

Migration and Art:
Exploring Experiential and Theoretical Connections

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Abstract

How can arts-based methodologies offer unique insights into contemporary migration and settlement experiences? Informed by qualitative research and a literature review which analyzes identity theory, social construction theory, and Canadian art organizations which support newcomer artists, this paper explores the potential for the intersection of the arts in immigration and settlement assessment. An exploratory investigation of the theory of art as linked to migration is illuminated by the experiences of a group of artists who have gone through a significant migratory experience and share their reflections on being artists in Canada. This paper argues that analyzing art created by immigrant artists offers insight into the contemporary Canadian immigration experience which quantitative data is unable to capture. Learning about the barriers which immigrant artists face through using arts-based research includes the subject in the research, thereby empowering and validating their lived experiences as valuable epistemologies and ontologies. Findings reveal the impact of acculturation on the identities of and opportunities available to immigrant artists in Canada.

Key Words: *Immigrant Art; Immigration and Toronto; Place-making; Acculturation; Hybridity; Identity*

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Table of Contents

Author's declaration	ii
Abstract	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Chapter 1: Introduction	2
Chapter 2: Contextualizing Art and Migration	7
2.1 Immigrant.....	7
2.2 Art.....	8
2.3 Arts Based Research.....	9
2.4 Neighbourhood Arts Network.....	12
2.5 Identity and Hybridity.....	13
2.6 Acculturation.....	14
Chapter 3: Methodology and Interview Subjects	
3.1 Methodology	17
3.2 Interviews: Subjects and Scope.....	23
3.3 Research Questions.....	24
Chapter 4: Immigrant Artists: Voice and Theory	
4.1 Inclusion of Participant Voices and Horizontal Methodologies	27
4.2 Storytelling for Social Change: Art as Political Participation.....	29
4.3 Desire Centered Research.....	32
4.4 Social Construction of the Vulnerable Immigrant: Art as Defiance.....	36
Chapter 5: Policy-based Suggestions	42
Chapter 7: Conclusion	46
Endnotes.....	50
Bibliography.....	55

Chapter 1

Introduction

The City of Toronto is Canada's largest and most diverse city racially, linguistically, and religiously, and is internationally known for the cultural makeup which contributes to its vibrant character. According to the 2016 census, 51.25 % of the City of Toronto's residents identify as a visible minority (Statistics Canada 2016). The diverse makeup of Toronto's residents is reflected in the wide range of cuisines, religious institutions, cultural events and celebrations, and art available in Toronto. Such cultural and creative amenities contribute to Toronto being an appealing and viable option for immigrants looking to resettle.

The analogy of a mosaic is often applied when describing the multicultural fabric of 21st century Canada (Peach, 2015; Porter, 1965; Reitz, 1998; Reitz & Breton, 1994). It is argued that the mosaic approach has greatly contributed to migrant social cohesion. This social cohesion, in turn, contributes to Canada's international reputation as diverse and welcoming to people of many nationalities and religious identities. Since Europeans colonized Canada (as it is known post-contact¹, previously known to some of Canada's Indigenous peoples as 'Turtle Island'²) Canada has remained a colonial settler-society which has heavily relied on immigration for nation-building, maintaining economic prosperity and population growth (Siemiatycki 2015)³. Immigrants make up a considerable percentage of Canada's growing population; as a result, an economic lens is often used to analyze immigrant integration and settlement (Grant & Buckwold 2013). This MRP suggests that exploring intersections of art and migration can also contribute to our understanding of social integration and settlement.

According to the 2016 Census, “7.5 million foreign-born people came to Canada through the immigration process... more than 200 places of birth were reported by immigrants in Canada” (Statistics Canada 2017). As of 2016, over 20% of Canada’s population identify as immigrants, with an estimated 1.2 million people having arrived within 10 years or less (Statistics Canada 2017). This number is anticipated to continue growing as economic inequality and civil strife contribute to push-factors⁴ for migrants internationally seeking a new home, many of whom will settle in Toronto, the country’s largest newcomer destination city. As Canada’s population continues to evolve alongside immigration patterns, understanding what⁵ barriers immigrant artists face and how they overcome them will help federal and provincial governments grasp a deeper understanding of how immigration impacts Canada’s creative economy.

In order to grasp a more robust understanding of the current settlement experiences of immigrant artists and the barriers they face entering Canada’s creative economy, researchers must look outside of economic evaluation methods. Canada has produced a robust and important body of immigration research. Many aspects of the lives of immigrants have been explored, such as housing, economics, education, identity, and field specific accreditation processes. However, the art and experiences of newcomers who are professional working artists is significantly understudied. Exploring the art of immigrants, as well as how they reflect on their creative work, provides unique and fascinating insight into the contemporary Canadian immigrant experiences. Some immigrant artists use their crafts to explore their settlement experience. This paper explores the role of the arts in settlement in two-folds: firstly, the barriers working-professional immigrant artists face when entering Toronto’s creative economy; as well as how art created by these immigrant artists can reveal unquantifiable but significant factors of the immigration experience for both immigrant artists and non-artists.

There are three (legalized) immigration streams which prospective migrants can use to obtain Permanent Residency (PR) and citizenship in Canada: Refugee class, Family class, or Economic class. Typical pathways to permanent residency and citizenship for immigrant artists under the economic class include immigrating as a Self-Employed Person – Cultural Worker, under the condition that they “intend and are able to make a significant contribution to the cultural life of Canada” (Government of Canada 2018). A ‘significant contribution’ may refer to financial contributions from creative work or general creative contributions to Canadian culture in a broad sense. While the government of Canada values art and culture, there is also opportunity for economic gain born from being a multicultural and creative city in terms of attracting top talent.

As previously mentioned, a significant amount of Canadian-based migration research seeks to understand immigrant integration by using an economic lens to assess the success of immigrant integration into the Canadian labor market and economy. The majority of immigration research is conducted through national quantitative research through surveys, polls, and assessment of household income. This approach has undoubtedly contributed to a valuable body of research which helps identify and respond to systemic inequalities immigrants are vulnerable to. However, little research has been done on how immigration influences immigrant artists and the work they produce, or the barriers immigrant artists face when attempting to live as working professional artists after migrating. How, and to what extent, do immigrant artists contribute to Toronto’s creative culture? Can art created by immigrant professional working artists, and the artist’s reflections of their art, communicate experiences which numerical data is unable to capture?

One interesting exception to this research gap is an earlier work from Peter Li. In one of the few scholarly articles devoted to the connection of art and immigration in Canada, Li (1994) argues that Canada's multiculturalism policy has produced "unequal art worlds for the dominant group and visible minorities" (pgs.365-6). Li's interpretation of how infrastructure reproduces dimensions of inequality invites us to further investigate artistic creation as a realm which reflects "the social organization that produces and sustains it" (p.368). These binary positions (between immigrants and the dominant group; and 'low' and 'high' art) are maintained through the systemic evaluation of art which is critiqued "from the vantage point of a racially-based hierarchy that upholds the artistic standards and cultural values of the dominant group" (p.369). When immigrant artists surmount the structural barriers posed, their creative contributions are categorized as public or 'low' skill art due to the racialization and class of the artist. Minimal space is made in the mainstream (or 'high') art scene for racialized artists or artists without local citizenship. Additionally, immigrant artists who become economically successful in the host country are often pressured to perform their ethnic identities through heritage-based creative production (Li 1994). That white artists are not expected to use art as a platform to educate the nation or their revisit their ancestors' migration to North America reflects racialization within the art world. This paper is an initial exploratory attempt to research linkages between the experiences of immigrant artists, and theories of art, culture and acculturation.

Recognizing how art is a mode of transmitting and communicating lived experiences and epistemologies (Danchev & Lisle 2009) can empower immigrant artists and the communities their work represents through including immigrants in migration discourse and policy. Validating immigrant voices, experiences and non-Western epistemologies as communicated through arts-based research can inform researchers and policy-makers of how settlement impacts migrant's

identities, such as processes of acculturation, hybridity and identity. There are many ways art can be an entry way into understanding the human experience, and in this case, immigrant experiences. This paper interrogates what the creative lives of immigrant artists can tell us about the immigration experience.

The next chapter will present a context for this MRP. It defines basic concepts and terms which will be used, as well as identifies the policy landscape which brings immigrant artists into Canada.

Chapter 2

Contextualizing Art and Migration

For research to be accessible the reader should have access to a shared understanding of the basic knowledge and themes which the research in question builds on. Part of making research equitable and self-reflexive requires firstly “interrogating the language used in policy analysis... this should be a high priority in effective and socially aware public policy research” (Marcuse, 2015, p.152). Providing a basis for themes to be discussed seeks to recognize how language is geographically contextualized and can reproduce power⁶ (McManus 2015).

