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## The post-migration sexual citizenship of Latino gay men in Canada

### Abstract

The *Cuéntame!* Study interviewed 25 Spanish-speaking gay and bisexual men in Toronto. Their migration experiences are traversed by economic rationales, security concerns, and the embodied experiences of race, gender, culture, and sexuality. Most express narratives of empowered opportunity in distancing themselves from restrictive sexual regimes of their place of origin, but at the same time, many migrants trade a new sense of social acceptance as gay for marginalized statuses defined by diminished social and economic capital. The social participatory rights of citizenship are particularly affected by sexuality and social class. The need and desire to establish social and sexual connections in a new environment often characterized by economic vulnerability shape experiences of social capital and citizenship rights.

Migratory experiences are embedded in complex networks of connections, motives, rationales and opportunities, and at times limited options especially among those fleeing war, economic devastation, insecurity, or persecution due to ethnicity, politics, religion, or sexual orientation, and gender.

Immigrants can experience devaluation of their professional credentials, work experience, and a loss of social networks, along with immersion in a new language and cultural codes in which they are not fully fluent. At the same time, the migration experience can be an opportunity for discovery, transformation, and even reinvention in new forms of sociality and participation in the host society.

This study of Spanish speaking gay and bisexual migrants explores both their motivations and aspirations in migrating to Canada but also their assessment of the opportunities and limitations they experience in seeking to participate in Canadian society. It inquires, in particular, into how sexuality may intersect with these transitions. The gay and bisexual Latino migrants in this study show how migratory experiences can entail difficult trade-offs as border crossing enhances a sense of sexual citizenship along with a devaluation of social and cultural capital.

### **Recognition, Citizenship and Sexuality**

The notion of citizenship as full participation in the economic, political, and cultural life in society can be traced to T.H. Marshall's (1970) classical piece, *Citizenship and Social Class*. He conceptualized social citizenship as a progression of rights bestowed by the state on the individual through a process of negotiations and tensions between the state and social constituencies shaping the formation of the modern liberal state. In this way, social citizenship evolved from the civil rights achieved in the eighteenth century to the political rights of the nineteenth and the social rights of the twentieth in the developed industrial world. However, as Wendy Brown (1992) and Ruth Lister (1997, 2007) have argued, this classical definition of citizenship obscured the gendered, that is the embodied and culturally produced, hierarchies of social participation in the system of rights. For Brown, the state is not only patriarchal but masculinist in its exclusion of women (and certain groups of men) from participation in political, economic, and cultural life by relegating them to the private sphere.

In recent years, the definition of citizenship has been expanding to include recognition of cultural and ethnic diversity based on communities of interest and affect (Kymlicka 1988, 1995, 2001). Somers (2008) notes that in Western societies individuals experience tensions in rights and belonging at the intersection of the state, market, and civil society. Overall, critics have shown the failures of liberal citizenship

regimes to include the previously excluded, such as women, cultural and ethnic minorities, and more recently sexual minorities, none of which can take for granted the beneficence of the state (Richardson 2000) but rather need to create alternative form of citizenship and belonging.

Steven Epstein and Héctor Carrillo (2014) observe that the notion of sexual citizenship has already come to refer to a range of structures and practices at the interface of state and sexuality such as (un)recognized claims by sexual minorities, heteronormative presumptions, or the inculcation of sexual norms. The lives of gay and bisexual Latin men are traversed with a diverse set of understandings of gay eroticism and homo-sociality from Latin America (Guzmán 2006, Carrillo and Fontdevila 2014) and their experiences are marked by the tensions between political advances in gay and lesbian rights and an enduring culturally sanctioned homophobia (Encarnación 2014). Even though increasing numbers of Latin American republics do now extend marriage rights nationwide (for example Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay) or offer de facto relationship recognition in at least in some jurisdictions (Mexico, Colombia, and Ecuador) (Pierceson *et al.* 2013), the actual degree of social acceptance varies considerably in different social arenas. As Omar Encarnación (2014) remarks, the recent achievements in the protection of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) rights continue to be fragile given enduring culturally embedded homophobia. Participants in this study reflect these layers of complexity in their experiences as Spanish-speaking migrant gay men in Canada. On the one hand, their experiences are ordinary in that their search for an economically better, safer, and more predictable life propels them to emigrate, risking the social and economic capital from their place of origin. On the other, their experiences are extraordinary, in that their search for a better quality of life opens new opportunities in developing sexual subjectivity and communities of desire. Their experiences are marked by opportunity and precariousness as well as by racism and sexual exoticism (Morales *et al.* 2013). As Epstein and Carrillo (2014) observe,

it is precisely the intertwining of their statuses and lived experiences as gay or bisexual men and as immigrants that defines, enables, and constrains their citizenship. In this case, sexual and legal citizenship concerns are not merely additive but in fact help to constitute one another. The product of that intersection is the emergence of new possibilities to exercise rights and achieve social inclusion but also substantial obstacles placed in the way of those very same goals.

