

una vida linda

By

Rolando Palacio

Bachelor of Fine Arts, Michigan State University, 2010

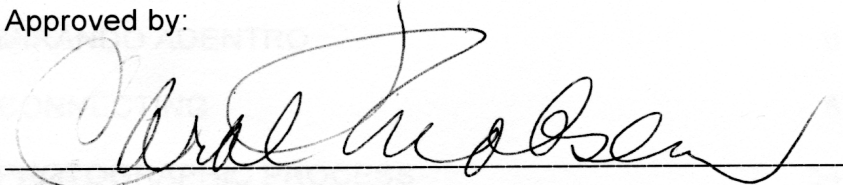
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Approved by:



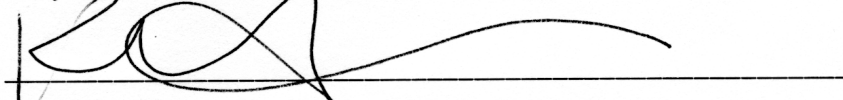
Carol Jacobsen, Graduate Committee Chair



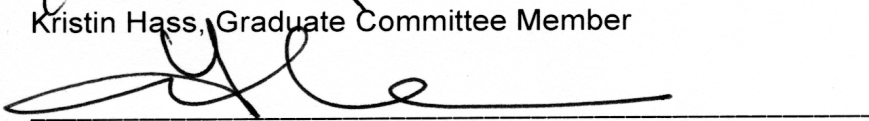
Sadashi Inuzuka, Graduate Committee Member



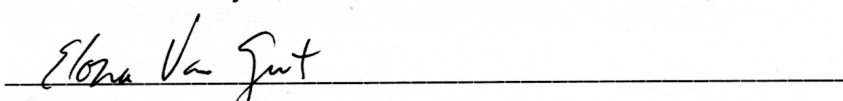
Amy Sara Carroll, Graduate Committee Member



Kristin Hass, Graduate Committee Member



Gunalan Nadarajan, Dean, School of Art and Design



Elona Van Gent, Associate Dean of Academic Programs

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ABSTRACT

As a photographer I have made a clear choice to become a voyeur in my own community. The camera lets in something that is a part of me but no longer all of me. It reflects my past and also gives me the power to see more clearly. The camera allows me to see structures of race and gender in my community while questioning the invisible forces that have shaped these constructions. This process has a psychological, economical, physical and spiritual impact. There is a constant tension between the world I live in and the world I was once entrenched in. I lived a life full of complication, a life filled with violence and inequality. As a photographer I am consciously detaching myself from this world. My world is now an academic world, one of educated privilege, and I am no longer part of the world of constant poverty. I have accepted this challenge. To leave the world I came from, and to enter a new one that may not be accepting of my past, is equally challenging.

KEY WORDS

structural Violence, immigration, migration, generation, Southwest Detroit, borders, gender, Midwest, in-between, photography, environment, poverty, voyeur

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MIRANDO ADENTRO

My memory was unwinding at a baptism party, the memory of being in marginal spaces full of Spanish speaking immigrants. At the party Photographing the adults and young people took me back to my childhood when most of my days were spent picking vegetables as a migrant worker in different states across the U.S. Somewhere along the way I got this idea that getting an education would get me away from those long hours of looking at the end of the rows hoping that the hours would change to minutes. I ended up going to college and the years seemed to fly. Gradually the memory of living in such harsh environments and in the shadows of indirect violence slipped away. The return of these powerful memories was the start of a new series of work that explores the experience of marginalized immigrant populations and the different social tensions in these spaces. It was the beginning of a series that explored the voyeuristic experience.

I met Mr. Rodriguez down the street for the baptism party. He made me think so much of my grandfather, so much that it felt like home again. His energy was like a lit firecracker and his laughter carried across the room. His journey started in the hills of Saltillo, Mexico a far away land where the birds chirp with human voices. His stories of the hills made me think of my grandma and how she would tell me she knew I was coming to visit her in Mexico; she said the birds always told her so. Mr. Rodriguez made it to Chicago by train and as the years passed and his savings accumulated he slowly brought his family to the States. This is often the story of immigrant families: one person, usually the father, is sent to the states to provide money for the household and sometimes to be able to bring the family later.¹ Rodriguez moved to Detroit because of family and job opportunities. After years of working in unreliable manual labor jobs

¹ Karen D. Johnson-Webb, *Recruiting Hispanic Labor: Immigrants In Non-traditional Areas* (New York: LFB Scholarly Pub., 2003), 11.

Rodriguez established a business for himself and his family. The Rodriguez family permanently settled in Detroit and slowly the family grew larger.

