

Preparing, Serving, and Sharing Stories:
Immigrants' Exploration of identity through Art – making, Oral History, Food, and Memory

Arianna García-Fialdini

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_____	Chair
Dr. Sébastien Caquard	
_____	External Examiner
Dr. Ryan Shin	
_____	Arm's Length Examiner
Dr. Rosemary Reilly	
_____	Examiner
Dr. Steven High	
_____	Examiner
Dr. Lorrie Blair	
_____	Thesis Supervisor (s)
Dr. Kathleen Vaughan	

Approved by _____
Dr. J C Castro Chair of Department or Graduate Program Director

November 12, 2025

Date of Defence

Dr. A. Guérin, _____
Dean, Faculty of Fine Arts

ABSTRACT

Preparing, Serving, and Sharing Stories: Immigrants' Exploration of identity through Art – making, Oral History, Food, and Memory

Arianna García-Fialdini, Ph. D.

Concordia University, 2026

In an increasingly unsettled and tense time for moving and finding ones' place in the world, many daily challenges for newcomers to Canada go largely unnoticed under the promise of brighter futures. Nevertheless, these challenges have a very real impact on a person's perspective on their new culture, memories of 'home', and intercultural community building. Beginning with an overview of the multifaceted origins of global migrations – economic, political, and social – and building from theories of critical art education and pedagogy, this doctoral dissertation is a practice-based exploration centered around newcomers' memories, preparation, and representations of favourite foods. Drawing on communal gastronomic experiences and the power of food to connect and bind us, this research uses a series of art workshops, oral history interviews, an exhibition, and the researcher's creation of a collaborative recipe/colouring book to examine and embody the development of identity among a specific group of newly arrived young Latina mothers in Montreal, Quebec. This research bridges notions of belonging and integration into new environments, exploring how having access to art educational platforms can foster a deeper sense of self within a new cultural landscape. Further, the study considers the direct impact of these practices on the participants, highlighting art's profound capacity to offer and foster community building, cultural integration, and social change.

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Introduction

My doctoral research, *Preparing, Serving and Sharing Stories: Immigrants' Exploration of Identity through Artmaking, Oral History, Food, and Memory*, uses research–creation and oral history in a project that explores the potential of art–making about food to build community and support individual identity within a group of young immigrant Latinx mothers. I conducted this research from Spring 2020 to Summer of 2024 in Montreal, with the project affected by and responding to the COVID–19 pandemic, and over 80 people participated. Outcomes of this collaboration included an art exhibition (featuring their visual art and sound installations of their oral histories, as narrated) and a coloring book of recipes, featuring my own artwork paralleling my participants' contributions. More fundamentally, my dissertation research is the

culmination of my own life and work — as a Mexican immigrant to Canada, scholar in art education and community practices for social justice, and a socially-engaged visual artist.

Over the past 15 years, my studio practice in paint and print media has grappled with issues including gender-based violence, human rights advocacy, and social change. As this dissertation will display, more recently I have found myself exploring the conditions faced by women and migrants from the margins. My current artistic practice focuses on storytelling through portraits and large-scale murals that humanize and represent socio-political experiences, while expressing my own perspective as a form of activism on diverse situations. In many ways, my work serves as a direct comment on the social realities I study both formally and informally.

Working across individual art-making, collaborative community projects, and oral history (in ways elaborated later in this text), I have cultivated a nuanced approach to artistic practice and research-creation. This approach is self-reflexive and attuned to my privileged position as both an internal and external figure in diverse communities. My work generally concentrates on investigating the potential of art as a tool for social awareness and change through printmaking, painting, and drawing.

Throughout the years and my own artistic development, I have had the opportunity to explore various ways art can influence and impact social concerns and issues globally. This has allowed me to better understand and elaborate on how socio-politically engaged art has been approached by artists of various backgrounds and mediums. I tend to gravitate towards the idea of artists as proactive citizens and creators, and find myself continuously pursuing ways in

which art and social responsibility can help restore order – or a glimpse of it – in society and the world I live in. By working closely with issues raising awareness on social change and gender violence, I am interested in exploring the conditions of women, immigrants, and refugee claimants, while observing and commenting on diverse social realities. My teaching and studio practices aim to serve as an alternative platform from which to reach and amplify marginalized voices and stories.

I began my migration journey at the age of 16 in 1999, moving to Ottawa, Ontario, from Mexico City. Mexico City's political climate at the time was tense, with rampant organized crime and daily threats of kidnappings, murders, and rapes, and a rising count of missing people (a trend that, unfortunately, has continued for the past 26 years, to this time of writing). Approximately three years later, my sister and mother were able to join me in Montreal, where I had relocated after being accepted into Concordia University's Faculty of Fine Arts Studio Art program.

Throughout my first degree in Studio Art, I concentrated on developing my technical skills and compiling a strong toolkit of artistic skill sets and techniques in diverse mediums. When I joined the Department of Art Education in 2008, I was officially introduced to artists working using art for social change. From this point onwards, I became increasingly interested in exploring my own artistic practice through this lens, given my background and lived experiences. It became impossible for me to ignore these, especially as I had accumulated a stronger repertoire of both technical know-how and theoretical perspectives, alongside increased exposure to contemporary artists with social agendas worldwide. With this new

knowledge and fresh perspective, I embarked on my two-year MFA program at the Burren College of Art in 2010, through the National University of Ireland Galway on the West Coast of Ireland. There, I had the rare opportunity to conduct a thorough creative investigation into one of the most pressing and concerning social phenomena affecting my own family and background, and impeding my return to my home country: *Femicides*¹. From 2010–2012, I concentrated specifically on Ciudad Juarez in Chihuahua, Mexico, a city neighboring the US border with New Mexico and Texas, as the place of origin for this occurrence.

Much to my surprise at the time, the more I researched, the more I uncovered the impunity, systemic racism, and organized crime that has forced so many Mexicans, like my family and myself, to find employment, refuge, and opportunities outside of Mexico. This emotionally and psychologically taxing process led me to become determined to raise awareness on this specific issue, which further opened my eyes to the fact that Femicide and violence against women is a much bigger and universal issue, affecting families all over the world. This subject matter continues to fuel my practice to this day.

As I began facilitating and participating in more community-oriented workshop settings upon my return from my MFA studies, four important observations surfaced that slightly changed my focus and defined the origin of my interest in pursuing a PhD in Art Education and a new shift in my artistic practice. First, I became increasingly aware of how many of the workshop participants had arrived in Montreal under precariously challenging circumstances

¹ Femicide fits into the larger sphere of violence against women and as a concept has been redefined since 1990 as the killing of women by men, motivated by hate, contempt, pleasure or passiveness be it due to race, nationality, religion, ethnic background, or sexual orientation (World Health Organization, 2012).

and were willing to share very personal migration stories, which would surface within the safe environment the art workshops provided. Second, it became apparent that art-making was a strong and accessible platform for these newly arrived immigrants to build new community connections and relationships, amidst the lonely and alienating process of moving from one country to another, often with families to care for. Third, the exchanges and interactions that these “third-spaces”² (Anderson et al., 2023) facilitated during the art-making and learning process fostered skill shares (Delano-Oriaran et al., 2015) and solidarity among all present. Simultaneously, the workshops facilitated the exchange of important resources for newly arrived immigrants and migrant workers in diverse situations in Montreal, which they might not have easily accessed otherwise, except through the ongoing dialogic exchange and interactions during workshop participation. And fourth, I began to notice that participants tended to arrive at workshops with homemade traditional dishes, intending to share a personal glimpse of their origins and roots with the other attendees, both to celebrate and introduce them to their own cultural background. This experience ignited my creative and nostalgic mind: I proposed to a group of participants³ the idea of sharing and recreating home-recipes of food and meals, to

² A “third space” is defined as a literal and figurative in-between, hybrid, counter-hegemonic place where prevailing dichotomies and ways of thinking are questioned. It arises between the dominant, frequently oppressive culture that aims to define people (a “second space”) and one’s lived cultural and social identities (a “first space”). In these spaces, it is possible to imagine and enact new ways of working, relating, learning, and being, making them generative sites for investigating issues of dominance, power, and emancipation. The term’s scholarly usage suggests a discursive or metaphorical “in-between space” that arises from the interaction and encounter of various cultures, especially in the context of colonialism and postcolonialism, rather than a specific physical location. In this transitional space, cultural identities are negotiated, translated, and hybridized, giving rise to new cultural forms and meanings. It is regarded as a forum where underrepresented voices can declare who they are, negotiate, and reinterpret the identities that prevailing cultural discourses have assigned them (Bhabha, 2012).

³ Throughout this document, I will refer to the participants using various titles, including adult-learners, co-researchers, collaborators, narrators, participating artists, and co-creators, to reflect their diverse roles and active engagement in this study.

delve into the endless possibilities that doing so could offer for building community and connections for newcomers like us to Canada, through art-making and learning experiences. This, as I will explain in depth in the following chapters, is the purpose and goal fueling my doctoral thesis and research.

Recognizing the economic, political, and social origins of global migrations (Papastergiadis, 2000), I had the opportunity from 2020–2024 to research how newly arrived immigrants develop their sense of identity. This involved drawing on elicited oral history narratives that emerged from communal gastronomic experiences, bridging notions of belonging and integration into new environments and realities over two years, amidst a global pandemic. So that the reader has in mind the components of research events and outcomes as they progress through the discussions, I will outline them here, in chronological order:

- 10 Art workshops with over 80 individuals, from which were recruited 37 research participants (2020–2022)
- Oral History Interviews with 13 individuals (2020–2022)
- Completion of visual artwork (drawings, paintings, clay, relief) and audio recordings of oral history narratives for an integrated exhibition, 48 participants, including myself as artist–researcher (2020–2022)
- Exhibition at the Native Immigrant Gallery (November 2022)
- Preparation of the recipe book *Recetas & raíces, Recettes & racines, Recipes & roots*, integrating drawings based on 39 participants' artwork (2022 – 2024)

- Circulation of completed recipe book to participants and celebration of completion (August, 2024)

As I will cover in depth throughout Chapter 2, the research conducted for this project was situated at the Community Centre for Latin American Families (CAFLA) in Montreal⁴. The project involved adult learners from a range of Latin American countries, recruited through a series of community art workshops. Recruitment focused on individuals who wished to explore questions of identity and belonging as embodied in art, story, and food. This small group of participants had the opportunity to use their stories as a basis of connection with each other, and as an entrée to their own art-making, thinking about still life practices, and the importance of food and food security within migrant communities facing increased social vulnerability. The objective of the study was to both document and research the ways in which creative and narrative practices impact newly arrived immigrants' integration process and journey, through memories of food and sharing, into the new culture in which they are being immersed.

On a personal level, collaborating and creating with this community has required me to challenge my studio practice and to grow as an artist, while continuously questioning how I navigate and construct my identity as both immigrant and artist through the experience of art creation.

⁴ <https://cafla.ca>

Research Questions

Throughout the following seven chapters, this dissertation will address the following key questions:

1. How can art and storytelling promote identity transformation and social reconstruction?
2. How do cultural elements, food, and community building aid integration and foster migrant identities?
3. How does the cross-disciplinary integration of visual practice and oral history enhance the impact of these activities for participants?

Background to the questions: Purpose of study

As previously and briefly mentioned, this doctoral research builds on my Masters of Fine Art thesis work, *Art as a vehicle for Social Change: Silence and the fields of Juarez* (2012), a socially engaged body of artwork that questions whether art can extend beyond the gallery context and impact social issues and concerns. It also builds on my current professional practice as a community art educator (Barndt, 2008), with experience working in diverse Montreal neighborhoods, including Côte-des-Neiges and Rosemont-La Petite-Patrie, both of which are new homes for many newcomers.

My Masters research asked how art can serve as a tool to raise awareness about social issues and considered the social responsibility of the artist. Through close exchange and long-distance collaboration with a support group and non-profit organization for affected relatives of femicide victims in Chihuahua, Mexico, my findings emphasized the importance of artists' engagement with their broader social and political context. In other words, my research

conceived of the artist as a socially engaged (Kester, 2013) ‘border crosser’ (Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2008), meaning someone who is a passionate intermediary, holding a position that benefits them while they engage with influential institutions in critical and challenging ways. This is the standpoint from which I take up my doctoral research.

This research proceeds from a postcolonial (Mohanty, 2003) stance, recognizing the challenges of international migrations (Shin, 2022, 2023, 2024), and building on artist-educator and scholar Dipti Desai’s (2010) notion of art as a counter-narrative that explores the racialization of immigration. It also draws on research by art theorist Jill Bennet (2005) and art historian and cultural critic T.J. Demos (2013), both of whom emphasize the personal and social benefits of using art to represent social trauma. My approach is also aligned with that of other emancipatory artist-teachers and artists, namely Mexican-American muralist and co-founder of the Social and Public Art Resource Centre Judith Baca (Olmstead, 2005), Nigerian sound and installation artist Emeka Ogboh (Johnson, 2019), Afro-Peruvian American political poster designer artist Favianna Rodriguez (Chang, 2016), Buenos Aires-born relational artist Rirkrit Tiravanija (Dohmen, 2016), American visual artist and printmaker Caledonia Curry, alias SWOON, (Swoon, 2019) and Brazilian performance artist and sociologist Rafael Guimarães (Journal Bahia, 2016). I elaborate on their impact on my practice in Chapter 1, as I note below.

Structure

I have organized the seven chapters of my dissertation in the following way:

Chapter 1 will introduce the theoretical framework, which provides the social justice-based philosophical lens and foundation through which I view and developed this research. I

specifically reference theories of migration and identity relevant to my research. Relatedly, I describe the work of certain contemporary artists whose core practice is community-based, with strong social justice agendas, as well as others whose work specifically deals with food and food practices. These theories and practices were relevant in the evolution and formulation of the guiding research questions I followed throughout my research and its community art workshops, where others' artwork served as exemplars in guiding and supporting the participants in their own creative expressions.

In Chapter 2, I go into further detail regarding the context and literature referenced throughout the project and its implementation. Here, I consider the significance of food and its relationship to culture and memory. I also discuss arts-based research and its specific applications in immigrant communities, used in preparation for the data collection portion of the study. At this point in the text, I situate my research site and introduce my co-researchers/participants, most of whom are young mothers.

Throughout Chapter 3, I offer a detailed rundown of the ways in which research-creation and oral history serve as methodologies and methods for this project, specifically pertaining to the data collection and analysis of the study. Similarly, the limitations of the research design and setup are brought to light, explored, and reframed.

Continuing with Chapter 4, I consider the activities of the project: the fieldwork carried out via two rounds of workshops and their culmination in the group exhibition of November,

2022. I also discuss the importance and relevance of the Recipe Zine–Colouring Book⁵ – *Recetas & Raíces, Recettes & Racines, Recipes & Roots* – that I created for both of these experiences, which can be accessed online at <https://www.garfiart.com/store/c2/about.html>. Images of the community recipe–zine book will be interspersed throughout the document to visibly foreground the community’s contribution and voice.

Throughout Chapter 5, I explore personal experiences, thoughts, and observations highlighting four participants’ accounts and artworks regarding the noted effects shared. In Chapter 6, I connect the participants’ oral histories⁶ and analyze the evolving values of meaning and food in the building of a changing migratory identity. I similarly delve into my own personal research–creation and oral history contributions and reflections. Finally, Chapter 7 is the closing chapter where I acknowledge how the experience concluded, the ways this work addresses my research questions, the personal implications it holds for me as community member, scholar, and artist, and the significance and contribution to the advancement of knowledge I advocate for and envision in the field of Art Education.

As previously indicated, I will commence by introducing the theoretical framework regarding social justice, immigration, and food that ignited the flame of curiosity fueling this research project.

⁵ Throughout the document, I will be referring to the ‘zine’ interchangeably as: recipe–zine book, community recipe–book, or recipe–zine–coloring book to reflect its multifaceted nature and diverse functionality within the research project’s various phases and contexts. Each title highlights a specific aspect of its purpose and utility, from its practical content to its interactive and communal elements.

⁶ I will similarly be using “oral histories” interchangeably with terms such as: personal testimonies, lived experience narratives, first–person accounts, spoken memoirs and interviews to reflect the diverse nature of the shared narratives throughout the text.

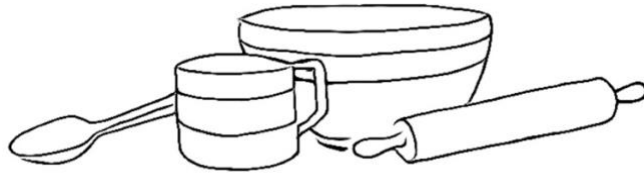
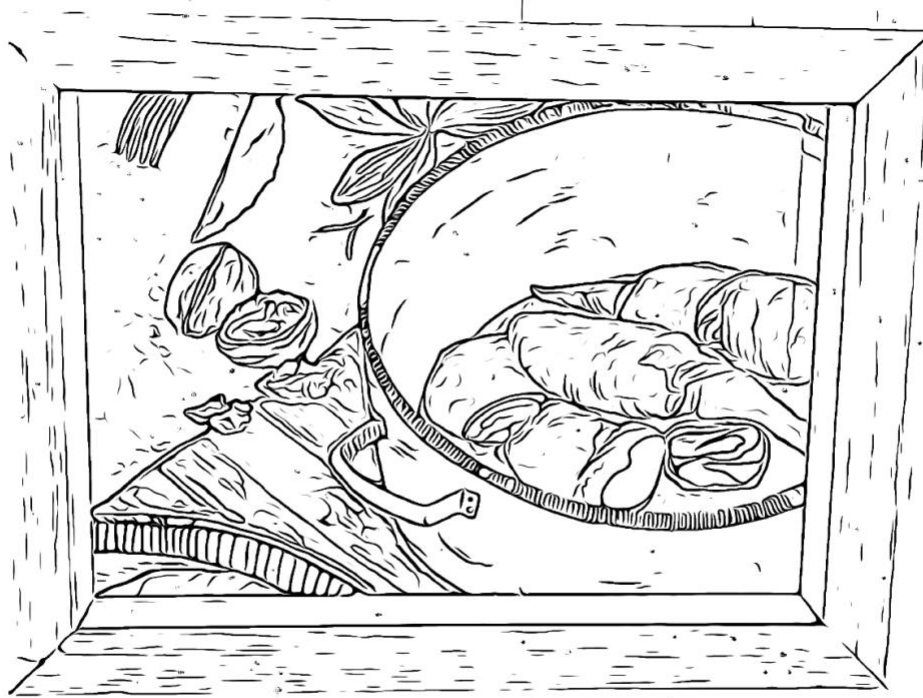


Figure 2: *Line Drawing of Kitchen Utensils.* As illustrated in the back cover page of *Recetas & Raíces, Recettes & Racines, Recipes & Roots* recipe zine book, 2024

Patitas a la vinagreta



Artista: Arianna Garcia-Fialdini, Mexico

Ingredientes: 2 dientes de ajo, 1 cebolla blanca, 2 hojas de laurel, 6 patas de cerdo, 6 papas medianas, vinagre blanco, aceite de oliva, 1 lata de chiles curtidos, bolillos de pan al gusto

Figure 3: *Patitas a la Vinagreta*. Digital line drawing illustrated in p. 40 of *Recetas & Raíces, Recettes & Racines, Recipes & Roots* recipe zine book, with ingredients⁷, 2024

Chapter 1 | Theoretical Framework

1.1 Social Justice and Inclusion: Key Theoretical Perspectives

Enlightened and supported by post-colonial, feminist, anti-racist, and socially-informed theoretical positions, my own perspective centers around the role, potential, and social responsibility of art. Both my perspective and this research have been heavily inspired, informed, and aligned with the work of three major theorists: Dipti Desai, Maxine Greene, and

⁷ Translation of ingredients: 2 garlic cloves, 1 white onion, 2 bay leaves, 6 pigs' feet, 6 medium potatoes, white vinegar, olive oil, 1 can of pickled chili peppers, bread buns.

Paulo Freire. All three propose education as a means for social justice, with Desai and Greene particularly sensitive to the impact of the arts in promoting the imagining of positive futures. Freire, at a much earlier time, similarly viewed education as a means of developing subversive actions directed towards social equity, equality, and justice against capitalism. In this chapter, I discuss their influence on my work and the adaptations I made as I integrated their ideas into this doctoral research.

Dipti Desai

Perhaps the strongest inspiration and influence in my art–educational research for this dissertation has been artist–educator and scholar Dipti Desai. Dedicated to discussing the influential role of visual representation and its capacity to effect social change, Desai not only advocates for art as a tool for social justice but also actively works in the areas of critical multiculturalism, critical race theory in art education, contemporary art as a pedagogical site, and postcolonial theory (Dipti Desai, n.d.). One of Desai’s (2010b) most important propositions (which, as I will later state, aligns her with Maxine Greene), argues that the arts are a particularly potent way to activate the imagination and understand injustice. To her, art defies deep–rooted mainstream patterns and institutions by engaging aesthetic and sensory capacities in order to imagine what could otherwise be (Bell & Desai, 2011). Desai’s broad understanding of social justice arts is composed of various strategies. Her approach aims to move participants to challenge oppressive relations and create more equitable solutions. Her reliance on art to situate individual stories within history at large both invokes and drives alternatives to the

status quo. This use of storytelling as a political vehicle for understanding oppression (Desai, 2010b) has parallels with my own work.

Like Desai (2014b), I am motivated by questions that explore the connections between contemporary art, education, and activism, which in many ways define my position on the social function art can have. Desai highlights the potential impact of socially engaged artists who ask critical questions and comment on pressing current social and political issues, while designing aesthetic interventions to effect change (Desai & Chalmers, 2007). She explores ways in which artists disrupt asymmetrical power structures, either by representing politics or by direct political action (Desai, 2014a). She insists on working both within institutions and in the public realm (an interest I share: Garcia-Fialdini, 2018; 2019), and uses her artistic background to design specific, useful strategies that inspire her teaching and, by extension, the socially engaged work of her students (Dewhurst & Desai, 2016). For instance, Desai (2020) expresses her understanding of social justice as a fusion of her lived experience that has prompted her to acknowledge her “privilege and oppression” (Desai, 2020, p. 12) and how both are intricately entangled. These, she claims, have consistently influenced the way she views and understands the world, which in turn affects the types of actions she is prepared to take in order to confront and alter the unequal power structures in education. In her teaching, she is known for promoting the idea that a social justice frame is not necessarily fixed but rather shifting, something that she remains steadily aware of as she opens critical conversations about justice in her own research, teaching, and the design and implementation of social justice-based art + education programs at New York University (NYU).

At the same time, Desai's work explores urban art interventions as a form of critical public pedagogy⁸ (Desai & Darts, 2016). She argues that public art projects provide those outside institutions with a space for dialogue, which is important given that the public sphere is increasingly co-opted by corporatization. I agree that this kind of urban interventionism is necessary in art education today, especially as the public sphere deteriorates due to private interests. It is only by diverse individuals' reclaiming the public sphere, Desai suggests, that we can develop a cultural politics with the power to renew our democracy (Desai & Darts, 2016). Particularly useful in Desai's theoretical and pedagogical approach is her analysis of personal experiences to explore the results of art educational practices that shift their focus from objects to individuals, with the capacity to spur social action. Desai's educational values, which tend to focus on art-as-instruction (Desai, 2014a) – meaning that she sees art as a potent pedagogical tool for teaching and learning about social, political, and cultural issues rather than just as a subject to be taught for its own sake (Anderson et al., 2023) – invite a profound and complex conversation on the idea of visibility and invisibility in art educational practices. She is particularly recognized for condemning the oppressive narrative of nations like the U.S., which while presenting themselves as a nation of immigrants, actually masks the deeper historical realities of settler colonialism and violence against other BIPOC peoples (Desai, 2025a). Desai feels implicated by this social narrative, for example, as an immigrant who is occupying and

⁸ Public pedagogy here refers to learning that takes place beyond school environments, in spaces like public art events, popular culture, and informal and public places. It can also be used to refer to learning delivered via informal channels such as media, politics, and social discourse, and the ways in which these can promote a particular view of things through their means of influence. Gert Biesta (2012) argues that public pedagogy is a way to (re)connect the educational and the political, locating both firmly in the public sphere.

profiting from the dispossession of Indigenous peoples' land. She advocates for a deeper deconstruction of the subject within art education, emphasizing how visual representation shapes our understanding of racialized perspectives that reinforce the status quo. Her work has notably focused on diverse approaches in art education, particularly in the realm of multiculturalism (Desai, 2020). In issues of art and globalization, Desai's scholarship offers productive dialogue with that of art education scholar Ryan Shin, who, like Desai, examines how art and visual culture can serve as a transformative tool for social change. Shin's research focuses on the representation of Asian images and minority visual culture, and his recent work, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic, addresses urgent social justice issues like racism and equity (Shin et al., 2023b; Shin et al., 2024). He champions alternative research methods to construct new ways of knowing, putting a strong emphasis on celebrating the lived experiences of marginalized communities and using art education as a vehicle for cultural integration, community-building, and social change.

Another relevant theme Desai explores relates to racialized silences and their historical development (Alfredson & Desai, 2012). She asserts the importance of addressing the social context of color in art education, specifically the silence of racial majorities, which means challenging the unexamined dominance of Whiteness to reveal and dismantle systemic inequities. The pervasiveness of this silence must be countered, according to Desai, with greater racial literacy among students. Given the extensive and influential agenda of mainstream public pedagogy, Desai underscores the urgency of rethinking what it means to educate students in our visual age, since new modes of information and cultural production

dominate the shaping and dissemination of knowledge and hold unprecedented influence. On a similar note, Desai discusses the far-reaching dangers of the public and pedagogical framing of terrorism and immigration in North America, and proposes modern visual art as a counternarrative to examine the racialization of immigration, particularly in the United States, and its connection to education (Desai, 2010b). She argues that various artists use their artistic practice to intervene strategically in the immigration debates that continue to plague our world, more today than ever before. It is in her exploration of justice in contemporary art practices, particularly as related to incarceration and immigration restriction, that my interest lies (Desai, 2010b; Shin et al., 2023b).

As Desai indicates, in recent years, both of these human rights violations have exacerbated, gaining renewed (especially American) government support, which has increasingly contributed to the disproportionate criminalization of racialized youth and the criminalization of immigrants (Desai, 2011). Drawing on critical race theory, she demonstrates how artists can use their practices to intervene strategically in immigration debates.

These artistic interventions are pedagogical, she contends, because they open spaces for students to address the topic of immigration, generating another venue for civic engagement (Desai & Darts, 2016). As I will cover further in Chapter 4, my own dissertation research relates to the perspectives of Desai and Shin (2023b) by providing diverse spaces and creative opportunities in the public realm and outside of academia, to individuals living their own migratory experiences. Along the lines Desai describes and that I will elaborate on in

Chapters 4 and 5, art in many ways became a vehicle for community building and fraternization.

Similarly, Desai's ability to reflect on the relationship between art education and society aligns with my interest in investigating ways in which academic work enacts its responsibility to extend into the public realm in our uncertain current times (Garcia-Fialdini, 2019).

Discrimination, xenophobia, the war on immigration, increased militarization, and censorship of civil society—all of these disturbing trends contribute to a growing state of anxiety and collective skepticism. The forces of globalization, Desai argues (2000), have created a world that is connected but fragmented, full of condoned and forgiven racism, unequal power dynamics, disproportionate wealth distributions, and increased unrest. As Desai further suggests (2010a, 2010b), in order to realize democratic possibilities in art education, art educators must explore contemporary art practices motivated by social justice and aim to inspire students to critically engage with pressing current issues.

Desai's work challenges me to consider the responsibility of cultural and educational institutions in creating critically engaged and mindful global citizens. Her proposals include, but are not limited to, new ways for cross-cultural art educators to construct formative narratives by mapping out the global networks that connect economic, social, and political processes to aesthetic production (Desai, 2025b). Furthermore, she encourages designing lessons that stimulate debate about current global issues, thereby fostering critical dialogue among learners (Desai, 2005). Desai's art-driven pedagogical approaches to social empowerment promote a democratic notion of education that cultivates interpersonal dialogue

and freedom, regardless of cultural background, gender, or social status (Desai & Chalmers, 2007). As the last two pages demonstrate, Desai's pedagogical philosophies and approaches have been instrumental and personally inspirational for me in the development of my research.

Paulo Freire

Popularly known in various fields and an important foundational reference for Desai's own framework, Paulo Freire was a Brazilian philosopher and educator, and a notable promoter of the critical pedagogy movement. Working predominantly with illiterate field workers of low economic resources in South America, he began developing an educational approach that would ultimately become a theoretical framework and movement, asserting the need for political liberation for the economically disadvantaged and oppressed (Freire, 1970).

Freire (2018) emphasizes the fundamentally political nature of education from a humanist perspective. He argues that human beings are subjects rather than objects constructed by oppressive forces. Our 'ontological vocation' is 'humanization': the capacity to immerse in learning, to identify social, economic, and political discrepancies, and to intervene against the repressive elements of life. Freire argues that students, when properly educated, can critique and change their social situation, avoid conformity, and transform a dehumanizing society. He attacks the imperialistic concept of education (connected to the idea of humans as objects constructed through oppression) and suggests instead the egalitarian notion of students as co-creators of knowledge, engaging in 'dialogics': open communication between students and teacher, fostering critical thought and 'epistemological curiosity' (Freire, 2000).

For Freire, traditional models of education risk objectifying students, who, forced to

internalize oppressive power structures, are rendered ill-equipped to analyze social reality or consider alternative forms of being. An oppressive educational system can function as an essential tool in the perpetuation of a “culture of silence,” which suppresses individuals through uneven power structures (Freire, 1970). Marginalized groups grow apathetic as a result of these systemic power imbalances, but their disconnection remains unacknowledged by current pedagogical methods, despite the development of educational discourses that espouse autonomous learning and student empowerment. Freire asserts that every human being, regardless of circumstance, is capable of viewing the world critically in a dialogic encounter with others. The traditional paternalistic teacher–student relationship must therefore be transformed, as people share different ways of knowing and being in the world. He argues that the creation of a transformative rather than transmissive system of education will guarantee sustainable learning, resulting in a world in which it is easier to love (Freire, 1970/2018; Sterling, 2001).

Freire’s work has been instrumental to my research because of his premise of solidarity and advocacy for democracy in teaching and learning (Darder, 2015). He criticizes pedagogy’s “fundamentally narrative character” (Freire, 1970/2018, p. 72), contending that it puts the teacher at the center of knowledge and essentially “narrates” facts to passive students who are viewed as empty vessels that need to be filled. This prevents students from thinking critically and actively participating in the learning process. This analysis informs his advocacy of libertarian and dialogic teaching. These pedagogies emphasize the shared creation of knowledge among students *and* teachers and the importance of a highly cooperative learning

environment. In this way, the learner is positioned as an agent involved in the inquiry and development of a creative, hopeful, and transformational reality (Freire, 2004; Roberts, 2016).

However, despite the value of Freire's overarching approach, several dimensions of his philosophy remain open to critique. With a touch of the preacher's zeal, Freire urges people to live more meaningful and transformative lives, without offering tangible ways for them to overcome the substantial personal and societal obstacles they face. He also fails to consider the myriad systemic barriers that stand in the way of the effective implementation of his ideas. According to some critics, such as scholar in cultural discourses and contemporary cultural theorist Abdul R. Janmohamed (1993), although Freire raises important issues about the intrinsic problems with an economic class system, he provides an oversimplified and naive view of how they can be resolved through pedagogical philosophies.

Another dimension of Freire's work that deserves further scrutiny is his concept of dialogue, which he envisions as a form of intervention on the part of "teacher-learners." His proposal blurs and often effaces the distinction between students and teachers. As I tried to familiarize myself further with his important contributions, it was very clear that he was aware of the incompatibility between the ethical requirements he outlines and the practicality of fulfilling them in real-world contexts for teachers. However, I find it less clear what he was offering in terms of viable methods for teachers to incorporate his ideas into daily pedagogical practices. What's more, Freire's concept of *conscientization* involves a partially contradictory radical denunciation of dehumanizing structures, followed by the proclamation of a newly created reality (Freire, 1970/2018). Freire is confident that this anticipated future will manifest

through free and equal dialogue between learners and educators. But one could argue that learning is secondary to this goal. In this reading, his radically open educational environment becomes, paradoxically, a site of indoctrination, especially given the students' lack of education and the obvious political charge of the teachers. Critics like Janmohamed (1993) claim that Freire's essentialism risks reproducing the same unjust and unequal power distribution it critiques.

Freire's discussion of emotion and care in education similarly brings up a number of inconsistencies, which prompt consideration of his influence on my own pedagogical praxis. On the one hand, Freire (1973) argues that mutual trust and love are fundamental to developing critical and dialogical educational spaces. On the other, he denounces such emotionality as evidence of naiveté and irrational consciousness. He thus neglects to clarify when and how to make use of emotion in teaching and learning.

To overcome these limitations and throughout the data collection portion of this project in Chapter 3, I revisited the ethical challenges associated with hierarchical power structures in my own collaboration with marginalized research participants. I similarly struggle with Freire's denunciation of a system he benefits from and participates in. It seems that his notion of *conscientization*, much like my engagement with his and other similar theorists' work, emerges from his privileged understanding of and access to the dominant system.

I therefore made a conscious effort to approach education in my own research context by acknowledging the strengths and shortcomings of conventional pedagogy, in order to learn from and, eventually, move beyond them. Respecting different values, questioning the canon –

or the body of received literature that has been seen to form the core of a discipline, often from a Western or Eurocentric imperialist vantage point – and including an array of perspectives representing diverse ways of knowing, all strike me as crucial elements to working within real-world contexts and making education meaningful and specific to diverse learners. Relatedly, and as I will illustrate further in Chapter 2, I actively worked towards advocating for an emphasis within my research sites' pedagogical space on the power of creativity to foster an appreciation of complexity and a tolerance for uncertainty and doubt (Facundo, 1984). My own philosophy of education and longer-term experience of teaching and learning recognizes the importance of incorporating lived and situated experiences of individuals into their learning, to ensure a more relevant and transformative experience. This objective was facilitated in this dissertation research by having provided ongoing reciprocal and circulating exchanges between me and the participants, as opposed to more top-down, static impartations of information.

Despite the reservations elucidated above, much of Freire's work remains resonant with and applicable to my role as a facilitator. My personal and professional objectives, and my understanding of broader sociocultural issues as an art educator, are directly influenced by his ideas on collectivity, cohabitation, and dialogics. In my experience, Freire's teachings are likely more feasible in non-institutional spaces (or as I call them "unconventional learning platforms" (Garcia-Fialdini, 2018)), where the inevitable student-teacher hierarchy is not a mandatory requirement or expectation.

Maxine Greene

American educational philosopher, social activist, educator, and author Maxine Greene was a foundational thinker in the field of pedagogical philosophy. The notion of a 'problem-posing' educational approach, most readily associated with Freire, also aligns with Greene's (1995) ideas about the moral and social responsibility of the teacher in disrupting complacency, promoting consciousness, and dissecting pre-established forms of knowledge to foster meaningful learning. Influenced by Freire, Greene suggests that mainstream knowledge systems should directly reflect the lived experiences of learners.

From what my experience collaborating artistically with vulnerable populations suggests is a somewhat privileged position, Greene asserts that knowledge should never be merely accepted; we have to resist pre-established truths. Instead, learners must take time to analyze, distinguish, and articulate perspectives based on personal ways of being. Only then can they denounce oppression and understand the incongruities between their lived realities and dominant modes of thinking (Greene, 1995). I would like to acknowledge my own privilege in the learning and teaching opportunities that I have been granted. That said, based on the conversations and realities I witnessed throughout my research collaboration at CAFLA, I can say that the kind of diverse situations that the participants there dealt with, including providing food and shelter for their families as well as many other needs, fail to be included in Greene's position. In this respect, I think it is of utmost importance to address these diverse realities when discussing theory versus practice in pedagogical and community exchanges.

However, Greene's work also addresses the complacency, comfort, and convenience that underlie larger oppressive epistemological systems and widely accepted notions of literacy (Greene, 1988). She illuminates the ways in which education is inaccessible to wider non-privileged audiences because of systemic barriers related to "class, gender, and race" (Greene, 1995, p. 110). Greene's analysis of the latent political agenda of educational discourses highlights the necessity of understanding participants' narratives of their own experiences through the lens of power relations. She encourages learners to embrace the challenge of voicing injustice and taking oppositional stances, arguing such practices ensure growth and disrupt widespread oppression (Greene, 1978). Despite emphasizing that one must be conscious of the multiple truths arising from one's background in order to adopt new creative endeavors, Greene (2007) nevertheless recognizes the difficulty of escaping pre-established, hegemonic discourse. For Greene, the educator's role includes encouraging learners to find gaps where new, free ideas can develop through ongoing questioning.

I identify one primary limitation in Greene's philosophy that is pertinent to my research: her insistence that teachers mold student habits and serve as ethical and intellectual models. Although I agree with her conviction that education develops perceptual tendencies and provides an important means of self-renewal, I struggle with the idea that teachers should act as authoritative moral examples or references. As with Freire's work, this stance seems contradictory, given Greene's simultaneous emphasis on recognizing and encouraging pluralist ways of being and knowing. This tension between didactic and collaborative learning implicitly suggests that, although these alternative forms of knowledge are welcome and encouraged in

pedagogical spaces, there can be only one underlying “correct” way of being a “good” citizen, to which everyone must strive and teachers must guarantee.

This concern, however, is countered by the strengths of Greene’s work. Her pedagogical views reflect the value she places on self-definition and self-creation. Her work weaves art and imagination with educational development. She urges teachers to guide open-ended explorations that challenge students to ask their own questions and create personalized projects to help them shape their identities. Learning, Greene underscores, is only possible through inquiry (Greene, 2007). Greene’s (1973) advocacy for what she calls “wide-awakeness” (p. 162) in classrooms suggests that students who explore and take healthy risks can encourage others to do the same. This term connotes a fully attentive consciousness of life and its requirements, and has interesting resonances with the more contemporary adaptation of the adjective “woke,” referring (now often pejoratively) to individuals who are attuned to and work against bias and social injustice.

Another key point in Greene’s work is the significance she places on imagination and reflection as the bases of praxis. This emphasis is evident in Greene’s passion for metaphor, which, she suggests, can aid creative thinking, foster new perspectives, and encourage experimentation. She argues that these kinds of aesthetic adventures develop skills that build community and provide fuller perceptual experiences, expanding what is possible in an educational context (Ayers & Miller, 1998). Greene’s theories encourage me to reflect on my own evolving culture and identity with the goal of integrating these insights into my teaching approach. For example, a prompt I used to help participants start their art-making process for

one of the workshops was to transport them to the pantries of their childhood and recall ingredients and food items that were always present. I asked them whether there were any ingredients in their current new Canadian pantries that held any of those same ingredients. My objective was to remind participants of the constructed nature of identity and culture as an evolving process. This prompt also allowed us to reflect on the idea that our own culture and identity are not fixed entities, but fluid and constantly being shaped by our experiences and interpretations.

Much like Freire's, Greene's work is rooted in critical pedagogy, emphasizing societal inequalities and the effort to address or eliminate them. This aligns strongly with my own approach to teaching (McLaren, 2015). Greene's focus on ethics has also prompted me to explore care theory (Noddings, 2002, 2013), particularly its later development into culturally-situated critical care theory. This perspective, notably discussed by Michalinos Zembylas (2018), a scholar in education and critical pedagogy, examines how "caring" is understood, practiced, and evaluated as profoundly shaped by specific cultural contexts, values, and power dynamics, rather than as a universal concept. Similarly, Laura Pautassi (2023), an Argentine scholar specializing in social rights and the human right to care, reframes this idea through a human rights lens, advocating for the effective and equitable exercise of the right to care within diverse contexts. Greene advocates for showing extra attentiveness to students and cultivating imagination in all its unexpected and diverse manifestations (Noddings, 2002, 2013). For Greene, a central question is how to engage in caring encounters and offer special attention to others, concerns I share in my own work. Greene's conception of pedagogy prioritizes love,

open communication, peace, and non-violence. It is, however, her incorporation of social justice into art education that most actively shapes my own praxis. Her theories have allowed me to fully appreciate the richness of diverse perspectives and understand my responsibility towards my students as global citizens (McDonald-Currence, 2008).

When considering the origins of my participants, all of whom were women navigating systemic misogyny, the lens of Latinx feminism became particularly salient. Specifically, Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (2002) and her theory of mixed identity construction deeply resonated with my understanding of their experiences. Her conceptualization of identity as a "fluid, mixed phenomenon" (Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 25) offered a powerful framework for interpreting the complex, hybrid identities expressed through their culinary narratives and artistic creations. These can be understood as "third spaces" for hybridity, a concept further explored by scholars such as Lamia Khalil Hammad (2010). However, while recognizing the profound relevance of Latinx feminist perspectives, this dissertation does not explicitly take up this theory, choosing instead to integrate critical pedagogy as its primary theoretical lens, given their inherent alignment.

It is important to acknowledge that issues of gender and race, particularly their intersectional complexities, did not emerge explicitly within the visual artworks created by the women or in the direct narratives they shared. This was primarily due to the limited studio time, frequency, and total number of workshops offered. While valuable insights into identity were indeed gained, I believe that if more time and increased frequency had been allocated to the workshops, discussions around identity in general – encompassing key markers such as

gender, class, and race – would have had more space to unfold and be explored in greater depth. (I more fully discuss the orientation and outcomes of the workshop later in the dissertation.)

Specializing in language and literacy educational practices, Sarah N. Newcomer (2018) significantly complements this discussion by foregrounding the practical application of critical pedagogy within Latinx communities. While Anzaldúa and Latinx feminism offer vital theoretical frameworks for understanding complex borderland identities and systemic challenges, Newcomer’s research demonstrates how culturally responsive and authentically caring pedagogical relationships are critical for fostering well-being and academic success of Latinx individuals. Her focus on “funds of caring” highlights how reciprocal relationships and the incorporation of students’ lived experiences can create supportive environments that acknowledge and uplift their unique identities, bridging theory with concrete, relational practices that align with the broader aims of social justice in education.

This entire theoretical discussion, encompassing the nuances of care theory, the exploration of Latinx feminist borderland identities, and the practicalities of responsive relationships, ultimately circles back to Maxine Greene’s foundational vision. She consistently emphasized a state of heightened awareness and the cultivation of a “social imagination,” both of which she believed were crucial for educators. Greene advocated for perceiving the world critically, recognizing diverse realities, and actively striving for a more just society. This involved creating avenues for individuals to express their experiences and actualize their potential. The project’s efforts to foster identity exploration through art, acknowledge systemic

barriers, and seek deeper understanding, even amidst limitations of time and resources, directly embody Greene's commitment to critical pedagogy as a powerful means of both personal and social transformation, perpetually encouraging us to envision and strive for a future that has not yet come to be.

The difficult questions Greene raises continue to provoke important contemporary discussions about culture, background, social change, and what we sometimes unquestioningly accept as knowledge (Egan, 1997). A significant portion of her work focuses on the consequences of teaching, with an emphasis on "what should be" (McDonald-Currence, 2008, p. 20), thereby implying a need for self-reflexive pedagogy. Her commitment to community and respect for culture emerge from a strong belief in both universal human worth and art's moral responsibility to raise public consciousness. Greene's (1995) faith in the unique power of artwork to foster connection without estrangement or objectification continues to strongly influence me as an artist and educator, empowering me to contribute to pedagogical theory, make more space for silenced voices, and center different ways of knowing and being.

In my academic and artistic practices, I stand both proudly and critically with educators and theorists such as Desai, Freire, and Greene who, through the arts, spark and sustain necessary conversations, and advocate for equity, kindness, solidarity, and collaboration between learners and educators. Their approaches also influence my consideration of issues of migration and identity.

1.2 Migration and Identity: Foundational Research

Global migration remains a defining feature of the 21st century, with global forced displacement reaching an unprecedented 117.3 million by late 2023, driven by conflict, violence, and human rights violations (UNHCR, n.d.). This escalating crisis is particularly acute in Latin America and the Caribbean, which by mid-2024 hosted 20.3 million forcibly displaced or stateless individuals – including 5.8 million refugees, 8.1 million internally displaced persons, and 5.8 million needing international protection. These regional movements are intensified by deep inequalities, climate change, and limited opportunities, posing a persistent humanitarian challenge (UNHCR, n.d.).

Over the last decade, the Latin American immigrant population in Canada has seen significant growth, with the number of immigrants increasing from approximately 274,445 in 2011 to 371,965 by 2021, alongside a notable rise in non-permanent residents during this period (Statistics Canada, 2024). This trend coincides with an overall increase in asylum claims in Canada since 2016, impacting populations from Latin America (UNHCR Canada, n.d.), who for the primary reasons noted above, are to seek protection and better prospects abroad.

Against this contextual backdrop, this sub-chapter presents my evolving familiarization with discussion about the different ways in which migration impacts identity construction in diverse individuals/settings. For resources that cover interpretations on the function and influence of migration in contemporary societies, I looked to scholars such as culture and communication theorist Nikos Papastergiadis (2000), who draw from a wide assortment of disciplines and theories. His work unpacks previous studies on migration processes and offers

new perspectives on how to fully explore the range of experiences that can contribute to various conceptions of migration and influence diverse individuals' day to day experiences.

By depicting the effect of the global movement of ideas, financial assets, and people, Papastergiadis helps me further understand how history has forcefully altered migrants' identity and experience. This can date back to slavery's colonialist forced migration to laborers' displacement during industrialization, as well as to more recent ethnic cleansings, and to religious, political, and racial discrimination (Papastergiadis, 2000). Papastergiadis recounts our world's current increase in human mobility, with an equal increase in destination uncertainty, while facing graver dangers in the journeys than ever before. His work was especially useful in providing me with a coherent outline of previous systems of global migration, presenting a clear description of emerging, tumultuous and unsettling patterns of international movement.

Specifically relevant to this project, I began to understand how one's personal ability or inability to move freely – a decisive characteristic of modern-day life – influences and results in significant adjustments in perceptions of identity, community, and culture. I incorporate these ideas into my project design, as I will show in Chapter 3.

The idea that diverse and specific migratory decisions, circumstances, and factors could directly influence each individual participant's identity development, memory, sentimental and cultural associations, and integration process was planted through my reading and research in this area, as well as my lived experience. I could see these realities surface in both the oral history components that participants shared and in their affective association of the specific memory of a particular meal or recipe they correlate with home, as I share in Chapter 4.

Drawing from an extensive spectrum of discussions and perspectives in cultural studies, anthropology, and geography, my research into immigration and its impacts supported me in reassessing and further understanding the rapport between migrant and outsider while offering an analysis of globalization.

Concentrating on ideas of visual culture and art in relation to migration, politics, and globalization was also essential to me. For instance, art historian and cultural critic T. J. Demos (2013) analyzes different creative strategies utilized by various contemporary artists in recreating investigative reports and processes in the portrayal of migrants, refugees, and the politically dispossessed. I benefited from this worldly inquiry into how international artists interpret and portray the oftentimes neglected and overlooked consequences of globalization, as well as the ways that their work connects various audiences to differing existing understandings of economic and political dilemmas.

