explored the question of *why it hurts so much to be away from home?* Using painting, narrative inquiry and photography, I discovered and understood that what is most difficult for me about being away from my country, is, specifically, being apart from my parents.



**FIGURE 2:** 'SKIN #8' RODRIGUEZ, 2010.

WHY DOES IT HURT SO MUCH BEING AWAY FROM HOME?

I untangled and expressed my personal feelings with an exploration in the forest, in which I took pictures of tree bark focusing on the wounds and scars it had, relating it the same time to my own skin and soul, as metaphors of my grief.

A/r/tography, an arts based research methodology, allowed me to discover meaning through my inquiry process. Through the creation of photographic images new ideas were presented that helped me see my experiences in new ways and thus gave me the potential to transform my understanding (Sullivan, 2005).



In order to find visual responses to my research question, I went inside the forest searching for



**FIGURE 3:** 'SKIN #4' RODRIGUEZ, 2010.  
WHY DOES IT HURT SO MUCH BEING AWAY  
FROM HOME?

After reviewing and analyzing the images I had created, I discovered that I possessed a deep wound that was always going to stay with me. This wound was the pain caused by being apart from my parents, who are elderly and need care, attention and support.

tree bark, focusing on textures that looked coarse and uneven. I sought textures that would portray metaphors of immigrants' feelings while being abroad and being pulled by two cultures. The black and white colors of the pictures were important in trying to narrate those in-between feelings that emerge in the confusion when passing from happiness to sadness and incongruence, the feelings of non-belonging and frustration.



**FIGURE 4:** 'WOUNDS #6' RODRIGUEZ, 2010.  
WHY DOES IT HURT SO MUCH BEING AWAY FROM HOME?

With the creation of these pictures, I further understood my own pain, from the past and present, which penetrates and roams through open wounds of tree bark. These images were metaphors of my own skin and embodied suffering, impotence and guilt.

Eventually, through this visual narrative, I learned about my own experiences, when digging into my deep feelings of displacement from being away from my country.



**FIGURE 5:** 'WOUNDS #2' RODRIGUEZ, 2010.  
WHY DOES IT HURT SO MUCH BEING AWAY FROM HOME?

### **I.3 THEORETICAL REVIEW**

Iain Chambers (1994) untangles how our sense of place and identity is accomplished as we move through diverse languages, worlds and histories. He states that migrancy compounds constant change wherein new experiences are mixed with past memories. This constitutes a juxtaposition of past and present, in which migrant's nostalgic memories of 'home' and origins coexist, while other histories and circumstances occur. According to Chambers (1994), immigrants' sense of belonging, language and traditions dwell inside of them as vestiges that are mixed with other episodes and encounters. Hence, their sense of identity and belonging are taken apart and re-routed. Similarly, Chambers (1994) describes a new sense of transformation, in which immigrants are recombining the construction of new horizons in the urban landscape,

reinventing the cartographies, aesthetics and languages of them, therefore appropriating and cultivating our cities with different rhythms (p. 23).

Gloria Anzaldúa (1999) discusses three concepts that are interrelated with each other: home, borderlands, and the liminality in which mestizos are exposed. Anzaldúa proposes (in her writing) a topography of displacement where Latino Americans are hybrid people with multiple identities and have a synergy of two cultures with various degrees of both Latino and American ethnicities. Regarding the concept of borderlands, Anzaldúa describes how two or more cultures edge up along one other, where people of different races dwell in the same land. Additionally, with the concept of 'home', Anzaldúa states that wherever she goes she will carry 'home' with her, home meaning her culture, her origins, her memories and her patriotic love for her country Mexico (p. 43).

In brief, these theories about immigrants' confrontation of identities, sense of place and belonging, and past and present are concepts that resonate with me. Furthermore, the theories regarding the liminality in which immigrants dwell, and the feelings of dislocation, are concepts that reverberate with me. These notions link with my own life experience as foreigner and with my study of how Latino American immigrants may feel while being away from home.

#### **I.4 RATIONALE**

The experience of migration is a learning journey, full of peripetia and lessons about oneself, life and other cultures. "Learning is journeying... away from home, into unfamiliar and unknown zones – not to make unfamiliar familiar or unknown known but to learn to dwell in

un/familiar and un/known” (Purru, 2003, p. 235). I have had the opportunity to examine my own experience as a foreigner, which has allowed me to change my perspective of guilt and suffering. I now perceive myself differently and understand myself a little bit more. At the same time, I am able to share my own journey with others, raising questions also about the meaning that dislocation, adjustment and belonging brings to our society.

I see the need to inquire further into how other Latino American immigrants feel when dwelling away from home and how they live and embody their journeys as foreigners.

It is essential to examine immigrant’s experiences, to further understand their daily adjustment to Canada, and generate more awareness towards the significance such circumstances brings.

Hence, the following questions:

1) What themes do Latino American immigrants to Canada express through their personal narratives of cultural displacement?

2) In what way is the creation and sharing of visual narratives a learning experience for a community of practice?

## **I.5 METHODOLOGY**

In order to create some understandings about how Latino American immigrants to Canada confront cultural displacement, I decided to look for a self-organized Latino group to study how they negotiated their roots while being migrants to Canada.

I scanned the lower mainland of Vancouver and I found a special group called 'Fusion Latina'. They are a unique ensemble that came together seven years ago and was formed by Latin-Americans. Fusion Latina is intact and its objective is to share their Latin heritage with Canada and the world with South American songs.

Based on my background as an artist and what I found when creating the tree bark photographs, I decided to use a/r/tography as a methodology with two objectives. Firstly, I wanted to set up conditions for participants to engage and construct meaning together about the experience of being away from home, and being *in-between* two spaces. Secondly, I hoped to invite my participants to create a series of photographs regarding their experiences as immigrants to Canada. Hence, through this study, I hoped to raise awareness about the experience of migration and cultural displacement as the sensation of being in a liminal space, of having to re-invent oneself again and adjust day-by-day to a different system. Additionally, I hoped to unravel the learning journey Latino American immigrants face, employing the theoretical framework, the research questions, the voices of the participants and my own experience as a foreigner.

## **I.6 OUTLINE OF THE THESIS**

Chapter 2 of this thesis renders a review of the literature relevant to this study. Firstly, I will give account of factors such as identity and sense of belonging, examining how they are negotiated and constructed. I will depict what effects and influences these two aspects within the context of diaspora. In the same way, the chapter examines studies related to how practices of belonging that integrate ethnic identification and community formation influence foreigners'

identities. Secondly, this chapter includes a section reviewing the many concerns that affect children, youth and adults immigrants, focusing on feelings related to cultural displacement and nostalgia.

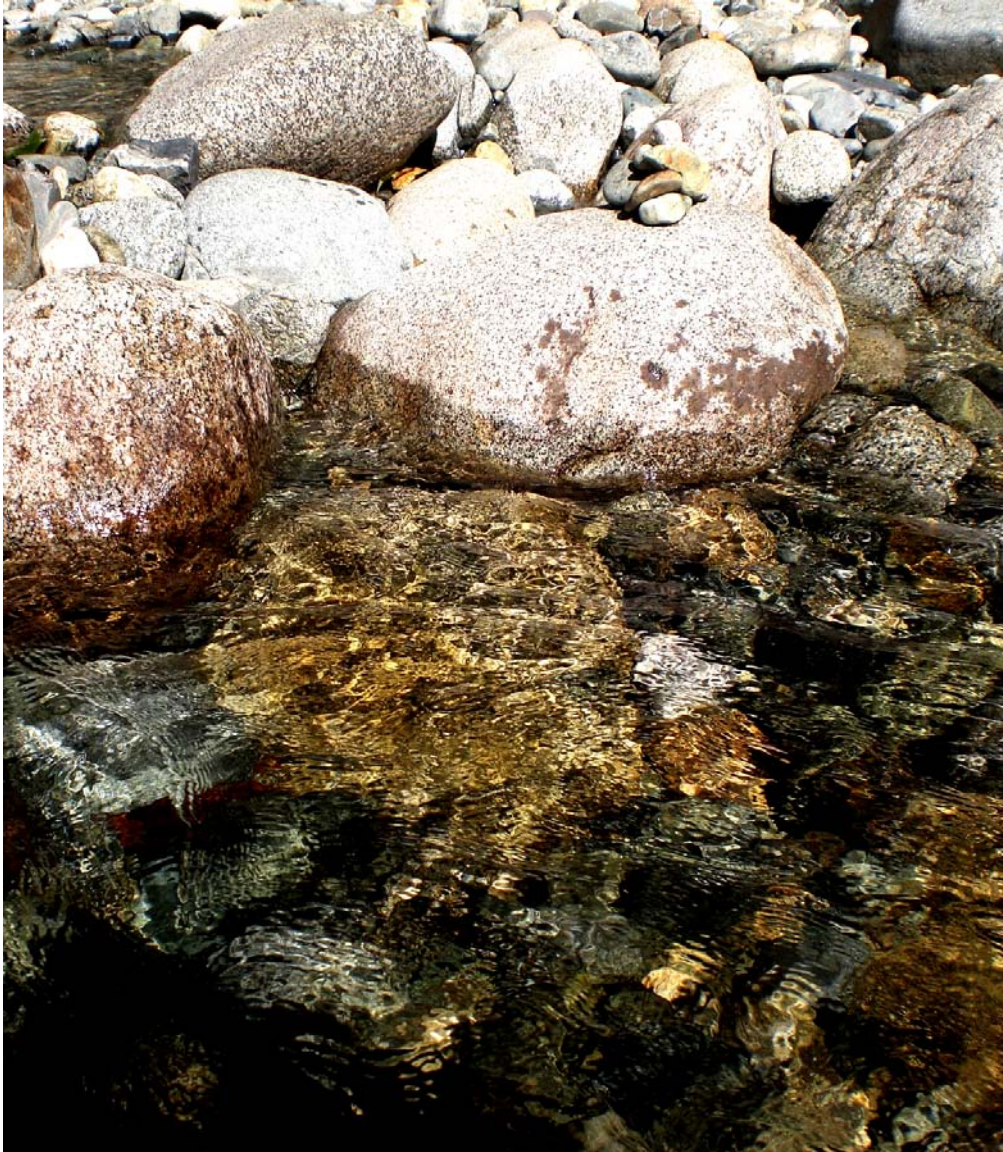
The third chapter starts with describing the aims, objectives and purposes of the study and then passes to a methodology review of the studies mentioned in chapter 2, which are related to the methodologies used for this study. Next, a rich description of the methodology is included, together with the explanation of the methods, delimitations, limitations, data collection and data management. Finally, the chapter provides a detailed explanation of the process used for data analysis.

The analysis of the data and the discussions of its results are included in chapter 4. In the first section, I describe the principal themes that appeared from the data. Here I also explain the images created by each of the participants, giving account of the personal narratives presented by them. Further, I juxtapose Chambers and Anzaldúa's theories of migration that resonate with the emerging findings.

Chapter 5 reports the significant findings of the study and concluding remarks segregated by the two research questions. Secondly, the implications of the study, recommendations, and questions for further research are incorporated. In the final chapter, I give an account of my final thoughts of the study, the methodology implemented and a final meeting with the participants where I shared my art work of immigration with them.

Additionally, the artwork, *Migracy Journeys*, renders an interlude that is embedded throughout the text as a way of bringing an alternative narrative of the topic of migration.





**FIGURE 6:** 'MIGRANCY JOURNEYS #11, RODRIGUEZ, 201

*Migrancy journeys narrates what it means  
to be  
in a space of liminality*



Vancouver, May 17

2012

Dear reader:

I feel displaced because I am away from my city, Medellín and my country, Colombia. I wish I could travel more frequently in order to fulfill my desire of being in both places (Canada and Colombia). The problem is that once you leave your country, you wish to be there and once you go back you still miss what you left behind, so my identity intermingles. This sensation of liminality is what is most difficult about being an immigrant. It is not always possible to have the finances and time required to travel and see your family, friends and city.

For me, nostalgia is homesickness and the desire to dwell again in the spaces and places that my country has. Colombia has wonderful towns, parks, oceans, neighborhoods, forest and deserts that contain incredible charm and beauty. I feel homesick for a past I want to recover and live again.

I feel nostalgia for the impossibility of being there, for the impossibility of hugging my mother, of holding my daddy's hand and keeping them company. Nostalgia is dwelling in the impotence of having this love in you and the desire to give with the impenetrable, furious distance in between. I feel pain and frustration...in the paradox of my life. How can I find the way to be 'here' and 'there'?

I feel melancholy for a better world where you don't have to emigrate and leave your family behind. I dream about a country that offers me safety, opportunities, and a chance to have a high quality of life.

I experience displacement because I feel I have nothing. I carry with me all the experiences of living around the world, of working in multiple places, being in many different situations and knowing many people from everywhere. I just don't know if all of that will have any meaning and value when my parents are absent forever. I just don't know if I am doing the best thing. Unfortunately, in my country, life is complicated. Thus, heart and reason get mixed with my nostalgic desires to be there.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

The phenomena of immigration reverberate with complex layers, dichotomies, political and social issues that have been written, and continue to be written, through the history of the world. In this study I approach a small part of this topic, concentrating on research areas related to concepts such as identity, sense of belonging, cultural displacement and nostalgia.

### **2.1 IDENTITY AND SENSE OF BELONGING**

Immigration is a condition typical of contemporary life: it is a space of liminality and transformation. Foreigners live at the intersections of histories and memories, where they find themselves being from 'there' and not 'here,' while simultaneously being 'inside' and 'outside.' In this space, a migrant's sense of belonging and identities are recognized, exchanged and mixed with other circumstances and histories. Consequently, transformation and movement occur also in the metropolitan aesthetics and lifestyles of the cities and spaces immigrants' inhabit, where the order of previous scripts are being reinvented and activated (Chambers, 1994).

Immigrants dwell in an in-between space in which they are constantly re-creating their identities due to the self-learning experience of living abroad. In this case, immigrants refer to their condition as foreigners as ambivalent ones, in which the dream of return is always dominant but at the same time, they wish to immerse themselves deeper in the society they have moved to. So, migrating means to reach a different level of experience and knowledge of the world in

which foreigners are able to successfully translate the detachment of their special positioning into a creative and hybrid reconstruction of identities (Bagnoli, 2009). For this reason, practices of belonging are crucial for migrant communities to further understand their own meaning of homeland within the context of diaspora. Such practices offer the possibility of bringing together members of the migrant community with the purpose of sharing emotions of a common homeland. As well, it is necessary to actively remember the cultural and social routines of a lived homeland recently left. Thus, the ways in which different members interpret their diasporic identities can reveal an important insight into the role of homeland practices in the creation of emotional geographies. And this also indicates the role space and place play into the development of diasporic belonging (Brown, 2011).