Like the Rodriguez family, many Latino/as came into the Midwest as early as the beginning of the 20th century. Some of the major contributors to Latino migration into Michigan were the surplus of jobs in the railroad and agriculture industries during World War I labor shortages. What made the passage into Michigan and other areas of the North easy was the direct connection the railroad industry had to inner Mexico. Latino/as stayed in Detroit because of the steady jobs in the automotive industry and by the end of the 1920's a majority of the Mexican population migrating to Michigan made Detroit their permanent stop.²

The Puerto Rican population in Detroit had a somewhat different story from the Mexican population. In Southwest Styles, a well-known barbershop on W. Vernor Highway, people would tell me stories from the island. They told me about the best salsa shows anybody could see and how they missed the beach side colors as the waves crashed the shoreline. Both populations were coming with the intention of making some money in the States. Much of the history of Puerto Ricans in the Midwest was also influenced by the agricultural beet industry in the early 20th century. The 1917 U.S. territory conversion of the island of Puerto Rico made citizenship into the states much easier and recruitment for jobs in the States would escalate in 1950 with the help of approved contracts for Puerto Ricans in 1947 and 1948. Once in Detroit most Puerto Rican people settled in the same barrios as Mexicans. Southwest Detroit's Spanish influence provided Puerto Ricans a welcome entry point for their culture. Today, if you drive down Vernor between Springwells and the Ambassador Bridge that leads into Canada you can see the

² David A. Badillo, *Latinos in Michigan* (East Lansing: Michigan State University, 2003), 3-9.

influence of the Latino/a migration to Detroit by the names of the storefronts and the people that congregate on the corners.³

CONNECTING

Eventually, as I spent more time in Detroit I was able to meet the entire immediate Rodriguez family and was fortunate to see the growth of the children and grandchild. With each generation of the Rodriguez family there came a shift in language, education and perceptions of gender roles. Because of this, the youth in Southwest Detroit became a hybrid of cultures that brought together the past with the present, the foreign with the American and the traditional with the rebellious.⁴ Walking through the neighborhood and meeting other people introduced me to spaces that seemed very familiar to me. The hours and days I spent sitting and listening to grown men talk about the everyday moments in their lives recalled my experiences of spending time with my father and his buddies. I met Sammy who lived down the street from the Southwest Styles barbershop. He reminded me of my siblings. I saw how difficult it was for him to undergo the shift from adolescence to adulthood when he became a teenage father. The constant transition I was making in my trips from Ann Arbor to Detroit made me realize the influence that environments and structural limitations have on the availability of resources and who can access them. Even within these structural limitations male and female experiences were different and were inner connected with Latino/a cultural influences. As scholar Patricia Zavella writes, I learned that because I had immigrant parents and grew up in an environment sometimes very consistent with those in Southwest Detroit, I was not necessarily given easy access to the lives of Latino/as in

³ Badillo, *Latinos in Michigan*, 25-28.

⁴ Nikos Papastergiadis, *The Turbulence of Migration: Globalization, Deterritorialization, And Hybridity* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2000), 123.

Detroit.⁵ Like Zavella, my experience in college gave people a reason to consider me an outsider.⁶ But my accent and ability to speak Spanish well allowed me to be viewed as an insider at times. Sometimes my status as and outsider and insider blurred. I became difficult to distinguish between the two, insider and outsider.⁷ This tension was complicated by the desire to enter this community with my camera.

Within the next three year of first stepping into this baptism *fiesta* the project began to explore avenues of structural violence, a concept unfamiliar to me before coming to graduate school. Structural violence is an invisible mechanism that has no actor and cannot be seen yet has the influence to cause physical violence and harm through the unequal distribution of goods and power.⁸ When there is high potential to prevent poverty, when it can be avoided then there is violence.⁹ I began to understand my past and how events unraveled the way they did. Most importantly it gave me a language that I could verbalize. Slowly the scars of structural violence started to physically manifest themselves through the life stories of the people I met in Southwest Detroit. The camera gave me the power to detach myself from those that I become very familiar with. I stood back and looked at my own community from a separate point of view.

In my parents' home the primary language spoken is Spanish. Attending public schools in the U.S. allowed English to seep into our home but learning it through interactions in school created an anxiety that still lingers in my memory. Language separated the world

⁵ Patricia Zavella, "Feminist Insider Dilemmas: Constructing Ethnic Identity with "Chicana" Informants," *Frontier: A Journal of Women Studies* 13, no. 3 (1993): 58-9, accessed April 19, 2014, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3346743>.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Karen Mary Davalos, "La Quinceañera": Making Gender and Ethnic Identities," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 16, no.2/3, *Gender, Nations, and Nationalism* (1996): 102, accessed April 4, 2014, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3346805>.