I acquainted myself with theories that analyze how some contemporary performance artists and photographers use diversified artistic and strategic techniques in their works to conceptually address distinct circumstances of dislocation, in varied geographical locations, with a sensitive but very real sense of urgency. Similarly, my research into how various muralists' and mixed-media and installation artists' creative mediations provide depictions of struggle while resisting cultural stereotypes, revealed the numerous ways culturally diverse artists and artist collectives propose new possibilities for a politics of equality, social justice, and historical consciousness. My most notable takeaway came from examining artist case studies addressing unequal geographies, militarized borders, and xenophobic social positions.

For instance, and as I will show shortly in section 1.3, Favianna Rodriguez, a cultural strategist and interdisciplinary social justice ‘art-ivist’⁹ (Aladro-Vico et al., 2018), uses her artistic practice to address issues such as racial equity, gender justice, and migration. Through visual and public art, writing, cultural organizing, and power building, she leads art interventions across the United States at the nexus of art, justice, and cultural integrity. Her work also records her personal transformation and her human experience as a woman of color. I was specifically taken by how she visually and experientially represents social justice movements, and how these representations encourage participation and change. For instance, her *Migration is Beautiful* campaign radically shifted the narrative around immigration from one of crisis to one of inherent human dignity and movement, thereby creating a new, empowering visual language for immigrant rights organizing. This wasn’t merely a change in imagery, but a fundamental re-framing of how people emotionally connect with and are moved to act on issues of migration, reflecting an evolution in how justice is sought. Similarly, her emphasis on themes of healing, joy, and self-determination in her visual art provides a powerful counter-narrative to traditional representations of struggle, directly impacting how individuals are inspired to participate in movements for racial equity and gender justice. Her innovative approach places her among artists who have invented new visceral designs, creative approaches to mobile images, and critical documentary strategies to mediate the heightened activity of life and movement across the globe.

⁹ The term ‘artivism’ was coined by researcher and professor Dr. Eva Aladro-Vico (2018) to refer to the practice of utilizing artistic expression as a vehicle for social activism and change. It fuses political action with artistic pursuits to increase public awareness and galvanize communities around significant issues.



Figure 4: *Migration is Beautiful*. Artwork by Favianna Rodriguez, 2018. Digital print artwork, depicting a monarch butterfly with human faces on its wings, symbolizing the beauty and resilience of migration and the right of all living beings to move freely.

Demos' (2013) examination of recent art and its exploration of our current global situation – where human rights are extensively violated, political identity is refused, and people are exposed to the state's violent use of power (Agamben, 2017) – was both powerful and startling. His and others' studies introduced me to scholarly uses of related terms such as exile, statelessness, and nomadism. These terms are thoroughly and theoretically developed in connection to artistic practices that examine the terminological aspects of contemporary mobility, offering a straightforward examination of the partnership of art and migration over the last few decades.¹⁰ The postulation of these terms is meant to expose the complicated reality of human transit and its social inequalities during the most recent stages of globalization since 2011, as much as the liberating potential of movement from the perspective of a politics of social justice and equality. I will indicate how these apply to my own participants in the discussion in Chapter 7.

¹⁰ For instance, while "migration" suggests traveling abroad with the possibility of acquiring citizenship or temporary legal residence, "nomadism" suggests continuous mobility and philosophical states of becoming, and "statelessness" and "exile" suggest the socially vulnerable position of the involuntary refugee denied the rights of the citizen (Demos, 2013).

Even before the world's current, exceptionally grave crisis of migration, interdisciplinary and intercultural scholars like Iain Chambers' (1994/2008) noted that identity and awareness of community is more likely attained as individuals drift through innumerable histories, realities, and idioms. His ideas touch on potentially under-explored repercussions that stem from issues of cultural diversity in current societies. Resources like this one guided me in becoming more familiar with the realities behind history's displacement and turmoil, and the challenges to identity and cultural experience that migrants face. Chambers' *Migrancy, Culture and Identity* (1994/2008) significantly shaped my understanding of how marginality, vagrancy, and geographical displacement (whether forced or voluntary) challenge conventional North American notions of progress and stability. His work powerfully reveals how these movements can undermine established ways of knowing and disrupt cultural identity. Chambers achieves this by recounting diverse realities through cultural study essays, often utilizing musical references to illustrate their impact on contemporary life. For example, his analysis of the Walkman and 'World Music' demonstrates how soundscapes contribute to the fragmented and hybridized identities shaped by migration and global cultural flows. Beyond simply offering an academic model, Chambers's text provided an important example of fostering open dialogue and working in solidarity, serving as a democratic, mindful, and creatively rhythmic approach to conversation that powerfully advances contemporary social concerns. This holistic and sensitive text introduced me to cultural theory in an organically progressive way, proving invaluable for this dissertation's research implementation.

From this reading came my idea of considering reasons for individuals' migratory decisions from a socio-psychoanalytical perspective. Here, authors such as social scientist, psychoanalyst, poet, and psychology and human behavior scholar Salman Akhtar (1999) offered an in-depth explanation on the difference between voluntary immigrants and exiles. The main distinction is that exiles have less opportunity to be nostalgic and retrospectively idealize their homeland, while "ordinary immigrants" (p. 8) are generally more able to fantasize about the 'paradise' that was left behind in their countries of origin. Akhtar made visible for me the differences between each group's integration process into the new culture. As I will expand further in Chapters 5 and 7, I found his ideas particularly relevant in understanding each participant further, as well as the personal experiences that they felt inclined to share in their oral history interviews that accompanied their artworks for both our community art exhibition and the recipe zine book.

Additionally, Akhtar extensively covered and thoroughly explained through case studies the determining factors behind the psychological outcomes of immigration, coping mechanisms regarding the loss of a country of origin, defensive functions of nostalgia, and some referential guidelines for psychotherapy and psychoanalysis for immigrant patients. The personal accounts in particular were of real benefit and relevance to my research. For instance, and as we will see in Chapter 5, some participants were faced with the choice of migrating in search for a safer and better place for their families to live in, with time to prepare and research the new whereabouts they would be living in. However, other participants had less choice in the matter and were forced to relocate quickly to completely new and distant settings and into

environments that added to the cultural shock and, in turn, affected their experiences and integration processes differently. After conducting the oral history interviews, each participant shared some of their coping mechanisms for addressing the nostalgia (always linked to food and memory) that they all encountered after relocation.

I therefore note, per Akhtar, that there could be potential long-lasting effects of migration on an individual's identity at different ages, as well as cognitive development stages in someone's life. These effects on identity change could involve a range of affective initiatives, transience, social affiliation, and mental/emotional space. Akhtar addresses an immigrant's potential glorification or depreciation of their country of origin, depending on proximity or separation, aspirations and yearning, changes in conscience as well as a possible outright switch and transformation in linguistic communication skills. I find this relevant to my participant's cases, considering that all went from only knowing and speaking Spanish to having to learn French as well as English and in some cases or Creole, for instance, should they be either married to or living with a person from a different cultural background than theirs.

To this point, three important ideas significantly guided the design of my research implementation: immigration, identity, and cross-cultural "treatment". This "treatment" refers to the process of adapting concepts and practices sensitively to incorporate the specific values, beliefs, and contexts of diverse cultural groups. For this research, however, I focused closely on immigration and identity.

Akhtar (1999) considers identity changes set in motion by immigration that address various challenges that newcomers may face. Specifically, in an attempt to overcome the fear of

assimilation with the new country, a newcomer may partially disengage from their 'new world' or perhaps cling to a romanticized preference of their country of origin.

Filled with personal letters and poetry shared with him by immigrant comrades from all over the world, Akhtar's book engaged both scientific and mindfully individualized ways of knowing that were full of expression and sentiment, and by offering inclusive accounts of the immigrant experience.

Moreover, Akhtar (1999) knows and speaks of the immigrant experience from a personal place, as I do myself. Infused with the author's own poetry, highlighting his own migration journey from India to the US, as well as the psychological and emotional changes and identity building challenges that characterized his adventure, this resource directly informed my project design and engagement with the research participants at CAFLA. His text was a constant, mindful reminder of the need to and benefits of making space in multiple ways to consider the individual factors, experiences, circumstances, and realities that each person faces or has faced in their individual migration journey. As we will see in Chapter 3, ample flexibility and learning by all of us (my participants and I) was necessary to understand how their background stories affected the oral histories participants shared, the artworks they made by engaging with recipes and meals that they associated with new and past "home," as well as their growing identities of integration into their new communities.

1.3 Art for Change: Community Artists and Social Agendas

To further illustrate the significant contribution of community artists with social agendas to the theoretical underpinnings of my research, I chose three key artist practitioners

whose work successfully and mindfully captures collaborative artistic exchanges with diverse communities, while engaging with social causes: Judy Baca, Favianna Rodriguez, and Caledonia Curry (aka Swoon).

Judith Baca

The first artist whose work closely relates to my proposed project is Mexican–American artist, public art educator, and muralist Judith F. Baca, Professor Emerita at the University of California, Los Angeles, USA, where she was a senior professor in Chicana/o Studies and World Art and Cultures Departments from 1980–2018. Baca has been and continues to be committed to community–based art–making and to facilitating the creation of public art in the L.A. community by providing a “space for the images and voices of peoples of color” (Pohl, 1996, p. 215). As art historian Frances Pohl (1996) stresses in a studio interview with Baca, Baca’s involvement in organizing city–wide community murals meant emphasizing the multiplicity of cultures that make up the greater L.A. area and nation at large.

Pohl (1996) highlights that Baca’s interest in working with such ethnically–diverse populations has been to document an alternative history of California, one that acknowledges the presence of Native Americans, Asian Americans, African Americans, gays, lesbians, and working–class people. Her coalition–building skills have been similarly applied to international scale projects, due in part to her unconventional views on “community”. She considers it important for diverse members of society to stay connected to the communities they originate from, rather than only contribute positively to contexts *away* from these communities. For Baca, the future for art education lies in developing approaches that can more holistically address what art–making is truly about, which is staying connected to the source of one’s own culture or ethnicity and to the geographic place from which one comes.

Although I personally struggle with the idea of working “local” and so potentially

reducing a broader possibility for dialogue with global culture, Baca's counterargument maintains that global culture keeps returning to the same solutions that may or may not be relevant to the specifics of what's needed at a local level. The artist passionately believes that individuals must work collectively and consciously. In her teaching practice, she focuses on fostering ideas of cooperation and relatedness to help people to honor where they come from and to stay rooted in their own cultures and what they know.

Baca's approach to art pedagogy aligns with my approach, in that it aims to teach individuals that achievement should not ignore issues of marginality, and that responsible education should be inclusive and equitable. Further, she encourages equality, balance, unity, and consistency when working with groups. Baca's approach to teaching connectedness views students as being in the process of identity building, and honors and acknowledges the identity of her students, which aligns with my own. The outcomes from this approach generally ensure the growth of healthier, increasingly mindful, and kind learners.

Similarly, Baca's encouragement of students to make connections with their immediate cultural background and the larger community represents a conviction important to this research. As an example, Baca mentions how she discourages students referencing or making use of cultural objects in their art-making unless they are closely familiar with these and their meanings. Baca attempts instead to inspire learners to develop and express valuable relations towards the object/image they plan on making reference to or representing. Throughout the interview, the artist indicates how the results she observes from this approach are generally reinterpretations of the American experience through the students' cultural backgrounds (Pohl,

1996). Thus, the image conveys the power of its sources and why and how it resonates for the student. To do this, Baca claims to bring into the dialogue what it is about the object that moves the person and, subsequently, suggests her students affirm their experiences. In such manner, Baca teaches a respectful honoring of tradition and cultural background, rather than one of mere appropriation.

The article had a strong resonance with me, particularly when Pohl (1996) addresses Baca's mural imagery, which aims to expose the roots of a specific place. Baca's respect for local issues and potential international ramifications echo with mine, in her work to build relationships and community in order to approach a specific issue or site, and become makers and problem solvers *alongside* the community, rather than *for* it (Pohl, 1996). Three exceptional murals reflect this pedagogical and aesthetic philosophy in action. Baca perhaps is best known for *The Great Wall of Los Angeles* (1978) (Figure 5), one of the largest murals in the world that stretches over half a mile, represents a sweeping people's history of California, all within a single artwork. It is located along the west wall of the Tujunga Wash flood control channel near Coldwater Canyon Boulevard in San Fernando Valley. *Hitting the Wall: Women in the Marathon* (1984) (Figure 6), was made for the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics, and is located at the Fourth Street off-ramp of the Harbor Freeway in Los Angeles. *Salsera (The Salsa Dancer)* (2022) (Figure 7), is printed on glass and was commissioned by The Getty Museum as a site-specific mural showing the "Salsera" – a dancing woman – in MacArthur Park on her way to catch a bus on Wilshire Boulevard, a major thoroughfare for domestic workers traveling to the West side to work. The image shows a woman filled with monarch butterflies, that symbolizes immigrants

and suggest transformation of hardship into resilience and celebration of Latinx life.



Figure 5: *Detail from The great wall of Los Angeles*. Image from Los Angeles City Planning, Office of Historic Resources, 1976. In the public domain. <https://planning.lacity.gov/blog/great-wall-los-angeles>

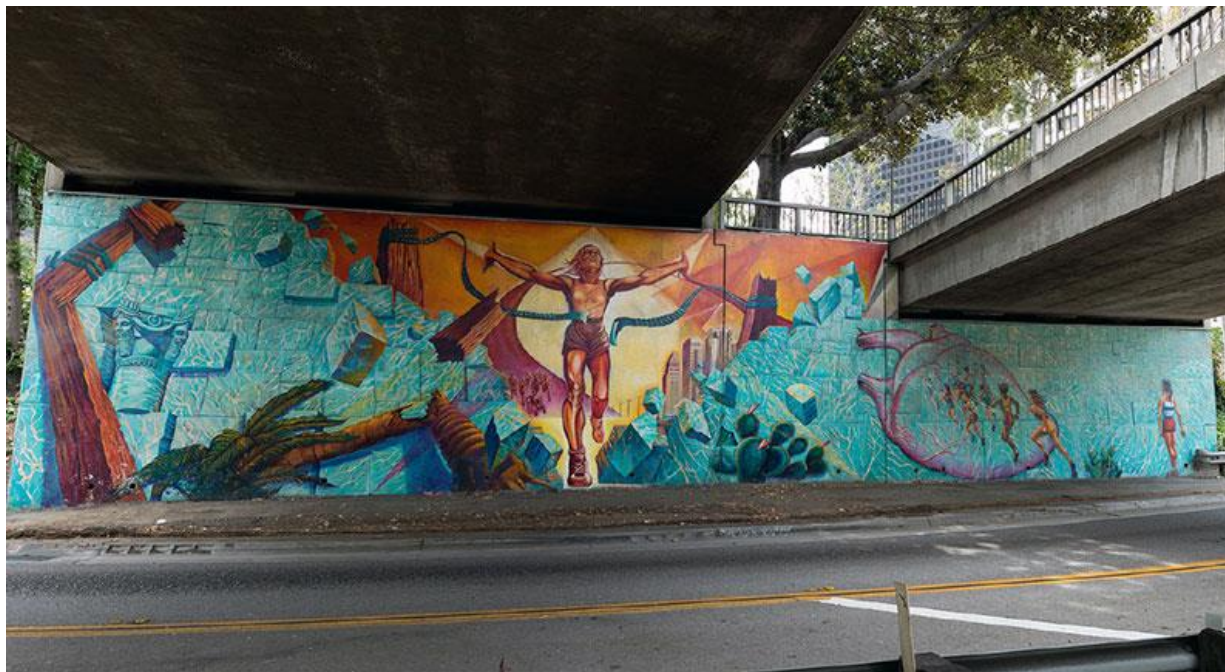


Figure 6: *Hitting the Wall*. Image by Judy Baca (1984). From judybaca.com. In the public domain. <https://www.judybaca.com/art/hittingthewall/>



Figure 7: *La Salsera / The Salsa Dancer*. Image by Judy Baca (2022). From judybaca.com. In the public domain.
<https://www.judybaca.com/art/la-salsera-the-salsa-dancer-2022/>

Favianna Rodriguez

The second artistic figure whose praxis is particularly relevant for my research is Afro-Peruvian American interdisciplinary artist, cultural strategist, organizer, and social justice activist Favianna Rodriguez (2019). Based in Oakland, California, Rodriguez' work and collaborative initiatives address migration, economic inequality, gender justice, and ecology. Her work leads art interventions around the U.S. at the intersection of art, social justice, and cultural equity. Other socially engaged themes she has worked with in the past include mass incarceration, racial justice, and climate change.

In a published article and multimedia interview for the Ford Foundation titled "*For the Wild Podcast*" with Ayana Young (2018), Rodriguez invites the reader/listener to engage with metaphors that are inspired by nature, exploring, engaging, and imagining a different solution to the ongoing immigration issue. Rodriguez guides the listener in exploring the knowledge that nature and the Earth hold as a "lens through which to envision an alternative to the current

immigration crisis” (Young, 2018, para. 3). The artist’s work currently questions the role of art in our present times and encourages the exploration of the interconnections between culture, economy, climate change, and pleasure activism.¹¹ This short and powerful resource was significant to my formulating the research questions guiding this project, as well as to the studio and teaching-based components I will address in chapter 6 and 7. In particular, I was struck by her proposals for the way that artwork can challenge the idea that dominant power structures can or should shape how individuals in society experience and see the world. As Rodriguez asserts, “we need to present a multi-dimensional view of who we are . . . in order to create the content that reflects our stories” (Ford Foundation for Social Justice, 2025).

Additionally, Rodriguez’s website (<https://favianna.com/special-projects/real-fruitvale>), which can be found under the tab that lists her SPECIAL PROJECTS, shows one in particular titled *REAL FRUITVALE– MINI DOCUSERIES* under the title *FAVIANNA* (Figure 8), which showcases in video format how her art and activism are transforming her community as a social change agent. The mini-documentary series called *REAL FRUITVALE* tell the tales of the tenacity and inventiveness of artists and activists who reside in Oakland, California’s Fruitvale neighborhood. Rodriguez’s community (primarily made up of Latinx immigrants) has experienced many tragedies and hardships but has also emerged as a hub for creativity, cooperation, and innovative problem-solving. Favianna Rodriguez explores the intricate connections between

¹¹ The term ‘pleasure activism’ was coined by American author, women’s rights activist and black feminist adrienne maree brown (2019). Pleasure activism explores a politics of healing and happiness while simultaneously interrogating the role of pleasure in both life and liberation work, what pleasure can look like, and how to reclaim it through a mindful and inclusive social justice agenda.

food and migration, employing a range of artistic mediums including prints, collages, and public art projects to illuminate their cultural and social significance. Her *Ancestral Food Legacies* (Figure 9) and *Favi's Cocina* 11 (Figure 10) series, for instance, celebrate food as a vital link to heritage, memory, and community, portraying cooking as a powerful act of cultural preservation and a source of joy amidst displacement. Through works like the *Real Fruitvale* project, Rodriguez demonstrates how food practices both reflect and shape the identities of immigrant communities, serving as a tangible expression of connection to ancestral lands while fostering new traditions in diasporic contexts. Ultimately, her art reveals food not merely as sustenance, but as a dynamic medium through which migrants maintain cultural integrity, build solidarity, and navigate their evolving identities across borders.



Figure 8: *Real Fruitvale Project*. Image by Favianna Rodriguez (2012). From favianna.com. In the public domain.
<https://favianna.com/special-projects/real-fruitvale>



Figure 9: *Real Fruitvale Project*. Image by Favianna Rodriguez (2012). From favianna.com. In the public domain.
<https://favianna.com/special-projects/real-fruitvale>



Figure 10: *Favi's Cocina 11*. Collage with Linoleum Block Transfer, Monoprint and Screen print. Elements on Cotton Rag Paper. 22.5 x 15 inches. Image by Favianna Rodriguez (2021). In the public domain. From favianna.com.
<https://favianna.com/artworks/favis-cocina-11>

Caledonia Curry, AKA Swoon

American artist Caledonia Curry, otherwise known as Swoon, is a classically trained visual artist/printmaker with a long history of interest in exploring the relationship between people and their built environments (Swoon, 2019). As Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter for the New York Times Melena Ryzik states (August, 2014), Swoon's early interventions in the urban landscape – wheat-pasted portraits – exemplify how the artist's public practice uses art in rebuilding communities and humanizing today's most pressing social and environmental issues. Other relevant community-based endeavors of Swoon's include initiatives oriented to neighborhood revitalization in the US, as well as studio practice in drawing, printmaking, architectural sculpture, and installations.

The aspects of Swoon's practice that resonate with my own artistic intent and vision for this research pertain to the artist's installation work, often imbued with a progressive activist approach. Swoon's intricate and delicate paper-cut portraits and cityscapes, often affixed to walls in marginalized places, are meant to decay and disintegrate in place (due to the delicate and ephemeral nature of paper, especially when it comes to how it reacts to outdoor settings), to offer "a refrain to the life around them" (Ryzik, 2014, p. 3). This approach is relevant to the political ambitions she has for her work in that she has carefully chosen a sustainable and environmentally mindful medium that can provide some relief or breathing space to the surroundings in which it has been installed, most usually, as previously stated, in spaces inhabited by vulnerable communities. Meanwhile, and particularly important to my own artistic and research goals, Swoon's socially engaged practice has concentrated on constructing

cultural centers for artistically welcoming communities in remote areas.

What differentiates Swoon from the other community-based artists discussed above is her lack of an overt critique of commercial culture; her work exposes a much more *emotional* core, seemingly important to the origin of her work. Building sustainable structures with residents of rural communities, among many other important, humbling, and impressive socially engaged artistic achievements, distinguishes Swoon once again from other artists with similar agendas, for it is apparent that she has found a balance between having a meaningful and genuine social impact through her work, while predominantly identifying herself as an artist rather than activist. This makes Swoon's work particularly relevant for my own research, leading by example on how "art is a way to process monumental change, on a global and personal level" (Ryzik, 2014, p. 5).

Swoon extensively explores themes of migration and displacement. Her art frequently centers on marginalized individuals and communities, or societal issues that lead to forced or voluntary relocation. Her intricate wheatpaste portraits, often placed in urban environments worldwide, dignify those "left behind or struggling in a globalized landscape" (Swoon, 2014). Several of her projects address migration such as *To Feed the Hungry Ghost* (2023) (Figure 11), which focuses on individuals struggling with addiction in the US., an issue that can be intertwined with displacement and marginalization. Similarly, her project *Submerged Motherlands* (2014) (Figure 12) directly addresses climate change, rising sea levels, and the resulting displacement from lost homelands due to environmental disasters. Through this work, Swoon envisions fantastical worlds where cities break free to drift on the ocean, forging new

lives and futures. She created a series of portraits honoring Turkish immigrants in Berlin (Figure 13), celebrating the cultural diversity of the city and recognizing individuals living and working together across cultural divides. This highlights the integration and experiences of immigrant communities. Overall, Swoon's work strongly resonates with the theme of migration and its human impacts, particularly through her compassionate portraiture and immersive installations that highlight displacement, resilience, and the complexities of human connection across diverse landscapes.

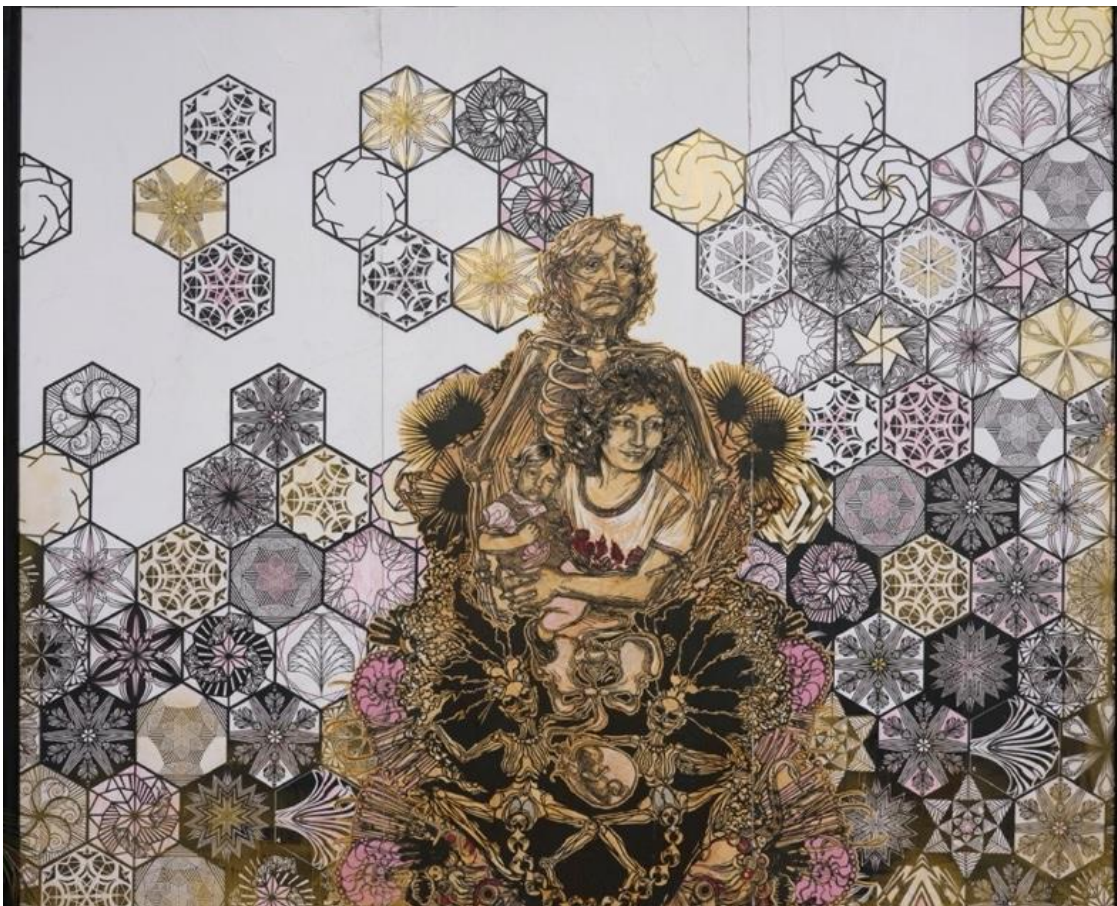


Figure 11: *To Feed the Hungry Ghost*. Artwork by Swoon (2023), from STRAAT Museum. In the public domain.
<https://straatmuseum.com/en/collection-databases/swoon-caledonia-curry-to-feed-the-hungry-ghost>



Figure 12: *Submerged Motherlands*. Mixed-media installation artwork by Swoon (2014). From Swoon Studio. In the public domain. <https://swoonstudio.org/submergedmotherlands>



Figure 13: *Cairo*. From Swoon: Immigrants and Persons of Interest, by J. Rojo & S.P. Harrington, 2015. Brooklyn Street Art. In the public domain. <https://www.brooklynstreetart.com/2015/03/08/swoon-immigrants-persons-interest-need-text/>

1.4 Artists Engaging with Food

Three other contemporary practitioners with social agendas of their own whose work pertains specifically to themes of food and food practices investigated for this research development were: Emeka Ogboh, Ryrkrit Tiravanija, and Rafael Guimarães.

Emeka Ogboh

Nigerian artist Emeka Ogboh explores migration, globalization, and colonization through sound and food in his artistic practice (Johnson, 2019). As an artist, Ogboh specifically explores migration through food and its metaphors, recently going as far as to create his own beer to “tell the story of African migrants living in Germany” (quoted in Johnson, 2019, p. 48). In an interview (Johnson, 2019), Ogboh explains how his work creatively investigates immigrant foodways by using food as his artistic medium, to more clearly visualize different ways in which immigrants adjust to their new environments. Additionally, and of equal interest to Ogboh, are the ways in which immigrants exist on a day-to-day basis and utilize different coping mechanisms to address the distance between their old and new home.

By questioning how immigrants find “authentic food” and how they cope with limited to no access to these foods, Ogboh centers the accessibility that reflects the conditions of living abroad, where food goes beyond satisfying hunger and physical nourishment. For him and his work as for me, food also acts as an instrument to access home and memories, and to help with adjusting to new circumstances and surroundings. As an immigrant, one becomes more attentive to food, its meaning, and its social and healing capacity. Ogboh asserts that “migration changes how we view food; whether eating to remember home or eating to connect

with a new place, food becomes an embodiment of cultural connections” (quoted in Johnson, 2019, p. 48).

Ogboh’s project *Stirring the Pot* (2022)¹² similarly touches on the concept of *fusion*. Fusion represents the assimilation, adaptation, and experimentation that happens upon migration. “When we substitute certain ingredients with others, because of not having access to the food we are familiar with, or simply due to curiosity and the need to experiment, we end up creating something new from the resultant combination” (quoted in Johnson, 2019, p. 49). This concept is of particular interest to this research because I encouraged the coming together and sharing of food through a multi-ethnic potluck or meal-sharing gathering, as I will show in depth in Chapter 4 through the culmination of a community art exhibition.

The process of fusion and assimilation in the identity building process is a key aspect of my research. As Ogboh suggests, the inability of accessing specific items and ingredients inclines individuals to try substituting locally available foods. To do this, one has to explore local cuisine and delicacies to be able to determine which combinations could work, and in this process, one experiments with new tastes and flavors. To this end, Ogboh collaborates with different chefs and individuals to create food that explores two different cultures. In the process of creating food together, Ogboh and his collaborators find that the food becomes a “point of departure into a wider discourse that centers around sociopolitical issues, opening new perspectives and insights into two different cultures” (quoted in Johnson, 2019, p. 49).

¹² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dKrHWJ87Q8g>



Figure 14: *Installation View of Emeka Ogboh's Stirring the Pot Exhibition.* Image from En revenant de l'expo, 2021. <https://www.enrevenantdelexpo.com/2021/06/10/emeka-ogboh-stirring-the-pot-friche-la-belle-de-mai/> In the public domain



Figure 15: *Good Soup na Money Kill Am 1.* Digital artwork by Emeka Ogboh (2017). From Artsy. <https://www.artsy.net/artwork/emeka-ogboh-good-soup-na-money-kill-am-1>. In the public domain

Rirkrit Tiravanija

The second artist I examine in this category is Thai/Buenos Aires-born international contemporary artist Rirkrit Tiravanija. Tiravanija's multi-faceted work prioritizes inter-human relations, which uses relationships and interactivity to illustrate sociable relational aesthetics (Bourriaud, 2002). His work includes painting, displacing, and reappropriating text in diverse settings and manners, installation, cooking, sharing meals, architectural elements, sculptural structures, and performances, with living and socializing as core underlying elements in his practice (Landen, 2016). Tiravanija builds on the consequences of negotiating cultural difference while staying closely connected with recent international agendas (Dohmen, 2016). He can do so by drawing on his own cultural background and by expanding relational aesthetics into culture.

First created in the early 1990s, Tiravanija's signature piece consisted of cooking and serving Pad Thai to visitors in galleries around the globe. For the artist, the preparation and sharing of food comprises the artwork and transforms impersonal galleries into spaces of nourishment and conviviality. His enactment of sociability within the art world is offered to counter hostility and alienation in present-day society, aiming to transform the familiar. His work employs performative and interactive techniques that rely on responses and co-creation with others within and outside the gallery walls (pedestrians, shoppers, browsers, and gallery goers). He is particularly interested in questions of cultural difference. Regarded as a rebellious outsider who challenges both art world conventions and fixed notions of identity, Tiravanija's installations overstep divisions between the public and the private by creating aligned spaces

where he assembles temporary public and interactive territories (Kester, 2013).

In an interview with Tiravanija conducted by art historian Thomas Kellein (2010), the artist confirmed that he intentionally uses cooking and food as a relational medium that simultaneously makes direct reference to culture, the environment, site, and previous art styles. His emphasis is on ensuring that his creative approach remains deliberately aware of the particular requirements every specific site he works with has. These include, but are not limited to, the demands of the location or site, and the culture/community he encounters and collaborates with. As Kellein addresses in the closing essay of the book, Tiravanija's continuous message is that his artwork should not be reserved, beautiful, unintelligible, detached, or difficult but rather useful and straightforward. Tiravanija transforms crucial questions, formats, and issues of current art production through his cooking (such as art historical exclusivity, collectors' private agendas, and rather different artists' attitudes), with the purpose of creating something almost indescribable about everyday aesthetics. In this way, his cooking appears to arouse an easily ignored, basic yet universal culture, linked to individual and collective memory and desire.

As I became more familiar with his practice, I could see that Tiravanija's meals appeared to generate social interactions, and it is exactly this social aspect at the forefront of his work that I find of particular relevance to my own research design. The production and use of food is paramount to his desire to go beyond the individual, object-oriented, commonplace and his method, to make art more accessible by expanding its reach into society.



Figure 16: *Rirkrit Tiravanija's untitled 1990 (pad thai) Performance View.* Image of untitled 1990 (pad thai), by Rirkrit Tiravanija, 1990. Photo by Mary Manning. From MoMa PS1. <https://www.momaps1.org/en/events/318-rirkrit-tiravanija-s-untitled-1990-pad-thai>. In the public domain



Figure 17: *Rirkrit Tiravanija Serving Pad Thai at MoMA PS1.* From Can Rirkrit Tiravanija Fry Globalization By Serving Bastardized Thai Food At MoMA PS1?, by J. Keats, 2023. Forbes. In the public domain. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jonathonkeats/2023/12/27/can-rirkrit-tiravanija-fry-gl>

Rafael Guimarães

Finally, and similar to Tiravanija, Brazilian performance “art-ivist,” art-educator, and sociologist, Rafael Guimarães works between the borderlines of art, politics, and education. In the last few years, he has developed a relational, food-performance-led practice through which *La Moqueca*, a typical Brazilian dish sometimes translated as a seafood stew with distinct regional variations, has transformed into a way of seeing the world, being part of it, affecting and being affected.

An Important dish in Brazilian gastronomy, *La Moqueca* is known to be a fusion of both African and Portuguese cultures, characterized by its wide variety of recipes and modes of preparation (Souza, 2023). *La Moqueca*, like many other Brazilian dishes, has an indigenous origin as well as African influences attributed to it. Located specifically in the Northeast of Brazil and forming part of what is locally known as “cocina bahiana” (roughly translated to “food of the bay”) (Souza, 2023), this specific dish is not only rich in its flavors and aromas but also known for connecting different cultures and communities that would express their identities through their own version of the *Moqueca* and its personalized rituals.

For Rafael Guimarães, *Moqueca Ciborgue* is an experimental place-based performance in the lands of southern Bahia, promoting a gastronomic and affective encounter through the streets of the city. “It’s about arriving in this land and meeting people from here. At the same time as proposing an affective dialog, it also seeks to reflect on the city, on what it’s like to live here” as Guimarães disclosed in a 2016 interview (Journal Bahia Online, 2016).

Throughout the staged intervention, Guimarães would prepare a *Moqueca* while the preparative actions took place in the public space and he invited people to try it. He states: “the dish is made by a foreigner who arrives, a cyborg foreigner, who assembles and reassembles himself here” (Journal Bahia Online, 2016). *Moqueca Ciborgue* has been presented since then, provoking a dialog between the performing arts and other artistic languages, focusing on the city, gastronomy, difference and decolonial criticism (Fajans, 2008).

Through the relational and performative acts of preparing and sharing food in public spaces, Guimaraes’s ‘art-ivistic’ practice, developed over the last few years, aims to re-examine how aesthetic experiences are shaped by colonial necropolitics. Specifically, his work posits that the colonial state’s processes establish a politics of death and social control. This system continuously constructs borders and reproduces biopolitics of security, all designed to regulate the movement of bodies, exploit their lives for capital, or, ultimately, to eliminate them. His artistic practice and approach speak to my own research interests from the perspective of creating social, interactive, and creative spaces within public realms, where relational exchanges and community-building opportunities are created, and fostered through food sharing and preparing practices. We both layer these convivial practices over a deep concern for complex and troubling social justice issues.

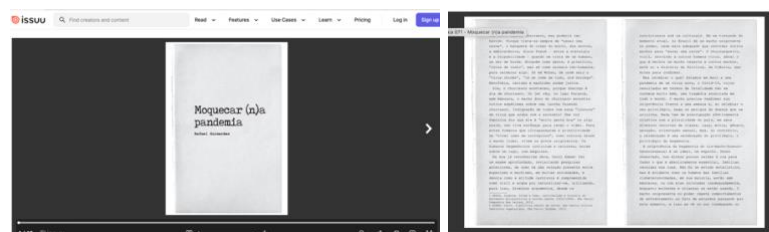


Figure 18: Pages from *Moquecar (n)a pandemia* Document. From *Moquecar (n)a pandemia*, by R. Guimarães, 2023. N-1 edições. Retrieved from https://issuu.com/n-publications/docs/pandemia_cr_tica_71. In the public domain



Figure 19: *Moqueca Ciborgue Performance View*. From Artes cênicas e gastronomia unidas na performance Moqueca Ciborgue, by Jornal Bahia Online, 2016. <https://jornalbahiaonline.com.br/noticia/32245/Artes-c%C3%AAnicas-e-gastronomia-unidas-na-performance-Moqueca-Ciborgue%E2%80%8F.html>. In the public domain

ARTE,
ARMA DE
CONSTRUÇÃO
MASIVA

Invitado> **RAFAEL GUIMARÃES**
Artista, professor, psicólogo,
produtor cultural & ativista.
BAHIA, BRASIL

EP-006

Proyecto> Moqueca ciborgue

Proyecto> Moqueca ciborgue

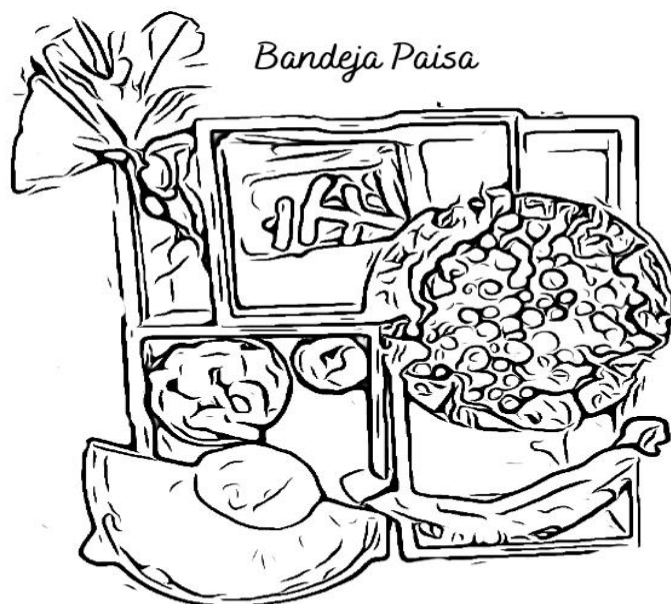
8 · Sept · 2020

INSTAGRAM LIVE & IGTV
9-10 PM
Hora BAHIA, BRASIL

MARTES
7-8 PM
Hora CDMX

Figure 20: *Instagram Post Announcing Rafael Guimarães Moqueca Ciborgue Project*. Screenshot of Instagram post by cerrucha, 2020, September 8. Retrieved from <https://www.instagram.com/p/CE4ahQ2jiLi/?igsh=MXdsNHI2cXVwbjUycQ%3D%3D>. In the public domain

As these artists' work demonstrates, artistic contributions can be considered as works of contemplation that promote a version of theorization. As we will see in the upcoming chapters, I was and continue to be interested not only in covering the social justice/inequalities through art creation, but also in incorporating food given its importance for all the women that participated in this research (myself included), particularly in relation to memory and identity from an immigration context.



Artista: Diana Vergara, Colombia

Ingredientes: 1.5 cucharadas de aceite (21g), 2 tallos de cebolla picada, 2 tomates sin piel picados, caldo con costilla, 3 tazas de agua, ½ lbs de frijoles remojados, 1 zanahoria, ¼ lb de carne molida, 1/2 lb de arroz, ¼ de tocino, 4 chorizos, 4 huevos fritos, 1 aguacate, 4 arepas pequeñas, 4 tajadas de plátano maduro

Figure 21: *Bandeja Paisa*. Artwork by Diana Vergara, Colombia. Digital image depicting the traditional Colombian dish “Bandeja Paisa” complete with its various components and an accompanying list of ingredients¹³, illustrated in p. 44 of *Recetas & Raíces, Recettes & Racines, Recipes & Roots* recipe book, 2024

Chapter 2 | Context & Literature

2.1 The Intertwined Palate: Food, Culture, and Memory

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the communal interactions that took place throughout the initial development of this project fostered spaces in which participants felt inclined to bring and share home-made dishes that often were tied to their countries of origin and cultural backgrounds. In these spaces where new community connections and relationships

¹³ Translation of ingredients: 1½ tbsp cooking oil, 2 slices of chopped onion, 2 skinless diced tomatoes, beef rib broth, 3 cups of water, ½ pound of soaked beans, 1 carrot, ¼ pound ground beef, ½ pound rice, ¼ pound of bacon, 4 spicy sausages, 4 fried eggs, 1 avocado, 4 small arepas, 4 slices of plantain.

were building and growing, they would share these gifts with the group and its members organically as the meetings took place. This prompted me to analyze some compelling links between food, culture, and memory in identity construction. I began by seeking out research in sociology and educational anthropology that enlightened me with social perspectives on food practices and the modern food system.

The following resources contributed greatly to my project design and, in various ways that I will expand on in this chapter, to what I told my participants about the role of food. Many of them were also useful to me post-workshops, in deepening my conceptualization of the relationships with food my participants had, which I will cover in more depth in Chapters 5 and 6. The resources listed below, similarly amplified my own understanding prior to the workshops, as part of the research, in addressing my guiding questions about how creative, cultural, and food-related practices can promote personal transformation, social reconstruction, and integration for newly arrived immigrants.

As I began exploring new-to-me research in food studies, I found a number of productive contradictions within the social constructionist framework (Guptill et al., 2013). For instance, food is simultaneously seen as sacred or ordinary, depending on the context. This duality offers a way to address global issues while exposing the forces of prominence and conformity. My participants expressed this contradiction by contrasting how affordable and readily available certain ingredients, like a favorite type of cheese, were in their home countries compared to how difficult and expensive they became to find in Montreal, leading them to glorify a once-ordinary food.

I similarly started engaging with considerations of food's function in identity work, social change, and health. Matters related to social inequality, structures, and culture stood out to me. For instance, anthropology educators Amy E. Guptill, Denise A. Copelton and Betsy Lucal (2013) suggest that the cultural significance of specific culinary rituals is constantly challenged. Accordingly, food-ways continuously evolve and transform, as individuals modify content and significance in food rituals, through either the manner in which they are executed/carried out or manifested, or by pushing new gastronomic limits (as seen in the case of Ogbhoh for instance). Through this approach, Guptill et al. (2013) provide examples of how food-ways leave different impressions on both locals and migrants, ironically and unintentionally perpetuating and promoting changes both socially and in identity construction. The team's case study results confirm that individual relationships with food are formed by our social position within intricate social inequality systems and that cultural origin, geographic location, ethnicity, social status, gender, and race influence and can have a positive or negative impact on social inequality relationships. As we will see further in Chapters 5 and 6, this was the case for one specific participant from the Dominican Republic who goes by the name of *Yesenia*. Unlike two other participants (namely participants *Ale* and *Maye*), *Yesenia* was able to integrate into her Dominican community faster, since she had pre-established ties to it, prior to her relocation. This was very different to *Maye* and *Ale's* case, as we will see, who knew no-one prior to their migration to Montreal.

As I considered how identities are profoundly shaped by our immediate societal environment (Guptill et al., 2013), I began to understand that gastronomic traditions can

accentuate both difference and acceptance. By encouraging communal relatedness and fostering integration through the mixing of culinary beginnings and traditions, food exemplifies this concept, as will be seen with *Yesenia*, for instance. This theory is consciously enacted by Rafael Guimarães, an artist discussed in the last chapter. His approach is particularly relevant to the visual artwork I created at CAFLA (further elaborated in this chapter), which provided diverse research examples. Through this work, I investigated how traditional homeland recipes – often a source of comfort for immigrants integrating into a new culture – reveal aspects of their evolving migration identities and memory making.

Another important resource I explored concerning food and culture was anthropology specialists' Carole M. Counihan and Penny Van Esterik's 2008 volume, *Food and Culture: A Reader*. Counihan and Esterik (2008) emphasize food's global importance in society, highlighting its ability to characterize and reinforce social relations while holding diverse personal and moral significance. This offered me a more comprehensive global analysis of food's symbolic, socio-economic, and political functions in various settings. For instance, the vast majority (if not all) of the dishes the women recreated in the community art workshops held special symbolic significance that they hadn't fully recognized before relocating. While these ingredients had always been easily accessible to them previously, as I indicate in Chapter 6 regarding four participants, gaining access to most of their traditional food stuffs in Montreal is now almost impossible or outrageously expensive. In a recent post-recent conversation, participants recently observed that newly imposed trade tariffs on various industries have fundamentally changed the political function of food for immigrants.

As I continued to explore the intricate links among food, memory, and culture, I found it valuable to delve into literature by food sociologists, particularly studies on food politics examining the rise of the “*Slow Food Movement*” (Leitch, 2008). This global trend is devoted to the conservation of ‘endangered foods’ – traditional foods that local cuisines can rarely reproduce or offer in modern times. These ideas were useful when I conducted the oral history interviews, mainly when participants spoke about fruits and dairy products’ they were nostalgic for. Most of the literature I found around this theme consisted of in-depth and insightful conversations that discussed views on the politics of “slowness” in contemporary discourse in relation to European identity (Leitch, 2008). I similarly encountered debates on neo-liberal models of rationality and the effects of favoring market-driven politics in leading capitalist nations, topics often examined through an ethnographic lens. These offered me some useful insight into the meaning of food, and its significance to culture and memory from an immigration perspective. Social anthropologist Alison Leitch (2008) proposes that, even amidst the sensory experience of daily life and its impact on space and time, moments of ‘stillness’ and slow contemplation can encourage the recovery and unfolding of sensory memories that may have been left behind, which can resurface as important stories to be explored. One of many, as we will see in Chapter 6, is the story *Yesenia* associates to her chosen coconut dessert – *Turrón de Coco*, and the same applies to how participant *Esmeralda* associates certain tastes and recipes to her cousin back in El Salvador. This resonated closely with the idea that fueled the research-creation component of my project: that sharing meals of personal significance away from what we know best can aid in helping immigrants both cope and become more

comfortable with their new spaces, relationships, and realities. In addition and to this point, Leitch (2008) also writes about the notion of memory and how it enmeshes itself through diverse sensory experiences that reclaim and revisit ‘taste memories’, which allows one to access the unconsciously nostalgic past (which as we shall see, below, was reported to be the case particularly for participants *Esmeralda* from El Salvador and *A/e* from Mexico).