Language shifts alongside time and is shaped by policy and cultural changes. Additionally, “meanings morph as a result of technological development, cultural change, and advocacy movements” (McManus, 2015, p.349). Dialogue which explores how personal and national identity politics impact art, cultural production, and hybrid identities requires first providing definitions of the overarching themes in this paper: art, cultural production, and hybrid identity. Context is also critical; this section explores and explains why the term “immigrants” is used henceforth to discuss migrant art and artists who entered Canada under various streams. This chapter outlines and defines language used in this paper.

2.1 Immigrant

The government of Canada defines “immigrants” as “persons who are, or who have been, landed immigrants or permanent residents in Canada. Such persons have been granted the right to live in Canada permanently by immigration authorities” (Statistics Canada 2017). By default, immigrant is a neutral term which does not inherently carry ideological baggage. However, as this paper investigates newcomer art and identity in Canada it is imperative to address how the term ‘immigrant’ has become racialized in 21st century migration discourse. Earlier forms of this

paper used the term ‘newcomer’ in hopes of including artists new to Canada (who entered under various streams) in the conversation under one umbrella term. This was done partially to be consistent with the language used by Neighbourhood Arts Network (NAN) which offers programming to newcomers. NAN defines ‘newcomer’ status as someone with Permanent Residency who has resided in Canada consistently between 1-7 years. This language choice reflects an attempt to acknowledge and strip away some of the negative associations with the terms immigrant (referring to those who chose to migrate at a time and pace comfortable to them, based on pull factors) and refugee (based on push factors). Despite recognizing such associations, ‘immigrant’ objectively refers to the three major legalized entry pathways for those looking to resettle in a new country. ‘Immigrant’ also acknowledges that while the term has some emotional and negative connotations (whether to politicians and citizens less than enthusiastic to open Canada’s borders), there are privileges associated with being a legalized immigrant which others who live as illegalized migrants are not afforded. The time and length remains of this paper did not allow for including a section on art and identity of illegalized migrant artists in Toronto. Research on how illegalized migrants navigate Canada’s creative economy and how their art can reveal complexities of their experiences and identities is needed to better compare how citizenship status impacts the lives of artists, as well as how the dynamic exchange between Canada’s creative economy and artists influence one another.

2.2 Art

In *The Decay of Lying* (1889) Oscar Wilde stated, "Life imitates art far more than art imitates life". What is understood to be and appreciated as art has historically shifted alongside time and colonization. Wilde (1889) argued that “the self-conscious aim of Life is to find

expression, and that Art offers it certain beautiful forms through which it may realize that energy" (p.17). Art is one method of communicating experiences in a way that make them tangible to both the creator and audience. This act of representation can work to validate the experiences of the creator reflected in the creative piece.

In addition to the aesthetic value art can hold, artists often use their creative practices as a form of political participation, self-reflection and voice. Art can "prompt us to rethink the possibilities of [using] contemporary art for reengaging with political power" (Pang, 2016, p. 155). This possibility of reengaging with power is especially meaningful for marginalized groups, who not only are often denied political voice but bring with them alternate ways of communicating outside of the [dominant] language. Art, then, becomes another method of resistance for artists through providing a platform for 'talking back'⁷ (hooks).

In addition to the formerly mentioned benefits which creative work provides artists, art also offers another method of social and cultural reflection. In their article *Response to: Commentary: What Is Art Good For? The Socio-Epistemic Value of Art* (2018) Sherman and Morrissey highlight the value of neuroaesthetics⁸ as a form of cultural reflection. In regard to how art is largely analyzed and appreciated within culture studies, Sherman and Morrissey state that art is a "rich arena for understanding the social development of... art appreciation... [and] is often done in service of measuring preference or beauty judgments rather than in service of understanding socially-relevant outcomes" (Sherman and Morrissey, 2018, p.1). Reflecting on the stories told through creative mediums, as well as the potential for audience impact, offers a window into how art imitates life in the current geopolitical context. In addition to the personal benefits of creating exploratory art, art and art policy also reflects societal values. How art is supported and disseminated reflects the social value of art and how certain voices are privileged.

The Government of Canada encourages people who work in creative fields to apply to immigrate to Canada. This can be done by applying as a Self- Employed person under the subcategory ‘cultural activities’. The Canadian government note that writers, performers, musicians, painters, visual artists, film- makers and film technical support workers, and creative designers qualify as professional artists so long as they make “a significant contribution to their field” (Government of Canada 2012). One would hope this is not simply an economic calculation but also takes into account the cultural value of the creative work to be produced. While it is true that art and culture offer national economic benefits, art also provides a platform which can “privilege minority voices that have historically been under-recognized” (Racevi, 2016, p.7). As this paper focuses on art as a tool which can better include marginalized voices in policy development, the Government of Canada’s definition of an artist requires further elaboration.

Toronto is home to numerous non-profit creative institutions, including the Toronto Arts Foundation (TAF). In 2011 TAF founded the Neighbourhood Arts Network (NAN) in hopes to help bridge the gap between newcomer creatives and the professional art world in Toronto. TAF and NAN offer a more flexible definition of art than the Government of Canada. In their document *Transforming Communities Through the Arts*, TAF defines art as “doing something because it is ‘inside you’ (p.25). Furthermore, TAF emphasizes that expanding the definition of art “beyond easily recognized art forms like painting or music encompasses a far broader sense of individual and collective expression” (2013). This paper highlights the intersection of linking the self to collective expression. Newcomers are presented in immigration discourse not as individuals but as a collective, primarily defined by their migration status and the barriers associated with belonging to systemically and socially marginalized groups. As pre-and post-migration experiences are subjective, using alternative research methods to better understand the

varying dynamics of migration and settlement is beneficial to the subject and researcher. Art based research is an example of an alternative research method which allows for adaptability, flexibility and reflexivity between the researcher and subject matter.

2.3 Art Based Research

In 1998 Shaun McNiff published the book *Art Based Research*. McNiff argued that the benefit of art extends beyond cultural and emotional, and questions why research often fails to embrace how art can convey experiences which language fails to. This is one of many reasons offered when arguing for the intersection of art and the sciences. McNiff's introductory text defines art based research as:

The systematic use of the artistic process, the actual making of artistic expressions in all the different forms of the arts, as a primary way of understanding and examining experience by both researchers and the people that they involve in their studies (McNiff, 1998, p.30).

Not only does incorporating art based research into fields which typically rely on quantitative data offer more information to researchers on topics difficult to quantify, it inherently recognizes alternative epistemologies through looking at various ways knowledge is transmitted and communicated. Recognizing and validating how lived experience contributes to valuable forms of knowledge is relevant to migration studies because immigrants bring a variety of experiences, education and bodies of knowledge with them to Canada which are not able to be explored in quantitative research alone.

The ability of art to communicate experiences and issues which quantitative data alone is unable to capture supports the need for settlement researchers to incorporate alternative methods

of understanding settlement experiences. Expanding ways of knowing results in a greater breadth of information. As the Toronto's immigrant demographic continue to diversify (in sending country, migration stream, and various other identity markers), using arts based research methods will help immigration policy makers understand the complexities which come with building a new home.

The following section provides a brief explanation of a non-profit arts institution in Toronto which offers programs that specially cater to the needs of working professional immigrant artists.

2.4 Neighbourhood Arts Network (NAN)

The qualitative component of the research conducted for this paper involved interviewing recipients of various award⁹ and mentorship programs from the Neighbourhood Arts Network (NAN). Founded in 2010, NAN is a non-profit initiative of the Toronto Arts Foundation (TAF). TAF is the largest non-profit arts institution servicing the City of Toronto; through partnerships, workshops, events and various funding opportunities TAF supports professional working artists of various identities, with programming catered towards specific needs of various marginalized groups (such as Indigenous, queer, or Black artists). NAN was partially created to recognize and service the unique needs and barriers which immigrant artists face when entering the Canadian creative economy. One component of NAN's programming and mandate includes helping immigrant artists personally and professionally settle in Toronto through providing various award¹⁰ programs, mentorship opportunities, and complimentary workshops which provide information pertaining to navigating the creative sector and leveraging creative opportunities and networking in a Canadian context. NAN offers complimentary translation and accessibility-support services through personalized support available to applicants of all programs. In May

2018, I completed a 150-hour placement required by the Immigration and Settlement program at Ryerson University with NAN. During my placement, I assessed the impact of NAN's immigrant programming through interviewing immigrant artists who have received funding through NAN about their experiences with NAN programs. This was done in hopes of assessing if programs were effective with providing capacity development, as well as identifying the disjuncture between the settlement sector and the creative economy. While the majority of interviews revealed the funding granted to participants interviewed enabled the transition to making a living as a working-professional artist, they also revealed that many participants use their craft to explore their migration experiences. Identity and acculturation were themes which were continuously brought up, both through analyzing an art piece itself, as well as through the artists' interpretations of their work and creative journeys.