⁸ Johan Galtung, "Violence, Peace, and Research," *Journal of Peace Research* 6, no.3 (1969): 170, accessed March 31, 2014, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/422690>.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 171

of education and my home and created a border.¹⁰ Education itself was foreign to my parents and thus created a separation that still exists. The drive to and from Detroit and Ann Arbor is a reflection of that divide. In the families in Southwest Detroit that I knew, being able to speak English fluently depended on whether you came from a Spanish speaking country (at young or older age), having immigrant parents or the generation you were born into in the States. Fluency of the English language controls the ability to be educated within the U.S. and whether the next generation is able to progress economically.¹¹ Immigrant families when migrating into the States tend to relocate in familiar culture and language spaces for a smoother transition.¹² These immigrant communities tend to have lower resources than the desired upper middle class Anglo communities that are segregated from this immigrant subgroup.¹³ Thus, the English language alienates and perpetuates violence indirectly.¹⁴

There is a taco stand that sits next door to a shipping container yard right off Vernor Highway where I sometimes buy food. The sweet smell of onions competes with the powerful smell of diesel from the semi trucks. I once sat there thinking about how much pollution must be sifting through the air from all that movement of containers (marked with other languages) as they travel back and forth across the border of U.S. and Canada. The traffic, the industrial factories and the huge highway systems all are affecting the respiratory health of people in this area.¹⁵ I thought about health issues

¹⁰ Gloria Anzaldúa. *Borderlands La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2007), 19.

¹¹ Carlos Suárez-Orozco, Francisco X. Gaytán, and Ha Yeon Kim, "Facing the Challenges of Educating Latino Immigrant-Origin Students" in *Growing up Hispanic: Health and Development of Children of Immigrants*, ed. Nancy S. Landale, Susan McHale, and Alan Booth (Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press, 2010.), 201

¹² Richard Alba et al., "Nowhere Near the Same: The Neighborhoods of Latino Children," in *Growing up Hispanic: Health and Development of Children of Immigrants*, ed. Nancy S. Landale, Susan McHale, and Alan Booth. (Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press, 2010.), 5.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (New York: Picador, 2008), 65.

¹⁵ Toby C. Lewis et al., "Air Pollution-Associated Changes in Lung Function among Asthmatic Children," *Environmental Health Perspectives* 113, no.8 (2005): 1068, accessed December 12, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3436367>

affecting the Latino/a community when I looked at the taco stand. I can recall the availability of different healthy foods in college. This was different than what I was accustomed to at home. Our eating habits, borne of poverty in transplant communities, form health risks of diabetes and heart disease that eventually become high mortality rates.¹⁶ Lack of education and financial resources also mean inability to access healthcare to prevent these risks.¹⁷ I never learned of these risks until attending college where much of what I read addressed issues such as these. The contrast between the selection of fruits and vegetables that were available in my college cafeterias and the processed, high starch foods in my family home was striking. Looking across that fence from the taco stand one day a thought ran through my mind: that the U.S. accepts the goods produced in the containers but not the hands that creates them. A nation-state anxiety perpetuates a fear that makes the other a criminal.¹⁸

The camera has been associated with the phallus of pleasure and the male gaze.¹⁹ The question I ask is whether I am exposing, perpetuating or undermining the patriarchal history of male dominance within photography. I am very concerned about how I depict females because I am a male that is now a part of the educated elite. I am always trying to investigate both my own culture and the voyeurism of photography; I try to expose some truth. It is difficult for me because I do want to talk about gender roles within my culture that sometime are perpetuated through religion. But I don't know if I have the right to do that because I am a male. I remember growing up and seeing that church meant a lot for my family. In spaces where much of the community was Anglo it was hard to find a church that had a Spanish-speaking sermon. The church brought together

¹⁶ Valerie Martinez-Ebers et al., "Latino Interests in Education, Health, and Criminal Justice Policy," *Political Science and Politics* 33, no. 3 (2000): 550-1, accessed April 17, 2014, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/420857>

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Papastergiadis, *The Turbulence of Migration*, 61.

¹⁹ Laura Mulvey, *Visual And Other Pleasures* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 16.

the small amount of Latino/a in the migrant camps and made us feel empowered as a community. This was very similar in Detroit. Historically, the church has been a helping hand to the Latino/a community in time of need and its involvement with the beginning of *colonias* helped build a connective space for Latinos to attend mass as a people.²⁰ As a political entity the church was a force that brought to light the social issues of struggle within that community.²¹ Unfortunately, the church also upholds the dichotomy between males and females.²² In family it was my mother that brought religion to the home. Family is of the utmost importance and in it the female is looked at as the caretaker of the home. She is to be a virgin until she is married.²³ These views were engrained through colonialism and still can be seen in the symbols of the church system, such as *la virgin*.²⁴ But more and more women are leaving their families to migrate across the border and having to take different roles. However, these cultural standards coupled with the continual threat of deportation can isolate them in the home even more.²⁵ As a photographer entering these spaces, I could be making them vulnerable and visible to the law and other threats, something that I am acknowledging.

It was hard for me to sort out because the questions of growing up were always there. But now as a photographer growing and involving people's lives in my work, the power that the camera gave me had to be questioned ethically. Representation within the photograph became more difficult and the camera became a double-edged sword.

²⁰ Badillo, *Latinos in Michigan*, 17.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 20.

²² Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 39

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Yolanda Broyles-Gonzalez, "Indianizing Catholicism: Chicana/India/Mexicana/ Indigenous Spiritual Practices in our Image," in *Chicana Traditions: Continuity And Change*, ed. Norma E. Cantú, and Olga Nájera-Ramírez (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 123.