I also turned to food study and anthropology scholars (Klein & Watson, 2016; Abbots, 2016) to familiarize myself further with the cultural and social contexts of food. I came across multiple in-depth ethnographic descriptions that explained the persistency and intricacies ingrained in our daily food practices and food systems at large. These types of resources helped me understand concerns regarding the moral use of food, the politics involved behind infantile gastronomy (which I found relevant considering all my participants are mothers), food as a strategy for citizenship and inclusivity, as well as other immigrant foodways. These provided me with greater insight into the ways social dynamics shape food today, which I found particularly helpful specifically in preparation for my workshop design.

By acknowledging the enormity of the topic of food and migration, socio-cultural and heritage anthropologist Emma-Jayne Abbots (2016) suggests it be considered in a more holistic and accessible manner. This would mean situating the topic within larger queries regarding the implications and exchanges among food and identity, ethnicity, memory, migration, globalization, kinship and the body, relationships and social interactions, material culture, and travel. Abbots suggests that these issues are steadily implanted, re-implanted, and entrenched, which problematizes the ability for migration and food studies to develop theoretical

groundwork/access that enable new lineages and new activity to emerge. Consistent with my goal of exploring how food practices facilitate traditional and innovative approaches to migrant being and belonging, this research further illuminated food's vital role in migrants' daily lives. It showed how food supports ethnic identities, helps bridge former social confines to foster new groups, and aids in establishing innovative, blended, versatile, and evolving communities, such as the one I worked with for this research project.

Sourcing, preparing and consuming food, together with feeding others, are some of the most immediate and pressing concerns migrants face and, as the ethnography demonstrates, these processes can be a mechanism for security, empowerment, and affiliation with others, just as much as they can be a site of difference, marginalization, and uncertainty. (Abbots, 2016, p. 128)

The anthropology of migration and food additionally displays how migrants are implicated in complex relational structures that form their food practices and educate those of others (like their offspring, for instance, as I will cover further in Chapter 5 when speaking about my chosen four specific participants). Some individuals give preference to connections within migrant groups, and others favor interactions with the new culture they are immersed in. I encountered both of these specifically with three out of four of the participants I analyze in Chapter 6. Recognizing that local and international foodways are subject to numerous changes and repercussions, and that these interactions and relationships are interwoven, is crucial, in my opinion. More attention needs to be paid to the exchanges between migrants who permanently relocate as well as the places they are coming from. We will see in practice all the

aforementioned theoretical considerations and how they support the idea for a wider expanding foundation that integrates these relations in a more holistic manner. Abbots (2016) indicates that the all-encompassing experience of migration is a developing area of research, with great potential to contribute to the conversation between migration and food, which I am hopeful this research does.

Like Abbots, food anthropologist and scholar David Sutton (2016) thoroughly addresses the interdependent facets of cooking. He explores what cooking reveals about the food itself, tools, bodily movements, the physical environment where it's made and consumed, and its broader symbolic and social contexts. Sutton briefly discusses anthropologist Brett Williams' depiction of Tejano¹⁴ migrant women and cooking's role for them. Williams found that cooking is part of a cycle of bond-building festivities within the community and also with members of the dominant Anglo society, functioning as "a way of creating a sort of social capital that can be called upon in times of need" (Sutton, 2016, p. 354). Cooking often brings women together, allowing them to extend their social networks and gain influence far beyond the immediate family – a dynamic I witnessed first-hand during this research. Sutton's book, for example, significantly supported my exploration of how life-history research helps depict communities and how food facilitates networks of connections. These networks, in turn, enable women to confidently challenge diverse dilemmas with added support, a topic I will discuss further later in the text.

¹⁴ This term refers to people of Mexican descent living in or from Texas, USA.

I explored cooking as a form of knowledge, agency, value, an embodied skill, memory, and sensory apprenticeship, or merely as everyday risk (Sutton, 2016). The deeper knowledge I developed came in handy particularly when both designing the community art workshops as well as in conducting the oral history interviews and familiarizing myself further with each participant. I found that cooking offers a glimpse into gaps in culture and the field of anthropology. Sutton confirms that taking cooking's everydayness and preparation seriously can be equally as ethnographically fulfilling (even when taste is compromised) due to foods' centrality to the daily recreation of life, a reality I found to be particularly true with all four of the participants I will soon discuss. Cooking has significance as culturally diverse, having the power to bear innovative knowledge-building ideas and opportunities about gender and power, space, time, tradition, and modernity. Because of this, as Sutton suggests, cooking should be approached with theoretical adaptability and ethnographic curiosity.

As my investigation into culinary practices progressed, I also realized the necessity of examining the significance of historical cooking methods, eating habits, and food-related traditions from various cultural perspectives (Montanari, 2012) before leading the oral history interviews. This led me to literature exploring food mythology, preparation, and selection. This body of work encompassed subjects such as cooking strategies across time and diverse geographic locations, the science of flavors, the evolving characteristics of communal rituals, and the evolving identity of food.

Accounts and insights such as those of food studies' scholar Massimo Montanari's (2012) affirm that cooking is an important part of cultural heritage and also a strong influence

on our psychological, emotional, and material well-being. I was particularly drawn to Montanari's discussion of how food, as a subject, generally raises politically charged concepts of identity to set boundaries between our individuality and others with potential cultural implications. As he explains,

History is often called in as the guarantor of our identity, our "tradition," our "roots," it is the duty of the historian to point out that history teaches us exactly the opposite. It shows us that alimentary traditions never remain the same but change with time, becoming modified as they come into contact with other traditions. (Montanari, 2012, p. 157)

This suggests to me that identities and traditions are generated by our lived experiences and our responses to them. I observed this through the more informal conversations and exchanges that took place during the community art workshops, of which I made note of in my debriefing journal entries. Identities are values and models that define individuals in their present state. Roots, on the other hand, are the places and the impulses from which our identity originated, but do not necessarily belong to us; as Montanari explains, roots are not identity, but should be rather viewed as "*the other in us*" (p. 159). This was certainly the case in all four of the participants of whom I will speak.

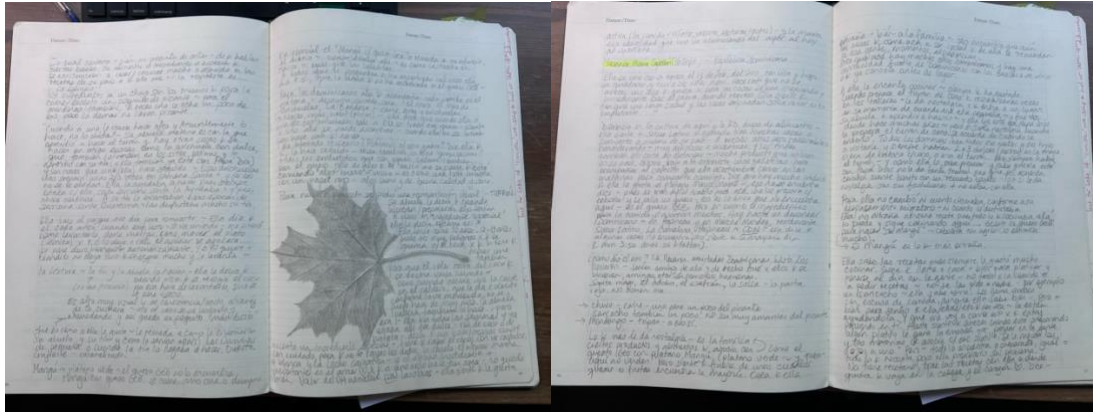


Figure 22: Excerpts from *Field Notes on Participant Observation*. These note details observations from a workshop in June, 2021. Personal journal field notes, 2021–2022

Positioning food as a fundamental instrument of cultural identity often implies that personally preferred recipes are associated with the mother. Montanari posits that in the mother, and all she represents, one can find the roots of ones' personal identity. This deep connection between food, motherhood, and a foundational sense of being strongly resonated with my research into co-creating a communal 'mother-land recipe' compilation with my workshop participants at CAFLA. I invited participants to explore identity through diverse media and to share how specific recipes, memories, and stories associated with home were evolving throughout their varied migration experiences. Collectively, we confronted the diverse challenges of initial integration into a new culture. For instance, participants frequently shared that they had learnt to work with unexpected but available ingredients and resources in the new environment, prompting them to consider how they might then recreate and build new notions of memory and identity.

2.2 Arts-Based Research in Immigrant Communities

As indicated above (section 2.1), I will be touching on how diverse arts-based/informed

research practices and studies can address how migration influences the construction of personal autobiographies and identities (Guruge, 2015; Gómez-Estern & de la Mata Benitez, 2013; Massing, 2016). This background investigation component was crucial for me to further understand and more effectively design the artistic activities that could compliment and foster the social interactions and creative explorations taking place with the participants at CAFLA.

For instance, social anthropologist and scholar Beatriz Macias-Gómez-Estern (2013) researched narrative as a sense-making tool in constructing of migrant identities. She argues that oral history narratives are indispensable for making sense of individuals' life stories and identities. Gómez-Estern views migration as a 'turning-point situation' where identity and life stories can be transformed, analyzing migrant identity advancement by examining the lived experiences and narratives of migrants. She emphasizes the skillful performance prompted by "space as a structuring device, in a set of narratives performed by a group of migrants in a focus group task" (Gómez-Estern & de la Mata Benitez, 2013, pp. 172).

Reading through the migrants' accounts documented and evaluated in Gómez-Estern's work (2013) suggested to me that diverse short stories can be used to help construct newcomer immigrant identities in focus group tasks. This understanding highlights how identity develops and is portrayed through illustrative narratives, where character and plot are evident in shared stories. These narratives also reveal potential conflicts and resolutions. Gómez-Estern suggests that characters possess two complementary narratives shaped by their spatial surroundings. By examining how their collective histories blend geographical and communal arrangements, we can better grasp the perception and construction of identity and interculturality. This became

increasingly clear to me during my one-on-one interactions with participants and especially during the in-person community art workshops.

In exploring how to measure the impact of migration on immigrant communities through arts research practices, I discovered the work of early childhood education expert Christine Massing (2016). Her research stemmed from a larger project examining how a group of eleven first-generation immigrant parents and children in Canada were led and facilitated by immigrant teacher. Massing specifically explored participants' bicultural identities through aesthetic representations of their sense of place (Massing, 2016). Participants engaged in shared art-making workshops, and she also gathered data through ethnographic methods. An interactional multi-media analysis of the video data recorded exchanges among participants, exemplifying the complex, expressive ways they connected. This research suggests new opportunities for determining and incorporating immigrant parent's culturally influenced interaction styles with their young children.

Massing's research design held particular relevance for my own work. Her study is framed by socio-cultural theory and the use of arts-based methods; the materials were seen as self-examining tools that facilitated immersion in the creative experience. The art workshop and studio setting were successful because participants' English language skills sometimes created potential barriers to involvement in typical language-based preschool activities. Her findings indicate that participants managed to make important links through diverse symbolic approaches. The study thus contributes to the growing body of literature on "multiple ways of being and learning embedded in the landscape of space, art-making and cultural meaning"

(Massing, 2016, p. 47). This research was highly helpful to me when preparing for potential scenarios with community participants at CAFLA. Although I was an active member of the community, new members from diverse backgrounds continuously joined and left the group, and were navigating very different integration processes and challenging migratory transition periods. Massing's research suggested that non-verbal arts activity, especially if shared by parent and child, helps them build meaning together.

In preparation for my fieldwork, I felt it imperative to learn more about the potential influence of gender, racial, social, and economic inequalities in migration contexts. Studying urban health specialist Sepali Guruge's (2015) community-based work, conducted through arts-informed methods, helped me understand changes in family dynamics reported by refugee youth during their relocation to Canada. Guruge appears to have chosen a case-study methodology for this research, though it is not explicitly stated in her text. She employed an arts-informed research method, specifically a qualitative drawing activity for data collection, conducted in collaboration with focus group discussions. By using drawings as a method to generate data, Guruge's arts-informed research methodology effectively enhanced the results from the focus group discussions.

Guruge's study concluded that the household roles and obligations parents assigned to the participating youth increased after migrating. In most cases, these roles required youth to help with translation, provide significant emotional and economic support, and juggle housework with their own school work. This was of interest and relevance to my work, when considering the many underlying realities and circumstances, often impacted by age, that

immigrants face. For example, the participants in the art workshops were for the most part young women who were mothers of one to three children on average. In most cases, their older children had migrated with them. I noted in my field journal that many of them shared during the art-making sessions that their older children had integrated and adapted much faster to the two official languages in their new environment. They similarly shared that these older siblings and children generally provided translation and interpretation assistance for parents and grandparents alike.

However, a methodological challenge I identified in Guruge's (2015) work concerned the unclear contribution of the drawings when compared to the interview data. It is not obvious how the researchers interpreted these drawings, given their limited background in image interpretation, symbols or coding. Arguably, a stronger background in arts-informed practices and methods, or semiotics, is needed to fully support the use of drawing in her particular study. This is noteworthy because few studies integrate drawing as a research method with immigrant youth, and Guruge did not address the specific methodological or data-related considerations of using drawing. In the following chapters, I will illustrate how my approach distinguishes itself from the methods previously discussed.



Figure 23 & 24: *Recetas y Raíces outdoor community art workshops.* Groupe de La Petite Enfance, CAFLA. Outdoor community workshops held in a park adjacent to CAFLA headquarters, 2021–2022, Rosemont – La Petite-Patrie



Figure 25: *Arepa Pelua*. Artwork by Naomy Rendon, Venezuela. Digital image depicting the traditional Venezuelan dish “Arepa Pelua” complete with its various components and an accompanying list of ingredients¹⁵, illustrated in p. 38 of *Recetas & Raíces, Recettes & Racines, Recipes & Roots* recipe zine book, 2024

Chapter 3 | Methodologies & Methods

In this chapter, I indicate ways I address my three guiding research questions, as well as the methods I implemented. My questions are: How can examining ideas of identity through storytelling and art-making support the social reconstruction and personal development of recently arrived migrants? How can exchanging ideas about food, culture, memory, meal sharing and intercultural community building help newcomers integrate while creating a supportive environment that allows their developing and changing migrant identities to thrive

¹⁵ Translation of ingredients: 250g of stripped beef, red pepper, onion, garlic, 1 tbsp tomato paste, ½ cup harina pan, water, 100g of grated cheese.

in their new Canadian settings? In what ways does the interdisciplinary combination of oral history and visual practice enhance the impact of these activities for participants?

The methodology includes research–creation (Chapman & Sawchuk, 2012; Sullivan, 2010) plus oral history, within a community art education frame (Leeson, 2009). I'll remind you that in addition to creating my own artwork and creating a recipe book collection from participants' suggestions, I held a series of community art–making workshops where participants connected with one another through their migration stories. In these spaces, participants were asked to consider the significance of food and its ties to memory and identity upon migration.

3.1 Research–Creation

A primary methodology of this dissertation is research–creation, taken up by myself as researcher in my individual studio–based works, and by my participants in the community–based workshops I led. The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (2025) defines research–creation in the following way:

An approach to research that combines creative and academic research practices, and supports the development of knowledge and innovation through artistic expression, scholarly investigation, and experimentation. The creation process is situated within the research activity and produces critically informed work in a variety of media (art forms). Research–creation cannot be limited to the interpretation or analysis of a creator's work, conventional works of technological development, or work that focuses on the creation of curricula. (Def. 24)

Communications scholars and theorists of research–creation Owen Chapman and Kim Sawchuk (2012) explain research–creation from an angle that embraces diverse ways of knowing. They suggest four modes of research–creation within this emergent area of practice–as–study: “research–for–creation,” “research–from–creation,” “creative–presentations of research,” and “creation–as–research” (p. 7). Their classification is particularly significant for understanding how research–creation originates from practice and is carried out *through* an artistic process, highlighting both the fluidity of partnerships between artist–researchers and their collaborators, and the similarities between creative practices and current integrative research. In this way, research–creation tacks between investigation and creation, suggesting a non–linear orientation that acknowledges innovation, dynamic systems, and unpredictability (Barrett, 2010; Knowles and Cole, 2008; Leavy, 2015; Liamputtong and Rumbold, 2008; Vaughan, 2005). Chapman and Sawchuk propose that research–creation fosters creativity and allows for different forms of expression, knowledge production, and dissemination. This methodology can encourage experimentation and create safe learning environments, which in turn can stimulate risk–taking, create opportunities for empowerment, and facilitate community building (Chapman and Sawchuk, 2012). It likewise has real potential to inspire reciprocity in teaching–learning exchanges, question hierarchical knowledge systems, and strengthen existing networks, thereby promoting social change (Vaughan, 2005).

The objective of the research–creation process is not to reach unanimity on a single model of research, but to suggest and assess different understandings of the practice/research relationship, and experiment with new forms of collaboration (Conrad and Sinner, 2015;

Vaughan, 2005), enabling a further democratization of traditional academic research (Leavy, 2011; Leavy, 2015). Furthermore, research–creation situates art as a way of knowing, and art–making as a kind of research, making it an appealing approach from an art education perspective (Sullivan, 2010). Other features that art educator and scholar Graeme Sullivan (2010) identifies in arts practice as research include the promotion of empathy, the presence of ambiguity, the use of expressive language, the personal signature of the researcher, and the presence of aesthetic form. Sullivan’s model proposes that the learner–centered activity is driven by real–world challenges, the overcoming of which encourages active engagement. Learning results not only from action, but also through intentional reflection *on* that action. This situated learning demonstrates a unity between problem, context, and solution. In this way, personal interest motivates the research process and provides a more profound model of learning while producing *new*, unanticipated knowledge (Barrett & Bolt, 2007; Sullivan, 2010). Drawing on Freire’s (2018) emphasis on dialogue, critical consciousness, and praxis, a research–creation methodology can foster an emancipatory process where participants collectively challenge power structures, co–create knowledge through artistic expression and reflection, and work towards social transformation. Similarly, drawing on Desai’s (2025b) emphasis on art as a site for activism, critical pedagogy, and social transformation, a research–creation methodology can facilitate praxis–based engagement, empowering participants to co–create knowledge and challenge societal inequities through artistic expression and community collaboration. Greene (2007) would likely view this methodology as a vital pursuit of “wide–awakeness,” where aesthetic encounters and imaginative capacities enable participants to

transcend the taken-for-granted, perceive new possibilities, and collectively engage in the ongoing making of a more just and democratic world.

In envisioning a less individualized and more collaborative approach to research-creation, it becomes imperative for the researcher to promote partnerships within collective contexts so that this approach may demonstrate the complexity of community in action (LeRue, 2023). A collaborative approach to research-creation must in turn explore the cultural and social realities of diverse and often under-represented groups of practice and their struggles, while examining community through anti-oppressive approaches, allowing the arts to create a space for alternative action such as empowerment and community advocacy. The purpose is to invite voice, to address civic issues, and to position community members as active agents for change (Conrad and Sinner, 2015). A key goal for collaborative research-creation is therefore to encourage diverse communities and colleagues to engage in peaceful dialogue, and, in this process, to explore the nature of collaboration itself. Descriptions, circumstances, restrictions, and limitations encountered in collaboration inevitably add to the conversation, highlighting specific challenges that will more realistically help situate and understand collaboration at both the community and artistic levels. I will share the ones I personally encountered in this research in Chapter 7. Collaborative research-creation, in this way, questions how to work and facilitate in partnership and solidarity to learn more holistically what true collaboration requires (Conrad and Sinner, 2015). Additionally, a collaborative approach to research-creation emphasizes holistic, equitable knowledge creation for both researchers and participants. It acknowledges the importance of recognizing multiple intelligences – a theory valuing diverse ways individuals

learn and express knowledge (Gardner, 2008) – and varied forms of expression among diverse communities and participants, particularly marginalized groups (Bleck, 2015; Mumtaz, 2015). Integrating tacit knowledge, research–creation aims to actively avoid potentially oppressive top–down power structures such as those critiqued by Freire, often masquerading as knowledge exchanges (that is, researcher as expert/authority and participant as novice) (Bleck, 2015; Koh, 2016).

This methodology requires research–creators to think as both researcher and artist. Various methodological theorists agree that skills necessary for this dual/dialogic role include spontaneity, emergence, flexibility, and tolerance, encouraging innovation through openness both to the unknown and to thinking emblematically, metaphorically, and conceptually (Koh, 2016; Leavy, 2015). Research–creation through its artistic focus can help to illustrate specifics about the social world, portray people and their circumstances mindfully, cultivate new understandings of the relationships between socio–historical situations and our lives, challenge biases, and disrupt dominant narratives (Leavy, 2015). These qualities are specifically relevant from a pedagogical perspective because of the nature of research–creation’s arts–based/informed dynamic, reflective, and descriptive practices. As previously mentioned, collaborative research–creation’s capacity to reveal aspects of human experience and the social world also make it useful for proposals designed to discover, describe, and explore from a collective perspective. By integrating and expanding on synergies between and across fields of study, artistic research as creation can enable research findings to usefully extend from individual lives to community building (inside and outside the classroom) (Bleck, 2015; Leavy,

2015). Furthermore, this practice of producing knowledge through art aligns closely with the principles of equitable community participation, because art-making, unlike many traditional research methods, can communicate without language. The educational power of research-creation's community-based exchanges lies in its capacity to help people "show" rather than "tell" researchers about the situations that they are trying to understand (Chin, Sakamoto, and Bleuer, 2014, p. 267), particularly valuable when words can't be found or languages shared. When language *can* be shared, oral history can add deep meaning to connections with community members, as described next.

3.2 Oral History

Oral history is a qualitative research method that uses deep, collaborative interviews to explore an individual's complete life narrative or a substantial part of it. It's particularly useful for gathering valuable data from those who have customarily been excluded from self-representation (Hesse-Biber, 2005). It is a method that empowers narrators to use their voices and claim authority through validating their life experiences as an important source of knowledge (Portelli, 1991). As a tool for linking life experience with collective memory, social power, and political culture, oral history can reveal the interaction between the individual and her society. Moreover, it prioritizes the relationship between the researcher and the narrator, a relationship that requires clear guidelines and relies on ongoing and open dialogue. The reciprocal nature of this process presents a particular set of interpretative challenges, offers unique opportunities, and requires continual ethical evaluation (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2010; Sandino and Partington, 2013).

A distinguishing characteristic of oral history is its usefulness in studying process and making holistic sense of life experiences (Portelli, 1991). Although oral history focuses on an individual's narrative, it attempts to connect "micro- and macrophenomena and personal life experiences to broader historical circumstances" (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2010, p. 153). Such connections can aid in understanding the experiences of an individual from a particular time, place, and social class. The data collection phase of oral history research encourages the researcher and participant to construct knowledge collaboratively through the creation of a life narrative that becomes the research data. A Freireian framework deeply informs oral history by transforming the interview into a dialogical and problem-posing encounter, where the co-construction of narratives fosters conscientization, challenges dominant historical accounts, and empowers participants to critically reflect on their lived experiences for social transformation. Similarly, Greene's (2007) perspective aligns with oral history as a research method by emphasizing how the act of narrating of and listening to lived experiences can enable participants to imaginatively transcend conventional understandings, perceive new possibilities within their past, and critically engage with their present realities for future transformation. Desai's views on praxis-based research methods (2007) align well with oral history's capacity to facilitate co-creating knowledge, amplifying marginalized voices, and empowering communities to critically reflect on their experiences to challenge existing power structures and inspire social transformation. Similarly, Shin's scholarship on collecting the lived experiences of immigrant art educators through counternarratives further aligns with this

commitment to empowering marginalized voices and constructing new ways of knowing (Shin et al., 2023b).

A crucial methodological similarity between oral history and research–creation is their capacity to (re)present a set of meanings to audiences. This is particularly evident in how personal experience and embodied knowledge resonate among individuals in identity formation, in the varying interpretations of identity itself, and in the potential pedagogical implications both methods can offer (Chapman and Sawchuck, 2012). Because both research–creation and oral history strive to create and raise analytical consciousness, they can be useful for ‘identity work’ by giving voice to subjugated viewpoints, promoting dialogue outside of academic audiences, and evoking diversified understandings through exploratory means (Barrett, 2010, pp. 13–15). Furthermore, both methodologies, as powerful forms of contemplation and mediation, can uncover stories and illuminate perspectives that would otherwise be inaccessible (Chapman and Sawchuck, 2012; LeRue, 2023). In this way, they can facilitate the creation of politically charged spaces of visibility without which certain narratives, identities, and forms of knowing would remain obscured by a lack of discourse.

These two approaches (oral history and research–creation) allow the researcher to transcend the facts and data and to acknowledge surrounding emotions and perceptions rarely presented in a historical account. It is this emotional component that facilitates entry into an artistic and creative space. The new work ceases to be merely a retold story, becoming instead a new work of art that holds rich and unprecedented possibilities. As a result, the narrator can develop new agency over, and understanding of her own story, and situate it within a larger

cultural history. Similarly, research–creation and oral history both focus on highlighting narratives, building understanding, and challenging assumptions. In both methodologies, the research process and findings can compel people to think and/or feel differently, and thereby gain fresh insights and build empathetic understandings (Leavy, 2015). A methodological partnership between the two is thus particularly well–suited to rendering life stories affective, enticing, innovative, and, therefore, pedagogically effective (Sajnani, 2011). On a wider level, both oral history and research–creation position themselves as potentially disruptive of the canon. Adopting oral history for data collection and research–creation for research presentation is a strategic attempt to avoid the continued privileging of the written word over both oral and visual messages (Rouverol, 2003). In this doctoral research project, and as I will reveal in further detail in Chapter 4, the culmination of this partnership resulted in the fields of art and oral history merging in strong symbiosis.

3.3 Community Art Education in Practice

Referring back to the discussions of community arts for social change that I offered in Chapters 1 and 2, I want to start this sub–section by referencing London (England) based visual artist and researcher Lorraine Leeson (2009) as a guiding example of and reference for how art can influence social and environmental change by bridging knowledge from the community into the public sphere. In recent addition to her decades of notable work linking visual art, community, and social justice, Leeson is a leading scholar in Deaf Studies and Applied Linguistics, and her work focuses on signed languages, sign language interpreting, and the rights and experiences of Deaf communities. Her project *Justisigns 2* (2024) for instance,

specifically develops evidence-informed training for stakeholders working with deaf, refugee, and migrant women who have experienced gender-based violence and use a language other than that of their host community. This directly relates to my own efforts in community art workshops that use multi-modal images and oral histories to uplift and project the voices and experiences of newly arrived women. Work like Leeson's offers a firsthand look at the planning, execution, and delivery of art projects with social agendas, shedding light on socially situated art practice (Leeson, 2017). As I will elaborate shortly, the work of Leeson and others unpacks the role of the artist in producing creative frameworks, the connection between collaboration and participation, managing group input, and the significance of the manner that projects of this nature are initiated and negotiated.

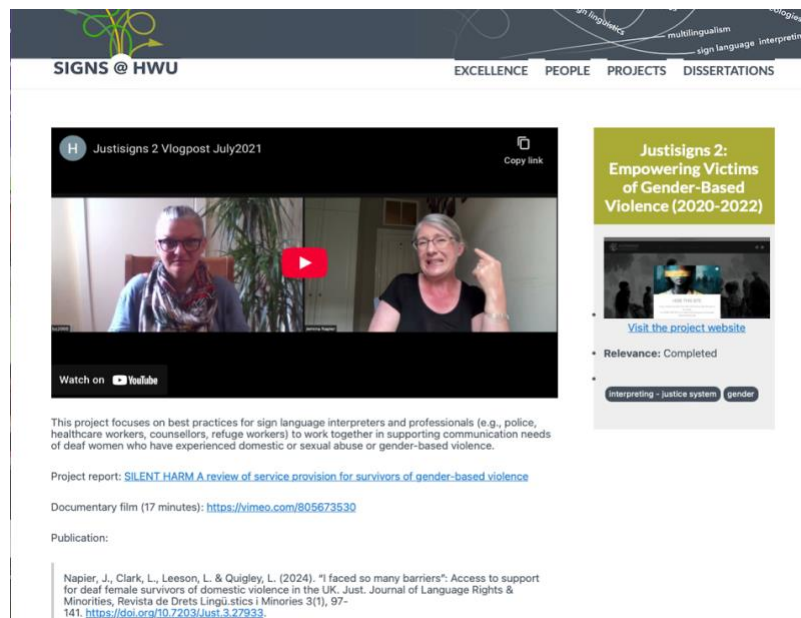


Figure 26: *Justisigns 2 Vlogpost*, July, 2021. From Heriot Watt BSL's YouTube channel, 2021. Copyright 2021 by Heriot Watt BSL

While the fields of community arts, arts-based research, and arts-based practices have grown considerably in the last 20 years, the methods and techniques used by researchers in

studies involving participant art-making have been relatively underexplored, as this chapter will elaborate. Furthermore, compared to related work in language and image production, as well as the interpretation and meaning making processes within research, the visual analysis of the artwork produced has tended to be less developed and theorized. Even so, the literature and resources I reviewed in preparation for this research provided detailed insight into how participant-generated artworks have been used in community-oriented art practice by diverse artists, explored in peer-reviewed research studies, and examined in theoretical investigations into the increasingly recognized validity of research-creation and arts-based research.

The contribution of art-making in terms of facilitating data collection was demonstrated in studies that examined and centered on constructing positive relationships between researchers and participants. Concurrently, they contributed reflection and access to otherwise inaccessible information about the conditions of participants' lives and their flourishing identities. Furthermore, art-making enabled participants to engage in creative activity as well to generate artwork and contribute to an appreciated, celebratory memento of the research.

Given the goal of my research and its guiding questions, methodologically I needed to extend the participatory nature and methods of both artistic research practices and oral history, moving beyond process and towards awareness-raising, promoting sustainable social change (Luchs and Miller, 2016). As previously stated, I developed a series of 10 studio-based and media workshops, reaching out to CAFLA's existing community for newcomer parents (predominantly mothers) of young children, and offered interested members the opportunity to learn and experiment with new visual arts skills, reflect on past experiences, work in

collaborative contexts, and develop networks. Ultimately, this creative expression resulted in compelling visual and oral history sound works, mixed media collages, food sharing, shared experiences, discussions, and visual interpretations and explorations. Part of my work's epistemological query involved exploring the impact of combining visual art studio practices with digital oral histories, to instigate interpersonal dialogue about identity, food, and memory. My research aimed to explore participants' cultural integration and the under-discussed struggles that newcomer and immigrant communities face. Doing so provided me an opportunity to confront my assumptions regarding the identity challenges experienced by diverse migrant communities, consider approaches that could be beneficial to all involved parties, and determine effective measures of the research project's results.

Despite my strong belief in the value of oral history and artistic research practices in the creation process, I found myself constantly questioning what would happen after the research was completed and the resulting material disseminated (which I will address further in Chapter 6 and 7). One of the main challenges I foresaw was the capacity to extend participatory methods once the project ran its full research term. I am interested in learning more about what this could look like for this specific community, and the methods for ensuring the research's engaged and sustained mutual benefit (High, 2014). My ideal outcome for this project is to create a continuous, if not permanent, positive impact for all members at CAFLA. This means ensuring its sustainability beyond my direct involvement. I would prefer to see the project continue with new images and recipes uploaded to a dedicated, indefinitely hosted online platform, rather than merely being displayed on my personal research website, although I

recognize that within CAFLA the challenge is to have an arts insider (staff or volunteer) continue to develop projects. Were this to be possible, an annual exhibition option could engage both new and returning participants who wish to continue expressing themselves artistically.

Ultimately, I hope the project finds a permanent home as a sustainable community initiative within CAFLA, provided the community embraces and values it. According to scholars in oral history Michele Luchs and Liz Miller (2016), one strategy is to encourage participants to assume a leadership role during both the participant recruitment and dissemination/campaigning components of the project. Another is to facilitate a peer support system among participants in order to provide mutual emotional support, and the chance to learn from each other's sharing styles. Unfortunately, and due to the vulnerable and unpredictable immigration status tendency of the participants with whom I worked (more of this on Chapter 6), neither of these options were possible. Finally, setting aside time for critical reflection throughout the process was essential to ensuring the continued well-being of collaborators. To these ends, I put great trust in oral history, not only as a means to build community and facilitate exchange, but also as a method to collect data. Oral history allows the research participant to maintain authority over her knowledge during data collection, and intrinsically challenges post-modern notions of the researcher-researched relationship (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2010) by building in shared authority, reciprocity, and emphasizing the participants' command over their own story (a.k.a. the research data). This approach also helps create more democratic knowledge production, benefiting all parties involved (Chenier, 2014; Zembrzycki, 2009). This collaboration is specifically necessary when situating oral history in an artistic framework, because it openly

acknowledges the moral, public, and connective facets of that practice (Sandino & Partington, 2013). I'll address how the artistic frame can function on the moral level with specific reference to the four participants I write about in Chapter 6; I'll tease out how I chose to discuss aesthetic and creative aspects of their creations in consideration of what they chose to share about their migration stories and circumstances. Despite having interview questions that may have guided the narratives, the participants all (the four profiled in this text plus the remaining nine who can be heard online) had full control and decision-making power on what they would share or expand on. The same is reflected in their artwork imagery and choices. All 13 interviewed participants ultimately felt it was of utmost importance that their oral history audio recordings accompany their final works in both the exhibition and recipe/coloring book zine.

The last pedagogical implication I foresaw centered on distributing authority within collaborative settings (High, 2014; Zembrzycki, 2009). Reciprocity and collaboration between the research-creator and the participants could easily become a central issue because of tacit power dynamics. It is important, therefore, to seek ways to reciprocate or give back to participants, while working in partnership and learning *with* participants rather than merely *about* them (Miller, Little, and High, 2017). Sharing authority implies sharing control of the outcomes, encouraging dialogue, and keeping open communication. As lecturer and author in creative writing, globalization, and neoliberalism Alicia J. Rouverol (2003) reminds us, when we seek multiple truths, it is essential to (re) present multiple perspectives in our research.

3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

After the instructional art workshops, I conducted oral history interviews, following Portelli's (1991) approach, which focuses on meaning and memory. Participants' narratives deepened and, in some ways, reshaped their understanding of their migration experiences. While there was some back-and-forth between the initial workshops and interviews, I primarily observed participants building a sense of belonging through their artistic practice, visually narrating their stories with paints and materials under my guidance. In addition, in a parallel activity through my own visual practice (research-creation), I created artworks alongside the participants throughout the workshops offered, and in my own private studio as an active member of the community, and co-participant in the project as an immigrant parent of young children.

This methodological approach builds on an artistic collaboration I participated in during January/February 2015, held at a different community site: the Immigrant Workers Centre at the Artists' Bloc in Côte-des-Neiges, Montreal. The project was led by the Artists' Bloc collective, in partnership with the Immigrant Workers Centre and its members at the time. I had the opportunity to take part as a community participant and learner. Titled *Migrant Memory, Living Memory* (2015), the project primarily utilized a methodology rooted in arts activism and participatory action research. The underlying theme was the increasing prevalence of temporary work in immigrants' lives in Quebec, with temporary agencies consistently directing migrant and immigrant labor. Towards the end of the project and collaboration, the public was invited

to reflect on the effects of this reality on immigrants' daily lives, creating interactive discussions that resulted in expressive sculptural installations.

This project served as a foundational antecedent to my research, employing artistic practices as a core methodology for social justice and advocacy. Its aim was to expose overlooked aspects of precarity and discrimination faced by im/migrant workers, specifically to denounce and visualize the social injustices within Montreal's im/migrant communities. The collaboration explicitly integrated knowledge building, action strategy, and the arts, meaning artistic creation was interwoven with developing a deeper understanding of issues and formulating challenges to Canadian migration policies. With contributions from Artists' Bloc collective members, affected community members actively shaped the artistic and political outcomes. This transformative and critical methodology utilized artistic practice to reframe and empower narratives, and it notably included an oral history component, or strong elements of direct testimony and narrative gathering from participants (Hall & Salamanca, 2017). My exposure to this collaborative work laid the groundwork for and inspired my subsequent doctoral research.

Additionally, this doctoral research's methodological approach built on my *Inter-Intra* initiative which I originally designed as I began to collaborate further with the Artists' Bloc in 2016. *Inter-Intra* evolved into a small-scale research-creation project in the form of a multimedia art installation, based on lived experiences of community art education and migration, through my personal engagement with newly arrived and disenfranchised immigrant communities in Montreal, Quebec (Garcia-Fialdini, 2019a; 2019b). I approached this inquiry

through portraiture of a series of immigrant inhabitants, depicted in meaningful urban landscapes, via mixed media and oral history methods. The work aimed to represent some of the many diverse cultures that share Montreal as a new home and living environment, and became, in one way or another, part of a collective migration story, through a visual and sound piece of immigrant and newcomer migration experiences.



Figure 27, 28 & 29: *Inter-Intra. Mixed Media Sculpture.* 18"x18". 2018. Personal Collection



Figure 30, 31 & 32: *Inter-Intra. Mixed media sculpture and sound installation.* 18"x18". 2018. Personal Collection

The process I developed for this artful experience shone valuable light on my current studio practice and my personal exploration of my own changing identity, linked to migration and the arc of this larger research. *Inter Intra* similarly illustrates recent newcomer experiences and challenges, as well as some of the commonalities that can be shared through diverse art-making processes around this theme.

3.5 Research Design and Setup

Throughout the following pages, I will discuss the methods of oral history in substantial detail, emphasizing the meticulously ethical engagement required given my participants' vulnerabilities.

When developing a research–creation project using oral history methodology, I remained continuously mindful of the potential effects of such an approach and research design on both participants and myself as the researcher (Freund, 2013). I had to formalize consent at the outset of the research process to understand and mitigate ethical risks for participants. Because the consent form is a contract that protects all parties involved, I had to negotiate and clarify expectations before participants signed the forms, with the provision that the agreement could be revisited at any time during the research process. Ensuring participants' full consent and prioritizing their well-being were paramount, given the potential pain involved in their revisiting past experiences and the time invested in the project. One useful approach to supporting participants was to offer, along with consent forms, a list of resources devoted to ethics of care and emotional support (High, 2014). Also, prior to each interview, I made it a point to disclose that the very nature of recording precludes any guarantees of complete confidentiality, as practices like skewing interview intent or failing to inform an interviewee they are being recorded constitute egregious breaches of trust (Yow, 1995).

Because of the importance of the safety and comfort of the interviewee, I had to carefully consider where each interview was held. I knew that interview venues are meant to be reflective spaces where researchers listen mindfully and attentively (Russell, 1999), because the

setup of the interview directly affects the representation of the interviewees. Both the physical space and tone are crucial to ensuring a safe and in-depth exchange (Hesse-Biber, 2010). I offered all interviewees the option to choose the interview location, respecting the COVID-19 regulations at the time to the best of my ability; most participants suggested and preferred I meet them at their homes. Most of these interviews took place in their kitchens, which proved ideal considering we were discussing notions of memory, identity, and food from their homelands. Prior to the interview, it was important to establish a rapport with the goal of sustaining conversation throughout the research process, and to have sufficient time to foster a trusting, collaborative relationship. This approach emphasizes regenerative possibilities, rather than falsely masquerading as a form of healing. Oral history will neither mend nor cure, but can offer subtle support to interviewees' efforts to recompose their sense of self and to re-establish agency (High, 2014).

It became clear that it was likewise necessary for me to establish a professional rather than personal relationship with each narrator/collaborator, especially as I became more acquainted with the narrator's ambitions, anxieties, plans, pains, and joys. It was ethically essential to ensure that my intent as researcher was clearly explained and that I outlined and respected relationship boundaries, so that neither of us felt taken advantage of or used (Yow, 1995). The personal/professional was an important distinction to make, and a challenge, for I was (and continue to be) an active member of the community and group. The background research I did on this shows that a friendship may develop after the research project ends, but if it is an on-going research project, the researcher's friendship is not disinterested but subject

to an intrinsic power dynamic. As Yow (1995) suggests, researchers are obligated to specify that a professional relationship must be maintained throughout the completion of the project. Of course, both background experience and social class influence interpretations of what constitutes professional relationships. As noted above, though friendships may result from these shared experiences, boundaries had to be nonetheless stressed throughout the process, and I had to be vigilant about any tensions or bias resulting from my personal investment (Yow, 2015). Traditional qualitative research requires that the researcher distance herself from her participants to work towards a kind of objectivity; however, feminist qualitative revisions propose that to treat participants with an ethic of friendship and almost any study that involves human “subjects” can use some form of friendship as a method (Tillman–Healy, 2003). In order to improve the study and guide its implications, researchers can ask about worries and anxieties, listen intently, and react empathetically. Friendship as a method works best for emotional subjects like forced migration, family separation, displacement, or geographical insecurity and instability because the more complex and emotional the subject, the more suitable it is for participants and researchers to have complex and emotional relationships and ties. Although I cannot claim that a mutual, close, and/or lasting friendship developed between myself as researcher and my participants for this study, I did approach all respondents from a stance of friendship, treating them with respect, honoring their stories, and trying to make the most of these for humane and just purposes.

The interview

Related to the establishment of trust and comfort in the interview there is a pressing ethical concern: the narrator's disclosure of potentially harmful information. Although most narrators are able to protect themselves from unwitting disclosure, some may not be. As sole researcher in this study, I was continuously aware that the safe relationship I had established with each participant being interviewed could make full disclosure more likely (Stacey, 1988). Because a narrator may seem completely at ease with the interview process, at times it can be difficult to gauge what he or she might find objectionable. To mitigate this difficulty, Yow (2015) suggests "active checking" because "the narrator knows better than the interviewer what might have an undesired impact in her or his world" (p. 60), which I found very helpful. It was a particularly necessary consideration for me to take, given the precarity and uncertainty of migration status and circumstances various participants were facing. As I will elaborate further in Chapter 5, some of the questions I asked participants during the oral history interviews included sharing some details about their migration journey or circumstances; whether they associated certain tastes or ingredients to their country of origin; and what elicited most nostalgia for them upon migrating. I also asked them whether the amount of cooking they did 'back home' (the place they emigrated from or considered home) changed in their new Canadian homeplace, and if finding ingredients from back home in their new location was simple or complicated. I shared the questions with all participants prior to the interview, to allow them time to prepare their answers in advance or disclose whether they preferred not to

answer any specific questions. Whenever any were reported I ensured to leave them out altogether.

Yow suggests that the intimacy of oral history can create dilemmas related to whether the inclusion of important evidence takes priority over the narrator's well-being. While solutions are not always unambiguous, the researcher should avoid exploiting research participants at all costs (Yow, 1995). Doing so requires an acute awareness of interpersonal relationships and their political implications, as well as the contextual ramifications of the interview relationship and process. Particularly pertinent, therefore, are differences in race, age, gender, social status, and culture. The implied asymmetrical power dynamic between researcher and subject is best mitigated by dialogue between individuals sharing and mutually exploring, different yet equal types of knowledge throughout the interview (Yow, 1995). It is especially important to avoid viewing narrators as resources that can be switched on or off in response to research questions. Sociologist Barbara A. Misztal (2003) underscores the dangers of attempting to do so, noting that narrative retelling can bring the past somatically and vividly into the present, and researchers may not be able to predict or control how these memories manifest or affect narrators. According to feminist scholar/educator Katherine Borland (1991), researchers must also be aware of the potential emotional effects of alternative readings of personal narratives on living subjects, and ensure that interpretation of data is accurate, fair, and consensual. For this main reason I encouraged and supported all participants interested in doing interviews to do so in their native language, meaning Spanish. A great deal of intention

and clarity can (and will inevitably) get lost in translation. Of course, it is even more challenging to recount one of a person's most life-changing experiences in a new and unfamiliar language.

Nonetheless, capturing the truth holistically often requires researchers to ask difficult and emotionally painful questions. Sociologist Anne Douglas (1985) suggests guaranteeing comfort for the narrator by 'circling' around uncomfortable topics. She argues that a comfortable narrator will generally engage topics directly, enabling the interviewer to pose and present related questions. If the narrator demurs, the interviewer can attempt to create an open and direct conversational space, by assuring the narrator that the interview is an opportunity to clarify her perspective on a sensitive subject. Insensitive questions risk eliciting displeasure and causing genuine emotional strain. Despite the goal of encompassing all historically significant aspects of a subject, the researcher should first discuss any delicate questions with the narrator, as I previously mentioned, and made sure to do so ahead of time. Honest conversation on topic sensitivity can reduce unintentional harm to the narrator and the researcher. It was also important to me to assure interviewees that they could end the discussion any time, and return to it later if they wished; as sometimes, harmless questions may bring up unexpectedly painful memories for the narrator (Yow, 1995).

Of utmost importance to me was that the oral history interviews be founded on trust and honesty. I was thoroughly aware that I was not only facilitating the revelation of information of historical significance, but also creating a trusting relationship with individual narrators. The quality and fullness of the collected testimony and final research project depend on the mutual confidence and honesty of the researcher and the narrator (Hoopes, 1979).

In preparation for the interviews, I was somewhat nervous of facing the possible ethical and interpretative challenge of *reticence*. Reticence describes a narrator's passive exertion of authority through redirecting the conversational narrative (Layman, 2009). In the given case, I foresaw being tasked with distinguishing between a narrator's genuine discomfort with sharing painful memories and cases of reticence, in which the narrator seizes authority to shape the narrative to frame herself more positively. As Portelli (1991) reminds us, it is a rhetorical challenge for the interviewer to respond in a way that respects the narrator's authority, while ensuring that the topic is not prematurely foreclosed. Reticence raises for interviewers the methodological question of what constitutes effective and ethical responses. Ethical standards cannot replace an individual's ethical judgment; a researcher must assess how far to push in an interview. Fortunately, I did not encounter scenarios or circumstances as these.

An equally important consideration in these reciprocal exchanges however was for me to ensure sufficient interviewer/researcher support. For example, filing a reflective blog after each session allowed me to have an outlet for processing the research experience (High, 2014).

Interpretation and follow-up

As oral historian and researcher Joanna Bornat (2010) suggests, a researcher must be alert to implicit and potential risks of interpretation and alienation of the interviewee, in the interview process/development. I was especially aware that ethical dilemmas could arise in this research phase because no consent procedure can ever completely guarantee a fully informed understanding of how data will be used, once it has been deposited in an archive (Chenier, 2014). Related concerns could also inhibit the research design and interpretation (Bornat,

2010). In order to mitigate these risks, my editing requirements had to be approached mindfully and with full awareness of censorship issues.

It was both personally and ethically important for me to attempt to create sustainable and reciprocal relationships with participants after the interview process, rather than simply exploit their stories for the benefit of a research agenda (Freund, 2013; Oral History Association, 2009). To ensure interviewees were completely at ease with their contributions, given the public presentation of their interviews in the exhibition and on the website, I provided them with transcripts of the proposed public content for their review and approval. In research-creation, documenting and reflecting on these collective storytelling activities and strategies are crucial to both the research method and the creative, collaborative result (High, 2014).

