

***La Vida Cotidiana del Migrante Ecuatoriano:  
A glimpse into the lives of Ecuadorian immigrants in Spain and  
the United States***

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**Abstract:** *This dissertation excogitates the concept of Ecuadorian migrant identity by exploring the lived histories of eight individuals in two major immigration hubs: New York City and Madrid. Since “identity” is a rather elusive and inconclusive concept, the importance of culture, race, citizenship and discrimination is also considered in light of these eight immigrants’ experiences. Even though the definitions and present relevance of these terminologies remains controversial in academic circles, interpreting these constructs is nevertheless a good starting point for understanding how Ecuadorian migrants perceive, interact, and feel about their host societies. In particular, the recent surges of Ecuadorian immigration to Spain and the United States has not only allowed this group to procure important social and political clout in the two areas, but has also introduced dramatic “cultural” changes to each destination’s status quo. Despite these notable transformations, however, Ecuadorian migrants’ experiences have varied significantly both between and within the two countries. Rather than attempt to ascertain a right or wrong answer, therefore, the material acknowledges the individuality and specificity of each case, and postulates that identity should never be negotiated through broad generalizations or “cultural” interpretations. While some comparison will have to be made with regards to the different economies and immigration policies of the two metropolises, this is only done to provide the contextual information that has influenced the self-perceived identities of the individuals being interviewed. Furthermore, this dissertation does not seek to examine the relationships between Ecuadorian migrants and their*

*host populations. Instead, it assesses immigrants' positions within all of the various (social, racial, economic, political, etc.) groups to which they belong, and considers the significance of these interactions on their experiences abroad. Thus, the overall focus of this dissertation is to convey an honest and authentic representation of Ecuadorian immigrants within both Spain and the United States.*

# CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>CHAPTER I: THE RECENT AND PRESENT IMMIGRATION DEVELOPMENTS IN SPAIN AND THE UNITED STATES .....</b>	
<b>CHAPTER II: DEFINING, CONCEPTUALIZING AND DISSECTING THE KEY CONCEPTS.....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY.....</b>	<b>43</b>

*\*\* Please note that the majority of the interviews were conducted in Spanish.  
These have been translated by the author and are represented as italicised  
quotes in the text.*

## INTRODUCTION:

The past two decades have been a decisive epoch of Latin American immigration to both Spain and the United States (US). These transnational movements have not only impacted the lives of millions of Latina/o migrants, but have also radically transformed the demographic, political and economic status quo of both destinations. A closer investigation of the circumstances in each country, however, reveals that these transformations have varied immensely between the two, thereby eliciting different perceptions among Latina/o migrants about their identifications within each context.

Given the limited time and scope of this dissertation, the research predominantly focuses on the lived experiences of Ecuadorian immigrants. This has been done in spite of the fact that in both contexts these individuals are often grouped into a single “Latina/o community” with other Latin American immigrants. Thus, even though this research is only concerned with Ecuadorian migrants, the majority of the academic literature, statistical analyses and other secondary resources that are used as contextual information, generally fail to treat Ecuadorians as a distinct group. Furthermore, an interesting anecdote about this absence of specificity is that in some cases Ecuadorian migrants have actually begun to self-identify with this new, all-encompassing “*Latinidad*” label in lieu of their nationality.

Overall, this dissertation endeavors to grapple with Ecuadorian migrant “identity” in Spain and the US. This is achieved by exploring the lived experiences of eight individuals in two major immigration hubs: New York City

and Madrid. In order to tackle the meaning of “identity,” other imperative questions are also considered, such as the use of language in intercultural exchanges, perceptions about immigration rights, the importance of *Latinidad*, the challenges of culture shock, and the meanings of citizenship, race and discrimination.

Ecuadorian migrants were chosen as the focus of this research precisely because they make up a significant percentage of the total Latina/o population in both Spain and the US. This means that there is enough data to analyze Ecuadorian immigrants both as a distinct group and as part of the overall Latin American community in each destination. The research does not seek to solely examine the relationships between Ecuadorian migrants and their host populations. Rather, it intends to assess their positions within all of the various (social, racial, economic, political, etc) groups to which they belong, and to consider the overall significance of these interactions on their immigration experiences.

Spain and the US were chosen as the settings for this research because these countries have been the epicenters of both Ecuadorian and Latina/o immigration over the past twenty years. As a result, Latin Americans are now the dominant minority group in both contexts, and the two have been described as having experienced a kind of “*Latinization*” in recent years (Davila, 2008, p.11). These changes have not only afforded dramatic social and demographic transformations, but have also rendered this umbrella group a “growing political

and economic force that can no longer be ignored” in either destination (Davies, 2010, p.xii).

The oral histories of eight Ecuadorian migrants are used as primary materials for this research. The first part of this dissertation provides an analysis of the recent legal, social, political and economic circumstances in the two host countries. It also discusses some of the more significant transformations that have ensued from benchmark events. The second part conceptualizes key concepts, such as identity, culture, citizenship, race, *Latinidad* and discrimination, and defined these in light of the personal histories presented in the interviews.

Since this dissertation does not endeavor to ascertain a right or wrong answer, the oral testimonies were not conducted in a “survey-format,” in which the participants would have been asked the same questions. Instead, these were carried out as informal conversations, so that immigrants could openly discuss and elaborate on their situations. Four of the interviews I personally conducted over Skype, while the remaining four primary materials are video recordings filmed in 2010, by the Ecuadorian television icon, Christian Johnson. In his programme, Johnson interviews Ecuadorian migrants in different cities around the world and asks them to both share their perceptions about their new homes, and to discuss how they feel about what they have left behind. As with my own interviews, Johnson’s methodology is primarily conversation-based, and he allows his interviewees to carry the discussion in whichever direction they please.

While some comparison will have to be made with regards to the different economies and immigration policies of the two metropolises, this is only done in

consideration of how these variations directly influence the self-perceived identities of the individuals interviewed. This dissertation is not meant to be a comparative piece on the host countries' immigration regulations, and the focus remains on the individual "Ecuadorian migrant experience." Nevertheless, there are an incessant number of factors which set the two apart, and some kind of comparison is unavoidable. This is especially the case when benchmark events occur which directly impact Ecuadorian immigrants' circumstances and opportunities in the host countries.

Since this is such an extensive topic, which would require far more time and breadth to gestate than this research can afford, the material does not attempt to ascertain a comprehensive conclusion about Ecuadorian immigrants' experience in each context. Rather, it endeavors to portray a more honest and authentic representation of the situation in the two areas by focusing on the depth of individual accounts. There are many areas that could be expanded upon for future research, such as the implications of age, gender, male/female relationships, sexuality, economic standing, political affiliations, etc. Furthermore, the study only focuses on first generation immigrants and does not consider the position of second and third generations of immigrants, albeit their importance in both contexts.