²⁵ Papastergiadis, *Turbulence of Migration*, 47.

Sontag would consider me a “voyeur,”²⁶ a position photographers need to be aware of. Photography did become “mainly a social rite, a defense against anxiety, and a tool of power.”²⁷ The question I ask myself was whether the loss of power at a young age, was for me, being compensated with the camera? Had the camera become a source of empowerment and agency that led me to question society and allowed my voice to finally be heard? The camera will always create a “voyeuristic stroller”²⁸, even for me. The difference between the white male photographer that “wielded cameras as a way of taking possession of the places they visited”²⁹ and the photographer that is a part of the community being photographed is experience itself. Indirect and direct violence changes the perspective of the voyeur and the label of Mexican-American becomes too boxed in for the generational ambiguity.³⁰ The new voyeur can dangerously become an informant of his/her community. Having to speak for people in Southwest Detroit to the University of Michigan community created the in-between figure for two separate worlds. Language became a border that separated each and translation was a task that required shifting between the two worlds.³¹ I can recall the anxiety of having to register myself for grade school. Now in a graduate program the anxiety of still being the in-between figure of separate worlds constantly returns, while at the same time trying to challenge my own community on issues of race, gender, and class can also alienate me from my community of origin.³² These experiences become the consequence of the camera making “everyone a tourist in other people’s reality, and eventually in one’s own.”³³ It

²⁶ Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, 1st Picadore USA ed. (New York: Picador USA, 2001), 10.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 55.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 65.

³⁰ Harry Gamboa, and Chon A. Noriega, *Urban Exile: Collected Writings of Harry Gamboa, Jr.* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 51

³¹ Anzaldúa, *Borderlands La Frontera*, 19,25.

³² Lucy R. Lippard, *Mixed Blessings: New Art In a Multicultural America* (New York: New Press, 2000), 51.

³³ Sontag, *On Photography*, 57.

becomes difficult to explain how one world affects another world and that comfort comes with consequences.

PHOTOGRAPHIC PROCESS

In my three years of graduate school I was desperately trying to create a style and form that was compatible with my ideas about what a photograph should convey. I work with two forms of photographic processes, one being the traditional form of large format color film wherein the immediate visibility of a shot is not possible and the other being the digital camera that displays the image instantly. Previously my work was staged, with ambiguous subject matter related to folk stories from my childhood. The photographs were fictional creations conducted with light strobe experimentation. In graduate school, as I began to focus on contemporary political and cultural issues I shifted towards portraiture in context as a way to capture the realities in people's lives.

The first roll of color film that I shot was at the baptism party. Film requires more thinking before clicking than the digital process does. It's expensive to develop chemically, so the measuring of light and focus within the frame of the photograph was meticulously measured before every shot. The inability to know whether each image was correctly taken gives me anxiety. That interplay of symbolically playing with emotion and emulsion created tension in the process of conducting and creating the image. Shifting to color meant relating the complexity of colors in film to the complex cultural ideas I was trying to communicate. The first year in graduate school was plagued with concepts of identity, of what was the authentic Mexican. There was time spent sitting in front of a mirror waiting for the reflection to speak back and give me answers. Anger swelled inside of me after experiencing incidents of racism and class-based bigotry in this first year. Feeling confused, I felt lost in the darkness. I became the roamer in the night using streetlights to

create the photograph and the camera was an instrument I used to flip through information that I was receiving.³⁴

In my second year, the use of the digital camera would help me sketch ideas for film portrait compositions. The focus on light changed and the color distinction that dusk provided better reflected the environment of the people that I was photographing. My relationships with many community members became very close. Their stories individually were complex; this was where the images started to relate specifically to the subject. As I explained before, I had to debate with myself where I stood as a photographer within the community of Southwest Detroit. As a voyeur, it was a challenge to see how I sometimes was the student and the host and sometimes hosted in communities unfamiliar with each other.³⁵ The responsibility of photographer halted and made me turn the camera toward myself.

The summer of 2012 was the start of my border project in Nogales, Arizona. Immigration has always been a factor in my family as well as with most of the families in Southwest Detroit. While in the desert I discovered the body of a female in the hilltop wash close to Arivaca, AZ. She had suffered from dehydration and had been deceased for about four days. Death changed my perception and the anger still lingers. It is unsettling to have freedom to move into the academic world, a world safe from daily suffering, fear, and confrontation. Those images first taken in the desert were of the desert itself and nothing more.

³⁴ Flusser, Vilém, *Flusser, Towards a Philosophy of Photography* (London: Reaktion, 2000), 27

³⁵ Papastergiadis, *Turbulence of Migration*, 108.