2.5 Identity and Hybridity

This section uses literature on identity theory to provide a definition of identity in order to later contextualize how art reflects nuances of identity of immigrant artists. I explore identity theory in a broad sense, followed by the concepts of hybridity and performativity. These subthemes of identity were chosen based on participant feedback and are further discussed with examples in Chapters 3 and 4.

Identity theorist Thomas Turino (2004) defines identity as “the representation of selected habits foregrounded in given contexts to define the self to oneself and to others by oneself and by others” (p.8, as cited in MacLachlan, 2014, p.59). But what happens when someone's ascribed identity does not completely correlate with their multifaceted identity? Hybridity includes the

interlocking relationship between an individuals' ethnic identity, religious identity and national identity (among other fixed characteristics) (Smith & Leavy 2008). This paper recognizes and problematizes that the root of the concept of hybridity is a colonial concept and "is first and foremost a racial term" (Prabhu, 2007, p.xii). While the racialization of hybridity as a concept is problematic, the term hybridity is used here to reflect a disruption of binary identities reinforced through the social construction of immigrants.

Art is a form cultural production which can depict the complex lived experiences of the artist's hybrid identities. Applying theorist Judith Butler's (1990) theory of performativity can help elaborate on Turino's concept of how we internalize how we are perceived by others through 'acting it back'. Butler argues identity is reinforced through how it is socially performed. There are multiple 'stages' where immigrants perform their identities as migrants, such as during the hearing process with Canada's Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB), as well as other institutions which provide immigrant settlement and integration services. Immigrant artists then "act back" their perceived identities in these different venues. Interestingly, art allows them to disrupt these perceptions. Some immigrant artists use a literal stage, through theatre or other performance sites, to acknowledge parts of their ascribed identities while disrupting components of prescribed identities.

Multiple participants interviewed for this paper commented on how they use their art to explore their evolving identities. In addition to feedback provided during interviews conducted for this paper, the artists' ongoing work in Canada and the evolution of their processes also reflects how migration category, gender and the country of origin deeply impacts immigrant access to creative and wellness support systems, processes of social inclusion, and access to forms of civic participation. The immigrant artists whose interviews are later discussed in this

paper (among others, whose excerpts were not able to be included here due to length restraints) mentioned their creative styles and content are emerging in Toronto alongside processes of acculturation. Their art is influenced by their new environments; similarly, they use their art to address their shifting identities and through disseminating their work in Toronto, mutually influence the local social and creative environment through a dynamic exchange as they acculturate.

2.6 Acculturation

Acculturation is a psychological phenomenon used by psychologists and cultural theorists to explain how culture and movement impact human behaviour in ways which “correspond to cultural influences and expectations (Berry, Poortinga, Segall, & Dasen, 1992, as cited in Berry 1997). The culture in which someone is raised has a significant impact on how they operate as individuals and members of society. But what happens when someone moves from one culture to another? The identity and habits of the individual is altered; similarly, the cultural landscape of which they are integrating into is also impacted by the cultural attributes the individual brings with them when they migrate. This dynamic process of personal and cultural adaptation is referred to as acculturation.

Acculturation has more recently been contrasted with the settlement theory of assimilation (Sapienza, Hichy, Guarnera, & Di Nuovo 2010). Assimilation theory expects the immigrant to abandon their culture of origin in favour of the host country’s culture as a process of integration. Alternately, acculturation does not demand that an individual completely disregard their cultural values or practices. It instead recognizes how culture and identity are not

static. Acculturation contributes to the evolving hybridized identities of immigrants as they become a valued component of their host country's social and cultural fabric (Linesch, Ojeda, Fuster, Moreno, & Solis 2014).

Interview findings reveal that the art which immigrant artists are creating in Canada is not the same as what it was in their homeland. One of the contributions of this MRP is demonstrating, from the experiences of artists, how their own work evolves and expands as they assume a wider range of cultural exposure and hybrid interests. The artist here is different from the artist that arrived. They are different as a result of their migration experiences. Migration changes the world of the artist; it provides them a new sense cosmopolitanism and exposure to other cultural motifs. This is reflected in the interviews and art, and can tell researchers a great amount about the migration experience.

Understanding processes of acculturation through reflections and art by immigrants can help researchers understand the dynamic exchange between movement, identity and culture. As interviews to be discussed later outline, art offers insight into how migration impacts the identity of immigrant artists, and as a result, the art they produce. The following section outlines the methodology of the interviews conducted through NAN, followed by an overview of interview subjects and scope.

Chapter 3

Methodology and Interview Participants

3.1 Methodology

As mentioned, much of existing research and literature in migration and settlement discourse is damage focused. While it is incredibly important to recognize the barriers immigrants face during settlement, it is also important to recognize how immigrant agency has prompted the development of grassroots movements, non-profit organizations and community mobilization (whether within the arts world or specific to a diaspora). Where are the service gaps for immigrant artists, and how are they being filled? How can researchers learn about the experiences of immigrant artists in Canada? Failure to acknowledge sites of resistance does not address how immigrant artists defy the social construction of the immigrant as vulnerable and costly to Canadian government and taxpayers.

Toronto is lauded for its opportunities for artists, as well as for its multicultural population and variety of cultures which many immigrants contribute to. Interestingly, little research has recently been conducted on how the creative sector and immigration intersect. I became curious about the lack of research on the intersection of the arts and settlement (beyond art therapy and immigrant writers) and began exploring what programs and funding opportunities are available in Toronto for immigrant artists, in hopes of learning about their experiences. I began brainstorming where to look to see success stories about people supporting themselves and their own communities despite the various barriers faced by immigrants during resettlement. I began noticing political overtones mentioned in artist statements and event summaries, as well as embedded within creative pieces. This led me to explore how alternative methodologies can

reflect and produce social and political participation for immigrants, many of which belong to multiple groups who are systemically disadvantaged¹¹.

Conducting research on the topic of art specific to immigrant, refugee, and illegalized artists in Canada drew minimal resources. The majority of resources were retrieved from the digital Ryerson library, read on-site at the Toronto Reference Library, and accessed through other digital library systems, namely JSTOR and Google Scholar. Search terms included “Immigrant Art”, “Immigration and Toronto”, “Place-making AND art”, “Acculturation”, “Hybridity” and “Identity”.

I expanded my search terms to “newcomer”, opposed to specific categories of status as originally used, as well as expanded where research was completed. Initially I had hoped to find previous studies on immigrant artists and arts based research in immigration research done specifically through a Canadian lens. I then expanded search terms to include nation states in the Global North who are now settling large numbers of immigrants; the minimal resources drawn concluded that very little research has been done on the integration experiences of immigrants using art based methodologies. Only research on art therapy for traumatized refugees used art based research for immigration research. This research gap echoes and reproduces the social, economic and political inequalities prevalent in existing research on immigrant integration experiences which cite the financial and social struggles some immigrants face when settling in Canada. If migration scholars critique the social exclusion of immigrants and the various arenas where these barriers are produced, it is imperative for research to diversify methodologies used when studying contemporary Canadian settlement experiences in order to not reproduce the inequalities being studied through exclusionary research. Through including participant voices in

research in creative ways while approaching comprehending migration from beyond an economic standpoint, policymakers may be able to understand the migration experience during the settlement period. Arts based research can celebrate the individuals who constitute Canada's changing social and cultural fabric. My hope is that including storytelling in policy evaluation and development can better inform policymakers, who are often otherwise disconnected from the communities most affected by migration and settlement policy. Not only do these policies impact immigrants, but methods used to understand the immigration experience can reproduce inequalities in the group being studied.

The methodology used for the investigative portion of my placement, and eventually this research paper, was primary research in the form semi-structured interviews, conducted on an individual basis. I interviewed 11 immigrant artists who had received either the Newcomer and Refugee Artist Mentorship (NRAM), the RBC Arts Access Award¹², or a combination of the two programs through the Neighbourhood Arts Network (NAN). The research completed for NAN was intended to provide impact analysis so NAN could understand how accessible and effective their newcomer programs are regarding supporting personal and professional development.

As I was conducting and transcribing the interviews, the participants continuously touched on themes discussed throughout Ryerson's Immigration and Settlement (ISS) program and the assigned literature. The words "community", "hope", "identity" and a general feeling of frustration and neglect from government settlement agencies emerged throughout multiple interviews. The artists I spoke to had provided such astute and valuable feedback it would have been a loss to not include their voices in this research paper¹³. I proposed allowing these two research projects to intersect; NAN graciously granted permission for me to use the interviews

conducted as part of their program assessment for this research paper. NAN consented to sourcing participants from the database which listed successful applicants of the RBC Arts Access Award and the Newcomer and Refugee Artist Mentorship (NRAM) program. I emailed multiple participants explaining my interest in speaking with them and how their feedback can help outline the disjuncture between the creative sector and settlement sector. 11 participants generously agreed to meet with me to share their stories. They all signed electronic consent forms which stated whether they wanted their feedback to be included in this paper and if they prefer to be referred to with a pseudonym. Everyone featured in this paper noted a preference for their real name to be used so their creative work and professional insight can be properly credited to them. The limitations of this paper did not allow for more interviews to be analyzed and included. I selected the feedback from Padideh, Ahmed, Alice II, Semret, and Maria based on their comments which directly spoke to acculturation and how their personal and creative identities evolved as a result of migrating to Canada¹⁴. I also wanted to include a variety of voices (gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, country of origin, and immigration stream) and chose to include interviews which reflect a variety of experiences. Many artists who have received awards through NAN and responded to the request for interviews are economic migrants and women. Exploring these demographics within Toronto's immigrant creative community requires more research and will hopefully be explored in future research.