The interviewees in this study come from a rapidly changing Latin American context with several speaking of developed gay scenes and sometimes legislated civil rights in their countries of origin. Their social locations of origin intersect with: social class, recent historical change, legal and civil rights provisions in Canada and Latin America, and heterogeneous practices of local communities in place of origin. Older men who migrated earlier from a more repressive era often retain a sense of comparison that comes from a point of origin a decade or two ago. Canada's segmented immigration regime means that regular immigrants are often selected for higher education and ability to speak English or French and thereby enter the country with considerable social and economic capital, while refugees often do not, having fled political violence and sometimes specifically anti-LGBT persecution. Those who arrive in Canada are among the few who have overcome the barriers to acquiring a visa or have successfully navigated the refugee system. Despite anti-LGBT persecution being an official ground for refugee status, many whose long-practised survival strategy in their country of origin has been to present themselves as *in no way* homosexual, find themselves required to document themselves as entirely homosexual to immigration authorities who may then judge them as (in)sufficiently gender deviant or "homosexual looking" to be granted admission (Jordan 2009, Lee and Brotman 2011).

The study period is characterized as well by particular historical circumstances. It comes after the 2005 legalization of same sex marriage in Canada, which was preceded by a decade of recognition of common-

law or de-facto relationships as legitimate grounds for immigration, and comes before federal recognition of same sex marriage in the United States beginning in 2013. It is also a period when Homeland Security in the United States pushed many undocumented residents out of that country post-9/11 resulting in an influx of US-resident Latin Americans flowing into Canada, which precipitated a 2009 re-imposition of visa restrictions on Mexicans by the Canadian government (Martin and Lapalme 2013).

### **This study**

This study arises out of discussions among researchers and front line workers in gay men's health with an interest in, or mandate to serve, Spanish speaking populations. The *Cuéntame* study conducted a web survey followed by in-depth interviews with Latino gay men through a community-based research project organized and directed by a team of Spanish speaking health workers and researchers. To be eligible for the study, prospective participants had to be Spanish speaking or come from Spanish-speaking origins, and have had sex with a man in the last year.

This is, to our knowledge, the first study of gay Spanish speaking migrants to Canada. In this paper, we report study participants' reflections on questions about transitions from home country to Canada, motivations and incentives to leave their country of origin then choose Canada, ability to participate fully in home and Canadian societies in various realms of life such as the social, sexual, cultural, and workplace, and comfort with the new social environment.

### **Methodology**

This study was carried out in Canada's largest metropolitan area containing the greatest concentration of Spanish-speaking people in the country. In this site, Latino migrants arrive primarily through regular immigration channels, including the skilled worker, family reunification, refugee, and asylum programs. Also because of this siting, this study did not include people arriving through the Canadian Seasonal

Agricultural Workers Program who are located in rural areas (Basok 2004). Latino migrants enter a city where one half of residents are foreign born and where 47 per cent of the population identify themselves as being part of a visible minority, all of which affects perceptions of “Canada” and “Canadians.” Overall, Latin, Central, and South Americans make up 103,360 or 4 per cent of the city population (Statistics Canada 2011).

Study participants were drawn from a larger pool of individuals who filled out a web-based survey and were purposively sampled to include a diversity of nationalities, ages, social class backgrounds, and immigrant statuses. Twenty-five interviews were conducted in Spanish by a doctoral candidate in sociology who was a Mexican national attending a Canadian university. Study participants were asked questions in semi-structured interviews about pre- and post-migration experiences in the workplace and gay scenes, push and pull factors for migration including sexuality and relationships, sense of inclusion or exclusion in home country and in Canada, and challenges and satisfactions in their new lives. Reflections and practices related to managing HIV risk are treated in a separate paper. Interviews were subsequently transcribed and narratives were coded into the above topic areas using NVivo10. Each topic area then was examined for themes, and narratives were sorted into a spectrum of responses for each topic area through constant comparative analysis. All interview excerpts were translated from Spanish. Italicized words in excerpts indicate words spoken in English in the original.