Yow (1995) suggests researchers avoid unconscious advocacy and approach recorded testimonies in a sufficiently critical manner. I tried to remain aware that my fondness or empathy for an individual, respect for an institution's work, and/or desire not to publish anything harmful to the reputation of a community or person, could bias the results of the research. Suppression of information is unethical, but it is no less problematic if my feelings as researcher unconsciously influence the research questions and handling of evidence. Yow's suggestion for avoiding "goodwill advocacy" is to cultivate a constant contemplative and self-reflexive position, particularly throughout the interview period, when it may be tempting to avoid challenging questions (as cited in Ryant, 1990, p. 60), something I found particularly helpful. I vigorously questioned what I might have overlooked or dismissed when reviewing the interviews, and made sure to take note of my reflections to potential biases in my debriefing

journal entries. It was also important for me to determine how the interviewees in the research–creation part of the project felt about their portrayals, both throughout the process and as it came to its final iteration in both the gallery exhibition and recipe zine book (Going Public Project, n.d.; Parr, 2010).

Overview

The aforementioned ethical concerns lead me to conclude that as a researcher, I had to listen with a sophisticated and rigorous form of attention, with special care for what is implied (Hesse–Biber, 2010). The *Tri–Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, & Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2022) summarizes the ethical conducts required for this type of research. It restates the indispensable need for researchers to equip themselves to experience the stories of others not only in their words, but through their emotions and silences (McGinn, 2018; Portelli, 1991). It is therefore essential to proceed with gratitude for the privilege of hearing stories so graciously shared with us (Taylor, Sollange, & Rwigema, 2015).

In an arts–based research approach with oral history methods, the underlying intention is for narrators to be positioned as social agents, who demand accountability and responsiveness from the viewer. This encourages the viewer to address the artist–storytellers as knowledge holders, rather than objects of pity. I wanted to avoid leaving narrators feeling desolate after sharing their experiences at great personal cost (Taylor et al., 2015). The oral history and research–creation collaboration attempts to address potential ethical concerns by

reaffirming that all forms of knowing are valid, and worthy of respect. Particularly relevant in this context is the practice of knowledge co-construction, intrinsic to both oral history and research-creation. Both entail methods and methodologies that problematize and confront hierarchies of knowledge (Taylor et al., 2015). As a researcher working in this paradigm, I acknowledge that my narrators were vulnerable to exploitation, colonization, and exoticization through my research. At times, disenfranchised stories or voices can lend authority to investigators who appropriate them, despite their own social distance from such experiences. It is important to be cognizant of ones' positionality and the power dynamics at play, when conducting the oral history interviews with different communities (Brownlie & Crowe, 2014). However, using friendship as a method (Tillmann-Healy, L.M. (2003) can again be beneficial when eliciting and approaching research like the one conducted in this study involving human subjects implicated in delicate situations. This may mean asking respondents to delve deeper into our lives than we have ever dared before, or it may mean investing more of ourselves as researchers in their emotional, relational, and political well-being. It will also entail treating participants with the same respect, understanding, inquiry, and development that we would show prospective or existing friends.

To conclude this chapter, I would like to reiterate Yow's (1995) request that interviewers carefully examine their feelings towards narrators and consider how they might influence the course of examination, dissemination, and artistic documentation/viewing. The research processes of both oral history and the creative collaborative exchange of research-creation demand an extraordinary level of mindfulness and consciousness (Yow, 1995). These ethical

concerns must be continually and carefully (re) evaluated and examined. The numerous strengths of oral history as a method and research–creation, through artistic practices, as a methodology, outweigh the challenges outlined here. In the upcoming chapter, I will cover these strengths, situating research specifically in the field of art education.



Artista: Esmeralda Molina, El Salvador

Ingredientes: Huevo, tortilla, frijoles, aguacate, uvas, plátano frito, mamey

Figure 33: *Desayuno Casero*. Artwork by Esmeralda Molina, El Salvador. Digital image depicting a traditional homemade breakfast and its accompanying list of ingredients¹⁶, illustrated in p. 63 of *Recetas & Raíces, Recettes & Racines, Recipes & Roots* recipe zine book, 2024

Chapter 4 | Unpacking the Journey of Preparing, Serving & Sharing Stories of Home: At Home

This research and creation project integrated art-making and oral history methods through multiple components. These included a series of art workshops where participants explored food and recipes from ‘home’ through creative expression, individual oral history interviews delving into their culinary narratives and experiences of home-making, and my own parallel research-creation work. All resulting artworks were presented in a public exhibition, culminating in the creation of a zine recipe/coloring book that collected all participants’ contributions for broad dissemination. In this chapter, I’ll lay out the basics of each of these components. This will establish a foundation for Chapter 5, which discusses how combining

¹⁶ Translation of ingredients: Egg, tortilla, beans, avocado, grapes, fried plantain, mamey fruit.

collaborative oral history with arts-based research-creation allows us to explore new multi-voiced narratives and ways of knowing within art education. Ultimately, this approach benefits not only the participants involved but also potentially society as a whole. I will begin by sketching out how this particular community collaboration came to be, once COVID-19 required that I change previous plans for my field work.

4.1 Field Work

As previously mentioned in Chapter 3, my earlier plans for my doctoral research included an altogether different community group and demographic that was situated in a very different borough of Montreal, with somewhat different methods and procedures. From the pre-established relationships at the Artists' Bloc (AB) through the Immigrant Workers' Centre (IWC) in C  tes-des-Neiges, I originally aimed to recruit five to ten participants who were newly arrived to Canada and planned to stay permanently. In terms of inclusion and exclusion criteria, I intended to choose participants based on migration circumstances, influenced by safety and/or political matters. Pending ethics clearance, I aimed to start the data collection portion of my research in early March 2020. However, on March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared the COVID-19 outbreak a global pandemic, and shutdowns worldwide followed. In May 2020, the IWC suspended all AB activities indefinitely due to both stringent COVID-19 health regulations and restrictions, and non-renewal of funding for that period. At this point, I began looking for a new community to collaborate with for my doctoral research project.

On July 23, 2020, Mme. Cecilia Escamilla, Director of the *Centre d'aide aux familles latino-am  ricaines* (CAFLA) in La Petite-Patrie, Rosemont, Quebec, replied with great interest

and enthusiasm to my proposal for collaboration. As a Latin American immigrant to Montreal, I was somewhat familiar with CAFLA and its mission. I began deepening my knowledge of the community by assisting with administrative tasks, volunteering for events (predominantly online at this point), developing poster and graphic designs, making phone calls to members for community announcements.

Mme. Escamilla suggested I volunteer and familiarize myself with the *Groupe de la Petite Enfance*, primarily composed of parents (mothers) with children aged 0 to 5. This group was of variable size, from 5 to 15 young adult women, usually accompanied by their children. Prior to the pandemic, they met bi-weekly for educational events and discussion of the importance of well-balanced meals for developing children, the value of the arts in early childhood education, and making space and time for parental self-care, with the group providing much needed connection and emotional support. The women were for the most part new arrivals in Canada, some immigrants, some refugees, some undocumented. Most spoke Spanish, while some also spoke some English or some French and at times Creole. Their situation of vulnerability was augmented by their need to care for their young children, some who had arrived from elsewhere and some who had been born in Canada. My own children at that time were part of this age group and I was fortunate enough to be welcomed with open arms into the community as a young Latina mother with a fully funded community-building arts and oral history research project to offer.

At this juncture, I found myself having to rethink the logistics concerning the research project's implementation. Originally (again, intended for the AB at the IWC), the research design

was developed with the idea that participants' tellings of their stories enhance and potentially reshape their understandings of their experiences of migration. I had anticipated that participants would further build a sense of belonging through artistic practice — creating visual stories with paints and art materials through my facilitation. From there I planned, through my own visual practice, to create artworks on site with them and potentially carry out a community mural project at the IWC headquarters, while I led various workshops that would interpret and represent the participants' experiences and visual symbols. These were meant to reflect a version of their stories back to them, both bearing witness and making them accessible to larger audiences in order to raise awareness of their realities and struggles and build empathy and solidarity. Despite my efforts to adhere closely to my original proposal, I could not ignore the new (and ever-changing) circumstances that my new site, participants, and reality required.

At the peak of the pandemic (circa October, 2020), I received from Mme. Escamilla the green light to officially introduce *Preparing, Serving and Sharing Stories* to the group of *La Petite Enfance*, where my artistic practice, research, and family had found a new home. Recognizing the vulnerability of these individuals, I ensured to strictly abide by all ethical protocols for research with human subjects for the two rounds of workshops I offered (November 11th, 2020 – November 10th, 2021 and March 10th, 2021 – March 09th, 2022). Having received ethics clearance from Concordia's Office of Research, I solicited informed consent from potential participants at this point both orally (via a consent script) and in writing (included in Appendix E), which I collected before the end of each workshop or gathering. To accommodate potential language barriers and low literacy levels within this vulnerable community, I prepared

for oral authorization, documenting consent via voice recordings to ensure participants fully understood and genuinely consented. Concordia University's (2019) Summary Protocol Form from the Office of Research's Research Ethics Unit stipulates the following:

vulnerability may be caused by limited capacity, or limited access to social goods, such as rights, opportunities and power, and includes individuals or groups whose situation or circumstances make them vulnerable in the context of the research project, or those who live with relatively high levels of risk on a daily basis. (p. 7)

Some of the specific vulnerabilities that my participants faced included trauma from border crossings, discrimination, racism, sexism, language barriers, healthcare access challenges, xenophobia, as well as the constant threat of detention and deportation, to name a few.

By October 2020, I began recruiting participants through a series of art education workshops and artist talks. These sessions, primarily held online, were part of CAFLA's Fall 2020–Winter 2021 programming. During these open workshops and talks – which attendees could join regardless of their commitment to the research – I presented the proposed research project, outlining its goals and expectations. I also shared visual examples and references of similar community-based contemporary art, showcasing both my own work and that of other local and international artists. Ultimately, individuals wishing to participate formally signed up via an online sheet and completed group surveys using Google Docs and Google Forms. This process was facilitated at each workshop and artist talk across the two distinct workshop periods. (Refer to Appendix C and D for blank examples of the Information and Consent forms.)



Figure 34: *Fall 2020 – Winter 2021 programming session poster for Recipes and Roots Workshops at CAFLA*

Once participants were recruited and onboard, I organized their involvement in oral history interviews and life narrative workshops. All activities strictly adhered to the COVID-19 protocols and safety measures mandated by both Concordia University and the Quebec government at that time. To help participants prepare, I provided them with questionnaires and interview guides in advance. Additionally, I offered resources for potential psychological or emotional triggers that might arise due to the nature of the interview questions (see Appendix E for interview guide and questions). Consistent with Portelli's (1991) approach, which focuses on meaning and memory, the oral history interviews took place during the early months of the pandemic in the winter of 2020/2021, a time when participants' feelings of isolation, loss, and disconnection were heightened.



Figure 35: *Online Art Kit Preparation.* Fifteen Mail Art Kits Ready for closing and mailing to participants homes in preparation for the first online drawing workshop. May, 2020

My original pre-pandemic proposal to the AB had envisioned inviting participants to a series of group gatherings and potlucks. At these events, they would have been encouraged to bring a dish that reminded them of home or a recipe to share (either orally or in written form). The personal significance of these recipes or meals, and why they evoked a sense of “home”, would have been discussed and recorded with participant permission, either confidentially or with the group. I also intended to share one of my own recipes or meals. However, given the evolving COVID –19 safety regulations and our new daily realities, and recognizing that all initial workshop interactions were held online via Zoom, I adapted this concept. I tried to open the CAFLA workshops with a similar ice-breaking warm-up activity. I asked participants to share their country of origin and the name of a dish that reminded them of home. To initiate the discussion and as an active community member, I volunteered to go first. Participants then shared the reasons why their chosen dish evoked memories of home, as well as how they adapted to recreating it in their new environment in Canada.

The project unfolded in distinct phases based on location:

1. The initial series of introductory drawing, painting, collage, assemblage, mixed media, and ceramic workshops were conducted on CAFLA’s Zoom platform.
2. The next two to three workshops, encompassing sessions from both the first and second rounds, took place outdoors at a park adjacent to CAFLA’s headquarters in La Petite-Patrie, Rosemont.
3. Finally, the concluding two workshops of the second round were held indoors at CAFLA’s main event room, once COVID–19 regulations permitted such gatherings. Throughout all

these workshops, participants engaged in turning diverse meals or recipes into visual representations using a variety of artistic mediums.



Figure 36: *Recetas y Raíces Outdoor Community Art Workshop.* A Gathering Taking Place at Park Drolet – Rachel. Rosemont – La Petite – Patrie, 2021–2022



Figure 37: *Recetas y Raíces Community Room Art Workshop.* A Gathering held at CAFLA headquarters community room. Rosemont – La Petite – Patrie, 2021 /2022



Figure 38: *Recetas y Raíces Outdoor Community Art Workshop.* A Gathering Taking Place at Park Drolet – Rachel. Rosemont – La Petite – Patrie, 2021–2022



Figure 39: *Recetas y Raíces Community Room Art Workshop.* A Gathering held at CAFLA headquarters community room. Rosemont – La Petite – Patrie, 2021/2022

All participants were thoroughly informed that if they expressed an interest in withdrawing from the research project, any information, artwork, and documentation

obtained from them would be excluded from analysis at their request. All physical documentation and artwork would be returned, and digital information would be destroyed, with the participant present, if requested. However, to allow for the timely progression of both the exhibition and the subsequent publication (the recipe book), withdrawal requests had to be submitted by two specified deadlines. Participants were reminded of these deadlines throughout the research process and as they approached.



Figure 40, 41 & 42: *Recetas y Raíces Community Room Art Workshop.* A Gathering held at CAFLA headquarters community room. Rosemont – La Petite – Patrie, 2021/2022

I suggested to potential participants that the benefits of being part of the research could include building community, fostering mindfulness, socializing with other immigrants (especially those from similar or older age groups), building confidence, sharing skills, learning art-making and art theory, and forming part of a positive, safe sharing space.

I transparently communicated the potential risks, including psychological and emotional discomfort, to participants both before and throughout the field work data collection.

Consequently, I continuously provided them with referrals to appropriate psychological and

emotional resources at each step of the data gathering process (see Appendix O for these resources).

During data collection, I ensured extensive documentation of the artworks, both throughout their process of execution and upon completion. All documentation of the artwork (completed and in progress) was shared with each participant. I continue to store these JPEG electronic files indefinitely in my personal archives, to which I have sole access. Individual artists, however, retain access to their own physical work, which was returned to them in December 2022. The data's journey from collection to storage and eventual archiving involved oral history recordings that are now permanently and safely archived at the Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling (COHDS), located at Concordia University.¹⁷ A copy of the recipe zine book also forms part of COHD's permanent archive collection, accompanying the audio files of all the interviews I conducted.

For the sake of safety and anonymity, a number of participants are referred to by pseudonyms, making me the only person to know all participants' real identity.

4.2 Community Art Exhibition

Following the approval of procedures by Concordia's Ethics and Compliance office and completion of the workshops, I organized a micro-exhibition showcasing all the artworks. The extensive logistics involved – including artwork documentation, collection, curation, identification, securing the venue, setting dates, ensuring accessibility, advertising, and

¹⁷ COHDS is located in the Library Building, 10th floor, Room LB-1042 at 1400 de Maisonneuve Boulevard in Montreal, on Concordia's downtown campus. COHDS's security measures stipulate and enforce the steps necessary to allow access and prevent unauthorized access of the sound files.

managing gallery sitting shifts – took approximately two to three months. The exhibition itself ran from November 1–13, 2022, at the Native Immigrant Gallery in the Notre-Dame-de-Grâce borough in Montreal. Our vernissage was held on November 4, from 5–7PM. Nearly all participating members of the research project were present, proudly accompanied by friends and family. As I will discuss further in Chapter 5 and 6, participants unanimously expressed in our debriefing sessions that this exhibition was not only their first opportunity to participate in an art show but also their very first experience visiting a walk-in art gallery.



Figure 43: *Vernissage Invitation for Recetas y Raíces, Community Art Exhibition. November 2022*

Native Immigrant, a community-based artist collective active from 2013–2023, notably prided itself on “building bridges between immigrants and First Nations peoples to inspire love for the land” (Native Immigrant, n.d.). Beyond this core mission, the collective also championed art making, art-teaching, and fostering creative appreciation for everyone. Given the strong alignment of their mission with my research values, coupled with my active membership in the collective at the time, I determined that Native Immigrant Gallery would be the ideal venue to host the culmination of the artworks created and compiled for this research project.

Some of the challenges encountered in carrying out this large endeavor included coordinating the drop-off of artworks and managing transportation logistics: all participating women relied solely on public transportation, often traveling from distant areas of Montreal Island while simultaneously working and caring for young children. Other coordination challenges involved identifying submitted works, respecting diverse privacy issues, and managing identity information concerns stemming from precarious migration circumstances and status.

Curating the presentation and representation of the artworks in the gallery space was complex and humbling. The dynamic of being an active member of the community and a peer to the participants, while simultaneously serving as the leading researcher, art educator, facilitator, and professional artist, was a demanding and complex one. Throughout the curation process, I was exceptionally aware that, as a trained professional artist, my own artwork could potentially be intimidating to participants. The last thing I wanted was to cause discomfort or self-consciousness by showcasing my work next to theirs. At the same time, it was important to all of us that, since I acted as a member of the community throughout the workshops, my artwork also be included. I believe I was able to find a comfortable balance in the setup and display of all artworks, as the exhibition images demonstrate.



Figure 44 & 45: *Recetas y Raíces*, Community Art Exhibition. November 2022

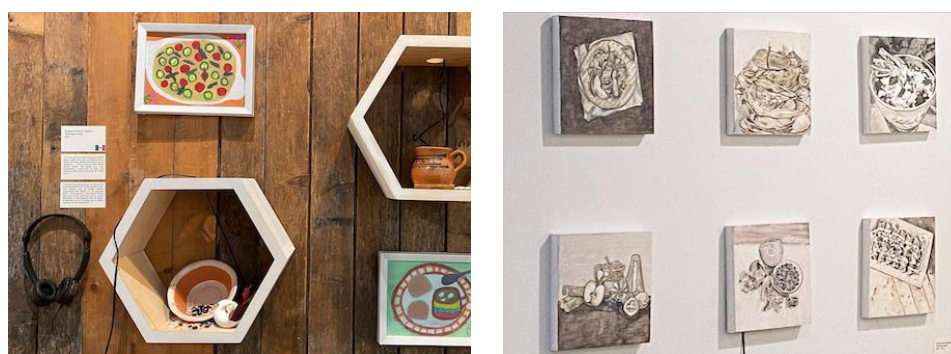


Figure 46 & 47: *View of the Recipes and Roots Community Art Exhibition*. Native Immigrant Gallery, Montreal, Quebec

The Native Immigrant Gallery's exhibition space, measuring 30 by 16 feet, showcased 52 diverse artworks in its final exhibition. These pieces were displayed throughout the gallery, utilizing walls, plinths, floor space, and even a small kitchen table walk-in-installation. Thirteen of these artworks were uniquely paired with oral history narratives. These narratives, shared by participants, delved into the recipes that inspired their art. To present these stories, a hidden MP3 player was discreetly placed behind or beneath each artwork, continuously looping the oral history recording through connected headphones. Of these twelve recordings, ten were in Spanish, one in English and one in French. To ensure accessibility for all visitors, I provided written, wall-mounted translations of key audio segments in both English and French. This

allowed non-Spanish-speaking attendees to grasp the context and essential elements of each narrative.

The vernissage was a truly special evening. A Latin American musician, newly arrived to Canada, provided lovely music throughout the event, and we served refreshments. A wonderful surprise was when several participants spontaneously brought homemade dishes to share with everyone – it really added to the community feel. I gave a brief introductory speech, taking the opportunity to thank everyone who made the project possible. This included all the participants for their invaluable contributions, as well as CAFLA, Madame Escamilla, my thesis committee, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, and the Fonds the Recherche du Québec for their crucial support. We also heard a few words about the project from Madame Escamilla and my thesis supervisor, Doctor Kathleen Vaughan. It was genuinely an unforgettable night for me, and I hope for all the participants and visitors too.



Figure 48, 49 & 50: *View of the Recipes and Roots Community Art Exhibition.* Participants, Family and Friends at the Opening Night, Native Immigrant Gallery, Montreal, Quebec

Throughout the show's run, participants were welcome to visit their artwork and share it with friends and family as often as they liked during gallery hours. The exhibition was open to the public for two weeks, from Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 AM to 6 PM. I personally gallery-sat the entire exhibition. This meant I was there to provide context to visitors, explain how to

access the audio narratives, and translate when needed. I also made sure all the audio devices were continuously charged and working properly, and handled any necessary upkeep for the show. Ultimately, the exhibition was enjoyed by approximately 300 visitors who came specifically to see the show. We also had many members of Native Immigrant's classes, artist talks, and workshops drop by, adding to the vibrant atmosphere.



Figure 51 : *Opening night Vernissage for “Recetas y Raíces” community exhibition.* November 2022, Native Immigrant Gallery, Montreal, Québec



Figure 52 : *Opening night Vernissage for “Recetas y Raíces” community exhibition.* Madame Escamilla, opening speech. November 2022, Native Immigrant Gallery, Montreal, Québec

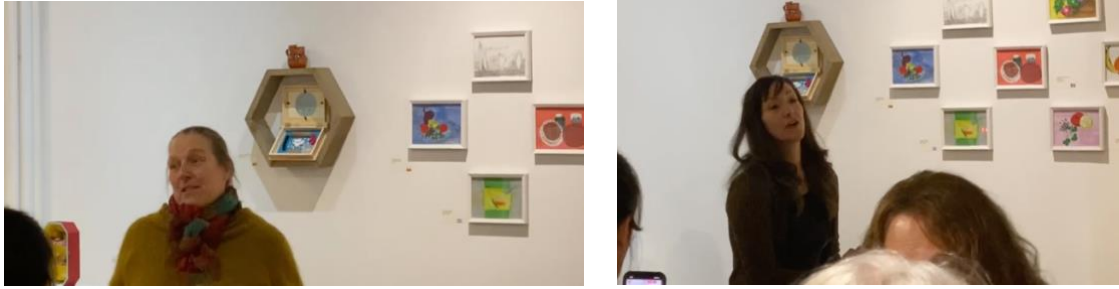


Figure 53 & 54: *Opening night Vernissage for “Recetas y Raíces” community exhibition.* Dr. Kathleen Vaughan (left) and Arianna Garcia-Fialdini (right), opening remarks. November 2022, Native Immigrant Gallery, Montreal, Québec

Once the exhibition closed, I began the meticulous process of de-installing the show, thoroughly documenting everything, and returning all artworks to the participants over the following weeks. This cleared the way for the next crucial phase: investigating the project’s impact through informal community gatherings and exchanges. With this new insight, I was able to conduct a final analysis of all primary data sources. These included the initial life history interviews, subsequent follow-up interviews, participants’ artworks themselves, and my personal research journals. My final task was to create a community recipe ‘zine book. This unique publication compiles images and recipes, also doubling as a coloring book for all ages. I intend the zine to serve as a lasting compilation of the artworks and recipes that emerged from the research, and as a cherished souvenir of the community we built together through shared food and art experiences.

4.3 Recipe Zine Book

The zine was a crucial component of the research, adding a functional and tangible dimension that the workshops and exhibition alone could not provide. Its inclusion stemmed from the desire to offer a more personal, hands-on approach to sharing and preserving culinary knowledge than traditional formats like mainstream cookbooks. This zine serves as a platform

for unique voices, often highlighting specific cuisines, personal stories, or distinctive cooking styles, thereby enabling a more intimate and experimental exploration of food. It also fosters connections with diverse food cultures and traditions, revealing the stories embedded within the recipes.

From the two rounds of workshops that I hosted, I extensively documented the resulting artworks and the workshops themselves (with participant permission and anonymity ensured), whether they were held online or in-person. This documentation allowed me to carefully compile and edit the images into the final zine: a community art recipe book that simultaneously functions as a coloring book for all ages. In total, thirty-two recipes from forty participants were included, alongside line drawings I abstracted from the documentation photos (further details on this process are provided below).

The zine served as a distinct space for my own creative engagement within the project. While the workshops and exhibition provided rich data and community interaction, the zine allowed for a different kind of synthesis and expression – one that extended beyond purely textual analysis. My creativity was deeply embedded in its creation, from the careful selection and editing of participant images to the abstraction of their artworks into line drawings that form the coloring book element. This process of visual interpretation and transformation was a deliberate artistic act, allowing me to distill the essence of the participants' contributions and culinary stories into a tangible, interactive artifact. It was through this hands-on, iterative process of design and compilation that I could truly weave together the diverse threads of life history interviews, follow-up exchanges and the visual narratives of the works, crafting a

cohesive and evocative “souvenir” that reflected both the participants’ profound generosity and my interpretative vision as a researcher–artist.



Figure 55: *Recetas & Raíces, Recettes & Racines, Recipes & Roots, Digital Zine Recipe Book*. Front and back cover. 2024

Drawing on philosopher and writer Gillian Rose’s (2023) insights, which emphasize both the image as an independent entity with its own inherent characteristics and effects and the broader social contexts that shape image production, circulation, and critical real–world impact, the participants’ artworks in this research project were far more than mere visual records; they were active meaning–making sites. Each piece – whether a painting, sculpture or mixed–media creation – embodied deeply personal narratives about culinary heritage and identity, transforming abstract life histories into tangible, interpretable forms. Rose’s framework encourages us to look critically at how these images are composed – their content, color, and spatial organization – not just as aesthetic choices, but as reflections of cultural significance and lived experience. Thus, I analyzed the artworks not only for their aesthetic qualities but as

rich primary data, visually articulating the very social practices and power relations embedded in food, memory, and migration that were central to the research. Their collective display in the exhibition and subsequent abstraction into the zine further amplified their social effect, inviting viewers to engage with these deeply personal visual statements and consider their broader cultural implications.

The process of creating the community recipe book proved to be longer and more challenging than anticipated. One significant technical challenge involved ensuring high-quality image production when transforming digital color photographs of artworks into black-and-white flat contour sketches suitable for coloring pages. I dedicated many hours to an application called *Colorscape*, which is “designed to transform any photo or image into outlines to make detailed coloring pages or Colorscapes” (Herc Ltd., 2024). Despite Colorscape’s impressive and affordable image resolution options, I occasionally found its features limited for certain documented images. In such cases, I had to rely on the archived digital documentation of the original artwork, manually retracing the image to the best of my ability. This retraced image would then be re-scanned and re-uploaded to the app. Once this step was complete, I would send the latest draft of the image to the artist for approval, a process that sometimes took weeks or even months to receive a response.

The most significant and ongoing challenge was maintaining consistent access to participants. Many of the women were living under precarious immigration circumstances, making it increasingly difficult to locate them (even with CAFLA’s continuous assistance) as the months progressed. Furthermore, their lives were exceptionally busy: many were sole

caretakers of one or more children, needing to balance work and home life while still adapting to new and shifting environments and realities. Consequently, they often lacked the time to complete the artwork they had hoped to submit for the zine. A further complication to communications arose when my family and I relocated to a different province in the summer of 2023.

As production continued, I consistently found myself confronting and reassessing the ethics and etiquette of participant communication. This involved balancing the need to obtain necessary information with respecting participants' timelines for response. I found this to be the most frustrating aspect of the process, as I had to navigate between touching base, reaching out, ceding artistic control, respecting diverse personal circumstances and preferences, and avoiding overwhelming participants who wished to have their work included in the recipe book. The information I requested included their country of origin, their preferred name for print, and approval of their oral history interview narrative (for those who provided one) which would be accessible via a QR code on their zine's page, accompanying their artwork image. This challenge also encompassed the practicalities of adequate artwork identification and co-curating the inclusion logistics for the displayed works. This was further complicated by some participants submitting diverse versions of the same recipe across various workshops and mediums, and subsequently requesting specific representations to be included or used as replacement for others.

A small launch event for the community recipe zine book was finally held at CAFLA's headquarters in the summer of 2024. This event, featuring light refreshments and music,

officially marked the conclusion of the research project: *Recetas y Raíces, Recettes & Racines, Recipes & Roots*, for “*Preparing, Serving, & Sharing stories.*”

The launch of the community recipe zine served not only as a celebratory conclusion but also as an opportunity for continued creative engagement, featuring a small and final art-making workshop. During this activity, old and new members of the *La Petite Enfance* group collaboratively recreated one of their favorite go-to dishes – meals they enjoyed both making and eating in their new homes, uniquely blending components of their roots with new Canadian ingredients. Using diverse mixed media such as Play-Doh, cardboard, found objects, paint, and glue, children and parents alike participated in this hands-on exploration of culinary adaptation and cultural synthesis. Once the artworks were finished, Madame Escamilla suggested a small parade around the common room where the workshop took place, allowing every culture of Latin America present to be represented and celebrated by showcasing the diverse meals that had been recreated in the art-making. The workshop included a concise presentation introducing new members to the project’s journey and achievements. The event culminated in a beautiful and meaningful ceremony where all attending participants were individually called forward to receive their personal copy of the recipe zine book. This poignant moment was reinforced by an expression of gratitude to CAFLA, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), and the Fonds de recherche du Québec – Société et culture (FRQSC), for their invaluable generosity and collaboration throughout the research endeavor.

The recipe zine continues to serve as a tangible legacy of the project, with spare copies permanently housed at CAFLA’s headquarters, readily available to both new and existing

community members upon request. Oral history narratives and digital versions of the zine recipe book are publicly available online at: <https://www.garfiart.com/store/c2/about.html>.

This enduring resource was recently highlighted at CAFLA's last Annual General Meeting event, commemorating their extensive community involvement projects and initiatives. Beyond its commemorative value, the zine also functions as a vital tool for future grant opportunities, effectively showcasing the rich array of activities the community has collaboratively undertaken. Since the completion of this research project, as one of its many impactful programs, CAFLA is now primarily focused on providing comprehensive support to precarious immigrant women during the perinatal period. This initiative specifically addresses their unique needs related to migration, maternal and child health, and social integration. Their ongoing efforts aim to offer information, advice, and personalized support, thereby promoting the psychological and social well-being of these women and their families within a supportive and solidary community environment.



Figure 56 & 57: *Recetas y Raíces closing ceremony event*. Small art workshop held at Espace des Possibles, Rosemont – La Petite – Patrie. August, 2024



Figure 58, 59 & 60: *Recetas y Raíces closing art workshop.* Attendee art works created at the closing ceremony event. August, 2024

Ultimately, to conclude this chapter on fieldwork, the artworks showcased in both research–creation components of *Preparing, Serving, & Sharing Stories* (the community art exhibition and the zine) interpret and represent both my own participation and experiences as an active community member. They also exemplify the participants’ experiences and visual symbols, reflecting a version of their story back to them as I had originally intended. These artworks serve to bear witness to their realities and struggles, making them accessible to larger audiences and thereby raising awareness.

In the following chapter, I will delve deeper into the personal experiences and artworks of four specific participants from the study, and address my observations regarding identity variations.



Figure 61, 62 & 63: *Recetas y Raíces closing art workshop.* Attendee art works created at the closing ceremony event. August, 2024



Figure 64, 65 & 66: *Recetas y Raíces* closing art workshop. Attendee art works created at the closing ceremony event. August, 2024

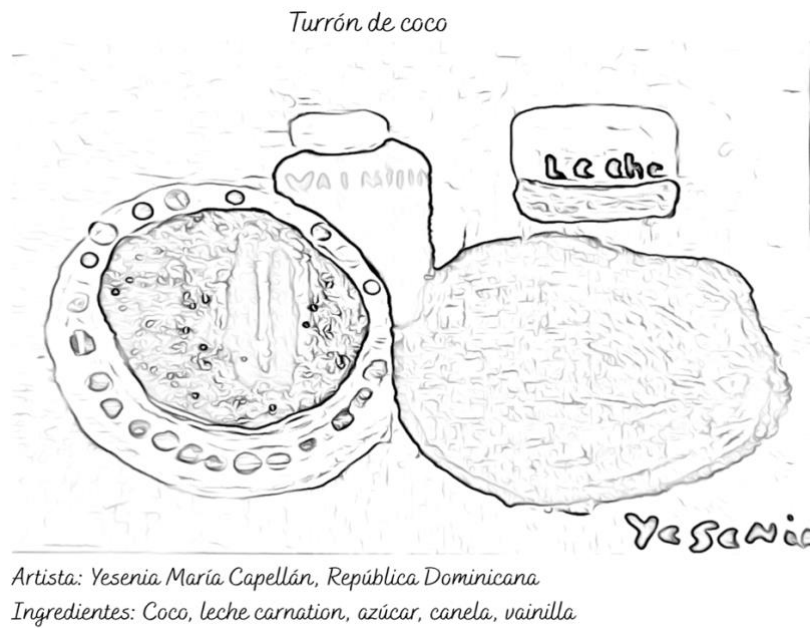


Figure 67: *Turrón de Coco*. Artwork by Yesenia María Capellán, República Dominicana. Digital image depicting the traditional Dominican dessert “Turrón de Coco”. Includes ingredients¹⁸ list in Spanish

Chapter 5 | Madres Artistas Migrantes: Migrating Mother Artists

As stated in Chapter 4, the fieldwork conducted in diverse settings throughout those challenging and uncertain times culminated in both the community art exhibition and recipe – zine book, and enveloped the praxis of my doctoral research project. Throughout the next two chapters, I will go into further depth on personal experiences, oral histories, and artworks of four specific participants as well as my observations and findings regarding the notion of identity development. Throughout these discussions, I will continually refer back to the three core questions guiding this research: How can art and storytelling promote identity transformation and social reconstruction? How do cultural elements, food, and community

¹⁸ Translation of ingredients: Coconut, condensed milk, sugar, cinnamon, vanilla.

building aid integration and foster migrant identities? And finally, how does the integration of visual practice and oral history enhance these activities' impact?

5.1 Recetas y Raíces Creadas que Crecen: *Roots and Recipes Created and Grown*

The workshops began from the comfort of our homes via Zoom. For the very first session, I sent everyone on a brief, five-minute scavenger hunt to find key ingredients in their pantries that were part of a recipe transporting them back to their old kitchen homes. The intent was to acknowledge that the resources they held in their current pantries, in their new locations, would allow them to continue building on their pre-existing cultural roots. These ingredients represented the foundational resources we all somehow carried with us, enabling our roots, past identities, and *new* identity to continue growing.

From there, drawing on materials in the art kits that I had assembled and delivered to participants (see figures 68–72, below), I introduced basic pencil sketching techniques to begin creating rough outlines of an observational drawing composition. Our project exemplifies the idea of “learning with a purpose” (Loveless, 2019), which transforms past experience by integrating new constructions (Anderson et al., 2023) within the space created for the workshops. The space¹⁹ referred to here is one where this type of learning could take place and be sustained – a space in between our lived cultural and social identity and the dominant culture that defines us. Created from the need to comprehend the myriad experiences and

¹⁹ Homi K. Bhabha (2024), an Indian scholar, critical and postcolonial theorist, proposes the concept of a “third space” as a hybrid, fractured realm. Here, cultural meaning and identity undergo continuous negotiation and transformation, born from the encounter and intermingling of distinct cultures. This space isn’t just a simple blend, but a dynamic site of ambivalence and invention where new subjectivities and cultural forms emerge beyond the confines of existing binaries.

obstacles associated with forced relocation, this space offers an alternative conception of learning. It facilitated the construction of a solidarity network, thereby expanding the definition of an educational setting (Anderson et al., 2023; Bhabha, 2024); Garcia-Fialdini, 2018, 2019). The goal was for the artworks to evolve into a more finished, two-dimensional visual representation of the ingredients that compose the magical recipes residing in our memories (Demos, 2013) and hearts. Likewise, I intended the artwork to reflect what inevitably forms a crucial part of the past, present, and likely future identities of people forced to leave their countries of origin.



Figure 68, 69, 70 & 71 : *Art Mail Kits Ready to be Sent to Participants.* Spring, 2020. Montreal, Quebec



Figure 72 & 73: *Recetas y Raíces Workshop art kits and sessions held online.* 2020/2021. Montreal, Quebec

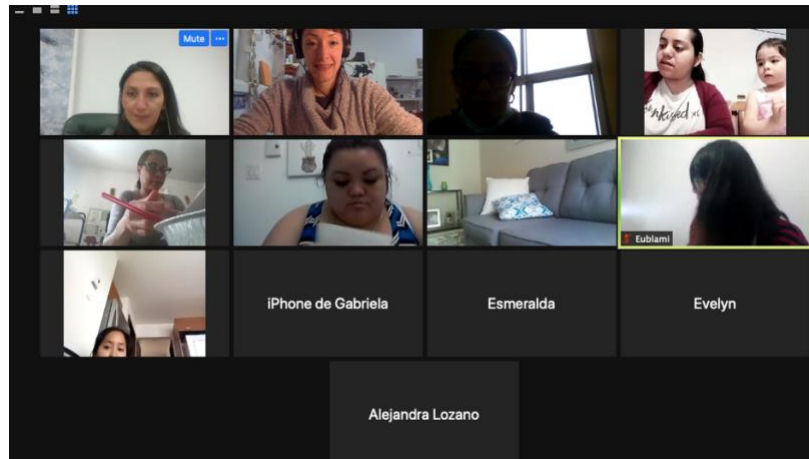


Figure 74: *Recetas y Raíces Workshop held online. 2020/2021. Montreal, Quebec*

From here, I covered an introductory demonstration and guideline on how to build up and layer an image using graphite, conte and charcoal.²⁰ As previously mentioned, these community art workshops offered a space for social interactions and interactive gatherings, initially held cybernetically. They allowed for organic exchanges on cultural similarities, resources for newcomers, and opportunities for networking and community building. Most participants who attended the workshops were newly arrived immigrants and allophones²¹. Many of them spoke neither French nor English, which significantly limited their ability to become familiar with available resources (legal, financial, child care, health related, etc.) in their new surroundings – a process further hindered by the pandemic and its limitations. Therefore, the workshops provided a safe platform where they could both create art and express

²⁰ Every participant received amongst various art materials, sticks of conte and charcoal in their individualized mail-art kits (see Figures 68–72). Graphite is a versatile medium that offers a wide tonal range from subtle grays to deep blacks, ideal for drawing and shading. Conte is a rich, crayon-like medium that provides dense, opaque color and is excellent for bold lines or broad, expressive strokes. Charcoal offers rich, deep blacks and varying textures for dramatic and gestural drawings.

²¹ According to “The Canadian Encyclopedia, “allophone” is a term that describes a person who has a first language that is not English nor French. According to the 2021 census, over 9 million Canadians had a mother tongue other than English or French (Statistics Canada, 2017) – (see Immigrant Languages in Canada; Indigenous Languages in Canada).

themselves, particularly regarding the many challenges involved in relocating and attempting to establish themselves in a new environment. Even before the workshops began, many participating women reported feeling isolated; these artistic pedagogical gatherings allowed them to hear and realize that many other newcomer experiences were similar to their own, which they reported offered a sense of security. Building on the scholarship presented in Chapter 2, which highlights the profound value of arts activities for immigrants' integration and well-being, researchers like Guruge and Khan (2015), Gómez-Estern (2013), and Massing (2016) emphasize how engagement in creative practices offers a unique avenue for expression. This is especially crucial when language barriers or traumatic experiences limit verbal communication. Such activities can serve as a non-threatening and accessible "third space" (Bhabha, 2024) where newcomers can articulate their narratives, process emotions, and make sense of their past and present experiences. Beyond individual expression, the arts foster a sense of belonging and community, creating supportive environments where immigrants can connect with others, share diverse cultural backgrounds, and reduce feelings of isolation. Furthermore, arts engagement provides a critical platform for identity negotiation and cultural maintenance within a new environment. Chin, Sakamoto, and Bleuer (2014) point to how creative endeavors allow immigrants to preserve and celebrate their heritage while simultaneously adapting to new cultural contexts. Through participation in visual arts, music, storytelling, or performance, individuals can explore the complexities of their bicultural or multicultural identities, fostering resilience and self-esteem. This active engagement in cultural production empowers newcomers, shifting them from passive recipients of services to active

contributors to the social and cultural fabric of their new communities, thereby enriching both their lives and Canadian society.



Figure 75: *Recetas y Raíces Community Room Art Workshop*. CAFLA Headquarters, Montreal, Quebec. 2021 /2022

Sociologist Jaqueline Adams (2013) further illuminates the power of artistic expression within vulnerable and marginalized communities, directly complementing this existing scholarship. While Adams focuses on art's role in social and political resistance against oppressive regimes, her findings resonate with the experiences of immigrants. Her research shows how creative acts offer people a vital way to express disagreement, regain control, and build shared identities when facing systemic challenges. In the context of newly arrived immigrants, who may carry experiences of displacement, political upheaval, or cultural marginalization, Adam's work underscores how art can be a potent tool for self-advocacy and empowerment, enabling them to construct new narratives and actively shape their integration process beyond mere adaptation. This illustrates the positive impact that creative gatherings can have on vulnerable populations' conscientization and development of a sense of social justice and democratic rights (Adams, 2013).

After covering some more formalist forms of instruction, I moved on to developing more conceptual opportunities to facilitate the creation of their desired dish or recipe. For instance,

in the first drawing workshop, I began by introducing Emeka Ogboh's *Good Soup na Money Kill Am* / digital photograph and audio work from 2017. This piece was, unsurprisingly, unfamiliar to everyone in the group that day. I chose it as an example of a contemporary international artist who similarly explores notions of migration, food, and identity within a creative framework. After a few minutes of familiarizing the group with the artist, his cultural context, and various more recent examples of his work, we took some time to discuss what different participants had observed in the artwork and its overall theme. These discussions took place in breakout rooms, after which we reconvened as one large group. From there, we spent a few minutes arranging our still-life compositions using the basic ingredients found in our pantries at the beginning of the workshop, and then proceeded to build our first still life. At this point, I once again offered guidance in basic drawing technique.

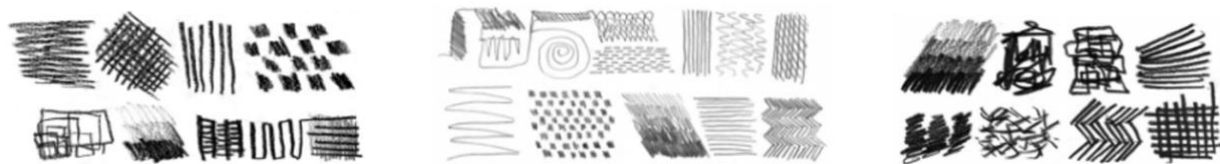


Figure 76: *Pencil and Line Experimentation Shared with Participants.* Techniques Covered and Tried during the Workshops. Conte and Charcoal on Newsprint Paper



Figure 77, 78 & 79: *Gesture Drawings, Sketching, Negative and Positive Space Compositions.* Techniques Shared with Participants during Workshops. Conte and Charcoal on Newsprint Paper

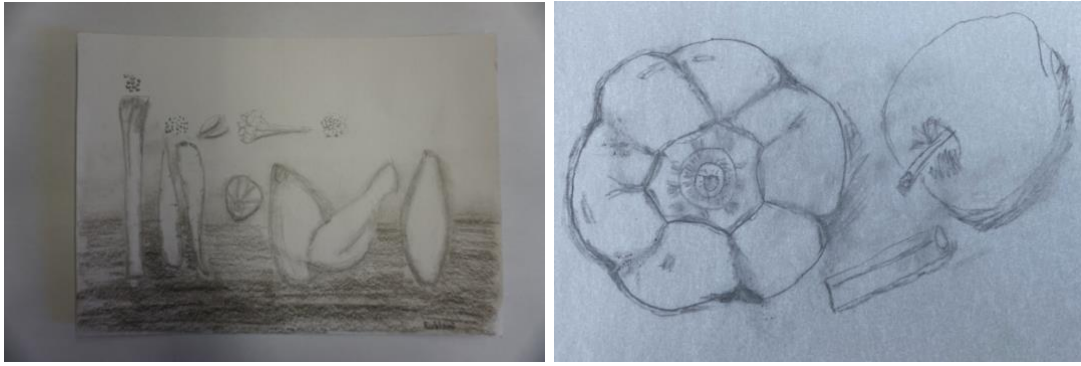


Figure 80 & 81: *Still Life Drawings*. Artwork by Eublami Santana Gaytan and Wadeline Michel. 8" x 11". Pencil and charcoal on paper. May, 2020

During the second workshop, I introduced Favianna Rodriguez's artistic practice, delving into her background, theoretical frameworks, and some of her collage, fabric, and print work on the theme of food, such as *Ancestral Food Legacies II*, (2021). Building on this foundation, we began developing an image-transfer technique using the artwork completed in the first workshop. Participants attending for the first time created an image on the spot, which they then transferred onto their canvas. Once their image was transferred, everyone had the opportunity to further develop it with acrylic paint, guided by the techniques I introduced that day.



Figure 82, 83 & 84: *Recetas y Raíces Outdoor Community Art Workshop*. Participants working with drawing and acrylic paint. 2021/2022

For the third workshop, I began by introducing the possibilities that collage held for creating a three-dimensional rendition of their desired plates or dishes. I presented Rirkrit Tiravanija's (1990) artistic background, artwork, and food/conviviality-related themes, using stills from his *untitled 1990 (pad-see-ew)* (1990/2002) performance work. His approach of combining disparate elements within a shared experience offered a conceptual parallel for how collage could similarly build new, layered realities for their three-dimensional dish renditions. While traditionally associated with the two-dimensional art of cutting and pasting materials onto a flat surface, the concept of collage extends fluidly into three-dimensional practice in this context. Here, "collage" refers to the act of assembling, juxtaposing, and integrating diverse, pre-existing physical materials – ranging from found objects and fabrics to various craft supplies – to construct a cohesive, multi-dimensional form. This method encourages participants to think sculpturally about how different elements, each with its own texture, color, and history, can be combined and layered to build a new, unified representation of their chosen dishes, transcending flat imagery to create tangible, experiential artworks. From there, I offered one or two demonstrations, again referencing the first two workshops and the artworks or imagery many of the participants had already developed. Some participants continued working on these pieces for weeks at home, bringing them into subsequent workshops to further develop them. All of these approaches were covered and revisited across both sets of five workshops.



Figure 85, 86, 87 & 88: *Recetas y Raíces Outdoor Community Art Workshop*. Participants working with collage and mixed-media. 2021/2022

The fourth workshop introduced the art of assemblage, a three-dimensional artistic medium created by combining and juxtaposing various found objects or disparate materials into a unified whole. I offered Swoon's artistic endeavors and artwork as examples, emphasizing their technical and aesthetic aspects rather than their thematic relevance. By this point, participants were deeply engaged with the theme, with many bringing in ideas for other nostalgic dishes they wanted to recreate in different mediums. For instance, this specific workshop on assemblage encouraged the women to attempt recreating an artwork related to the same recipe or a new one from the perspective of the ingredients stored in their pantries – either from when they were back home (prior to migration), or from their new homes abroad (in Canada), or as a mixture of both, reflecting their identity development. Assemblage allowed their recipes to be represented by physically combining diverse materials to embody their ingredients, textures, and the multi-layered experience of their creation or consumption. This last prompt was a way for me to guide the conversation toward gaining more insight into their evolving identities pre- and post- migration (Akhtar, 1999). Many participants brought

personal memoirs, letters, objects, and photographs to include in their assemblage works, fully personalizing the artistic rendition of their recipe. In this context, assemblage transcends its material definition to become a profound metaphor for the immigrant experience itself. It can be conceptualized as the tangible act of gathering and re-contextualizing the fragmented pieces of identity, memory, and cultural experience that these newcomer women were navigating. Like assembling disparate objects to form a new whole, participants could physically (re)construct their evolving sense of self, weaving together threads of their past homeland with elements of their present Canadian life. This process fostered community building by allowing newcomer women to literally and metaphorically share and combine their individual histories and cultural fragments, collectively assembling new narratives and shared understandings within a supportive creative space.