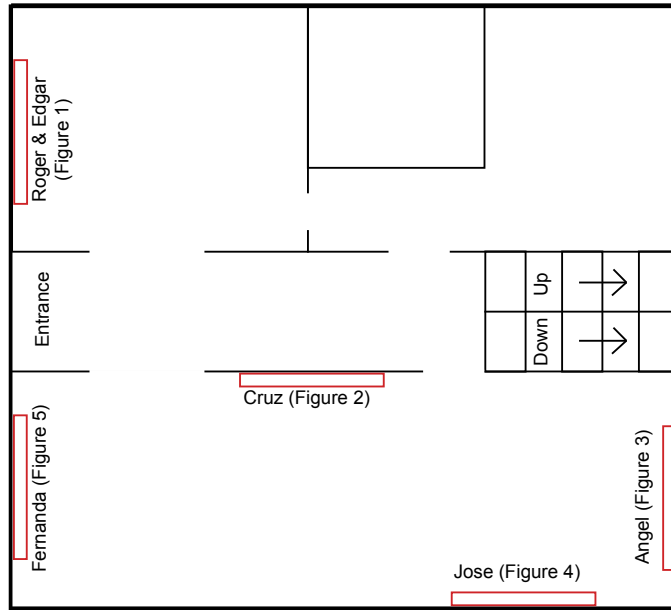
I had to return in the summer of 2013. In Nogales, Mexico, people settle into shelters after being deported. Some are getting ready to cross the desert. The bandits, border patrol, deadly animals and the extreme temperatures of the desert break the migrant down. This place emanated death and foreboding and the tension was constant. The harsh sun and deep shadows of my photographs were symbolic of extreme borders. They represented the migrants' wish to be invisible, to move undetected, but also they made visible the harsh division between life and death, the border, and my personal position in this harsh environment.

This visual approach was used to represent divisions between borders of language, gender and structural violence similar to my approach in the Detroit photographs. The invisibility of structural violence was reflected in the shadows. Still continuing the digital work, I changed the way I captured portraits, without prior setup. The large format 4x5 camera was used because it allows for communication with the subject and lets them share in control of the process. I became the meticulous creature of complicated voyeuristic investigations. This resulted in more discussions between the subject and myself. As each process, film and digital, was interplaying with the other, it became a symbolic gesture that echoed the connective evolution of the generations of Latinos.

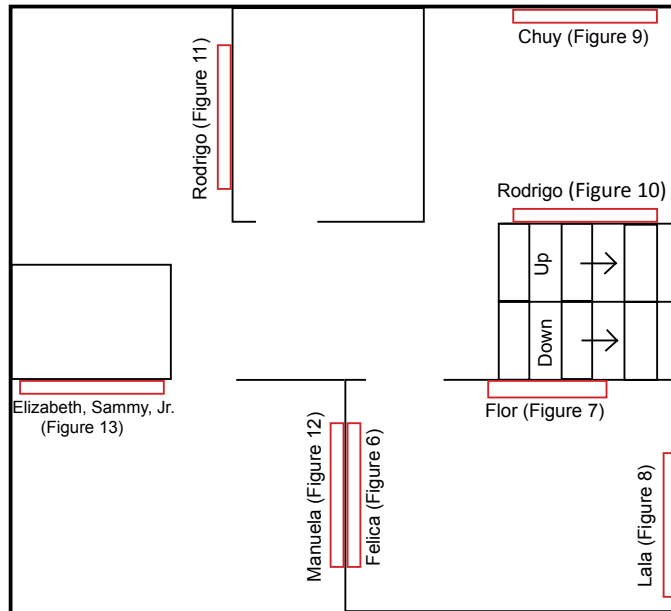
SPACE INTERACTION

I presented my thesis work in a home re-established for community use between community members, professors in the School of Social work and the Latino Studies program at the University of Michigan. Both the ground level and second floor of *El Museo del Norte* was occupied by my large-scale photographic portraits of members of the Latino/a community in Southwest Detroit as they were situated within the personal spaces they created for themselves. The rooms of the museum/house interact with the portraits to convey a feeling of both intimacy and tension. That is, each portrait reveals a personal setting relating to the life story of the subject. At the same time there is a sense of the structural violence that is ever-present within the Latino/a community through the gender relationships and visual cues and the evident messages of cultural change in the generational differences of the subjects. I chose to present my work in this venue to allow for the community members in my photographs to come to the show and view themselves in the space. I also wanted to break down borders of language through interaction between the academic world and the community of Southwest Detroit. Below I am presenting a floor plan of the venue to show where the images were positioned in the ground level and second floor. Along with this, I will provide information about the images themselves and the reasoning for their placement.

Ground Level



Second Floor



EXPLORATORY FRAMES

When entering the Boulevard house, on your left of the ground level there is a picture of Roger and Edgar (Figure 1), the grandchildren of Mr. Rodriguez. I visited their home several times. Their mother was the first and only child of the family to ever go to college and graduate from high school. She became pregnant at a young age and her aunts, Felica and Manuela, now in their eighties, helped to raise her children so that she could graduate from college. Roger and Edgar grew up with the absence of their biological father and very often at a young age wanted to have a figure that they could call dad. When they got older they were sent to a man's house to visit several times and after questioning the visits they were told that the man was their father. They would not feel close to him until they were older because of his absence from their daily lives. Now both in college, Roger and Edgar still come home to their aunts' house and sit at the same old table where they ate all their meals while growing up.