## Demographics

The twenty-five study participants showed the following characteristics:

- Age: 18-24: 2, 25-34: 7, 35-44: 12, 45+: 4
- Education: high school or less: 6, 1-3 years postsecondary: 4, university degree: 15

- Income: <\$10,000 per year: 9, \$10,000-19,999: 3, \$20,000-29,999: 5, \$30,000-39,999: 5, \$40,000+: 2
- Employment status: 10 full time, 5 part-time, 7 unemployed, 2 students, 1 disability
- Countries of origin: 9 Mexico, 6 Colombia, 1 or 2 from each of Argentina, Bolivia, Cuba, Nicaragua, Peru, Spain, Venezuela plus one Canadian-born of Spanish and Venezuelan parents
- Immigration status: 8 residents, 7 citizens, 8 refugee claimants, 2 refugees
- Sexual practice in country of origin: sex with men 20, sex with men and women 3, sexually inactive 2

Overall then, study participants included significant proportions of both modestly educated and well educated men. The preponderance of well-educated men in this demographic profile reflects Canadian immigration requirements that select applicants with education and employment skills. Migrants with less social and economic capital more often arrive as refugee claimants. The migrant farm worker program selects for male heads of household with families in the country of origin which creates a barrier that few gay men can surmount. The result is a set of male migrants with, for the most part, considerable economic and cultural capital indicative of middle class standing in the country of origin. With a few exceptions, income levels were low. Countries of origin were also generally reflective of Latin American migration patterns to Canada with Mexico and Colombia accounting for a major portion.

### **Sexuality, security, and migration**

Overall, participants reflect a diverse set of experiences in terms of the social class locations they occupied in their countries of origin and then in Canada, but also in terms of intersections with variable social climates around LGBT rights and cultural acceptance across regions and within countries. The

rationales and the means for immigration vary with the resources available. For those with elevated economic and social capital, Canada was one among many options and the possibilities of gay life were among several considerations in migration. In the words of one,

I didn't want to live in Japan. I wanted to live in a quieter, easygoing place with more space and I liked Canada a lot when I was on vacation. Because of that I decided to apply for residence.

(30s, postgraduate education, Mexico)

Men with resources and options could contemplate other equally liberal states when it comes to the legal status of LGBT people. As these interviewees, who came with their same-sex partners remarked,

My partner and I decided to pursue other options for emigration. There was Canada, Australia, and New Zealand and we decided on Canada and applied to the government and they approved us. (30s, postgraduate education, South America)

My boyfriend and I began the immigration process in 2006 when I had recently got out of university because I was waiting to finish my degree to apply....In August 2009, about a year and a half ago, a letter arrived from the embassy that we had residence....We applied as *common law partners* and yes, we applied together. (20s, postgraduate education, Mexico) (Italicized words spoken in English in the original.)

Like many immigrants, study participants sought to mobilize their cultural and economic capital to realize aspirations for better and safer lives including a search for less stigmatizing environments in which to realize sexual and emotional selves. The Canadian state's recognition of same-sex relationships was a major consideration for several. As one man commented,

Really I am in Canada because of love; one could say out of romance, from love. (40s, university, Spain)

For the large majority, the immigration process was the result of a calculated decision motivated by a combination of factors that range from the pursuit of economic possibilities to finding the right cultural, social, and political climate to develop as gay men. When asked, “What were the circumstances of your immigration?” these combined priorities come to the fore:

Canada, out of all the countries that belong to the G8, has the most solid economy in the world. Also I was saying to myself that the gay life here was developed [seria], it was very good...There was a lot of freedom. (30s, postgraduate, Colombia)

It was a combination of circumstances: the fact of being gay, the economic question, because although I had a good job, I had not really progressed the way I wanted to progress, never had benefits, never had made a life the way I had wanted, although I had my partner there...We wanted to continue in another place. (40s, postgraduate, Central America)

The fact that Canada allows couples to continue their relationship while pursuing their economic and personal development constitutes one of the major narrative lines. In some instances, especially in countries with no legal recognition, the ability to live with a male partner in the home country was deemed to be too difficult.

