Latinidad in the face of Globalization: Some examples from Australia

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Abstract

I have come to Australia to seek expression of Latinidad. Why look for Latinos in Australia? The answer is simple. As the “Western” world is rapidly becoming a “globalized” world, with a “global mass culture”, I seek to find representations of Latinidad (Latin-ness, or expressions of Latino/Hispanic identity) in a “Western” context that is not the United States. I plan to make use of my positionality in a unique insider/outside dynamic (Because I was born in the United States, I can claim to be an insider in “global mass (or Western) culture” although I am an outsider in Australia. As the child of a Latin American immigrant to the US, I can also claim membership to a Latino identity, although the Latin American diaspora in Australia is completely different than that in the US).

This research will draw on a combination of fields and disciplines regarding ethnic relations, immigration studies, cultural studies, politics, studies of “race” and ethnicity, sociology, anthropology. Through the examination of “ethnic” businesses, community organizations and networks, personal and family histories, and through qualitative, ethnographic research, I seek to address the following questions.

How is “the community” (or segments thereof) imagining itself as an actor within a globalized landscape? How are individuals within the community organizing, imagining and maintaining cultural practices and political links with the home country? What benefits/insights can the experience of Latin Americans migrants within Australia add to the debates regarding transnationalism, ethnicity and identity? What lessons can be learned from examining ways in which globalization (rapid air travel, internet, mass media outlets available in Australia, commercial and political links between Latin America and Australia, the global flow of goods, capital and people) is shaping and affecting the daily lives of these migrants?

How has the arrival of some community members as “refugees” been incorporated into the image of the community? To what extent are links of solidarity being formed on the basis of similar region of origin? On assumptions of shared language? On links of shared culture (or cultural values)?

In short, I am investigating how, given the backdrop of globalization, the increasing speed of communications between sending and receive society and our current, globalizing, transnational context, how do Latin American immigrants in Australia understand the world around them?

Having studied Latin American and Latino Studies at the University of California at Santa Cruz, I have studied how immigrant groups from the “developing world” im/migrate to the “developed world” and incorporate and/or integrate themselves into a transnational context. I have looked at various aspects of the Latino community in the United States to examine processes of identity formation, community development, re/presentation of culture, re/production of culture, attempts at homogenization by hegemonic forces, immigrants and the assimilation/ incorporation/integration debates, the use of strategic essentialism to counter
dominant tropes, the presentation of complex and nuanced representations of Latinos in the media to counter the simplistic depiction of dark skinned, monolingual Spanish speaking “wetbacks”. All of this has been done against a backdrop that seeks to examine political, social and culture forces within Latin America and the United States that have driven Latin Americans to im/migrate.

In short, I can be an insider / outsider in the culture I seek to study (Latinos in Australia) and an insider / outsider in the context in which I study (American in Australia).