

The Metamorphosis of Self:  
Phenomenological Insights into the Meaning of Being for Immigrant Artists

by  
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## **AUTHOR'S DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public

## ABSTRACT

In 2013, 232 million people or 3.2 percent of the world's population lived outside their country of origin (United Nation's Population Fund [UNPF], 2015). According to the UNPF, the majority of migrants venture into new lands to chase their dreams or to escape oppression, war, poverty, or misfortune. Regardless of their reasons for leaving their countries of origin, immigrants face profound shifts and transformations in their *being*. Diverse aspects of a humanly *being* are developed through interactions of mind and body with the physical environment, relationships with *others*, and practicing and cherishing cultural values and beliefs of a particular place. These constructed parts of our *being* then provide the pathways for perceiving, believing, evaluating, communicating, and acting in this world. Physical surroundings or *space*, and *others* or encounters, are dramatically influenced by migration. These domains affect the way immigrants make sense of their *self* and ultimately their *being* in a new home. This study utilizes Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological explanations of *being* in relation to *self*, *others*, and *space* in order to create insights into the experience of migration for seven immigrant artists settling in Greater Toronto Area. The analysis reveals that after migration, participants experienced shifts in the ways they make sense of their *being*. The transformed *being* was expressed through a sense of living with two selves, the sorrow of separation from family and relatives, encounters with other individuals who have migrated, new relationships, and navigating through the unfamiliar physical surrounding.

This study also exposes the role art plays in making sense of *being* in a new setting for these immigrants. Art making not only helped the participants accept the changes, but it

also enabled them to explore their metamorphosed *self* and *being* in and through new art styles.

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## **DEDICATION**

To all those who left their homes behind to explore themselves in new spaces and through new encounters. And to those who welcome these individuals with open arms and help them settle in their new homes.

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To begin a beginning,  
desperately new  
I've answered many,  
but still looks few

A quest to stand,  
apart so tall,  
I've strived through  
to resist my fall

To justify my being,  
to honor my existence  
I've lived my dreams through,  
those now appear persistent

To search myself onto,  
that unmapped introvert road  
I've started to disburden,  
my life's own orthodox loads

With a hope to blink,  
someday somewhere  
I am leaving home,  
to engross that dare

Maybe someday,  
I shall find me  
Onto my inner self's diversion,  
my thoughts where, can left to flee

... forever!

*Mohit Sharma (2014)*

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In 2013, 232 million people or 3.2 per cent of the world's population lived outside their country of origin (United Nation's Population Fund [UNPF], 2015). According to the UNPF, the majority of migrants venture into new lands to chase their dreams or to escape oppression, war, poverty, or misfortune. Regardless of their reasons for leaving their countries of origin, immigrants face profound shifts and transformations in their *being*.

Once immigrants uproot themselves and settle in new countries, according to Heller (2007), they experience a constant interaction between inside and outside, subjective and objective, emotional and rational, and imagination and reality. This endless clash can result in experiencing a different way of *being* for these new immigrants. The shifting understanding of *being* is based on elements of both cultures - the original and new host society- past and present living conditions, and memories of home and exploration of the new space. In addition, the shifting relationships with those left behind and new encounters in the host society affects immigrants' *being*. In other words, the constant clashes of past and present, the known and the unknown, and the old with the transforming *self*, result in immigrants gradually forming and adapting novel meanings of *being* in their new setting. Physical surroundings or a new *space* and new encounters or *others*, are the two main domains dramatically influenced by migration.

This research offers in-depth insights into the ways immigrants make sense of their changing *being* in their new homes. In particular, this study investigates the migratory lives of immigrant artists as portrayed/shown in their artwork, because a work of art communicates the artist's feelings, understandings, and the meanings of a lived-

experience on a deeper level. According to Merleau-Ponty (2002), art pieces “help us rediscover the world and explore its unknown territories, those that cannot be measured or calculated” (p. 31). Through conversations with participants about their art pieces created post migration, this study explores the role of art in meaning-making as participants attempted to understand their changing *being*. Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological concept of *being* is employed as the theoretical foundation of this study as it allows us to understand how immigrant artists experience *being* in a new home. In addition, participants’ understandings of their *being* are examined in relation to *space* and *others* to understand how immigrants make sense of their *self* and ultimately their *being* post migration.

### **Research Questions and Purpose**

The purpose of this research is to develop insights into the experience of migration through: (a) an understanding of the role of art in meaning-making in a new setting for immigrant artists, and (b) how immigrant artists make sense of their *being* in relation to *self*, *others*, and *space*.

In this research, phenomenology was chosen as the most suitable philosophical paradigm. Phenomenology is directed towards exploring a human experience of a phenomenon as it is lived rather than how it is conceptualized, theorized, or reflected in the literature (van Manen, 2014). According to Merleau-Ponty (1962), developing a phenomenological paradigm enables us to develop a “direct and primitive contact with the world” as lived and experienced in daily life (p. vii). Applying Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological philosophy, this research allows us to rediscover and describes the experience of *being* in a migratory life through understanding it and looking at it from the

“world of perception”; the world that is hidden under the sediments of common sense and social life. Merleau-Ponty is concerned that the natural attitude of common sense leads humans to overlook lived phenomena in the perceived world. Hence, in order to avoid common sense and arrive at the meaning of *being* as lived and understood by the participants of this study, the process of bracketing is used. In this research bracketing is approached as suspending judgments, beliefs, and common sense about migration. It is not the purpose of this research to refute the existing understanding of the experience of migration as it is discussed in the literature or to create new sets of reality or common sense about migration. This research explores and describes *being* for immigrant artists as they understand and make sense of it prior to conception, theorization, or abstraction.

Through the presented themes, evocative anecdotes, and reflective texts, this study reveals many experiences encountered by immigrants as they uproot and resettle in their new homes. In addition, the findings of this study present insights into immigrants understanding of their *being* in their new homes. This knowledge can assist scholars, planners, and policy makers in designing and delivering more meaningful and sensitive settlement programs and policies.

### **Significance of Study**

Few studies have tried to understand the experiences of immigration for immigrant artists (for overviews see Bennett, 2010; Boren & Young, 2013; Drake, 2003; Markusen and Schrock, 2006). Immigrant artists are part of a society’s creative class (Kronstal & Grant, 2011). People from creative classes are identified as playing key roles in the economic and social development of regions (Florida, 2002). Even though research demonstrates that migration can result in creativity in artwork (Blackman, 1976; Karim, 2008), Bennett (2010) suggests that established artists are among the groups of society

that prefer to stay in places where they created bonds with the surrounding artist communities, thus are less likely to emigrate. Cook (2010) and Lucida (2010), in their personal weblogs, speak to the creativity that was brought to their paintings as a result of immigration and the need to adjust to new homes. As I searched through the literature on immigration, phenomenology, arts-informed phenomenology and arts-informed studies in the fields of immigration and settlement, I was unsuccessful in finding an arts-informed phenomenological study of the experiences of immigration and art for immigrant artists living in Canada. As an immigrant who practiced art recreationally before migration, and as an individual who experienced the influence of art in her settlement in Canada, I was compelled to conduct an arts-informed phenomenological project to create an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of immigration and art for immigrant artists.

Employing phenomenological philosophy requires slight shifts from the traditional academic structure of a doctoral dissertation. The following section will explain the organizational structure of this research study.

## **Organization and Structure**

The objective behind the organization of this study is to utilize the phenomenological paradigm not only in the processes of data gathering and analyses, but also in the presentation of the derived themes and findings.

Chapters Two through Five begin with a reflective passage from my own migration experience and interpretations of it. These passages also act as part of the bracketing process. My reflections and memories of my own lived experience of migration enable me to bring into my consciousness how I make sense of my own *being*

in the migration experience. The last reflective piece reveals the way I experienced my *being* after exposure to the narratives of the participants.

As the nature of a phenomenological inquiry necessitates, the structure of this research was reformed several times before arriving at this final presentation. Chapter Two discusses phenomenology as both philosophical and methodological underpinning of this study. Merleau-Ponty (1962) notes that developing a “phenomenological manner of thinking” is the core of a phenomenological inquiry. In this regard, this chapter presents the methodology thorough which I cultivated a phenomenological lens. The paradigm is also presented, and the phenomenological framework used for data analysis is explained. In addition, the steps and processes used to conduct the research are described in detail. This is followed by the literature review presented in Chapter Three and is focused on the existing discourse in the field of immigration studies as well as discussions of the concept of being in migration and art.

As an essential step in a phenomenological inquiry, the researcher’s common sense, assumed realities and perceptions regarding the phenomenon of migration that usually is formed through previous literature review or personal experiences must be identified and disclosed. This step appears necessary to assist me with delving deeper into the meaning of *being* for the participating immigrant artists. Moreover, as academic exploration necessitates, the literature review took place to establish the theoretical knowledge that exists around the phenomenon of interest to create awareness of the existing meanings of the experience of migration. Therefore, in this study the literature review is approached in two manners: first, to inform and bring into my awareness what is known about migration in related discourses, and second, to situate the findings of this

study within the related discourse. Hence, the process of literature review took place in two rounds, first I focused on literature to become aware of the scholarly understandings of the phenomenon of migration, and then after conducting the analysis, I revisited the existing literature to focus on the concept of *being* indirectly defined or explored in a migration context. In this regard, the literature review is presented in two sections, first in Chapter Three, and second in Chapter Six, where it is embedded in the discussion of the findings. In addition, the first round of the literature review was also approached as part of the bracketing process, which is explained in more detail in Chapter Two.