I have a partner. It was complicated to live together, to want to legalize the relationship. In Venezuela, you can't, so it looked better in Canada. Even though we have no plans to marry, there is still the possibility. Yes, that influenced us. We felt and feel that here we can be freer, hold hands; everybody can know we're gay without so many complications. (30s, postgraduate)

[Central American country] was not a country where a same sex couple could live together even though it is a fairly open country. There are legal provisions that penalize two men or two women living together as a 'public scandal' as it is written in the civil code. (40s, university, Spain)

Others experienced repeated instances of homophobic harassment and hoped for something better through emigration.

I was part of the Mexican national swim team and there was a lot of discrimination from heterosexuals. During university life, then living with adults makes you realize that Mexican society is completely discriminatory towards homosexuals. (20s, postgraduate, Mexico)

Even though these days there are many rights for gay people [in Mexico], the mentality of the people continues being the same regardless of the changes. (40s, secondary school, Mexico)

Homophobic harassment was for some just one face of a larger sense of a general insecurity in their societies of origin. The level of generalized insecurity and violence in the countries of origin exacerbated a sense of vulnerability along the lines of sexual orientation.

Unfortunately they have assaulted me since I was a boy. They assaulted me when I was 12 with a pistol. They assaulted me again when I was 15 and five more times with a gun. Many times they stole money on the subway out of pockets or by slashing backpacks and taking things. My dad was kidnapped about ten years ago. For me, it was insecurity and culture that bothered me, that people smoke, that they're discriminatory....Discrimination toward homosexual people is big. (20s, postgraduate, Mexico)

Being homosexual can add another layer of risk to an already precarious social citizenship in the place of origin. The relative weakness of the state exacerbated perceptions of being gay as a risky subjectivity in the context of structural violence.

The constant threat from guerrilla forces demanding money that we didn't have ... I came as a refugee because of trouble with the rebels [la guerrilla], with the FARC [Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia]; also trouble being gay. It is a very homophobic country. We cannot express our emotions....because in Colombia sometimes the rebels come in the night and, because they are homophobic, they 'cleanse.' If you appear mannered in the street, they kill you. (20s, postgraduate, Colombia)

Certainly, homophobia is far from a distant memory in Canadian society; some participants were surprised to find themselves the objects of homophobic slurs in Toronto. Nonetheless, for these participants the promise of an affluent economy together with human rights legislation are major attractions for immigration. This is especially strong for participants with fewer economic resources and for those living with HIV who see a real possibility for survival and growth in a comparatively beneficent state system. The threefold set of economic, social, and cultural reasons can be explicitly seen when one respondent remarks about his reasons to migrate to Canada, "One, economic, and the other, because there was at that time no treatment for people with HIV" (30s, secondary school, South America) and in the words of another participant,

Here they respect you; they don't interfere with you....Mexico is a city that is supposedly in quotation marks 'very open' but no, there continues to be a lot of rejection, a lot of discrimination for being homosexual and then they label you as an HIV carrier and then there is more discrimination. In Canada, no. In Canada, it is totally different and for example if you do

have HIV, people are totally incredible because they help, they give you benefits. (40s, some postsecondary, Mexico)

For many, the expectation of a stronger, more functional state is a significant incentive to leave behind accumulated cultural and social resources. The rule of law and the values of the liberal state are embraced and celebrated by several interviewees. Many remark favourably on the orderliness of Canadian society and benefits of legal oversight as remedies to their sense of insecurity in countries of origin.

Another thing I like the most is the respect for the law. It is one of the main reasons that I came. At work, they respect your work hours. They respect everything. What they say is what they do. That is what I like most about Canada. People respect in general. They know the transit laws. They know labour laws. The order. (30s, postgraduate, Mexico)

Another thing I like is the freedom I have to be who I am as a person, as a man, as a human being, whether homosexual, heterosexual or bisexual. I like that about Canada that every person is independent....In Colombia, security is very bad because if you don't have money, there is no security for you, but if you do have money, there is, while in Canada there is security for everybody, independent of social class and I like that. (30s, postgraduate, Colombia)

This lawfulness of Canadian society was perceived as an assurance of the security of the person as sexual beings but also in other spheres of life. Social regulation and the liberal value of individualism often entered into these narratives as guarantors of freedom rather than being perceived as restrictive or oppressive. For some, Canada offered the opportunity to develop a sense of self based on an ethos of individualism.