Overall, this remains an elementary investigation, as is shown by the fact that only eight individuals are interviewed. Such a tiny sample size obviously yields extremely limited results, and the research does not purport that the responses provided are representative of the larger population.



I.

THE RECENT AND PRESENT IMMIGRATION DEVELOPMENTS IN  
SPAIN AND THE UNITED STATES

As this dissertation endeavors to demonstrate, *timing* is a pivotal aspect of the immigration experience (Cwerner, 2010). Until only a few years ago, for example, Spain was the preferred destination for Ecuadorian immigrants, despite the better economic opportunities for settlers in the US. Certain legal and political developments in Spain, along with the onset of the 2008 economic recession, however, have recently reversed this trend in favor of the latter destination (Bertoli et al., 2010). A superficial synopsis of the evolution of Ecuadorian migratory flows over the past twenty years shows that from the mid to late 1990's, most Ecuadorian chose to move to the US, that between 2000 and 2009, this trend changed in favour of Spain, and that since the 2008 global recession, the US has once again become the preferred destination (ibid). Thus, it is precisely because of *timing* that the two countries under investigation experienced different types of Ecuadorian migration flows. This is meant with regards to the profiles of the immigrants that moved to each country, the reasons for their displacements, and the general attitudes that these individuals adopted once abroad.

The recent fluxes of Ecuadorian emigrations to these two destinations can be understood by looking at the “push-pull theory in that: 1) economic and political dilemmas in Ecuador (the “push”) motivated individuals to leave, and 2) the (*more*) favorable immigration policies and financial circumstances of the two

host countries (the “pull”) persuaded them to choose these two destinations (Pribilsky, 2007, p.7). More precisely, the Ecuadorian debt crisis of the 1980’s, coupled with the low oil prices, flood damages and political instabilities of the late 1990’s, propelled many Ecuadorians to seek out new economic opportunities abroad (ibid).

Spain did not develop concrete immigration legislation until the 1990’s, when immigration to the country first began to gain momentum (Aja, 2012, p.65). Most of these early regularization programmes were geared towards providing legal rights to the illegal migrants already residing in the country, rather than on monitoring the country’s increasing influx of foreigners (ibid. pp.72-76). This placid approach to immigration (as compared to the policies of the US at the time) became one of Spain’s cardinal appeals for Ecuadorian immigrants (Bertoli et al., 2010). In addition, these migrants were also attracted to the fact that they shared meaningful “cultural” legacies with Spain—such as a common language—and that the Spanish government seemed to promote these links to encourage Latin Americans to settle in the country. This is why, until as late as 2003, Latinas/os were the only non-European “group” that was not required to obtain visas to enter Spain (De Pablos, 2010).

The combination of these factors rendered Spain a veritable “*imán*” (a magnet) for the majority of Latina/o migrants, who, by the late 1990’s, began flocking to the country as “tourists” that would overstay their visits (ibid). It was not until 2000, with dramatically expanding presence of foreign labourers, that Spain was finally forced to address the “immigration issue,” and develop direct

regulatory practices for its incoming migrants. Spain's 2000 "Law on the Rights and Freedoms of Foreigners in Spain and their Integration" (*Ley Orgánica 4/2000*), for example, was passed with the intention of both curbing the growing flows of illegal immigrants, and further integrating unauthorized foreign residents (Jokisch, 2007). A year later, in January 2001, Ecuador and Spain signed a bilateral agreement that granted legal work visas to over 25,000 Ecuadorians living in the country illegally (ibid). Then in 2003, for the first time, Spain required that all Latina/o visitors obtain visas to enter the country, thereby ending the common "surreptitious 'tourism' trips" (Bertoli et al., 2010, p.21).

Finally, in 2004, the country passed the *Real Decreto 2393/2004*, a regularization policy which, in another attempt to address the growing "illegality problem," granted legal status to over 400,000 unauthorized Ecuadorian workers (Jokisch, 2007). What is interesting and almost sui generis about the Spanish case is that between 2000 and 2008, its immigration policies were mostly founded on integrating Latin American migrants into its economy and society, rather than following the exclusionary examples of the US and other European countries at the time (Bertoli et al., 2010).

This does not mean that Spain was entirely welcoming of its ever-expanding Latina/o population, however. Nor does it suggest that it axiomatically treated this group as social, political and financial equals either. A notable percentage of the host population was actually perturbed by these demographic transformations, and racism remained a pertinent component of many of the interactions between the two groups (Bunge, 2014) Nevertheless, many "native"

Spaniards recognized the economic benefits that Latin American migrants created for their country, particularly because Spain had experienced almost no natural population growth over the previous thirty years. Between 2002 and 2007, for example, foreigners accounted for 73% of Spain's total demographic expansion and immigration became the country's greatest contributor to labour market expansion (Departamento Comunicacion de la Fundacion BBVA, 2014, p.6).

Latin Americans, in particular, held an exceptional position within Spain's immigration legislation, and were clearly favored over other non-European minority groups. Latina/o migrants could apply for citizenship after only two years of residing in the country, a privilege which other non-European nationalities did not enjoy (Enrriquez, 2014). This favoritism and racial/national discrimination precipitated dramatic transformations in Spain's demographic landscape, especially with regards to its population size, gender ratios, age averages, labour profiles and linguistic diversities. By 2007, one in every four foreigners came from Latin America (Departamento Comunicacion de la Fundacion BBVA, 2014, p.9). In terms of Ecuadorian migration specifically, this group experienced its highest immigration flows to Spain between 2000 and 2004, with the majority of the group's members choosing to reside in Madrid (ibid, pp.10-12).

As previously mentioned, however, the acceptance of these immigrants was not without its limitations. Even though Latinas/os quickly became "*los preferidos*" (the preferred ones) of Spain's foreign residents, and despite the fact that many gained citizenship after only a few years of living in the country, these titles failed

to always guarantee a legitimate parity and tolerance of this group (Escribano et al., 2003, p.3). Beyond national surveys, which reveal a growing malaise towards these changes, (ibid pp.4-6) these shortcomings in the “Spanish integration process” are best exemplified by the alacrity at which this “favouratism” was reversed at the onset of the 2008 recession. For example, whereas in 2005, Spanish Prime Minister Zapatero annoyed many other European leaders because of his exceptionally easygoing policies towards undocumented Latina/o workers, by 2009, he was one of the principle advocates of the European Union’s Return Directive for all foreign labourers (Kern, 2009, p.1).