Phenomenological investigations, both methodologically and from the perspective of methods, rely on the participants' lived experiences in collecting data and arriving at descriptions of their lived experiences. Chapter Four introduces the participants and provides a general overview of their migratory stories. This introduction is essential to gain a meaningful understanding of these stories before the resulting themes are presented in Chapter Five. The participants' migratory stories build a foundation for understanding the relationship between their lived experiences and the way they make sense of their *being*.

Findings are presented through three embracing themes of *self*, *others* and *space* and sub themes that describe the essences of the experience of migration and art for the participants. This section also includes pictures of the art provided by participants as these too were used in the analysis. Chapter Six presents the discussion of the research and concludes with study implications as well as limitations and opportunities for future research. Second portion of literature review is highlighted in the implications discussion.

## REFLECTIVE PASSAGE ONE

I am barely five years old, it's early spring, and it's our third day in Dubai. I am standing uncomfortably on the tips of my toes, looking out the window and hoping the fighter jet will make another maneuver across the deep blue waters of the Persian Gulf. My younger brother is running around the empty living room, with his hands wide open, mimicking the aircraft and yelling "Iraqis are attacking us, Iraqis are attacking us, they came, they followed us here." I am shivering in my bones, my heart is beating rapidly, and I run to my grandmother's arms, in search of safety.

I am just about to turn fifteen. I'm sitting in the doorway of our apartment in Dubai with my best friend and neighbour originally from Egypt, We are both silent. Miriam is holding my hand but avoids looking into my eyes. Behind the door, from inside our apartment, I hear my mother and father packing the very last pieces from a decade of life in Dubai, which tonight is coming to an end. I'm dazed, confused, a bittersweet sensation is running through my mouth and heart. I don't know if I'm leaving home or returning home, but all I think is that I am leaving parts of myself behind in that city, in my school, in that building and with my friend. Miriam takes a little pink-haired troll doll out of her pocket and gives it to me. Then she hugs me, looks me in the eyes, whispers that she will miss me, and runs back to her unit. I'm sitting by the doorway watching her as she vanishes around the corner of the hallway taking a piece of me with her.

I am sixteen and have finally started to like my new home and school. I am working hard on strengthening my bond with other teenagers in our neighbourhood and on developing a sense of belonging to the city that I was born

in. Tehran (the Capital of Iran) is preparing for Nowruz (Persian New Year) and this will be my first time celebrating the New Year in Iran. I have just arrived from a nearby market with a little goldfish for our Haftseen setting (traditional table setting of Nowruz). As I step into our apartment, my younger brother runs towards me to deliver the great news that we are permitted to migrate to Canada and are flying out in less than three weeks, on the night of Nowruz. I am shaking from the thought of another start. I feel torn and broken into pieces; yet another migration, more pieces of me left behind.

I am in my mid-twenties. The cabin crew is preparing for takeoff. The heavy door of the aircraft clicks closed. Drops of rain are running down the plane's window, racing each other, and disappearing in the darkness of the background. I am staring at the dark black sky of Tehran and wonder: how many times have I moved back and forth having the thought that I will never see this city again. The city lights, cars, trees, buildings, and people are becoming smaller and smaller as the plane rapidly increases its altitude. Everything has disappeared now, vanished behind the thick layers of cloud. I am feeling lonely, scared, sad, and desperate. This time I am all by myself. A strong feeling of uncertainty rushes through my body. A voice inside keeps whispering: you are leaving everything and everyone behind, you are selfish, and you are a betrayer. I am hating this voice; I am hating myself.

I am on my connecting flight from Amsterdam to Toronto. I feel excited about this new start, my new life waiting for me. I am dreaming and imagining myself in different scenes and stories. I am even talking to myself in English, preparing for starting life from scratch, and this time on my own. I am happy and

enthusiastic. I'm laughing inside but also worried for the days ahead. I can feel the change happening from inside; I am becoming someone else.

## CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK, METHODOLOGY, AND METHODS

“Looking for the world’s essence is not looking for what it is as an idea once it has been reduced to themes of discourse; it is looking for what it is as a fact for us, before any thematization.” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. xvii)

This study utilizes Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological explanation of *being* as the foundation of understanding how immigrant artists make sense of their migratory lives in Canada. Phenomenology was one of the twentieth century’s main philosophical movements and continues to be a vibrant and widely studied methodology (Luft & Overgaard, 2012; Norlyk & Harder, 2010). In exploring the phenomenological literature, it is evident that the term ‘phenomenology’ holds different meanings depending on the context. Whether the context is theoretical or applied, phenomenology is described as both a philosophical movement and an approach to human science research (Adams & van Manen, 2008; Dowling, 2007; van Manen, 1990).

In the field of social sciences there are a considerable number of phenomenologists who are extraordinary diverse “in their interests, interpretations of the central issues of phenomenology, and in the application of what they understand to be the phenomenological method” (Moran, 2000, p. 3). Caelli (2000), for instance, identifies 18 different phenomenological approaches. Although phenomenologists generally agree that their “central concern is to return to embodied experiential meanings”, and they aim for “fresh, complex, [and] rich descriptions of a phenomenon as it is concretely lived” (Finlay, 2009, p.6), many phenomenological approaches hold distinct philosophical underpinnings (Dowling, 2007; Spielberg, 1982).

Despite the popularity of phenomenology as a methodology in the field of qualitative inquiry, the initial nature of phenomenology described by its pioneers such as

Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, was philosophical in nature, and none of these philosophers attempted to develop a set of guidelines for conducting phenomenological research (Annells, 1996). In this regard, along with employing Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and descriptions of *being* as the theoretical foundation, this research also used modern phenomenological approaches to conduct the research.

To develop an essential phenomenological lens, or as Merleau-Ponty defines it, a phenomenological "manner of thinking" (1962, p. xxi), the following central steps were taken:

1. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological explanation of the concept of *being* was explored to develop a phenomenological understanding and lens. Also, the role art plays in enriching a phenomenological exploration was investigated to create the necessary theoretical connection between phenomenology and art.
2. Bracketing was practiced as is needed for phenomenological inquiries.

Bracketing enabled me to delve deeper and closer to the core meaning of *being* for the participants of this research. As part of the bracketing process, this research identified and brought into awareness the existing literature or, as approached in this research, the *common sense* understanding of the phenomenon of migration. In the following section, these steps are explained in detail in terms of their relation to the purpose of this inquiry.

### **Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology and the Concept of *Being***

Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908 – 1961) describes phenomenology as the study of essences, and a philosophy that puts essences into existence through identifying and

describing them in a natural, lived setting (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Merleau-Ponty believes the world as perceived by us is the world that needs to be rediscovered through a phenomenological manner of thinking in order to unseal new aspects of its existence. Based on Merleau-Ponty's definition of perception, in different circumstances, due to our natural attitude, our consciousness toward a humanly experience, such as our *being* and our *self* in the world, the setting we live in, and the way we make sense of it, may stay hidden to our consciousness. However, this does not mean that our consciousness is absent, or that it does not exist. It can become inaccessible once we lose awareness of it, or, in other words, when it becomes taken-for-granted. The role of phenomenology, then, is to let our consciousness to delve into those concealed aspects and experiences in order to reveal them to us.

In Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological philosophy, human consciousness does not focus on the phenomena; rather it passes over them to focus on the end result that emerges for the perceiver through the perceptual process. In other words, when reflecting on a phenomenon, humans naturally focus on an understanding that emerges from a process of perceptual discovery without reflecting on the process or the experience itself. To understand the processes and essences through which meaning takes form, phenomenology brings our consciousness back to the moments of the experience. When looked at through a phenomenological lens, a core element in the meaning-making process of immigration is *being*, which is constantly shifting. The way immigrants make sense of their *being* in their migratory experiences is connected to the way they understand and make sense of immigration. In this regard, to explore the meaning-making of *being* in a migratory experience, the meaning of *being* is first studied.

Understanding the notion of *being* is a complex task in itself, not to mention attempting to describe how it is experienced and defined by individuals who have experienced migration. Wentzer (2012) believes the complexity of grasping the meaning of *to be* or *being* is not because of its philosophical sophistication; rather it is based on the insufficiency of philosophical theories offering a comprehensive account of *being*. He adds that we, the humans who are living our lives, have already created some understanding of *being* by just being what and who we are. Humans are part of this world, creatures occupied with the way they perform their individual *being*, a *being* with meanings already inherent in daily pursuit of human life. Existentiality is one of the core concepts of Merleau-Ponty's (1962) phenomenology of *being*. Existential meaning of *being* refers to the way we are, or to the sense of our own *being*.

Merleau-Ponty's main concern regarding understanding the experience of *being* in this world was to understand consciousness, the world, and their relation as understood and lived by humans. Humans have always been in a constant struggle, a humanly challenge, to make sense and understand their *being*, their *self*, and their *existence*. Having a *self* and understanding our *being* and existence through this *self* cannot occur through detachment from our environment and surroundings. In other words, our mind and body act in an intertwined manner, making the separation of the subjective, or mind, from the objective, or body, almost impossible (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). In this regard, *being*, existence, and living in the world, means being totally engaged in the subjective, or our selves, and the objective, or the physical space and other humans. Consequently, it is the constant interaction between the two, the mind and the body, the *self* and its surroundings, which help us make sense of our *being*. As Merleau-Ponty (1962) noted:

My existence does not stem from my antecedents, from my physical and social environment; instead it moves out towards them and sustains them, for I alone bring into being for myself (and therefore into being in the only sense that the word can have for me) the tradition which I elect to carry on, or the horizon whose distance from me would be abolished—since that distance is not one of its properties—if I were not there to scan it with my gaze. (p. ix)

In Merleau-Ponty's (1962) world of perception, mind and body work inseparably to make sense of one's *being* and associate meanings to it. He believes that because we are born in the world, "we are condemned to meaning" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. xix). Based on Merleau-Ponty's explanation of meaning, in every encounter of the body with its surrounding meaning making is happening.