First, all the freedom, that nobody questions anything, that one has the right to do anything, that you respect the law. You are free, a free person. Second, that there is no oppression against being gay, at least I haven't seen any. It could be that I haven't left the gay area. I haven't lived in another area. The facilities, the way of thinking, studying, working, saving money, going out. When you are a resident, you can travel wherever. All that. (40s, secondary school, Mexico)

The freedom to express myself, the freedom of thought, the freedom of action, the freedom of expression. You can think freely. For me, it took about two years to learn to think independently and really develop my individuality. (30s, postgraduate, Caribbean)

Participant narratives show the tensions inherent in the experiences of immigrants from societies where gay and lesbian rights are not well consolidated and where the institutional and general culture sanctions expressions of homophobia and stigma, particularly towards HIV positive people. For some of these men, immigration is an opportunity for personal transformation at the intersection of state beneficence, the rule of law, and the cultural ethos of individualism.

### **Sexual citizenship and social practice**

All experienced same-sex intimacy before their immigration to Canada and had these earlier experiences as a point of reference for assessing the conduct of their intimate lives after migration. Most remarkable in the narratives of the men participating in this study was their affirmation that Canada's legal regime governing sexual conduct, non-discrimination, and the recognition of same-sex relationships did translate into social practices that they perceived as giving them opportunities for full participation in society despite the challenges that migration poses, especially for economic readjustment. Freedom of sexual expression, freedom to love and live with a person of their choice without penalty, and freedom

from confinement in the closet in other aspects of their lives were major, celebrated aspect of their immigration experience. In the words of a participant,

There is a lot of freedom for a gay man that there is not in my country. There, many gay people live hidden, hidden from family, hidden from friends, from workplaces, presenting themselves as not gay. There is a lot of discrimination, a lot of machismo. (30s, secondary school, South America)

As a gay man, I could not be open with everyone. Here it doesn't matter....People don't see you as something abnormal. (30s, postgraduate, Mexico)

For these gay Latino immigrants, the recognition of civil rights on the part of the Canadian state—a relatively recent accomplishment over the last thirty years—has created the possibility of better reaching their potential, not just as sexual beings but as fully engaged citizens. When asked about reasons for leaving the home country and for migrating to Canada, followed by the prompt, “Did your sexuality have a role in how and why you came to Canada?” robust narratives emerged about citizenship and sexual citizenship in particular.

I feel I can be gay and live my gay life without any limitations insofar as it could bother other people or bother society or be a problem for the government or for anybody. No, on the contrary, concerning my sexuality, I can express myself completely. Second, it's a first world country, a country with a very good quality of life where they respect human rights....To live sad, to not live to the fullest is a waste of a life and here you can have that opportunity and insofar as I am happier with myself, then love comes into life, money comes and things come and everything else until I am more productive because I am happy with myself. (50s, postgraduate, Colombia)

What I like most is how I connect with people, express myself freely, be gay, go to Church [street], go wherever and not feel caught out, not feel, oh God, they are going to catch my family or *whatever*, or that they are going to kill me for being gay. (20s, postgraduate, Colombia)

Yes, it's different. I feel Canadian society gives you a place as a homosexual person or rather they treat you like anybody else and so it's better. You feel at ease. You feel fine because there is no discrimination. (40s, secondary school, Mexico)

In a couple of instances, study respondents were startled to find their being gay was not a liability but potentially even useful in the workplace. In this, they came across a phenomenon identified by Nick Rumes (2013) in Britain, where being gay may be treated as an asset in some workplace environments.

At work they picked me to organize something for *Pride week*. My boss who is from Boston said to me and my workmate who is also gay, "*OK guys, I have no idea what to do, where to go. You are totally in the scene, so you have to help with this.*" I did not plan to be the advisor for *Pride week* but that is what happened (laughs). I loved that I could be totally gay. (40s, college, Colombia)

In terms of overall assessment of their immigration experience, interviewees express generally positive experiences, having come across only a few incidents of homophobia. For one, "I have never encountered homophobia in Canadian people" (40s, high school, Mexico). Another remarks that despite being "quite effeminate," his overall experience has not been bad.

Because of my way of carrying myself, because I am a little--well quite--effeminate which has caused me some problems and here, no. I live peaceably and nobody interferes. (40s, preparatorio, Mexico)

For these men, the new social environment allowed them not only to rebuild social networks where their working and private lives could intersect, but also allowed them to create distance from previous networks traversed by homophobia.