Therefore, in creating transnational social ties and cultural identifications, immigrants may engage in discourses that serve to construct an in-between space between their host and home societies. Through the engagement in practices that develop immigrant's intercultural voices and perspectives, and recognizing that are multiple linguistic and cultural affiliations, the formation of identity can reach beyond the national borders. Here, people actively mobilize their diverse sources of identifications to resist subordination. And also new subject positions emerge out of cross-cultural exchange and the negotiation of difference (Wan Shun Eva Lam, 1999). From this perspective, ethnic identification and community formation tend to take place within subgroups that share commonalties rather than at the level of the entire population. These subgroups are made up of friends, relatives, and others with whom immigrants shared trust and close relations. In that case, the social structure varies according to the characteristics of

migrants, the nature of the receiving society, and conditions in the country of origin (Gold, 2004).

Guerrero and Tinkler (2010) study how refugees and internally displaced youth, in two distinct international contexts, interpret their political and social identities. They affirm that it is through the recognition of the process in which identity is readjusted that immigrants are able to deal with their problematic lives. Thus, immigrants are capable of negotiating both myths and realities to make meaning out of their past, present, and future. And yet, family relationships, connection to the (home) land as well as everyday rhythms of working-class life, are factors that affect the way immigrants see themselves, according to Luttrell (2010) who examines immigrant children in the U.S.A.

In a similar way, Graham and Khosravi (1997) declare that the experience of diaspora consists of multiple 'homes' in which home is either a sense of fulfillment for a person's practical needs or a home in the sense of place. The authors examine attitudes toward returning to Iran among Iranian refugees in Sweden, investigating the way that the representation of 'home' informs the construction of diaspora culture in Sweden as well as in other countries. The authors describe that although Iranians remember and love their homeland, they show feelings of alienation towards Iran. And they show a preference to live 'elsewhere,' due to political and religious tensions. Thus, the construction of 'home' is built by Iranians around the globe.

Identity and differences are permanently negotiated and immigrants' hybrid, multiple and contradictory experiences are mediated by both the local and the global. It seems that a

generation of deconstructive possibilities serve to re-occupy and re-invent these identities in immigrants (Rifà-Valls, 2009). These issues are salient as well when trying to fit into a new society and dealing with categories such as woman, foreigner, wife, mother and US citizen (Noland, 2006). As an immigrant, I embrace identity as the relationship I have with my new reality and with myself. I recognize it as the core of who I am. In my journey in a foreign land, identity and sense of belonging are some of the factors that are constantly changed and re-shaped as I face new challenges and situations. This transforms my relationship with everything I face while my reality and the new sense of myself emerges.

## **2.2 CULTURAL DISPLACEMENT AND NOSTALGIA**

There are many factors that affect immigrants as they arrive in a new land. Kirova and Emme (2008) declare that at school immigrant children frequently experience feelings of rejection, isolation, peer exclusion and loneliness. And they also endure feelings about being scared and being looked at (Kirova & Emme, 2006). In spaces such as the playground, complex social settings and hierarchies exist that make the adjustment process even more difficult (Emme, Kirova & Cambre, 2006; Emme, Kirova, Kamau & Kosanovick, 2006). In addition, the language barrier becomes one of the main obstacles to socialization, and causes immigrant children to be rejected by their classmates, leading to lower self-esteem and a poorer school performance (Kirova, 2001). In other cases, foreigners, although they may feel happy with their decision to migrate, still experience depression, trauma, psychological distress and anxiety. Aspects like discrimination towards Hispanics, and for not knowing English properly cause this anxiety. Moreover, lack of access to health care and higher education (due to their legal status)

is part of the concerns that affect them (Perreira, Chapman, Potochnick, Ko & Smith, 2008). And even though they value their Latino identity and customs, Hispanics often experience feelings of rejection from administrators, teachers, their non-Latino classmates and the community (Streng, Rhodes, Ayala, Eng, Arceo & Phipps, 2004).

Immigration is a highly stressful transition regardless of the life stage of the immigrant. Children for example, are likely to experience greater depression, lower self-concept, and poorer school adaptation under high stress conditions. Parents also report strain regarding monetary worries (Levitt, Lane & Levitt, 2005). Additionally, parents confront feelings of disrespect when their own children express embarrassment about their English-language skills and cultural heritage. They also suffer feelings of marginalization and disenfranchisement when teachers, school administrators, or health care providers fail to communicate with them. In addition to this, immigrant parents are often overwhelmed by the demands of work, combined with the absence of strong kinship networks in their new homes (Perreira, Chapman & Stein, 2006). Furthermore, factors such as learning English, finding a place to live, securing decent jobs and methods for transportation, increase the hardships that parents have to endure. Thus, immigrants undergo sadness and loss, affecting their relationships with their families and their adjustment to their new lives.

On top of that, immigrants confront feelings of anxiety and fear regarding their legal status in the host country (Falcón & Rode, 1992).

Certainly, the immigration process in addition to the loss of the homeland, friends and relatives strongly affects foreigners' identity and self-esteem. So, newcomers face cultural confusion due

to the changes in their roles, statutes and experiences of discrimination (Zuniga, 2002). Some Hispanic women in the U.S. do not have an adequate level of physical activity, for instance. Factors such as poor environmental conditions and exposure to chronic life stressors, poverty, and limited access to health care services, impede them from accessing health education information (Fleury, Keller & Perez, 2009; Keller, Fleury, Perez, Ainsworth & Vaughan, 2008).

Alternatively, it has been discovered that social and cultural activities in outdoor/natural environments help immigrants find links and means of connection between their past and present locations. In this way, immigrants are able to handle any feelings of nostalgia (Rishbeth, 2004). As well as developing (rich) connections with the city, they come to discover their social identity when connecting with the new environment. In this way, immigrants are able to juxtapose their past and present memories (Rishbeth & Finney, 2006).

According to Sterba (1940), nearly all immigrants pass through a psychic experience of loss, anxiety, perturbation and a fear of starvation. These feelings are similar to the trauma of weaning; indicating a sense of breaking away from something one is dependent on. Nostalgia is a central aspect of the immigrant's psychic life, where feelings such as pain, guilt and frustration are juxtaposed with feelings of joy, so as to create "Bittersweet pleasure" (Akhtar, 1999, p. 7). So, in order to help the immigrant and the exile, it is important to help them to renounce the idealizations of their homeland and motivate true commitment to their new country.

Furthermore, Estévez (2009) explains that digital technology can be used to erase distance and its access to it renders a sense of belonging, simultaneity, and continuity with the immigrant's



country, family and friends. Thus, digital access is crucial to the immigrants' lives to the extent that it allows a continuity of space and time, so that those abroad can participate in events that strengthen and reinforce a sense of belonging and affinity to the home country. These important connections "reverse [the] global process of fragmentation and uprooting of individuals in postmodern societies' and help them 'to construct an 'effect' of continuity" (p. 407). Likewise, Maghbouleh (2010) declares that cultural pathways, such as the consumption of nostalgic popular music and the wistful retelling of family stories, are very important into the acculturation process. They serve as tools to share, make connections and articulate both culture and national identity among immigrants. To conclude, King, Christou and Teerling (2011) declare that the children of immigrants can also develop a sense of belonging, nostalgia and attachment to their parent's homeland based in experiences and memories from trips made to their respective countries.

Most of the authors mentioned above, infer that schools and communities are significant for guiding and supporting immigrants, in order to help them adjust to the new system more effectively. We must create participatory, stimulating and creative processes wherein immigrants can identify and address their challenges. Specifically, Hepburn (2011) declares that regional citizenship should not be greeted with suspicion. Immigrants are an active part of the nation by increasing the population of the community and sharing in the common identity, culture and language.

In the same way, Brah (1996) theorizes on the notion of diaspora, borders and the politics of location. Describing the ways in which these three concepts offer a conceptual grid for

historicized analyses of contemporary transnational movements of people, information, cultures, commodities and capital. Brah argues that the concept of diaspora refers to *multi*-locationality within and across territorial, cultural and psychic boundaries, describing identity as always plural and in process. This also implies that borders are arbitrary diving lines, which are simultaneously social, cultural and psychic; their forms of demarcation and the very act of prohibition assume transgression. So, the concept of border and diaspora reference a politics of location, in which the notion of diaspora, with displacement and dislocation, means that the experience of location can easily dissolve out of focus. Thus, Brah proposes the concept of *diaspora space* as a site of immanence, where multiple subject positions are juxtaposed.

Anzaldúa (1999) incorporates her lifelong feelings of social and cultural marginalization into her narrative. Firstly, as an immigrant to United States, Anzaldúa describes a contradictory space, (an in-between space) towards feelings about her culture.

Within this space, Anzaldúa reveals the contradiction of her emotions, love for her Mexican identity, and repulsion for the chauvinistic ideas and behaviors of her culture.

The author also mentions her struggle in dwelling away from ‘home’ and the process of being recognized by the standards of the dominant culture.

Moreover, the experiences of immigrants when negotiating racism, xenophobia and structural inequalities in the production of stereotypes are taken as both a social betrayal and public assault (Cahill, 2009). Cahill based in a participatory action research project with young people in the US, explored everyday experiences, concerns, feelings and negotiations of young Latino immigrants. Participants stated: “We use the arts to process and make sense of social issues” (p.

2). Here, the arts were a key tool of inquiry into a critical and revelatory space for responding to what was happening in their community and making sense of social problems such as racism and anti-immigrant politics.

Latino newcomers also feel rejection when they receive negative perceptions from Latino old timers. Aspects such as differential class, immigration and generational experiences influence the production of misgivings regarding newcomers (Lopez, 2000). Immigrants are stereotyped and perceived as inferiors to local citizens, being depicted as demanding, cheaters and suspicious (Lalioti, 2005). Further, many immigrant preschoolers struggle to learn and communicate in their classrooms, due to the teachers and classmates' misconceptions and assumption concerning their own culture. For this reason, teachers are challenged to effectively facilitate the necessary responsiveness for learning to occur (Strickland, Keat & Marinak, 2010).

### **2.3 SUMMARY**

Indeed, a growing body of literature has made some contributions to our understanding of the way immigrants confront cultural displacement. An important part of the existing research deals with the re-construction of identities in a foreigner land and the process of adaptation (Bagnoli, 2009; Brown, 2011; Gold, 2004; Graham & Khosravi, 1997; Guerrero & Tinkler, 2010; Noland, 2006; Rifà-Valls, 2009; Wan Shun Eva Lam, 1999).

Others have focused on children's experiences of migration (Emme, Kirova, Kamau & Kosanovick, 2006; Kirova, 2001; Kirova & Emme, 2008). Adults' experiences of loneliness, anxiety and stress (Levitt, Lane & Levitt, 2005; Perreira, Chapman & Stein, 2006; Perreira, Chapman, Potochnick, Ko & Smith, 2008; Streng, Rhodes, Ayala, Eng, Arceo & Phipps, 2004)

in which immigrants encounter a road full of difficulties in starting their lives again (Keller, Fleury, Perez, Ainsworth & Vaughan, 2008; Fleury, Keller & Perez, 2009; Zuniga, 2002). Besides this, immigrants face discrimination and rejection (Cahill, 2009; Lalioti, 2005; Lopez, 2000; Strickland, Keat & Marinak, 2010). Research also studies immigrants' feelings of nostalgia and psychic conditions (Akhtar, 1999; Sterba, 1940) and the experiences of immigrants without documentation (Falcón & Rode, 1992).

In addition, practices that enhance the sense of belonging in foreigners have been examined (Rishbeth, 2004; Rishbeth & Finney, 2006), as well as the way immigrants negotiate distance and borders by the use of digital technology (Estévez, 2009), which is a form of acting upon nostalgia. Moreover, studies in which second generation immigrants make sense of their ethnicities and identities are also explored (King, Christou & Teerling, 2011; Maghbouleh, 2010). Similarly, with the increase of immigrants other studies have proposed a re-conceptualization of citizenship in which identities multiply and the sense of cultural integration emerges (Hepburn, 2011). However, there are some points that have yet to be addressed which should facilitate a better understanding of the phenomena of immigration. There is a need to investigate the process of immigration after the transition and adjustment process, in which foreigners have already faced the different aspects that are normally encountered when re-starting their lives again.

My study of adult Latin American immigrants presents a unique approach, whereby the study began with my own experience as foreigner which led to exploring how other Latin Americans feel after they have already settled in Canada. I go beyond their first years of migration and initial culture shock to examine their current realities as immigrants. I study how

Latin American immigrants to Canada confront the fact of being away from their native countries, examining to what extent their identities have changed while conducting and inquiring to see if the process of migration has prompted a learning experience for them. Lastly, I scrutinize how the creation of a visual narrative enhances the creation of new knowledge.

In the next chapter, I explore how visual research methodologies and arts-based research are applied to investigate migration to further explain the methodology of a/r/tography.



**FIGURE 7:** 'MIGRANCY JOURNEYS#4, RODRIGUEZ, 2011

*and  
the  
in-betweenness*



### CHAPTER 3: INQUIRING INTO THE WORLD



**FIGURE 8:** 'A BOYFRIEND IN ANOTHER COUNTRY' RODRIGUEZ, 2010

Vancouver, April 10

2012

Dear reader:

Did I tell you what I am?

Well, I am an artist/researcher/and teacher. I am excited to tell you about these three identities since they embody my whole self, purpose in life and contribution to humanity. Today I am going to tell you how I came to this point.

Everything started when I decided to go to college to study fine arts. There, I learned a range of options for doing art and conceptualizing art, integrating my creation with my soul. I discovered that through art, I was able to express my feelings, share ideas and propose new ways of thinking and seeing. Most importantly, through my studies I developed a way of being in the world. You see, an artist's mind is never at rest. We live in a world where we are constantly imagining new alternatives for what we look at, changing the perspective of the landscapes that surround us. And we have the need to communicate to the world what we are able to perceive.

For this reason and although I have not been actively selling or exhibiting my art work, I do consider myself an artist. This links to how I came to my next two identities. After working 5 years in a pre-elementary school, I decided to study Art Education with the aim of telling the world that art is more than simple decoration.



Art entangles multiple meanings with its creative process and what happens after, involving multiple levels of significance and signifiers for the creator and the viewer. While looking for schools to apply to, I encountered a/r/tography, which caught my attention and interest with its phenomenological and post-structuralist elements, where knowing, doing and making merge together. And this is where I am now, developing my identity as researcher through the methodology of a/r/tography as a way of raising questions, exploring experiences further and understanding human behavior better.