Excerpts from interviews are integrated throughout this paper in hopes of providing the reader with a clear link between issues commonly faced by newcomers during settlement. The intention is to show how the arts both support newcomer wellness and political and social participation, as well as to emphasize the need for recognition of the diversity of artists which contribute to Toronto's reputation as a world class creative city. From the standpoint of dominant

institutions, the question of how to support newcomers and the arts is no longer approaching cities as a creative sound box, but analyzing the creative sector as the lifeblood of urban centers.

The time constraints of this paper did not allow for including more interviews, nor was it possible to interview immigrant artists who use art for personal expression (compared to as their primary occupation). Further research on art created by immigrants for their communities, measured not by economic success but community impact, is needed to better understand the breadth of art as a form of alternative political participation. Participants featured in the interviews included requested their real names are used in this publication.

Semi-structured narrative was the most appropriate fit considering the subjective and interpretative nature of art. Additionally, semi-structured interviews allowed me to ensure predicted themes are touched on without overtly influencing participant responses. This interview method also enabled unanticipated themes to emerge as conversation flowed. Themes I anticipated emerging during interviews which coincide with existing research on immigrant art include hybrid identities, art as a political platform, and resiliency.

Broadening my search terms to uncover existing literature on various art forms created by immigrants drew from a small body of literature which argues for the therapeutic effects of art programs for refugees. While art therapy is recognized by many health professionals for its benefits, focusing on refugee art within the context of trauma can reproduce the stereotype of the refugee as damaged and in need of Western saviors.

3.2 Interviews: Subjects and Scope

NAN offers two major funding opportunities specifically for immigrant artists. The first is the RBC Access Fund¹⁵ which provides funding to professional working immigrant artists who have resided in Toronto between 1-7 years. They are granted \$500-\$1500 to apply towards a project or personal development¹⁶. The second program is the Newcomer and Refugee Arts Mentorship (NRAM). This mentorship pairs the immigrant artist applicant with an established Canadian professional artist who works in a similar medium as the immigrant artist applicant. Once the artists are matched they are each granted \$5000 (totaling \$10,000 between them to allocate as they see best, whether that means paying for materials for a specific project, studio rental costs, etc.). During my placement with the Neighborhood Arts Network (NAN) I interviewed artists who received awards through both categories. The majority of artist participants migrated under the economic- self-employed persons immigration stream. A small number of those interviewed either immigrated as refugees or became refugees while visiting Toronto, and were unable to return to their countries of origin¹⁷. Unsurprisingly, the refugee artists had a vastly different experience from the economic migrant artists.

When I began recruitment of participants through my placement with NAN I assumed many of the immigrant artists who I was to speak to include the theme of migration in their work. In addition to being valued for its aesthetic pleasures, art has the ability to communicate universal stories while helping the artist process and share their lived experiences (Danchev & Lisle 2009). In their article *Introduction: art, politics, purpose*, Danchev and Lisle quote the artist Picasso: “‘Painting is not made to decorate apartments,’ said Picasso. ‘It is an offensive and defensive weapon against the enemy. Let us mobilize it’” (Danchev & Lisle, 2009, p.777). I presumed the art created by the immigrant artists I was interviewing would convey a similar sentiment of

resistance. While this was not untrue for all the artists, I found myself surprised by participants who noted their experience breaking into the Toronto art scene pushed them to resist how their migration categories, religions, ethnicities and countries of origin are socially constructed in Canada. They resist through being unpredictable; reflections and demonstrations of resilience is explored in chapter 4.

3.3 Research Questions

There is a literature gap on integrating art based research in migration research, as well as research on immigrant artists and the creative economy. In their article discussing Western traditions with art engagement, Danchev and Lisle argue “International Relations too often merely tolerate scholarship on art, culture and imagination, and therefore underpins all the latent power relations that modes of toleration always produce” (2009, p.776), and ask if “art, broadly conceived, is the missing dimension in the study of international relations?” (2009, p.776). This practice of tolerating art, rather than exploring its multiple benefits to subjects and researchers, is present within the field of immigration and settlement studies. This paper builds on Danchev and Lisle’s question in two folds: Can integrating art based research into migration studies be beneficial to both immigrant artists and the nation-state through unearthing nuances of settlement which economic analysis alone is not able to capture? Does looking to art created by immigrants help researchers better understand diverse lived experiences through inviting a horizontal approach to epistemology and ontology?¹⁸. Lastly, I investigate if the former research questions work to make research more equitable and inclusion when put into practice in the immigration

and settlement sector by asking what research choices and frameworks result in inclusion and exclusion when building cultural policy.

Chapter 4

Immigrant Artists: Voice and Theory

4.1 Inclusion of Participant Voices and Horizontal Methodologies

Feminist, Black, Indigenous, mad and disability scholars have critiqued how academia can reproduce the marginalization and exclusion of groups which the same research sought to discuss or ‘empower’ (Campos 2017; Lund, Panda & Dahl 2015; Brun & Lund, 2010; Tuck 2009; Mohanty, 2003; Nagar, 2014). Research methodologies can be harmful to the communities they seek to empower because “the power over the research definition, representation, and benefits of partners is in the hands of the researcher, not his or her subjects” (Lund, Panda & Dahl 2015). Despite a researcher’s altruistic intentions, it can be damaging to exclude those centered within the research topic from directing how the story is told as inequalities may be reproduced or reinforced inadvertently through methodological exclusion. Additionally, including participant voices in research helps subvert positioning marginalized groups as inherently damaged and in need of saving by Western researchers. Including participant voices through arts based research methodologies is one form of disseminating horizontal ontologies and epistemologies.

Vertical research is juxtaposed with horizontal research. Vertical research is commonly reflected in various fields of study, and reflects hierarchies of power (both within the group being studied, as well as the society which produced the study). Horizontal research is argued to be more equitable, opposed to the vertical top-down approach commonly used in policy analysis and anthropology (Sillitoe, Bicker & Pottier 2002). Using arts based research can support horizontal methodologies by recognizing the value of lived experience of the participants as a

valuable form of knowledge by more directly injecting participant voices into the research process and product. While conducting primary research for this paper it became apparent that there are various restrictions which complicate the ability to include various voices through horizontal arts based research, including language, the location and economic situation of the participant, and migration status, amongst other factors. Immigration status not only impacts an immigrant's access to various services in the City of Toronto (such as government-sponsored language classes for refugees who do not yet have permanent residency status) but can pose barriers to how they use art to represent themselves.

Semret immigrated to Canada over 4 years ago from an East African country which poses severe restrictions on free speech. There are severe legal, physical and emotional consequences for critically commenting on the nations' politics. As a journalist, restrictions on government and political criticism posed an issue for Semret, who at the time of his migration had been working as a journalist for multiple decades in his home country.

Despite the severe consequences for using writing to speak out against systemic injustices, Semret continued to publish articles which advocated for increased human rights in his country. He was severely punished by the local government; rather than becoming discouraged, Semret's experiences strengthened his belief in freedom of speech and storytelling. He felt the only way he was able to continue writing the truth was to migrate to a nation which allows freedom of speech, Canada, by applying for refugee status. However, the transition from silence to speech was not as smooth as anticipated. In response to a question about what he wishes he knew about immigrating to Canada as an artist refugee, Semret replied,

“From the beginning, I wanted to work as a journalist. I wanted to continue doing that here, and was expecting to start work within a couple of months. I found myself stuck

without work for over 4 years. It was very frustrating. I never expected it to happen to me. Many people from my country find work here within 6-7 months.”

Despite having been in Canada for over 4 years to date, Semret still does not have permanent residency. His [lack of] proper status has impacted his mental health and his ability to publish his writing; he fears having his residency application denied if he is critical of either government. If his application is rejected after publishing an article critical of his country of origin’s government, he would be deported back to a nation that would quickly incarcerate and brutalize him to send a message to civilians. He is also wary to write about his experiences waiting for status for 4 years in Canada in case it impacts his pending application.

When we spoke, Semret said being in status limbo has been challenging emotionally and financially; without permanent residency status, he is not able to work legally. He signed up for the Newcomer and Refugee Artist Mentorship (NRAM) program with the Neighbourhood Arts Network (NAN) where he was matched with a Canadian writer who operates his own local newspaper. While NAN requests program applicants have permanent residency status or citizenship, they do not require proof of status for an application to be successful. For this reason, Semret was able to benefit from their services while his application was being processed.