### **Social and material trade-offs**

Nevertheless the celebration of sexual rights comes at a high cost for several participants. State recognition of sexual citizenship appears not to translate into full affirmation of ethnic and cultural diversity, particularly in recognition of foreign credentials and work experience in the corporate sector. This tension can be seen in the ways in which study participants understand the paradoxes inherent in Canadian openness to immigrants combined with restricted opportunities that act as structural barriers. Evident in the narratives of the men participating in this study were trade-offs between a new sense of sexual citizenship and diminished cultural and social capital at times caught up in a dynamic of discrimination, racism, and social devaluation. The erosion of economic and social capital was stark in several instances.

I was in sales, but after my disillusionment with the Fox government that in my opinion came to nothing, and struggling, and worrying about money [quebrándome la cabeza], suffering all the hardships of a broken country, I decided to come to Canada.....Here in Canada, I am like all immigrants; we are all overqualified immigrants. I think that that's exactly what the people who created this [immigration] plan wanted, over-qualified labour; there is zero opportunity after five years. I don't know how to enter into the world of better paid administrative work, so I am, like everybody, struggling and working here and there in occasional, temporary, weekend work doing maintenance and cleaning. (50s, postgraduate, Mexico)

This interviewee attributes his difficulties not to the Canadian state's migration policies, or to global political economy, but rather to the Canadians, including the newly arrived Canadians, he has encountered. He enumerates the difficulties he has experienced:

English, racism, and the hostile attitude of Canadian society, not the government which has an excellent plan for immigrants. Unfortunately Canadian society, meaning locals and immigrants who assimilate and copy Canadians in a worse way are those who cause difficulties in my opinion for the integration of new immigrants. (50s, postgraduate, Mexico)

Migration often entailed major losses and the need to rebuild life from zero. Migration policy often resulted in the selection of well qualified applicants who subsequently found themselves in a highly competitive, saturated labour market. Janitorial work was frequently the only available option despite successful careers in the home country.

I had a very prosperous beauty salon. I was well known in my state. I specialized in make-up and I prepared people for beauty contests....Here I have to learn beauty all over again but in English. I know no English. It is a double barrier, first I have to learn English and then go to beauty school....As I need to work because I have no money, I looked for work and found a job in cleaning. (40s, secondary school, Mexico)

I did not have a problem with my grades or diplomas being accepted because I studied in the United States....Of the group of 25 of us, 5% succeeded in getting work. The rest of us had to start work with what they call a *survivor job*....I was working as an engineer as a project director and I was in charge of people. I had a budget of \$1 million....Today the work I do is a technical assistant. (40s, postgraduate, Central America)

Only in a few instances, did immigrants who were in Canada for several years succeed in re-qualifying themselves and regaining professional positions, in these cases in architecture and medicine:

I was looking for an intern position for someone just out of university even though I had four or five years experience.....I was in a program of five or six weeks and in the fourth week, they invited me for an interview for a position that was open in our company and a week later offered me the job. (20s, postgraduate, Mexico)

I arrived in -3 C weather and a week later it was -22 C with snow up to my ankles and I started manual work for the first time in my life in a language I didn't know in English and French in a completely different culture...I worked at night in a hotel at minimum wage....Two or three weeks later, I encountered a guy in a Cuban restaurant who had a wife who was a physician. She told me everything I had to do and all the books I had to buy to get my license here. At the same time I was working at night, I was studying by day. (30s, postgraduate, Caribbean)

Mastery of English figured as a major challenge in many of the narratives as was difficulty in having their skills and education recognized in a way that translated into an equivalent social status after migration.

The more common pattern, at least among these twenty-five, was experience of ongoing mutually reinforcing challenges that kept the possibility of regained social mobility largely out of reach.

### **Racist exclusion and multiculturalism**

Difficulties in gaining a foothold in the Canadian economy were experienced as racial exclusion in various ways. One man referenced statistics demonstrating a glass ceiling effect. Another referred to a subtle or "submerged" racism, sometimes coming not only from "Canadians" who were typically identified with white people, but also from other immigrants.

I am convinced it is a question of race because the statistics do not lie. I've gone to the office district and noticed for example that in client service, there are people of many races in the operational part. There are people from all over because they need to attract clients from all over...but those in charge, going up the organizational pyramid; there is a certain point where there are only whites. (30s, postgraduate, Colombia)

The barriers are not made directly evident; they are a bit submerged....I feel it everyday....I work in a big company...in a competitive sales environment. There is an undercurrent where the Canadians protect each other and those who work in the office who are from other countries....suddenly people speak more slowly as if I don't understand, that kind of thing all the time, but one learns to overcome, manage or ignore that depending on your style. (30s, postgraduate, Mexico)

Another felt that both home and new countries posed daunting barriers of different kinds in each place.