Figure 89, 90 & 91 : *Recetas y Raíces Outdoor Community Art Workshop*. Participants working with mixed-media on their Assemblage artworks. 2021 / 2022

In the fifth and final workshop, we concentrated on making the “vessels” that hold our chosen dishes and favorite recipes, whether for serving, cooking, or presentation. In most Latin American cultures, plates and cooking/serving vessels are more than mere practical tools; they represent a rich tapestry of cultural heritage, tradition, and social cohesion. They embody the history of diverse Indigenous, African, and European influences that have shaped the region’s

culinary practices and social rituals. Clay, as a material, is similarly vital in Latin American cooking and food traditions, serving as a primary material for various tools and cookware. Its use in cooking vessels like clay pots and *comales*²² is deeply rooted in history and continues to be valued for its unique ability to enhance flavor and cook food evenly. For this workshop I began by giving an introductory glimpse at some basic ceramic (self-hardening clay) hand-building techniques. I then shared Rafael Guimarães's (2020) art-ivistic vision and some stills from his *Moqueca Ciborgue* (2016) performance practice. I linked these examples to how contemporary artists of Latin American backgrounds globally engage with themes of memory, food, identity, conviviality, and exchange.



Figure 92, 93 & 94: *Recetas y Raíces Outdoor Community Art Workshop*. Participants hand-building with clay and mixed-media. 2021/2022

This blend of formalist, art historical, and conceptual community pedagogical art approaches yielded a significant outcome: each participant shared a very unique yet deeply relatable story. This shared resemblance offered participants a sense of certainty that they were

²² A flat, ground griddle traditionally used in Mexican and Central American cooking for cooking tortillas and other flatbreads. It is also used for toasting spices, nuts, and for searing meat and vegetables. They can be made from clay, cast iron, carbon steel, or other materials.

on the right path, despite the difficulties and challenges of their migration journeys, which they openly shared during the workshops. It provided them with an invaluable opportunity to connect with others in similar situations and from comparable backgrounds, fostering social networks, and support systems. Furthermore, they gained new creative skills and forms of expression, at no monetary cost. These tangible benefits strongly align with the scholarship on arts-based interventions for immigrant populations highlighted in Chapter 2. Specifically, the collective sense of validation and shared experience echoes findings by Guruge and Khan (2015) and Gómez-Estern (2013) regarding psychosocial support and community building through creative engagement. Moreover, the development of new skills and expressive capacities resonates with Chin et al.'s (2014) emphasis on how creative endeavors foster identity negotiation and empowerment, while the emergence of mutual support reflects Adams's (2013) observations on art's role in forging collective agency amidst challenging circumstances.

The intentional design and execution of these community art workshops directly embody the interconnected theoretical frameworks of Paulo Freire, Dipti Desai, and Maxine Greene. By inviting participants to recreate dishes from “home” using diverse mediums, the workshops became a site of Freirean conscientization, encouraging critical reflection on lived experiences of migration and identity formation rather than simply transmitting knowledge. The emphasis on learning with a purpose and the creation of “third spaces” through art-making aligns with Desai's call for social justice-oriented art education, where creative acts foster

dialogue and challenge dominant narratives by valuing participants' unique cultural contributions.

However, while the workshops provided some initial opportunities for participants to collectively reflect on identity issues, they didn't have enough working time. Additionally, perhaps due to being mostly young women and mothers, they might have lacked the emotional capacity to critically engage with social justice concerns. With their sometimes precarious position in Canada, these participants might have been hesitant to appear overly critical or to acknowledge perceived 'faults' in society here, such as racism, sexism, classism, or other discriminations they may have encountered. This position differs significantly from that of the Chilean women, for instance, working on *arpilleras*²³, whom Jaqueline Adams (2013) writes about as having developed a profound sense of democracy and social justice in their own countries through their collective handwork.

Ultimately, these workshops resonated with Greene's vision of "wide-awakeness" and "social imagination," offering a space where individuals could actively articulate their evolving identities, find common ground in shared struggles, and collectively envision new possibilities. This demonstrates art's profound capacity for personal and social transformation within a supportive community, an approach that directly resonates with Ryan Shin's (2023a) emphasis on art as a tool for coalition-building and empowering marginalized voices.

²³ A vibrant, three-dimensional textile collage, typically made from scraps of fabric, depicting scenes of daily life, protests, or storytelling, often created by women in politically repressive environments to denounce human rights abuses and preserve collective memory (Adams, 2013).

5.2 Heroínas Desapercibidas: *Unnoticed Heroines*

Here, I will briefly introduce four key participants and the artworks they and their children created in the workshops. I would like to remind the reader that *Preparing, Serving and Sharing Stories* included over eighty newcomer participants of Latin American origin. These individuals, often with differing or pending migratory statuses, intended to relocate indefinitely to Canada. All identified as part of a vulnerable population within a lower social-income bracket.

Out of the eighty people who participated in the workshops for *Recetas y Raíces*, thirteen women agreed to one-on-one oral history interviews. From these, I have selected four to profile: *Mayerlyn, Alejandra, Esmeralda* and *Yesenia*. Their experiences, oral histories (discussed in detail in the next chapter), notes, and artwork weave directly into the core of my inquiry. These four specific newcomer women and mother artists, with distinct migration stories and circumstances, originated from four different Latin American countries. The life-story oral history interview guide, shared with these women and all interested participants prior to the interviews, can be found in Appendix E. In general terms, the interviews involved me asking questions about their specific migration journeys into Canada, focusing on what they felt comfortable sharing. Recognizing that many were and are in socially vulnerable situations, I refer to some of them here by pseudonyms.

As previously mentioned, I asked participants to think of a recipe that reminded them of home – evoking the smells, sounds, tastes, warmth, freshness, satisfaction, comfort, safety, and familiarity that the notion of “home” (wherever that may be) brought for them. I purposely

intended this as a method to consciously elicit conversations related to their past identity (“who and what was I *before*”) and their present transformation (“who and what am I *now*”). All participants created visual embodiments of these recipes for the art installation, using materials such as charcoal, conte, lead, paint, mixed-media, fabric, glue, wood, found objects, brushes and clay. Sometimes, their accompanying children helped or created their own versions of favorite dishes. In our oral history interviews (described in Chapter 6), we collectively explored the themes embedded in these artworks, as I will present in the upcoming pages.

Esmeralda

Esmeralda, originally from El Salvador, migrated to Canada with her mother in 1983 due to the outbreak of war. She arrived in Montreal at a very young age and has resided there ever since. *Esmeralda* recounts how her mother was unable to teach her to cook or prepare meals, as she was diagnosed with schizophrenia immediately upon their arrival. From that point forward, *Esmeralda* found herself having to care for her mother. Due to these unfortunate life circumstances, *Esmeralda* and her immediate family were able to seek refugee asylum during the war and safely and permanently relocate to Canada. She explained that her knowledge of cooking from her native homeland came from visiting her aunts and family in El Salvador as she grew older.

Esmeralda completed a total of five artworks, with four showcased in the art exhibition and included in the community recipe zine-book (*Recetas y Raíces*, pp. 21, 42, 54, 63). She participated in almost all ten workshops I offered.



Figure 95: *Desayuno y su Chocolate Caliente*. Mixed-media Artwork by Mikhael Flores Molina, El Salvador/Canada. Artwork depicting Esmeralda's 5-year-old son's creation of his daily breakfast. 10" x10". 2021

One of *Esmeralda's* artworks and chosen recipes is titled *Flautas*²⁴, which she created in the assemblage workshop. She was accompanied by her five-year-old son, who chose to participate by making his favorite daily breakfast. He carefully drew his daily tortilla, scrambled egg, fried plantains, refried beans, a slice of avocado, grapes (his favorite fruit), a piece of cheese, warm milk, kiwi, carrot, and a glass of water directly onto a disposable plate (*Recetas y Raíces*, pp. 43–45). The vibrant, concentrated color and three-dimensional texture of the grapes, strategically placed among the meal's more muted tones, create a focal point, drawing the viewer's eye and visually emphasizing the child's individual preference and a touch of sweetness within his representation of daily sustenance.

For the *Flautas* assemblage, her son colored the Styrofoam "meat" that went into the *flautas*. With *Esmeralda's* help, he also chopped and crumbled green tissue paper to represent the cheese and lettuce topping. They both enjoyed this process. *Esmeralda* then asked her

²⁴ A Central American and Mexican food made by rolling a filling, typically shredded chicken or beef, inside a small flour or corn tortilla. The fried tortilla is then deep-fried until it is crispy and golden brown.

then-fifteen-year-old daughter to help glue it all together for the final presentation. She also asked her daughter to draw an outlining image to clearly demonstrate the dish's ingredients, inspired by a board game they often played at home featuring a chef and many ingredients. *Esmeralda* shared feeling very grateful for the creative collaboration with her son and older daughter, suggesting that the art workshops and projects helped her daughter experience well-being in her mind, body, and soul. Just as she found with cooking, *Esmeralda* realized that art stimulates her children, and she actively tried to encourage more family art activities at home.



Figure 96 & 97: *Flautas*. Mixed-Media Artwork by Esmeralda Molina, depicting the traditional Salvadoran Dish “Flautas”. 11” x 7”. June, 2022

Esmeralda's Flautas can be analyzed as a complex visual text, inviting interpretation through its layered presentation. It can also be understood as a site of cultural knowledge production, aligning with Gillian Rose's (2016) emphasis on images as socially and historically embedded practices. The open wooden box, adorned with tropical palm trees on its exterior, acts as a frame, drawing the viewer's eye into the 'narrative' held within. The lid presents a hand-drawn illustration of a smiling chef figure surrounded by various food ingredients – pepper, ham, tomatoes, onions, cheese, a grater, and a frying pan – suggesting themes of culinary creation and perhaps a playful, instructional tone. The strong use of outline and clear,

defined shapes in the chef illustration, drawn by her daughter, is a notable visual feature; it emphasizes distinct components and creates a sense of clarity and organization, much like a recipe. Below, nestled within the box, lies a meticulously crafted, fabric-based “flauta”, complete with textured green “lettuce”, white “cheese,” and red “tomatoes” and “beans,” all resting on a vibrantly patterned fabric base. The contrast between the two-dimensional, instructive chef and ingredients on the lid and the three-dimensional, tactile *flauta* inside creates a dynamic interplay. This invites viewers to consider the journey from concept to creation – from the visual representation of ingredients to the physical embodiment of a finished dish – and perhaps to reflect on the process of assembly and consumption itself.

Yesenia

Yesenia, originally from the Dominican Republic, moved to Montreal with her husband in February 2011 on a travel visa, intending to relocate indefinitely. She birthed her children in Montreal and has no plans of moving back to the Dominican Republic. She shares that she hasn’t travelled back to her homeland in some time, stating in her own words, “a veces uno dice que quiere ir pero las cosas se van mejorando y primeramente Dios, Él sabrá cuando regreso. Yo siento que con que uno tenga salud y las cosas se puedan solucionar, es lo importante.” I’ve translated this as, “[...] sometimes we might say we want to go back but things start to look up and get better and God will know when it’s time for me to return. I feel that as long as we have health and things can resolve themselves, that is all that matters” (personal communication, September, 16, 2021).

Yesenia has always loved cooking. The dish she chose to transform into an artistic visual representation using diverse mediums throughout the *Recetas y Raíces* workshops is called *Turrón de coco* (Recetas y Raices, pp. 50–42). She created four total renditions of this recipe: three were displayed in the gallery exhibition accompanied by her oral history interview, and two appear in the community recipe–zine book. Her first rendition was a black and white graphite drawing (not included), followed by an acrylic painting (*Recetas y Raíces*, p. 50), a three–dimensional assemblage piece (*Recetas y Raíces*, p. 51, image below), and finally, the ceramic vessel she would serve it on (displayed at the gallery exhibition but not in the recipe–zine book). This dish is composed of fresh coconut, condensed milk, brown sugar, cinnamon and vanilla.

Yesenia's Turrón de coco assemblage presents a fascinating site of visual contestation between the real and the represented, inviting a contemplative gaze on memory and displacement. The roughly crafted cardboard basket, lined with a soft, hand–cut white fabric, cradles four small, clear glass jars, each containing a distinct element signifying an ingredient: raw cinnamon sticks amidst shimmering gold glitter; wispy white shredded Styrofoam simulating coconut; granulated white sugar catching the light; and neatly folded white paper simulating condensed milk. This juxtaposition of authentic materials (cinnamon, sugar) with their symbolic stand–ins (Styrofoam, paper for coconut and milk) creates a palpable tension, hinting at both the sensory memory of the dish and the abstracted reality of its present reconstruction in a new land. Notably, the deliberate use of texture, from the coarse cardboard and the delicate fabric lining to the varying surfaces within the jars, alongside the unifying

rhythm of the four similar containers, orchestrates a visual dialogue about absence and presence, the tangible and the imagined, evoking the fragmented yet persistent nature of cultural memory in migration. The addition of a delicate yarn ribbon and artificial flowers introduces a layer of personal adornment, perhaps alluding to the care and nostalgia in this culinary recollection.

Yesenia chose this dessert dish because it is the one that brings her most nostalgia and that she associates most strongly with a loved one – her grandmother – who, in *Yesenia's* words, “*has since 'joined God the Father in heaven' (ya está con papá Dios).*” This specific dessert recipe evokes a memory from when she was a young girl, learning how to prepare it with her grandmother in the Dominican Republic. She recalls how every Sunday, all the children and grandchildren would gather at her grandmother's house, where there were always two or three sweet desserts ready on the table. It was either *batata con coco* (sweet potato with coconut) and/or *turrón de coco*. However, *turrón* would always be served. She states that because she knows how to prepare it and believes her grandma is now safe with *Papá Dios*, she doesn't necessarily feel sad, but rather remembers her beautifully. It makes her feel warm and safe inside. Yet, what she does remember often with a sad nostalgia are the people back home she can no longer see.



Figure 98 & 99: *Turrón de Coco*. Mixed-Media Artwork by Yesenia María Capellán, depicting the traditional Dominican Dessert “Turrón de Coco”. 11” x 7”. June, 2022

Maye

Mayerlyn Arteaga, 39 years old at the time of the interview, was born and raised in San Juan de Pasto, the capital of Nariño department, Colombia. Maye arrived in Montreal in 2018 on her own. Shortly after her arrival she met her husband and was encouraged by a family friend to reach out to CAFLA for assistance with cultural integration into her new life in Montreal. She soon found employment in family development, focusing on mental health and well-being. Early in the pandemic, while working as a front-line worker for CAFLA, Maye discovered almost simultaneously that she was pregnant with her first child and had contracted COVID-19, just as the first round of community-based research-creation workshops began. Maye ultimately attended four out of ten workshops across both programming rounds (consisting of two sets of five workshops total). She completed three different visual renditions, works, and creative interpretations of one recipe from her home country, Colombia: *Empanadas de Añejo Colombianas*, described below. The first one was rendered in graphite (*Recetas y Raíces*, p. 5), the second as an acrylic painting (not featured in the gallery exhibition nor the recipe-zine

book), and the third is a large three-dimensional assemblage work (*Recetas y Raíces*, p. 8, displayed below).

This recipe consists of corn flour, water, salt, cooking oil, saffron, ground meat of preference (pork, beef or chicken), seasoned with pepper, onion, coriander, red pepper, tomatoes, and garlic. The cooking preparations involve first preparing the dough that envelops the seasoned meat, which is then deep-fried prior to serving. It is a long and tedious process that usually requires more than one person to prepare, as I will discuss further in the upcoming chapter. In her acrylic painting of the dish, Maye depicted visually the final dish, whereas in her other two works, she concentrated on representing the many ingredients that go into making it.

Maye's mixed-media assemblage presents a meticulously crafted miniature kitchen pantry, its open, slightly askew door immediately suggesting a personal and inviting space. The interior walls, lined with textured paper mimicking aged wooden planks, create a sense of rustic authenticity, subtly hinting at memories of home. Within this intimate space, a carefully arranged collection of small glass jars on the top shelf holds representations of spices and grains, their varied textures and the implied orderliness evoking the essential building blocks of culinary tradition and the *empanadas* recipe. Below, tiny glass bottles filled with liquid stand alongside miniature sacks labeled with food times, while a small woven basket overflowing with vibrant yellow and orange paper "*empanadas*" serves as a central focal point. Notably, the scale of the entire piece, rendering a familiar domestic scene in miniature, fosters a sense of intimacy and invites close inspection, prompting reflection on the significance held within these small representations of essential ingredients. Furthermore, the deliberate juxtaposition of

meticulously labeled containers with the brightly colored, handcrafted empanadas suggests a journey from raw components to finished, culturally significant food, subtly narrating the process of making and remembering home through its foundational elements.



Figure 100: *En Mi Alacena: Empanadas*. Mixed-Media Artwork by Mayerlyn Arteaga, depicting the ingredients used as seen from her home pantry to make the traditional “Empanadas” Colombian dish. 28” x 15”. October, 2022

Alejandra

Alejandra, who goes by *A/e*, was in her mid-thirties when she migrated to Montreal from Mexico with her husband and four-year-old daughter, while expecting her second child. The details and reasons for their migration journey were not shared, but *A/e* mentioned that it all happened very quickly, within a matter of months. They arrived in Montreal without having any existing networks of support. Although she had visited Montreal for a few weeks as a single young woman many years prior, she had never considered the possibility of moving there permanently. She knew only one woman in the city, with whom she had traveled years ago.

A/e attended two workshops from the first round: the online drawing workshop, where she began sketching the ingredients of her chosen recipe, and the assemblage workshop, which

utilized clay to build vessels for cooking or presenting dishes. In the latter, *A/e* and her children collectively completed three small vessels.

The recipe *A/e* chose was the traditional Mexican stew called *Pozole*, made with hominy corn, meat (chicken or pork), and a rich broth. This dish is known for being hearty and flavorful and is usually accompanied by various garnishes like oregano, onions, avocado, radishes, and limes. *Pozole* is typically served in deep, large ceramic or porcelain bowls to accommodate the generous portions of broth, meat, and corn. Other smaller bowls are filled with the aforementioned garnishes.

A/e and her children completed one larger *Pozole* bowl and three smaller vessels for garnishes. Unfortunately, during the air-drying process, and due to the unsteadiness of public transportation, two of the three smaller vessels were damaged and did not appear in either the exhibition or the recipe-zine book. However, the larger bowl, intended to hold the *Pozole* recipe, and one small garnish vessel appeared in both (*Recetas y Raíces*, p. 46), alongside other artists' clay vessels completed during this workshop.



Figure 101 & 102: *Plato Pozolero y sus Platitos*. Self-Hardening Clay Vessels by Alejandra Lino-Barajas, Depicting a Serving Vessel Intended for the Traditional Mexican Stew “Pozole” and its Side Dish

Ale's small clay vessel intended for *Pozole* garnishes, immediately draws the eye with its striking use of color contrast. The raw, unglazed, and somewhat uneven off-white interior and base provide a tactile, earthly foundation, while the vibrant, almost playful red rim creates a bold, circular boundary. This distinct red, applied with a visible, hand-worked texture suggesting finger marks or simple tools, emphasizes the vessel's handmade quality and imbues it with a sense of warmth and a connection to traditional, rustic craftsmanship. The slightly irregular, organic form of the bowl, with its undulating rim, further reinforces its artisanal nature, conveying a sense of personal touch and the unique character of a dish prepared with care. The larger *Pozole* vessel, immediately conveys a powerful narrative through its central motif. The hand-formed, off-white clay bowl, with its slightly uneven, organic edges, possesses a rustic, grounded quality, suggesting a connection to traditional craftsmanship and the earth itself. Dominating the interior is a boldly rendered, deep red maple leaf, centrally placed and deeply impressed into the clay, indicating a deliberate and symbolic act of mark-making. This prominent national emblem, contrasting sharply in color and form against the neutral white background, acts as the primary focal point, immediately signaling themes of identity, belonging, and the experience of immigration to Canada. The tactile impression of the leaf, alongside the bowl's simple, functional form, visually articulates a new home's embrace of a culturally significant dish, embodying the integration of personal heritage with a new national identity.

It can be difficult to find models for this kind of work. Fortunately, Gillian Rose's (2016) approach to visual interpretation offered me a productive, if not widely adapted, methodology

for analyzing how images and objects, like *A/e's* vessels, can be deeply embedded in social and historical practices.

Through the upcoming chapter, I will connect the four detailed oral histories shared by *Maye, Ale, Yesenia* and *Esmeralda*. This analysis aims to link their narratives back to the conversation around evolving values of meaning and food sharing, as implicated in the transformation of migratory identities.



Figure 103: *Pescado al Horno*. Digital Image by Valeria Campos, depicting a traditional dish “Pescado al Horno” from Belize, complete with its various components and an accompanying list of ingredients²⁵, illustrated in p. 79 of *Recetas & Raíces, Recettes & Racines, Recipes & Roots* recipe zine book, 2024

Chapter 6 | *Connecting Oral Histories*

In the previous chapter, I introduced four participant mother artists, their artworks, and the chosen recipes they completed in the community art workshops I offered. In this chapter, I will delve in detail into their individual oral histories. For the sake of brevity, this chapter summarizes their spoken remarks. These latter can be found fully articulated in Appendix N.

As explained before, oral history is a method for creating and conserving unique, historically significant information from individual memories. This approach to interviewing preserves the voices, recollections, and viewpoints of historical figures. I conducted thirteen interviews in total; nine were conducted in-person at the interviewees’ kitchen tables, and the remaining four were conducted online. Each interview lasted approximately one hour and thirty

²⁵ Translation of ingredients: Lemon juice, garlic, onion, peppers and spices.

minutes, though a few participants were willing or inclined to share more or less. Each interview invited the participant to introduce themselves, tell a brief story of their migration, and reflect on the importance that oral history held for them in the art-making and display of their work.

The interview recordings I selected to analyze for this chapter provide four examples of individual stories and memories, each constructed through the unique narrative shared by each woman. I made these particular choices to provide a nuanced understanding of identity transformation and integration by deliberately selecting four women from distinct Latin American regions and with varied migration stories. This allowed for the exploration of how diverse cultural backgrounds influence the role of art, food, memory, and community in shaping migrant identities, while also providing varied perspectives on how the cross-disciplinary integration of visual practice and oral history enhanced participant impact across different lived experiences.

6.1. Culinary Narratives: Food's Evolving Role in Migrant Identity

I asked participants to transport themselves back to the kitchens of their childhood or young-adult lives, before life circumstances brought them to their new surroundings in Canada. The profound value that food held in all of their identities, spanning both past and present, was a consistent theme across all four interviews. They each reported that the role of food had changed for them in some way. Now, through food, they all shared a common objective tied to their identity and that of their young families: a deep yearning for their children to cultivate their cultural roots. This desire persisted despite their awareness that their children would inevitably have very different relationships with favorite dishes – in their knowledge of them,

their ways of experiencing them, and even the memories they would associate to those same dishes. All four women expressed a willingness to accept these changes, so long as those cultural roots are well planted, grounded, and present in their young families being raised in a new country.

I found particularly significant that the dishes all four women chose to artistically recreate were rooted in their past, specifically in their countries of birth. Originally, none of the participants associated their chosen dish with their personal identity; instead, they linked them to important festivities, celebrations, or expressions of love from their childhood. These dishes, therefore, initially held no intrinsic connection to their individual identities. However, this changed dramatically when they were forced to leave their countries of origin and immediately became 'immigrants' or 'newcomers.' Once they embraced this new status, two key aspects emerged that fundamentally altered their identities. First, there was the undeniable reality of not being originally from the country they now resided in. Second, and crucially, to counteract the negative burden of relocation, the dishes they once associated solely with family, sharing, joy, and love transformed into a kind of shield. These dishes served to protect their past identities, memories, and associations, thereby helping them build new ones in their adopted home.

As an example, *Maye* recounts how, during the studio exploration, she was immediately drawn to the prompt of considering what food she craves when she misses home. For her, this craving is linked to moments shared during important festive dates such as Mothers' Day, Christmas, and Easter. Aside from these special occasions, she is happy to try as many new

meals and food as possible, something she acknowledges was not as easy in her home country before coming to Canada. This is how she found herself deciding to recreate her “*empanadas*” (a popular Latin American resembling a baked or fried turnover made with various fillings), a special dish she deeply craves and misses. She reports having prepared them four times since her arrival, calling her mother in Pasto each time for instructions, moral support, and suggestions for adequate substitutions for specific ingredients that *Maye* finds impossible to locate in Montreal.

Maye describes herself as most nostalgic about the people, community, solidarity, and exchanges among them, which she strongly relates to food making and sharing. In Colombia, unlike in Canada, she found it easy to visit family or eat out healthily, affordably, and accessibly. Here, she found herself cooking significantly more upon her arrival and after starting her own family. The *empanadas* trace back to her childhood, all the way to when she was first introduced to solids as a baby. She claims that what she loves most about this particular dish is the aspect of collaboration and community building always involved in its preparation and execution, as well as the symbolism it holds for celebrations.

Other notes from *Maye’s* interview highlight her origins in a very rural Colombian town, where food was consistently fresh and recently harvested. The food items she has found in Montreal that are from ‘back home’ taste old to her, often coming in frozen packs that lack the freshness or healthiness she associates with them. Once she began integrating more into the community upon her arrival, she discovered more products from Colombia were available, as were some Colombian restaurants. However, she noted the food tasted very different, the costs

were much higher, and it lacked the authentic “*sazón criollo*” (creole seasoning). She gradually adjusted to the idea that she couldn’t have everything as it was. Recognizing a significant cultural and gastronomic difference, she has actively tried to integrate more by embracing typically Canadian/Quebecois cultures through her taste buds, with their unique flavors and ingredients.

Her biggest migratory nostalgia is linked to the realization that she must now navigate many new challenges alone, figuring things out by herself without knowing who to ask for no-strings-attached help. This feeling is compounded by missing all the important festivities from her homeland, celebrated on specific dates with their special associated foods. She remarked that those occasions bring out the best in people, who strive to prepare and share food and meals with others. She feels her new life in Montreal has been very difficult, as she has had to learn how to share in new ways. Nevertheless, she finds she is getting increasingly accustomed to eating new and different things. She genuinely enjoys cooking at home, which allows her to experiment with new ingredients and combinations. However, she still calls her mother for recipes, preparation methods, the order in which ingredients should be cooked, and suitable substitutions for missing ingredients. She finds she is now able to cook more successfully and tastily. Her husband also loves cooking, and they share many moments preparing meals together.



Figure 104: *Empanadas*. Artwork by Mayerlyn Arteaga. Acrylic on Canvas, 8" x 6". 2020

Maye finds herself yearning for *empanadas* during tougher moments in her day-to-day life because they were always readily available to her before, and a significant part of her dietary repertoire, despite their intricate preparation. *Maye* shares how rare it would be for only one person to prepare them by themselves back home, where they are normally made by a minimum of two people: one preparing the dough, another the stuffing, and usually a third in charge of deep-frying them. Since her migration to Canada, she has only prepared *empanadas* a handful of times because she has to fulfill all those roles by herself. Similarly, at times when she feels down from not being able to return home to her family, she finds herself craving her mothers' special chicken soup. In her city, a dish known as *frito pastuso* (made with pieces of pork leg, corn and roast potato, sometimes with yucca) and *empanadas* are always shared and enjoyed during special festive dates.



Figure 105: *En Mi Alacena: Empanadas*. Maye working on her Assemblage Installation Sculpture, September, 2022

She found the *empanadas* particularly challenging to prepare because they are made with a special dough called *añejo*, which can be bought at any grocery store back home or whose making can be learned by watching the *abuelitas* (grandmothers) prepare it from scratch. Repeatedly and on different occasions, she was able to find all the ingredients necessary except the *añejo*, composed of fermented flour dough. She remembered, however, that in Colombia, they would sometimes substitute it with the flour used to make *arepas* (pre-cooked corn flour from the brand *Doña Arepa* o *HarinaPan*) whenever they couldn't find the *añejo* flour, and this would help. She finds it impacts the process a bit, as well as the taste, but it's the closest she can get. Despite her husband loving them, he finds they taste very different from the ones from his own home country, Nicaragua.

Maye recalled that mothers back home have developed many preparation tricks. Her own mother would gather the entire family at her *abuelita's* house for Mother's Day, Christmas, and Holy Week during Easter, where they would undoubtedly share and eat *empanadas*. In Canada, she made them for her baby, *Victoria*, whenever she has had the opportunity. *Maye's* biggest cooking challenge with this dish lies in making the stuffing (which can be chicken, meat or egg). Consequently, she finds herself preparing a stir-fry, initially unsure of the ingredients or preparation order. She remembers her grandmother once mentioning that it must have more salt added, otherwise the salt in the meat would dissipate upon frying.

Reading between the lines of *Maye's* narrative, we can see that her new culinary habits reflect the struggle inherent in accepting certain changes, both in her new gastronomic composition and in her identity. The art-making and subsequent interviews have allowed her to acknowledge this struggle and to accept that the person she was prior to her arrival in Canada is no longer the same person who participated in the workshops. In my opinion, this adds an invaluable layer of significance to her artistic experience.

Much like *Maye*, prior to moving to Montreal, *Alejandra* had never cooked. She relied solely on her mother and aunts, as well as on very affordable and accessible on-the-go food whenever she was working or away from home. Upon her arrival, she found herself cooking significantly more for her young family, driven by both economic reasons and the nostalgia of maintaining a diet similar to what she was accustomed to. She now reports enjoying cooking and having learned and improved her skills since her arrival.

As I mentioned in Chapter 5, the recipe *A/e* chose to recreate was *Pozole*, a traditional Mexican soup–stew that varies in color and preparation depending on the region of Mexico it’s eaten. Regarding differences in food items and culinary trends she has noticed, she finds she now has access to many products and a greater opportunity to cook similarly to how her family did back home, using certain products she has found in her new community. However, she states there is far more accessibility back home to a wider array of fresh products, as well as to ready–made meals that are significantly more affordable. The tastes and basic ingredients she associates with home include *chile peppers* and *tomatillos*.



Figure 106, 107 & 108: *Plato Pozolero y sus Platitos*. Ale and her children working on clay vessels. August, 2022

A/e misses traditional food as well as her family, but she believes she can live without the food, although it is something she yearns for a great deal. She feels that food and family are deeply connected and that she associates a specific memory, meal, or dish with each person she misses. *Pozole* (as noted in the previous chapter, a brothy, hearty soup built on a base of hominy corn and tender pork or chicken, flavored with a homemade red *chile* sauce and garnished with shredded lettuce and thinly sliced radishes, among other things) is the one meal that she finds herself missing and remembering the most. However, the hardest change for her

to assimilate into her diet has been the absence of freshly made *tortillas*²⁶. The inability to find tortillas as she did back home was her first significant cultural shock. She realized she would either have to learn how to make them or get used to the different flavor of the pre-packaged ones she found at the local Latino grocery store. The general difference in meals and dishes was not as surprising to her as the limited access to pre-made tortillas and how distinct the taste and consistency were compared to those she found back home. She explains that in a Mexican context, tortillas are like the bread that accompanies every meal (breakfast, lunch, dinner, and mid-day snacks), and she associates tortillas with her infancy, childhood, and adulthood.

After numerous attempts to recreate them upon her arrival using store-bought *masa harina Mazeca* (which she agrees doesn't require much skill— just enough water, then roll and flatten), she still doesn't find them to have the same taste. Nowadays, however, she buys pre-packaged tortillas and finds both white and yellow corn varieties. She prefers the yellow ones and has since familiarized herself with available brands, becoming fonder of some over others. Yet, any time she has the opportunity to make them from scratch, she easily finds all ingredients and makes them herself, despite reporting the taste to be different.

Creating the visual interpretation of her *Pozole* recipe, *A/e* worked alongside her children with basic hand-building techniques under my supervision, following the prompts I introduced during the workshop. They decided to make the bowls in which *pozole* is

²⁶ Round, thin, flat bread of Mexico and Central America, made from unleavened cornmeal or wheat flour.

traditionally served (typically in a terracotta ceramic bowl, decorated with colorful glazes). She notes how she has prepared this important soup a couple of times since her arrival. In her region of Mexico, it is customary to prepare it red or green, whereas in other regions it could also be white²⁷. She feels she gets better at preparing it each time, as she adds and removes certain ingredients on the go. She mentions it was simple enough to find all the necessary ingredients, except for the fresh corn used in the preparation. She was unable to find fresh corn and instead found it canned or frozen, which she doesn't find people use back home. However, she finds canned or frozen corn to be better than nothing, so she substitutes them.

She chose *Pozole* because it reminds her of family celebrations due to its accessibility and popularity. Then, from a much more personal stance, she shared how it reminds her of a time pre-migration when she struggled with her health. During this period, she was unable to eat almost anything, especially high-fat foods, and found herself greatly craving *Pozole*. Her mother then prepared the green kind with chicken breast for her. She was in great pain when attempting to eat anything else, and found *Pozole* was the only thing she could tolerate while regaining her strength.

In my debriefing journal notes after the interview, I noted that my curiosity was piqued by *Ale's* assertion that *tortillas* tasted differently when made and eaten in Mexico compared with Montreal, even when made with the exact same ingredients. I speculate that this

²⁷ Pozole gets its different colors from the type of chili used in the salsa. Red pozole uses dried red chiles like guajillo or ancho, giving it a red color and a spicy kick. Green pozole uses fresh green chiles like poblano, serrano, or jalapeño, along with tomatillos, which contribute to its vibrant green hue. White pozole omits any sauce altogether, resulting in a clear broth with a milder flavor.

comparative evaluation and preference for homeland-sourced food and ingredients – a sentiment also present in the other three women regarding different food items – derives from immigrants’ hyper-valuing of what originally belonged to them, as compared to what is found elsewhere. I am curious whether this bias might be linked to the necessity of re-inventing oneself upon migration, utilizing whatever remnants of our previous home we could bring to our new environment. In the case of myself, as well as the four women profiled here, our reinvented selves never seem to be as positively perceived as our original pre-migration identities.

This phenomenon is directly tied to Salman Akhtar’s (1999) observations, discussed in Chapter 1, regarding how immigrants can fantasize about the ‘paradise’ left behind in their countries, depending on the circumstances under which they were forced to leave their countries of origin. This intricate relationship between food, memory, and a re-evaluated past further resonates with the work of Nikos Papastergiadis (2000), T.J. Demos (2013), and Iain Chambers (1994/2008). As mentioned in the very first chapter, these scholars explore how migration fundamentally reshapes identity, memory, and belonging. Their theories collectively highlight how the experience of displacement often leads to a complex negotiation with the past, where cultural artifacts like food become crucial anchors for maintaining a sense of self in new and unfamiliar landscapes.

Esmeralda recounts that her ability to cook dishes from her native homeland, El Salvador, stems from what she learned during visits to her aunts and family as she grew older. She was always especially captivated by her aunt’s cooking, which included delicacies such as

*tamales*²⁸, *pupusas*²⁹, *atoll de chuco*³⁰, and *panes*³¹. She vividly remembers watching attentively as her aunt prepared food, particularly the delicious, sweet fruits that were abundant there but are rare or nonexistent in Canada.

Esmeralda reports that she and her husband (also from El Salvador but a more recent arrival) found a few authentic fruit pieces at the Latino grocery stores in Montreal, but “*nada que ver*” – *it tasted nothing like the ones back home* (E. Molina, personal communication, September 24, 2021). For instance, her husband excitedly rushed home one afternoon with a bag full of *jocotes de corona*³², a sweet fruit normally large, juicy, and easily found in El Salvador. To their dismay, when they bit into the fruits, they tasted nothing like those back home and had to throw them out. The same happened with *anonas*³³, which she recounts can be found in both white and pink varieties back home. She was surprised that one tiny *anona* cost eight dollars, considering that in El Salvador, for that price, one could buy a bag so large that most would spoil before being eaten, or they would simply fall from trees outside ones’ house. Mangos and *Mamey*³⁴, are also what she misses most from her childhood memories,

²⁸ A traditional Mesoamerican dish made of cornmeal or wheat dough (called masa) wrapped around a savory or sweet filling such as beans, meat or fruit. It is steamed in banana leaves or corn husks.

²⁹ A popular Salvadorian and Honduran flat bread made from rice flour, cornmeal flour, stuffed with various fillings, typically fried until golden brown.

³⁰ Traditional to El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras fermented corn-based beverage. It is served hot and has a porridge-like texture, often consumed as a mid-day or late-night snack. Its primary ingredients are fermented black corn, water, and salt.

³¹ In El Salvador this refers to warm sandwiches, typically made with chicken or turkey, marinated and roasted with spices native to El Salvador and served with salsa, tomato and lettuce.

³² A variety of *Spondias Purpurea* fruit, known for its slightly elongated, tear drop shape, thin, waxy skin and sweet, tart flavor. Often compared to a plum with a crusty undertone.

³³ Fruits from the *Annona* genus, known for their unique, often custard-like texture and sweet aromatic flavors.

³⁴ A tropical fruit with a vibrant orange flesh, a creamy texture and a unique flavor, often compared to sweet potato, pumpkin or apricot.

noting they would never arrive in Canada due to their delicate handling. Her observation is that cultivated fruits exported from Latin American homelands are cut from their trees too early in the hope of them maturing and ripening during their journey to Canada, which inevitably negatively affects the taste. She finds that the freshness is also lost when eating them frozen. *“Los traen a madurar, que no es igual que si maduran de su propio arbolito” – “they send them over young to ripen along the journey, which is not the same as if they ripened on their own tree”* (E. Molina, personal communication, September 24, 2021). Her biggest observation is that these homeland fruits are either unavailable or rare, and their taste is inevitably compromised and altered, with even their size affected by early harvesting.

Esmeralda mentions that whenever she has the opportunity to travel back home to visit her family, she tends to bring back as many cooking spices as she can. Yet, she finds that with the difference in temperature and merely by storing them for too long, they lose freshness, and once again the taste inevitably changes for the worse. One anecdote she shares in her interview is about a special type of cheese used back home to make *pupusas* that is impossible to find in Montreal. Her Salvadoran friends and acquaintances go to great lengths to reproduce it by mixing mozzarella with feta (cheeses easily found in Montreal but not back home), aiming for a taste as similar as possible to the original cheese. That special taste, she claims, is stored in the memory of the land they left behind where they first tasted it. *“In the end, one has to experiment the best one can and mix whatever possible to come closer to those flavors”* (E. Molina, personal communication, September 24, 2021).



Figure 109: *Esmeralda talking about her Assemblage box*



Figure 110: *Esmeralda working on her clay vessels. 2022*

Some of these flavors and ingredients *Esmeralda* recognizes as traditional from her home country include the Salvadoran *tortilla* (similar to the Mexican ones described earlier in this chapter), which they tend to eat for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, along with red Salvadoran beans, cilantro (coriander), fresh cheese, *chimol* (a mixture of tomato, cilantro, onion), *empanadas*, and *tamales* (both described earlier). She vividly remembers how her cousin made *tamales* with *chipilín*³⁵ and is certain that the original taste will never leave her memory and palate. She also recalls using the entire banana leaf to wrap and cook the *tamales*, as opposed to the tiny portions served here in Latino grocery stores that are wrapped in aluminum foil. She mentions that any time she visits home, she stays at her aunts' house, where her cousin now cooks for her. Something she reflects on, however, is that if one is not familiar with the difference in flavors between food from home and food found here, then one does not miss it

³⁵ A leguminous plant, commonly used as a leafy green known for its mild spinach-like flavor.

or suffer its absence. For instance, her little boy, five years old at the time of this research, was familiar with *tamales* yet had only ever tried and eaten them in Montreal when she prepared them at home. She shares how much he loves them and can eat them for any meal of the day (as is customary back home) and says he would not be able to tell the difference from how they taste in El Salvador since he never ate them there. My field notations highlight this observation as very interesting, because in reality, the supposed difference in flavor is an element created by memory and potentially from the fear that one cannot find equivalent ingredients outside of one's hometown. The transculturation (Demos, 2013) that results from having been forced to leave one's country to relocate in Canada therefore encounters resistance in both food and memory (Akhtar, 1999).

Esmeralda believes that even the cooking tools used to prepare meals play an important role in the tastes found in ones' country of origin versus how they taste when replicated elsewhere (using *charolas de barro*³⁶, *comales*³⁷, etc.). When I asked her if she cooks frequently at home, she reiterated that she had to learn by herself as she grew up and later as she became a mother. Consequently, she has certain "go-to" recipes that she figured out here in Canada. Her examples include *spaghetti* and the French-Canadian dish, *pâté chinois* (shepherd's pie of ground meat topped with mashed potatoes). Since she has now lived most of her life in Montreal, and her little boy learned to enjoy *pâté chinois* at daycare, she makes it at least once a month. She loves that her children have the opportunity to taste so many different foods from

³⁶ Clay terracotta-made trays and bowls for serving.

³⁷ A flat, round griddle, traditionally made of clay or metal, used for cooking tortillas, toasting spices and searing meat, particularly in Mexican and Central American cuisine.

all over the world in Montreal, which she enjoys trying to recreate in her own way at home. The same applies to dishes traditionally from her country that she has tried in Montreal, such as the *flautas*³⁸ that she visually reproduced as an artwork for the assemblage workshop through *Recetas y Raíces*. She shares how a neighbor who recently moved from El Salvador to the borough of Rosemont–La Petite-Patrie invited her over for dinner and made them for her. *Esmeralda* fell in love with the *flautas* and tried to recreate them as best she could at home for her family. She is also fond of preparing *tacos*, and since she leads a busy life as a mother of young children, she chooses recipes that are accessible, straightforward, and simple.

Esmeralda shares how the research project helped her teach her Canadian-born, first-generation children about their cultural roots. She loves that food and art are something she can share with them. This profound link between food, family, and cultural heritage, so evident in *Esmeralda's* narrative, was also richly explored by *Yesenia*.

In her interview, *Yesenia* mentions that friends from the Dominican Republic took her to all the different Latino stores in Rosemont–La Petite Patrie when she first moved to Montreal. She had also learned a few tips from various friendships she made and sustained since the beginning of our art workshops. She was excited to share how, due to these new connections

³⁸ Fried tortillas filled with savory ingredients like shredded chicken, meat, cheese or vegetables, often served with toppings like thick cream, guacamole and salsa.

and networks, she now has had easier access to ingredients like *sopita Maggi*³⁹, *el adobo*⁴⁰, *el azafrán*⁴¹, *la salsa*, and *la pata roja*⁴², which were an important part of her family's diet.

What *Yesenia* truly yearned for, however, was the people. She mentions her diet hadn't changed much since her relocation, but the people she left behind were what she felt nostalgic for, specifically family members. She shared that despite her diet remaining almost identical to when she lived back home, certain products and meals reminded her of those people she misses so much, which to this day causes her a great deal of nostalgia. For instance, she grew up on a daily diet of green plantains and *Geo* cheese (a popular Dominican cheese: semi-hard, pale, yellow, with a mildly-tangy and slightly salty taste, similar to Edam but with a firmer texture and sharper flavor, often coated in red wax). She associates this dish with her loved ones, with memories and experiences they shared. However, she considers herself very fortunate to know a large Dominican community in Montreal that has welcomed her with open arms and made this transition easier.

For *Yesenia*, neither the amount of cooking nor enjoyment of it changed upon her relocation. She never finds herself missing any dishes because she can easily cook them all in her new home. The only item she misses, is her *Mangu*⁴³ with *Geo* cheese, accompanied with

³⁹A type of instant soup, typically chicken-flavored, popular and convenient option for a quick and satisfying meal.

⁴⁰ A flavorful, all-purpose dry spice blend and marinade widely used in Dominican and Caribbean cuisine. Key for enhancing the taste of various dishes, particularly proteins and is usually added to sauces. The blend includes paprika, oregano, cumin, garlic powder, onion powder and turmeric.

⁴¹ Saffron, a spice derived from the *Crocus sativus* flower, used in Dominican and other cuisines for its vibrant color and unique flavor.

⁴² Refers to a crimson color due to spices that color meat – pork, chicken or beef – a reddish color.

⁴³ A creamy and savory mash of boiled green plantains, served with toppings like fried cheese, salami, eggs and pickled red onions.

bitter-sweet onions. She shares that she never has difficulty remembering recipes and never needs to call home for cooking advice, tips, or reminders. However, she uses the excuse of needing help with a recipe to call and stay updated with her loved ones, simply to hear their voices. For example, she mentions knowing very well how to make the commonly enjoyed *Sancocho*⁴⁴ and where to find all the necessary ingredients. Yet, sometimes she calls her family with a food pretext (in this case the *Sancocho*), but in all honesty, she just wants to have something in common to talk about, since their lives and realities have changed so much due to their separation by distance and time. She likes to pretend she needs help with food sometimes so that they can see that she still needs them in many ways, despite the distance, and that she's preparing and eating something that reminds her of them and makes her think of them often. Sometimes when she's cooking, her emotions overcome her as she thinks of those people back home and the memories they shared together, which she associates with the dish she is preparing. "*Se le mojan los ojos a uno*" – "*my eyes get wet when I think about it*" (Y. M. Capellan, personal communication, September 16, 2021). Nonetheless, *Yesenia* mentions how she is comforted by knowing that she can easily find everything she needs, whether ingredients or ready-made dishes. She does not have nor need a recipe book, since she carries those recipes with her everywhere in her head and heart. She says that "*cuando a uno le gusta hacer algo y frecuentemente lo hace, no lo olvida*" – "*when someone likes to do something and you do it frequently, you can't forget it*", (Y. M. Capellan, personal communication, September 16, 2021).

⁴⁴ A hearty stew featuring a variety of meats and root vegetables, often served with white rice and avocado.



Figure 111 & 112: *Yesenia working on her clay vessels, July 2022*

Much like the *turrón de coco* that she learned to make as a young child with her grandmother, *Yesenia* mentions that she has also been able to find other dishes at Latino markets that are made at specific times of the year – such as *la habichuela con dulce* (a dessert made of sweet beans and brown sugar). This is a dish she learned to make back home with her aunt, who has also passed away. These are recipes that she makes often, at least two to three times during Holy Week and Easter, and she finds that she can't forget them because of how frequently she prepares them. Back home, she used to help her aunt prepare these during those dates, and now in her new location, she carries on the tradition because her aunt enjoyed Easter and Holy week celebrations so much.