(Figure 1)

In the photograph of Roger and Edgar (Figure 1) you are confronted by different gestures from the twins. One is glaring at the camera with a look of confrontation while the other seems more vulnerable yet protective. Both assert a non-acceptance toward the viewer, voyeur, photographer that has entered their personal space. On the kitchen table you can see the tortillas and two bowls that contain food prepared by their great aunts. The space resembles the security and love the aunts give them with food and shelter. The food is also a cultural symbol while it raises questions about health and authenticity.



Four photographs cover the walls of the room to the right of the entrance of the ground level to the museum. Three of them are hung upon each window to allow the viewer to see the image and then to push past the frame into the context, the neighborhood of Southwest Detroit in which the photographs were taken. Three of the images are of Latino males, each of different age, ethnicity, and generation. The images are shot with high contrast between light and shadow to visually limit the focus of the image and to reflect the harshness of the sociopolitical structures that constrict their lives. They are positioned in a way so that all the subjects are looking at each other. The younger teenage Puerto Rican boy, Angel (figure 3), looks over his shoulder at a Mexican man, Jose (Figure 4) old enough to be his grandfather, with suspicion. In the image of Angel what is in focus are his eyes. The eyes represent how society judges by perception and the probability that he would be treated negatively because of his appearance. In the background you vaguely see a Native-American dream catcher. The effects that colonialism had on this population are similar to those experienced by the Puerto Rican population. The young boy, Chuy (Figure 2) is at the front door of a house marked by violence (the 911 and gun symbol on the door speak of presence of danger in the neighborhood). He is pushing against the door wanting to get out but he looks over his shoulder to see the generations before him looking at him in judgment. In the images of Jose (Figure 4) he is repairing a vehicle. This reflects the impact of the automotive industry on the communities of Detroit. Directly across from the photograph of the three male figures is a photograph of a Fernanda (Figure 5) sitting with her food cart. The impact the Latino/a community has in Detroit is reflected in the competitive marketing between the Mexican goods and the corporate signage in the background. Citizenship, migration, immigration, economics are all affected by the forces of globalization. The woman's presence reflects the impact of these forces on individual women's lives. In the room she is facing looking at the men, reversing the male gaze.