Not only did the NRAM program provide Semret with \$5000 he was able to use as needed, Semret was able to build professional connections which he was lacking in Toronto. This enabled him being published in his mentor’s newspaper, as well as developing an understanding of how publishing and journalism industries operate in Canada. Semret stated the funding removed a large contributor to his stress, commenting that funding provided by the Canadian government to refugees is often insufficient. Through the support provided by NRAM Semret was also able to build his creative writing skills. This has now become another writing

method he uses for personal fulfillment and storytelling. Although he was faced with challenges accessing platforms to share his work due to institutional disorganization, Semret is able to use his writing to advocate for the social and political issues he is passionate about. His story on the struggle he faced as a creative asylum seeker in Canada shows policy-makers that prioritizing certain asylum seekers, such as persecuted journalists, is crucial for supporting their physical and emotional safety and social integration. Journalism enables Semret to use storytelling for social change.

4.2 Storytelling for Social Change

While historically associated with fiction and entertainment, storytelling has recently been incorporated into various disciplines. As a research tool storytelling has “taken on new prominence in psychology, philosophy, semiotics, folklore studies, anthropology, political science, sociology, history, and legal studies” (Davis, 2002, p.3). This is in part due to an increasing awareness of the importance of acknowledging subject agency through recognizing the subjectivity of the human experience. In the text *Stories of Change: Narrative and Social Movements* (2002), Davis argues that stories not only have the capacity to shed light on the ‘plot’ and ‘characters’ of the stories themselves but can offer insight into the context in which the story is reproduced for an audience. How we as a society tell and honour stories holds a mirror to the society engaged in the particular research at hand, as it illuminates who is invited to participate in storytelling, and how social inclusion is navigated by marginalized groups (Razack 1993). Immigrant artists are a marginalized group who have a particularly close tie to using storytelling for social change and reflection.

Maria Perez is a Peruvian sculpture and painter who specializes in the Indigenous Peruvian art form of retablos. Retablos are three-dimensional sculptures which have historically been created by men to tell Indigenous Peruvian folklore and resist narratives imposed by colonialism (Stein 2005). The fact that as a woman Maria is trained and continues to create retablos is a form of resistance in itself, stating,

“It’s part of my identity. My city, Ayacucho, is where it originated. When I was a kid I felt I wanted to do it but only guys make it in my city. When I started I was the only woman in my school. Because most of this kind of work is done by men while the women can’t spend this kind of time on it- they have other responsibilities. But here I have more help and different responsibilities.”

Being a migrant and diasporic can disrupt the limitations imposed in the homeland culture on how art is, or can be, done. Maria is expressing an experience suggesting that the altered terrain of diasporic existence can open up new artist pathways.

When asked if she feels her art is political, Maria paused before replying that during her first year in Canada she was very lonely. Despite migrating to marry a Canadian man (whom she met while he was backpacking through Ayacucho) Maria lacked a Peruvian or even a broad Latin American community in Toronto. It felt very isolating and she struggled to fill the time while her husband was at work and she awaited citizenship. During this period, she began learning about Canada’s history and was immediately interested in Canada’s Indigenous history. During our interview Maria expressed shock in never hearing about Canada’s Indigenous people, and felt Canada’s contemporary reputation excludes Indigenous history and the ongoing impact of colonialism on Indigenous communities. As someone of Indigenous Peruvian heritage, Maria immediately experienced feelings of solidarity with Canada’s Indigenous people. While retablos

are traditionally used to depict Latin American folklore, Maria has used the NRAM funding to create retablos which depict Indigenous history, experiences and folklore. In addition to using traditional Peruvian art methods to advocate for the rights and recognition of Canada's Indigenous peoples, Maria's art reflects how migration has altered her hybridized identity through acculturation. How Maria's use of retablos have changed, as well as her reflection on how immigration has changed how she uses retablos to recognize and share the stories of marginalized and underrepresented groups demonstrates how alternative forms of storytelling can be used as a tool of empowerment and solidarity.

In addition to voices and experiences of identity being included in research, storytelling can also be a method for marginalized voices to talk back regardless of receiving an invitation from a researcher or institution (hooks 1989). The concept of talking back, or back talk, was introduced to feminist theorists by bell hooks in her critical text *Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (1989). hooks defines talking back as "speaking as an equal to an authority figure, daring to disagree and sometimes just having an opinion... it is an act of resistance, a political gesture that challenges politics of domination that would render us nameless and voiceless" (hooks, 1989, pp. 5, 8, as cited in Fitch, James & Motion, 2016, p.280). hooks argues that experiences of oppression are not synonymous with one another. Representing the variety of experiences of intersectional identities is crucial for both defiance and growth of the individual and the audience. Such defiance is a form of creative political participation, which is considered to be a form of performative citizenship (Iannelli 2017) which storytelling can enable.

Performative citizenship holds a unique significance for groups on the margins. While the City of Toronto is lauded for its slogan "Diversity Our Strength" (City of Toronto, 2009a), research on access to and representation of political inclusion of marginalized groups (including,

but not limited, to racialized immigrants) has revealed “the paradoxes of Toronto’s experience of immigrant and minority political incorporation” (Siemiatycki, 2011, pp. 1214). Regardless of the fact that “the City of Toronto has branded itself as an immigrant city” (Siemiatycki, 2011, pgs. 1214-15) the majority of positions of power fail to represent the diverse population of Toronto.

Despite the racialization of official distributions of power at federal and municipal levels, Toronto is home to a plethora of non-profit organizations and individuals who utilize lived and professional experiences to inform radical approaches to social justice and community mobilization through the arts. While creative modes of talking back are often initiated by individuals or grassroots organizations, it should be noted that all citizens do not have equal access to the materials and time needed to talk back, such as immigrant artists. Resources needed to talk back include digital literacy, time, the cost of materials (i.e. creative materials for back talk through the arts), and financial and community support (should disagreeing with authority have legal or financial consequences). Consequences of “talking back” may include termination of employment, housing eviction, or rejected citizenship applications. Not only does representation matter but it can come at a cost. One method of mitigating negative representation of marginalized immigrants is through research which recognizes how immigrants support themselves and their communities in the face of adversity. This recognition is a form of desire centered research.

4.3 Desire Centered Research

bell hooks defines damage centered research as “research that invites oppressed peoples to speak but to “only speak from that space in the margin that is a sign of deprivation, a wound, an unfulfilled longing. Only speak your pain” (hooks, 1990, p. 152). Eve Tuck builds from hooks’ criticism of damage centered research and juxtaposes it with desire centered research.

Desire centered research. Tuck problematizes ‘damage centered research’, defining it as ethnographic research which excludes participant voices and largely focuses on hardships within a community (opposed to acknowledging innovative practices used by the group being studied). Alternately, desire centered research documents “not only the painful elements of social realities but also the wisdom and hope” (Tuck, 2009, p.416). Desired centered research is celebratory; this does not mean excluding content which is perceived to be negative, but using research as a tool of acknowledging resiliency and resistance present in the population being studied.

In *Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, cultural theorist Stuart Hall (1997) defines culture as a set of “shared meanings” (p.1). Hall questions how culture and representation intersect, and argues language “has always been regarded as the key repository of cultural values and meanings” (p.1). Gillian Rose’s article *Visual Methodologies* (2007) builds on Stuart Hall’s cultural theory, arguing:

“Culture is not so much a set of things...as a process, a set of practices. Primarily, culture is concerned with the production and exchange of meanings- the ‘giving and taking of meaning- between the members of a society or group... This culture depends on its participations interpreting meaningfully what is around them, and ‘making sense’ of the world.” (Hall, 1997 a:2, as cited in Rose, 2007 pgs.1-2).

In this sense, supporting and appreciating art created by immigrant artists serves multiple purposes. It encourages immigrant artists to further unpack their personal and migration experiences through creative storytelling, as well as provides members of the host country with opportunity to explore and interpret the experiences of new Canadians as expressed at a grassroots level. The exchange of stories between artists and audience creates a dynamic

conversation which can acknowledge hybrid identities and acculturation experiences, acting as a form of using arts based research to support desire centered research.

Anthropology, sociology, and immigration and settlement research often focuses on trauma and hardships immigrants face as understood through numerical data. While such studies are often well intentioned, they can work to victimize and dehumanize the research subjects. This ultimately has problematic outcomes for the groups being studied as objects and reproduces the inequalities they experience through being excluded from the research and dissemination processes. This is considered ‘damage centered research’.

Aside from an existing body of research on contributions from immigrant authors¹⁹, the creative and social contributions of immigrant artists are relatively underexplored in Canadian immigration research. Analyzing the alternative narratives which immigrant art presents can offer a unique window into the Canadian immigration experience. Art also enables including immigrant voices in desire based research (Tuck 2009). Art based desire centered research recognizes the platforms and processes immigrants may utilize and create within and for their communities. This works to recognize and validate the increasing amount of hybrid identities in Canada’s population.