Figure 113: *Turrón de Coco*. Artwork by Yesenia María Capellán. Acrylic on Canvas. 8" x 6". 2020

For the *Mangu* she remembers so fondly, she recalls how it can be eaten for breakfast or dinner and how it reminds her of her childhood. It was a dish she would eat every single day, always present, just like the cookies she shared with me that day. She mentions how for Dominicans, plantains are the one food item that accompanies every single meal daily – for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. *El plátano* (plantains), *el moro de habichuelas* (black or red beans and rice), and *La Bandera*⁴⁵ are also traditional daily meals, composed of meat, rice and beans (red, black or pinto). She says that when she or a friend travel to the U.S., they always bring back the *Geo* Cheese, which for some reason can be found there but not in Canada. She has recreated the *Mangu* with different cheeses many times upon her arrival, including salami cheese, but no other cheese feels the way *queso Geo* feels when she eats it– as though she's eating something wholesome and good for her body. It is unique and looks like a giant cheese ball covered with a red paper. As we can observe here, for *Yesenia*, creating artwork based on her most significant dishes, engaging with her memories through oral history, allowed her to acknowledge her own role in the creation of cultural roots that form part of her identity as a Dominican–Canadian.

A notable finding is that participants had already undergone significant adjustments simply by relocating. This necessary adaptation inherently suggests a fundamental shift in their identities as a direct consequence of their new environment and experiences. The function of these meals for them when they were young or in their home countries represented something

⁴⁵ Translates to “the flag”, a hearty meal consisting of rice, beans and meat, representing the colors of the Dominican flag.

different – something expected and linked to celebrations, religious dates, or festivities, for instance. However, *today*, in their new surroundings, these functions have either changed, or the significance and attachment to the dishes and recipes have intensified.

Remarkably, all four women agreed on the ingredients that were easiest and hardest to find in their new geographical locations. They all similarly shared that a large discrepancy in cost was an important consideration regarding both the accessibility of these products and their freshness. Including myself in this group, I can say that we all researched and found ways to access the most basic and fundamental ingredients necessary. A collective experience for all of us all was that these changes left us floating in a sort of in-between space or limbo. We were acutely aware of what we no longer had access to, but also of what we *did* have and what we *could* do about it, or to make the distance feel more bearable and smaller between the memories, tastes, and people left behind. In many ways, we found ourselves having to reinvent new versions of who we used to be and who we were becoming.

Our shared experience has consistently been that integrating into a new culture, which itself is composed of multiple cultures (as is the case in Canada), necessitates a very large and important personal transformation. Canada's cultural diversity and multiplicity of cultures and backgrounds was not a reality we ever experienced in our own countries of origin, and here, we have to find new ways of connecting to these. My field notes suggest that through the opportunity of community-based art education and oral history interviews, the participants were able to rewrite and recount their own stories. Simultaneously, they realized that they had become new versions of their former selves and that they were not merely the case numbers

that immigration officials and social service agencies sometimes made them feel they were. The new growth the participants experienced can be s very positive, as all four women shared, but it can also create conflict, tension, or disconnection with the people who stayed behind (as *Yesenia* mentioned).

This community-based research-creation project offered a space for these transformations to be processed through the facilitation of community art-making, pedagogy, and skill-sharing, regardless of participants' prior experience with certain art mediums. As I have been arguing, these experiences reflect that ideas pertaining to culture, food, memory, meal sharing, and intercultural community building assist newcomers' integration processes. These experiences provide a positive setting for their growing, evolving migrant identities to flourish in their new Canadian environments.

When discussing their journey to Canada and their food memories, habits, and longings, I also invited participants to consider the benefits of oral history to the artwork they created. Their reflections indicated that verbally recounting their experiences provided a rich narrative foundation, imbuing their artworks with deeper personal and cultural significance. This process of verbalizing their experiences fostered a powerful form of self-reflection, allowing them to clarify and solidify the emotions and stories they wished to convey visually. Ultimately, participants reported that the opportunity to bridge their spoken narratives with tangible artistic creation felt empowering, offering a unique avenue to both express and preserve their evolving identities and heritage in a new environment.

When considering how the cross-disciplinary integration of visual practice and oral history could enhance the impact of these activities for participants, I observed that providing the participating women artists a platform to express the context of their stories, which in turn fueled and inspired their artistic creations, was of utmost importance. This was crucial for both the integrity of the research project and their final showcased artworks (as seen in both the community art exhibition and the recipe-zine book). It was especially significant for the participants to have their voices heard regarding one of the most important times of their lives. Oral history's ability to collect and investigate historical information and truths that generally go unheard allows for the candid showcasing of varied ways of knowing and learning, and diverse individual life experiences. I found this to add an important layer of humanity and personalization that would otherwise be lost through other interview methods, processes, and data gathering frameworks.

With my methodological query in mind – how does the cross-disciplinary integration of visual practice and oral history enhance the impact of sharing ideas pertaining to culture, food, memory, meal sharing, and intercultural community building, thereby assisting newcomers' integration processes? – I will focus this discussion on the importance these participants ascribed to the integration of oral history and art-making within this research project, both for their own self-reflection and concerning the public display of their works.

In addition, I was interested in discovering if a story or memory came to mind for the participating women, prompted by recalling a particular dish or recipe. Towards the end of each interview, I asked participants whether they thought it would be important for their recorded

interview or oral history narrative to accompany the artistic visual representation of the recipe/dish they created in the art show and zine, and the reasons behind their answer. I followed their responses by asking if they would be interested in exploring, sharing, or visually and creatively recreating any other recipes in the near present or future, and why.

Maye felt strongly about her oral history narrative accompanying her creations. She recalls how, during the final days of production in preparation for the gallery show, her husband noted he hadn't realized her strong interest in art. *Maye* remembers replying that the project helped her to liberate herself and offered an escape from the everyday pressures of motherhood, housekeeping, employment, and the lasting impacts of her migration and new life abroad. She shares how participating in the research project made her want to explore and recreate many other recipes, such as traditional stews, soups and *coladas*⁴⁶ from her region. She opened up about how greatly she yearned for certain dishes when she was pregnant and postpartum. *Maye* shares that the audio recording captures important details and context about *her* journey; for instance, how in her home town, during the first forty days postpartum, women are traditionally collectively cared for, tended to, and fed large amounts of fish and chicken soup, as well as beverages from fresh cow 's milk and fruit. She found herself missing these greatly and resorted to teaching her husband how to make them so he could prepare them for her as she both prepared for and recovered from childbirth.

⁴⁶ A type of thick, sweet and refreshing drink, often made with fruit, cornstarch and spices.

These important details served as motivators for her to continue exploring artistic mediums as she participated in the workshops. I found this to be a learning situation and opportunity that would have otherwise been difficult to access anywhere else. The reflexivity of oral history triggered significant learning, creating a space for her and other participants to express their unsteadiness in living new experiences (in *Maye's* case, maternity) in a new country, far away from her pre-existing support system. Oral history also helped, in many cases like *Maye's*, to raise awareness of how her identity had evolved.

Alejandra found that the oral history audio was an important asset to the artwork she and her children completed together. She felt sure that once people heard the audio while admiring the work, they would more easily connect and relate with her and her young family's lived experiences, especially when associating them with memory, food, identity, and migration. For her, the audio component added a more personal layer to her story, delving deeper into the inspiration guiding the work, the process of its making, and considerations of how the final ceramic piece came to be displayed. *A/e* shared that the artwork would likely become more meaningful, valuable, and precious when presented alongside the audio, especially complemented by having co-created it with her children in their new environment and lives in Montreal. She was excited at the prospect of sharing with them and archiving their opportunity to "create-together" while learning about an important part of their cultural roots, traditions, and migratory journey to Canada. In *A/e's* specific situation, oral history, art, memory, and food were important variables in the process of redefining her and her children's identities.

Esmeralda also had strong feelings about pairing the oral history audio with her artwork; she excitedly responded that it was important for them to be included in both the community art exhibition and the recipe zine–book. She believes the audio offers additional context to the imagery shown, and that it also speaks directly and figuratively to what she was trying to visually and artistically represent. Similar to *Maye* and *Ale*, *Esmeralda* felt that the audio attributed more meaning and weight to *her* voice, the specificity of *her* story, and the circumstances and experiences *she* had when making the works, as she shared stories with her children and others during the workshops.

Esmeralda confesses that, at first, she thought the artworks should speak for themselves and felt somewhat apprehensive about participating in the oral history interview. However, she found along the way that she wanted the opportunity to voice the stories and memories associated with the works for whoever viewed them. She warmed up to the idea that the audio would carry memories of the meals important to her family, recalling and celebrating a life she left behind, and communicate the significance behind festive dates. She liked thinking of how the audio would serve as a sort of memoir that she could revisit to remind her of her hopes to return to El Salvador one day to enjoy these meals and create new memories. For all these reasons, *Esmeralda* strongly believed that this voiced context should accompany the imagery. Once again, we can see how the audio support provides a certainty that the women and their works will be understood more genuinely and accurately. I find it interesting that oral history adds a certain validation and certainty to their creations, both of which are very important attributes in the process linked to reconstructing their identities.

When I asked *Yessenia* about the value of her oral history narrative accompanying her artworks and the recipe book, she briefly hesitated before replying that she liked the idea of pairing and presenting them together. She expressed that having her voice guide the viewer through what she was trying to share would more closely capture what the recipe and dish represent for her, including the memories and experiences she attributes to it. She clarified that while she wanted to leave full curatorial responsibility to me, she envisioned both components working better if presented together. She was especially fond of the idea of viewers knowing that *El turrón de coco* is a dish special to *her* family and *her* story, despite the fact that other more traditional dishes like *La Bandera* or *El Sancocho* (descriptions on p.144 and p.145 of this chapter) are perhaps more representative of the Dominican Republic as a whole. The recipe *she* recreated for this project, however, is specific to *her* and *her* family's memories, as well as the love she still holds for her late grandmother, who taught her to make it as a young girl.

As we can see, the possibility of accompanying their creations with their stories represents, for all four participants, an opportunity for individual recognition. The oral history interviews also provided a platform to voice their personal narratives and resist being reduced to a case or a number, a common experience for those seeking refuge or asylum. In a way, each of their stories helped them to recuperate and validate their identity while simultaneously rebuilding it as part of being a new Canadian.

Prompts encouraging participants to revisit their home countries and the circumstances of their departure critically connected to notions of identity, migration, and memory. These

phenomena are intrinsically linked to building community, forging new connections, and fostering learning.

6.2. Personal Echoes: Flavors That Nourish My Artist–Researcher Path

The process involved in developing the artful experience component of this research project shed valuable light on my current studio practice. The same holds true regarding the personal exploration of my own changing identity linked to migration.

In addition to discerning and communicating recent newcomer experiences and challenges, and identifying some commonalities that can be shared through diverse art-making processes around this theme, the research and data gathered presented me with the artistic challenge of exploring those same themes through personalized imagery of food. For the first time ever, I worked without using portraiture, employing both two-dimensional and three-dimensional approaches with varying mediums. This experience sparked my ongoing and highly experimental personal studio reflection and exploration, whether I was working alongside participants in the workshop settings or in my own independent studio space. I had to undertake the very task I was asking of the participants: to look inwards and revisit their migratory journeys by travelling back via memory to the home countries and contexts they had all so painfully had to leave for one reason or another.

As I embarked on that nostalgic journey myself, I immediately envisioned my own mother making her *sopa de frijoles con chorizo* (a black bean and spicy sausage soup) and

serving it to me and my sister in our family's *Talavera*⁴⁷ plates. Thinly sliced avocado and crushed *chicharron* pieces⁴⁸ would always sit close by, so that we could add as much as we wished to our soup. I immediately realized that this very dish is one I make almost urgently whenever I find myself under the weather (seasonally or morally speaking). Making and eating the soup feels like receiving an immediate embrace from my mother and grandmother in the house that I left over twenty years ago, with smells, sounds, and other memories that will forever travel with me. It is pure comfort in a bowl. I approached making this work, and every other piece I recreated in workshops alongside the CAFLA community, with a clear purpose: to transform my personal narratives and memories into tangible art, thereby preserving and honoring my cultural heritage. This process aimed to bridge the two cultures I am entwined in, fostering a deeper sense of connection. The creative act of recreating and reimagining these dishes became a healing process, offering comfort and a profound sense of continuity amidst change and displacement, much like receiving an embrace from my past.



Figure 114: *Sopa de Frijol – Black Bean Soup*. 20"x20". Black and sepia acrylic painting on wood. 2022

⁴⁷ A Mexican ceramic tradition and artisanal functional work predominantly composed of tin-glazed earthenware, with a white base glaze decorated largely in blue.

⁴⁸ A type of crispy pork rind that is largely used as a snack or served to accompany and garnish other meals.

The mixed-media painting titled *Sopa de Frijol – Black Bean Soup*, 2022, (Recetas y Raíces, p. 25) (Figure 114), presents a visual narrative rendered in a nuanced palette of sepia and black, focusing on the intimate details of cultural sustenance. The composition, a carefully arranged still life, features the foundational ingredients of the titular soup: a halved onion revealing its intricate layers, garlic cloves, chili peppers, and a bowl brimming with rich, dark beans, all carefully positioned to evoke a sense of preparation and anticipation. A notable visual feature is the monochromatic scheme, which lends a timeless, almost archival quality to the image, suggesting that these ingredients and the meal they compose are deeply embedded in memory and tradition rather than a fleeting present. Furthermore, the textural detail evident in the rendering of the onion's papery skin, the individual beans, and the delicate fronds of herbs creates a tangible connection for the viewer, inviting an imagined sensory experience that transcends the visual. This deliberate choice to portray raw, essential elements in a muted yet evocative manner underscores the work's meaning: that the core of identity and heritage often resides in the most fundamental and deeply remembered components of one's culinary past. This analysis aligns with Rose's (2016) argument that images are not static objects but active sites where cultural knowledge and identity are produced, rather than simply reflected.



Figure 115, 116, 117 & 118: *Sopa de Tortilla, Chiles Rellenos, Tamales & Flautas*. 20"x20". Black and sepia acrylic painting on wood. 2022



Figure 119, 120, 121 & 122: *Sopa de Chorizo, Guacamole, Ponche Navideño & Flan*. 20"x20". Black and sepia acrylic painting on wood. 2022

The body of work I created consisted of a series of thirteen black and sepia 20" x 20" acrylic paintings on wood, each depicting a recipe I associate with home and feel most nostalgic about. I showcased fifteen three-dimensional mixed-media assemblages of varying sizes and shapes, and completed a total of thirty-four self-hardening clay, hand-built vessels of different hand-painted sizes. I incorporated personal photographs, gel medium transfers, text, newspaper collage elements composed of recipes, personal journal entry segments, drawings, and actual spices, herbs and dried up food items from my pantry and home into every showcased and mounted assemblage vessel and displayed plinth.



Figure 123, 124, 125 & 126: *En La Alacena Series: Aromas y Especies que me llevé 1, 2, 3 & 4*. 25"x25" and 25" x 13". Mixed-Media on wood. 2022



Figure 127: *En La Alacena Series: Aromas y Especies que me llevé 5*. 25"x25" and 25" x 13". Mixed-Media on wood. 2022



Figure 128: *Arroz Rojo con Verduras*. Self-hardening clay and dry rice. 2022

I recorded my own oral history narrative following the same interview guide used for the participants' storytelling. Versions in English, French, and Spanish were installed throughout the gallery space. One accompanied an area where I displayed the assemblage boxes, one next to the paintings, and the third next to the plinths holding the ceramic vessels near the center of the gallery space.

Despite having lived now for many years outside of my home country, having embraced the multicultural richness of being "Canadian," and loving tasting and enjoying food from cultures all over the world, my pantry still stores the most basic ingredients that link me to my origin and its food: *chiles*, *frijoles negros*, *bayos*⁴⁹, *cochinita pibí*⁵⁰, and *tortillas*. Similarly, I will always feel the need to find new suppliers (now in Ontario) where I can access these foundational ingredients to prepare dishes that bring me joy and that have also helped me

⁴⁹ Black and red beans

⁵⁰ A slow-roasted pork dish, traditionally cooked in a pit oven after being marinated in achiote paste, citrus juices and spices, wrapped in banana leaves.

understand myself as a first-generation Canadian. I continue sharing and enjoying these dishes with my three boys and their Egyptian-Canadian father.



Figure 129: *En La Alacena Series: Aromas y Especies que me llevé 7*. 25"x 13". Mixed-Media on wood. 2022

Figure 129 above, shows one assemblage piece from my "*En la Alacena* series ("*Aromas y Especies que me llevé 7– Scents and Spices I took with me*," 2022, not featured in the recipe-zine book), featuring a three-tiered, shallow rectangular box assemblage painted in a stark white, serving as a poignant visual narrative of memory and migration. The artwork's most notable feature is the contrast between the pristine white interior of the box and the dark, silhouetted birds that appear to fly across its surfaces, creating a powerful motif of movement, departure, and the enduring journey of displacement. Within this contained space, the deliberate arrangement of objects – such as the prominently placed dried *chile* pepper, its rich texture and color a tangible link to a homeland ingredient, alongside other smaller, symbolic elements like wooden cylinders and ceramic bowls – speaks to the fragmented yet carefully preserved aspects of cultural identity. This meticulous composition within the box's defined boundaries transforms it into a metaphorical vessel for cherished memories and a testament to

my negotiation with a new environment, conveying how even in absence, the essence of home and heritage persists through tangible and symbolic forms.

The ceramic piece compilation titled *Caldillo*, 2022, was presented as a still life, laid out on a woven mat, creating a strong sense of a domestic and intentional arrangement. The piece is dominated by earthy tones, primarily the muted brown of a rectangular tray and a large, textured leaf-shaped form, both crafted from clay. A notable visual feature is the deliberate arrangement of various small, uniformly sized bowls, some in a soft pink, others in deeper red or brown, meticulously placed around the larger forms. These bowls contain a diverse array of real ingredients – including whole grains, pumpkin seeds, and dried herbs – inviting the viewer to consider the fundamental components of a meal, and by extension, cultural sustenance. Furthermore, the subtle texture conveyed by the woven mat underneath, with its alternating bands of natural fiber and vibrant pink and yellow threads, adds depth and a tactile dimension, hinting at traditional craft and the rich sensory experience associated with food preparation and shared culinary heritage. This careful composition of raw elements and handcrafted vessels powerfully conveys themes of origin, the painstaking process of recreating familiar tastes, and the profound connection between food, memory, and cultural identity.



Figure 130: *Caldillo*. Clay, newspaper clippings, wicker place mat, paint, seeds, spices, rice. 224 x 315 mm. 2022

A prominent visual feature is the repetition of organic, leaf-like forms crafted from clay, suggesting a deep connection to nature, growth, and the passage of seasons or the enduring presence of natural elements from a homeland. The earthy-toned leaves were strategically placed on striking colorful backgrounds, creating a dynamic color contrast that draws the eye and emphasizes the handcrafted quality of the pieces. Scattered across the clay forms are small, fragmented pieces of text, reminiscent of torn newspaper clippings, which introduce a textual layer that hints at stories, recipes, or memories that are incomplete yet deeply personal.

From a very early age, while still living in Mexico, I was always conscious of having a different cultural identity from the rest of my Mexican friends. My mother is half Italian; her father migrated from Tuscany to Mexico in the 1950s, where he met my grandmother and raised their three children. This research project has required that I confront my own prejudices or cultural traumas related to my mixed Mexican identity. It has also helped me to come to terms with the idea that identity is by no means something monolithic (especially when stemming from a bicultural context); rather, identity now feels to me more like a living phenomenon, one that flows and changes depending on the environment and circumstances we find ourselves in.

The oral history component became much more important to me once I began curating and mounting my work after displaying the participants' work in the gallery space. I found it of great significance to be able to provide a recording of my oral history narrative in all three languages (one of which I learned only upon my arrival and life in Montreal). The three

languages now form a very real sense of who I was, who I have become, and who I will likely continue evolving into. They reflect my past, ever-changing present, and future.

As I went through the questions I asked participants during their interview, and as I mention in the narrative, while working through my own artworks and recipes, I found that much like *Yesenia*, I also call my grandmother on a weekly basis to ask her for recipes that I for the most part know very well how to cook. I also ask her for others that I've never been courageous enough to try before, but mainly so as not to forget my cultural roots. This is because I love cooking dishes and flavors from my home country, and above all, I want, despite the distance and time apart, to continue having something in common with her and those family members still there.



Figure 131, 132 & 133: *Studio Process Images.* Painting Assemblage boxes, image transfers and hand-building clay vessels. 2021 – 2022

In the following and final chapter, I will present observations about this research study with specific reference to my research questions, and indicate its benefits, risks, and limitations. I will conclude by suggesting the contributions to knowledge I believe my research offers, and the next steps of inquiry that I intend will come from what I have accomplished here.



Figure 134, 135 & 136: *Studio Process Images. Assembling Assemblage Boxes. 2021 – 2022*

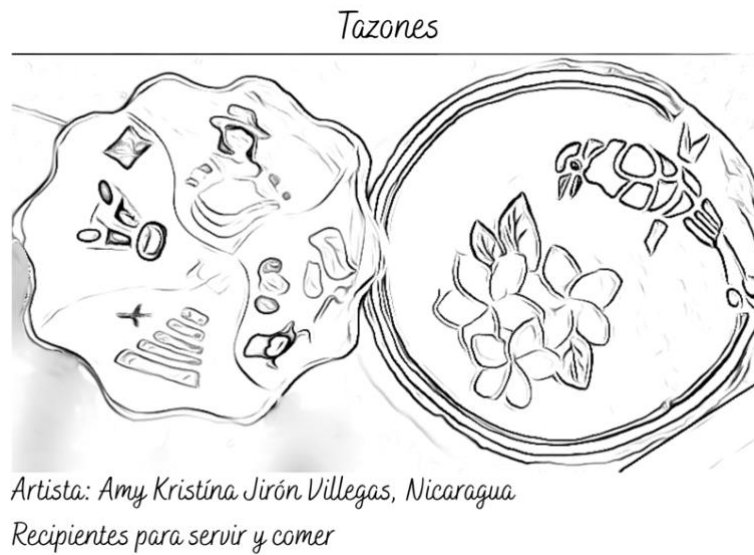


Figure 137: *Tazones*. Artwork by Amy Kristina Jirón Villegas, Digital Image Depicting Serving Vessels Intended for everyday meals. Illustrated in p. 55 of *Recetas & Raíces*, *Recettes & Racines*, *Recipes & Roots* recipe zine book, 2024

Chapter 7 | *Conclusion*

7.1. Closing Thoughts

This concluding chapter presents final reflections on the observed effects reported by the participating women artists and my own insights, while revisiting the core research inquiries that have guided this study. This research project set out to explore:

1. How can art and storytelling promote identity transformation and social reconstruction?
2. How do cultural elements, food, and community building aid integration and foster migrant identities?
3. How does the cross-disciplinary integration of visual practice and oral history enhance the impact of these activities for participants?

The unique blend of art-making, storytelling, and community engagement I oversaw addressed all three guiding questions by creating a safe, welcoming space for participants to

articulate their narratives. The workshops offered a vital outlet for expression, particularly when language barriers or traumatic experiences limited verbal communication (Guruge & Khan, 2015; Gómez-Estern & de la Mata Benitez, 2013; Massing, 2016). Revisiting and artistically re-creating dishes from their childhood and home countries proved to be an empowering process, enabling participants to process emotions, make sense of their past and present, and reclaim agency (Adams, 2013). The shared, yet relatable, stories that emerged fostered a sense of collective understanding and validation. This contributed to participants' confidence in their integration journey and implicitly promoted social reconstruction through the creation of bridges between diverse experiences.

Food, in particular, emerged as a central cultural anchor, providing a tangible and sensory link to participants' background and memories. The workshops, through their focus on personal dishes and shared culinary traditions, cultivated a positive setting where diverse cultural backgrounds could be celebrated. This created an environment for intercultural community building, allowing participants to interact socially, form new social networks, and reduce feelings of isolation. Through mediums like paint, hand-building with clay, three-dimensional collage, and assemblage, the collaborative re-creation of dishes became a powerful means for individuals to preserve and celebrate their cultural origins while adapting to their new Canadian environment. This process fostered resilient and evolving migrant identities (Chin et al., 2014).

Oral history provided a rich narrative foundation, imbuing the artworks with deeper personal and cultural significance. Verbally recounting their journeys, memories, and reflections

fostered a powerful form of self-reflection, enabling participants to clarify the emotions and stories they wished to convey visually. This synergy allowed for a more comprehensive and multi-layered expression of identity than either medium could achieve alone. Participants explicitly reported that bridging their spoken narratives with tangible artistic creation felt profoundly empowering, offering a unique avenue to express and preserve their evolving identities and traditions in their new whereabouts.

Unforeseen personal circumstances complicated the completion, official launch, and distribution of the recipe zine (both print and digital), as well as the write-up of these findings. Since the exhibition's conclusion, I've found it increasingly difficult to maintain contact with both the community as a whole, and individual participants. The specific nature of CAFLA's *La Petite Enfance* community, a support group for newcomer Latinx young parents and caregivers of children ages 0–5, means participants often change or move on. This dynamic inherently makes long-term engagement challenging. Furthermore, maintaining long-term rapport with many participants proved difficult due to the complexities of diverse immigration statuses, including voluntary displacements and governmental relocations, which affected many of the women involved in the workshops, exhibition, and community recipe zine. Nevertheless, these activities offered an invaluable opportunity to share recipes and migration stories through artwork and oral history narratives. We co-created spaces of possibility dedicated to communal contemplation and dialogue. I am inspired to further investigate how safeguarding migration recipes contributes to individual identity and, more broadly, helps create and share a more encompassing and inclusive narrative of migration and displacement.

7.2 Shared Visions: Collaborating Forward

My academic contribution to the emerging area of community-based research creation in Art Education (LeRue, 2024) aimed to extend opportunities and foster a productive space for making, telling, and knowledge-generation among underrepresented communities, specifically the Latinx community of *La Petite Enfance* at CAFLA (Lawless, 2000; 2019). Collaborating closely with participants, I strove for a “less extractive, more reciprocal” (Lawless, 2000. 2019) research design, ensuring the “data” primarily belonged to participants themselves (Bishop, 2009). It was of equal importance to me to find a way to hold space for participants to represent their own views, every step of the way, as other emerging scholars and researchers have done.

7.3 Towards Place-Conscious Futures

Building on these values, and acknowledging that my research was a product of its specific place and the pandemic context, I am now drawn to place-conscious pedagogy. I want to explore how to integrate my local community and environment (Sobel, 2005) more deeply into my art-making and research. This shift stems from my experience implementing *Preparing, Serving, and Sharing Stories* in less conventional learning spaces, such as parks or common rooms. I have come to believe that community-based-research-creation is best done outside of conventional institutions.



Figure 138: *Sirviendo Reflexiones: Food for Thought*. Clay and newspaper. 2022

These thoughts also connect to exploring the sense of self in art, specifically *where* we teach (Jardine, 2016; Kovach, 2009). This is directly related to the unconventional pedagogical spaces (Garcia-Fialdini, 2019) where I conducted most of the community art workshops and interviews for this doctoral research. I am now strongly inclined to explore the structures, histories, and ecologies of these (and new) spaces, particularly through the concept of outdoor classrooms, as we implemented in the later stages of our workshops with the CAFLA community. I am interested, for instance, in what daily visits to a green space or weekly visits to a forest or estuary could bring to teaching, learning, and research. This would push the possibilities of the “unconventional” classroom, exploring *who* and *how* location impacts teaching and learning, and how it might foster “selves in the making” (Power & Bennett, 2015). I am fascinated by how place and oneness can interweave with identity formation through engagement with the natural world. I ponder how the outdoors might disrupt the inherent power hierarchy of conventional classrooms, facilitating more engaged interaction with learners. I wonder if this approach could also foster greater trust and deeper engagement by allowing more connections: among individuals and with the more-than-human elements of

nature. This may be particularly true when working with non-institutionalized individuals, facilitating the “authentic kinds of learning” for newcomers that scholar Elizabeth Ellsworth (2005) suggests. Would the research, teaching, and learning experience more easily unearth the crucial distinction between residing versus inhabiting (Orr, 1992) – a concept particularly resonant for newcomer populations like those at CAFLA? I am intrigued by the potential of introducing place-based framing and content to my artistic practice, research, and for fostering a more accessible pedagogy.

To investigate some of these questions in the near future, I want to further explore action research as a methodology. I’m drawn to its capacity to address real-world problems and foster equitable, reciprocal co-participation. I see a strong alignment with Rosemary Reilly’s work (2014), which highlights the power of using arts-based methods not only for data collection but also as an intervention to improve group dynamics. This dual role of artistic practice – as both a research tool and a catalyst for change – resonates strongly with my own interests. Her use of artistic methods to explore the social and emotional landscape of a group provides a compelling model for how I can use place-based practices to investigate the complex interplay between location, identity, and learning, especially with newcomer populations. I am also similarly interested in the potential inter-relations between theories and practices of art education, art therapy, oral history, and identity development. In this research, we occasionally accessed an unexpected space where traumas, fears, and anxieties surfaced. It was in these moments that I realized the research extended beyond the sole purview of Art Education, the field I represent. To meet my participants’ needs, I ensured immediate access to

a comprehensive list of social service agencies (see Appendix P) and CAFLA's on-site psychosocial counselor, thereby directly addressing any emergent emotional needs.

Nonetheless, I began to recognize the significant relevance of these experiences to the field of Art Therapy. Therefore, I propose future collaboration and deeper investigation into how art education and art therapy might intersect with newcomer populations. This would allow for a more in-depth exploration of how engaging with themes of migration and memory (through art and oral history) can trigger and interlace with trauma.

7.4 Benefits and Limitations

Participants in this research project experienced several recognized benefits, including community building, fostering mindfulness, socializing with other immigrants (both similar and older age groups), building confidence, sharing skills, learning art-making and theory, and forming part of a positive, safe sharing space.

My research-creation process greatly relied on oral history's ability to overcome communication barriers, particularly for individuals sharing their testimonies. In this specific context, oral history alone is spatially limited, potentially narrowing the audience the work is intended to reach. However, by implementing oral history as a method of data collection *for* and *with* arts-based-research-creation, the participants' narratives are able to reach a far wider audience.

I will now address some of the limitations the work confronted from a research-creation context followed by ethical concerns relevant to implementing oral history as a data collection method.

The first limitation pertains to the efficacy of art as research when the practitioner lacks genuine artistic skill, a critique raised by education and psychology scholar Jane Piirto (2002). Piirto argues that artistically investigative work often fails to meet basic standards of skill and mastery in an art form. In response, Patricia Leavy (2015), an internationally recognized leader in arts-based and qualitative research, emphasizes the importance of considering a project's point of entry. She asserts that researchers without formal artistic training undertaking art research should prioritize learning the craft. While some contend that artistic research must meet established art criteria,⁵¹ thereby requiring extensive artistic training for studio-based researchers, Leavy counters that artistic research is not "art for art's sake"; rather, it is artistic, and *more*. She maintains that its value is better judged on its usefulness, prompting the question: "What is a piece of art good *for*?" She defends this by framing art as "a 'doing' activity," suggesting that learning is best achieved through practice (Leavy, 2015, p. 29). Research-creation detractors, however, argue that when social sciences adopt artistic research methods, they push discourse towards an irrational and subjective vision of empirical work, suggesting such a partnership would not provide trustworthy, generalizable, or credible information (Pariser, 2009; Piirto, 2002).

Another critique of artistic research practices is the common underrepresentation of various groups. Leavy (2015) notes prevalent distortions and stereotypical portrayals in artistic

⁵¹ For instance, the Fonds de recherche du Québec – Société et Culture (FRQSC) defines research-creation as based on "a sustained creative or artistic practice" (FRQSC, 2025), which implies a kind of professionalization. Similarly, NSCAD University defines research-creation as "a form of arts-based practice that undertakes rigorous inquiry and generates new knowledge." This suggests a professionalized approach as well where artistic methods are employed systematically to produce valid new insights (NSCAD University, n.d.).

representation, highlighting how some groups have been systematically privileged over others. However, art's power to defamiliarize – to compel people to look at something anew – is pivotal to social change and community strengthening. To fulfill its political, anti-oppressive potential, multidimensional portrayals must be presented in art-as-research practice (Leavy, 2015). While I generally agree with Leavy's practicality argument, I would also contend that an artwork's ultimate purpose is not always immediately discernible. The creator/researcher may not initially know its full impact, as interpretations typically lie with the receiver(s) and can vary significantly across contexts, individuals, and moments.

The second limitation my work confronted stemmed from the inherent openness of "research-creation" and its diverse, sometimes contradictory, defining methods. This challenged me in clearly foreseeing and defining the final product and outcome of this research project. As I mentioned in my methodology chapter, research-creation theorists Chapman and Sawchuk (2012) posit four subcategories of research-creation: "research-for-creation," "research-from-creation," a "creative ([re]) presentation of research," and "creation-as-research". In the early stages of this work, I did not always clearly understand where this doctoral research fit among these categories. That said, the authors agree that these categories are generally connected, not easily divided, and often materialize in non-linear, continuous, or spontaneous ways. As I worked, I found comfort in the community. This experience fostered a more expansive perspective of creative practice, one that includes not only the artwork but also its encompassing understanding and representation (Smith & Dean, 2009). Thus, the final result comprised the community art exhibition and the community recipe-book zine, which compiled

the artworks and also served as a coloring book for all ages. It also included additional artistic contributions of my own, as described in Chapters 4 and 6.

The third limitation I would like to address concerns relational power dynamics between myself and my participants/co-researchers. Throughout the project, I became increasingly aware of how my multifaceted status – as an immigrant, emerging university researcher, community artist, and co-participant – could influence power dynamics and the distribution of authority within the research. For instance, I worried that participants, especially younger women, might feel pressured to create “good” art or narratives that aligned with my academic goals, rather than expressing themselves authentically. This concern stemmed from my perceived authority as a university researcher and trained artist. I was also mindful that participants might self-censor their creative output, prioritizing my perceived approval over genuine self-expression, given my various roles in the project. To address these concerns, I leveraged the collaborative nature of oral history and research-creation (Conrad & Sinner, 2015; Zembrzycki, 2009) by having them co-author our published work in the community recipe book, ensuring their voices were centered as much as my own. This allowed participants and I to collectively explore our shared and individual experiences of migrant identities and cultural integration within our new environments and realities (Greene, 2000), despite differences in background or values. This approach mitigated power dynamics by offering an opportunity to creatively share similar experiences, moving away from a conventional top-down knowledge exchange that would position me as the ‘expert’ rather than a co-researcher and learner. Additionally, I addressed this concern by supporting and democratically practicing “dual

authority” (High, 2009, p. 13). This meant consciously acknowledging and balancing both the participant’s expertise and my own as a researcher. By implementing collaborative practices throughout the entire research process, I ensured their voice and agency were prioritized, even within the academic framework of the research project. Consequently, interviewees were not passive sources but active co-creators of the historical record. Their choices regarding what to share, how to frame it, and what to emphasize were fully respected and integrated. Further, I committed to continuous self-reflexivity and accountability throughout the research process to uphold these principles. For instance, I worked towards developing the interview questions alongside participants. After interviews were conducted, I provided them with recordings so they could edit or contextualize anything further. This encouraged the co-production of artwork and knowledge that prioritized the diverse cultures, voices, and lived experiences of newly arrived immigrants. I was confronted with multiple instances, however, when my own plans had to be adjusted and renegotiated due to the collaborative nature of my chosen methods.

A final personal limitation in this study concerns the gains reported in the data analysis for arts-based and arts-informed research studies identified in my proposal’s literature review. Upon careful analysis, these gains appeared less clear due to the open-ended nature of research-creation and arts-based research guidelines for result assessment. I believe we need changes in how researchers report their use and data analysis of visual methods. This would provide more clarity on how these methods support the research process. Likewise, a stronger structure may be needed to support the techniques used to analyze and interpret diverse

artworks, enabling researchers to quantify, measure, or at least specifically describe the benefits and results of using arts-based methods.

Currently, few established criteria exist for assessing rigor in research-creation or arts-based research. The many research papers and other resources I reviewed offered limited methodological information, suggesting a potential need for developing methodological protocols and quality appraisal tools in this area. While such development was beyond the scope of this particular project, I worked diligently to create clearer systems for data analysis in Chapter 5. To mitigate this limitation, I prioritized transparency, reflexivity, and interdisciplinary collaboration. I engaged in detailed reflection on the research process and incorporated feedback from participants and peers. I clearly documented the research process and explained the rationale behind artistic choices and data collection methods in Chapter 5. I also deliberately reflected on my own biases and assumptions throughout the research process, acknowledging their potential influence on my interpretations. Additionally, I integrated data from interviews and observations alongside the artistic outputs. However, in my opinion, further research is needed on how researchers and participants engage with research-creation and arts-based methods, particularly in the analysis phase. This will help develop appropriate assessment tools, foster proper academic appreciation, and ensure validity in these innovative research approaches.

Despite the rich insights gleaned from integrating visual practice and oral history, a potential area for further methodological development lies in the systematic approach to visual data collection and analysis itself, particularly from the perspective of Gillian Rose's (2016)

Visual Methodologies. While this research project effectively leverages artworks as a means of expression and storytelling, the nuanced ways in which the visual material itself constitutes data – beyond its thematic content – remains somewhat underexplored. This could mean missing deeper analytical layers related to an artwork’s formal properties, material choices, or compositional strategies. Moreover, challenges in capturing the full, dynamic process of art-making in a 3D medium like assemblage, for instance, as opposed to just the final product, may limit access to crucial insights regarding participants’ decision-making, negotiations with materials, and evolving ideas during creation. To more fully engage with visual data, and drawing on Rose’s emphasis on understanding images within their “site of the image,” “site of production,” and “site of spectatorship,” I would integrate more specific visual analysis techniques if I were to conduct this research again. For instance, connecting with participants’ work would not only involve discussing what the artwork *represents* thematically, but also delving into *how* the choice of particular objects, their textures, spatial relationships, or color palettes within their compositions actively *constructs* meaning. Furthermore, by explicitly inviting participants to articulate their own “reading” of their completed pieces – how their art speaks to them – and potentially facilitating peer interpretation, the project would then tap into the “site of spectatorship” as a rich source of participant-led meaning-making. This would provide a more comprehensive visual methodology (Rose, 2016) and enhance the authority of their own interpretations of their research-creation, which LeRue (2024) posits is a primary factor of community-based-research-creation.



Figure 139: *Alacena*. Artwork by Cecilia Salazar. Mixed-Media. 2021



Figure 140: *Thanksgiving*. Artwork by Joan Y.L. Mixed-Media. 2022



Figure 141: *Pescado al Horno*. Artwork by Valeria Campos. Clay and paint. 2021

7.5 Significance and Contributions to Knowledge

My doctoral research project contributes to the field of Art Education by beginning to provide a framework for the data analysis and discussion of visual works that emerge from socially engaged art practices. My analytical approach not only interprets the thematic content of participant artworks – such as representations of food, memory, and cultural heritage – but also systemically examines their formal properties, material choices, and compositional strategies. This method articulates *how* these visual elements actively construct meaning, allowing for a deeper understanding of immigrants' evolving identities and sense of belonging in their new Canadian environment. By documenting the art-making process and by incorporating participants' own 'readings' of their creations, the research reveals the nuanced ways in which visual language serves as a powerful means of self-expression, identity reconstruction, and cross-cultural dialogue. These insights can directly inform pedagogical practices in art education, offering concrete strategies for fostering empathetic understanding, celebrating diverse cultural narratives, and empowering new Canadians to articulate their unique experiences through visual means.

This studio-based research aims to further demonstrate the benefits of creative engagement for vulnerable populations and to cooperatively represent and express the integration challenges immigrants can face. Methodologically, it aspires to advance the emergent practices of linking oral history and creative expression as a cohesive approach⁵². Furthermore, this research intends to advance broader social knowledge of immigrants' changing identities and senses of belonging by exposing diverse audiences to the participants' and my own artwork. I believe that through the research findings and the art created, the broader public can gain further enhanced understanding and respect for new Canadians' 'otherness.' As Eisner (2008) persuasively states:

Experiencing a situation in a form that allows you to walk in the shoes of another is one way to know one aspect of it. Empathy is a means to understanding, and strong empathic feelings may provide deep insight into what others are experiencing. In that sense, the arts in research promote a form of understanding that is derived or evoked through empathic experience. (pp. 6–7)

This research challenges and pushes forward my evolving artistic studio practice as a socially engaged community visual artist, testing new limits to raise awareness and collaboratively advocate for positive social change, empathy, and kindness amidst the uneven power distributions faced by diverse socio-political experiences locally and globally.

⁵² In this regard, see also the 2023 doctoral dissertation of Lea Kabiljo, "Beyond the Interview: Oral History x Photography Research-Creation methodology for the enhancement of social-emotional competences for teacher candidates in art education."

The compiled research findings translate diverse oral histories of hopes and evolving migratory identities. These findings hopefully inspire by promoting the idea that “knowing is always about relationships” (Eisner, 2008, p. 5), while also stressing the importance of acknowledging multiple forms of knowing. By observing, commenting on, exploring, and addressing the gap in conversations about immigrants’ and refugee claimants’ social realities, this studio-based and collaborative art education research served as an alternative platform. It leveraged art’s influential power – regarding food, culture, integration, community, memory, and identity – to reach, project, and celebrate marginalized voices and stories. Additionally, it mindfully contributed to the conversation by carefully speaking *with* the community (as an active member), and simultaneously empowering co-researchers to speak *for themselves*, rather than me speaking or making work *for* them as both artist and emerging researcher.

Despite the limitations of this research project, I strongly believe it holds significant potential as a foundation for a beneficial, longer-term initiative. I foresee expanding this project to a larger platform, potentially at both provincial and federal levels, with the aim of supporting the growing immigrant population in their cultural integration into multicultural Canada. This work is particularly relevant amidst the controversial political atmosphere of 2025. In this new era, marked by toxic and xenophobic narratives surrounding “others,” immigration, and displacement – where Hispanic communities, among others, face increasing discrimination and targeting – these findings offer a more hopeful counter-narrative. The research indicates that the project design and facilitation by an implicated, caring researcher can foster a safer, more inclusive, positive, and mindful environment for diverse cultural and migratory identities.

This would allow these identities to flourish and contribute to both the collective well-being and economic growth of Canada's multi-ethnic society. Such an initiative would not only benefit newcomer immigrant populations but also provide important, socially engaged employment opportunities for present and future art educators, art therapists, anthropologists, sociologists, and community-based artists across the country.

Throughout this investigation and field work, I continuously considered and revisited how constructing and exploring thematic notions of identity through art-making and storytelling can promote newly arrived immigrants' personal transformation and social reconstruction. My interest in how the cross-disciplinary integration of visual practice and oral history enhances the impact of these activities for participants in diverse settings and from varying backgrounds continues to grow and I will continue my work. I remain hopeful and reassured by the gathered results that I'll be able to contribute further from my new whereabouts in the North York region of Ontario, with its own expanding newcomer populations. With a population of over 1.2 million, the York Regional Municipality is one of Canada's most diverse and rapidly expanding communities. More than 84% of the region's population growth between 2016 and 2021 can be attributed to recent immigrants alone (York Region, 2023). North York, Ontario, is known for its linguistic diversity, with residents speaking over 120 languages including Cantonese, Mandarin, and Iranian Persian. Almost 60% of people in York Region are multilingual; beyond the top three, other commonly spoken languages in the area include Tagalog, Spanish, Portuguese, Tamil, Italian and Urdu (Toronto City Planning, 2024).

This research aims to contribute to both the fields of art education and oral history. In doing so, I echo Eisner's (2008) belief that "the products of this research are closer in function to deep conversation and insightful dialogue than they are to error-free conclusions" (p. 7). By acknowledging that such knowledge isn't always expressible in ordinary discourse, and by reaffirming through a new lens that "an education of the life of feeling is best achieved through an education in and through the arts" (Eisner, 2008, p. 7), this research contributes to the broader conversation on immigration and community-arts-based practice. I believe it's possible to establish learning environments that actively strive toward a more just, equitable, and democratic post-capitalist future (Anderson et al., 2023) by promoting new social relationships and educational models that subvert prevailing ideologies.



Figure 142: *Pozole*.
Artwork by Alejandra
Lozano Garza. Mixed-
media. 2021



Figure 143: *En la Alacena*.
Artwork by Paola Polanco
Torres. Mixed-Media.
2021



Figure 144: *Tazón con
orgullo Panameño: Bowl
for Serving Panama Pride*.
Artwork by M. Caceres.
Clay, paper and paint.
2021



Figure 145: *Tazón*.
Artwork by Cecilia Salazar.
Clay, paint. 2022



Figure 146: *Casamiento*. Artwork by Sarai Rivas de Edey. Clay, paint, rice, raw beans, string. 2022

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Appendix A: Research Invitation

Good day, I hope this message finds you well amongst the current uncertainty that our world faces. My name is Arianna Garcia-Fialdini and I am an ABD/PhD Candidate in Art Education here at Concordia University. I would like to approach you today with a specific proposal for an artistic research–creation project that will be fully funded and ready to begin implementation effective immediately as of this fall of September 2020.

Before going into specifics pertaining the project, I thought it would be relevant to mention that I have had the great opportunity of volunteering and collaborating artistically with diverse organizations in Montreal over the past 5–7 years that work predominantly with newly arrived immigrants and refugees. The previous organization I was fortunate enough to work with for the last 5 years has recently informed me that it has had to unfortunately suspend its activities until further notice, due to both an inability to renew funds as well as due to the current COVID–19 situation that continues to unfold world–wide.

In this specific community (as well as in others that you will find listed in my attached curriculum vitae), my artistic background, fluency, and visual art skill set helped the organization achieve and artistically express its visions and goals with specific project campaigns. For example, I helped the participants design posters, banners, info–graphics and tool kits; develop drawing and painting techniques; and create marionettes and masks as well as present and organize diverse artist talks/collaborations from different local (and socially engaged) community artists. It is with great sadness that my collaboration with this specific site ends due to these unforeseen circumstances, but I will cherish our artistic exchanges fondly as I approach new exciting partnerships with new individuals in solidarity.

As part of my PhD dissertation, I am currently working on a project titled *Preparing, Serving and Sharing Stories: Immigrants' exploration of identity through Art– making, Oral History, Food and Memory*. The goal of my research is to advance oral history and research–creation methods to explore the pedagogical impact of collaborative art practices on new Canadians' sense of identity and belonging, and consider the role of food sharing in this process as a creative mode of connection with newly arrived immigrants from diverse backgrounds/contexts. This project will explore how newly arrived immigrants develop their sense of identity, drawing on elicited oral history narratives emerging from communal gastronomic experiences and bridging notions of belonging and integration into new environments and realities. I will use food to illustrate how traditional cultural meals combine comfort, connection and ties to one's country of origin, and community building, while simultaneously creating relational gatherings that reveal the complex social and political conditions affecting migrant experiences in Montreal.