This reaction against foreigners can be expected given the particularly protracted impact of the global recession in Spain. The country’s unemployment rate almost doubled between 2008 and 2009, and the majority of its largest sectors—such as housing, real estate, construction, etc.—which had previously boomed as a result of immigrant labour, suddenly collapsed. Almost overnight, Spain changed from being one of the fastest growing economies in Europe to one of the countries with the greatest levels of social unrest (ibid). It is imperative to mention this shift in Spain’s immigration disposition because these events engendered radical changes in the Ecuadorian migrant experience. Whereas many of the earlier sources on this subject present the Latina/o position in the country in a propitious and encouraging light, reports written after 2009 relay the extent to which the opinions of “the other” took a turn for the worst (Buck, 2014).

In February 2014, for example, *The Financial Times* reported that Latin American residents in Spain (including newly made Spanish citizens) were

fleeing the country by the thousands, thereby leaving many neighborhoods and communities bereft of their previous inhabitants. According to the article, the cardinal reason for this “drain from Spain,” was that Latina/o residents felt that there was “nothing left” for them “anymore” (Buck, 2014, p.1). As the interviews in this dissertation expound, this perceived “nothingness” for Latin American residents was not only meant with regards to the job shortages in the country, but also in terms of the overall absence of opportunities for them to genuinely integrate into Spanish society.

In Johnson’s 2010 clip, *Trabajadora Aeropuerto* (Airport employee), for example, Ruth, a bathroom cleaner at the Madrid airport, discloses her experience of living and working in Spain over the past twelve years. While the interview starts off rather amicably, with Ruth elaborating on how busy she has been working two jobs, the more she describes her current situation, the more emotional she becomes. She explains that even though she feels extremely homesick and would *love to see her family again*, her financial situation makes this impossible. Ruth begins to break down as she talks about Ecuador, and she confesses that life in Spain *is too different for her...that the people are too different*, and that it has been *particularly difficult in recent years*. Thus, even though she acknowledges *that there is a bit of everything in Spain*, and that “*hay buenos y malos*” (there are good people and bad people), Ruth makes it clear that she neither feels fulfilled, nor happy in her current situation. Throughout the interview, she keeps repeating that it is *very difficult*, and that, despite having

lived in Spain for twelve years, she continues to feel extremely lonely (Johnson, 2010d).

In another one of Johnson's 2010 clips, *Guayaquileña telefonica* (the Guayaquilena telephone marketer), the woman being interviewed shares a very different immigration story to Ruth's, but a somewhat comparable perception of her current position as an Ecuadorian migrant in Spain. Dolores first arrived in the country with her two children to improve her financial position in 2007. In the three years that she has lived in Spain, she has married a Cuban, while both her children have married Spaniards. Even though she too, longs to return to Ecuador, she believes that this is no longer a possibility because of her children's marriages. Nevertheless, as she proudly proclaims, *there is no other country like Ecuador...that is "seguro"* (sure). Despite having faced many problems with finding and maintaining a job, she *thanks god* that she has overcome these challenges and now works as a salesperson (*"he salido aflote"*).

Dolores propounds that people in Spain *are good*, but that *there exists far too much racism, and that the current situation is bad*. This, she attests, is especially the case for Ecuadorians, who *always end up working a lot, regardless of the type of occupations that they find*. The problem stretches back to before the economic recession, in her opinion, but now things are worse because *"no hay trabajo"* (there is no work). Diaz et al. support this final point that Dolores makes, and attest that Spain's previous solidarity with its Latina/o immigrants was more "a reality conditioned by the needs of globalized work markets" than a genuine rapport of "cultural compatibility" (Diaz et al, 2012, p.831). In their

opinion, therefore, Latin American migrants were primarily encouraged to move to the country because of economic and social necessities at the time. As a result, “Latin American labourers are incorporated into Spanish society” in the “context of this inequality” and remain excluded from real inclusion and parity (ibid). This is perhaps why Dolores advances that, despite her children’s integration into the Spanish milieu, and despite her frequent use of the word “*vale*” (a specifically Spanish expression for “okay”), that she does not feel completely integrated into the Spanish way of life, and that her *heart* remains with *the food, the people* and “*la fiesta de Ecuador*” (the party of Ecuador) (Johnson, 2010a).

The women’s oral testimonies suggest that a number of the presently prominent Spanish immigration dilemmas—such as employment discrimination—have actually always existed, even before the onset of the 2008 recession. The difference is that these were previously concealed under the guise of a supposed cultural affinity between Latinas/os and Spain.

The inequality of which Dolores speaks, however, is not only evidenced by the undesirable occupations that traditionally employed Latinas/os, but is also seen in the kinds of pressures that many individuals within this group have felt to either adapt to a Spanish identity (and shed overt aspects of their “Ecuadorianess”), or to remain “loyal” to Ecuador and reject many of the identifying elements of their host environment. According to Oscar Jara, who was *El Director de la Secretaria del Migrante en Espana* (the Director Secretary of Migrants in Spain) until 2013, many immigrants have been afraid to pursue the



middle route, whereby they combine aspects of both countries to shape a unique immigrant identity. He supposes this is the case because migrants mistakenly believe that they will lose out in both areas. Either they will continue to be treated as inferior foreigners or they will no longer have strong national ties to revert to when they are confronted with Spanish discrimination.

Oscar was an Ecuadorian immigrant who resided in Spain for twenty-nine years. During this time, he became one of the most influential spokespersons for Latinas/os in the country, and often worked to establish support networks to help immigrants integrate into Spanish society. Oscar contends that one of the biggest exasperations for Ecuadorian labourers in Spain are the types of employments that are available to them, because these jobs are generally inferior to their qualifications from back home. Between 2000 and 2008, for example, the vast majority of Ecuadorian men worked either in construction, agriculture or hospitality, while most female labourers took on jobs as home-takers or domestics.

Oscar has previously worked to improve this employment dilemma by pushing for the introduction of conversion degrees that allow migrants to equate their foreign qualifications with those recognized in Spain. An example of a project that he has worked on was the introduction of a conversion programme in the Technico de Madrid, which offers specific courses for immigrants to complement their skills and previous degrees and gain Spanish diplomas. Despite some of these breakthroughs, however, Oscar recognises that it can be challenging for immigrants to have the opportunities to integrate within Spanish

society. He equates this to both externally imposed barriers, such as racism, as well as to the internally-imposed barriers which immigrants sometimes create, such as their fears of losing their national roots through assimilation.