Within existentialism, and how we make meaning of our *being*, the notions of *self*, *others*, and *space* stand. The being of existence is characterized by its individual moment and its individual address (Wentzer, 2012). According to Wentzer, even though existential *being* refers to the way "being is distributed to the individual...it is not conceived as individualistic" (p. 313). Thus, *being* is not just about the individual, but it is part of a bigger societal being. This means that other people and society become part of one's *being*, and everything together creates and becomes one's *space*, or the world they are in.

Dreyfus (1996) interprets Merleau-Ponty's explanation of meaning-making around *being* as needing three main factors: "innate structures, basic general skills, and cultural skills" (par. 4). He explains that each of these ways contribute to our meaning-making in a situation. For example, once a human being sees a chair, based on the previous meaning making processes, they automatically relate the chair to the humanly experience of sitting. This meaning-making happens because, "we have the sort of bodies that get tired and that bend backwards at the knees, chairs can show up to us - but not flamingos, say - as affording sitting" (Dreyfus, 1996, par.4). He continues to attach this

basic general skill of sitting to cultural skills by exemplifying that, if sitting on a chair is learned as part of a culture or a general way of sitting, then chairs or the object will solicit the subjective or humanly act of sitting. However, this act happens only when we have learned to sit. Thus, on a daily basis all three aspects, the structure, general skills and cultural components need to be present to experience existence and *being* in the world.

Being born into an existing and predetermined setting, and being raised in the same environment, through different stages of exploration and discovery of *self*, *others*, and *space*, an individual creates and stabilizes sets of meanings and definitions. This means that as we grow up, through our interaction with the surrounding physical space and humans, we make particular sense of our being. June Huntington (1981) recognizes migration as a process in which individuals go through an experience of loss of their ordinary, or the known *space*. Consequently, with this loss of the known existing assumptions and meanings may disappear. Once uprooted and exposed to potentially different values, history, language, people, and space, an immigrant might realize that several of those established and previously created meanings are not applicable to the new setting. In other words, for an up-rooted individual the meaning-making process is interrupted, or some of the learned basic general skills and cultural skills may become dysfunctional in the meaning-making of *being*.

In summary, the majority of our skills are learned through our interaction with our physical surrounding and other humans. In a migratory process and experience, several of these learned skills and facts about our being might become invaluable. Thus, the individual starts experiencing a shift in their being in the world. In order to better understand the alterations in the meaning of being post migration, Merleau-Ponty's

(1962) explanation of *being* in relation to *others* and *space* is explored and presented in the following discussion.

### **Space and Being in Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology**

Merleau-Ponty (1962) explains the physical world in relation to consciousness. He believes that the consciousness and the world are mutually dependent and are parts of a whole. He rejects both Transcendental Ego existing independent of the physical world (Intellectualism) and the claim that there is a world in itself (Empiricism), he writes that:

The world is inseparable from the subject, but from a subject which is nothing but a project of the world, and the world is inseparable from the world, but from a world which the subject itself projects. (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 430)

According to Shengli (2009), in concrete movements, it is never our objective body, or body as object, that we move in an objective space; rather, it is our lived body, the body as subject or as consciousness, which we move in a bodily space. Shengli (2009) incorporates Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of physical space to argue that in these movements, our lived body is a means of access to a familiar situation, to familiar objects in a world. "This *familiarity* implies that the body understands its world and objects without having to represent or objectify them. It communicates with them through a "*praktognosia*", a practical knowledge, and makes possible a direct reference to the world and its objects" (Shengli, 2009, p. 136).

Merleau-Ponty (1962) states the relation between body and space is not that of "a body in space", but a body that "inhabits space" through a simultaneous interaction and communication between the two (p. 162). In other words, they are dependent on each other and their *being* becomes correlated in this constitution. In this regard, and through embodiment, we interact with our surrounding and make meanings of these interactions.

One of the apparent consequences of migration is exposure to a new physical surrounding or *space*. To understand how immigrants make sense of their *being* post migration, it is essential to understand the ways immigrants embody their new surroundings, navigate through the different settings, and make sense of it.

Another component that assist with understanding *being* for immigrant artists is the presence or absence of *other* humans in the new setting. The world in which we live comprises of objects, and one of these objects that we encounter are other humans. Unlike other objects, our interaction with humans is not entirely objective; rather, through inter-subjectivity we learn both about *others* and our *self* (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). In the following section the relationship between *others* and *being* is discussed.

### **Inter-Subjectivity and Being in Merleau- Ponty's Phenomenology**

Merleau-Ponty identifies two dimensions of existence to human's *being*: situation in the world and social existence (1962). For Merleau-Ponty, arriving at a full analysis of our existence requires an account of other *selves*. In Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological approach, human's understanding of other *selves* is a matter of inter-subjectivity. Based on his explanation of inter-subjectivity, humans ordinarily experience themselves as one of many selves, to whom they relate in many ways, and with whom they share a common world. In this encounter, humans become aware of *others* as subjects; one experiences oneself as *being* in the company of other conscious *beings* and becomes aware of their consciousness over them. In other words, for one person to experience another human being, *self* is brought into awareness in a twofold manner: *self* as experiences by one's perception of it, and *self* as understood to be perceived by other human beings. According to Merleau-Ponty, we experience our awareness and our understanding through

introspection, but it becomes inaccessible for us to introspect the *other* person's consciousness.

Romdenh-Romluc (2011) describes this process as humans starting to create their understanding of the *other* person's consciousness of their existence based on what they can observe and through an interpretation of their bodily reactions. However, Merleau-Ponty insists this bodily self is not perceived merely as an object, but as a power to perform various kinds of action. Moreover, Merleau-Ponty (1962) believes we are never just presented with another body; rather we inevitably perceive another body as it is situated in the environment and interacting with its components. According to Merleau-Ponty, we experience *other* people based on their *being* in the environment. The environment, and the context through which the humanly encounters take place, affect our perception and experience of the interaction, the *other self*, and *our self* in relation to the *other*.

Based on Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological philosophy, *space* and *others* both play a significant role in our experience and understanding of our *self* and *being*. In this research the concepts of *space* and *others* in relation to *self* and *being* is explored in the migratory lives of immigrant artists. The following discussion explores the role of art in developing a phenomenological lens, and supports and justifies the decision behind choosing immigrants artists to participate in the study.

### **The Pre-Reflective and Embodied Nature of Painting in Phenomenological Understanding**

Artists invest their identities, emotions, and understandings of the world and the environment in which they live into the creation of their artwork. Langer (1957) believes

that art seeks to express, “more or less purely, more or less subtly, not feelings or emotions the artist has, but feelings which the artist knows; his [the artist’s] insight into the nature of sentience, his [the artist’s] picture of vital experience, physical, and emotive and fantastic” (p. 91). A work of art communicates the artist’s feelings, understandings, and meanings of a lived-experience.

Chaplin (2005) believes art itself is a pre-reflective, non-discursive mode of knowing, symbolizing, and being in the world. Thus, there seems to be a strong connection between art and phenomenology. Both phenomenology and art seek to restore and explain lived experiences as they are embodied and immediately experienced by individuals (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Therefore, this study explored immigrants’ artwork to enhance the phenomenological insights into the meaning of *being* for these individuals.

Artists sketch and draw objects, they draw their feelings and their understandings of their surroundings as they are felt and appeared in the moment, without bestowing any perceptual meanings (Davis, 2010). These are the moments the artist experiences the lived world. Crowell (2011) claims “art is itself an original source of phenomenological insight” (p. 37). Through understanding deeply the essences hidden in the depth of a piece of artwork, unexplored dimensions of an experience can be discovered.

For Merleau-Ponty, the phenomenological attitude involves “the same kind of attentiveness and wonder, the same demand for awareness, the same will to seize the meaning of the world as can be found in the works of painters” (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p. xxi). By respecting artwork’s autonomy and richness, in the world of perception, the viewer will experience the unity and necessity of the temporal progression in a work of art without ever having a clear idea of it (Merleau-Ponty, 1962).

Merleau-Ponty approaches art, and particularly painting, through his phenomenology of perception and the theory of embodiment. In the experience of embodiment with an artwork, in the very short moment at a particular time and in a particular space where an observer is observing or the artist is creating a piece of artwork, there is a moment of phenomenological perception (Parry, 2011, p. 4). Merleau-Ponty believes that artists perceive the world with their bodies and duplicate the embodied experience in the lived world through their art.

Art encompasses a variety of creative forms of representation such as the visual, auditory, gustatory, and kinesthetic, creating diverse expressive possibilities (Eisner, 2008). Despite the diversity of art forms, they all share the common mission of “achieving expressiveness through the ways in which form has been crafted or shaped” (Eisner, 2008, p.8). Art, in the context of this research, is discussed as not merely being emotive, but also as an object of enjoyment that is felt strongly about, or savored for delicacy (Ayer, 1952). In other words, art is better understood in its embodied form of meaning making.

The artists who participated in this study not only invest their emotions and feelings into the creation of their artwork but they also record their understandings and meaning making of their migratory *being* on canvas. Interestingly, the immigrant artists claimed that, by reflecting on their artwork created at different times during their settlement period, and through questions and discussions about the pieces required by this study, they were able to make better sense of their migratory lives and adaptations experienced to the associated changes.