### 3.1 AIMS, OBJECTIVES AND PURPOSES

There are many factors that have influenced my study about the personal a/r/tographic narratives of cultural displacement of Latino American immigrants living in Canada. One of them is the fact that I am an immigrant myself and through the years I have had the opportunity to know other foreigners who struggle to adapt to their new lives abroad. I have witnessed immigrant's different circumstances and difficulties in terms of social displacement, adaptation and legal situations. In addition, I have seen some of my family members and friends emigrate, leaving behind their careers, belongings and social networks. This study, addresses some important issues that have not yet been examined effectively in previous research studies. I seek to investigate the issue of how Latin American immigrants deal with the phenomena of being *away from home* and being displaced from their cultures. Moreover, this study aims to illustrate how the experience of migration is an optimum opportunity for learning. The poem about the Odyseean journey to Ithaka written by Constantine P. Cavafy (1911/2001), teaches us the value of the adventure itself:

*“When you set out for Ithaka  
ask that your way be long,  
full of adventure, full of instruction...”*

The poem continues by describing the incredible creatures that Odysseus may find on his way, advising him that he should keep his soul steel and he should not fear them. Then the poem follows:

*“But don't in the least hurry the journey.  
Better it last for years,*

*so that when you reach the island you are old,  
rich with all you have gained on the way...”*

When a person takes the path of migration, other cultures, views, systems, philosophies and landscapes are discovered as well as different aspects of ourselves as humans are always in constant growth. My aim is to show immigrants that the experience of migrating is a learning journey.

Likewise, my objective is to generate new knowledge about the feelings and experiences of Latin American immigrants to Canada regarding their journeys as foreigners. Specifically, I am studying how visual methodologies might contribute to participants’ understanding of their experiences as immigrants. As well I am curious how the creation of visual narratives evoke information and feelings before, during and after the process of creation. Lastly, my purpose is to illustrate that immigration is a global phenomena and our world should be adapted and structured as a multicultural place constantly being enriched by diverse cultures. Overall, this study strives to examine the phenomenon of immigration as a learning journey for the immigrant himself. The study aims to increase the respect for all immigrants around the world, inculcating unity among all humanity in which cultures, classes and races should not have any value distinctions.

### **3.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Despite recent research efforts investigating immigrant's experiences with children, youth and adults, some significant gaps still exist in the literature, as evidenced in the last chapter.

Therefore I present the following research questions:

- 1) What themes do Latino American immigrants to Canada express through their personal narratives of cultural displacement?
- 2) In what way is the creation and sharing of visual narratives a learning experience for a community of practice?

### **3.3 METHODOLOGY REVIEW**

Maxine Greene (1995) asserts how important art is to research: "The arts can release imagination to open perspectives, to identify alternatives. The vistas that might open, the connections that might be made, are experiential phenomena; our encounters with the world become newly informed. When they do, they offer new lenses through which to look out at and interpret the educative acts that keep human being and their cultures alive" (p. 18). In this section, I am going to briefly describe how some of the authors mentioned in last chapter employ different kinds of arts-based methodologies and visual research methodologies within their studies.

Rifà-Valls (2009) uses contemporary art with the objective of stimulating her participants to create polyphonic and multilayered texts of identity and diversity narratives. Bagnoli (2009) uses a holistic and a multi-method qualitative approach including autobiographical materials strategies such as the making of a self-portrait, a one -week diary, and a photograph of the participant that they particularly liked. Noland (2006) used auto-photography as a form of research practice, stating that this visual research methodology helps to overcome cultural marginalization. As well as age and language barriers among participants, allowing them to analyze their context through their own images. Also, Guerrero and Tinkler (2010) employ photography and narrative, allowing participants to make sense of themselves and their lived experiences. Inferring that the use of photography is significant in helping participants to gain self- esteem, build leadership skills and evoke deeper understandings of their life experiences.

With the purpose of looking for strategies to help integrate immigrant parents and their children into the school culture, Luttrell (2010) studies immigrant children from a public school in the U.S. The children, who are from a diverse range of nations, are asked to take pictures of their school, family, community or something significant to them. With the use of an image-based methodology, the author is able to understand participants' interpretations of their relationships with their families. And she also discovers through the children's images and narratives that meanings are made and remade using photographs for self- and identity –making purposes. Moreover, through participatory action research (PAR) and arts practice (ethno-mimesis), O'Neil and Hubbard (2010), explore the senses of belonging negotiated by asylum seekers, refugees and undocumented migrants in the English East Midlands. In the process, participants

re-enact a set of embodied feelings and trace imaginary and real journeys. Thus, participants, make sense of their new space and selves, following the core event of the study; the act of *walking* as practice. The authors determine that this experience helps participants to search for the in-between spaces where they are dwelling, spiritually and physically.

In Emme, Kirova, Kamau and Kosanovick's (2006) research, immigrant children create a visual narrative of the playground experience from their perspectives. The process results in participants creating a fotonovela that intends to help children understand their own and their peers' nonverbal behavior. Indeed, the creation of the fotonovela as a visual narrative is crucial to crossing the domains of language, embodiment culture and image and most importantly, gives participants the tools to be self-researchers. Furthermore, Streng, Rhodes, Ayala, Eng, Arceo and Phipps (2004) through a community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach with Latino high school students in North Carolina, study how immigration influences their quality of life, using a visual research methodology called photo voice. The authors acknowledge the importance of engaging immigrants in participatory, stimulating and creative processes wherein they can identify and address their challenges.

Furthermore, Rishbeth (2004) examines how people experience immediate and ongoing 'culture shock' with respect to the outdoor environment and how they sustain a connection with experiences of their homeland's landscapes. The study uses methods derived from photo-elicitation where the participants create a 'theater-like' model representing their ideal open space, their childhood landscapes and their current experience of the green space in Britain. Likewise, through participatory and visual (photography) methods, Rishbeth and Finney (2006)

investigate memory, nostalgia and ‘place-attachment’ for asylum seekers and refugees’ perceptions and experiences.

Also, Fleury, Keller and Perez (2009) as well as Keller, Fleury, Perez, Ainsworth and Vaughan (2008) use photo elicitation to explore the resources for physical activity available to Hispanic women in the United States of America.

In a research/art/performance process O’Neill (2008) develops a study that leads to an experience of deeper understanding towards asylum seekers, refugees and migrants. Focusing upon the transformative role of art as a methodological approach, artists conduct ethnographic research with refugees and asylum seekers. The study employs ethno-mimesis, which is a combination of biographical narrative and arts-based work.

Likewise, Caitlin Cahill (2009) creates a participatory action research project with young people in Salt Lake, Utah. Cahill explores everyday experiences, concerns, feelings and negotiations of young, Latino immigrants. Through the arts, specifically spoken word, photography, songs, visual art making, movement and performance, participants are able to (respond and) express their feelings. Also, through photo elicitation, Lopez (2000) examines attitudes of a selected population of Latino old timers, towards new Latino American immigrants in Omaha-Nebraska. Using pictures of places that belonged to Latino Americans, (in specific locations) such as the Museo Latino, the supermarket, The Chicano Awareness Center among others, the author evaluates old timers’ perceptions, opinions and attitudes towards the newcomers. On the other hand, Strickland, Keat and Marinak (2010) explore how teachers enhance connections with their immigrant students through the use of photo narrations. In this case, the young participants

present photos and personal stories in which they share information about their families, home contexts and relationships, providing a unique and creative opportunity for teachers to get to know the students' lives, feelings and experiences better.

The topic of immigration has been investigated using arts-based research methodologies and visual research methodologies in a variety of ways. The authors described above utilize photo elicitation, fotonovela, participatory action research, walking, auto-photography, contemporary art and narrative to further understand immigrants' experiences. However, a gap still exists within the literature that studies adult Latin American immigrant's experiences in Canada.

### **3.4 METHODOLOGIES**

In order to answer the research questions previously stated, auto-photography and a visual research methodology called photo elicitation were employed. Both of these methodologies allowed the exploration and understanding of immigrant's personal narratives, perceptions, thoughts, and feelings. Such methodologies were required to enhance and deepen understandings about the way in which Latino American immigrants confront cultural displacement. The use of visual methodologies allows other kind of information to emerge.

#### **3.4.1 VISUAL RESEARCH**

Visual research offers a deeper insight into current possibilities and approaches as well as the stimulus of new kind of knowledge. The visual is central to the cultural construction of social life in contemporary Western societies. We are surrounded by different sorts of visual



technologies (photography, film, video) that render the world in visual terms (Rose, 2007, p. 2). Therefore, visual research offers a deeper insight into current possibilities and approaches as well as the stimulus of new kind of knowledge. Visual research is a domain that in the past years has been used within the field of social sciences. Here, images are considered cultural artifacts that offer a connection with the culture of the producer. With this idea in mind, researchers are able to prompt people to react to visual stimuli and use their reactions as data in their research. Also, researchers have the option to invite participants to produce their own visual representations as a response to a specific assignment. This technique is known as ‘visual elicitation’ in which either photo, film or drawing is analyzed (Pauwels, 2010).

This study employs a visual research methodology called photo elicitation, which “is based on the simple idea of inserting a photograph into a research interview” (Harper, 2002), allowing participants to add their voices into the research and extend the study to spaces beyond the boundaries of the researcher. The power contained in a photograph when used for research, renders the activation of emotions and then more information is brought to light. The photograph, as Schwartz (1989) declared, becomes then a receptacle from which individual viewers draw meaning. Disciplines such as anthropology, psychology, sociology, education and health sciences have used photography in their research (Douglas, 1998; Ornelas, Amell, Tran, Royster, Armstrong-Brown & Eng 2009; Taylor, 2002). Photography brings an optimum medium to understand more deeply the perspectives, experiences and beliefs of people. As well as how they perceive and define their own worlds. Photo elicitation has proven the polysemic quality of the image (Harper, 2002) and has the effect of evoking deeper elements of human consciousness. Thus, photographs allow memories and feelings to arise and render the active

construction of meaning when participants respond to the image and share their own narratives and experiences.

### **3.4.2 A/R/TOGRAPHY**

A/r/tography as an arts-based research methodology is an approach that inquires into educational phenomenon through artistic and aesthetic mediums (Springgay, Irwin, & Kind, 2005). It is a practice based form of inquiry which fuses the identities of the artist/researcher/and teacher. A/r/tography is a way of living, inquiring, and being that is relational. A/r/tography's theories and practices entangle the generation of meaning through visual art, narrative, drama, music and poetry. In this interdisciplinary space, meanings are generated and interrogated but at the same time they flow and provoke other ideas and perceptions. Meanings also reside in the in-between spaces, where they are divided and ruptured forming rhizomes. A 'rhizome' is a concept referred to by Deleuze and Guattari that allows for multiple, entry and exit points in data representation and interpretation. A rhizome has no beginning or ending as it is always in the middle. Such rhizomes have the quality of activating the in-between as an invitation to explore the interstitial spaces of art making, researching, and teaching (Springgay, Irwin, Leggo & Gouzouasis, 2008). Moreover, a/r/tography contains three forms of thought and ways of understanding experience, knowing (theoria), doing (praxis), and making (poesis) which when linked together, form rhizomatic and prismatic ways of perceiving the world. So by living and embodying inquiry, a/r/tography is committed to generating circumstances that produce and understand knowledge. Herein, all bodies/subjects involved in the research inquiry are active participants whose meaning making exists in the moment of encounter (Jevic & Springgay, 2008, p.70). It is through this understanding and interpretation

that the experience of learning takes place in the context of communities of practice. In fact, it is in such intertextual situations that a/r/tographical research is induced. A/r/tographers recognize that no researcher, or artist, or educator exists on their own, nor do they simply exist within a community, for in fact both occur (Irwin, 2003, p. 72). Thus, artists and educators' work is inevitably related to other's work, and their theorizing happens within their communities of affiliation.

Consequently, learning is engendered by rhizomes in which learning becomes concerned with critical concepts and the interconnections between those concepts, instead of being discovered through isolated facts. These concepts in a/r/tography are called *renderings*, which direct our active involvement in meaning making through educational and artful inquiry. Both of these are interconnected, existing in relation to one another and offering possibilities for engagement. Renderings move into boundaries, between theory, practice and creative activity and allow each to impact one another. They provide access to, and new insights about, a particular phenomenon (Springgay, Irwin, Leggo & Gouzouasis, 2008, p. xxxi).

According to Sullivan (2005), art offers diverse forms of inquiry in which artistic forms are used to capture, reflect, and critique the multiple textural realities being investigated (p. 56). Thus, theory as practice becomes an embodied living space of inquiry in the methodology of a/r/tography. The *in-between* spaces of thinking and materiality, invites researchers to explore the interstitial spaces of arts making, researching and teaching/learning. So these *in-between* spaces are usually recognized in hyphenated relationships, which at the same time allow the creation of *métissage*, as a language of the 'borderlands'.

Irwin, Beer, Springgay, Grauer, Xiong, and Bickel (2006) develop through a/r/tographic methodology a project called “The City of Richgate”. Exposing issues related to immigration, place, and community, within an artistically oriented inquiry. Using arts as a form of practice-based research and as a journey to understand immigrants’ paths, this study explores the Chinese-Canadian experience in the City of Richmond, a geographically and culturally hybrid place. The study shows that culture and memory can be transformed and maintained. Site, home and location can be more than one place, and they are more likely somewhere in between. In this a/r/tographic project, the artistic products created through the metaphor of ‘the gates’ represents each family’s journey, describing a flow of immigration, a marking of place, identity and transformation.

Similarly, O’Donoghue (2008) uses a/r/tography to explore the processes and practices of writing and art making, when conceptualizing, doing and representing research about fifteen male elementary teachers in Ireland. In order to make visible the social constructs of male elementary teachers, O’Donoghue, through graphic and linguistic mediums gives form to participant’s experiences. Focusing on his participants’ process when negotiating and embodying multiple identities as teachers, men, and male teachers, O’Donoghue creates art throughout this process. With an a/r/tographic and multimodal reflexive process of inquiry (p. 112), the author applies the data generated by journaling, narrative writing and observations to create a visual narrative constituted by a series of 8 photographs. O’Donoghue’s study renders an example of a/r/tographic practice in which findings are shaped by the different points and perspectives of a community of practice that he develops in collaboration with his participants.

Also, in 2010 I developed a project using a/r/tography for a class under Dr. Rita Irwin's supervision. In this project, I, as an artist/researcher and teacher, was able to learn from my own inquiry when applying visual arts as data for my research. In order to explore my research questions which was *Why does it hurt so much being away from home?* I applied narrative inquiry and paint through journal writing as well as photography.



**FIGURE 9:** 'GABRIEL, GABRIEL' RODRIGUEZ, 2010

I developed an internal dialogue, regarding my experiences as a foreigner, interpreting and analyzing situations, circumstances and feelings that emerge as a person away from my home country. Issues regarding English, nostalgia and guilt for being away, the sadness for illegal immigrants' stories around the world, as well as the satisfaction of being in Canada, were topics that appeared during my study.

Through a/r/tography, where theory as practice and complication disturbs perception and knowing, I examined factors that caused me feelings of dislocation. I observed my own behaviors and attitudes towards the following aspects: the barriers of the English language, the lack of close friendships and the weather. I also inspected internal feelings towards adjusting to a new system, which includes new rules, new ways of doing things, different types of behavior, finding new social networks and so on. After reflecting on all of these aspects, I discovered that

despite such reactions to the adjustment process, the main reason for my sadness about being an immigrant was the fact of being separated from my parents.