In the US case, on the other hand, Latin American immigrants appear to enjoy greater levels of overall “inclusion” into the country’s mainstream, albeit with many limitations. One of the most pronounced examples of this was President Obama’s re-election in 2012, which is commonly attributed to “the Latino vote.” Polling data reveals that Obama received a record high 69% of the total Latin American vote that year, which, given the prodigious number of Latina/o residents in the US, was one of the most influential and decisive support bases during the election (Forbes, 2012). This more active political participation of Latinas/os does not confirm that the group has necessarily achieved complete social, economic and/or political equality in the country, however. Ultimately, Latin American migrants’ experiences will continue to vary based on a range of different factors. These include their various countries of origin, the reasons they chose to immigrate, the connections they may have had before arriving, their financial situations and the areas in which they settled. Also, since this is such a large umbrella group—it was estimated that 54.1 million Latinas/os resided in the US as of July 1, 2013—there is no viable method to expound a general overview of the group’s experiences (Brown and Patten, 2013, p.1).

In comparison to Spain, the US has experienced a much longer and more complex history with Latin American immigration, which is that reason for country’s traditionally stricter immigration regulations for this group. In particular,

the “[tightening]” of border controls over the past decade, and the ever expanding “surveillance at the U.S.-Mexico border,” rendered “clandestine migration” to the US far more “expensive and dangerous than migration to Spain” (Jokisch, 2007).

Nevertheless, despite these challenges, the numbers of Ecuadorians entering the country, both legally and illegally, have never faltered. National statistics posit that between 1,000 and 2,000 Ecuadorian migrants are apprehended at the US border each year, while thousands more make it across without being stopped (ibid). Many among this group are from urban areas in Ecuador, and hold different university or skill-based qualifications (Bertoli et al. 2010, p.11). While some struggle to gain any kind of legal documentation, others have had an easier time obtaining these through family members or acquaintances who already held citizenship. Between 2000 and 2005, for example, an estimated 9,196 Ecuadorians obtained legal residency in the US (Jokisch, 2007). This number has steadily increased each year, so that by 2011, national data estimated that a notable 645,000 Ecuadorians (or individuals of Ecuadorian origins) resided in the US. This increase in the group’s numbers has now rendered it the country’s 10<sup>th</sup> largest Latina/o group (Brown and Patten, 2013, p.1). The majority of Ecuadorians have chosen to reside in New York—about 40%-- and a little under half of the total population are now US citizens (ibid, pp.1-3). Ecuadorian men are usually employed in restaurants, while most female migrants find jobs in sweatshops or as cleaners in office buildings (ibid). Despite these “lower” jobs, compared to many other Latin American groups,

Ecuadorians have traditionally enjoyed a higher average annual earning and lower unemployment and poverty rates (ibid, p.3).

The length restrictions of this dissertation have made it impossible to elaborate on the numerous immigration legislations that have been passed in the US over the past two decades. Furthermore, such an overview would take away from the primary objective of this research. Nevertheless, it is crucial to highlight the fact that the immigration debate, and especially Latin American immigration, continues to be a hotly contested issue within the US political arena. Two immigration policies, in particular, deserve mentioning. These are the *Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (Daca)* and the “*Gang of Eight*” Immigration Bill.

Daca is an executive order that President Obama introduced in 2012, to protect illegal migrants who had entered the US under the age of 16. The legislation “delays” any kind of deportation and harassment against these youths by two years, and can be renewed biannually until individuals have obtained a legal status. While it has many benefits, the act is also restricted by numerous eligibility requirements (Mayorkas, 2012). The 2013 “Gang of Eight Bill,” on the other hand, is a monumental “compromise” between Democrat and Republican congressmen, which has opened the doors for millions of undocumented residents to attain citizenship. In a nutshell, the bill outlines a “13-year pathway to citizenship” which is based on a series of “security benchmarks” that individuals must first meet (Kim, 2013).

These two imperative legislations have begun to redress many of the challenges that Latina/o migrants continues to endure, such as social exclusion,

employment insecurity and political discrimination. These are some of the hardships that Eros Guevara—an Ecuadorian musician who illegally immigrated to New York as a teenager in 1996—discusses in an interview with Johnson in 2010. Even though he struggled to move to an environment that is estranged from his native country, and void of the rest of his family and friends, after living in New York for sixteen years, Eros feels that he has become a *New Yorker of sorts*. That said, he is still very attached to his Latin American roots, not necessarily because he plans to return to Ecuador, but because he empathizes with the millions of illegal Latinas/os who continue to be exploited as a result of their clandestine status. His music is based on the theme of illegality, and his songs are meant to reach out to his *Latin American brothers*, who remain victims because of their “*documento ilegal*” (illegal documents). Since Eros came to the US as an illegal immigrant, he understands the struggles to integrate that the Latina/o community must endure in light of the country’s tough immigration policies. Since this interview was recorded in 2010, it would be interesting to find out whether Eros considers Daca and the “Gang of Eight Bill” as progressive steps towards eliminating these problems. This is because even though both of the aforementioned legislations contain a number of eligibility limitations, the two were nonetheless introduced (and adamantly fought over) in order to offer greater opportunities to undocumented migrants in the US.

In addition to these legal advancements, Latina/o immigrants are currently redefining the US’s social, political and demographic identities. While this has engendered fears among certain individuals of a “browning” of the country, the

phenomenon has also anchored new and exciting “normalities” for what it means to be an “American” citizen (Davis, 2000, p.1). This includes changes such as the present usage of Spanish in most public sectors and institutions, the explosion of Latina/o dance and music in the charts and the availability of Latina/o food in every corner of the country, regardless of an area’s political, religious or ethnic constitution (ibid, p.44). These changes have become an integral aspect of the status quo, despite the fact that barely twenty years ago these kinds of influences were only prevalent in a few, concentrated areas, such as Miami (ibid). The spread of Spanish throughout the US (and not solely among immigrant communities) is a particularly notable transformation that is rather rare for most host countries. In fact, as some of the oral testimonies will confirm, the use of Spanish has become so prevalent in the US, that a significant number incoming Latina/o immigrants no longer feel obligated to learn English once they settle in the country.

## II.

### DEFINING, CONCEPTUALIZING AND DISSECTING THE KEY CONCEPTS

Identity remains both challenging and problematic to define because the concept can be interpreted through a number of different representative markers—such as, race, “culture,” gender, wealth, age, religion, etc. While postmodern discourses posit that “identity does not exist,” and is nothing more than a “catch-all” concept, other theories propound that it is an indispensable element of a person’s life, which needs to be specifically examined as an intimate, social and political construct (Schwartz et al., 2006, p.5).

Stuart Hall proposes a rather negative interpretation of the concept by defining it as the combination of “many superficial or artificially imposed ‘selves’,” which are used by people with a “common history or ancestry” to ascertain “an unchanging oneness” and “exclude others” (Hall, 1996, p.4). According to Hall, therefore, identity continues to be relevant to the individual precisely because it is “more the product of the marking of difference and exclusion,” than a “sign of an identical, naturally-constituted unity” (ibid). In addition, he posits that power should not be underestimated when defining the concept because identity is always constructed in the context of hegemonic structures.