Illustrative representation is known as one of the main characteristics of art (Leavy, 2009). In general, entities identified as representations are usually images of an

object, or an intention to stand for something. This is known as the intentionality condition or a recognition condition (Young, 2001). An illustrative representation may involve similarities between, “the experience of representations and the experience of emotional states” (Young, p. 32). The first step in understanding an illustrative representation, or visual art, would be to identify if an image is a direct or indirect illustrative representation. Young identifies an illustration as being direct when there is a “similarity existing between the experience of the representation and experience of the represented experience itself” (p. 33). Indirect representations, on the other hand, indirectly represent a meaning associated with the representation in the illustration, making it possible to represent illustratively, objects that cannot be depicted such as state of mind (Young). For example, paintings created in the realism style can be categorized as direct illustrations. In this realm, paintings created about social-historical incidents such as the Great Depression or America’s Civil War, are examples of direct visual representations of the lived experiences of a society (Powell, 2012). On the other hand, paintings created by the participants of this study demonstrate their lived experiences of migration and their discoveries of their morphed self in relation to *space* and *others* in an indirect manner, which, based on Young’s classification, are indirect illustrative representation.

The work of art has existence, thus the feelings and experiences behind its creation can themselves be explored using a phenomenological lens (Crowell, 2011; Kwant, 1963; Noe, 2000; Wrathall, 2011). The interweaving of emotions and experiences with lines, colours, and texture creates a piece that is unique in its existence and distinctive in capturing a very distinctive moment, experience, or essence. Merleau-Ponty (2004) defines the experience of the creation of an artwork and the value of it in relation

to ways the artist records what he or she sees and feels on the canvas, as phenomenological in nature.

In this study, the artwork of immigrant artists was a valuable tool for enhancing my phenomenological understanding of the meaning of *being* after immigration. Prosser (1998) argues that one of the four forms of data gathered through visual research or arts-informed research is “respondent-generated visual data.” In this form of visual-data generation, the participants of the study provide the researcher with drawings, photographs, or videos to elicit a response during an interview. Visual materials are also known to provide “thick description” (Geertz, 1973), which can help in the exploration and understanding of a social phenomenon. In this regard, the participants’ artwork was included in the phenomenological analysis and understanding of this research.

One of the complications of using arts in research has to do with the relationship between the referent, the symbol, and the interpretation (Peirce, 1998). It is argued that, to conduct a study in, and through arts, requires the use of skills, knowledge of techniques, and the familiarity with the material themselves with respect to the way in which they behave when they are employed (Arnheim, 1954). If the interpreter is not clear enough, the referent to which an art refers, or the essences behind the creation of that piece, might not be identified and understood (Peirce, 1998). Eisner (2008) believes that researchers can, and need to, learn to read arts. “The examination and perception of a painting is as much a kind of ‘reading’ as a text might be, one needs to learn how to see as well as learn how to read” (p. 10). For developing such a lens, Eisner (2008) recommends a provision of a fresh perspective so that the researcher’s dominant habits and patterns of thought do not prevent them from noticing and understanding what is not literally there. In this regard, my previous interest, knowledge and experience of art

making enabled me to create mutual grounds for conversation about the artwork of participants created post migration.

Scholars argue the potential role of arts-informed inquiry from diverse perspectives. Brigham (2011) believes that arts-informed inquiry can inspire, motivate, provoke, challenge, engage, develop skills, and reduce stress among participants (Brigham, 2011). Moreover, an arts-informed inquiry empowers both participants and the researchers to critically reflect on identity and practice (Brigham, 2011), discuss the issues of inner self and society (Dirkx, 2001), deeply explore an experience (Brigham and Walsh, 2011; Walsh and Brigham, 2007), improve interactions with others (McNiff, 2003), engage community members in creative civic dialogue to critique and challenge social injustices (Clover, 2000, 2006; Clover, Stalker and McGauley, 2004), and promote human growth and development (Jones, 2001).

In this research, dialogues around the artwork created post migration assisted the participants to recall emotions and experiences they had around the time they were creating those pieces. As part of this study's data gathering processes, recorded conversations about the participants' artwork revealed topics and themes that were not reflected on or shared in the other portions of the interview. Thus, a significant portion of data in this research is based on dialogues between participants and myself around their paintings created after immigration to Canada.

In the following section, phenomenology as both methodology and method for analysis, is explained. In this research, Hermeneutical Phenomenological Analysis (HPA) is employed to analyze lived experiences of participants and to arrive at in-depth insights into their migratory lives.

## **Phenomenology as Methodology: Hermeneutical Phenomenological Analysis**

Hermeneutical Phenomenological Analysis, (hereafter HPA), is informed by hermeneutics or the theory of interpretation. This type of phenomenological analysis is committed to the exploration of how people make sense of their life experiences (Smith et al., 2009), and in the case of this research, I was interested in how people make sense of their *being* in the migratory context.

One of the key concepts in the theory of hermeneutics is the hermeneutic circle. The hermeneutic circle is concerned with the dynamic relationship between the part and the whole (Smith et al., 2009). As Smith and colleagues argue, “to understand any given part, you look at the whole; to understand the whole, you look to the parts” (2009, p.28). In HPA this circle is used to describe the process of interpretation, speaking to a dynamic and non-linear style of thinking and interpretation (Smith et al., 2009). In HPA, Smith and his colleagues use the hermeneutic circle as the foundation for their iterative method of interpretive phenomenology by “move[ing] back and forth through a range of different ways of thinking about the data, rather than completing each step, one after the other” (p. 28). Employing the non-linear, dynamic HPA methodology in this research resulted in the entire study going through several reformations before arriving at the emerging themes. Not only the analysis was shaped and influenced by the hermeneutical circle rooted in the HPA analysis, but other parts of this research such as the research questions and literature review were taking shape as I analysed and re-read the data. The initial research question was general in nature, aiming to explore the experience of migration for immigrant artists without knowing which aspect of the experience needed to be explored to provide in-depth insights into the experience migration as lived by immigrant artists. However, once data was gathered and analyzed based on phenomenological paradigm,

the core component of the experience was revealed. Being was the major element that needed to be explored. This awareness then influenced the second round of analysis and as the storied of the participants unfolded space, others, and self became more and more dominant in the way being was experienced post migration. This process of moving back and forth, and in and out of data enabled the essences, meanings, and feelings associated with the way immigrants lived their migratory lives to be brought to the forefront and be concealed in this study. The practical steps taken for data analysis using HPA guidelines are further discussed in the methods section.

### **Bracketing as part of Phenomenological Framework**

“The most important lesson that the reduction teaches us is the impossibility of a complete reduction” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. xv)

Phenomenology, in its many contemporary manifestations and historical orientations, continues to make us mindful, to be critically and philosophically aware of how our lives (and our cognitive, emotional, embodied, and tacit understandings) are socially, culturally, politically, and existentially fashioned. But phenomenology also reminds us that these constructions themselves are always in danger of becoming imperatives, rationalities, epistemologies, and ontologies, which need to be bracketed, deconstructed, and substituted with more reflective portrayals (Van Manen, 2014).

One of the widely-discussed issues of phenomenology as methodology is the matter of the researcher bracketing their known to achieve an understanding of the lived experience from the participants’ perspective (Moustakas, 1994, Sokolowski, 2000). Lindseth and Norberg (2004) claim bracketing helps in interpreting the phenomenon by taking the researcher closer to the underlying essences as lived by individuals. In the process of bracketing, “the ordinary understandings, judgments, and knowing are set

aside, and phenomena are revisited, freshly, naively, in a wide-open sense” (Moustakas, 1994, p.33). Hycner (1985) defines bracketing as stepping out of the researcher’s own world of meanings and interpretations and entering into the world of participants to be able to co-create understanding and meaning with them (this definition highlights the importance of hermeneutical circle in phenomenological analysis and understanding). However, he acknowledges that bracketing should not mean the researcher is standing in “absolute and totally presupposition-less” space, but rather he explains the phenomenological reduction as “teaching [the researcher] impossibility of a complete and absolute phenomenological reduction” (Hycner, 1985, p. 281). As this research is motivated by my personal experiences of immigration and art, the process of bracketing for me started with reflecting on my own understandings and meaning-makings of my *being*, and my lived-experience of migration prior, during, and post interviews with participants. In addition, when conducting a review of the existing migration literature, I became aware of my own assumptions and common sense understandings of this phenomenon.

Bracketing, in this case, is the process of bringing existing meanings and common sense understandings of the phenomenon of migration into the researcher’s consciousness to look at the experience from a fresh perspective (Georji, 2009; Mustakas, 1994; Smith et al., 2009; van Manen, 1990, 2014). Bracketing, in this study, involved reflecting on my personal experience of immigration, which resulted in the composition of the reflective pieces appearing at the beginning of each chapter (except in the Introduction). These reflective pieces revealed my lived experiences of migration and how I have made sense of my *being* during my settlement in Canada. The bracketing process also involved a broad review of the immigration literature. This process helped create awareness about

the existing notions and concepts in the field of migration studies, notions that could have acted as a barrier to reaching the core essences of *being* for the participants.

Accordingly, Van Manen (2014) argues the concept of bracketing should not separate the researcher from the researched, but rather act as a tool to bracket the researcher from theory. In van Manen's revised approach to conducting phenomenological research, the mandate of phenomenology is to critically reflect on the lived experiences that have turned into theories, beliefs, and epistemologies, in order to revisit and reconstruct meaning as being lived rather than being perceived. In this regard, the first portion of the literature review (presented in Chapter Three) entails a broad overview of the foundational literature, which created a basis for understanding immigration in many disciplines.