This process offered me an exceptional learning experience about myself, located amidst memories from the past and dislocation from the present. My study became a process of exchange that was not separated from the body but emerged through an intertwining of mind and body, self and other, and through my interactions with the world (Springgay, Irwin, Leggo & Gouzouasis, 2008, p. xxii). My art practice was thus informed by creation and questioning. In here, meanings as well as understandings were not revealed from a point of origin, they were complicated as relational, rhizomatic, and singular (Springgay, Irwin, Leggo & Gouzouasis, 2008, p. xxi). I was able to theorize through inquiry into my own experience.

In this a/r/tographical project, the data were collected from the visual and written narratives taken from my a/r/tography journal as well as the images captured in the forest. I was able to inquire and learn from my own experience and feelings about being an immigrant. Specifically, the a/r/tographical journal allowed me to portray the circumstances and situations that made me feel dislocated when being away from home. In figure eight, for example, I represented the pain of leaving a relationship behind, in a moment of suffering and trouble when I was confronting sentimental conflicts.

In figure nine, I expressed the joy of all my family, when we witnessed my brother finally getting his residency in the U.S. and then reuniting with my parents after 10 years of being away.

Thus, a/r/tography as a visual journaling, narrative inquiry and art making, makes possible the exploration of the spaces that are messy, uncomfortable, and complicated (Jevic & Springgay, 2008). So through journaling I consolidated the multiple reasons and inner feelings towards immigration, narrating my family experiences as well as my own narratives



**FIGURE 10:** 'SKIN #3' RODRIGUEZ, 2010.  
WHY DOES IT HURT SO MUCH AWAY FROM HOME?

.. Also, through photography I represented and expressed metaphors of my grief and dislocation resulting from my experience as an immigrant. With my camera, I looked for representations of such feelings, representing open wounds and coarse bark, internally juxtaposing them with my own skin and my own pain. Through a/r/tography, I was able to inquire and learn from myself and the circumstances around me. I was able to situate and re-cognize myself as an immigrant and to acknowledge the reasons I needed to be away from home. Indeed, a/r/tography allows me to experience a life of deep meaning enhanced through perceptual practices that reveal what was once hidden, create what has never been known, and imagine what we hope to achieve (Pinar, 2004).

Likewise, and keeping in mind the concept of cultural displacement from an immigrant perspective, I tried photo elicitation on myself as a pilot study, for a class in 2011 with Dr. O'Donoghue in a visual research project called: "*The Power of the Image Through the Use of Photo Elicitation*". Over a one day time frame, I explored which themes appeared when feeling nostalgic and/or uncomfortable about being away from home. The process involved taking pictures when these feelings were aroused and then I explained the images as if I were a participant at the time of the interview. The outcome was an understanding and awareness of my actions and attitudes towards the life I had created in Canada and the fact of having two lives and being in between two cultures. Therefore, after having seen my reality from another perspective and having learnt from it, I saw the need to study how other immigrants feel about *being away from home*. In order to do this, I employed a/r/tography and photo elicitation, in order to create the circumstances that produce understandings through an artistic and educational (laden) process.

In brief, I chose a/r/tography as a research methodology in my study for its distinctive properties that unify art, research and education. Through this methodology, I was able to establish a community of practice in which my participants were able to discuss their realities as immigrants, and their experiences of cultural displacement. I wanted my participants to have the chance to inquire together about the aspects that highlight their experiences abroad. At the same time, I invited my participants to create a visual narrative in which they were able to express through photography some of the points, aspects, feelings or situations about their personal experiences as Latin American immigrants to Canada. In order to invite participants to the



creation and sharing of visual narratives, I integrated photo elicitation as a visual research methodology.

### **3.5 DATA COLLECTION**

Three methods of data collection were employed to qualitatively elicit and describe immigrants' experiences when being away from home: interviews, field notes and the creation of visual narratives. Next, I am going to describe each one of these methods.

#### **3.5.1 INTERVIEWS**

In this study, semi-structured interviews were used as the main research method. In a time frame of one month and meeting almost every week, we had a total of three semi-structured group interviews, each one, two hours in duration. In this space, participants discussed and shared stories about their journeys as immigrants to Canada. Specifically, six questions per section were discussed regarding cultural displacement, nostalgia for their home countries and the type of life they had here. Also, participants talked about their connection with their native countries as well as Canada, the situations and circumstances that brought them here, the adjustment process, their family, and their link with Fusion Latina. The language we used during the interviews was Spanish and the interviews were audio-recorded.

### **3.5.2 FIELD NOTES**

After each meeting ended I summarized in written text the outcome of the interview, describing sensations and feelings I experienced during the discussions. Through field notes I indicated the overall atmosphere of our encounter, highlighting my main reactions or comments among participants.

### **3.5.3 CREATION OF VISUAL NARRATIVES**

With the objective of informing the participants about the possibilities of communicating sensations and feelings through art, I introduced one example of contemporary art to them. At the end of our first meeting, I showed the participants Gu Xiong's art work called *Becoming Rivers*, an installation that was unveiled at the Museum of Anthropology in 2010.

Next, I invited them to create a visual narrative of four photographs in which they were able to express their experience as immigrants to Canada. In this study, the visual narratives created by the participants are taken as data, since they were springboards for discussion. Moreover, the images provided an invitation to speak and are representations of the participants' life experiences. They symbolize their points of view and the notions that were discussed in the meetings.

The study is limited to examining three Latino American adults between the ages of 30 and 55 years old. They have all been living in Canada permanently for more than two years and they are not intending to move back to their homeland. In addition, the study is limited to the

members of The Latin American Choir *Fusion Latina*, which meets every week at St. Mary's Kerrisdale Church, in the city of Vancouver.

The data collection focused on the participants as they went through the creation of the visual narrative. I also examined the process before, during and after the visual task, in which I observed reactions, attitudes and feelings of the participants and the group as a community of practice.

### **3.6 DATA RECORDING PROCEDURES AND MANAGMENT**

The data were recorded through a *smartpen*, which is a ballpoint pen with an embedded computer and digital audio recorder. It is used with special paper that records what is written for later uploading to a computer, and synchronizes those notes with any audio it has recorded. Additionally, the pictures are going to be kept by the participants and I will retain a digital copy of them. This information was included in the consent form that the participants signed at the beginning of the study.

#### **3.6.1 ETHICAL ISSUES AND QUESTIONS OF CREDIBILITY**

It is important to note that at the beginning of the study, the participants signed a consent form. The form included the aim of the study and a statement of how they were entitled to participate in the study, withdraw from it and/or refuse to answer certain question without negative consequences. Also, the consent form contained the assurance of the confidentiality of the information provided. Another ethical consideration is that participants decided to keep their

real names. Likewise, participants know that the information disclosed during the interviews and visual narratives would serve as a platform for future research, publication of papers in journals, or presentations at conferences.

As a researcher I conducted this investigation with the professionalism it merits and completed the tutorials that Humans Research Ethics provided in order to achieve the knowledge required to conduct this study

### **3.7 THE PROCESS**

One of the main purposes of the study was the unity among participants and researcher towards creating meaning and knowledge. I sought to establish a relationship in which participants could share the power of research by being part of the inquiry process in all aspects. The knowledge and the learning experience achieved from this investigation is the result of a relationship of trust between the participants and researcher and among each member of the community of practice. In this study, we as a community developed a close and open interaction through which each person could learn and understand with each other. We were creating a reciprocal interaction and dialogue.

To start, I was prompted to work only with Latin American immigrants to Canada, in order to narrow my search and find parallels and dissimilarities with my own study as a Latin American immigrant. Throughout my search of Hispanic associations or groups I discovered Fusion Latina, a unique choir formed mostly by Latin Americans with a compilation of music from all over South America. In order to approach this group, I first contacted the committee members

of the choir, by email, telling them about myself, the study, and its intentions. Then, after having a response from them, I met the members of Fusion Latina, during one of their weekly rehearsals. I introduced myself and proceeded to share with the choir my interest in them and the research study, concluding my short presentation with an invitation to participate in the investigation. After receiving some answers back from the members with their intention to participate in the study, I selected three subjects to start my a/r/tographic project.

### **3.7.1 PARTICIPANTS**

The three participants were selected according to their age, time in Vancouver, and future plans to stay in Canada. More specifically, I looked for people between the ages of 30 to 55 years who were living in Vancouver for at least two years and who were not intending to move back to their native countries. The subjects who agreed to participate in the study were participants Candido Vigil, Laura Aveledo and Nene Lofrano.

Candido Vigil was born in Mexico and moved to Vancouver two years ago. One month after arriving, he found a company in his field of engineering, who agreed to do the required paperwork for him to obtain a work permit. He is now working, successfully holding a high position in that company.

Laura Aveledo is from Venezuela and moved to Canada 16 years ago. During this time she has lived in 2 other countries and she always returns to Vancouver, which is home for her. She is a management professional with an MBA and a master in Marketing. In addition, Laura trains and

advises small business owners, teaches management, marketing, entrepreneurship and change management.

Nene Lofrano, owner of a well known catering business, has been in Vancouver for about 34 years and is from Venezuela as well. In particular, Nene was selected as a participant for the fact that she does not consider herself in a state where '*she misses home*'.

Regarding the interviews, it is important to observe that I did not mention to my participants any of the concepts involved in a/r/tography, with the objective of avoiding any confusing or dissuading details. Instead, I focused on creating our own space of trust among our group. I focused on building a community of inquirers and researchers. Through sharing life experiences we constructed theories, notions and meanings about being Latinos and immigrants to Canada.

With the purpose of studying the participant's experiences, I asked participants to bring four pictures to the second meeting. The pictures were related to what had been discussed in our previous meeting. From this point the dynamic changed, evoking new topics and concepts.

### **3.7.2 DATA ANALYSIS**



**FIGURE 11: 'DATA ANALYSIS BOARD (MAIN VIEW)' RODRIGUEZ, 2012**

According to Banks (2007) "Several analysts point out that the context in which an image is encountered (what he calls a part of its external narrative) is not merely something to

subsequently take into account: the ‘meaning’ of the image and the ‘meaning’ of the context are mutually constituting” (p. 41).

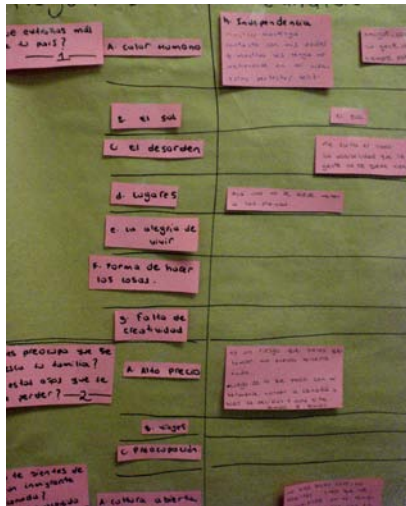


FIGURE 12: ‘ZOOM OF DATA ANALYSIS BOARD’ RODRIGUEZ, 2012

Next, I sought the themes that evoked more responses and reactions from all of the subjects. In this way, I evaluated topics that had a more complex significance for the discussion of immigration and displacement, topics that were incarnated in the journeys of Candido, Laura and Nene. In addition, the images that the subjects brought to the second meeting were analyzed respectively with the narrative each participant shared.



FIGURE 13: ‘ZOOM OF DATA ANALYSIS BOARD’ RODRIGUEZ, 2012

On the other hand, the visual task analysis is based upon the personal narratives participants described about their experiences lived as foreigners. I also kept in mind the resonance the pictures made among the rest of the group, the process when taking the photographs and the kinds of questions each image evoked.

All in all, we have seen the way other studies have implemented arts based methodologies and visual research methodologies in their studies and the theory that both a/r/tography and visual research entails. In addition, we have seen how this study was conducted and the methods involved.



## CHAPTER 4: META-ANALYSIS



**FIGURE 14:** 'MIGRANCY JOURNEYS #3' RODRIGUEZ, 2011

*We, immigrants carry with us  
past identities  
that at the same time  
are juxtaposed  
with new ones*

Vancouver, April 23

2012

Dear reader:

Yesterday, I attended a concert of Fusión Latina. It was a very good experience because I could feel an atmosphere of joy among the choir and the public. With t-shirts of vibrant colors, songs from all over South America and a variety of instruments, the choir shared their Latin heritage with the public. Magically, the choir took me back into my childhood and my land, when listening to songs that are traditional from my country.

However, when I saw them singing, I was wondering about their personal stories as Latin American immigrants. I was wondering as well about the difficulties they had to confront in order to adjust to Canada. Then, I realized that there are many immigrants who are doing their best to be part of Canada, understanding and absorbing its culture. In the same way, there are many immigrants who are contributing to the culture of Canada, bringing a variety of tints to Canadian community. Certainly, while trying to blend into Canadian culture immigrants are able to share their roots as well. They are able to be both Hispanics and Canadians.

Dear reader, in this chapter, I am going to share with you the most significant points that were discussed among the participants in our meetings. Life experiences, adjustment process and many other issues that arise when being away from home. Additionally, I forge connections between theoretical concepts with participant's narratives.

The analysis approach of this study is based in grounded theory in which theory is developed out of data and analysis is preceded simultaneously and repeatedly referring back to each other (Bryman, Teevan & Bell 2009, p. 252). I employed an open coding system that consists of the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 61). Subsequently, the data were re-explored and re-interpreted in terms of the selected codes, moving to a more selective and abstract way of conceptualizing the phenomenon of immigration.

In this chapter, I am going to describe the principal themes that emerged regarding the personal narratives of cultural displacement, as rendered by participants.

#### **4.1 LIVING ABROAD AS A PAINFUL DECISION AND HUGE SACRIFICE**

For all the participants, living abroad was a painful decision and a huge sacrifice for the price they had to pay for leaving their families. Specifically, there are two factors that increased this feeling. One is the factor that with time your family ages (parents, aunts, siblings and so forth). The second fact is the preoccupation of leaving your family in a city that is dangerous. Some of the participants' family members have experienced violence while participants were living abroad. This means they had to bear such events from a distance, in a position of total impotence.

#### 4.1.2 NOSTALGIA

- a- For the culture\*
- b- For family and friendships
- c- For a home country that has changed

Participants expressed feelings of nostalgia about the culture, family and friends. Specifically, the participants that are from Venezuela, Laura and Nene, expressed nostalgia for a country, which one day was but now does not exist anymore.

It is important to note that when the world culture is mentioned by the participants they are referring to the following points: (taken from their own voices)

- Human warmth
- The disorder and chaos in the cities (*'the possibility of breaking the rule. Here people are restricted, they are kind of plain.'*)
- The happiness of living
- Way of doing things (*"Here you have to re-learn everything again: how to talk, behave and so forth"*)
- The friendliness of people and how people are (*animated, forgive easy when you make a mistake...*)
- Creativity
- Activities around the family especially at Christmas time
- Food
- Music

- The jokes
- The way of taking when you are allowed to tease each other among co-workers, friends, etc.
- The hospitality where *'My home is your home'*.
- Unity and brotherhood at school and work where it is easier to establish friendships.
- A word mixed between men and women.