Since identity can hold such diverse meanings for individuals, it has been somewhat of a daunting task to negotiate Ecuadorian migrant identity without reducing the group’s members to a single, static and isolated interpretation. This dissertation supports part of Hall’s analysis, particularly his assertions that identity is often generalised into broad labels to dissociate groups from one another, (a kind of *we vs. them* approach), and that it can be founded on varying understandings of power. The research does not propound that the concept is completely “artificial” and “exclusionary,” in nature, however. Even though exclusionary practices can sometimes empower immigrants within their new societies, it should not –as is unfortunately often the case—be understood as the preeminent component of their individual identities. As is further explained below, Ecuadorian migrants in the two countries may resort to their greater “Latina/o” identities to feel included within a larger community, but this does not mean that they are not also a part of many other, non-Latin American affinity groups.

The research, therefore, principally supports Schwartz et al.'s interpretation, which contends that identity is a "synthesis of personal, social, and cultural self-conceptions" (Schwartz et al, 2006, p.6). The personal component of this definition is the culmination of an individual's "goals, values, and beliefs," the social aspect relates to the group(s) that he/she belongs to, and, finally, the cultural part "refers to a sense of solidarity" that individuals may feel towards the "attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors" of a [particular] group (ibid). Thus, because identity can be both broad and specific, and because it is always context-dependent, it remains extremely challenging to interpret. In order to dissect this concept in light of Ecuadorian immigration in Spain and the US, other relevant terms will first have to be examined. These are culture, discrimination, race, *Latinidad* and citizenship.

As with identity, "culture" is another highly contested mega-concept that can convey different meanings for different people at different times. While Hall contends that culture is based on "fixed entities that similarly describe or affect all individuals, groups, and nations" (Hall, 1980, p.20), other theorists, such as the "postmodernists," advance that "all human experience is variable, malleable, local and ....in constant flux," and that culture is therefore "difficult to define in any general [term]" (Schwartz et al, 2006, p.3)." These latter group of academics posit that culture is irrelevant and should no longer employed as an identity marker because it is constantly changing in new environments and circumstances (ibid). Both interpretations ultimately prescribe very limited methods for resolving the meaning of culture. On the one hand, using excessive



caution when interpreting the concept can be ineffective, as it becomes almost impossible to employ “culture” without appearing reductive, whereas erringly employing it as an “explanation” for the (perceived) differences between individuals only bolsters barriers to genuine intercultural communication.

*Acculturation* is sometimes described as a subdivision of the greater umbrella concept of “culture,” and is considered in this dissertation because of its relevance to the immigrant experience. The process is perhaps best explained as “the adoption of ideals, values, and behaviors of the [migrant’s] receiving culture,” coupled with “the retention of [the] ideals, values, and beliefs from [her/his] culture of origin” (ibid p.7). Acculturation, therefore, should not be mistaken for *assimilation*, because even if it does beget changes in a person’s identity, the term is primarily meant to describe a process of fusing different identifiers, which only “occurs when individuals from different cultures come into contact” (ibid).

*Assimilation*, on the other hand, takes place when the “norms” and practices of “immigrant groups entering a new society become similar over time to those of the host society.” Ultimately, it requires that immigrants “[shed their] native [cultures]” and “gradually” adapt to the mainstream norms of the adopted country (Ansell, 2013, p.14). Despite their different outcomes, the two concepts are nevertheless related, and in many instances of immigration, acculturation is a precursor to assimilation.

The US case study is a prime example of the acculturation process because many of the Latina/o migrants in the country have successfully fused aspects of their (supposedly homologous) Latina/o backgrounds with elements of

“US culture” to produce a new “middle culture,” or “third culture,” known as *Latinidad* (Holiday, 2012, pp. 239-240). Davis describes this process as an attempt by Latina/o migrants to reconfigure the “cold” frozen geometrics of the old spatial order to accommodate a hotter, more exuberant urbanism (Davis, 2000, p.55). Thus, many Ecuadorian migrants in the US have expanded their “definitions” of the “in-group” to include individuals from “the new receiving society” in addition to those “from [their] heritage society” (Schwartz et al., 2006 p.7).

Alexandra Tavares is a thirty-seven year old nursery school teacher and Zumba instructor in New York City. Before immigrating to the US from Ecuador almost twenty years ago, Alexandra worked as a flight attendant and traveled all around the Americas. This provided her with the opportunity to visit many different areas in the US, and to contrast the situation in the country with the circumstances in Ecuador at the time. Her cardinal motivation for deciding to move to New York was her determination to become a “working woman” that could push herself and break boundaries. She was afraid that if she remained at home she would eventually fall into the trap of the “typical Ecuadorian woman,” who married and did not pursue a career.

Alexandra professes that she considered this displacement as a kind of “escape,” despite her love for her country and her apprehensions about migrating on her own, because she knew that she would not have had the same opportunities in Ecuador. She has since married a Dominican man (who only spoke English when they first met) and has had three children who are all

citizens of the US. Alexandra is a quintessential example of an immigrant who has “acculturated” during her time abroad because in her household she makes it a point to fuse aspects of both her Ecuadorian background and her husband’s Dominican roots, with US practices and norms. Even though she initially struggled to integrate into her new environment because of the language barrier, she pushed herself to learn English by attending language courses and by practicing with her husband, to whom she taught how to speak Spanish. As a result, her family is now bilingual, and her children are proud to say that they are both “Ecuadorian” and “American.”

Alexandra has not exclusively pushed for this kind of acculturation in her household, however. When her children were little she became frustrated and disappointed with the programme at their nursery school, because she felt that they were not being given adequate attention from their teachers. She therefore took it upon herself to open her own daycare centre, which would be more creative and activity-filled for students, and which would not treat children as “*just another number.*” In addition to these changes, Alexandra decided to make her school bilingual, and ensured that everything—including games, songs, lessons, prayers—were done in both English *and* Spanish. Many children now attend Alexandra’s daycare, and the majority are not from Spanish-speaking backgrounds. When asked if she had ever been confronted about her bilingual teaching, Alexandra surprisingly answered that the only problems she had had were from some of the other Ecuadorian and Latina/o parents, who were afraid that Spanish-language teaching placed their children at a disadvantage in the US

milieu. “*Other parents, such as regular Americans,*” she says, “*were actually the most excited about the idea.*” Alexandra’s daycare also focuses on expression through music and dance, because Alexandra believes that “*music is important for everyone.*” As with her fusing of English and Spanish, she enjoys combining different global music and dance for her students.