## **Methods**

In the following discussion, I discuss my approach for recruiting participants, data gathering, and interview and analyses processes. In addition, I explain the rationale behind each choice.

### **Recruitment, Data Gathering, and Transcripts**

Participants in this research were immigrant artists who reside in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) in Ontario. Copies of the call for participation in this study were first distributed in the Gooderham and Worts Distillery District art galleries located in South East Toronto (Please see Appendix A). However, after waiting for three months and not receiving any response from the artists, I identified and approached immigrant artists through an Internet search. Three female and four male individuals self-described

as immigrant artists with Iranian, Cuban, and Japanese origins were identified and approached through their Facebook pages and commercial websites. An additional three potential participants were approached, however they were not included due to failure to respond or to meet the study criteria.

To be included in this study, participants had to be immigrants who: (1) migrated to Canada as adults, (2) migrated to Canada no less than three years ago, (3) describe themselves as artists, and (4) are able to speak in English or Farsi (Persian). These criteria were chosen based on the requirements for phenomenological studies. Phenomenology requires participants to have undergone the experience (of immigration) and be in the midst of coping with it in order to provide a comprehensive description of their lived experiences. In this regard, and based on Tolley and Young's (2011) theory of settlement, three years was chosen as the minimum time in Canada. Tolley and Young (2011) identify the settlement process of newcomers as starting from the time they first land in Canada until three years after their arrival (Tolley & Young, 2011).

Once identified, participants were informed of the purpose of the study and were provided with my contact information. Open-ended interviews were conducted between the months of May and September, 2014 and ranged in length from 90 minutes to four hours and forty-five minutes, with an average length of 151 minutes. Interviews were conducted in person at a mutually agreed upon place and time, and were tape-recorded with participants' permission. Lastly, the interviews were transcribed, and in five cases, translated by me from Farsi into English.

As part of data gathering, three different types of comments and narratives were recorded: "Descriptive comments", "Linguistic comments", and "Conceptual comments" (Smith et al., 2009). Descriptive comments, which include the key words, assumptions,

terminologies, phrases and mainly descriptions provided by participants, demonstrate their understanding of the key events and their experience of the phenomenon in their life-world. These descriptions, assumptions, sound bites, acronyms, idiosyncratic figures of speech, and emotional responses were the core source of data in this research. In addition to descriptive comments, linguistic and conceptual comments were also brought into analysis in order to step as close as possible to the core essence of the experience of migration for immigrant artists. Pronoun use, pauses, laughter, emotional breakdowns, functional aspects of language, repetition, tone, usage of metaphors, and the degree to which participants were able to articulate their experience or were hesitant to do so were noted and brought into consideration as elements that impacted my understanding of their experience and their reflection on the way they made sense of their migratory lives. Even though the main focus of a phenomenological inquiry is to minimize interpretation by participant and encourage them to provide in-depth description of the experience, but at times the participants seemed to need to analyse their experiences as they reflected on their life events and shared them with me. This research approached those portions of data as conceptual comments, and perceived them as part of hermeneutical circle, posing further wonders about of the way the participants were experiencing reflections on their being as they talked about their migratory lives. As Smith and colleagues (2009) write, “[t]his level of initial notes is very much about taking things at face value, about highlighting the objects which structure the participants’ thoughts and experiences” (p. 84).

In a qualitative endeavor, ethical issues, including the protection of dignity, privacy, wellbeing as well as confidentiality, are of high importance (Wiles, Coffey, Robinson & Prosser, 2010). Assurance that this study met ethical standards for research

set forth by the Tri-Council Policy on Ethics and as regulated by the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo was obtained, and efforts were made to provide the highest security and to maintain the confidentiality of the participants' personal information. Participants were provided with consent letters and were required to review and sign them upon their agreement of participation. Participant confidentiality was maintained by changing their names to pseudonyms in four cases, others using their real names, as requested. The pseudonyms were then used in all written records.

The debate over the acceptable number of participants for a qualitative study has been an ongoing discussion. Scholars such as Glaser and Strauss (1967) believe different objectives, like data saturation, play a significant role in determining the appropriate number of participants in a qualitative study. Scholars such as Creswell (1998) and Morse (1994) provided novice qualitative researchers with guidelines for the proper number of participants. Such guidelines are based on the methodology of choice. Creswell (1998) recommends five to twenty five participants for a phenomenological study, and Morse (1994) suggests at least six interviewees. What is apparent from these arguments is that a minimum number of five interviews are required to provide the researcher with an adequate amount of data to be able to create a basis of understanding. In the case of this study, after completing the seventh interview, I realized that common themes were emerging from the conversations and an understanding of the meaning of *being* was shaped. Thus, I trust that the average length of 151 minutes of in-depth open-ended interviews along with conversations about the artwork created by the participants provided me with extensive data, which proved adequate for forming in-depth insights into the phenomenon of interest.

## Interview Questions and Process

In a phenomenological inquiry, open-ended, in-depth descriptive interviews are known to be the most effective method for obtaining insightful understandings of a lived experience (Moustakas, 1994; Seidman, 2006; Smith et al., 2009; van Manen, 1990). All study interviews were conducted in one round except for one case where the second round was required. In the interviews, the participants were asked to think about how they felt about their immigration to Canada, and I asked open questions, which helped them recall on their feelings, emotions, understandings, and meanings of their experiences of immigration and art. As part of the interview, the participants also showed and talked about samples of the paintings they created after migrating to Canada. Our conversations and the participants' reflections on the memories of painting pieces and the accompanied narratives enriched my understanding of the way they made sense of their *being* post migration.

The set of interview questions developed to guide our conversations are provided below. However, not all questions were asked directly in each case as some of the participants talked about many aspects of their migratory process by merely sharing their stories and experiences of migration.

- Can you describe your experience of migration to Canada?
- Do you remember how you felt during your transition and settlement in Canada?
- What did being an immigrant artist mean to you in your new home?
- Can you tell me about the art you created post-migration?
- Can you show me a sample or samples of the art you created post migration? Can you remember how you felt while creating them? What is the story behind them?

- Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience of migration?

The questions were intended to encourage participants to talk about their experiences and feelings, and to share their stories of migration. The participants also talked about pieces of their artwork, which were created after their migration to Canada. All participants provided a sample picture or showed their original pieces.

Sharing experiences of migration and art between the participants and myself resulted in the creation of a comfortable and trustful dialogue. This common ground felt stronger with the Iranian participants as we shared the same background. Also, conducting interviews in Farsi helped in creating longer and more in-depth conversations between the Iranian participants and myself, conversations which resulted in deeper insights into their lived experiences.

### **Analysis Process**

Upon completion of the interviews, the recorded conversations were transcribed and, in five cases, translated by me from Farsi to English. I then read the transcripts thoroughly to create a naïve understanding of the text as well as to create an initial understanding of the experience of migration for the participants. This naïve overview of the entire transcriptions provided me with a holistic view of the meaning of immigration for the participants. This holistic view was mainly based on the descriptions, key events, and incidents provided by the participants. In the first and second round of reading through the data, I noticed that there were similar patterns repeated in their stories. Some parts of their stories, even though described in slightly different contexts, had similar feelings and anecdotes mainly focused on their feelings after migrations such as “feeling alone, lost, and isolated” or “feeling of being torn into two halves”. As I kept re-reading the transcripts and re-listened to the interviews, similar patterns started to reveal such as

descriptions about relationships with their family members after migration, and also those who were left behind. After re-reading the transcripts two to three rounds, I separately read each individual's interview transcript a few times, focusing on the details of each person's migratory story. From each participants stories, I derived a handful major themes that I could use to describe the associated feelings and essences of their experience of migration, such as "leaving home to provide a better future for my children", "Missing my parents and feeling horrible for not being there when they need me" or " feeling paralyzed at arrival and not being able to easily navigate in the society and physical surrounding". Even though each of the stories had their own sets of themes, but it became very obvious in the first round of condensing and abstracting that there were major overlapping among their experiences of migration. The first set of concluding themes were composed of handful key theme units such as " a different understanding of self before and after migration", "a changed role of migrated family members and those left behind", "new home incorporates anxiety, isolation, additional effort for settlement, paralisation, and confusion", "settlement feels everlasting", " immigration feels like being born again and involves a lot of learning about your self and the new home", " art as a survivor tool post migration", "art themes, stories, mediums and styles dramatically change after migration", "art helps immigrants arrive at peace with the changes and emotionally settle faster" and " immigrant artists discover novice art styles to express their transitions and feelings associated to their migration in their new homes". Even though the derived key themes seemed to explain the essences of the experience of immigration for the participants, and consequently provide insight into the initial research question of the study, but I realized that most of these understandings are my interpretation and conclusion of their stories, which itself is shaped by common sense and

personal experiences. Hence, I went back to the data, reading the text again as a whole, reflecting on the naïve understanding and the themes (as part) in relation to my general understanding of the data. It was at this point that the theme units started merging into three main meaning units of *self*, *others*, and *space*, which seemed to be the core components of their migratory stories, and elements through which new meanings and understandings of life after migration had emerged. After revisiting the major phenomenological ideas of Merleau-Ponty, I noticed that these three main meaning units define our *being* in this world. Thus, it was the being of the immigrants, which had changed post migration, and this realization resulted in redefining the research question focusing on understanding the changed *being* in the migratory experience. The formation of embracing themes, which lead the analysis into identifying the core essence of the experience of migration (the changed being) and the need to revise the research questions validated the sub-conscious use of HPA in the analysis which itself demonstrates a good grasp of phenomenology as both theoretical paradigm and methodology.