Il Shin, who currently promotes her films under her chosen “Canadianized” name ‘Alice Il Shin’, is a filmmaker originally from Korea who was technically trained in Japan. During our interview, she noted that following her second migration²⁰ her films primarily discuss migration and relationships. When asked how she feels her films have changed since moving to Canada, Alice replied:

“I used to make more family dramas. One film on my website is about a Korean girl who lost her mother and found out she’s part Japanese. She goes and tries to find her family in

Japan; it's about identity and family. Another film is a Korean father-son story. But this time, it's more [about] friendship. It probably reflects me. It's about a Japanese immigrant girl who has her first day in a Canadian school and can't understand the language. She meets a Canadian girl who may become her friend. This immigrant life story reflects my own life. In Asia, you use different language for addressing different people. But in English it's more saying the same kind of thing. This might be why I started looking at friends instead of family. In this language, it reflects everyone can become friends."

Alice uses her films to connect with others while processing her own experiences in a way that recognizes the loneliness of settlement while celebrating the beauty in building new friendships. This positioning does not frame the immigrant character as meek or in need of a gracious Canadian to extend friendship. It instead recognizes how immigrants develop hybrid identities and build a chosen family in the host country. In response to being asked about if Alice finds her art to be a vessel for self or political participation and what this means for her as an immigrant, she paused before thoughtfully responding that although film sets are often stressful,

"When the camera movement is perfect, when the board is singing- it's those tiny moments that make me content to stay in film. It's these small moments in life, too, which are also surrounded by suffering, which make you continue. I like my work to reflect this."

In the case of Alice's work, art intentionally and blatantly imitates life. Through juxtaposing suffering and joy, loneliness and forging meaningful connections, her own story and fictional adaptations, Alice's work offers a humanized narrative of how some young immigrant women experience settlement. While Alice's films often recognize how migration is often complexly

wrapped in heartbreak, the stories of immigrants are also about strength, identity, and acculturation. This echoes Hall and Tuck's theories on cultural exchanges being most effective when they are collaborative and mutually beneficial, as this approach recognizes the agency of the immigrant. Alice's film also depicts immigrants as complex individuals; this representation outside of the mainstream portrayal of immigrants helps audiences unlearn social construction of immigrants.

4.4 Social Constructionism of the Vulnerable Immigrant: Art as Defiance

Coined by Berger and Luckman in their text *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966), social constructionism refers to how a group is socially constructed in society through verbal and non-verbal representations (Zajacova 2002). Social construction theory is based on the notion that knowledge is created through "active process of categorizing, processing, and constructing" subjects through language (Gergen & Davis, 1985 as cited in Zajacova, 2002, p.70). These representations, or forms of knowledge, are reproduced through various discourses and media.

The social construction of marginalized groups assumes everyone in the group has a homogenous experience and fails to account for interlocking identities (Mithlo 2009; Tlostanova, Thapar-Bjorkert & Koobak 2016). The social construction of immigrants²¹ does not acknowledge the different experiences which immigrants have pre-migration and post-settlement (Malkki, 1995; Grove & Zwi 2006), and does not acknowledge how settlement is experienced differently by economic immigrants compared to refugees.

Ignoring the varying histories and identities within refugee populations contributes to the social construction of the refugee as the exotic 'other' (Said 1978). This contributes to general

assumptions of who are ‘real’ Canadians (the hosts) and who do not belong (guests in the ‘host’ country). This form of othering is reflected in access to social inclusion and power distribution and is reflected in various levels of government, various work environments, and the creative sector²².

One participant I interviewed commented on the particular uniqueness of his ‘becoming’ a refugee while visiting Canada for work as an actor in the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF). Ahmed’s story embodies ‘refugee-ness’ as an emotionally charged migration category which is put upon an individual by the host country’s immigration system. In addition to the creation of the refugee through migration policy, refugees are often constructed as the exotic or violent other in popular migration discourse²³. This discourse is reproduced in public, legal and media discourses, and ultimately “creates and reinforces the position of forced migrants as different, as not belonging” (Grove & Zwi, 2006, p.1931). Despite the contributions refugees make to the development of their community in the host country (such as economically, politically and in the creative economy), popular discourse and government policy often essentializes immigrants as either the vulnerable or violent ‘other’ (Said 1978). Refugees are rarely portrayed as complex and resilient individuals who are capable of contributing to their new communities (Grove & Zwi 2006). Ahmed’s work as an actor and musician challenges this representation in multiple ways, including the care which he navigates casting calls with. When asked if he feels his art is a form of political participation, he replied:

“I am addicted to theatre. I will continue it, but I will be pickier with Arabic [roles].

Many agents look at me like a terrorist. They type-cast me because I am black and speak Arabic. My thing is, love is the reason for a great future. Because of this I have to be

careful with what I do- my vision, journey and target. I will be the first Canadian-Iraqi actor to win an Oscar.”

Landing a spot in a casting room is one thing, but the roles which are offered to him are another barrier due to racist tropes popular within the entertainment industry. While Ahmed is eager to continue exploring a variety of roles and building his portfolio, he is mindful of how as an actor he contributes to representation of Muslims and racialized men in an increasingly xenophobic world. Here, Ahmed defies the social construct of the refugee through being conscious of how the arts contribute to the world the next generation will inhabit; representation matters. On representation, Ahmed spoke to the importance of the hybrid music genres his Toronto-based band plays, noting that “Despite everything happening in our countries, we have amazing culture and amazing life. I want to reflect all these kinds of art through street festivals which provide a bridge between cultures.”

Despite the ascribed identities which refugees are socially assigned in the host country, many refugees participate in transnational and diasporic art. Art created by refugees recognize the complex and unique identities of artists. Refugee art also works to foster and demonstrate resiliency through the creation process. Art is one method of sharing differing stories of refugee migration; this works to remind the local population that despite how refugees are socially constructed there is not one homogenous refugee experience. It also reflects the valuable contributions which refugee artists make to Canada’s art and culture sector.

Ahmed also noted that how his music and theatre work has adapted to life in Canada coincides with how he feels received in Toronto by the greater community, saying “It’s been interesting to see the shift in how people embrace me as one of ‘them’- going from being ‘a refugee from Iraq’ to ‘Ahmed the artist’. Eye contact was difficult at first but 2 years and 8

months later Toronto is my home”. Interestingly, when asked when he felt this identity switch from ‘refugee’ to ‘Canadian-Iraqi artist’, Ahmed quickly replied it was the day he was granted citizenship. He is currently exploring the concept of having a hybrid national identity as an immigrant and place-making through his forthcoming theatre project which explores what it means to lose your home and build another. This project will explore the theme of national identity in an immersive fashion which can help educate migration scholars and Canadian-born citizens on the contemporary Canadian settlement experience.

Despite migrating as an economic migrant, Padideh had a similar experience to Ahmed regarding settlement workers and professional musicians trying to put her in a box based on her country of origin (Iran). Padideh noted it was not only difficult finding out about auditions due to the lack of information settlement agencies and employment centers have about the creative sector. It was shockingly difficult to convince Canadian musicians and theatres that she is qualified, experienced, and was successful in Iran.

“I was very busy and famous in Iran. It’s hard to work in Iran as a woman musician, but I worked very hard and achieved many things. But as an immigrant mother [here] I couldn’t... people didn’t believe I had so much experience, because they think Iran is so oppressive to women, there’s no way I had that opportunity or experience. Many people don’t know what happened in Iran. Even telling people that I was allowed to play music at home shows Iran doesn’t forbid everything. It helps show there is not a single story.”

Padideh’s rebellion against assumptions of what a Iranian- Canadian musician should look and sound like extends outside of how she is now carving space for herself in Canadian symphonies.

“In my country, I played traditional music. The tar is one of the most famous and

traditional Persian instruments. My friends would find what I'm doing with tar now, with international musicians, untraditional and 'wrong'. But I love it and that I'm now thinking outside the box. These days I play traditional Persian and modern music; I play in the Iranian community, and in the Iranian ensemble, as well as with other groups where I don't use Persian techniques or songs. Now, I play *everything*."

Padideh is currently in an orchestra called *Kune* which means "together" and is garnering national attention. *Kune* consists of 12 musicians from 12 different countries. Their songs are hybrid creations collectively written with the intention of disrupting traditional methods of approaching culturally-specific instruments folklore. (For example, playing Brazilian music on the tar.) In addition to disrupting notions of conventional art and gendered associations with sending countries, Padideh also disrupts assumptions of Iran in interviews when she was provoked to reinforce the single story of Iran:

"Interviewers always ask my opinion of Iran. I come from a country that has complicated politics and I hate relating my music to it. I wrote a song for the *Kune* called *Moment of Silence*. In the orchestra, everyone talks about their piece before it's played. I always say the first year I was here, I felt nothing in my mind- only silence- which is not positive or negative. I want music to be for pleasure and expressing myself, my feelings, and to communicate."