What is remarkable is that the second and third generations of Latinas/os in the US sustain the trends created by immigrants such as Alexandra, and continue to contribute to the ever-expanding “sabor tropical of food, music, fashion and language” in the “American” lifestyle (Davis, 2000, p.22). This is seen through a number of different channels, such as the music and film industries, where the use of Spanish and Latin American rhythms are commonly expressed.

Ecuadorian migrants in Spain, on the other hand, do not seem to have undergone the same kind of acculturation process as their US counterparts. Rather, as the oral testimonies reveal, the “archetypal” experiences of these individuals has been to either completely resist integration, or to directly assimilate by replacing most of their Ecuadorian cultural practices with Spanish norms. Language, in particular, has been one of the most obvious indicators of the assimilation process of Latina/o immigrants in Spain. As a result, some individuals intentionally adapt their accents in Spanish to sound more “European.” The significance of these forced transformations should not be depreciated as this is a prime example of how “language is political,” and can be

used as a tool for coveted racism and political and economic exclusion (Lippi-Green, 1997, p.186).

In Christian Johnson's 2010 clip, *Lojano Madrid*, an immigrant from the Loja region in Ecuador discusses some of the pressures he and a number of his Latina/o compatriots have felt to adopt "Spanish" practices and norms. The man, who preferred to remain anonymous, talks about how his original Spanish accent "*está perdido*," (is lost). He describes the initial shock he felt when he first arrived in Spain, and realized that the Spanish he had learned in the Ecuadorian schooling system was barely recognizable to that which is spoken in Spain. He elaborates on the fact that not only do many words differ—such as "*cuyes*" in Ecuador are "*cobayas*" in Spain (guineapigs), but that the actual method of speaking and phrasing sentences is also very distinct. Even though the man mocks some of the cultural and linguistic variations that he has encountered (such as the Spanish obsession with treating dogs as members of the family, which is practically unheard of in Ecuador), he nonetheless admits to having taken on many of these different practices because he felt that he needed to. Furthermore, although he does not explicitly confess this, it appears that the Lojano immigrant feels pressure to disassociate from his Latin American roots by changing aspects of his identity—such as his accent—to become more accepted into Spanish society. An interesting anecdote is that throughout the interview, the man barely talks about the significance of his Ecuadorian background to current identity, and, instead, he focuses on comparing and contrasting his "old" and "new" cultures.

The Lojano immigrant's proclivity to assimilate suggests that he plans to remain in the country for a long period of time. The man's reservations contrasts the assertions made by Ruth and Dolores, who are both more adamant about their desires to return to Ecuador (Johnson, 2010b).

The anticipated of the length of time that individuals plan to remain abroad, therefore, can often influence their dispositions to assimilate, acculturate or reject their host societies. During her interview, for example, Alexandra says that she would like to move to Ecuador when she retires, but presently intends to remain in New York for many years for her children to have better opportunities. This is one of the cardinal reasons why she wanted to learn English and integrate into the "American" milieu.

In fact, Alexandra expresses her disappointment in many of the Latin American immigrants in the US and who refuse to learn English, or to become involved in "non-Latina/o" groups and organizations. She agrees that while the recent surge in Latin American communities, commodities and "trends," which have pressured institutions throughout the country to offer service in both English *and* Spanish has been a breakthrough, she also maintains that immigrants need to take advantage of this as an opportunity to enjoy the best of both worlds, and not as an excuse to remain isolated in one's cultural community. In 2011, for example, it was estimated that only 53% of Ecuadorian residents in the US spoke English proficiently (Brown and Patten, 2013, p.1).

Thus, while maintaining connections with one's country of origin can be important for an immigrant's transition into a new environment, this kind of "banal

nationalism” can also be inhibiting, because it can constrict his/her experiences abroad (Pillar, 2011, p.73). This is because migrants that focus excessively on the past carry this “cultural baggage” with them to all of their “intercultural encounters” (ibid).

Oscar elaborates on this point when he discusses his own immigration experience to Spain as a postgraduate student in 1985. He admits that the first few months were extremely difficult, as he struggled to become accustomed to the cold Spanish winter and the country’s “odd traditions.” He remembers his arrival day, in particular, because it was the Day of Kings, the celebratory day in Ecuador when family members gave each other gifts. He was surprised to find that in Spain this gift-giving tradition only occurred on Christmas day. Despite his initial struggles, when asked how he perceives his overall experience of living in Spain, he ascertains that it has been a positive one. *It is not easy at all*, he admits, because individuals *constantly need to adapt*, but it is *also an enriching experience and people need to take advantage of the good parts and live them to the fullest*. He recognizes that because *identity is “volátil”* (volatile), *every case is unique and individual*, and that *Ecuadorians may hold different statuses in Spain* which ultimately *affects their experiences within the country*. Some may be considered foreign/immigrants, while others have had an easier time gaining a double-nationality, especially if their children are born in Spain. This latter group has the advantage of not being listed as “foreigners,” but classified as “nationals.”

Nevertheless, regardless of what ensues, Oscar maintains that *immigration is a difficult process for anyone*, as it is full of *suffering, confusion*,

*uncertainty* and *instability*. He goes on to talk about the emotional and psychological that immigrants must undergo, which he describes as “*el duelo de haber salido de su país*” (the pain of having left your country). In his opinion, the main problem in this process is the split lives that immigrants self-impose when they “[*viven*] con [*sus cabezas*] en [*sus*] país de origen y [*sus cuerpos*] en el país del destino” (live with their head in their country of origin but their bodies in the destination country). This, he blames on individuals’ the fact that too many Ecuadorian immigrants focus on returning home during their time abroad, rather than living “*a tiempo completo*” (in the present). In his opinion, those who are less sure of when and how they will return are those who tend to enrich their time abroad.

Oscar encourages Ecuadorian immigrants to let go of their fears and reservations, and to push themselves to integrate more in their new homes because this will render the overall experience easier for them. In addition, he says that by doing this, immigrants are axiomatically abandoning their native identities, either.

According to Oscar, as of 2010, Ecuadorians were Spain’s largest minority community, with around 340,000 registered residents, and an estimated 15,000 illegal immigrants. These numbers have rendered the group a weighty force within Spanish society, politics and the economy, and has consequently put pressure on the Spanish government to further formally recognize this community.

Of course this decision to resist assimilation is never made in a vacuum, as



the willingness and capability of immigrants to integrate is also influenced by the attitudes and perceptions of the host society (Ansell, 2013, p.16). It is precisely when “cultural explanations” are used to define relationships and interactions, that individuals begin to *discriminate* and “approach each other through stereotypes” (Pillar, 2011, p.73). According to the Oxford Dictionary, *discrimination* is “the unjust or prejudicial treatment of different categories of people, especially on the grounds of race, age, or sex” (Oxford Dictionaries, 2014). With regards to immigration, this concept can be defined in a number of different formal channels—such as citizenship rights—and informal practices and perceptions—such as the “cultural explanations” described above.