In the following chapter, the first portion of the literature review is presented as it is focused on the existing scholarly discourse about the phenomenon of migration. This discussion acts as means to bring into awareness the general understandings of the phenomenon of migration. According to Merleau-Ponty (1962), to understand an experience pre-reflectively, and from a phenomenological perspective, we must first become aware of what we have learned about it and to understand what we took for granted.

## REFLECTIVE PASSAGE TWO

Growing up I become aware of my self. Year-by-year I become known and familiar to myself; that self, the one I knew, the one I grew in and with, the pre-migration me, was what I knew of myself, was me, my existence, my identity. I barely remember any incident that made me reflect on “me”, “I” was my name, my language, my thoughts, my neighbourhood, my home, my city, my family, my friends, my favourite food, my jokes, my values, the sports team I cheered for, my terminologies, those few words that I used to express my feelings through, my likes and dislikes. I know who I was through all those things.

Then I migrated...

At first, those first months of my arrival in my new home, I still knew who I was; or I thought I still knew who I was. I was still me; I was looking for all those familiarities in each and every corner of the city,

At first, it felt like I was in the land of unknown but the only known thing was myself! I knew what I liked and what not.

But,

As I gradually learned about my surroundings, about the unknowns—as the land becomes more familiar and known, I become more of a stranger to myself. “I” start to become unknown...

### **CHAPTER THREE: WHAT IS KNOWN ABOUT IMMIGRATION**

Throughout history humans have uprooted and moved in search of new opportunities and horizons, an activity that resulted in the creation of the complex phenomenon of migration. Meanings and the experiences of migration are dynamic and in constant change. While at one point migration was considered moving out of one's tribe, today immigration is widely known as crossing borders, sometimes continents, to live in a country often with significant differences in cultural and environmental settings (Goldin, Cameron & Balarajan, 2011). Decades of research into settlement issues demonstrate that to successfully settle, immigrants often need to learn different lifestyles including new cultural values, languages, or even change their dietary habits (Crawford & Campbell, 2012). These novel encounters with new settings and values compel immigrants to develop new ways of understanding, making meaning, adapting, and living.

The complexity of the phenomenon of immigration has attracted the interest of scholars working in a wide range of disciplines. For example, researchers in biology are exploring the possibility of individual variations in human genomes that may lead to a propensity to migrate in the first place (Boneva & Frieze, 2001; Campbell & Barone, 2012; Chen, Burton, Greenberger, & Dmitrieva, 1999). Mosher (2012) recently explored the role of diet and nutrition pattern changes after migration and its associated physical and mental impacts on individuals. Another interesting example is Dillehay's study in 2002 on the role of climate in the patterns of migration. However, the majority of our understanding of the phenomenon of immigration, as well as the immigrant's experiences, comes from investigations in the fields of sociology, psychology, and social psychology (e.g., Berry, 1997; 2005; Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006; Gibson,

2001; Goldlust & Richmond, 1974; Liebkind & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2000). Much of this literature explores and explains social psychological notions such as acculturation, adaptation, identity definition, integration, and inclusion for immigrant groups. Other areas of scholarship, enriching the general understanding of the phenomenon of migration are notions of displacement and diaspora. Concepts such as geographical and cultural identities have also contributed to our understanding and the immigration discourse has taken many forms in the past three decades.

Naficy (1993) claims that, through the process of migration, individuals are involved with separation from home, a period of “liminality” and “in-betweenness” that can be temporary or permanent, followed by integration into the dominant host society that can be partial or complete. Kim (2001) explains the experience of migration as a crossing cultures phenomenon, an experience where individuals face uprootedness, and where immigrants end up gradually establishing relationships with their new milieu. Understanding the existing meanings and concepts around the phenomenon of migration requires broad-ranging research and the interplay of multiple fields such as psychological, social, economic, political, national, and international studies (Krau, 1991). However, for the purpose of this research, and in order to identify the common sense and general meanings and concepts, the fundamental notions of acculturation, integration, adaptation, transition, and identity are explored. These notions create the basis of the majority of the scholarly discourse on immigration. As part of the bracketing process, this brief review sheds light on these dominant concepts to bring to light existing meanings and understandings of this phenomenon in the related discourse.

## **Acculturation**

Acculturation is defined as the changes that take place in an individual as a result of continuous contact with dissimilar cultural values, behaviours, and practices (Berry, 1997, 2005; Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006; Gibson, 2001; Tadmor, Tetlock, & Peng, 2009; Schwartz, Unger, Zamboanga, & Szapocznik, 2010). While acculturation can happen during almost any intercultural contact (Arnett, 2002), most research generally focuses on immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, who are recognized to have been uprooted from their homeland and to have settled permanently in a different country (Schwartz et al., 2010).

Early conceptualizations of acculturation suggested a one-dimensional process, indicating that in the process of acculturation, two different cultures contact and communicate. In the classical understanding of acculturation, immigrants conduct an evaluation on either total or partial acceptance of the cultural patterns. After such evaluations, integration and adjustment of the initial constituents occurs and then finally assimilation happens (Gordon, 1964; Malinowski, 1945; Redfield, Herskovits & Linton, 1936). A few decades later, in early 1980s, psychologists such as Berry recognized that acquiring the cultural beliefs, values, and practices of the host society does not necessarily result in immigrants totally abandoning their original cultural values (Schwartz et al., 2010). Later, Berry (1997) developed one of the most widely-known acculturation models, which demonstrated four different types of acculturation based on the reactions of the immigrants to new cultural values. In this model, the intersection of the host culture and the immigrant's original culture creates the following four responses to acculturation. *Separation* happens when immigrants show high resistance to contact or participation in new culture and insists on maintaining homeland traditions and values.

*Marginalization* occurs when immigrants do not demonstrate any level of interest in preserving birthplace culture, yet they are not keen on getting involved in the host society. *Assimilation* is the term used to describe the stage where immigrants absorb the new culture and adjust their notions and values based on the new settings and cultural values. In this case, individuals do not demonstrate any concern for maintaining original cultural values. *Integration* happens when immigrants form new cultural values based on both original cultural values and the lifestyles of the new country.

Although Berry's (1997) acculturation model brought a new perspective to our existing understandings of the cultural aspects of immigration, recent studies criticize the validity of his model (Unger et al., 2002; Schwartz & Zamboanga, 2008; Schwartz, Unger, Zamboanga, & Szapocznik, 2010). Most critiques of the original model of acculturation, presented first by Berry in early 1980s, were concerned with the simplification of the complexity of acculturation. For example, Schwartz (2010) believes Berry's acculturation model overlooks the role of ethnicity, class, cultural similarity, and discrimination in the acculturation process. Rudmin (2003, 2009) claims Berry's acculturation model is based on a two-by-two matrix, classifying individuals as either high or low in acquisition of the host culture and retention of the original one. Studies employing Berry's acculturation model used priori values such as sample median (e.g., Giang & Wittig, 2006) or midpoint in the range of possible scores (e.g., Coatsworth, Maldonado-Molina, Pantin, & Szapocznik, 2005), raising the likelihood that all four categories exist in one sample is highly possible (Schwartz et al., 2010).

Relatedly, Schwartz and Zamboanga (2008) tested Berry's acculturation model and found that not all of Berry's categories may exist in a given sample or population. Their study suggests Berry's acculturation model may result in generalization of the

acculturation patterns and meanings among immigrants. In addition, such arbitrary ways of perceiving acculturation across samples make comparison among them difficult. The simplification of comparison among different groups of immigrants may also result in ignorance about the existence of subtypes of acculturation categories within those groups (Schwartz et al., 2010). In another study of acculturation processes, Del Pilar and Udasco (2004) questioned the validity of Berry's marginalization category. They demonstrated the likelihood of a person developing a cultural sense of self without drawing on either of the host or original cultural context is very low. However, in 2006, Berry elaborated on the notion of marginalization, stating it may happen in a small segment of the immigrants who reject or feel rejected by both their heritage and receiving cultures (Berry, 2006).

Despite on-going debates regarding different levels and types of acculturation, most researchers emphasize acculturation as an inevitable part of the process of migration, both from a social level and individual perspective. Acculturation unfolds in different ways among diverse groups of immigrants based on the age group, gender, social status, and country of origin, and individuals may respond differently to acculturation.

The process of acculturation is also considered to impose tremendous amounts of pressure on immigrant individuals and families (Arends-Tóth & Van de Vijver, 2003; Birman & Trickett, 2001; Navas, Rojas, Garcia, & Pumares, 2007; Rumbaut, 2005). For example, research on immigrant and newcomer children and youth demonstrates accelerated processes of acculturation in younger members of the immigrant families, imposing conflicts not only in their relationship with other members of the family, but also in their self-identification and identity definitions (Birman, 2006; Rumbaut, 2005).

Linescha, Acevesa, Quezadaa, Trocheza & Zuniga (2012) conducted an interesting arts-based grounded theory study of immigrant families who have young children. In their study, all members of the family created artwork based on their understandings of their acculturation and their relationships with each other post-migration. The results of their study demonstrated each member of the family experienced impacts of acculturation in different ways. Fathers struggled with unexpressed anxieties and stressors, mothers were concerned with holding the family together with traditional values they feared losing, and adolescents demonstrated strengths as bilingual, bicultural agents of acculturation for the entire family system. This study demonstrates the subjectivity of the experience of migration, and indirectly highlights the importance of understanding how immigrants make sense of their *being* in relation to other migrated family members.