Figure 3

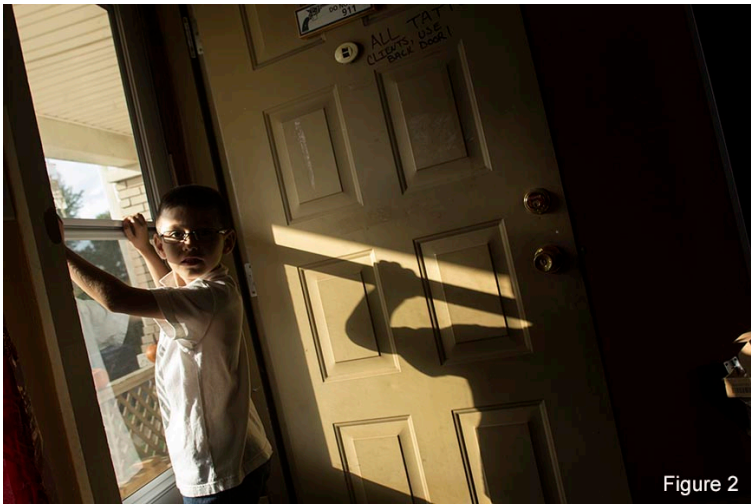


Figure 2



Figure 4

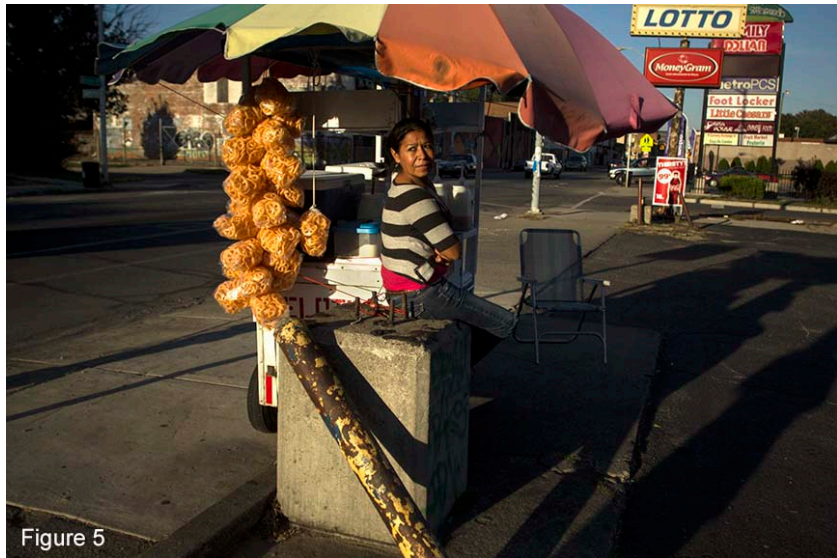


Figure 5

The second floor is split into four rooms, all the rooms except for one having multiple images. When you come up the stairs the first room to your right contains three photographs. The subjects in all three are female and they vary with age. Like the room below, the three images are split within the room to show the impact of globalization and religion on female generations. Lala and Felica are related. Felica (Figure 6) is Lala's great aunt. Every Christmas the family is gathered at Felica's home where she prepares a corner space near the entrance of her home to celebrate a posada. This religious ceremony creates a communal space for the family, which produces a connective unity among the family members. Placing Lala (Figure 8) in a room with her aunt was in a way showing an opposition, a rebellious figure going against the grain of the submissive female that has been constructed by religion. Lala is a confrontational figure. Never shy of expressing herself she is very forward with her opinions. Because Lala was rebellious and part of gang in her youth, her family did not let her celebrate a quinceañera. The quinceañera dresses represent a perfect female character in the Latino/a culture. In the photography, Lala appears in control of her environment. She owns a quineañera shop now in rebellion for never having had a celebration.



(Figure 6)



(Figure 8)



(Figure 7)



The third image in the room is of Flor (Figure 7). I recently met Flor while attending a soccer match for Rodger and Edgar. She was working as one of the vendors at the event. Once an abandoned building, the space has been converted into a small indoor arena that can house a small group of people for a soccer game during the winter. Like all other images I am not expecting the viewer to fully understand every small detail that is represented in the image, especially Flor's image. The focus is on Flor and the advertisement of food products in the space surrounding her. She is the next generation of Latino youth and her absorption by her cell phone music is a telling symbol of our time. The Kennel corn references the effects of processed food on Latino/a culture and health. In a global perspective the kennel corn reflects Mexico's inability to compete with the U.S. agricultural corporate industries that have caused a rise in poverty in rural regions of the country since the passing of NAFTA.³⁶ Those affected sometimes migrate to the States where they then can create a hybridity of Latino/a culture, represented in the presence of the Doritos. The products surrounding her consume Flor. She lives in a time when the Latino/a is being consumed.

The room across from the one containing the images of three females has two photographs of males that are positioned directly across from each other. Their looks are intense. The position of the images was intended to make the viewer uncomfortable when standing between the two images. The intention was to reflect a feeling of anxiety of being the in-between figure for both worlds but also to express the effect structural violence has created on these individuals. Knowing that there would be people from Ann Arbor and locals from Southwest Detroit, I wanted people to think about masculinity and

³⁶ Manuel Angel Gómez Cruz and Rita Schwentesius Rindermann. "NAFTA's Impact on Mexican Agriculture: An Overview." in *NAFTA and the Campesinos: The Impact of Nafta on Small-Scale Agricultural Producers in Mexico and the Prospects for Change*, ed. Juan M. Rivera, Scott Whiteford, and Manuel Chávez, 1-20. (Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 2009), 12-13.

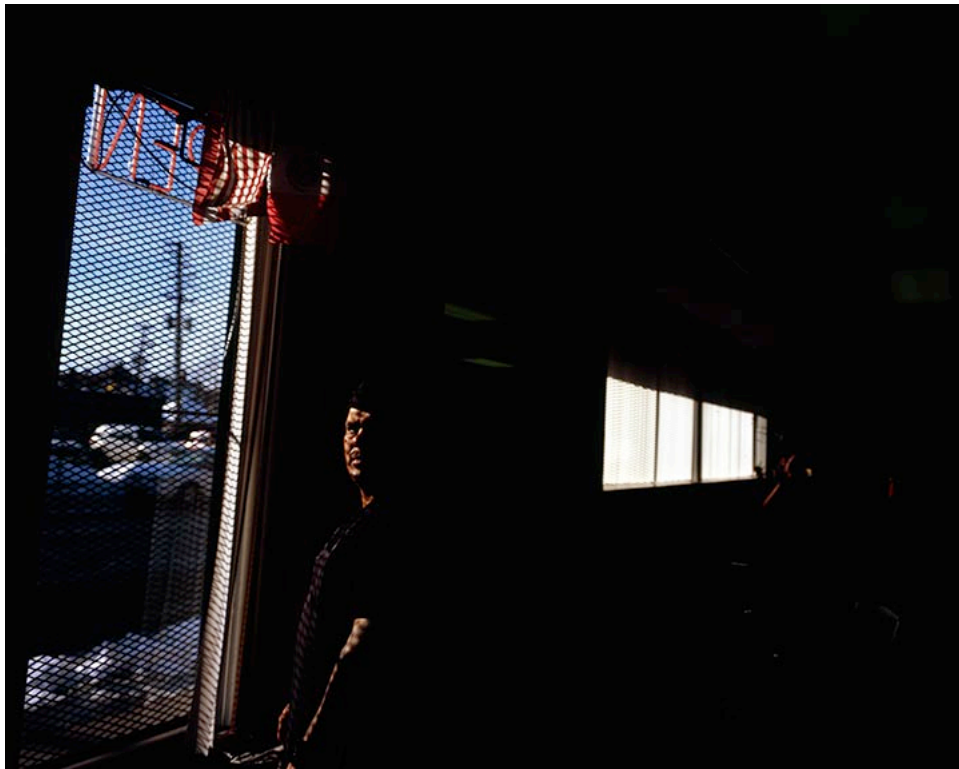
the aggressive nature portrayed in Spanish machismo. Do you think I am recycling stereotypes here? A stare life both of theses men is sometimes necessary to survive in the world they grew up in. By having people from different worlds enter this space I was symbolically gesturing that collectively there is connection between both and that with comfort comes consequences.