For the purposes of this dissertation, the term is examined through its more informal expressions, such as when culture becomes “fixed” in individuals’ minds, like “a tag that people exaggerate or unduly emphasize at the expense of variation and variability” (Holiday, 2012, p.245). Ingrid Pillar denounces these kinds of stereotypes as nothing more than “interested generalisations,” which fail to reflect “other aspects of [individuals’] identities,” such as “class, gender, ethnicity and regional background” (Pillar, 2011, p.53). Discrimination and culture are commonly interlinked in immigration discourses, therefore, because an individual’s culture is often postulated as a timeless *reason* for *why* he/she acts a certain way. This kind of discrimination, of course, only reinforces misunderstandings between groups, and further isolates them from one another. In order to rectify this problem, Holiday advises that quotation marks be placed around the word “culture,” so that individuals can be more aware of the “nature of

the knowledge” in which its interpretations were first suggested (Holiday, 2012, p.238).

Consequently, in order to avoid discriminating and essentialising Ecuadorian migrants in Spain and the US, this dissertation approaches the concept of culture with three cautionary considerations: 1) the context in which the cultural interpretation was defined 2) who/what the individuals under consideration are being compared to, and 3) the extent to which these conclusions have been drawn from real life experiences (Pillar, 2011, pp.19,23).

Holiday’s two paradigms, which he defines as large and small “cultures” are a good starting point for overcoming the barriers created by stereotypes. While Holiday ascertains that individuals are generally associated with “large cultural categories”—such as being a Latina/o—he postulates that these should not be accepted as “floating signifiers” because they are entirely ideologically based (Holiday, 2012, p.237). “Small cultures,” however, are the many different groups to which individuals can belong, regardless of their larger “cultural” identities. According to Holiday, the small culture paradigm “[liberates] ‘cultures’ from [the] notions of ethnicity and nation” and the “perceptual dangers [that] they carry with them” (ibid, p.240). It is this kind of intercultural interaction that Oscar encourages when he discusses the Ecuadorian migrant dilemma in Spain, because in his opinion, an immigrant’s detachment from the larger paradigm ultimately permits them to *live in the present*, and gain the most from their experience abroad.

Alexandra and Maria are quintessential examples of immigrants that have embraced the opportunities to form their own small cultures. Both women are cancer survivors who attest that without the aid of certain support groups, such as *Share*, that they would never have been able to fight their sicknesses. Maria first joined *Share*, one of the leading woman's breast cancer organizations in the US, when she was first diagnosed five years ago. Her experiences with the group were not only helpful in pushing her to overcome her cancer, but also permitted her to form an extensive support network with women from many different nationalities and backgrounds. In addition, her participation with *Share* is what inspired her to take on her current job, which is to assist new-coming immigrants, such as with legal queries, issues of exploitation and violence, health advice, etc. Maria's dream is to one day establish a similar kind of support network to *Share* in Ecuador, where she knows that many women would benefit.

Alexandra also became actively involved in *Share* when she was diagnosed at the age of twenty-two. As with Maria, the experience motivated her to become more involved in other support networks, and she has since both participated in, and founded, a number of different community groups for children with physical and learning disabilities. Both examples portray the ways in which immigrants' involvement in "small cultures," can facilitate acculturation or assimilation, and enrich their overall experiences in their host countries.

Unfortunately, the refusal to partake in either process—whether out of an insecurity of losing one's original identity, or as a defense mechanism against discrimination—can prompt tension between immigrant communities and their

host societies. This is because such resistance can make migrants seem like the perpetrators of “cultural wars,” and consequently become scapegoats for many of the host country’s social, political and financial dilemmas (ibid).

Oscar posits that while this can be a common trend among the older generations of Ecuadorians in Spain, that the younger migrants who come across are “*especialmente sensibles*” (especially sensitive) to identifying with “*el entorno y con la forma cotidiana de vida*” (the environment and the lifestyle) in Spain, and often lose the kind of attachment to Ecuador that the older generations may cling onto because “*sentirse españoles*” (they feel Spanish).

Dario Martínez is a good example of what Oscar is talking about. Dario moved to Spain with his mother and older siblings when he was ten, and has since remained in the country, despite the fact that his mother returned to live in Ecuador in 2012. Dario, who is now 24, is currently employed in the Spanish army and lives in Madrid. Whereas his mother moved to Spain with the intention of finding a better job and making enough money to enjoy a better life in Ecuador, Dario makes it clear that he has no intention of going back. He has Spanish citizenship, he feels Spanish, and he says that he has *no connection to Ecuador really*. All of his friends are now in Spain, his career is in Spain, and he is not a member of any Latina/o organizations or groups.

When asked about his experiences with discrimination and the possible pressures that he may have felt to assimilate to Spanish society, Dario admits to having adopted *two different ways of speaking* when he was young, one for when he was at home with his Ecuadorian family, and another for when he was with his

Spanish friends. In terms of discrimination, he feels that *Latinas/os do not have it that bad*, and that he personally had never been a victim of it. Rather, he says it is the Moroccans and other ethnicities that have a bad reputation because, according to him, they are always causing trouble. He acknowledges that the fact that he lives in Madrid, a cosmopolitan area, could influence this, and that the circumstances may be different in rural areas. Dario, nevertheless, admits that many Latin American immigrants have left Spain in recent years both because of the country's economic problems and because it is no longer easy to obtain citizenship. The problem, in his opinion, is that too many people come with the intention of *already going back...which is why some integrate and some don't*.

In contrast to cultural identity, *racial* and *ethnic identity* can be understood as the feelings of attachment “that one maintains toward one's ethnic group,” or community of origin (Schwartz et al., 2006, p.7). Even though race and ethnicity are often treated as separate terms, they will be used interchangeably in this dissertation. This is due to both the length restrictions of this research, as well as the fact that *Latinidad* as an identity marker has been considered to be both a “race” and an “ethnicity” at times. In spite of the expanding assertions that globalization and international migration are rapidly erasing racial and ethnic distinctions, this dissertation confutes these claims and posits that both continue to be acutely relevant in Spain and the US (Ansell, 2013, p.ix).