By means of diverse virtual and at–a–distance studio workshops and collaborations, my hope is for this studio–based practice to help in representing or expressing the process of integration that immigrants might face and be challenged by.

Because of its' interdisciplinary nature, the success of my investigation depends largely on collaboration with newly arrived immigrants who plan to stay in Canada permanently. Participation is volunteer based, and upon confirming participation I will be sending out monthly art-kits via mail (a total of 4-5 T.B.C.) and contact participants individually in order to conduct oral history life-story interviews. After the one-on-one meeting with each participant, I will arrange for a third meeting where I will ask participants for their feedback on their experience in order to co-consult curatorial logistics on both the final art work that will be showcased and their contribution to the final community zine/recipe book.

With great excitement and motivation, I would like to extend this participation offer to members of CAFLA, in order to see (if you see fit and appropriate) if there would perhaps be any community interest from members in participating in this specific, fully funded, project. Once again, the project aims to begin as of early September, 2020.

For the purposes of this project, it is important to mention that interested participants are under absolutely no obligation to participate in this study and there are similarly no consequences if they decide not to participate after all. It is of utmost importance for potential participants to feel completely free to decide whether they are interested in taking part in this project or not as they see fit and as it evolves by gaging their interest in it. Participants are similarly free to withdraw from the research at any time up until research findings are made public, without consequences. I would like to re-emphasize that participation in this research is entirely voluntary. There are no known or anticipated risks to participating in this study.

If individuals were to agree to be part of this research it will nonetheless be necessary for them to sign a consent form at the time of their interview. I can forward you a copy for reference in the next few weeks. I would be more than happy to go over the form with any interested students as well as discuss and answer any specific concerns or questions that may arise from it. For further details or project information please feel free to contact me at ariannisquis@gmail.com or 514-704-7308.

I hope to hear back from you regarding the opportunity to engage and collaborate with CAFLA, and hope interested members may agree to be part of my research study.

Kind regards,

Arianna Garcia-Fialdini
ABD/PhD. Candidate, Art Education
Concordia University, Mtl. Qc
www.garfiart.com

Appendix B: Participant Information

Study Title: Preparing, Serving and Sharing Stories: Immigrants' exploration of identity through Art-making, Oral History, Food and Memory.

Researcher: Arianna Garcia-Fialdini

Researcher's Contact Information: arianna.garciafialdini@concordia.ca
514-703-7308, www.garfiart.com

- This project is being initiated in the context of how community art practices and initiatives can positively impact the process of cultural integration into Canada for newcomers.
- The project aims to offer a series of artistic workshops linked to the theme of identity, homemade recipes from Latin American countries, community, migration and the process of integration to Canada.
- The researcher hopes to fill a gap in scholarly knowledge about how community art educational platforms can spark new connections on how coexistence and exchange through food affects the process of cultural integration and builds new community connections.
- This research project has the support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council as well as the Fonds du Recherche du Quebec en Société et Culture.
- Thanks to participants' collaboration in this project, the researcher anticipates that it will contribute to offering opportunities for building community, fostering mindfulness, socializing and finding common experience with other immigrants from similar or differing backgrounds, building confidence, sharing skills, learning art-making and art theory, forming part of a positive safe sharing space as well as extra support in a time of COVID-19.
- Applications to participate in this research project are based entirely on a voluntary basis and are free of charge.
- Art kits will be mailed on a monthly basis to interested participants directly to their home address where a new artistic technique and artist will be introduced and explored through an online platform following the theme around ideas of traditional home recipes from around Latin America. Each art kit will be delivered free of charge once per month for a total of 5 months.
- After the completion of the 5 workshops, interested participants will have their completed creations and art pieces professionally documented and compiled into a community recipe zine-book. Copies of these will be distributed to each participating artist.
- A final exhibition at a local art gallery will take place upon the completion of the 5 workshops. Interested participants will be invited to showcase (free of charge) their desired words in the closing group show and be invited to attend the opening night Vernissage of the event.

- The artistic workshops that will be offered as part of the project to prepare the community cookbook include:
 Workshop #1: Homemade recipes and migration addressed through a drawing workshop.
 Objective: To learn introductory drawing and sketching techniques.
 Main activity: Introduction to drawing and sketching techniques, informal conversation around the theme of migration and homemade recipes from our countries.
 Date: Thursday, March 25 2–3:30pm, or Saturday, March 27 from 1:30–3pm
 Duration: 1 hour 30 mins approx.
 Workshop #2: Home recipes and memory approached through a painting workshop.
 Objective: To learn introductory water-based painting techniques.
 Main activity: Introduction to painting techniques, informal conversation around the theme of memory and homemade recipes from our countries.
 Date: Thursday April 22nd 2–3:30pm or Saturday April 24th from 1:30–3pm
 Duration: 1 hour 30 mins approx.
 Workshop #3: Homemade recipes and identity approached through a collage/bricolage workshop.
 Objective: To learn introductory collage and bricolage and mixed media techniques.
 Main activity: Introduction to collage and DIY techniques and mixed media, informal conversation around the theme of identity and homemade recipes from our countries.
 Date: Thursday May 20 2–3:30pm or Saturday May 22 from 1:30–3pm
 Duration: 1 hour 30 mins approx.
 Workshop #3: Homemade recipes and identity approached through a collage/bricolage workshop.
 Objective: To learn introductory collage and DIY and mixed media techniques.
 Main activity: Introduction to collage and DIY techniques and mixed media, informal conversation around the theme of identity and homemade recipes from our countries.
 Date: Thursday May 20 2–3:30pm or Saturday May 22 from 1:30–3pm
 Duration: 1 hour 30 mins approx.
 Workshop #4: Homemade recipes and community addressed through an Assemblage workshop.
 Objective: To learn introductory techniques of the Assemblage art form.
 Main activity: Introduction to Assemblage techniques, informal conversation around the theme of community and homemade recipes from our countries.
 Date: Thursday June 24th 2–3:30pm or Saturday June 26th from 1:30–3pm
 Duration: 1 hour 30 mins approx.
 Workshop #5: Homemade recipes and solidarity approached through a clay sculpture workshop.
 Objective: To learn introductory clay sculpting techniques.
 Main activity: Introduction to clay sculpture techniques, informal conversation around the theme of solidarity and homemade recipes from our countries.
 Date: Thursday July 22nd 2–3:30pm or Saturday July 24th from 1:30–3pm

Appendix C: Sample Consent Script

This is the information and consent form that I am required by Concordia University's ethics office to have you read and sign before participating in any of the offered workshops and conducting your oral history interview. It breaks down the research project by describing the purpose of the research, what your participation will entail, and important information about how you are protected as a research participant and collaborator. This has to do with things like confidentiality, risks, benefits, and the conditions of your participation. In order to ensure I have your informed consent, I would like to go through the form together before you choose to sign it. Please feel free to ask me any questions you may have as we go along. Once completed, please check the box if you accept the conditions, write out your name as you would like it to appear in place of signing and leave the form with me here or email it to me at ariannisquis@gmail.com before we begin the interview and set up our final exhibition.

Appendix D: Information and Consent Form

INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

Study Title: *Preparing, Serving and Sharing Stories*: Immigrants' exploration of identity through Art- making, Oral History, Food and Memory

Researcher: Arianna Garcia - Fialdini

Researcher's Contact Information: 514-704-7308, ariannisquis@gmail.com

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Kathleen Vaughan

Faculty Supervisor's Contact Information: 514-848-2424 x4677, kathleen.vaughan@concordia.ca

Source of funding for the study: Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Doctoral Fellowship

You are being invited to participate in the research study mentioned above. This form provides information about what participating would mean. Please read it carefully before deciding if you want to participate or not. If there is anything you do not understand, or if you want more information, please ask the researcher.

A. PURPOSE

The purpose of the research is to explore the pedagogical impact of collaborative art practices on new Canadians' sense of identity and belonging, and consider the role of food sharing in this process as a creative mode of connection.

B. PROCEDURES

If you participate, you will be asked to participate in a series of oral history interviews and life narrative workshops. You will also be asked to participate in communal gastronomic experiences where you will be encouraged to share and reflect on notions of belonging and integration into new environments and realities. This means you will be asked to participate and attend relational gatherings that will reveal social and political conditions that affect migrant experiences in Montreal by sharing a dish from your home country that reminds you of home or a recipe to share with the group (orally or in written form). At a later date, you will be asked to participate in a series of introductory studio community art education workshops at the Immigrant Workers Centre headquarters where you will have the opportunity to turn your recipe or meal into a visual artistic representation in a medium of your choice. The resulting artwork will be documented (with your permission) and compiled into a final zine or community art recipe book of which you will be given copies. Finally, you will participate in a micro-exhibition with other participants that are collaborating in this project in which the art work you complete will be showcased.

In total, participating in this study will take approximately 7 months, which will involve approximately 20-40 hours of your time.

C. RISKS AND BENEFITS

You might face certain risks by participating in this research. These risks include: Potential psychological and emotional discomfort during or after the oral history interviews and life narrative workshops.

Potential benefits include: Building community, fostering mindfulness, socializing with other immigrants from similar or older age groups, building confidence, sharing skills, learning art-making and art theory, and forming part of a positive safe sharing space.

D. CONFIDENTIALITY

The researcher will gather the following information as part of this research: Oral history interviews will be permanently and safely archived at the Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling (COHDS), situated at Concordia University. Your artwork will be documented extensively throughout your process of execution and once completed. This will be returned to you once the data process is concluded.

The researcher will not allow anyone to access the information, except people directly involved in conducting the research. We will only use the information for the purposes of the research described in this form.

You will be given the choice as to which level of disclosure you wish for your real identity to be disclosed. If you chose so, the information gathered will be anonymous. That means that it will not be possible to make a link between you and the information you provide.

You also have the choice of having the information you grant protected by having you provide a pseudonym. In this case, the information provided will be linked to you, but you may choose to provide only a fictitious name.

The researcher intends to publish the results of this research. Please indicate below whether you accept to be identified in the publications:

☐ I accept that my name and the information I provide appear in publications of the results of the research.

☐ Please do not publish my name as part of the results of the research.

The researcher will destroy the information five years after the end of the study.

F. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

Participation in this research is optional. If you do participate, you can stop at any time. If you decide that you don't want us to use your information, you must tell the researcher before May1st 2022 (or deadline limit / art show Vernissage date T.B.C.).

There are no negative consequences for not participating, stopping in the middle, or asking us not to use your information.

You will not be compensated for your participation in this research.

G. PARTICIPANT'S DECLARATION

I have read and understood this form. I have had the chance to ask questions and any questions have been answered. I agree to participate in this research under the conditions described.

NAME (please print) _____

SIGNATURE _____

DATE _____

If you have questions about the scientific or scholarly aspects of this research, please contact the researcher. Her contact information is on page 1. You may also contact their faculty supervisor.

If you have concerns about ethical issues in this research, please contact the Manager, Research Ethics, Concordia University, 514.848.2424 ex. 7481 or oor.ethics@concordia.ca.

Formulario de información y consentimiento

FORMULARIO DE INFORMACIÓN Y CONSENTIMIENTO

Título del estudio: Preparar, servir y compartir historias: La exploración de la identidad de los inmigrantes a través del arte, la historia oral, la comida y la memoria.

Investigadora: Arianna Garcia - Fialdini

Información de contacto de la investigadora: 514-704-7308, ariannisquis@gmail.com

Supervisora docente: Dra. Kathleen Vaughan].

Información de contacto de la supervisora:

514-848-2424 x4677, kathleen.vaughan@concordia.ca

Fuente de financiación del estudio: Beca de doctorado del Consejo de Investigación de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades (SSHRC)

Se le invita a participar en el estudio de investigación mencionado anteriormente. Este formulario proporciona información sobre lo que significaría participar. Por favor, léalo detenidamente antes de decidir si desea participar o no. Si hay algo que no entiende, o si desea más información, por favor pregunte al investigador.

A. PROPÓSITO

El propósito de la investigación es explorar el impacto pedagógico de las prácticas artísticas colaborativas en el sentido de identidad y pertenencia de los nuevos canadienses, y considerar el papel de compartir comida en este proceso como modo creativo de conexión.

B. PROCEDIMIENTOS

Si participa, se le pedirá que participe en una serie de entrevistas de historia oral y talleres de narración de la vida. También se le pedirá que participe en experiencias gastronómicas comunitarias en las que se le animará a compartir y reflexionar sobre las nociones de pertenencia e integración en nuevos entornos y realidades. Esto significa que se le pedirá que participe y asista a reuniones relacionales que revelarán las condiciones sociales y políticas que afectan a las experiencias de los inmigrantes en Montreal compartiendo un plato de su país de origen que le recuerde a su hogar o una receta para compartir con el grupo (oralmente o por escrito). En una fecha posterior, se le pedirá que participe en una serie de talleres introductorios de educación artística comunitaria en la sede del Centro de Trabajadores Inmigrantes, donde tendrá la oportunidad de convertir su receta o comida en una representación artística visual en un medio de su elección. El trabajo artístico resultante se documentará (con tu permiso) y se recopilará en un fanzine final o en un recetario de arte comunitario del que se te darán copias. Por último, participarás en una microexposición con otros participantes que colaboran en este proyecto en la que se expondrán las obras de arte que hayas realizado. En total, participar en este estudio le llevará aproximadamente 7 meses, lo que supondrá unas 20-40 horas de su tiempo.

C. RIESGOS Y BENEFICIOS

Es posible que se enfrente a ciertos riesgos al participar en esta investigación. Estos riesgos incluyen: Posible malestar psicológico y emocional durante o después de las entrevistas de historia oral y los talleres de narración de vida.

Los beneficios potenciales incluyen: Crear comunidad, fomentar la atención plena, socializar con otros inmigrantes de grupos de edad similares o mayores, aumentar la confianza, compartir habilidades, aprender creación artística y teoría del arte, y formar parte de un espacio de intercambio seguro y positivo.

D. CONFIDENCIALIDAD

El investigador recopilará la siguiente información como parte de esta investigación: Las entrevistas de historia oral se archivarán de forma permanente y segura en el Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling (COHDS), situado en la Universidad Concordia. Su obra de arte será ampliamente documentada a lo largo de su proceso de ejecución y una vez finalizada. Se le devolverá una vez concluido el proceso de recogida de datos.

El investigador no permitirá que nadie acceda a la información, excepto las personas directamente implicadas en la realización de la investigación. Sólo utilizaremos la información para los fines de la investigación descritos en este formulario.

Se le dará la opción de elegir el nivel de divulgación que desea para su identidad real. Si así lo elige, la información recopilada será anónima. Esto significa que no será posible establecer un vínculo entre usted y la información que proporcione.

También tiene la opción de que la información que conceda esté protegida si proporciona un seudónimo. En este caso, la información facilitada estará vinculada a usted, pero podrá optar por facilitar sólo un nombre ficticio.

El investigador tiene la intención de publicar los resultados de esta investigación. Indique a continuación si acepta que se le identifique en las publicaciones:

☐ Acepto que mi nombre y la información que facilito aparezcan en las publicaciones de los resultados de la investigación.

☐ Por favor, no publiquen mi nombre como parte de los resultados de la investigación.

El investigador destruirá la información cinco años después de finalizado el estudio.

F. CONDICIONES DE PARTICIPACIÓN

La participación en esta investigación es opcional. Si participa, puede dejar de hacerlo en cualquier momento. Si decide que no desea que utilicemos su información, debe comunicárselo al investigador antes del 1 de mayo de 2022 (o fecha límite / fecha de Vernissage de la exposición de arte T.B.C.).

No hay consecuencias negativas por no participar, dejarlo a medias o pedirnos que no utilicemos tu información.

No se le compensará por su participación en esta investigación.

G. DECLARACIÓN DEL PARTICIPANTE

He leído y comprendido este formulario. He tenido la oportunidad de hacer preguntas y se me ha respondido a todas ellas. Acepto participar en esta investigación en las condiciones descritas.

NOMBRE (en letra de imprenta) _____

FIRMA _____

FECHA _____

Si tiene alguna pregunta sobre los aspectos científicos o académicos de esta investigación, póngase en contacto con el investigador. Sus datos de contacto figuran en la página 1. También puede ponerse en contacto con el supervisor de su facultad.

Si tiene dudas sobre cuestiones éticas de esta investigación, póngase en contacto con el Responsable de Ética de la Investigación de la Universidad Concordia, 514.848.2424 ex. 7481 o oor.ethics@concordia.ca.

Appendix E: Life–Story Interview Guide

BASIC INFORMATION

NAME:

EMAIL:

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN:

APPROX. ARRIVAL DATE INTO CANADA:

1. Can you tell me a little bit about your migration journey to Canada?
2. Are there certain tastes or staple ingredients you would associate to your country of origin's food or cooking?
3. What is it you find yourself being the most nostalgic about upon your migration?
4. Do you find yourself enjoying and or doing a lot of cooking at your home upon your arrival to Canada?
5. Do you find you long for your country of origin's food and traditional dishes since you began to settle in to your new geographical whereabouts?
6. Was there a specific dish that you craved and found yourself remembering upon your migration to Canada?
7. What was it about this dish that you found yourself remembering or longing for? Would you tie it to your childhood? Or to older years?
8. When did you first try this specific dish?
9. What was it about the dish that you liked or disliked? Has that changed as you grow older?
10. Have you tried recreating or making this dish upon your arrival to Canada?
11. Were there any challenges along the way as you tried to recreate/make it? How did you overcome these?
12. Was it straight forward to get access to all ingredients involved in your recipe/dish making? If not, did you find yourself substituting some ingredients for others? What impacted your decision-making process in this? Are the substitutions ingredients native to your country or how did you come across them?
13. If you were to take on making a visual representation of this recipe and dish, how do you think you would go about it? What fuels these choices if any?
14. Is there a specific story or memory that comes to mind that you would feel comfortable sharing that is prompted when you think back on this specific dish/recipe?
15. If you were to decide to make a visual artwork representation of this recipe/dish, would you think it important for this memory or story to accompany your artwork? Why or why not would this be important to you?
16. Are there any other recipes you would perhaps be interested in exploring, sharing or recreating visually and creatively now or in the future? Can you tell me a little bit about why these would come to mind?

Appendix F: Art Workshop Mail Kit 1

Welcome to the first workshop in the series of Creative Workshops: Recipes and Roots! These workshops are made possible through CAFLA and the group of La Petite Enfance's efforts and will be facilitated by local artist and art educator, Arianna Garcia-Fialdini with Concordia University's Faculty of Fine Arts' support in the Department of Art Education.

You will find the following materials enclosed in your mail art kit:

- 3 varying sized graphite pencils
- 2 charcoal drawing sticks
- 1 pencil sharpener
- 1 eraser
- 1 small paper clip
- 1 paper clipboard
- 1 blurring pencil
- 1 view finder
- 1 sheet of Bristol paper
- 2 sheets of Manila paper
- 3 sheets of newsprint
- 2 sheets of 6" x 9" paper for your final artwork
- 1 pre-paid stamped, self-addressed envelope to send your final work that you complete today to be professionally documented (and become part of our community recipe book) and the official consent form
- 1 official consent form to confirm your participation in this Project

The workshop designed for this package you are receiving will take place on Thursday, March 25th from 2:00 pm – 3:30 pm and will be facilitated through the Zoom Platform by CAFLA for the Petite Enfance group of members only.

You will receive the Zoom link by mail the same day of the workshop. The session will be recorded, please contact Arianna Garcia-Fialdini directly at arianna.garciafialdini@concordia.ca if you need a copy of the recording if you are unable to connect or present.

It is important to note that part of participating in this Project includes the responsibility and commitment to read and complete the consent form that accompanies your package if you want your final work to appear in print and be part of our community cookbook (for which you will be sent approx. 10 copies of the cookbook free of charge).

If you have any questions regarding any part of this project, please contact us at 514-704-7308, arianna.garciafialdini@concordia.ca.

We wish you a very happy and fun workshop!

Thank you for participating! The CAFLA team of La Petite Enfance & Arianna Garcia-Fialdini

Appendix G: Art Workshop Mail Kit 2

Welcome to the second workshop in the series of Creative Workshops: Recipes and Roots! These workshops are made possible through CAFLA and the group of La Petite Enfance's efforts and will be facilitated by local artist and art educator, Arianna Garcia-Fialdini with Concordia University's Faculty of Fine Arts' support in the Department of Art Education.

Inside this package you will find the following materials:

- 5 brushes of different sizes
- 1 sponge
- 3 sheets of paper to clean surfaces
- 1 large sponge brush
- 5 small pots of acrylic paint
- 1 medium-sized pot of white acrylic paint
- 1 plate for mixing your paint
- 1 small cup for water (and for cleaning your brushes)
- 1 pre-paid stamped, self-addressed envelope to send your final artwork that you complete today to be professionally documented (and become part of our community recipe book) and official consent form
- 1 official consent form to confirm your participation in this Project.

The workshop designed for this package you are receiving will take place on Thursday, April 22nd from 2:00 pm – 3:30 pm and will be facilitated through the Zoom Platform by CAFLA for the Petite Enfance group of members only.

You will receive the Zoom link by mail the same day of the workshop. The session will be recorded, please contact Arianna Garcia-Fialdini directly at arianna.garciafialdini@concordia.ca if you need a copy of the recording, have any questions about the activity or would like to re-watch the video of the workshop.

It is important to note that part of participating in this project includes the responsibility and commitment to read and complete the consent form that accompanies your packet if you want your final work to appear in print and be part of our community cookbook (for which you will be sent approx. 10 copies of the cookbook free of charge at the end of the project).

For any questions or concerns you may have regarding any part of this project, please contact us at 514-704-7308, arianna.garciafialdini@concordia.ca or Mayerlyn Arteaga at CAFLA at 5142738061 and/or petiteenfance@cafla.ca – if you have any other requests regarding a personal issue or situation.

We wish you a very happy and fun workshop!

Thank you for participating!

The CAFLA team of La Petite Enfance & Arianna Garcia-Fialdini

Appendix H: Art Workshop Mail Kit 3

Welcome to the third workshop of Recetas y Raíces: Creative Workshops! These workshops are made possible through the efforts of CAFLA, the Petite Enfance group and will be facilitated by Visual Arts Specialist, Arianna Garcia-Fialdini with the support of Concordia University in the Visual Arts faculty of the Art Education department.

Within this package you will find the following materials:

- 1 brush
- 3 sheets of paper to clean surfaces
- 1 personal kit of various acrylic paints
- 10 sheets of white rice paper
- 1 bottle of white liquid glue
- 2 wooden sticks
- Various textures, buttons, textures, papers, cardboards, wires, etc.
- 1 disposable plate
- 1 disposable deep plate
- 1 spoon, 1 fork
- 1 plate to mix your paint
- 1 small cup for water (and for cleaning your brush)
- 1 sponge to clean the brush
- 1 pre-paid stamped, self-addressed envelope to send the official consent form for your artwork to be part of our community recipe book
- 1 official consent form to confirm your participation in this Project.

The workshop designed for this package you are receiving will take place on Thursday, May 20th from 2:00 pm – 3:30 pm and will be facilitated through the Zoom Platform by CAFLA for the Petite Enfance group of members only.

You will receive the Zoom link by mail the same day of the workshop. The session will be recorded, please contact Arianna Garcia-Fialdini directly at ariannisquis@gmail.com if you need a copy of the recording, have any questions about the activity or would like to re-watch the video of the workshop.

It is important to note that part of participating in this project includes the responsibility and commitment to read and complete the consent form that accompanies your packet if you want your final work to appear in print and be part of our community cookbook (for which you will be sent approx. 10 copies of the cookbook free of charge at the end of the project).

For any questions or concerns you may have regarding any part of this project, please contact us at 514-704-7308, ariannisquis@gmail.com or Mayerlyn Arteaga at CAFLA 5142738061 and/or petiteenfance@cafla.ca – if you have any other requests regarding any topic or personal situation.

We wish you a very happy and fun workshop!

Thank you for participating!

The CAFLA team of La Petite Enfance & Arianna Garcia-Fialdini

Appendix I: Invitation to Follow-up Discussion

Good afternoon X,

I hope this email finds you all well and in good health! I wanted to take the opportunity to thank you once again for participating in my research project, for your artistic contribution and participation in the Gallery exhibition, for the time you gave to the interview, as well as your interest and contributions to the community recipe zine-book for the *Recipes and Roots* project.

Given the interest some participants expressed in reconnecting at a later date for a follow-up meeting, I'm writing to see if you would be interested in meeting up to debrief and/or engage in a discussion as the project comes to a close. This would take place on a one-on-one basis at CAFLA once again, no audio recording would be necessary, only some note-taking, and it would last 30 minutes – one hour.

I am offering this space and opportunity for me to 1) share my findings and analyses with you and 2) discuss any comments or feedback you may have about the research process, findings, and/or analysis. It is entirely optional.

If you would like more information, please contact me directly at arianna.garciafaldini@concordia.ca.

Thank you kindly in advance,

Appendix J: Follow-Up Discussion Guide

1. Do you have any comments or questions about these findings?
2. Do you have any comments, questions or concerns about the research process?
3. Did you receive and collect your artwork from the gallery show upon take down at the CAFLA offices?
4. Are you interested in participating in the community recipe-zine book and have your Oral History audio included in the digital version?
5. Are there any other questions or anything else you would like to share with me about the project?

Appendix K: Community Art Exhibition Invitation

Dear participant of the Recipes and Roots Project of CAFLA's La Petite Enfance group;

Arianna Garcia-Fialdini here, the main researcher, facilitator and instructor of the creative workshops "Recipes and Roots" at CAFLA. I hope this email finds you all well.

I am writing to share with you the latest details of the Creative Project in which you participated in one or more of the workshops offered:

On Monday, October 17, we will be mounting our Recipes and Roots Project exhibition at the Atelier Native Immigrant gallery which is located at Notre-Dame de Grace, 5442 Cote Saint Luc, Montreal, QC. The exhibition will be open to the public from Tuesday October 18th until Sunday October 30th from 10am- 5pm.

During these two weeks, with your permission, the Native Immigrant Gallery will be exhibiting to the public your artwork (and that of the other participating mothers) created during the course of our workshops that follow the theme of Recipes and Roots, speaking of the exploration of the identity of Latin American immigrants in Montreal through artistic creation, oral history, food and memory.

Today I wanted to give you advance notice of the dates, and invite you and your friends and family to join us for the exhibition opening celebration on Friday, October 21 from 5pm – 7pm where we will have the opportunity to present the exhibition to all present and celebrate the culmination of our efforts with food, refreshments and music. The event is open to the public and is completely free. Please RSVP. On the opening day, the community recipe book compiled from all the artwork and recipes that were shared by all the participants, including yours, will be released. Each participant will get 10 copies of the community recipe book that doubles as a coloring book for all ages.

At the same time, I am contacting you today to follow up on picking up your work, or to finalize the recording of your oral history that will be available to accompany your work(s) in the exhibition, giving your own voice to your experiences and recipes under the theme of the exhibition and the project. Please let me know if there is a day, time and place that best suits you to pick up the works you would like to include in the exhibition or to make the recording of your oral history. Also, please send me the recipe in writing so that I can include it with your work in the community cookbook.

Thank you very much for your time and participation in this beautiful project, and we hope you will join us (and invite your loved ones) on October 21 to celebrate this special event.

Very good afternoon and best regards,

Arianna Garcia-Fialdini

Appendix L: Recipe Book Update and Deadline Reminder

Good afternoon and Happy New Year! This is Arianna Garcia reaching out to you today, the facilitator of the CAFLA art workshops of the *Recipes and Roots* Project in which you so generously participated!

I am writing to share with you my new phone number – 647–200–9079 and to let you know that the *Recipes and Roots* community cookbook is almost ready to print with the images that came out of our projects that will also serve as a coloring book for all ages.

I estimate that the cookbook will be ready to print by the end of February! CAFLA will contact you in mid-February with the launch date so that we can all get together to celebrate this special completion of our project and give you your copies of the cookbook to share with your friends and family as you wish!

I also wanted to take this opportunity to ask you to send me by mail or WhatsApp message your name as you would like it to appear in the cookbook, your country of origin, the name of the dish or recipe that accompanies your image that you would like to share AND THE RECIPE ITSELF as you would like it to appear.

Some of you were generous enough to share an audio covering the origin of the recipe and what it means to you specifically in your new surroundings here in Canada. If anyone has not yet been able to share this recording to accompany your artwork and recipe, please let me know if you are interested so I can share with you the list of questions that you can record on your phones or via WhatsApp and answer (informally as if it were a conversation rather than necessarily an interview per se) to accompany as audio to your beautiful recipe and artwork in the recipe book and on the future website with the digital recipe book.

I am sending you today in PDF format what I have recorded for the cookbook. I ask you to please check each image that appears and let me know (by giving me the page number) which of the images are yours, the name of the dish/recipe, the recipe itself, its country of origin and your name as you want it to appear in the cookbook.

IMPORTANT – In the case that your image or an image of a work you have completed that you want to appear in the cookbook does not appear, please send me a good resolution photo to my email with your name, the name of the recipe, your country, AND THE RECIPE itself as you want it to appear.

The deadline to send this information and confirm the one that is already present is Monday, February 12th at 6pm in the evening.

I look forward to receiving this information to complete our beautiful recipe book! I hope you enjoy it as much as I do and with the pleasure it has been to have this incredible opportunity to collaborate with all of you!

A huge warm greeting to all of you and wishing you a beautiful holiday season and above all health always to you and your families.

Warm regards,

Appendix M: Final Community Workshop & Event Invitation

Good afternoon, I hope this message finds you well.

It is with great joy that I am writing to invite you and your families to the event of the official launch of our community artistic recipe book of the *RECIPES AND ROOTS* project on Wednesday, August 14, 2024 from 10 am – 11:30 am at the *Salle – Espace des Possibles* located at 6450 Ave. Christophe Colomb.

We hope you can join us for this exciting launch as well as to participate in our closing family art workshop. Refreshments and light snacks will be provided.

This project has been made possible through CAFLA and La Petite Enfance groups' continuous efforts and support as well as Concordia University, generous funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada as well as from the Fonds de Recherche du Quebec en Société et Culture.

For any questions or concerns regarding the event please contact me directly at arianna.garciafialdini@concordia.ca or Ms. Nidia Bravo at petiteenfance@cafla.ca .

I look forward to seeing you all again to celebrate in person and to have the opportunity to create together!

Best regards,

Appendix N: Oral History Transcripts and Translations

Maye

Mayerlyn Arteaga, 39 years of age at the time of this interview, goes by the name of “Maye”. Born and raised in San Juan de Pasto in the capital of the department of Narino, Colombia; Maye arrived in Montreal in 2018 by herself. She met her husband shortly after her arrival and was referred and encouraged by a family friend to reach out directly to CAFLA, to help her with her cultural integration into her new life in Montreal. She soon found an employment opportunity there, in family development/mental health and well-being. Early on in the Pandemic, while working as a front-line worker for CAFLA, Maye found out almost at the same time that she was both pregnant, expecting her first child, and that she had contracted COVID-19 as our first round of community-based research creation workshops took off. She was an important guiding light for me in both implementing and carrying out the *Recetas y Raíces* community art initiative, because she was the person in charge at the time the workshops started off of facilitating and organizing the community events for the group of young mothers at *La Petite Enfance*. Fortunately, Maye was able to navigate these two sets of news smoothly and safely, mainly because of how well integrated and familiarized with the group at La Petite Enfance she was from the very first workshop, as both an active participant (even before she learnt she would become a mother herself) and member of the community.

Maye attended 4 out of the 10 workshops at different times throughout the programming (which as mentioned consisted of two rounds of 5 workshops total). She was able to complete 3 different visual renditions, works and creative interpretations of one recipe from

her home country in Colombia: *Empanadas de añejo colombianas*. The first workshop she attended and helped facilitate, was the introductory drawing and sketching techniques one, where I guided participants towards creating space and thought to share with the group the diverse recipes that they brought with them to their new homes. Throughout the workshop, we covered the foundational principles of sketching and drawing from observation, as well as arranging an interesting and balanced visual composition. The session took place approximately two hours online via Zoom due to strict COVID regulations at that time.

The second workshop Maye assisted and helped co-facilitate, was the introductory painting and mixed-media methods workshop (second one in line and again held on-line) where participants learnt basic image-transfer techniques, introductory acrylic paint application, color theory and mixing techniques (recipe zine-book pages 5 & 6). This workshop was a sort of continuation for participants who had attended the first workshop that wanted to continue working on the same recipe or meal in drawing methods. Subsequently, Maye attended the fourth workshop (this time held in person) on Assemblage methods, where we concentrated on recreating a recipe of choice three-dimensionally using mixed media and collage from the perspective of the ingredients that go into the recipe as seen from our pantries (either in our new home environment in Canada or as recreated from our memory and associations from back home –recipe zine-book page 8). Maye continued to work diligently on this final artwork for the remaining duration of both her pregnancy and the workshops. She was able to join us once again a few months post-partum, for the second round of workshops in the Assemblage session. For these she chose to use her time working independently completing the

work she wanted to showcase in the exhibition, and concentrated mostly on her assemblage piece. She approached this slot as an open-studio space.

In her oral history interview, Maye recounts how for her project study and the preparation and studio exploration that went into her visual renditions, she was immediately drawn to think about what she craved food wise when she finds herself missing home most (a verbal prompt I gave specifically when introducing the research project in the first and second workshops). She reflected that what she missed the most, were moments she shared during important festive dates such as Mothers' day, Christmas, Easter, etc. Outside of those special events, she mentioned she was happy to try as many new meals and food as she was able to, which she recognizes she was not able to easily do in her own country before coming to Canada. This is how she found herself deciding on recreating her "*empanadas*", a special dish that she finds herself craving and missing greatly. She reports to have prepared them a total of four times upon her arrival and having called her mother in Pasto every single time for instructions, moral support as well as to find adequate substitutions for specific ingredients that she finds impossible to find in Montreal. As Maye recounts "*el sentido de prepararlas es de recordar mucho que (...) llegaba el día de la madre o en diciembre o en semana santa todos a visitar a mi abuelita, y pues era que íbamos a comer empanadas. Ese momento feliz de que los niños en mi infancia nos reuníamos con todos los veinticinco primos y nos hacían hacer filas como en las escuelas, para comer una empanada con café – pues en Colombia los niños toman café. Recuerdo que comparábamos cual era la mas grande, a quién le dieron más, porque la tuya tiene esa forma o la otra.... y hasta hace poco lo repetía, ahora que estoy mayor en esas*

fechas especiales con mis hermanas y mi paáa – él se sentaba en la mesa a que le sirvieran a comer– a recordar esos momentos de la infancia – era muy bonito.” {The feeling of preparing them is to remember my mother and how when Mothers’ day came around or in December or Easter we all went with her to visit my grandmother, and well we knew we would undoubtedly be eating empanadas. I recall that glorious moment where other children like me at the time would get together, all 25 of us cousins, and the grown-ups would make us line up like at school to have our empanada with a cup of coffee– because children in Colombia drink coffee. I remember that we would compare who got the biggest one, who got more, why theirs was shaped a specific way or another... and until recently we would repeat this tradition at home as I got older, during those special dates, with my sisters and my dad – he would sit at the table and wait to be served – to remember these moments from our childhood was so lovely”}.

Maye shares how there are many foods in Canada that are similar to the ones in her country, yet she perceives certain flavors and freshness levels to vary and be compromised. What she finds herself being most nostalgic about is the people, community, solidarity and exchanges among them, which she encountered strongly relating to food making and sharing. Back in Colombia she found herself being able to visit family and eating out healthily, affordably and accessibly, so she found herself having to cook a great deal more upon her arrival to Canada and when starting her own family here. The *Empanadas* trace back to her childhood, all the way back to when she was first introduced to solids as a baby. She claims that what she loves most about this particular dish, is the aspect of collaboration and community

building it always involves in its preparation and execution, as well as the symbolism it holds for celebration.

Maye recounts how the first two workshops where the dish representations were carried out with the use of charcoal and paint mediums, she found as more technical and eye-opening as to the possibilities available to her in how to go about visually recreating certain shapes, aesthetic arrangements, etc. She carried out the third and final representation via assemblage, and she felt as though it was a more intuitive process that she had to trust and flow with. She recalls it as accessing a child-like playful side of her that she had not made space for in a very long time, to create something out of nothing, in order to represent very real every-day and familiar things to her, in a smaller format. While making it, it also reminded her of how much she enjoyed organizing her pantry back home as a young girl. She shared how her mother would purposely assign this chore to her at home, once a month or so, to encourage responsibility after noticing just how much she enjoyed the task. As she continued to work on this artwork throughout her pregnancy, her husband commented one evening on how surprised he was to learn and see just how much she enjoyed working with her hands on creative projects and how artistic she was. Maye replied that it was not necessarily something she thought she was ever “good” at or even enjoyed, but that she found that the prompt given to guide the project had really allowed her to submerge herself into exploring this opportunity which she found herself enjoying and wanting to complete. Upon her various reflections and recounts, she mentions that she finds it of utmost importance for the oral history audio to accompany her

works (both for the community art exhibition and the final zine) in order to give further context to the recipe, the aesthetic choices and its symbolism for her as the artist.

Finally, she mentions that another recipe she would be interested in exploring visually and creatively in the future would be that of the “*coladas*” – fruit and vegetable blends. These, she shared, are traditionally given to pregnant women in her home town and sustained throughout both the pregnancy and post-birth to help with healing and post-partum rehabilitation/nutrition. Maye shares how throughout her pregnancy, she often craved these blends, and called her mother to find ways to recreate them as closely as possible to help her stay healthy and strong throughout her pregnancy. Her husband, who migrated from Nicaragua, mentioned that there was a similar tradition and meal in his country. They both took turns teaching each other how to make these, so that Maye could continue taking them throughout her pregnancy and after.

Throughout the interview, Maye continued to share that she comes from a very agricultural city where food is known for being very fresh. The food items from “back home” that she has found in Montreal taste old to her, and they usually come in frozen packs which affect the flavor as well. Once Maye began integrating into the community at CAFLA soon after her arrival, she quickly learnt that there were more products from her country available, as well as restaurants. However, the food tasted very differently to her, they didn’t have the same “sason criollo {creole seasoning}”, and the costs were much higher. Maye says she got used to the idea that she couldn’t have it all. She found there to be a large cultural and gastronomic difference, and she

made a big effort to integrate more and more by welcoming the Canadian/Quebecois culture through her taste buds with its own flavors and ingredients.

Her biggest migratory nostalgia is linked to learning that she has to do so many new things alone and figure them out by herself, without knowing who to ask for help without having strings attached. In like manner, missing all the important festivities from back home (dates associated with these) causes her the greatest deal of homesickness, as well as all the special food that is linked and associated to those dates, as previously mentioned. She finds those festive dates bring out the best in people, for they try the hardest to prepare and share food and meals with others. Maye feels that this difference has been very hard for her to get used to in her new life in Montreal. She has found that in her new life here, she has had to learn how to share in new ways. Nevertheless, she finds she is getting more and more accustomed to eating other and new things. She is increasingly enjoying cooking at home, for it allows her to experiment with making and trying new ingredients and things, despite still calling her mother on a regular basis to ask for recipes, preparation methods, opinions, the order in which ingredients need to be cooked in a dish. She often asks her for suggestions on substitutions, and she finds she is able to cook more successfully and tastily now. Her husband loves cooking as well, and they are able to share many moments cooking together.

Mayerlyn finds herself yearning for the *empanadas* throughout tougher moments in her day to day, because they were always readily available to her before and a big part of her dietary repertoire, despite their intricacy in preparation. Maye shares how rare it would be for only one person to prepare them by themselves back home, for they are normally prepared by a

minimum of two people. She recounts how one person takes responsibility of preparing the dough, and another one usually prepares the stuffing, leaving someone else in charge of deep frying them. Upon her migration to Canada, she has only prepared them a handful of times because she has to fulfill all those roles by herself. Similarly, at times when she feels down from not being able to return home to her family, she finds herself craving her mothers' special chicken soup. In her city, a dish known as *frito pastoso* (made out of pork meat) and the *empanadas* are always shared and enjoyed during special festive dates such as Christmas or Easter. Outside of these special nostalgic and emotive dates, Maye reports to be more than happy and willing to try and enjoy as many different cultural meals as she is able to. She recalls how the *empanadas* were specifically challenging in their preparation because they are made with a special dough called *añejo*, and the preparation to make this dough can be bought at any grocery store back home or one can watch the *abuelitas* (grandmothers) that prepare it from scratch, but there are many tricks that mothers back home have found to prepare them as close to the original hand-made ones as possible. Every time Maye makes the *empanadas*, she remembers how her mother would arrive on Mothers day, for Christmas and during holy week in Easter to bring the whole family to her *abuelita's* house where undoubtedly they would share and eat *empanadas*.

The first time Maye tried this dish was when her mother started feeding her solids at 6 months of age and her own first memory of it is from when she was five years old. She now makes her baby (a young toddler at the time of the interview) *Victoria*, enjoy them every time she has had the opportunity to make them. She makes it a point to recreate and prepare them whenever she

is able to, and despite her husband loving them, he finds they taste very different from the ones from Nicaragua. Maye's biggest cooking challenge with this dish is when making the stuffing (they can be stuffed with chicken, meat or egg) and so she finds herself preparing a stir-fry (but initially she was not sure what to put in it or the order of the preparation) that she remembers her grandmother mentioning to her once must have more salt added to or else the salt in the meat would dissipate upon frying them. From here, she recalls how the hardest part was recreating the *añejo* dough, which she felt could be similarly replicated using certain ingredients from the local Latino supermarket near her home. Repeatedly and on different occasions, she was able to find all the ingredients necessary except the *añejo*, composed of fermented flour dough. She remembered however that in Colombia, they would substitute it sometimes with the flour that is used to make arepas (pre-cooked corn flour from the brand *Doña Arepa* o *HarinaPan*) whenever they couldn't find the *añejo* flour. She finds it impacts the process a bit as well as the taste, but is the closest to it she can get.

For the closing community art exhibition project in *Recetas y Raíces*, Maye remembers me giving the participating women an orientation and prompt to search inside their memory to call upon a meaningful recipe or dish that would remind them of back home and what they left behind as well as their origin. When working towards making the dish and recipe visual, she found it challenging at first, for she does not consider herself an artist and has had no prior training in the visual arts, nor experience drawing or painting. She also considers herself a very novice "cook", and so she remembers feeling extra inadequate to live up to both these tasks. However, as she encouraged (considering she helped co-facilitate the workshops at the

beginning, when she was working for CAFLA leading the group of *La Petite Enfance*), she realized that the project was not about making something or carrying out a craft just for the sake of it. She realized that there was a much more meaningful and heartfelt connecting experience and opportunity at hand that the project was offering – to recreate and bring forth something very worthwhile and personal about where they come from and their new whereabouts and connections. At this point, Maye recalls that it became much easier for her to engage with the artistic development, and the creativity began to flow more freely through her, allowing her to lose some self-consciousness about her art-making level and instead to focus more on her expression and problem-solving skills, as she was very unfamiliar with the materials and mediums. “And this is how I chose my recipe – *Empanadas de Nariño* – a dish made with family for special dates”. Maye reports choosing it because it is a dish she lost and learnt how to make herself upon her arrival to Canada. It makes her recall the spaces and moments she shared with family despite speaking to them often. *“El amor causo esa decision, y que espero poder regresar pronto, y se que lo primero que me va a esperar es un gran plato de empanadas, porque no se hacen unas cuantas, normalmente se preparan de ochenta a cien y cuando las recalienta uno saben hasta mejor”* {Love drove that decision as well as the wish to go back home one day – to which she knows the first thing her family will have waiting for her will be a large plate of empanadas because whenever they are made the family does not make one or two or even ten, they make batches of eighty to one hundred minimum and when served as reheated leftovers they taste even better!}

Maye recalls how every January 1st, up until she was eighteen, her family would go and spend New Years' eve with her grandmother (on her mothers' side) – it was an event that could not be missed. Her grandmother would greet all her daughters and their partners, and everyone would come together to make empanadas. The men would help wash the corn brought in from the fields, to collect the wood for the firepit, and the women would cook the meals. *“As children we would watch attentively and try to make some small ones – my grandmother would spoil us and always bring us a bowl full of dough and stuffing and told us to make little tiny ones for practice. It was the best! It was better than playing or watching television, we all felt like it was amazing to be able to make our own food, both girls and boys. Once she passed away when I turned eighteen we stopped going and meeting up all together that way (we actually never did fully again) and nowadays everyone meets up in their own city”*. Maye's mother still asks and insists that every January 1st empanadas be made no matter where they all are, as a family tradition. She recalls her mother sharing with her over a telephone conversation as she prepared the artworks, that when she was a little girl, everyone in her town would gather and congregate to make empanadas collectively as a community.

For Maye's first two visual representations, she represented a plate of *empanadas* and a cup of coffee that commemorates this story and recipe. For her third representation (the assemblage), she chose to recreate a pantry – *alacena* – which is the place located in every Latinamericans' household, found next to the kitchen, where all the dried and canned foods, dishes, pots and pans are stored. She wanted to represent it from this perspective because she thinks of it as a special place where one goes to find all the ingredients needed to make a loved

recipe – a sort of “sacred place and space”, as Maye recounts, for mothers and grandmothers alike. Ever since she was a little girl, she used to organize it with care and ensure all the ingredients needed for meals were fresh, stored and accessible at hand.

The three final renditions she completed for both the art exhibition and community recipe–zine book made her want to explore and recreate many other recipes such as the *sopa de pollo*, *sancocho*, *coladas de plátano y de maíz* and *avenas*.

Ale

Alejandra Lino–Barajas, goes by the name of “Ale”, and was in her mid–thirties at the time of the interview. She had migrated to Montreal from Mexico with her four–year–old daughter, expecting her second child and her husband. The migration journey itself and the reasons behind it were not shared, but Ale mentioned that it all happened very quickly and within a matter of months. They arrived to Montreal without knowing or having any networks of support they knew of, or counted on. She had previously visited Montreal as a younger single woman for a few weeks, but she had never considered the possibility of moving there one day. During that visit, she befriended a woman she had travelled with many years ago, but she chose not to reach out to her until she made sure that her family had safely arrived in Montreal and once she began looking for a permanent apartment to move into. Prior to moving to Montreal, Ale had never cooked before, and relied solely on her mother and aunts as well as on a very affordable and accessible way of eating on–the–go, whenever working or not home. Upon her arrival she found herself having to cook for the first time for her young family due to cost of living and the nostalgia of eating and following a diet close to the one they had always been

accustomed to. At the time of the interview, she reported enjoying cooking and to have learnt and improved her skills upon her arrival. When participating in the art workshops, her two children were approximately six and one and a half years old. Both children accompanied her to the ceramic hand-building in-person workshop I offered for the first round of workshop series in the summer of 2022. The recipe that Ale chose to recreate was *Pozole*, a traditional Mexican soup-stew that differs in both color and preparation depending on the region of the republic of Mexico that one eats it in.