#### 4.1.3 FEELINGS OF CULTURAL DISPLACEMENT

All of the participants expressed their difficulties towards assimilating and understanding the appropriate behavior regarding verbal, physical and emotional contact.

a- *'Keeping a stiff upper lip'* in which you never show your emotions

b- Harassment Culture

c- Differences between men and women

Wrong conceptions regarding the other sex when being friendly

d- Extreme precautions against germs. *'No toques!! Don't touch!'*

e. Maintaining a political correctness with everything you say

f- Difficulty in knowing the limits regarding certain circumstances in friendships

*'Keeping a stiff upper lip'* in which you never show your emotions, is one aspect that emerged.

Laura explained that Latin Americans are very affectionate and are more used to physical contact. *"Estamos mucho más acostumbrados al contacto físico y aquí le tienen pavor al*

*contacto físico y también al contacto emocional.” “Here they are afraid of physical and also emotional contact.”*

Following this idea, appeared the topic of harassment culture in which women can misunderstand the way men treat them or vice versa. Candido, shared his feelings regarding being a Latin male where he has to be cautious of his behavior, knowing that even a slap on a woman's back can be a cause for being accused of sexual harassment. He mentions that in Mexico, touching your family, friends or coworkers is part of the culture, particularly, taking hands or a hug. As an example, Laura narrated an experience that took place at a store, in which a man she did not know, took a wrong conception of her and invited her to his home. Because Laura answered a question he asked and smiled, the stranger thought she may be interested in him.

Moreover, the differences between men and women, specifically the expected passive behaviors from women in the professional level, indicate some levels of chauvinism in this field. Laura who worked in the area of corporate banking, describes the difficulty she had when holding a high position in this field and dealing with her male coworkers.

Laura narrates that instead of being honest and direct she felt she had to agree with her coworkers all the time. In the same way, Nene corroborated this concept, describing how in her kitchen, she prefers to have women, because *‘men don't like to be told what to do.’*

When observing extreme precautions against germs from Canadians, participants declared feeling a level of discomfort. '*No toques!! Don't touch!*' (Nene's words) Observing how some Canadians sometimes even clean their hands after shaking another person's hand.

Regarding verbal behavior, participants expressed the precautions they have to have in maintaining a political correctness with everything they say, to avoid misinterpretations with others. In a similar way, Laura discussed the difficulty for her of sometimes not knowing the limits regarding certain circumstances in friendships. She shared an experience where she did not know how many times she should call or visit a friend she had who was at the hospital.

#### **4.1.4 BELONGING TO TWO CULTURES**

Besides the efforts to adapt to Canadian culture, participants consider Vancouver their home, showing great appreciation and passion for the city, the country and the kind of life they have here, where the amount of stress is low. Therefore, participants showed a better adjustment to Canadian culture, acknowledging that they do not longer belong to their native countries but to both cultures.

#### **4.1.5 FUSION LATINA AS A CONNECTOR POINT WITH LATIN CULTURE**

Being a member of the choir has helped participants to re-connect with their culture.

In a unique family environment, participants are free to speak their native language (Spanish) and act according to their culture, tease each other, laugh and dance. Additionally, the choir allows them to share their Latin heritage with others.

- *‘Tener esa parte Latina es como tu colchoncito y la parte de calor y la parte de relación’*
- *‘Having that Latin part is like having your little mattress and the part of warmth and the part of friendship.’ (Candido)*
- *‘Esa parte de que nunca vamos a ser rojos rojos, porque tenemos esa parte que queremos que ustedes vean, lo que tenemos que ustedes no tienen, pero para que ustedes lo disfruten.’*
- *‘The concept regarding that we never will be red, because we have that side that we want you to see, what we have that you don’t have, but which is for your enjoyment’.*  
*(Nene)*
- *‘Para mí es esa parte de disfrutar esas 2 horas a la semana de ser latino, de desconectarte de entender ingles, de abrazar, de no justificarte con nadie’*
- *‘For me is that part of enjoying those 2 hours per week of being Latin, of disconnecting myself from understanding English, of hugging, of not justifying myself - for anybody’.*  
*(Candido)*
- *‘Y ese es mi punto porque somos amarillos, porque tú tienes que poner una fachada, controlar cosas tuyas. Esa parte de expresar como te sientes, de mover tu cuerpo con tus emociones es muy típico de nuestra cultura y aquí no’*



- *‘And that is my point why we are yellow, because you have to put on this façade, controlling your things. It is - that part of expressing what you feel, of moving your body with your emotions, that is typical of our culture and not here.’ (Laura)*

#### **4.1.6 OBJECTS THAT BRING YOU CLOSER TO HOME**

Through folkloric objects participants negotiate also the memories of their culture, bringing with them a sense of ‘home’ with symbolism and representations of their own history.

#### **4.1.7 FINAL THOUGHTS**

Participants acknowledge three points: Firstly, it is possible to be ‘here and there’ with the various ways of connecting with friends and family who are in their native countries. Forms such as the Internet, the easy access to communications and travel made either way (from Canada to their country of origin or from family and friends to Canada) make it easy to stay in touch with family and friends. In this way it is possible to be aware of the events that are happening with both their countries and families. Secondly, due to the immigration system, which gives preference to educated immigrants, Hispanics are a minority and Canadians do not have a pre-conception towards them. Hence, to be a Latin American immigrant in Canada is a different experience from other countries, in which they are more strongly stereotyped.

However, the experience of immigration is very intense and you as an immigrant need to make a strong effort to integrate. It is necessary to absorb many aspects of the system and culture.

Also, in this process Candido describes *“You watch to learn the ways; you try not to bother, to*

*be friendly, to belong. It is a process of intense assimilation about what Canadians have known already since birth.”*

So, the phenomenon of immigration entangles points and sentiments that sometimes collide with each other. Nostalgia for the country of origin, family and friends, interweave with the possibility of being able to communicate with them or even see them. Additionally, the struggle of adjusting and learning about the system and culture in Canada becomes easier when Canadians are kind to foreigners and make them feel at home. In brief, participants expressed their personal narratives throughout their journey of migration, acknowledging that they now belong to two cultures. Cultures that are not parallel instead they cross with each other.

*‘Una ventaja que nosotros tenemos es que podemos entender y vivir entre dos mundos’*

*‘One advantage we have is that we can understand and live between two worlds’*

## **4.2 PICTURES**

This study created a research space in which participants were enabled to connect, reflect and analyze aspects that probably they would not perceive on a regular basis, using a language of inquiry to make sense of their experiences. Thus, according to what participants shared, the topics that emerged in the visual narratives illustrate a sense of nostalgia for the culture, landscape and weather, while other images represented their connection and adherence to Canada. Furthermore, the image immigrants have to project to others in order to belong and be part of Canadian culture and the effort of integrate, are subjects that appeared as well. Next, I am going to explain in detail each of the visual narratives that the participants portrayed.

Nene presents the following pictures:



**FIGURE 15:** 'AREPA, LATIN DISH' LOFRANO, 2011



**FIGURE 16:** 'LATIN FUSION FEAST' LOFRANO, 2011

Metamorphosis of Latino dishes

- -*'Poder mantener algo típico criollo pero presentado al primer mundo de una manera primer mundista'*
- *'Being able to maintain something typical but presented to the first world in a first world way'*

**Arepa** is a bread made of corn popular in both Colombia and Venezuela. It is similar to the Mesoamerican tortilla and even more to the Salvadoran pupusa. Arepas can also be found in Panama and the Canary Islands in Spain (Babylon dictionary).

Nene explains that her narrative is a comparison of the food, specifically the typical arepa as eaten in Venezuela and the '*arepitas*' that we make here, that are gourmet.



**FIGURE 18: CANADIAN FOLKLORIC CARVINGS'**  
LOFRANO, 2011



**FIGURE 17: 'VENEZUELAN CARVINGS'**  
LOFRANO, 2011

The second set of photos is a comparison of folkloric art from Venezuela and from Canada.

Nene narrates the way the peasants in the Andes, after doing their daily chores sit down and carve folkloric figures that are then sold. For Nene whose mother lives in the Andes, the woodcrafts are objects that remind her of her land. She explains that because it has been a long time since she visited Venezuela, she likes to look for woodcrafts similar to the Venezuelan collection she has. *“Aquí busco lo que es el arte popular, de aquí, que tenga algunas semejanzas a la colección que yo tengo.”*

Thus, Nene’s visual narratives portray a representation of herself in Canada, in which she embodies and lives both cultures when narrating her negotiation with Latin culture and Canadian culture. Her photos create a space in which the liminality of her two selves encounter and merge together to inform and recreate each other. Moreover, the representation of the arepa is the expression of Nene’s achievements in Canada (starting her own company is one of them). She is able to show others about the ‘Latin Fusion’ of what she was and is now, that is: a mix

and connection of both cultures. Indeed, Nene presents the idea of recapturing our past and bringing it in to the present in a process of constant transformation, as there is a constant need for alternating the path.

Furthermore, Candido starts his visual narrative stating the way he felt connected with Canada when witnessing the Olympics, bringing a picture that was sent to him by a friend, displaying the Olympic rings in Vancouver, 2012 (Since Candido did not create this image, due to ethics considerations the image is not being published).

*“Ahí, creo que ha sido uno de los momentos en los que más me he sentido parte de Canadá”*

*“There, I believe is one of the moments in which I felt more part of Canada”*

He expresses his joy and sense of unity with Canadians when watching a player win a medal, listening to the Canadian anthem or seeing Canadians celebrating in downtown. He recalls all of this as *‘being an explosion of passion.’*

*“No tenía que ver con el deporte sino con el orgullo de sentirte parte de un país como Canadá.”*

*“It did not have to be with sports but with the pride of feeling part of a country like Canada.”*

Additionally, Candido observes from the Olympics, the capacity that sports and art have to erase borders of race and color.

In the next image, Candido presents a picture that represents change. After a two-year application process, Candido arrived with his wife in Canada. Both of them were full of illusions, regarding job opportunities and a better quality of life. However, after a while they separated. Candido explains that it was the month of February when this happened and it was the most difficult time of the year for him.

This was the first picture that Candido took in his life with the first camera he got. He describes how it was one of those days when he dragged himself from his apartment and said: *'I have to get out now.'*



**FIGURE 19: 'RE-STARTING AGAIN' VIGIL, 2011**

*'Para mí representa como haber empezado a re-contruir toda mi vida en Canadá.'*

*'For me this represents how I started to re-construct all my life in Canada'.*

Additionally, Candido describes his third picture that is from a trip he made to the Rockies, explaining that for him, they are what Canada represents. Candido analyses that:



**FIGURE 20: 'THE ROCKIES' VIGIL, 2011**

*"La belleza de México, se me hace que es una belleza en el detalle, en la gente, en la comida, en los colores. Pero no es algo que te abrume, no es algo que te impacte."*

*"The beauty of Mexico is a beauty in detail, in the people, the food, in the colors. But it is not something that overwhelms you and impacts you."*



Candido also comments that the strident beauty of Canadian nature is something that engages you little by little, and suddenly you start enjoying the rivers, forests and all the change in the seasons. In addition, Candido explains that in his country the weather does not affect you as it does here. He describes how in Canada, with each season the style of life changes the people, their attitudes, behavior and clothing.

The last picture Candido presents is a church in Mexico, the Mexico he remembers and loves. He explains that he does not remember the Mexico with violence or vehicular traffic. This is the side that is not going to change in Mexico and it does not matter which president is ruling or how many ‘narcos’ we have. He also mentions that this picture reminds him of the reason he continues to be Mexican.



**FIGURE 21:** ‘A MEXICAN CHURCH’ VIGIL, 2011

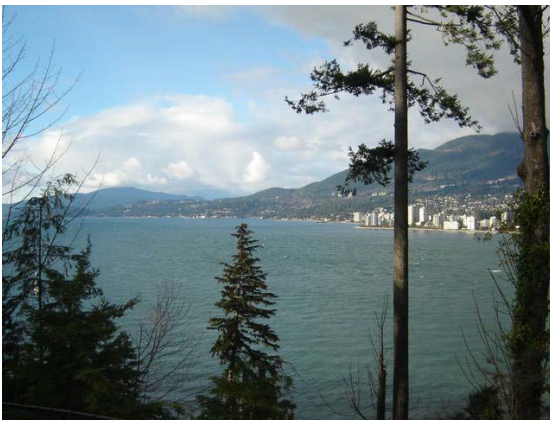
*‘Esa parte de la cultura que no ha cambiado, que no cambiara, que forma parte de tu ADN, entonces, esa parte de México que no vas a perder.’*

*‘It is this part of the culture that has not changed, that is not going to change, and that belongs to your DNA, then, it is a -part of Mexico that you are not going to lose.’*

In brief, Candido through his visual narratives illustrates his identity, recognition and adherence with Canadian style of life. At the same time, he acknowledges his affection towards Mexican

culture, allowing convergence with both cultures. So, although Candido accepts that Mexican art, practices and activities are intrinsic to him, he does not let these feelings impede his acculturation process in Canada. Moreover, in Figure 21- *Re-starting again*, Candido represents how, after a difficult situation, he stood up and continued with his life in Canada. He never thought about moving back to his country because of his situation. Instead Candido considered Canada part of his new reality, embracing the new sides of himself.

Subsequently, Laura displays her visual narrative through five images. The first two photographs are a comparison between the Canadian and Venezuelan littorals. She narrates that when she walks by the seawall she remembers the coast in Venezuela and the beauty of its mountains and sea. She also mentions that she misses the sun and the temperature of the water, where she is able to submerge as well (In fact, this is a common topic among participants).



**FIGURE 22:** 'VANCOUVER'S LITTORAL'  
AVELEDO, 2011



**FIGURE 23:** 'VENEZUELAN' LITTORAL'  
AVELEDO, 2011

These two images of the littoral evoke feelings of dislocation and nostalgia generally confronted by immigrants where past gets mixed with present. Here, the comparison of the two spaces



renders the dislocation Laura feels when being reminded of the life she used to have as well as the fact of being apart of her landscape as well as her country. However, the similarity between the two landscapes brings to Laura certain sensations and emotions of familiarity and comfort that allows her to feel (perhaps) at home.

For her third image Laura creates a contrast of two typical and very similar Canadian houses, illustrating her own house and her neighbors' house (This image for privacy purposes is not being published). In this way, Laura comments on one important concept, the concept of the façade. She explains that similar to the houses which appear to be 'identical' from the outside, immigrants can also 'be Canadians' with their façades. It is the notion of the image that immigrants have to follow in order to adjust to the culture of the country they are in. In addition, immigrants, although having inside of them their own culture and roots, have to lock away their customs to be able to enter this culture and communicate with others.

Laura also explains that between the two houses, there is one difference. One of the houses has a pumpkin, which is a decoration to celebrate Halloween. But in her house she does not have any decoration because it is not part of her customs. In Laura's house following her Latin roots, Spanish is the language that is used. She speaks, argues, counts and listens to music in Spanish. Therefore, she dances merengue and salsa that are popular South American rhythms. To conclude, Laura adds that probably in the other house, everything they do is in the English language.