### **Integration**

Integration, also known as biculturalism, is identified as the most favourable type of acculturation among immigrants (Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005; Coatsworth, Maldonado-Molina, Pantin, & Szapocznik, 2005; David, Okazaki, & Saw, 2009). Some studies reveal bicultural immigrants, or immigrants who have integrated, demonstrate higher self-esteem and lower depression (Chen, Benet-Martinez, & Bond, 2008; Schwartz, Zamboanga, & Jarvis, 2007; Szapocznik, Kurtines, & Fernandez, 1980).

Integration is described as the process of participation of immigrants in the social trends of the country of adoption and their accompanying settlement experiences (Hyman, Meinhard & Sheilds, 2011). The notion of integration entails different elements. The most commonly-cited notions are economic integration, usually focusing on the

absorption of immigrants into the labour market, as well as political or civic integration, electoral processes, and other forms of civic engagement. Another aspect relates to social integration, which happens in various levels, from the networks of friends and neighbours to the larger sectors such as formal organizations (Kymlicka, 2010). Hyman, Meinhard, & Shields (2011) argue integration is a two-way interaction between the host society and the immigrant, which is influenced by different factors such as institutional structures and societal attitudes.

The most commonly used explanation of integration is provided by Berry (1997), who considers and measures integration in terms of attitudinal preferences for biculturalism. Berry believes integration happens when an immigrant starts building new cultural beliefs based on both the original cultural values and the ones from the host society. Integration of two cultural systems has been acclaimed as a socially desirable ideal in the acculturation process (Berry, 2003). Integration is claimed to secure the peaceful co-existence of two different cultures, providing the basis for intercultural contact (Berry & Sam, 1997; Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006). Despite the popularity of Berry's explanation of integration, scholars such as Boski (2008) believe there are more clarifications and interpretations needed because of the "psychological mechanisms supporting individual functioning in such bicultural environments" (p. 141).

Relatedly, Boski (2008) identifies integration to be a process starting with Berry's integration as the first phase. In the first phase of integration, individuals start searching for ways to adapt to a new, complex environment. This happens through collecting knowledge and experience. According to Boski (2008), the second phase of integration happens when the immigrant is able to map distinctions and similarities of two cultural worlds and express their evaluations. In the third phase, the experience of the domination

of either the original or the host culture is based on the division of life span into private and public spheres, meaning that, based on the environment, one set of cultural values (either original or host) dominates the other. As Boski (2008) writes, “with the progress of experience and learning, bicultural integration may broaden and replace the earlier split of living separate cultural lives in private and in public” (p. 151).

Integration involves the culture of origin and that of the host society (e.g. Berry, 1997, 2003; Benet-Martinez, Leu, Lee, & Morris, 2002; Boski, 2008). The immigration literature limits cultural diversity and integration research to the relationship between two different cultural groups. However, one could argue given the multicultural nature of societies such as Canada, and the dominance of virtual social networks, which foster connections among people from different backgrounds, immigrants are not only exposed to the host culture but also to the cultures of other immigrants of different origins. The new models of integration suggest immigrants’ experiences of exposure to new cultures and values could be both positive and negative. In the case of a positive immigration experience, where discrimination is not evident and other cultural values are welcomed, bicultural integration can result in harmonious multiculturalism. However, if the immigrant experiences racial discrimination or if other cultural values are not cherished, the bicultural integration could result in a conflicted society (Boski, 2008).

Integration can be considered a complicated challenge for immigrant artists as they may face additional insecurities in their professional settlement. While some artistic practices may not be easily translated or recognized, immigrant artists may face additional challenges in finding audiences for their artistic practices or connecting to the artists’ communities in their new homes (Grant & Buckwold, 2013). The economic integration of artists is also challenging. As most artists are self-employed (Markusen,

2006), employment for artists is generally transient and insecure, influenced by many factors such as availability of governmental funding and practice space (Hracs, Grant, Hagget, & Morton, 2011). In many cases, artists end up in mundane jobs or pursuing entrepreneurship activities post migration (Nekhim, 2009).

### **Inclusion and Adaptation**

Another aspect of immigration, as set out in the literature, is the notion of inclusion. Inclusion is defined and characterized as equal and active participation of immigrants in opportunities and life chances in the host country, which results in the achievement of a basic level of well-being for those individuals (Hyman, Meinhard & Sheilds, 2011). When inclusion exists in a multicultural society, members of the majority of the society are called upon to join members of a minority community in celebrating not only their own particularities, but also the very idea of living in a diverse society (Kivisto, 2012). This idea is mostly defined as celebrating multiculturalism where different ethnic backgrounds are welcomed and diverse cultural values are encouraged and supported (Brotz, 1980). In most scholarly literature addressing immigration and immigrant's experiences, inclusion and integration are studied in alliance. Integrated immigrants are identified as individuals who have a job, who achieve higher education, and who are included in social networks with people from the majority population (Fangen, 2010).

### **Immigration and Identity Reformation**

This study explores the notion of identity in the context of immigration. McAdams, Josselson and Lieblich (2006) define identity as the individual's own

construction of *self*. Through telling stories about their experiences, individuals not only understand how they position themselves in their experiences, but they continuously redefine their identities through their narrations (McAdams, Josselson & Lieblich, 2006).

The humanly experience of *being* appears to be first recognized by the existence of *self*. One of the ways to explore the notion of *self* is to approach it from an “identity formation” perspective. Identity formation and re-definition is also perceived as an open-ended, dialogical, and narrative engagement with the world that can have multiple origins and trajectories (Raggat, 2006). As we interact with our surroundings, whether the physical environment, relationships with *others*, or practicing and cherishing a specific set of cultural values and beliefs, we are involved in the development of diverse aspects of our identities. These interactions constructed parts of our identities then provided the pathways for perceiving, believing, evaluating, communicating, and acting, which in turn shape our understanding of our *being* in this world. Our *being* in the world, based on Merleau-Ponty’s (1962) phenomenological explanation, can only have meaning to us when our mind and body interact with their surroundings. In other words, our consciousness of our existence, of our *self*, and our identity, no matter what it means to each of us, is inseparable from the objective world and this is how we make meaning of our *being*. Hence, identity can be recognized as the reflection of the connection of an individual’s mind and body (self), with people, and space in the context of time, constructed by each life experience.

Salman Akhtar, a renowned psychoanalyst and human behaviour scholar in the field of immigration, believes that “culture shock” and “mourning over the losses” inherent in uprooting “challenges the stability of the newcomer’s psychic organization” and causes a “serious shake up of the individual’s identity” (1995, p. 1052). According

to Akhtar (1995), the process of identity redefinition in a migratory experience is comprised of several interlinked journeys. These journeys involve dimensions of drives and affects, space, time, and social affiliation, and can be seen as involving psychic travel from: (a) loving the country of origin or the host society to hating it, (b) from feeling internally far to near to his native self-representation and his newly emerging one, (c) from fixating in the past to dreaming about an unknown future, and (d) from a “mine” and “yours” split to resolving it and arriving at a “we” experience (Akhtar, 1995).

Akhtar (1995) believes that changes in the “external environment”, including physical *space*, people or *others*, and the cultural setting are “bound to test ego resilience, both from outside and from the forces unleashed within” (p. 1058). He emphasizes that once the settlement anxieties are overcome<sup>1</sup>, individuals experience a split in their view and understanding of their self-representation. At some point, the immigrant’s original identity, “being Indian, Chinese, Belgian, Iranian, or Japanese” tend to be “libidinized and to become a source of pride” (Akhtar, 1995, p.1059). In such cases the newly emerged self-representation, say American or Canadian, is devalued. When the immigrant goes through identity reformation, a clash of two identities constantly occurs and the identity assessment reverses itself. What was once idealized becomes devalued and vice versa. According to Akhtar (1995), through the settlement process a “synthesis of two self-representations sets in” (p. 1060). As a result of this synthesis, “a hyphenated identity emerges which demonstrates a good-humored ambivalence towards both the country of origin and country of adoption, and an increasing comfort in the person associating with individuals from both cultures” (Akhtar, 1995, p.1007).

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<sup>1</sup> One of the characteristics of the early period of entry into a new culture is a type of anxiety- a hypomania like feeling that never seems to be fully renounced and may surface over and over again whenever the need for mastering a new cultural task arises (Annie Bergman, personal communication as cited in Akhtar, 1995)

Akhtar (1995) believes that by separating from the homeland, one's ego, or as approached in this study "*self*", loses the support it had drawn from the familiar environment, climate, landscape, culture, and people. As a result, immigrants seek the lost support by creating ties with elements that remind them of the homeland, such as listening to native music or attending ethnic events.