Padideh's use of the physical stage to share the stillness and neutrality of her settlement experience is particularly meaningful. When depicting immigrant women in a positive light, migration discourse and the social construction of the immigrant often positions immigrants as victims who are extremely grateful to the host country for saving them from their 'uncivilized'

country of origin. While Padideh did note the gratitude she feels for being able to raise her children in Canada, she disrupts the single story of the immigrant Persian woman through being vocal about her life as a strong and independent woman, mother, and highly regarded tar player. Playing sold out shows in a diverse and international city demonstrates how Padideh is financially profiting for herself and Toronto's economy through the amount of tickets sold to Kune's performances.

Chapter 5

Policy Suggestions

While the intersection of immigration, the creative economy and settlement experiences is under-researched, there have been a few studies and reports written on this topic. This section explores policy suggestions put forth by various institutions, and concludes with some of the author's own suggestions, based off the interviews conducted for this paper.

In April 2018, the International Centre of Art for Social Change (ICASC) (a Canadian-based research center) issued a report titled *Art for Social Change: Policy Recommendations*. ICASC justifies their recommendations through stating “Art for social change (ASC) is a form of cultural democracy, using the arts to create dialogue and new solutions to often-complex problems” (p.5). They cite evidence of the effectiveness of ASC is found in a variety of social arenas, including “more social inclusion for at-risk youth, improved levels of literacy, reduced prison recidivism, more effective refugee settlement programs, improved physical and mental public health policies and programs, and more sustainable economic development” (p.7). Suggestions in this report include working “with community partners and post-secondary institutions to provide ASC learning opportunities for emerging practitioners and administrators within professional arts training curricula, as well as within non-arts contexts” (p.8), and “working with Statistics Canada and other key partners to conduct research on art for social change, including on longitudinal impacts and employment and compensation levels” (p.9). Building from this suggestion includes conducting such longitudinal studies specifically on immigrant artists working in the creative sector, as well as gaging public engagement with community art and arts programs in underserved neighborhoods heavily populated by immigrants. ICASC also recommended the Canadian federal government and ministries

“Support the creation of a national network of locally-based communication and resource hubs, to support local ASC knowledge exchange within the sector and with other-sector change initiatives across Canada”, and “Contract ASC professionals to help facilitate business planning and team-building retreats” (p.10). Interviews conducted for this paper echoed the sentiment that there are minimal networking and resource opportunities available for and advertised to immigrant artists. Supporting the social cohesion of immigrant artists includes better prioritizing networking and development opportunities for those looking to work in the creative sector.

In her article *Arts-based Research: An Overview* (2009) Elizabeth Andrews echoes a recommendation put forth by ICASC regarding renovating the definition of art in policy to better acknowledge the classed and colonial aesthetic notions associated with art. What is considered to be art impacts how it is funded, valued, and disseminated. Experiences of being categorized as an “ethnic” artist, which is juxtaposed with high art or the mainstream art world, were referenced in interviews, such as Ahmed noting his frustration with being type cast as a terrorist, or Maria’s struggle to understand where her retablos may be displayed. Andrews quotes arts scholar Leavy’s critical text *Method meets art: Arts-based research practice* (2008), noting that

“On a theoretical level, the emergence of these new [art and research]²⁴ methods necessitate not only a reevaluation of ‘truth’ and ‘knowledge’ but also of ‘beauty.’

Furthermore, the research community needs to expand the concepts of ‘good art’ and ‘good research’ to accommodate these methodological practices” (Leavy, 2009, p. 17, as cited in Andrews, 2009).

Applying an equity-based framework in both the arts and settlement sector will help to reimagine how definitions can reproduce problematic assumptions about what is considered valuable and a body of knowledge. Indigenizing research methods requires critically resisting

arenas where colonial positioning is embedded, such as within academia and structures of popular research methodologies. This includes intentionally incorporating perspectives from multiple cultures and bodies of knowledge, such as languages, personal and national experiences, philosophies, and folklore (Walsh, Mignolo, & García, 2006, as cited in Romero & Cal y Mayor, 2017, p.235)

During the interviews conducted for this paper, multiple immigrant artists noted the disjuncture between settlement agencies and the creative sector. While policy-makers and the general public can enhance their understanding of the contemporary Canadian migration and settlement experience, financial and technical support must be further implemented in order for artists to create pieces which not only enrich Canadian art and culture but help educate immigration researchers. None of the working professional immigrant artists interviewed for this research said they were able to learn of funding and professional development opportunities through settlement agencies, social workers, or employment agencies. Everyone sought out information on funding, networking and mentorship opportunities through organizations relative to their diaspora or community.

Additionally, many people interviewed noted that when they told settlement workers and employment agency staff of their skills and work experience they were streamlined into other programs deemed to be more financially beneficial than their creative field. Employment and settlement staff discouraging immigrant artists from continuing their craft in Canada is emblematic of notions of what a productive citizen looks like under capitalism. The disjuncture between the settlement sector and the creative sector, as well as other barriers noted in existing literature as well as by participants, are an invitation to the settlement sector to help bridge this

gap through convening with immigrant artists and further developing pertaining policies and programs.

It is imperative that both the creative sector and settlement sector receive more funding to support immigrant artists. This support includes outreach to the other sector; without sharing knowledge and forging connections between art and culture workers and settlement organizations, immigrant artists will remain unaware of the funding and development opportunities they have access to. Supporting immigrant artists therefore supports migration research and policy-makers through the facilitation of storytelling, which can then inform immigration and settlement research.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

The majority of research on immigration and settlement in the Global North uses economic integration to measure ‘successful’ settlement and social inclusion (Hiebert & Bragg 2017). While using an economic analysis to measure and analyze how successful immigrant settlement programs are is imperative for understanding the impact of need-based programs (i.e. government funded language, housing, and employment assistance programs), it is unable to recognize the nuances of identity, barriers within the creative economy, and processes of acculturation. An economic lens also does not capture the creative settlement strategies which many immigrant artists utilize during their settlement period, nor can it explore how creative settlement strategies reflect the complex hybrid immigrant identities and processes of acculturation which exist within immigrant artists and their communities. Art created by immigrant artists can provide insight into the Canadian settlement experience through identifying services gaps, as well as experiences of hybridized identities, acculturation, and storytelling as a form of talking back. Policy-makers in the immigration and settlement sector can be informed by experiences shared through creative storytelling produced by immigrant artists.

Not to be minimized is the economic impact and benefit of cultural diversity which results from immigration. Whether measured by immigration to multicultural Toronto, or the economic benefits that flow to the city from distinct cultural events such as the *The Peeks Toronto Caribbean Carnival* (formerly and still commonly called Caribana), immigrant art and culture brings huge benefits to the city of Toronto. For the purposes of this MRP, this needs to be borne in mind through acknowledging the tangible, material, and economic benefit added to

Toronto. Further research measuring the economic benefit of immigrant and diasporic art to the city of Toronto is needed.

All of the immigrant artists interviewed noted the funding money from NAN (and final projects which the funding enabled) helped them feel like members of the greater Toronto community. Participants felt this was significant as “citizenship is claimed through social practices and political action, is embedded in the ordinary and the everyday, and is enacted for the purpose of social reproduction” (Bauder, 2006; Isin and Nielsen, 2008; Ong, 1999; Staeheli et al., 2012; Torpey, 2000, as cited in Bauder, 2013, p.91). In summary, individuals interviewed felt they did not see themselves represented elsewhere outside of common representations of a homogeneous experience based on identity markers, such as “refugee”, “Muslim” or “immigrant woman”. The support of non-profit arts organizations whose work addresses the unique needs of immigrant artists in Toronto’s creative economy enables participants to tell their story themselves. Many noted accessing voice in this sense was empowering as it validated both their experiences as artists, migrants, and hybrid individuals.

The interviews conducted with immigrant artists in Toronto regarding their experiences settling in Toronto confirmed a disjuncture exists between arts policy which recognizes the needs of immigrant artists in Toronto, and what the implications are of the intersection of arts policy and migration in multicultural and creative urban environments. The experiences of participants highlighted realities both similar and different from the profile painted of immigrants in migration discourse. While some participants cited barriers to financial security and social participation which existing migration discourse also notes, these interviews confirmed that some immigrant artists use their creative work as a platform to explore their experiences settling in

Canada. The ability to share one's experience is validating and empowering, and impacts local and national communities.