*“Aunque uno aparente y trate de ser ‘Canadiense’, uno por dentro es latino.”*

*“Even if one pretends and tries to be ‘Canadian’, one is Latin inside.”*

In the next photograph, Laura shares a personal picture, in which she is standing next to her female coworkers all of them wearing business attires (due to ethics considerations this image is not being published). Laura explains that in this picture there are three Canadians and three immigrants, one from China, one from Iran and herself. Stating that immigrants in this picture reflect what other immigrants are doing, that is to adapt to the daily routine of the city. Every one brings their own baggage, which is their own culture and traditions. Moreover, Laura makes the observation that her Chinese coworker was wearing a typical Chinese dress, declaring that:

*“Estas como trayendo lo tuyo a esta parte y tratando de adaptarte y melting in, in the ‘Melting pot’ de lo que es este proceso’.*

*‘You are bringing your things to this site and trying to adapt, and melting in, in the ‘Melting pot’ of what this process is.*

From Laura’s point of view, there are going to be situations where immigrants are going to miss their cultures and be misunderstood. And maybe, there will be aspects that immigrants need to comprehend from this culture. Despite the differences, immigrants are in fact trying to integrate with Canadians, and Canadians at the same time are accepting them.

Lastly, Laura creates an image<sup>1</sup> representing the immigrant flag, which consists of three Rs that signify what immigrants are not. Immigrants are not Ready, Ripe and Red to be 100%

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<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that the concept of the Immigrant Flag was totally created and developed by Laura Aveledo, 2011.

Canadian. Laura uses a biological metaphor to compare the color of the leaf with the immigrants' process of adaptation. In this flag – Laura explains that – the leaf is not completely RIPE because, immigrants are not completely mature due to lack of experience and knowledge about Canada. And immigrants are not completely adapted or absorbed into Canadian culture. It takes time to learn and mellow and when we ripen we are red. So, the maple leaf is mellow when it is red and an immigrant is ripe when s/he adapts (Emotionally, culturally, climatically, and so forth).

In this way the immigrant and the leaf becomes redder and more Canadian. An example of this is when people talk about politicians, comedians, cartoons or events from the past. In this case, we immigrant feel a gap because we do not know the subject of the topic.



**FIGURE 24:** 'THE IMMIGRANT FLAG' AVELEDO, 2011

Secondly, we are not READY, because we bring our 'baggage' with our roots. These roots, which we enjoy immensely, impregnate our food, our music, our way of being so expressive and affectionate and so forth. Thus, we are not RED enough to be full Canadians, although we do our best.

- *'La hoja no está lo suficientemente roja y nosotros no estamos lo suficientemente maduros como canadienses'.*
- *'The leaf is not red enough and we are not ripe enough as Canadians'*
- *We are not red because we have with us a variety of colors, since we bring our own culture.*
- *'Siempre hay algo que es intrínseco en tu cultura'*
- *'There is always something that is intrinsic in your culture'*
- *'We have two cultures and they are not parallel, instead they cross with each other'*

So, in order to integrate into the system, Laura explains the way she renders an image of herself where she does not give evidence of where she is originally from. Laura depicts this notion when taking a picture of her house and the neighbor's. Furthermore, in the other three images, she represents her effort to integrate and blend into the Canadian system. She states that although immigrants sometimes appear to be blending in as Canadians, through the clothing, places where they live, or even their behavior, they have to lock their own cultures inside. Laura then describes how she has done her best to blend in Canadian culture when trying to melt with other Canadians in keeping her culture to herself in certain situations.

‘While ‘going home’ recalls the nostalgic associations of a mythologized point or origin (our mothers and fathers), being at home in the world involves finding ourselves in a wider, shifting, but more flexible, framework in which our mothers and fathers, bonds and traditions, the myths we know to be myths yet continue to cling to, cherish and dream, exist alongside other stories, other fragments of memory and traces of time’ (Chambers, 1990. p. 104).

Immigrants live between two different worlds that connect and nourish their new identities, juxtaposing past with present, present with roots, of who you were and what you have become. You are suddenly a new you, with other layers, other views, you feel expanded. You belong here but you belong there.

#### **4.3 OVERVIEW**

In reviewing all of the above data, two main themes have emerged: dislocation and liminality.

##### **4.3.1 DISLOCATION**

The data illustrate to what extent the experience of living abroad is a painful decision and a big sacrifice immigrant make in respect to leaving their families behind. Also, the data depict an aspect of dislocation that is a hurdle immigrants face when learning the codes, rules and expected behavior of the new system and culture. When you leave your home country, you leave behind a ‘state of code safeness’ and literacy about a culture and the system. At the time you arrive in a new land, this ‘safe state’ is erased and transcribed with new regulations that the newcomer perhaps does not know exactly how to read. Likewise, Anzaldúa (1999), states that

culture forms our beliefs explaining that humans perceive the version of reality that culture communicates. Specifically dominant paradigms and predefined concepts that exist as unquestionable, or unchangeable, are transmitted to us through the culture. This notion of culture and beliefs resonates with the difficulties immigrants have regarding the expected behavior in terms of verbal, physical and emotional contact with other persons in Canada.

Indeed, immigrants' visions of reality and behaviors are highly influenced by the culture in which they grew up together with the customs and practices they have in their spaces with their fellow citizens. This is one of the reasons of why immigrants have to make a great effort to acculturate, adjust and understand the different practices people do in the country they moved to.

#### **4.3.2 LIMINALITY**

Not only was the brain split into two functions but so was reality. People who inhabit both realities are forced to live in the interface between two, forced to become adept at switching modes (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 59).

According to Chambers (1994), immigrants dwell in the middle of histories and memories, in a space of liminality and transformation. In such space, foreigners simultaneously embrace two cultures, being from 'inside' and 'outside'. Living a history that is continually being decomposed and recomposed in the interlacing between what they have inherited and the place they are. Likewise, in this space different identities are recognized, exchanged and mixed, but they do not vanish. The sense of belonging, language and myths that

are carried by them, remain but not longer as ‘origins’ or signs of ‘authenticity’ that assure their meaning in life. On the contrary, they persist as traces, voices, memories and murmurs that are blended with other histories, episodes and encounters.

Chambers (1994) continues explaining that foreigners’ previous sense of knowledge, language and identity, together with their peculiar inheritance cannot be simply rubbed out of the story and cancelled. None of the immigrants can just simply choose another language and completely abandon their past. Foreigners’ heritage in terms of culture, history, language and tradition, and sense of identity, is not destroyed but taken apart, opened up to questioning, rewriting and re-routing. For this reason, the zone immigrants dwell in is open and full of gaps; it is an excess that is unconquerable to a single center, origin or point of view. This means that immigrants’ sense of centre is displaced.

And in such intervals other stories, languages and identities can also be heard, encountered and experienced. Indeed, immigrants “sense of being, of identity and language, is experienced and extrapolated from movement: the ‘I’ does not pre-exist this movement and then go out into the world, the ‘I’ is constantly being formed and reformed in such movement in the world” (Chambers, 1994, p. 25).

Subsequently, Chambers (1994) declares that immigrant’s historical, cultural and psychic subjects are also uprooted and forced to correspond to their existence in terms of movement and metamorphosis. And this journey is open and incomplete. It involves a continual fabrication, invention and construction, in which there is no fixed identity or final destination. So, there is not final referent that exists outside their languages and traditions and roots become less

important for them. They are part of a vanished “authenticity” while acquiring significance as part of a flexible, rewritten, modified and composed inheritance.

Likewise, the data make visible the way foreigners make sense of their inherited cultures in combination with the new ones. Herein, immigrants’ core selves gets blended and transformed with a second culture. Particularly, immigrants do acknowledge that they dwell in a space of liminality, accepting it and taking advantage of it. They embrace what they think is best from the country of origin and the host country. Besides, immigrants through their adaptation process adjust little by little and discover connections with the new culture, while experiencing constant transformation.

Thus, considering the violent dispersal of people, cultures and lives, we are inevitably confronted with mixed histories, cultural mingling, composite languages and creole arts that are also central to our history (Chamber, 1994, p. 16). Candido, Nene and Laura discovered in themselves new changes and transformations. In fact, the data portray the comparisons that participants make, regarding elements that symbolize their lives and culture in Canada with elements that symbolize their country of origin. Past and present intermingle when participants juxtapose images that belong to their history in their countries with images that pertain to their lives here. Similarly, Anzaldúa (1999) describes that she was the first in six generations to leave the Valley and the only one in her family to ever leave home. But she didn’t leave all parts of herself: she kept the ground of her own being. She walked away, taking with her the land.

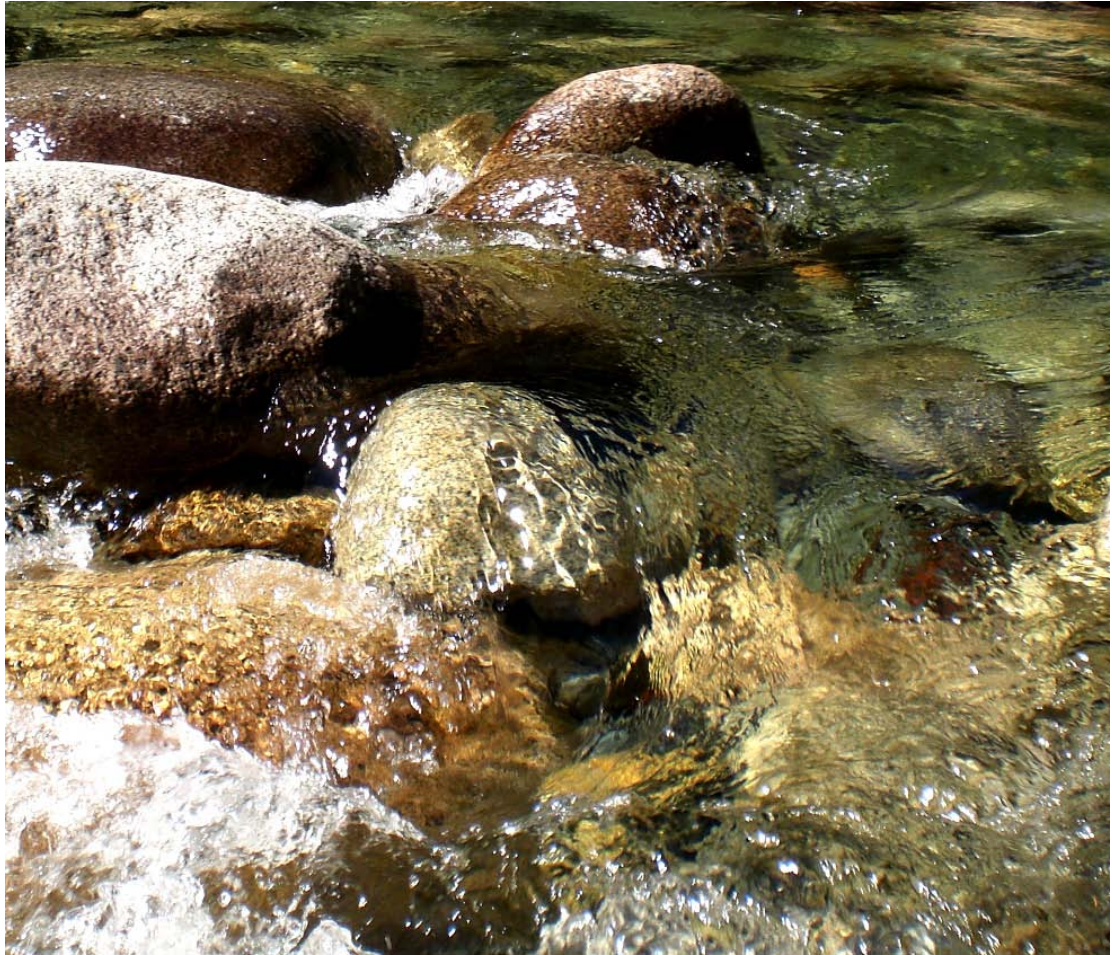


The Immigrant Flag created by Laura Avelo, becomes an icon that symbolizes Canadian immigrants. The Immigrant Flag renders the main point about immigrants' realities, illustrating, in a metaphoric way to what extent immigrants carry both cultures. In the same way, Anzaldúa (1999) creates a concept she calls *Nepantla*, a word that describes the space between two bodies of water and the space between two worlds. Immigrants are not this or that but are constantly changing. Foreigners encounter a transition in which they have not integrated into the new identity yet haven't left the old identity behind either. Hence, the condition of being an immigrant brings a journey of constant transformation and permutation. As such immigrants will never belong to just the culture they were born into. It is very awkward, uncomfortable and frustrating to be in that *Nepantla* because you are in the midst of transformation (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 237). However, such liminality is the challenge and beauty of the immigrant journey.

Altogether, the data give evidence that when in-between spaces are embraced by immigrants they indeed achieve the ability to adjust and merge with Canadian culture, thus, making possible the immigrant's sense of belonging and identity as Latino Americans and Canadians. In particular, what mainly surprised me with regard to the data analysis is the fact that participants went beyond the expectations regarding the creation and sharing of the visual narratives. For the visual task, participants prepared and created each image taking photographs to share their thoughts, as well as using personal ones that had a specific meaning for them. In this way, participants were able to use the images to express concrete aspects that spoke of their experiences as foreigners. As a matter of fact, I, as a researcher, consider that none of the images were shared accidentally simply in order to accomplish the visual task. Instead the images were created and developed bringing with them a piece of the participants' essences and

their lives, rendering powerful sentences of their own experiences and narratives. Participants engaged in the visual exploration reflecting about the meaning of being in Canada, making sense of the different aspects that are encountered in their memories and reality at the same time.

In addition, it is important to note that at the moment they were asked to share the images, participants had a clear and concrete meaning for each one of the images presented, even comparisons between images. This thoroughness left me, without the need to inquire further, when I saw the precision and transparency of the visual narratives displayed. Also, one of the things that surprise me was the fact that the participant Laura Aveledo invented an icon for immigrants, establishing it with her own opinions and position as foreigner. This demonstrated the effectiveness the positive influence a community of practice brings to people when inviting them to contribute with certain matter in a creative way with their voices.