The first image in the room is of Chuy (Figure 9). I met Chuy at a local barbershop in Southwest Detroit. At first encounter he presented a protective wall. I discovered that he had spent time in prison. This made sense and explained why he and many others suspected me of being an undercover cop. Chuy's life was intense and as he opened up more to me I discovered that his number of brushes with violence was heavily influenced by his environment. At a young age he joined a gang and his introduction to death robbed him of his childhood innocence. As he got older, Chuy ended up in and out of jail. There was a moment where he stopped to really think about how to change this cycle. While in prison another inmate, sentenced for life and now turned Muslim, sparked his interest in knowledge and made him question the cycle he was caught up in. The inmate explained that Chuy had a small window for freedom, something that he would never have again. This moment stuck with Chuy and since then he changed his path. In his late thirties Chuy now cuts hair for a living and his craft is meticulous when it comes to fades and hair lineups with the razor. I sometimes wonder how my own life might have

been if my mother had not made the right choices that landed me in school. I relate to Chuy and his experience of violence and sometimes wonder if I could have taken a similar path if not for education.

The light strikes through the window and the stark contrast of lights and shadows gives an intense feeling of what his life was like. On Chuy's body the reflection of the window bars remark his past in a penitentiary cell. Above his head you can see a glimpse of the American flag along with the Mexican flag, which for Chuy has several meanings. The flags represent his culture and his generational background as a Mexican-American but also juxtapose his reality with the concept of the American dream, something he missed out on. The dark shadows cover what he has lost and give a glimpse of what is left. What we cannot see in the image is the invisibility of structural violence that scarred Chuy.



(Figure 9)

The image directly across from Chuy is of Rodrigo (Figure 10). Rodrigo is like a strict advisor; he's always telling me what not to get into and encouraging my performance in school. Rodrigo used to roll little baggies full of cocaine for drug dealers just to get his kicks from some free dope they would toss him for the help. He was never into selling it just taking it. He lived the 100% cowboy lifestyle that cost him everything. As a musician he would compete in talent shows in Chicago and win with standing ovations. In Detroit his guitar sits in a corner of a room with no strings for him to play. I always know where to find him. The Vaquerita, dollar store and Lala's shop are the three locations that he fluctuates between throughout the day. The photograph was taken on his daily path. The doors reflect the impact of his lifestyle and his loss of family connection. Sigue is a popular money transfer system used to wire funds to families in Mexico and Latin American countries. It is a source of connection to the families left behind through migration. Sometimes I can see that he misses his family. That loneliness is reflected through the second image (Figure 11) of him that hangs alone in one of the rooms upstairs. When this second image was taken he was a transient figure sleeping on his sister's couch. Recently, Rodrigo found an affordable rental space through a local low-income housing program, a space that he can call his own.

(Figure 10)



(Figure 11)



The images at the end of the hall to your left of the second floor are of a young family and of an elder female. These images are about family and the impact of religion through generations. Both images reflect the image of the Virgin Mary and resemble the impact of colonialism: they reflect how the Virgin was used to convert the indigenous population in Mexico. Manuela (Figure 12) never got married and as a virgin is still upholding the expectations of her church and culture. Opposite her are Elizabeth, Sammy and Jr. (Figure 13). As teenage parents Elizabeth and Sammy started a family out of wedlock. The matriarch sits without the child and her poster is the dominant figure within the photograph and family portrait, which is oppositional to the image above her that places the male at the center.



Figure 12



Figure 13



CONCLUSION

My mother once told me that my life would never be the same as hers. I remember the first time I talked to her through Skype; she was confused and un-amused by the uncertainty of not being able to hold me in her arms. Frustrated, she told me to just find a way to get home and forget the futuristic communication. Not that long ago I remember how in my father's town there was one phone that the whole town would use to communicate with family in the States. Thirty minutes later after making the first call a family member would be in the opposite end of the line. I can recall the rivers that we swam after washing our clothes with my aunts. Things aren't like that anymore. I call my cousin on his cell phone now and the pollution accumulated through local factories together with all the Coca Cola bottles drifting on the water have managed to make the rivers unsafe to swim in. I am not the same any more, and neither will be the generation that comes afterwards. I thank education for an opportunity of a lifetime and am thankful for the connections I have made with people in Southwest Detroit. I continue on a journey that has not ended for me.

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