Going back to briefly speaking about her migration journey, Ale recounts how within a time span of two months her family had to suddenly leave Mexico and relocate to Montreal. In terms of the difference in food items and tendencies that she has noticed, she finds that she has access to many products nowadays and thinks there is a greater opportunity to cook more similarly to the way her family did back home using certain products she has found in her new community. Nonetheless, there is far more accessibility back home, she shares, to a wider array of products, freshness, variety and accessibility – as well as for pre-prepared affordable and fresh ready-made meals. The tastes and basic ingredients she associates with back home include: *chile peppers* and *tomatillo*.

Ale misses the traditional food as well as her family, but she figures that she can live without the food although it is something she finds herself yearning for a great deal. She feels as though food and family are greatly connected to each other and that she associates a memory and meal or dish to each person she finds herself missing. *Pozole* is the one meal that she finds herself missing and remembering the most – although the hardest thing for her to

assimilate food-wise as a change in her diet has been the absence of freshly made *tortillas*. The inability to find and access tortillas the way she did back home was hard on her as a first cultural shock. She figured she would have to learn how to make them or get used to the difference in flavor when eating the pre-packaged ones' she found at the local Latino grocery store. The difference in meals and dishes was not as surprising to her as how little access she had to pre-made tortillas and how different the taste and consistency was to the ones she found back home. She explains that, from a Mexican context, tortillas are like the bread that accompanies every meal (breakfast, lunch and dinner, mid-day snacks) and she associates tortillas with her infancy, childhood and adulthood. She shares how every Mexican she has ever met both abroad and back home can tell you a story that dates back to the first time they remember "dropping the tortilla package". She recounts how many Mexicans share the collective experience of being sent to the nearby "*tortilleria*", to buy a package of freshly made tortillas and tripping as a child or losing one's balance to find them accidentally dropping to the ground. Ale recounts how she remembers the first time this happened to her and how worried she felt about getting in trouble, once arriving home. As a result, she confesses to have quickly picked them up from the ground, ran back home and omitting to share the experience with her mother, in hopes of no one finding out. "As dinner time rolled in" she says "everyone started noticing all the tortillas covered in dirt!"

She has tried numerous times to recreate them upon her arrival with the flour she finds in stores – *mazeca* (which she agrees does not require a great deal of skill or science to make – just add enough water and roll out and flatten). However, she reports to find the taste very

different, despite claiming not to dare recreating them from scratch by grounding the corn, etc. More recently, she had been buying them in a bag and had also been able to find both white and yellow corn ones. She preferred the yellow ones, and has since familiarized herself with brands available as well as becoming fonder of some, over others. She liked to take advantage of the opportunity to make them herself using the pre-made *mazeca* mix whenever possible. She said she was able to find all ingredients easily, despite them tasting differently.

For her *Pozole* recipe, she worked alongside her children with basic hand-building techniques under my supervision and followed the prompts I shared during the workshop. They collectively decided to make the serving bowls they used back home at Ale's mothers' house, where they served pozole while living there⁵³ (recipe-zine book p. 46 in collaboration with another artist for presentation in final exhibition display). She notes how she has prepared this important stew a handful of times upon her arrival, and how in the region of Mexico she comes from, it is customary to prepare it red or green (whereas in other regions it could also be white). Ale says she feels as though she gets better and better at preparing it, as she adds and removes certain ingredients on the go each time. She mentions that it was simple enough for her to find all the necessary ingredients, except for the corn used in the preparation. She was unable to find fresh corn, so instead she has found it canned or frozen (which is rarely used back home to her knowledge).

⁵³ *Pozole* bowls are traditionally made of terracotta clay.

She chose *Pozole* as her recipe, because it reminds her of celebrations with family, how accessible it is in being a good dish for all ages as well as nutritious and filling. She shares how from a more personal stance, it is a dish that will forever remind her of a time in her life when she struggled with her health (pre-migration). At that point in time, she had been unable to eat almost anything (specifically things with high contents of grease and fat) and she found herself craving Pozole a great deal. At the time, her mother prepared her a big pot of *Pozole verde* (the green kind), cooked with chicken breast. She found herself in great pain whenever attempting to eat anything else and found it was the only thing that she was able to tolerate while regaining her strength and health.

Ale finds that the artwork her children and her completed for the workshop, should be accompanied by the oral history audio component as an important asset to the work they made. She feels as though once people hear the audio while admiring the work, it will help connect and relate with her lived experiences linked to memory, food, identity and migration. To her, the audio component adds a more personal level to her story, going further into what her inspiration behind making the work was, the process and just how the final ceramic work got to where it is.

Other recipes she is interested in exploring include *Mole*, a savory traditional Mexican meal made with chocolate-based sauce that usually covers chicken served with tortillas as tacos and accompanied by rice. Ale had not tried making it yet at the time of the interview, but reported eating it since her relocation and hoping to one day muster up the courage to make it at home. She felt as though there were certain meals that once are cooked, take away from the

taste for her; usually tasting a whole lot better if someone else prepared them (which she speculates has to do with how many times one tastes the dish for the right flavors, while cooking).

Upon her relocation to Montreal, she had tried *Poutine* and Middle-Eastern food, for the first time. They both tasted fine to her, she said, but she hadn't found any specific culture or dish that she craved to try or even recreate at home for her family. She continued to explore new cultures through her tastebuds, but was happy sticking to what she knows and focusing on recreating the flavors of "back home" the best she could in her new whereabouts.

As the interview came to a close, Ale shared that as a Mexican woman she associated every dish, as previously mentioned, to a specific memory and person in her life (either that has passed, or was left behind or co-exists with her day to day). As an example, she shared how when she thinks of her fathers' mother, *abuela paterna*, she remembers how she used to make a special noodle soup mixed with beans. To this day, she says, any time she thinks or smells or sees this dish, she immediately remembers her paternal grandmother and no one else. And that is what food and family is like for her. She recounts how when they first arrived to Montreal, her daughter was four years old, and when she accompanies her in cooking sometimes in the kitchen now, she would turn to her to say "this smells and tastes like what *abuela* made us!", or "this dish tastes like *abuela's* soup". She finds that her little girl already has memories associated to a world she only briefly knew through food and people. She feels like the gastronomic cultural richness that Latin America and specifically Mexico has, shows how a dish or a recipe can taste so vastly differently even in other parts of the same country (as is the case

for *Pozole* in different parts of the republic). She marveled at the thought of how taking a little bite out of a familiar dish could give you an automatic embrace, while transporting you immediately back so far away in distance and time, even if just for a few seconds, to something that is still yours, eternally familiar, yet had to leave behind.

Esmeralda Molina

Esmeralda was born in El Salvador. She migrated to Canada with her mother in 1983, due to the war that broke out. She arrived very young to Montreal where she has been residing since, and recounts in her interview how her mother was not able to teach her how to cook or prepare meals, due to being diagnosed with Schizophrenia immediately upon their arrival to Canada. From that point forth, Esmeralda found herself having to take care of her mother moving forward. Due to these unfortunate life circumstances, Esmeralda and her family were able to claim for refugee asylum at the time of the war and relocate safely and permanently in Canada. She admits that any dishes she knew how to cook from her native homeland, were learnt in her return trips to El Salvador, when visiting her aunts and family as she began to grow older. She claims to be taken by her aunts' cooking back home, which included delicacies like *tamales*, *pupusas*, *atol de chuco* and *panes*. Esmeralda remembers watching her attentively as she prepared food, and remembers more than anything the delicious and sweet fruits that abounded there, that can rarely be found in Montreal, if at all.

In the interview, she reports that her and her husband (also from El Salvador but more recently arrived), were able to find some authentic fruits at times, when visiting the Latino grocery stores in her neighborhood of La Petite Patrie, but "*nada que ver*" – { *it tasted nothing like the*

ones back home}. For instance, she says, her husband rushed home excitedly one afternoon with a bag full of “*jocotes de corona*”, which one would normally find easily and large in size in El Salvador; very juicy and sweet. He claimed he found them either at *Sabor Latino* or *La Mundial*. When they bit into them, she remembers how they tasted nothing like what they taste like back home. They ended up throwing them out, much to their dismay. The same thing happened with a bag of “*anonas*”, which she recounts can be found both white and pink back home, but was surprised at how one tiny *anona* was worth eight dollars at the local Latino store; an amount one can buy a large bag for in El Salvador, or how they fall right off the trees outside ones’ house. Mangos as well, she says, is also what she misses the most from her memories as a small child. Fruits like *Mamey*, which would never arrive in Canada due to their delicate handling. Her observation was that the fruits that exporting companies attempted to bring over from her country, were surely cut off their trees too early with the hopes of them ripening on their journey over to Canada. She found this to inevitably affect the taste and freshness, which also applied when eating them from frozen. “*Los traen a madurar, que no es igual que si maduran de su propio aroblito – {“they send them over young to ripen along the journey, which is not the same as if they ripened on their own tree”}*”.

Esmeralda talks about spices as well; she mentions how whenever she has the opportunity to travel back home to visit her family, she tends to bring back as many cooking spices as she is able to. However, she finds that with the difference in weather as well as storing them for too long, it makes them lose freshness once again, inevitably changing the taste for worse. She shares an anecdote in the interview about a specific type of cheese that is used back

home to make *pupusas* that it is impossible to find in Montreal. She shared how her Salvadorian friends and acquaintances go to great extents to reproduce it by mixing mozzarella with feta (cheeses that can be easily found in Montreal, but not back home) in order to interchange them in hopes of reproducing that traditional cheese as closely as possible. *"In the end, one has to experiment the best we can and mix whatever possible to come close to those flavors stored in our heart and mind"*.

Some of the flavors and ingredients she recognizes as traditional from her home country include the Salvadorean *tortilla* (which they tend to eat for breakfast, lunch and dinner), red Salvadorean beans, cilantro, fresh cheese, *chimol* (mixture of tomato, cilantro, onion), *empanadas* and *tamales*. She remembers vividly how her cousin makes tamales with *chipilín* (a specific herb from the spinach family, she says) and add it to their soup; how the taste will never leave her memory and palate and how she remembers that her aunt would use the entire banana leaf to wrap and cook the tamales as opposed to the tiny portions served in the local Latino grocery stores that are wrapped in aluminum paper near her house. She mentioned how any time she goes back home to visit, she stays at her aunts' house, where her cousin (same age as her) grew up learning how to cook from her, cooking for Esmeralda whenever she is able to visit. One of Esmeralda's many reflections is on how if one is not familiar with the difference in flavors used back home from the ones found elsewhere (making specific reference to her Canadian-Salvadorian children), then one does not miss or suffer it. For instance, her little boy who was four years old at the time of the interview, was very familiar with tamales. However, he had only ever tried and eaten them in Montreal, when Esmeralda prepares them at home. She

shared how much her boy loved them and asked to eat them for various meals of the day (as is customary back home), and she thought about how she found he couldn't tell the difference from how they tasted back in El Salvador, given he had never eaten them there. Esmeralda believes that even the cooking tools made to prepare and cook the meals, play an important role in the tastes found in ones' country of origin versus the way they taste when replicated elsewhere (using *charolas de barro*, *comales*, etc.)

Her childhood memories similarly include animals that roamed around the house she grew up in, freely. Her family used to purchase chickens, and then fed the family with these (using their eggs, making broths, stews, milk, butter, etc.) So, whenever she is able to visit home, she finds there is a special magical touch that her aunt or cousin add to anything they make and eat – as simple as it may be – making everything taste more delicious. With this, Esmeralda remembers the sounds that she associates with food and its memories in El Salvador. She remembers how the town baker would drive by her neighborhood in his bicycle screaming “*El pan! Pan fresco de la mañana!* – {“Bread! Fresh morning bread!”}. She remembers how *empanadas* are sold at every street corner, handmade and homemade preservative free, fresh, non-commercial, non bulk nor packaged. “*It's these things – like finding a pupuseria at every streetcorner, or if you crave a quick pupusa with a cup of coffee, the warmth, joy, music and smells that I always find back home, despite the amount of time I've lived away from there, that I've never found in my new whereabouts. The ability to ask someone to climb up a palm tree to bring you down a coconut and drink the fresh water, or eat something cooked by hand easily anywhere at any time. I miss the people that climb aboard city buses and play live music, the sound and smells of the*

farmers markets, how you can have your shoes shined quickly on the way to work – all of the things that I find so stimulating and invigorating when I go back, with so much variety available and affordable at once”.

When I asked her if she cooks a great deal at home, she repeats that she had to learn by herself as she grew up and also as she became a mother, and so had certain “go-to” recipes that she learnt and figured out as she continued living in Montreal. An example she gave was the French–Canadian *Pate Chiniois* dish. Since she had been living most of her life in Montreal, and her son learnt to eat certain Canadian meals at daycare in his early childcare years (and reported to enjoy it), she made it at least once a month at home for her family. She taught herself how to cook these as well as other meals that her children would tell her they enjoyed at school. Another go-to dish she made regularly was *spaghetti*, and she loves that her children have the opportunity to taste and try so many different foods from all over the world in Montreal, which she later enjoys recreating in her own way, at home. The same goes for dishes traditionally from her country that she has tried in Montreal, such as *flautas* – another dish she visually reproduced as an artwork for the assemblage workshop. She shares how her neighbor, who moved from El Salvador not too long ago, invited her over for dinner and made them for her. She says she fell in love with them and tried recreating them at home for her family. She is fond of preparing *tacos* as well, and since she leads a busy life as a mother of young children, she chooses recipes that are accessible, straight-forward and simple.

Esmeralda mentions that her husband loves cooking and does most of it at home, especially the recipes and meals that require more time and preparation, like his famous “*sopa*

de pata” which takes approximately three hours to make and cook. Her youngest son tells her he dreams of opening a family-restaurant one day, because he feels his parents are both excellent cooks.

Esmeralda recounts how one of the things she enjoyed the most from the art workshops was the ability to share and speak with other mothers from different Latin American countries, to share both recipes and tips on cooking, buying, finding and replicating or replacing certain ingredients with others in their new whereabouts. *“Not long ago, I felt sad and nostalgic and I missed the “sopa de pata” that I remember so well from back home, so I looked it up on Youtube and called my aunt – I made my own version”* (minute 19:56:58).

Among the other observations from her experience Esmeralda shared towards the end of the interview is that as of late, she tried to prepare recipes that were shared with her and recommended through the workshops at CAFLA. She admits that she was drawn to the idea of attending and participating in the community art workshops I offered at CAFLA because of that opportunity. It proved to be a great way to also learn new artistic skills, she said, that she could share and do with her children as well as the ability to take home a community recipe book that was composed by other mothers in similar situations as hers, free of cost.

When I asked her if she missed living back in El Salvador, she shared that she feels emplaced and settled down in Montreal as her permanent home now. But she does find herself feeling nostalgic when Christmas, Easter and other festive holidays come around. She always remembers during those dates that specific foods and meals are cooked and family reunites and congregates to share new memories. She mentions how her family and her are very faithful

to the Catholic church, therefore she associates many of those meals to those festivities as well. For instance, her aunt makes “*tamales pisque*” and “covered fish” on Good Friday, and so every year before Good Friday she feels as though her family has to eat fish. She mentions how she always asks for that day off at work, so she can take time before Holly Week to go and find the right filet of fish, leave it soaking in water to remove the excess salt, leave it marinating with special spices and cook it for the occasion, the best way she learnt how. She notes, for instance, how back home they prepare this fish with corn flour but she always makes it with regular corn flour, for it's the most accessible ingredient she has at her disposal. She also takes the time every year to find the spices necessary ahead of time. At Christmas, she feels the need to prepare *tamales* as well as the traditional sweet breads eaten back home at this time of year and turkey or turkey buns. She mentions how she goes through the trouble of preparing for this with great anticipation, as it is an important opportunity for her to remember her roots with her family. This helps her feel close to the life and people she had to leave behind and to celebrate *with* them, from where she is living *now*. “*The sense of community and exchange is what I miss – putting thought into the preparation for what one brings to share with others*”. She specifically recounts liking to prepare a Russian Salad to serve at gatherings, or freshly baked sugar bread for dessert – the associations in her country she has with “*receiving and welcoming people*”, going to mass and then having a *tamalito* after church with a coffee, or even when loved ones pass away. This reminds her of attending wakes as a small child and playing with other children present, patiently waiting to be served a warm *tamal* for lunch or dinner to share with other mourners at the event. “*The family gathering, sharing as a group with others. How people*

showed their care and love through the preparation and presentation of the dishes and meals. I remember how my aunt would find these huge tomatoes from her orchard and I would watch how she would put them on the brass or grill and cook them there with no other ingredients – they didn't have as many resources there as we do here – and would eat them with freshly made tortillas. I just remember thinking how delicious it all looked, with a little bit of salt and how my mouth waters whenever I remember that.”

For the Assemblage workshop, Esmeralda chose *Flautas*, and her son came with her that day and chose to make his own favorite dish – his favorite daily breakfast, where he carefully drew directly onto a disposable plate his daily *tortilla*, an egg sunny side up, fried plantains, refried beans, a slice of avocado, some fruit (grapes, his favorite), and a piece of cheese. He was five years old at the time he made this, with his mothers' help. He chose to include his warm milk, some kiwi fruit, a carrot and a glass of water. Esmeralda recounts how she felt so grateful to be able to collaborate creatively with her son and older daughter on almost all of the workshops and artworks, and how her son in specific really wanted to participate. For the *Flautas* assemblage, he colored the meat that went into the flautas (which she made using Styrofoam); he chopped up and crumbled up the cheese that goes on top of the flautas, using the green tissue-paper as lettuce simultaneously, with her help. They both enjoyed it, and then she asked her fifteen-year-old daughter at the time, to help glue it all together for the final presentation. She asked her to make a drawing, to demonstrate clearly the ingredients that went into the making of the dish. Her daughter found inspiration from a boardgame they all played often at home, that showed a chef and had many ingredients to play and choose from

(community recipe-zine book p. 42). Her daughter drew the image with great ease and sophistication, although she was very busy at the time with school work, but Esmeralda remembers encouraging her to collaborate with her and her brother, to take some space and time away from her schoolwork to realign and decompress in a creative activity and spend time with the family. She shares how she finds that art and creative expression through the workshops and projects helped her daughter, and brought her mental, physical and spiritual wellbeing when she was able to make things with her hands (much like what Esmeralda says she feels when she cooks, she said), for she finds art stimulates both her children and she tries to encourage her family to do that together whenever possible.

Esmeralda shares how she found the research project to have helped her in teaching her Canadian born first-generation children about their cultural roots. She loves how food and art is something she can share with them. *“Breakfast is a very important meal in our home and family life; she finds we tend to mix a lot of both Canadian or Quebecois culture with our Salvadorian roots when eating breakfast at home. On the weekends specifically, my husband makes a large batch of tortillas for the week, and he’s so artistic! We all make breakfast together and take our time to prepare and share and eat”.*

Some of the challenges Esmeralda reports from the workshops attended include the problem-solving aspects associated with trying to represent an item visually. For instance, the *tortilla*, and finding the right material to visually represent this food item as closely to the original one as possible. So, for instance, she mentions having looked for something flat and round at the time, both through the assortment of materials sent to her in the mail kits at the beginning of

the research project, as well as from the ones offered in person later on. She shared how when at home, she similarly looked carefully through her own personal arts and crafts stash. She found that she had to re-access a very child-like side of her, imbued with imagination and creativity. For example, when she was trying to recreate the meat, she found some old dried-up pasta she was about to throw out, and chose to use it to visually represent the ground beef that fills the dish and paint over it. The hardest part for her, she says, was deciding on the recipe. She felt a bit of a creative block at the time, in terms of finding a worthy one. However, she found it helpful when I offered my own personal examples from my own migration journey and background with accompanying stories that I associated with the dish as the workshop facilitator.

Esmeralda reported that without these prompts and personal stories, she would have likely felt too overwhelmed and intimidated in knowing that the work would be showcased in a Gallery Exhibition and later form part of a community recipe-book that would be distributed to many. She reports to feel like an “imposter Salvadorian”, given her story and background. Esmeralda does not feel like an authentic 100% Salvadorian woman, which she says is the reason as to why she was only able to think of breakfast for the first two workshops she attended (in the drawing and painting methods). She recalls asking me if this was ok to choose from, and that I happily accepted, which meant she felt a stronger direction in terms of what she was going to make: a typical breakfast *her* family had at home on almost daily basis. She strongly considers that they need a large meal in the morning to feel ready for what the day brings. On weekends, she mentions, their meals tend to be even stronger and heavier than the

ones they prepare and have during the week. These include beans, fried plantain and hopefully enough is made for leftovers to eat during the week.

Another notable artistic challenge Esmeralda shared and encountered, took place during the second workshop when working with paint-media while she recreated her *tamal*. Esmeralda shares how she painted the background with green, which she found to be of a much too dark hue, and when she carried out the image-transfer of the drawing she made of the *tamal* from the first workshop on top of it, it was challenging for her to follow and paint the lines transferred. She found the paint itself hard to apply, and felt that she did not wait long enough for the acrylic paint to dry before applying on the second and third coat. She felt as though this caused most of the paint to be removed from the canvas, rather than it building on top of the first coat, as she would have liked. Esmeralda finds the image hard to read, as a result, making it hard for viewers to decipher it without context. She feels that although the fork she drew in the image, for instance, next to the *tamal* is clearly represented, that it is hard to visualize the tamal as a rendered final work. She mentions jokingly how this was confirmed by one of the participating mothers she befriended at the workshops.

Having completed her works and participated in most of the ten workshops, she finds it important for the oral history audio of her interview to be included in both the community art exhibition as well as in the recipe zine-book. She shares that she believes it offers additional context to the imagery shown and to what she was trying to represent. Similarly, to attribute more meaning and weight to her voice, the specificity of her own story and circumstances as well as the experience she had when making the works, exchanging with others during the

workshops and with her own family that collaborated in the making of the pieces. Esmeralda confesses that at first, she thought the works should be able to speak for themselves and felt somewhat apprehensive to participate in the oral history interview. However, she found along the way that she wanted the opportunity to voice the stories and memories associated behind them with people who viewed them. She is fond of the idea that the audio will carry with it the memories of the meals that are important to her family, and that inevitably remember a life she left behind and once knew, celebrate what she has lived, what special dates mean to her and how she hopes to return to El Salvador one day to eat these delicious dishes once again. She strongly considers that it is important for this context to accompany the imagery.

For the final ceramics workshop she attended, she started recreating an *enchilada* with egg, meat and tomato, but she shares how it broke apart and crumbled in the drying process. She felt that she moistened the clay too much too fast, which changed the clays' consistency. She expresses how she would have liked more time to get familiar with this medium, for she had never had a chance to work with clay before. She wanted to paint the piece and attempted gluing some of the pieces back together. She mentions trying to recreate it at home at a later time and expressing how she likely wouldn't have enough time to have it ready for the exhibition. She also expressed concern regarding safe-handling and transportation in order to bring it to the gallery safely on her long commute.

The final thoughts Esmeralda shared include how she finds music, much like food from her childhood, to have had a huge imprint on her memory. She holds a memory of when she first tried *Paella* on a very hot day and recalling how the people that prepared it had added

lemon to it to mix in with the sea food. She remembers how despite the heat felt that day, she ate it scalding hot and enjoyed it tremendously. She also remembers once having a boiling hot seafood soup in El Salvador on a very hot day, and how the boiling soup imprinted the flavors in her heart and memory forever. She feels awe at the thought of how food and music have this effect on her. She relives the memories with the same intensity of who she used to be by being activated with scents, textures, sounds and how food does this the same way for her. The identity of who one used to be before, to who one is today and to who they might become tomorrow.

Yesenia Maria Capellán

Yesenia moved to Montreal with her husband on the 13th of February of 2011, with a travel visa and ended up relocating indefinitely. She birthed her children in Montreal and had no plans of moving back to the Dominican Republic (DR) where they originated from. She shares how she has not travelled back to her homeland in some time, because in her own words *“a veces uno dice que quiere ir pero las cosas se van mejorando y primeramente Dios él sabra cuando regreso. Yo siento que con que uno tenga salud y las cosas se puedan solucionar, es lo importante” {sometimes we might say we want to go back but things start to look up and get better and God will know when it’s time for me to return. I feel that as long as we have health and things can resolve themselves, is all that matters”}.*

When I asked Yesenia about the cultural differences she has experienced upon her geographical relocation in terms of food ingredients and items, she shared that she feels that *Sabor Latino* – the local Latino grocery store nearby – offers a wide array of things either

identical or similar to the ones found in her country. Perhaps at higher prices, yet still reasonable ones, she believes. Yesenia finds them delicious and accessible. The same goes for the second well known Latin grocery store, *Los Andes* on Belanger street, where she is certain she can find plenty of products that are used back in the DR, she assures me. As she shared this with me, she remembered that she brought to the interview one of those exact favorite products (salted cookies) of hers, that she ate growing up that she wanted to share with me and have me try with the coffee she prepared for us in her kitchen. She told me how it was customary for her to enjoy these in the mornings with her coffee. She continued to tell me how her only observation has been that one of her favorite dishes ever is the *Platano Mangu/Majao*, and that this is the only thing she has not been able to find and eat since she moved, because of how hard it is to bring in from her country. She recounted how the dish could easily be prepared with onion and grated cheese – which was the specific item and product she could not find in Montreal, the *Geo* Cheese. However, she found every other ingredient needed for the day-to-day meals she prepared could be found easily.

She mentioned that there was a Dominican Dépaneur on Papineau street called *Marche Mendez*, as well as the sit-in restaurant that *Sabor Latino* offered at their grocery store, and *La Comelona* was similarly nearby her place, on Papineau street. She assured me that in the nearby borough of Côtés des Neiges, she was able to find a few items that are harder at times to find in her own side of town, but the vast majority were always there.

When I asked how she learnt about these available resources, Yesenia mentions how friends of hers from the DR personally took them there when they first moved to Montreal. She

also learnt a few new tips, she shares, from various new friendships she made and sustained since the beginning of our art workshops. She was excited to share how now, due to these new connections and networks, she was able to have easier access to ingredients like *sopita Magi*, *el adobo*, *el asafrán*, *la salsa* and *la pata roja*, that were an important part of her family's diet.

What Yesenia recounted missing the most, however, was the people. She mentions her diet had not changed much since her relocation, but the people she left behind were what she missed the most, specifically from her family. She shared how despite her diet remaining almost identical to when she was living back home, certain products and meals reminded her strongly of those people she missed so much, which to this day causes her a great deal of nostalgia. For instance, the *Geo* cheese she grew up eating with green plantains, she ate daily back home. She associates this dish with her loved ones, memories and experiences they shared. But she mentions to this that she is very fortunate to be part of a large Dominican support community and presence in Montreal that has welcomed her with open arms and made this transition easier for her and her young family.

Yesenia loves cooking, and always has. The dish she chose to turn into an artistic visual representation with diverse mediums throughout the *Recetas y Raíces* workshops is called *Turrón de coco*. She chose this dessert dish because it is one of those dishes that brings her most nostalgia and that she associates most strongly to a loved one – her grandmother – who has since (in Yesenia's words) "*joined Father God in heaven*" – *ya esta con papa Dios*". This specific dessert recipe makes her access a special place in her memory of when she was a young girl and learnt how to prepare it with her grandmother in the DR. She remembers how

every Sunday all of her grandmothers' children and their grandchildren would come over to her house to visit and there would always be two or three sweet desserts ready on the table. It was either *Bataca con coco* (sweet potato with coconut) or *turrón de coco*. But the *turron* would always be served, and since she knows how to prepare it and that her grandma is now safely with *papa Dios*, she doesn't necessarily feel sad, she says, but rather remembers her beautifully instead. It makes her feel warm and safe inside; but what she does remember often in a sad nostalgic way are the people that are back home and she can't see anymore.

For Yesenia, the amount of cooking never changed upon her relocation, nor how much she enjoys it. She never finds herself missing eating anything other than the *Geo* cheese, or any meal because she finds she can easily cook them all in her new home and whereabouts. The only item and dish she misses is her "*Mangu*" with *Geo* cheese, accompanied with bitter-sweet onions.

She shares how she never has a hard time remembering recipes, nor needs to call home to ask for cooking advice, tips or reminders. She calls, however, to keep up to date with her loved ones and hear their voice. For example, she mentions how she knows well how to make the very frequented *Sancocho* that is eaten often back home, as well as where to find all the necessary ingredients for it. However, sometimes she may call her family back home with a food "excuse" (in this case the *Sancocho*), but she mentions how in honesty she just wants to have something in common to talk about with them, since their lives and realities have changed so much upon their separation amidst the distance and time between them. She likes to pretend that she needs help with food sometimes, so that they can see that she still needs them in many ways,

despite the distance, and that she's going to prepare and eat something that reminds her of them and she thinks of them often. She feels as though sometimes, when she's cooking something, her emotions get the best of her because she feels emotional when she thinks of those people back home and the memories they shared together, which she associates with the dish she is preparing.

“Se le mojan los ojos a uno – {my eyes get wet when I think about it}”. Nonetheless, Esmeralda mentions how she is comforted by knowing that she can find everything she needs either ingredient wise or already prepared and ready to eat, easily. She does not have nor need a recipe book, she brings those recipes with her everywhere she goes in her head and heart. She says : *“cuando a uno le gusta hacer algo y frecuentemente lo hace, no lo olvida” – {when someone likes to do something and you do it frequently, you cant forget it}.*

Much like with the *turron de coco* that she learnt to make with her grandmother as a young child, Yesenia mentions that there's other dishes that are made at specific times of the year like *“La avichuela con dulce”* (sweet beans), which she has also found at Latino markets. She learnt how to make this one with her aunt back home (who is also now with Father God). These are recipes that she makes often, she mentions, at least (*the avichuelas*) two to three times during Holly Week and Easter time, and she finds that she can't forget them because of how often she makes them. She used to help her aunt prepare these during those dates back home, and she carries on the tradition in her new whereabouts because her aunt enjoyed Easter and Holly Week celebrations tremendously.

Yesenia reminded me how for our final ceramic hand-building workshop for *Recetas y Raíces*, she generously brought in some freshly made *Turrón de Coco* to share with our group. “The coconut in the recipe always lets me know when it’s ready – I will notice that it starts to clump up, and my grandma taught me how to lift it at this point and turn it continuously, to move the plate strategically because if left for too long, the sugar will turn too sweet. It becomes hard and white automatically, and if you want a softer texture, you just have to not let it dry out too much and lift it up sooner. The texture you have to get is one that requires practice, which my aunt and grandma both taught me. You need to know when to lift it so it doesn’t dry out. It’s something very visual and sensorial to the touch”. Her grandmother always told her that whenever they prepared anything they had to use a special secret ingredient, and as a twelve-year old girl she remembers feeling very enthralled by this idea. She was always cautious when helping her cook the *Turrón*, because it required cooking with high temperatures. “*She always told me to grate the coconut carefully, add cinnamon and brown sugar and then carnation milk– and last but not least the most important ingredient– love. Because if it doesn’t have that, it just won’t taste right*”.

For the *Mangu* she remembers so fondly, she recalls how this can be eaten for breakfast or dinner and how it reminds her of her childhood. It was a dish she would eat every single day. A dish that was always there, just like the cookies she shared with me in her kitchen during the interview as we sat together that day. She mentions how for Dominicans, the one food item that accompanies every single meal every day is plantain – for breakfast, lunch and dinner. *El plátano, el moro de avichuelas*, and *La Bandera* are traditional daily meals as well, composed of

meat, rice and beans (red, black or pintos). She says that when she travels to the US or one of her friends goes, they always bring back the *Geo* Cheese, which for some reason can be found there but not in Canada. But she reports it has been some time since she travels to the US as well.

She has recreated the *Mangu* with different cheeses many times upon her arrival, including using what she calls “salami” cheese, but no cheese tastes the way the queso *Geo* tastes when she eats it– as if she’s eating something wholesome and good for her body. It is unique and looks like a giant cheese ball, covered with a red paper.

When asked what the value of the oral history narrative had for her in terms of accompanying her artworks and the recipe book, she briefly hesitated and finally replied that she liked the idea of them going and being presented together. She felt that the voice and the sharing would feel sweeter together, more real of what the recipe represents for her of where she comes from, her memories attributed to the dish, her experiences, etc. She didn’t care so much if I chose in the end to put them together or not, but she mentioned that if she had the option, she would like for them to go together. She liked the idea of others knowing that this is a dish special to *her* family and *her* story, because other more traditional dishes like *La bandera* o *El Sancocho* are perhaps more representative of the Dominican Republic as a whole. However, the recipe *she* recreated is specific to *her* and *her* family and memories as well as the love she still has for her deceased grandmother.

Finally, Yesenia mentions that she has found the Turrón de coco being sold in various Latino fast-food restaurants and markets, but she enjoys making it herself the most. Some

other recipes she would like the opportunity to recreate artistically would be *El Sancocho*, a stew made up of two or three different meats. “Eso es algo que comemos y que prepare casi diario” –This is something we eat and I prepare almost daily”. The *Turron* is something of great emotional weight to her, and she prepares it only for special occasions. The stews that she makes on a daily basis hold a much less emotional connotation for her she says, and she adds plantain, corn, *yuca* or anything she has available to her at home.

In terms of wanting to try dishes from other cultures, she mentioned having tried couscous and enjoying it. She finds it to be similar to the consistency of dough or flour, and she enjoys middle eastern food and likes to mix it with vegetables and meat which a friend of hers taught her to do. The first time she tried it, her sister in-law sent her a package in the mail and she thought the texture of it resembled dough, so she added milk and vanilla and sugar, but after some time in Canada she noticed that her middle eastern neighbor prepared it differently when she hosted potlucks for her building. She similarly shares how a recent Cuban friend of hers that she met at the workshops is married to a middle eastern man, and her son has joined the daycare that she runs. During a *Partage de Mammans*, she tried it once again and got to see how it was prepared. Yesenia especially enjoys that it has a great deal of vegetables and that one can add meat to it.

Appendix O: Psychological and Emotional Referral Resources

Dear participant,

You will find here an extensive list of resources, categorized for clarity, compiled to help you with various aspects of settlement and integration. Many of the organizations included offer services in French, English, and often Spanish, catering to the specific linguistic needs of Latin American immigrants in Montreal's La Petite-Patrie and Rosemont neighborhoods.

In the given case that you found any aspect of today's interview triggering, this list aims to offer and equip you with available information to navigate your new environment and thrive. If you were to require any assistance contacting any organization directly for their most up-to-date program offerings, eligibility criteria, and hours of operation, please do not hesitate to let me or Nidia Cristina Bravo, the social interventionist for the Familles-enfance at CAFLA know so we can gladly help you.

Thank you kindly once again for your participation in this research project and sharing your story!

Warm regards,

CLSC de La Petite-Patrie: Offers psychosocial support, including individual and group therapy, and can refer to specialized services. Located at 6526, rue Saint-Hubert, Montréal. Call 811 (Info-Santé) and choose option 2 for psychosocial support.

CLSC de Rosemont: Provides similar psychosocial services for the Rosemont area. Located at 2900, boul. Rosemont, Montréal. Call 811 and choose option 2.

Centre des femmes de Montréal: Offers psychosocial support and counseling, with specific services for immigrant women. Located at 3585 Saint-Urbain Street, Montréal. Phone: (514) 842-4780.

L'écho des femmes de la Petite-Patrie: Provides a safe space, listening, and support, and can refer to mental health resources. Located at 6032, rue Saint-Hubert, Montréal. Phone: (514) 277-7445.

Centre d'orientation paralégale et sociale pour immigrants (COPSI): Offers social consultations and support, which can include addressing emotional distress. Located at 435, rue Beaubien Est, Bureau 203, Montréal. Phone: (438) 531-6976.

SOS Violence Conjugale: While focused on domestic violence, their 24/7 helpline can offer immediate support and referrals for women experiencing emotional distress related to violence or displacement. Phone: 1-800-363-9010.

211 Grand Montréal: Call 211 or visit <https://www.211qc.ca/en/> for a comprehensive directory of social and community resources, including mental health services, in the area.

PRAIDA (Programme Régional d'Accueil et d'Intégration des Demandeurs d'Asile): If the woman is an asylum seeker, PRAIDA offers reception and psychosocial support. Phone: (514) 484-7878, poste 64500.

Clinique Médicale Maisonneuve-Rosemont: While primarily a medical clinic, they may have resources for mental health or be able to provide referrals.

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC): Their website may have information on settlement services that include mental health support.

Quebec's Ministry of Immigration, Francisation and Integration (MIFI): Check their website for resources related to immigrant integration, which can include mental well-being.

General Immigration & Settlement Services

These organizations are crucial for initial support, information, and referrals to other specialized services.

La Maisonnée

Focus: A pillar in newcomer services, offering reception, administrative assistance (government documents, health card, social insurance), housing aid, francization, psychosocial support, and employment assistance. They serve a wide range of immigrants regardless of status.

Location: 6510, rue Saint-Denis, Montréal (Plateau Mont-Royal/Rosemont border, easily accessible).

Contact: (514) 271-3533, info@lamaisonnee.org

Website: <https://lamaisonnee.org/en/>

Centre d'orientation paralegale et sociale pour immigrants (COPSI)

Focus: Provides paralegal and social consultation, assistance with document translation and certification, support for asylum seekers, and various workshops including those for parents and seniors. They offer services in French, English, and Spanish.

Location: 435, rue Beaubien Est, Bureau 203, Montréal (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie).

Contact: (438) 531-6976, directrice@copsi.ca

Website: <https://www.copsi.ca/> (check via 211qc.ca for the most current details)

Solidarity Across Borders (Solidarité sans frontières)

Focus: An anti-detention and anti-deportation network that organizes and provides mutual aid to people with precarious or no immigration status. They offer crucial support in legal and social navigation for those seeking regularization.

Location: Montreal-wide support.

Contact: (438) 933-7654, solidaritesansfrontieres@gmail.com

Website: <https://www.solidarityacrossborders.org/>

PRAIDA (Programme Régional d'Accueil et d'Intégration des Demandeurs d'Asile)

Focus: Specifically for asylum seekers, offering reception, temporary accommodation, psychosocial support, and assistance with administrative procedures. They can connect individuals with essential services.

Location: While their main office is not in the immediate neighborhood, they are the primary gateway for asylum seekers in Montreal.

Contact: (514) 484-7878, poste 64500 (reception)

Website: Search "PRAIDA" on the Quebec.ca website for current information.

II. Women-Specific Support & Empowerment

These organizations address the unique challenges and needs of women, often with programs for immigrant women.

L'écho des femmes de la Petite-Patrie

Focus: A local women's center providing a safe space, listening, support, and referral services. They offer workshops on various topics (violence, poverty, mental health), support groups, and collective actions to improve women's quality of life. Services are available in French, English, and Spanish.

Location: 6032, rue Saint-Hubert, Montréal (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie).

Contact: (514) 277-7445, echo@echodesfemmesdelapetitepatrie.org

Website: Search "L'écho des femmes de la Petite-Patrie" on 211qc.ca for their listing.

Centre des femmes de Montréal

Focus: Offers a wide array of services including job support, personal and psychosocial support, legal information, and francization programs, with specific services for immigrant women. They offer services in English, French, Spanish, and Creole.

Location: 3585 Saint-Urbain Street, Montréal (accessible by metro from Rosemont/Petite-Patrie).

Contact: (514) 842-4780 (Personal Support), (514) 842-6652 (Job Support)

Website: <https://centredesfemmesdemtl.org/en/>

Mères avec pouvoir

Focus: An innovative organization supporting single mothers in precarious situations by offering affordable housing, integrated daycare services, and professional training programs to foster their autonomy and integration. Highly relevant for Latin American women who are single mothers.

Location: In Rosemont.

Contact: (514) 527-3138

Website: <https://meresavecpouvoir.org/>

La Petite Maison de la Miséricorde

Focus: Provides a safe and welcoming environment for pregnant women and mothers in difficulty, offering temporary housing, psychosocial support, and resources related to childcare and family well-being.

Location: In Rosemont.

Contact: (514) 727-4636

Website: <https://www.petitemaisondelamisericorde.org/>

Casa de la Mujer Inmigrante Latina (La Maison de la Femme Immigrante Latino-américaine)

Focus: Dedicated to offering a safe space for the well-being and development of Latin American immigrant women. This organization is specifically tailored to the target demographic.

Location: Montreal (specific address may vary, check their website).

Website: <https://www.mujerinmigrantelatina.com/>

III. Language Learning (Francization)

Learning French is key for integration into Quebec society.

Cégep de Rosemont – Cours de francisation gratuits pour les personnes immigrantes

Focus: Offers free full-time or part-time French courses funded by the Government of Quebec, adapted to different levels.

Location: Directly in Rosemont.

Contact: Registration is typically done via the Quebec government's "Apprendre le français" website.

Website: <https://www.crosemont.qc.ca/programme/cours-de-francisation-gratuits-pour-les-personnes-immigrantes/>

Petites Mains

Focus: Offers free French courses open to all immigrants (men and women). They also provide vocational training in fields like kitchen assistance, promoting integration into the job market.

Location: 500, rue Saint-Paul Ouest, Montréal (easily accessible by metro from Rosemont/Petite-Patrie).

Website: <https://petitesmains.com/en/programs/learn-french/>

Government of Quebec – Apprendre le français (MIFI)

Focus: The official portal for all government-funded French language learning services. It's the primary point of contact for immigrants aged 16 and over to register for free courses (full-time, part-time, in-class, distance, specialized courses). Financial aid may also be available.

Website: <https://www.quebec.ca/en/immigration/learn-french>

IV. Employment & Professional Integration

Support for job searching, credential recognition, and career development.

Groupe Conseil Saint-Denis – CJE Rosemont/Petite Patrie (Carrefour Jeunesse-Emploi)

Focus: Supports individuals without employment or in precarious situations in their socio-professional integration. While it's a CJE (Carrefour Jeunesse Emploi) mainly for youth, they often have programs open to adults, including immigrants, and specific projects for women.

Location: 1453, rue Beaubien Est, Montréal (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie).

Contact: (514) 278-7211

Website: Search "Groupe Conseil Saint-Denis" on MaCommunaute.ca for their listing.

Women's Centre of Montréal – Job Support (also listed under Women-Specific Support)

Focus: Provides comprehensive job search support, career counseling, and workshops tailored to women, including immigrant women.

Location: 3585 Saint-Urbain Street, Montréal.

Contact: (514) 842-6652

Website: <https://centredesfemmesdemtl.org/en/job-support/>

V. Health & Social Services (CLSCs & Clinics)

Access to healthcare, mental health support, and social workers.

CLSC de La Petite-Patrie

Focus: Provides a range of local public health and social services, including general medical consultations, vaccination, psychosocial support, home care, and referrals to specialists. Essential for navigating the Quebec healthcare system.

Location: 6526, rue Saint-Hubert, Montréal.

Contact: Call your local CLSC or 811 (Info-Santé for health advice, option 2 for psychosocial support).

Website: Find contact info on the CIUSSS du Centre-Sud-de-l'Île-de-Montréal website.

CLSC de Rosemont

Focus: Similar comprehensive health and social services as the CLSC de La Petite-Patrie, serving the Rosemont area.

Location: 2900, boul. Rosemont, Montréal.

Contact: Call your local CLSC or 811.

Website: Find contact info on the CIUSSS du Centre-Sud-de-l'Île-de-Montréal website.

Clinique d'Immigration Maisonneuve Rosemont (CIMR)

Focus: Specifically offers medical examination for immigration (EMI) required by IRCC. They may also have general medical services or referrals related to immigrant health needs.

Location: Associated with Clinique Médicale Maisonneuve-Rosemont (check their website for exact address, usually around 2500 boul. Rosemont).

Contact: 1-888-445-8173 (phone/WhatsApp), info@im.clinic

Website: <https://clinique-dimmigration-maisonneuve-rosemont-cimr8.webnode.es/fr/>

SOS Violence Conjugale

Focus: A 24/7 provincial helpline for victims of domestic violence. They provide support, information, and referrals to safe shelters and resources across Quebec.

Contact: 1-800-363-9010 (toll-free)

Website: <https://sosviolenceconjugale.ca/en>

VI. Housing Support

Assistance with finding affordable and safe housing, and understanding tenant rights.

Comité logement Petite-Patrie

Focus: Provides information, advice, and assistance to tenants regarding their rights, landlord-tenant disputes, and finding affordable housing in the Petite-Patrie neighborhood.

Location: In La Petite-Patrie.

Contact: (514) 272-9133

Website: <https://comitelogementpetitepatrie.org/>

CDC de Rosemont (Corporation de Développement Communautaire de Rosemont)

Focus: As a community development corporation, they have a deep understanding of local resources, including housing, and can provide referrals or support in navigating the housing market in Rosemont.

Location: In Rosemont.

Contact: (514) 524-1797

Website: <https://www.cdcremont.org/>

VII. Childcare & Family Support

Resources for mothers and families with children.

CPE La Petite-Patrie (Centre de la petite enfance)

Focus: A quality educational and community daycare setting. While often having waiting lists, it's a key resource for affordable, regulated childcare.

Location: 700 et 720, boul. Rosemont, Montréal (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie).

Contact: (514) 274-4795

Website: Search "CPE La Petite-Patrie" for details.

FAFMQR (Fédération des associations de familles monoparentales et recomposées du Québec)

Focus: While a provincial federation, they can provide information and referrals to local organizations that support single-parent and blended families, offering resources relevant to new immigrant women with children.

Location: Provincial reach, but can guide to local support.

Website: <https://fafmrq.org/>

VIII. Food Security

Access to food banks and collective kitchens.

Banque alimentaire Rosemont

Focus: Provides food aid, including food baskets, for individuals and families in need within the Rosemont–La Petite–Patrie area.

Location: 5925, rue Cartier, Montréal (Rosemont—La Petite–Patrie).

Contact: (438) 763–3488

Note: Check their website or 211qc.ca listing for specific registration and distribution schedules.

Bouffe–Action de Rosemont

Focus: A community resource in the field of food security, aiming to improve citizens' capacity to act on issues related to food and health. They offer collective kitchens and food distribution.

Location: 5350 Rue Lafond, Montréal (Rosemont—La Petite–Patrie).

Contact: (514) 523–2460

Website: Search "Bouffe–Action de Rosemont" for details.

Appendix P: Ethics Certificates



CERTIFICATION OF ETHICAL ACCEPTABILITY
FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

Name of Applicant: Arianna Garcia-Fialdini
Department: Faculty of Fine Arts \ Art Education
Agency: N/A
Title of Project: Preparing, Serving and Sharing Stories: Immigrants' exploration of identity through Art- making, Oral History, Food and Memory
Certification Number: 30014146

Valid From: November 11, 2020 To: November 10, 2021

The members of the University Human Research Ethics Committee have examined the application for a grant to support the above-named project, and consider the experimental procedures, as outlined by the applicant, to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Richard DeMont".

Dr. Richard DeMont, Chair, University Human Research Ethics Committee



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Valid From: March 10, 2021 To: March 09, 2022

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Dr. Richard DeMont, Chair, University Human Research Ethics Committee