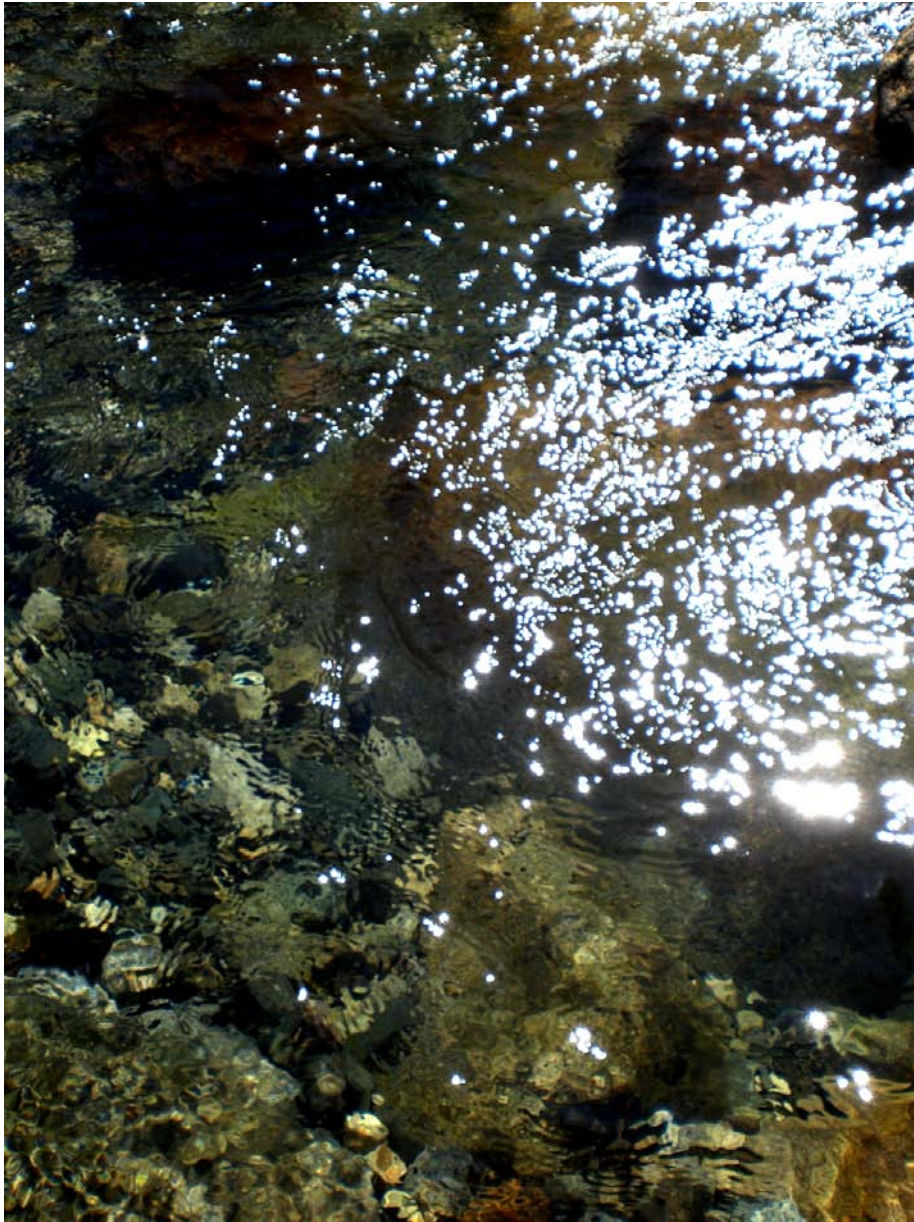


**FIGURE 25: 'MIGRANCY JOURNEYS #7' RODRIGUEZ, 2011**

*And then these identities  
get mixed with sensations such as  
nostalgia, dislocation and astonishment.*



## CHAPTER 5: FINAL REMARKS



**FIGURE 26:** 'MIGRANCY JOURNEYS #8' RODRIGUEZ, 2011

Vancouver, June 13

2012

Dear reader:

The other day, I was talking to my Colombian friend, Liliána, who immigrated with her family to the United States 12 years ago. But due to some difficulties with her visa she had to go back to Colombia alone. This meant that Liliána was forced to re-locate and experience again the acculturation process, this time all by herself.

While she acknowledged the positive points of living in Colombia, my friend confessed to me that this process was harder than she thought. Liliána shared with me some situations and experiences that were difficult for her to understand. She narrated in particular how hard it was for her to establish friendships and adjust to the rhythm of the city and the way of thinking of the people there.

For me it was a surprise to learn about this experience from a person who frequently visits Colombia. It made me think about the way immigrants spend our lives imagining how it would be if we went back home. You see, as immigrants we usually fantasize on memories from the past and expectations for the future, dreaming of the day we will be able to move back to our countries of origin. We often visualize wonderful colors and scents, the kindness of the people, the music, the food, and so forth. To later on find that indeed we have evolved and changed. As immigrants, we think that going back is our final destination, the one where we are finally going to be happy and fulfilled.

However, we forget that we are no longer the human beings that used to live in these places. In fact, we are different people, who have been transformed in the process of acculturating ourselves abroad. Thus, perhaps we no longer fit in the culture of our countries of origin anymore.

Certainly, I find that her narrative renders a crucial element in the journey of the immigrant as the poem of Ithaka written by Constantine P. Cavafy (1911/2001), depicts:

*"So that when you reach the island you are old,  
rich with all you have gained on the way,  
not expecting Ithaka to give you wealth.  
Ithaka gave you a splendid journey.  
Without her you would not have set out.  
She hasn't anything else to give you.  
  
And if you find her poor,  
Ithaka hasn't deceived you.  
So wise you have become,  
of such experience,  
that already you'll have understood  
what these Ithakas mean."*

The journey of an immigrant is a tough one to confront and survive. It is one journey full of emotions, memories and nostalgia that not everyone is capable of enduring.

There are obstacles to confront, such as cultural displacement and adaptation to the new system, and the fact of creating, developing and discovering new identities within the environment. The treasure is the learning process that comes within this experience, the many things you achieve and the person you become.

Chambers (1994) declares that "Migrancy involves a movement in which neither the points of departure nor those of arrival are immutable or certain. It calls for a dwelling in language, in histories, in identities that are constantly subject to mutation. Always in transit, the promise of a homecoming – completing the story, domesticating the detour – becomes an impossibility" (p. 5). When going back you will find that you are different from the other citizens of your native country.

Indeed, you are no longer holding the vision they have for life, you are also holding the perspective of the other culture you immigrated to. You are now, not a Colombian, Chinese, Hindu...etc. You are a person that has two cultures, who belongs to both countries, and who lives in a third space, the space of liminality, of the in-betweenness. As a foreigner you should be aware that indeed you are an extraordinary person and you are a citizen of the world.

In this final chapter I summarize the salient understandings for each of the two research questions that guided this study.

This study examines the way Latin American immigrants to Canada confront the fact of being away from their countries of origin. I aim to render for immigrants how this experience contains a journey full of learning. At the same time, the study generates new knowledge, regarding feelings and experiences of Latin American immigrants to Canada. Presently, after dealing with the results and discussions that emerged from the data gathered, I am going to summarize the salient understandings for each research question that guided this study. In addition, I am going to suggest some implications from my review of the overall study.

This section presents the prominent understandings and concluding remarks of the study segregated by research question.

Research question 1: What themes do Latino American immigrants to Canada, express through their personal narratives of cultural displacement?

- Participants acknowledge that the process of settlement in a foreign land is complicated and it takes time to adjust and understand the culture.
- In addition, they recognize the immense challenge of being separated from their families. On one hand, participants are preoccupied with the safety of their family members, as the risk of any violent attack is perhaps higher. On the other hand, the fact of being separated from their love ones is an emotional sacrifice that is always going to be difficult to confront.



- Participants experience the differences between Latin culture and Canadian culture. They have become concerned with conventions that are related with the appropriate conduct at the verbal, physical and emotional level. Indeed, such aspects cause feelings of cultural displacement to occur.
- It is indicated that feelings of nostalgia are part of the lives of immigrants (Akhtar, 1999; Rishbeth, 2004; Rishbeth & Finney, 2006; Sterba, 1940). In particular, besides good weather, participants long for certain aspects of their cultures that trigger feelings of nostalgia in them.
- However, participants appreciate the support Canada gives to all immigrants and are grateful for the variety of programs that support their transition.
- They also admit the importance of comprehending, cultivating and embracing Canadian culture, in order to merge easily in their communities.
- The notion of change as individuals is evidenced in participants who find themselves different from the people they were in their home countries.
- Furthermore, participants are aware of the importance of adjusting and projecting an accurate image of themselves, with the purpose of fusing with Canadian culture.

- From the different experiences lived, participants acknowledge a significant sense of belonging and connection to Canada.
- After seeing themselves dwelling in the middle of two cultures and seeing the need of having both, participants have decided to embrace the two of them. In addition, participants acknowledge the advantage they have of understanding and living in both cultures.
- To this regard, participants in their daily routine are constantly negotiating with both Latin culture and Canadian culture.
- Fusion Latina is an example of this negotiation, which operates as a connection point with Latin culture. In this space participants are able to speak their native language and freely interact among themselves.
- Indeed, Fusion Latina impacted me as a researcher, by means of an informal education experience, linked with a/r/tography, which focuses on making relationships within the community through art and education. Herein, the creators and members of Fusion Latina have found a way of addressing the in-between space while maintaining and negotiating Canadian and Hispanic's cultures.

2) In what way is the creation and sharing of visual narratives a learning experience for a community of practice?

- Knowing that the notion of a photograph is a speech act (O'Donoghue, personal communication, March 3, 2012), these visual narratives render and symbolize participants' points of view. As well as the notions discussed in the meetings are representations of the participants' life experiences as foreigners.
- Through the visual narratives participants explored their connection and identification with both cultures. In a similar way, they illustrate their integration with Canadian culture and the effort to blend with their communities.
- Likewise, the photographs shed light on the growth as human beings that participants had achieved throughout their journeys as immigrants.
- The search for similarities and linkages among Canadian culture and Latin American culture is depicted in some of the pictures, as well as the acceptance of negative and positive points of each culture.
- The analysis of the number of immigrants that are fighting and searching to achieve their goals and adapt to their new lives, is represented also through the visual narratives.
- Indeed, the participants created a community of practice that evolved into a learning experience of everyone involved. The learning that took place was not just between me

as a researcher and the participants. It was among all of us as a group having a collective experience as immigrants to Canada.

- The image of *The Immigrant Flag*, created by Laura Aveledo, apart from having a visual impact had the ability to depict a deeper level of the reality of the immigrant. It became an icon for the group that recognized it positively and identified with it.
- Moreover, *The Immigrant Flag* was used by the rest of the participants to make references and connections with their life experiences. And most importantly, participants expressed their points in further discussions, using the concepts embedded in the image. The flag was juxtaposed at the same time with their narratives and ideas.
- Also, as soon as *The Immigrant Flag* was shared, the rest of the group began to see, and speak aloud, about their sense of readiness towards being Latin American immigrants. So, *The Immigrant Flag* gave the group the language and space to express their experiences in another way.
- Participants' experiences in Fusion Latina, together with the creation of their visual narratives, led to an increased awareness of the concept of the in-between. Here, instead of straddling two cultures, participants were able to unfold a third space in which everything dwells together.

Irwin (2004) theory of a/r/tography as métissage reveals the need to immerse oneself in a collection of ideas, information, and artifacts within the borderlands, while imagining and

forming different relationships amongst people and ideas (p. 32). In particular, this study creates a space of meaning through making and the process of that creation allows new ideas and concepts to come to the surface. Indeed, such concepts that emerged activated other forms. Likewise, in this space all subjects involved in the research inquiry were active participants whose meaning making existed in the moment of encounter (Jevic & Springgay, 2008, p. 70). Thus, meanings were generated and interrogated, provoking other thoughts and perceptions. That process brought a variety of rhizomatic ways of perceiving the reality of the immigrant.

### **5.1 IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY**

Some implications for the field of Latino American immigrants to Canada emerge from the main understandings of this study. This section describes the reverberations of this investigation of the personal a/r/tographic narratives of cultural displacement in Latin American immigrants living in Canada.

Latin American immigrants to Canada decide to move to this country for multiple reasons. Particularly searching for better opportunities and a change in their life style is what drove them to leave their land and families. However, the distance that separates them from their loved ones has become an emotional sacrifice, producing feelings of nostalgia and loneliness in certain situations. For this reason, they are constantly looking for ways to reunite with their families and friends during vacations and they are also keeping frequent communication.

Furthermore, Latin American immigrants comprehend that the process of adjustment and acculturation takes a significant amount of time. And they understand that as people who were

born in different places, they carry with them other views and different cultures. They acknowledge that they are, perhaps frequently going to have to confront situations where they are going to feel out of place. However, Hispanic immigrants acknowledge the importance to belong to Canadian culture and do their best to understand and blend with its system. They find connections with aspects of the culture in Canada that they like, enhancing their sense of belonging within their communities.

In a similar manner, immigrants from South America negotiate the unique space where they dwell, which is the space of liminality. In such space, immigrants discover that the cultures they possess don't go in different directions, instead they cross each other. Thus, Latin American immigrants discover the importance of blending both cultures as an effective method of dwelling in the space *in-between*.

Certainly immigration is embraced as a learning journey in which human beings are in a constant state of growth. Hence, their identities are transformed and re-routed in the process of positioning their identities and lives again.

Therefore, immigrant's final destination and main purpose is to situate themselves in the new land, rediscovering and embarking on new circumstances and spaces. Precisely as the poem of the Spanish poet Antonio Machado (1912/1978) from the CXXXVI Proverbs and Songs (p. 82) narrates:

'Wanderer, your footsteps are  
the road and nothing more;

"Caminante son tus huellas,  
el camino y nada más;

wanderer, there is not road,  
the road is made by walking.

By walking one makes the road,  
and upon glancing behind  
one sees the path that never  
will be trod again.

Wanderer, there is no road-  
only wakes upon the sea.

Caminante no hay camino,  
se hace camino al andar.

Al andar se hace camino,  
y al volver la vista atrás,  
se ve la senda que nunca  
Se ha de volver a pisar.

Caminante no hay camino,  
sino estelas en la mar.

## 5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations emanating from this study synthesize some suggestions and references towards art education, arts based methodologies and visual research methodologies.

- It is important to keep doing arts based research that sets up conditions to creatively and analytically investigate human's thoughts and actions.
- The combination of different research methodologies, have the ability to inform one another, offering significant elements for knowledge construction.
- Developing research among a community of practice enriches the alternatives to share, examine and analyze human phenomena in a collective way.

- Arts-based living inquiry embodies a reflective nature of life experience, which, combined with artistic queries, produces an evocative and persuasive form of research. Simultaneously, conveying connections between arts and scholarly work.
- Visual research enables the examination of analytical and interpretative methods, which induce the emergence of new kinds of evidence with the act of meaning making through the creation of visual narratives.
- When encountering a visual image created within the framework of research other forms of text emerge different from the standard scholarly texts. Hence, visual narratives become visual artifacts that render socio cultural texts that contribute to knowledge construction.
- Informal education is implemented and achieved through the direction and facilitation of settings where teaching and learning takes place among a community of engagement.
- It is possible to apply art education through the consolidation of communities reunited by means of a pedagogical activity. Probing is found to be an effective way of attaining knowledge through learning and sharing a deeper understanding of the feelings and perceptions of the community members.



- The creation and reflection of a creative narrative within a community of practice is an effective way of promoting social engagement with art. The use of photography enables the community to portray and explore personal experiences and concerns with others.