It is challenging, however, to measure the extent to which this concept “intersects with class, gender and sexuality,” especially because racial categories can be so “flexible” and “ambiguous,” and are contextually defined (ibid, p.x,

Montes and Davila, 2001, p.9). As Maria Perez, an Ecuadorian immigrant in New York, posits, “*en Ecuador no hay Latinos*” (In Ecuador there are no Latinos). What Maria means by this, is that in Latin American countries the racial category “Latina/o” does not exist. Rather, as she ascertains, “we are white, or Indian...but not “Hispanic” or “Latino.” According to her, it is only in the US, and now increasingly in Spain, that this racial category has come to be. When I asked her how she identified herself, she replied that she would first say that she is a “Latina,” then, if asked to be more specific, she would say “Ecuadorian.” Maria moved to New York ten years ago with her husband and four children. Her father was already working as a paralegal in the country, so she did not have a difficult time obtaining a residency status. She has had a number of different jobs since she arrived—including working as a cook, for a telephone company and an assistant for an immigration programme—and she confesses that even though she has learned English, she spends the majority of her time speaking in Spanish, both at work and in her circles of friends. Even though she personally does not feel that she has had to change her “Cuencan” Ecuadorian accent, she claims to know a lot of other Latinas/os that have changed their modes of speaking to a more generic “Latino accent.” As with Alexandra, Maria has made it a point to combine aspects of US life with her Ecuadorian roots for her children. All four speak both languages, and she exposes them to as many Ecuadorian things as she can. As is the case with Alexandra, she also plans to return to Ecuador when she is much older, but feels established in the US at the moment.

While she says that she has never experienced extreme discrimination, Maria laughs as she says *to Americans everyone (all Latinas/os) are Mexicans*. This depreciation for Latin American diversities is both the cause and the result of the introduction of “*Latinidad*” in the US as a “third race” (Lao-Montes and Davila, 2001, p.9). Ultimately, this phenomenon has engendered a divide in the ways in which Latin Americans self-identify, because while some individuals embrace *Latinidad* as an outward expression of membership to a significant and influential minority group, others have tried to conceal this overt distinction from the “host society” (Davila, 2008, p.11). Members of this latter group have long tried to frame themselves as “American,” by “adhering to American values” such as ambition, family, religions, etc., and by attempting to “distance [themselves] from “blackness” (ibid, p.7). For example, in 2000, 48% of the Latina/o population of the US identified as “white,” while 43% of those surveyed rejected the idea of racial categories altogether (ibid). These numbers are telling precisely because they reveal the extent to which Latin American immigrants are at “the crux of transforming the meaning of race itself” (ibid, p.11). Furthermore, “*Latina/o* is no longer an artificial, racialized box invented by the majority society” and to be an individual in this group today is more “a *practice* rather than a *representation* of identity (Davis, 2000, p.15) Thus, despite the numerous interpretations of *Latinidad* in academic writing, it seems almost impossible to provide a palpable definition of the term because it is a “general assumption” that is “an ethnic marker of a mosaic of nationalities with a common ancestry and shared experience in the US” (Lao-Montes and Davila, 2001, p.8) Furthermore, it is

crucial not to accept this identification marker as static, as often the case, but as a “a flexible category that relates to a plurality of ideologies.... cultural expressions and political and social agendas” (ibid).

The existing variance in Latina/o migrants’ self-identifications is largely a result of their individual perceptions about their opportunities for social, political and economic inclusion. *Citizenship*, in particular, is often perceived as the ultimate step in an immigrant’s acceptance into the host society. This is because it is commonly believed that such a status will automatically guarantee an individual all of the same rights, freedoms and opportunities as other citizens. Citizenship remains a “slippery concept,” however, and may fail to deliver the concrete changes that immigrants expect (Galvez, 2013, p.727).

This is demonstrated by the five interviews of Ecuadorian migrants in Spain, as these present an ideal example of how elusive and context-specific the concept’s meaning can. These differences in individuals’ perceptions can, as Oscar stresses, result from both the host country’s external and structural restrictions to genuine parity, *as well as* the self-imposed barriers that immigrants may create. It is imperative to recognize that these varying attitudes have ensued in spite of the fact that all of the Spanish Ecuadorian interviewees had an “easier” time (in terms of time duration and legal accessibility) obtaining their legal status in Spain. Moreover, these oral testimonies allege to having maintained the same feelings about their positions even before the hardships brought on by the 2008 recession, even though whether or not this event actually influenced their attitudes remains questionable.



The migrants interviewed in New York, on the other hand, where citizenship is significantly more difficult to come by, depict a different story altogether. Despite their starkly different arrival experiences, the three individuals appear to have adopted a comparably positive attitude about their current positions in the US. Even Eros, who has made it his career to both highlight his Latina/o roots, and to bring attention to the sufferings brought on by illegality, fashions himself a “New Yorker of sorts,” and expresses some kind of affinity to his new home. Furthermore, in all three cases, the immigrants plan to remain in the US for a long period of time.

Thus, even though none of the interviewees purport that the opportunities for Ecuadorian immigrants to integrate in the US are straightforward and painless, all three have nevertheless pushed themselves to become involved in their local “neighborhoods, schools, workplaces, churches and public institutions” (ibid). Ultimately, this greater willingness to become involved has permitted these individuals to become “imbedded” into “the social life” of their communities in a more profound, and perhaps meaningful, way than some of their counterparts in Spain (ibid).

As Oscar remarks on his views on citizenship, *“El ejercicio de ciudadanía es la continuación. Es lo real. No sirve de nada declarar derechos si después no ejerces los derechos en la realidad”* (the exercise of citizenship is continuing. It is real. It serves no use after being declared if you do not exercise the rights in reality).

## CONCLUSION:

The cardinal objective of this dissertation has been to demonstrate the extent to which “the arrival of the immigrant...marks the fueling of change,” and, consequently, cannot be so easily explained by broad labels and essentialised generalizations (Nair, 2010, p.4). This is because such an arrival is “an irrevocable event” which “portends not the nicely packaged prospect of multiculturalism, but the radical prospect of hybridity, cultural translation and translocation” (ibid). Thus, the material challenges many of the “comprehensive” assertions that are often made about Ecuadorian migrants, both as individuals, and as members of the greater Latina/o community. This is because, as the oral testimonies reveal, even immigrants with comparable experiences and backgrounds can have completely contrasting attitudes about their “positions” within their new countries. The terminologies that are examined in this work were chosen precisely because they present a good starting point for understanding how immigrants may perceive, interact, and feel about their new environments. As Pillar ascertains in her analyses on intercultural communication, “perception informs performance and vice versa,” which can influence opinions such as the length of time that migrants *intend* to remain abroad, as well as the extent to which they *want* to become integrated into their new societies. Thus, despite the monumental and supposedly “unifying” transformations brought on by globalization in recent decades, immigrant “identity” is a convoluted and controversial concept, that given its contextual specificity, remains impossible to define in a single, genuine and comprehensive fashion.

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