Research on arts-based research methodologies should explore the intersection of arts and policy. Similarly, a bridge between the creative sector, settlement sector, and employment sector must be built in order for immigrant artists to be supported. Without funding, space and validation, immigrant artists are not able to create and share their knowledge with other Canadians and policymakers. Supporting artists means supporting the developing social fabric, economy and well-being of the Canadian population as individuals and a collective community. Diversity is a fact, whereas meaningful inclusion is a process which requires decolonizing Canadian epistemologies, including but not exclusive to migration and settlement research. If Canada lauds itself for diversity, this means reevaluating how meaningful inclusion is navigated during the design of a decision-making process or conversation, not merely providing feedback that a process or policy is ineffective without being subjects being invited to the preemptive conversation. Additionally, meaningful inclusion requires recognizing the legitimacy of stories at an institutional level. Including arts-based research methods in fields often analyzed through an economic lens supports meaningful inclusion, as well as provides a more robust body of knowledge to inform Canadian policy-makers.

Lastly, further research on the Canadian and migration experience must explore how to include subject voices within the research, as lived experience is a form of expertise which is often undervalued in academia and policy development. Supporting alternative epistemologies through including creative methodologies will help disrupt the pattern of research further marginalizing the subject group. This paper concludes by calling for further developing arts policy which recognizes the needs of immigrant artists in Toronto, and what the implications of

the intersection of arts policy and migration are for multicultural and creative urban environments.

Endnotes

¹ Post-contact refers to after European colonizers landed in North America. Colonization and Indigenous scholars debate the use of the terminology “post-colonial” on the basis that Canada is not post-colonial. Canada continues to have crown land and belong to the Common Wealth. Unless all of North America, or Turtle Island (see footnote below) is fully returned to and governed by Indigenous groups and law, Canada continues to be a colonial state.

² Turtle Island is the Indigenous name for the landmass now known as North America. Turtle Island was and continues to be home to many different Indigenous groups today, although their access to the land, and relationship to the national justice system, has shifted dramatically since European contact. For more information on the colonization of Canada, please reference writings by academic Victoria Freeman. The online Canadian Encyclopedia also offers an interactive digital timeline of colonization of what is now Canada.

<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/timelines/colonization-and-immigration/>

³ This paper does not argue that immigration is solving the issue of declining birth rates at no cost. The exclusion of Indigenous leaders and communities from migration and settlement policy development directly hurts Indigenous communities. This intersection is increasingly being explored in recent and forthcoming Canadian migration research.

⁴ Push and pull factors are terms used in migration discourse to describe migration factors. Push factors refer to fear of persecution, economic, political and safety reasons which make migration the only option for a group or individual to have a decent quality of life and their basic needs met. The large majority of refugees and undocumented migrants are forced to migrate by push factors. Pull factors refer to associations with the host country which make it appealing to the migrant, inspiring them to willingly relocate. Pull factors largely influence the migration of newcomers who apply and enter Canada as economic migrants. Pull factors of Canada include diversity, equality, high quality and affordable education, family already residing in Canada, and perceived political and economic stability (Schoorl, Heering, Esveldt, Groenewold & van der Erf, 2000).

⁵ There are various definitions of the creative economy. In 2013 the Government of Canada partnered with Heritage Canada and published the report *The Creative Economy: Key Concepts and Literature Review Highlights*. It notes that following a “refined understanding of the drivers beneath the post-industrial economy has spurred the evolution of the concept of the knowledge

economy into that of the creative economy – a notion that recognizes the greater value and desire being placed on expressive content in goods and services... It is also changing what work people do and want to do as well as where they want to live” (p.3). The Government of Canada also notes that “economic and cultural development are not separate but can be a part of a larger process of development” (p.3).

⁶ Linguistic and cultural scholars have interrogated how language is used to uphold epistemological hierarchies.

⁷ A thorough explanation of talking back, a concept introduced by bell hooks, can be found on page 20.

⁸ Neuroaesthetics is a relatively recent field which sees a nuanced intersection of “hard” sciences (neuroscience) and the “soft”, or social, sciences. It studies “a wide spectrum of aesthetic experiences, resulting from interactions of individuals, sensory stimuli, and context”, and asks why do we like what we like? What do our preferences say about us as individuals, as a group, and as a species in general? While neuroaesthetics looks at taste in relation to brain function, the intention is for methodologies and findings to be “complementary to approaches in the humanities” (Pearce, Zaidel, Vartanian, Skov, Leder, Chatterjee & Nadal, 2016, p.265).

⁹ In this context, an award is similar to a grant in that applicants must state intended use of allocated funding in their application. Unlike a grant, which requires proof of how the funding was used once the project is completed, an award allows the recipient more flexibility with how the artist disseminates their project to the funding body. The intention is to provide more flexibility to the artist, as needs differ based on the project, medium and the personal circumstances of the individual.

¹⁰ An award is similar to grant in that funding is disseminated based on a successful application. However, unlike a grant which requires showing the funding institution what the money was used for, an award allows more flexibility for recipients to use it as they need. Some artists interviewed for this paper used the award money for professional development, such as workshops on marketing yourself in Canada’s creative economy, or lessons to improve their craft. Award money may also be used for materials or to pay the artist for their time. It is up to the discretion of the recipient to showcase how the funding was used to the funding organization.

¹¹ Newcomer populations often experience interlocking oppressions. This refers to identity markers which cannot be viewed in isolation from one another, such as ethnicity, religion, class, gender, sexual orientation, (dis)ability, and citizenship status.

¹² While RBC funds the award program, both programs are operated by NAN.

¹³ Interview questions conducted for the intention of assessing program impact, but which also inspired and spoke to this research on acculturation, include:

- 1) Is there something you wish you knew when you were recently arrived and looking for creative work/funding?
- 2) How has your art changed since moving to Toronto?
- 3) How has your culture of origin informed your work?
- 4) What has your experience been breaking into the Toronto/Canadian art scene/community?
- 5) Do you consider [your] art an important mode of self or political expression? Why or why not?

Using interviews done for another intention has been generously approved by the Ryerson University Research Ethics Board.

¹⁴ It was difficult limiting the information gathered during these interviews to 4 participants. Other participants were not able to be referenced here due to space and time limitations. The 4 people I chose to include also spoke more directly to the themes of acculturation. Other artists interviewed touched on other valuable and interesting these which unfortunately do not fit the main theme of this paper. Their feedback will hopefully be disseminated in another paper which explores how immigrant artists are navigating neoliberalism and supporting themselves and their own communities.

¹⁶ Examples of funding personal development include specialized workshops, classes, or residencies where the artist can further expand skills related to their field, self-promotion skills, or financial management specialized for artists. These are all necessities which settlement agencies currently do not have the breadth or funding to offer.

¹⁷ Where one becomes a refugee is important to note when discussing the social construction of the refugee, and how this social construction impacts the settlement and integration experience for refugees in their host countries. For further reading on how formal and informal space and legal procedures create (and often re-traumatize) refugees, *Becoming Queer Here: Integration*

and Adaption Experiences of Sexual Minority Refugees in Toronto by David Murray (2011) is strongly recommended.

¹⁸ Including participants and non-Western epistemologies and ontologies in research has been suggested by research scholars. This horizontal approach is argued to be more equitable, opposed to the top-down approach common in policy analysis and anthropology. The text *Participating in development: approaches to indigenous knowledge* by Paul Sillitoe, Alan Bicker & Johan Pottier (2002) is suggested for further reading on Indigenizing research and integrating horizontal methodologies into research in the humanities.

¹⁹ Writing is undeniably an artistic practice. There is a robust body of research on immigrant writers. This body of literature was excluded from this paper for multiple reasons, partially because the writing I encountered on immigrant authors did not in discuss how acculturation impacted their creative work, but namely because immigrant artists who are able to publish in Canada in English often migrate already possessing the language skills which ESL immigrant artists do not have. Access to the official languages (English and French) makes navigating online resources and networking opportunities considerably easier. For this reason, I chose to engage with literature that spoke more directly to the themes which interviews unearthed.

²⁰ During our interview Alice explained that her first experience as a migrant was when she moved from South Korea to Japan for film school. Shortly after experiencing the 2011 earthquake in Japan she decided to return to South Korea, where she later met her future Canadian husband. They decided to migrate to Canada together in 2015.

²¹ This paper recognizes the social construction of refugees, economic migrants, and illegalized migrants often differ from one another. Illegalized migrants are villainized considerably more than migrants who were able to afford the time and cost of a visa application. Additionally, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexuality, status, and class of the individual has a significant impact on how they are presented to, and received by, the host society. Unfortunately, length restraints of this MRP do not allow for an in-depth discussion of social constructionism.

²² For further reading based on studies regarding current racialization prevalent in power hierarchies in Canadian government, please see Siemiatycki, M. (2015). 'Continuity and Change in Canadian Immigration History', in Bauder and Shields (eds.), *Immigrant Experiences in North America*, pp. 93-117.

²³ The term ‘popular migration discourse’ is loosely used to refer to the various arenas where discourse is produced, consumed, and reproduced. This includes academic articles (which are often inaccessible to the general public, as well as the marginalized groups discussed in the article), as well as how new media and social media circulate compelling, critical, and clickbait articles on the theme of migration and migrants.

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