[Mexico] is a country of scandals, fraud, and constant abuse of people. People keep their heads down [agachado], they don't have ideals, they don't have hopes. [There is] shocking paternalism--waiting for someone to come and magically resolve life for everybody....In Canada, there is respect, [but also] indifference, let's say a lot of abuse by the locals, by established people; there is shocking abuse of immigrants....You go to an interview for work and the worst is if the people who are recruiting are immigrants. They apply a hard hand, more than the locals; whites are not that hard...however I am here and staying here because of the economic difference from my country. (50s, postgraduate, Mexico)

This interviewee was led to assign blame for the overall exigencies of the labour market to other job-seekers, including other immigrants trying to make their way in a competitive environment. A sense of

racial exclusion however was not a universal experience. Others typified Canada as multicultural and felt able to participate in the inclusive ethic propounded by official multiculturalism (Kymlicka 1995).

Particularly in an urban area where half of the population is foreign born, not all felt “different.”

In truth, no, on the contrary, I have never felt different because as I said at the beginning, one sees different cultures and I never felt that I was treated in a different manner. I think that people here, Canadians, are accustomed to cultural diversity, so it’s normal. (20s, college, South America)

In the United States, people don’t make an effort to understand you when you don’t have good pronunciation. Here, yes, as they understand that everybody speaks funny so they just ask that you repeat yourself and people make the effort to understand nicely. (30s, postgraduate, Mexico)

Others remarked that they did not “look Latino” and so were not perceived through racialized lenses. Racial presumptions could extend into sexual interaction, experienced alternately as objectification as the racial other but sometimes as a sexual asset. Some had experienced the projection of Latino stereotypes which they found harmful and insulting.

### **Cultural adjustments and trade offs**

Sexuality, security, and income all loom large in the experience of well-being, participation, and full citizenship in Canadian society. Less easy to characterize but nevertheless the subject of considerable commentary is the question of cultural adjustment. Many reflect on the less overt or unofficial norms of Canadian interaction particularly in response to such questions as: “What do you miss about [home country]?” “How did you find Canada and Canadians to be different from [home country]?” and “What

do you like about being here?” These cultural expectations contribute as well to a sense of inclusion or social isolation. Overall the gay Latino immigrants in this study perceive Canadian society as valuing non-interference, an approach experienced as both providing the freedom to conduct one’s own life without interference, but alternatively as a lack of caring. The two faces of this perceived ethic of non-interference contrast most sharply in sexual and intimate relations as many men found this expectation extended into meeting gay men. As Bianchi et al (2010) found in a study of Brazilian, Colombian, and Dominican men in the United States, “Common perceptions of Anglo-American men as cold, practical, and independent contrasted with self-perceptions of Latino men as passionate, emotionally expressive, loyal, and desirous of close relationships.” A similar view is reported among Latino gay men of Québécois society (Guevara *et al.* 2008). Several men remarked on this perceived Canadian ethic:

They separate their personal life from their work life. They don’t ask any kind of questions. In Mexico, it goes from “Why aren’t you married?” to “What are you doing this evening?” to “Where are you going on vacation?” or that kind of thing. Everybody wants to be involved in everybody else’s lives....I have a friend who is a good person. When I was recently arrived and we were working, he said to me, “Do you know what you can do this weekend?” not “What can we do?” No, he was looking for activities that I could do without involving himself in my personal life....”You are going to go. I am not going but if you want,” as he was looking for what I could do without interfering. (30s, postgraduate, Mexico)

The men in this study commented on the two aspects of this cultural difference, often with a mix of appreciation and discomfort.

People in [country of origin] can be more open and more expressive....Canadians are more respectful, less invasive, or may be quieter. (30s, postgraduate, South America)

Canadian society is much more advanced than Mexican, light years ahead in many ways...more sophisticated, but they don't have other things that are very strong in Mexico like the importance given to family relations which are very weak in Canada or to friendships. Social ties are less tight. I feel those are the pros and contras. (30s, postgraduate, Mexico)

This sense of Canada being "ahead" is reminiscent of the views of Dominican migrants interviewed by Carlos Decena (2011) who identified living gay in New York as "modern" and cosmopolitan but this modernity is also viewed with some ambivalence by the participants in this study. A face of this ethic of non-interference was a restraint that seemed surprising. Underneath perceived Canadian reserve, some say, is a less effusive but nevertheless genuine emotional life.