### **5.3 QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

This study provides new insights into the ways in which Latin American immigrants confront cultural displacement when they settle in Canada. Specifically, the study examines adults from the middle class, who have been in Canada for two years or longer, and who are not intending to return to their country of origin. However, some emerging issues ought to be considered as areas for further research. For instance, it would be useful to examine elderly and young Latin American immigrants, together with refugees and exiled Hispanics.

Investigating different populations will increase the understanding and move us towards a more unified perspective of Latino American immigrants. Exploring to what extent the curriculum is helping Hispanic immigrant students at the high school and higher education is crucial. Research could focus on language, culture and identity and the complexity in which such identities are constructed within the school context.

It would be useful to enact studies that facilitate creative pedagogical spaces that examine the emotional and social adjustment of elderly and young Latin American immigrants as well as refugee and exiled Hispanic immigrants, and how the cultural and ethnic identity is interweaved with the sense of belonging to Canada.



**FIGURE 27:** 'MIGRANCY JOURNEYS #12' RODRIGUEZ, 2011

*The heaviness of the path when leaving home,  
changes you forever.  
We dwell in a third space.  
We carry with us the pain  
for those who we left and we love.  
But still we keep searching,  
that is our journey.*

## CHAPTER 6: REFLECTIONS

A/r/tography and my a/r/tographic practice affect my study of immigration to the extent that I am able to incorporate the theory of a/r/tography and the participants' narratives with my own experience as immigrant. Through the images I depict my family story of dwelling in the distance and my own journey of agony and anguish represented through metaphors founded in nature. The images entangle complex layers and dichotomies that complement and superimpose on top of each other. My images represent complications in the lives of immigrants and represent the ways these sentiments feel inside me. When expressing my visual narrative, I examine my position from another perspective and thus I am able to acknowledge it. While comparing my feelings with those the participants expressed, I comprehend that I am not the only one carrying such controversial baggage.

A/r/tography as methodology enabled me to create the conditions for participants to share their personal experiences regarding their migration to Canada. The methodologies implemented also afforded the invitation to create and share images that illustrated their own stories as foreigners. A/r/tography elicited and provoked different kinds of layers regarding the context of migration and opened up spaces that allowed us to comprehend participant's narratives further. Simultaneously, a/r/tography offered a unique pedagogical component that conferred participants the license to conceptualize and create, like artists. Thus, participants' became interpreters of their experiences in a safe environment, generated by the community of practice that we constructed. Additionally we as a group spoke the same language of origin (Spanish), were born in South America, and participants knew each other from the choir. These connections allowed that as

community of practice we generated stronger ties, familiarity and trust. Indeed, a/r/tography provided the opportunity for all of these facts to merge: this would not necessarily have happened with just research interviews or with just photo elicitation by itself.

In my capacity as artist I was able to interpret with other lenses the images that were brought to the table, allowing me to pose questions on certain points rendered in the images. Also, I had created art work regarding immigration that I did not share with the participants before, for this reason, I decided to meet them again. The objective was to share with them the images that composed the art projects of *Migrancy Journeys*, *Wounds*, and *Skin*.

Once I presented *Skin* and *Wounds* to the participants they shared with me their feelings about being away from their families. However, Nene expressed that in her case there is a great difference because instead of sadness she feels worried for her mother, who lives by herself, wondering what can she possible to do in case her mother gets sick or something else happens. Then, Laura reflected on the concept of the wound, and related it to when her father passed away. Commenting that this wound would always be open but she learned how to live with it, and this wound would always hurt when somebody touched it. Yet, Laura continues, I decided that there are some wounds that eventually will close, there are some that do not bother me as much, and there are some that are small and are part of me. In a similar way, Laura stated that although we have these wounds, we, as human beings, posses many capacities that allow us to build a crust to

protect us. And even with the wound being there, life still continues and you as person continue growing and advancing because life does not stop there. In fact, you decide to keep this wound –Laura continued and it is going to be there, perhaps because you want to hold that memory, that pain and that moment. Moreover, Laura observed how these injuries give us a certain shape, making us purer as human beings.

Referring the art work *Migrancy Journeys*, Laura mentioned that these stones change according the space where you are, because if you are perhaps in a safe zone (let's say your country of origin) you know how to stand up, even when you are facing a turbulent time. And you are capable to stand up on that stone because you identify the flat part of it that won't make you fall. For this reason, when you are migrating it is more difficult to maintain that balance and recognize the appropriate space to grasp because you don't know where to go. Yet, all of us have whirlpools in our lives and the water where we pass is not always going to be the same. Another interpretation that Laura provided is that the stones can be your family members and friends and the purpose is to learn how to maintain these bonds with everybody you care about. She declared that this process of learning how to maintain these connections and distances is part of what sustains you. However, it is important to have a foundation in the stone –Laura continued because at the end you are alone and you are responsible for yourself and what you have from others is mere support.

On the other hand, Candido related *Migrancy Journeys* with the picture he presented of the Rockies. He explained that in South America the culture and its practices are based

according to relationships with your family and friends, and then it passes on through the city, the music and food. On the contrary, he observed that in Canada these practices were based not so much on people but nature. Explicitly, Candido reflected on my experience as immigrant and how it was not through people but through nature. He stated that nature is noble, it allows you to enter, to reflect, to create and that is when you start to open your own identity as immigrant (referring to my identity). In addition, Candido mentioned that the textures in my pictures, in fact, render a certain feeling and help to recall memories. He concluded with the notion that the gift to enjoy nature is universal because it does not require you to speak the same language or be of the same place. Subsequently, Candido described how this study was very interesting to him because it was not only about his experience but also about Nene and Laura's experiences. Here, he felt that as group all of them comprehended the fact that they would never be 100% on one side or the other. He stated as well that the day you leave your land of origin and the day you fall in love with the new country, there is a lasso that breaks. And certainly, the visual task and the sharing helped him to further understand his personal process of immigration and also build stronger ties with Nene and Laura, his friends in the choir.

As an artist, researcher and teacher I am indebted to my participants for the concepts and interpretations they provided when they saw my art work. Their notions manifest clear perceptiveness, embodiment and connection with the images I created. The study of the personal a/r/tographic narratives of cultural displacement experience by Latino American immigrants living in Canada does not end here; it is certainly an ongoing inquiry.

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## APPENDIX A: LETTER OF INICIAL CONTACT

### Personal A/r/tographic Narratives of Cultural Displacement in Latino American Immigrants Living in Canada

#### Research Team

Rita Irwin (Principal Investigador), Gloria Rodriguez (Primary Contact)  
Department of Curriculum and Pedagogy, Faculty of Education, University of British Columbia

To Whom It May Concern,

We are writing to request your consideration to participate in a study about the personal narratives of Latino American immigrants living in Canada. We greatly appreciate your willingness to take a few moments to read this letter before advising us of your response.

The purpose of our study is to develop and in-depth understanding about how Latino American immigrants in Canada confront cultural displacement. Understanding cultural displacement as adjusting day-by-day to a culture that is not yours, this study pretends to set up conditions for participants to engage and construct meaning together about the phenomena of being away from home, and how participants negotiate being *in-between* these two spaces, through the creation of a series of photographs and conversations. I will use an inquiry-based research methodology called a/r/tography, where the three identities of artist/researcher/teacher blend together to inquire in the world through art making and writing.

The first phase of our study involves three group interviews, in which we as a community are going to reflect, share and analyze what has been our experience when being in the middle of two cultures and inquire about how we as Latino American immigrants feel about being away from home and how we negotiate in a daily basis this fact. We are also going to analyze at the same time some artists, short pieces of literature and research studies regarding the topic of immigration.

The second phase of this research, consist in creating images that represent those feelings and circumstances as immigrants, to later on, as a group decide the best way to visually share it with others.

We hope you will consider participating in the interviews to share your experiences and perspectives with us. The group interviews will be conducted in person by the primary contact of the research and they will be conducted at UBC campus. Each meeting will last for two hours maximum.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and, even if you decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time.

The data collected in this study will be stored in computerized files, kept in a secured locked location in a computer with password protected and encrypted.

The information gained from this research is going to appear in the master's thesis of the primary contact and also, may appear in various publications, reports and/or conference proceedings. As a study participant, you may request copies of these publications. These will also be shared with other interested agencies.

Please contact Gloria Rodriguez by phone or email to request additional information and/or arrange to participate in the research.

Your time and interest in this study are much appreciated.

On behalf of the research team,

Rita Irwin,  
Professor of Curriculum Studies, Art Education, and Associate Dean of Teacher  
Education

## APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM



August 2011

### Participant Informed Consent Form

**Principal Investigator:**

Dr. Rita L. Irwin  
Professor and Associate Dean, Teacher Education Office  
University of British Columbia

**Student Investigator:**

Gloria Rodriguez  
M.A. in Art Education  
Faculty of Education (Curriculum and Pedagogy)

**Project Title:** Personal A/r/tographic Narratives of Cultural Displacement involving Latino American Immigrants Living in Canada

**Purpose:**

The purpose of our study is to develop and in-depth understanding about how Latino American immigrants in Canada confront cultural displacement. Understanding cultural displacement as adjusting day-by-day to a culture that is not one's own, this study seeks to set up conditions for participants to engage and construct meaning together about the experience of being away from home, and being *in-between* these two spaces, by creating a series of photographs and having conversations about them. I will use an inquiry-based research methodology called a/r/tography, where the three identities of artist/researcher/teacher blend together to inquire into the world through art making and writing.

**Procedures:**

As a participant in this study, you will be asked to come to the University of British Columbia. Your participation in this study will last for 7 weeks and will involve 3 group interviews and one final meeting, each of which will last 2 hours (maximum). The maximum number of hours you are expected to expend is 10 hours, in total. We will schedule the group interviews and final meeting at a time that you find convenient. The group meetings are going to be a set of conversations and reflections about our experiences as foreigners and how we have to confront and adjust to a new culture abroad. In addition, as a group we are going to create a set of photographs that relate to our journeys as immigrants, with the purpose of sharing it with others.

During our meetings, the information is going to be saved through the use of a *smart pen*, which is a ballpoint pen with a digital audio recorder. (This will help me remember what is said). I will only use a recording device with your permission. If you do not wish to be audio recorded it will not be possible for you to participate in the study.

**Confidentiality:**

If you agree to participate in this study you will have the choice of either remaining anonymous or having your professional identity revealed in publications. You may choose to change your mind at any time during the study. You will also be able to review interview transcripts, images and other material before they are used in publications.

At any time in the study, you may decide to withdraw from the study. If you withdraw no more information will be collected from you. When you indicate you wish to withdraw the investigator will ask if the materials already collected in the study can be used.

Your participation does not involve any risks other than those that you would encounter in daily life but if you feel emotionally upset or uncomfortable when answering and discussing some of the questions you may decide not to answer the questions.

**Remuneration/Compensation:**

Apart from the provision of snacks at the group interviews, there is no remuneration available for your participation. Your contribution may be beneficial to you as it will provide an opportunity to talk to others about your experiences and opinions.

**Benefits:**

The potential benefits to you from your participation in this study may include the awareness of some of your behaviors and attitudes towards your experience as a Latino/a American immigrant. At the same time you may find that your personal identity may be clarified, accepted and healed when you are sharing and discussing ideas and perspectives with others.

Moreover, the findings in this study could possibly contribute to society by helping others to appreciate the effort Latino American Immigrants face when living abroad.

**Data collection:**

The results of your examinations will be collected in a centralized computer, at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC. The results are going to be stored under a code with an encrypted password to ensure the privacy of your records.

At the end of this consent form, you will be given the option of allowing us to use the photographs you will take, and (use) the audio recording of your opinions and experiences, to analyze along with the research data and use it later for publications and presentations. In case any of your photographs include an image of yourself or any other person, we will protect the identity of all people by covering the faces. No other personal information about you will be included in the presentations.

All audio recordings and photographs will be destroyed at the end of the study.



**Subjects' Rights:**

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time.

Choosing not to participate, or withdrawing from this study, will not affect your present or future involvement with the ensemble Fusion Latina.

You are free to withhold your opinion about particular experiences if you wish. You may ask that the pen recorder be turned off at any point during the group discussions if there is something that you do not want to have recorded.

**Contact Persons:**

If you have any questions about this study you may call Gloria Rodriguez. If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject you may call the Office of Research Services of the University of British Columbia.

**Consent:**

I have read this form and the research study has been explained to me. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. If I have additional questions, I have been told whom to contact. I agree to participate in the research study described above and I will receive a copy of this consent form.

I chose to include my professional identity (name) in all documentation and publications.

---

Participant signature

---

Date

---

Name (please print)

---

Phone Number

---

Email

I do not choose to use my professional identity in all documentation and in publications.

I chose to remain anonymous.

---

Participant signature

---

Date

---

Name (Please print)

---

Phone Number

---

Email

I consent        (    )        to sharing the photographs I created for the research project allowing them to be used for research and publication purposes.

I do not consent    (    )        to sharing the photographs I created for the research project allowing them to be used for research and publication purposes.

## **APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. What do you miss most about your country?
2. How do you feel about being an immigrant to Canada?
3. What do you do to cope with nostalgia?
4. Could you describe some circumstances where you feel culturally displaced?
5. Is your family in your country or here in Canada?
6. How often do you visit your family in your country?
7. Why did you come to Canada?
8. Do you think about moving back to your country?
9. Does it make sense to be abroad?
10. Do you feel that you are adjusted to Canadian culture?
11. How do you feel about your English?
12. What Latino American traditions do you follow in your home in Canada?
13. How linked are you to your home country regarding political news, cultural events, general advances and television programs?
14. Are you still in touch with your friends in your country?
15. How strong are these friendships?
16. How involve are you with Canadian politics?
17. Do you consider Fusion Latina as an element that connects you to Canada or as a way to show your origins?

1. Que extrañas mas de tu país?
2. Como te sientes acerca de ser un inmigrante en Canadá?
3. Te da nostalgia por tu tierra natal?
4. Que haces para enfrentar la nostalgia?
5. Podrías describir algunas circunstancias en donde te hallas sentido culturalmente desplazado, como que no te identificas, que no eres parte de?
6. Tu familia está en tu país natal o acá en Canadá?
7. Cada cuanto visitas a tu familia en tu país?
8. Porque viniste a Canadá?
9. Has pensado en devolverte para tu país?
10. Tiene sentido vivir en el extranjero?
11. Sientes que te has ajustado a la cultura canadiense?
12. Como te sientes respecto a tu ingles?
13. Que tradiciones latino americanas sigues en tu casa en Canadá?
14. Que tan conectado estas respecto a las noticias políticas, culturales, eventos, avances generales y programas de televisión de tu país?
15. Aun sigues en contacto con tus amigos en tu país?
16. Que tan fuertes son estas relaciones?
17. Que tan involucrado estas con la política Canadiense?
18. Consideras a Fusión Latina como un elemento que te conecta con Canadá o como una manera de mostrar tus orígenes?