The Canadians I have seen are a bit suspicious, more reserved. If they don't talk to you, it's not because they discriminate against you or because they reject you as much as they think about whom they will give friendship to. They will talk to you and they want to help and when they offer friendship, they offer it for real. (40s, secondary school, Mexico)

But another found this reserve hard to bear. Disappointment with this lack of connection or care seemed most acute when found among gay men who might otherwise be thought to have reason to go beyond the instrumentalist ways that men in the mainstream society treat each other.

Gay Canadians have many advantages because society accepts them as they are. In the eyes of the law, they have the same rights as a heterosexual couple...but in Colombia we are more open, more friendly; we are good people among ourselves, we take care of each other. Gay Canadians don't seem to like each other so much as they reject each other. (30s, postgraduate, Colombia)

This “reserve,” then, could be seen as assent, as precaution, or as a form of care for the self, but it could also be seen as a form of disconnection and even as a way to invalidate others. It may be that many of the traits perceived to be “Canadian” speak less to any national essence than to perceptions of a society more thoroughly imbued with the tenets of neoliberal citizenship that instantiates all as individuals responsible for themselves in a “free” marketplace. This valuation of individualized freedom presents itself as an opening for self-realization but it inevitably implies the non-interference, if not neglect, identified by several in this study.

## Conclusion

The notion of citizenship has proven fruitful for a growing body of scholarship that explores the interface of state and everyday life. State systems can institutionalize or alter social arrangements in ways that advantage some populations while restricting the life chances of others. Whether through taxation, education, health and social services, or immigration, the consequences of state-sanctioned systems can be profound for the well-being of people differentiated by race, social class, gender, ethnicity, and place of origin. As citizenship has come to be extended beyond its initial conceptualization as a set of legal or political rights in liberal democratic societies, it has become a barometer of the enfranchisement of people in the various spheres of their lives, most notably the workplace, family, sexuality, and cultural representation (Kymlicka, 1995).

Changing concepts of citizenship have become powerful conceptual tools for understanding the transformations and the possibilities of effective citizenship for individuals and social groups in western societies (Somers, 2008). Along with gender, race, ethnicity, and culture, sexual citizenship is the most recent expansion in the repertoire of conceptual tools for understanding social rights, inclusion, and belonging (Richardson, 2000). The recognition of sexual citizenship by the Canadian state has become a

central factor in the immigration experience of gay Latino migrants, from thinking about migration to adaptation and belonging. Nevertheless their experiences reflect the tensions and possibilities of current forms of citizenship shaped by the intersection of market, state, and civil society (Somers 2008).

The study participants recognize and underscore the value of sexual recognition as an important axis for integration and belonging in Canada; they nevertheless face formidable obstacles in finding a place in the post-migration labour market. While Canadian migration policy is skewed in favour of people with educational credentials and language proficiency, the paradoxical effect is a devaluation of cultural capital along the lines of ethnicity and place of origin. This combination of high cultural capital and limited economic status in a new society shapes perceptions of Canada as a beneficent state with a less caring and competitive society.

Gay Spanish-speaking migrants embody many of these issues and provide a unique perspective on the realization of citizenship as they traverse different state and social systems, often making hard choices to enhance their freedom of movement and ability to advance their well-being in some spheres of life while sacrificing options in others. A limitation of a study of this kind is that it captures the experiences of migrants who have decided to stay (or are at least currently staying) in Canada and does not capture those who have returned to their home countries. For those in Canada at this particular socio-historical juncture, sexual citizenship concerns loom large in their narratives not infrequently at the expense of economic devaluation and cultural adjustments. Many of the men in this study arrived with significant educational and employment credentials. The sense of loss is perhaps greatest among those who found themselves unable to translate this social class status into an equivalent standing in the new environment. The right to live as gay or bisexual men is an important axis running through the majority of the narratives in this study regardless of migrants' degree of control over migratory circumstances or

the economic outcomes of their transition into the Canadian labour market just as Epstein and Carrillo (2014) find in the United States. Still, the migratory experiences of gay men reveal paradoxes where sexuality intersects with economics in the Canadian context: while sexual citizenship is a major theme in the migratory experiences of these gay Spanish-speaking migrant men, their overall sense of citizenship is compromised by their new status as racialized, and at times economically and culturally marginalized, migrants.

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