Another shift in the migratory life is language acquisition. Throughout the settlement process, immigrants experience feelings of living in two linguistic worlds, pronouncing their own name in two different ways (Akhtar, 1995), constantly switching from one to the other depending on the encounters, and often thinking in mother language and translating thoughts while verbalizing them in non-native language. In between the linguistic transition and acquisition, another split of self-representation takes place (Akhtar, 1995) where each of the *selves*, the old identity and the emerging one, clings to one language for self-presentation. Kristeva (1988) describes her experience of division of *self* through linguistic cleavage as:

Not to speak your own mother tongue. To live with sounds, logics, that are separated from the nocturnal memory of the body, from the sweet-sour sleep of childhood. To carry within yourself like a secret crypt or like a handicapped child-loved and useless-that language of once-upon-a-time that fades and won't make up its mind to leave you ever. You learn to use another instrument, like expressing yourself in algebra or on the violin. You can become a virtuoso in the new artifice that provides you with a new body, just as false, sublimated-some would say sublime. You have the impression that the new language is your resurrection: a new skin, a new sex. But the illusion is torn apart when you listen to yourself-on a recorded tape, for example-and the melody of your own voice comes back to you in a bizarre way, from nowhere, closer to the grumble of the past than to the linguistic code of today...thus, between two languages, your element is silence. (as cited in Akhtar, 1995, p. 1069)

According to Akhtar (1995), the degree to which a linguistically torn identity reforms and reshapes itself differs from one person to the other. Different self-representations may remain under the influence of different languages and express

different conflicts and aspirations. Also, adopting a new language can, at times, represent the acquisition of a developed identity for the rift time:

a multilingual dimension certainly does allow for an internal enrichment not only at the cognitive level. However, it is also true that the actual mental organization of the multilingual subject lends itself in particular to the enacting of defenses, splitting, and repressions. Occasionally, a new language represents a life-saving anchor, which allows for 'rebirth'. At other times it can be a justification for the mutilation of the internal world of the self. (Amati-Mehler et al., 1993 as cited in Akhtar, 1995, p. 1071.)

In conclusion, Akhtar (1995) along with other scholars in the fields of human behavior, anthropology, sociology, and psychology, such as Berry (1997), Garza-Guerrero (1974), Copelman (1993), Mahler (1958, 1971) and Pollack (1989), believe that shifts in elements such as space, social affiliations, language, and objects surrounding immigrants lead to the emergence of a new and hybrid identity. Akhtar (1995) emphasizes that development of emergent identities post migration does not have a clear endpoint; "the identity change of immigration continues to evolve throughout the [immigrant's] life span" (p. 1076).

This brief review of these concepts helps to create awareness of the existing understanding, definitions, and theories that form the basis of immigration studies. In addition, the first part of literature review of the phenomenon of immigration acts as part of bracketing for the researcher, helping with the development of a phenomenological theoretical framework.

In phenomenological inquiry, narratives and life stories of participants form the backbone of the research. Thus, the following chapter is dedicated to introducing the participants and providing a general overview of their migration stories. These stories are essential to know before the themes and analysis results are described in Chapter Five.

The participants' migratory stories build a foundation for understanding the relationship between their lived-experiences and the way they made sense of their *being*.

### **Art and Immigration Inquiry**

Arts-informed inquiry, in a few cases in the immigration and settlement scholarship, is employed to understand the phenomenon of immigration, as well as a practical tool in the settlement process of immigrants (e.g. Brigham, 2011; Brunick, 1999; Lee, 2013; Linesch, Aceves, Quezada, Trochez & Zuniga, 2012; Rousseau, Drapeau, Lacroix, Bagilishya, & Heusch, 2005; Shik, 2012). The majority of research using arts-informed qualitative inquiry with immigrants is developed in therapeutic conditions, employing art as therapy for improving the settlement process and the lives of immigrants in their new homes.

Shik (2012) conducted an arts-informed case study on Asian-American youth and demonstrated how art was used to assist immigrant youth to identify and achieve their personal goals, mitigate their emotional and behavioral problems, and reach a sense of overall well-being. Shik's study demonstrates that the use of creative art can transcend cultural and language barriers, empowering Asian American youth. In their arts-informed study on the experience of immigration in Latino families in United States, Linesch, Aceves, Quezada, and Trochez,(2012) employ family drawings in addition to verbal descriptions of their experience with migration. The results of their study give valuable insight into the roles of each of the members of an immigrant family in the settlement process. Moreover, this research sheds light on the powerful role of arts in facilitating communication about the complex phenomenon of acculturation and migration for immigrant families.

Brigham (2011) conducted an arts-informed focus group inquiry with a group of internationally educated female teachers to understand their transformative lifelong learning and the role art plays in their settlement in Canada as teachers. The participants of Brigham's study, through engaging in writing, storytelling, art-making, dialogue, and critical reflection were able to construct an understanding of their experiences of being immigrant teachers as well as lifelong learners. This study demonstrates how art-making permits participants, who do not have the same first language, foster communication through visual means. Moreover, the art-making "required the participants to tap into unconsciousness and bring to light un-verbalized meaning and embodied experience" (Brigham, 2011, p. 74). Brigham, states that arts-informed research processes act as a shuttle between the unconscious and the conscious, and between the rational/cognitive and the extra-rational/affective dimensions. Through an arts-informed research both researchers and participants of the study, individually and collectively, and in varying degrees, worked to uncover an awareness of their new contexts and bring into focus the meaning of their lived experience in more holistic ways (Brigham, 2011; Leitch, 2006).

In a recent study on the role of art in the settlement of immigrants, Lee (2013) employed arts-informed inquiry as a tool for empowering immigrant children with adjustment difficulties. Lee learned that immigrant children experience numerous challenges and risks both at home and at school. Anxiety, fear, boredom, and social isolation were few feelings shared among the immigrant children of this study. However, when engaged in the creative process of art making, the same children demonstrated evidence of experiencing Flow (Nakamura & Cs'ikszentmihalyi, 2009), a psychological state in which individuals feel entirely absorbed in their activity (Lee, 2013). Lee's study demonstrated that the flow experience that emerged during art therapy transported these

migrant kids to new, imaginary worlds. With this new reality, as Lee states, “they reported an altered sense of time, positive emotions, and even a capability to set artistic goals to negotiate between their skills and challenges” (2013, p.61). These arts-informed inquiries not only resulted in the creation of deeper understanding of the social phenomenon of immigration, but also provided the participants with new possibilities for individual and social transformation in order to help them fulfill their settlement experiences.

### **Summary**

This portion of literature review, conducted as part of the required phenomenological bracketing, and in order to create a better understanding of the discourse, took place in two phases. The first phase was prior and during the early stages of data gathering. The main purpose of the first phase of literature review was to broaden my knowledge and understanding of the existing theories and discussions in the immigration discourse. The second phase of literature review, mainly revisiting the collected work in the first phase, was to reflect on my analysis and compare them to the major discussions and the common sense in the literature. This comparison of findings made me aware of the areas where required bracketing in order to arrive at a phenomenological understanding of immigration. Nevertheless, my prior exposure to the literature, personal experiences, and literature review influenced my interpretation and the provided insight into the migratory lives of immigrant artists. In this regard, in the second portion of literature review I look into the gaps in the literature and the common understanding of immigration that my research findings could fill. This segment is further discussed in findings and conclusion discussions. The following chapter shares the life stories of the participants of this study.

### REFLECTIVE PASSAGE THREE

It is my third month in Canada. It is sometime in the afternoon. I am still in bed staring at the ceiling, I've been in this position for the past couple hours. Days are passing by and I am losing myself. I am forgetting about my dreams, about my plans. I am feeling empty, energy-less. I am feeling alone. I am not sure what I'm doing here, in this bed, in this small old apartment in Burlington. Burlington? I search Burlington on Google maps, I zoom out to find Tehran, I want to see how far I am from home, on the world's map which is perfectly fitted on a 13-inch screen. Burlington gets smaller and smaller, Ontario, Canada, North America, I scroll to right, I go and go and go...I give up...This is not making me feel any better!

In my mind, I am playing one of my favourite music tracks. I close my eyes and picture my younger "self" with my parents; we are on our way to visit my grandparents. I'm re-playing the same music the entire way and it's pissing off my father. I clearly see my mother's face as she turns to me and winks! I can smell her fragrance in the air.

It is still the same week. Days feel longer, nights shorter. I am scared, confused, I am doubting myself. I am not sure who I am anymore. I feel sick, every day I feel sick. I don't like doing anything anymore. I don't care about my friends. I stare at the long list of my phone contacts but I don't have anyone to call. I can simply delete that entire list because all they are now are names and numbers! They don't exist anymore! None of them are here...no one is accessible! I feel so empty, so alone...

It's my fifth month in Canada. It feels a lot longer, like ages...I am dragging myself out of the bed. My body aches from sleeping long hours...I take a piece of paper from the stack of flyers and newspapers sitting at the corner of the kitchen. I am staring at it. I am starting to recall the joy drawing used to bring to me back home. I am starting to

remember the feeling of touching a white canvas, staring at its blankness, yet imagining a finished piece with all the details, lines, and colours.

I can smell oil colour in the air. I can hear the sound of a brush stroke on the uneven surface of the canvas...

## CHAPTER FOUR: PARTICIPANTS' MIGRATORY STORIES

Immigrants are ...human beings grappling with the anxieties and pleasures of life in a new world and the best clue to their life and future often lie in their own thoughts and words.

(Price, 1969, p.237)

Comprehending and revealing insights into how individuals understand, make sense of, and create meaning about their *being* in the lived-experience of migration was a challenging task. Part of the difficulty was due to the diversity of lifestyles, perspectives, backgrounds, and the subjectivity of meaning-making processes for participants. While trying to research the meaning of *being* for immigrant artists, I realized the participants' narratives and life stories of before and after migration were the context in which both their meaning-making and my understanding of their meaning-making took place. Thus, it was unreasonable and almost impossible to describe the way these individuals made sense of their *being* in their migratory lives without a glimpse into their life stories. In this regard, in the following section, the participants' narratives and stories as shared in our meetings are described. In addition to the excerpts from the participants' narratives, a brief explanation of the setting where conversations took place is also added to describe the nature of the encounters and to create an image of the setting.

### **Meeting Sara – April 2014 – Toronto**

Sara promptly replied to my Facebook message and call for participation. We only exchanged three sets of messages and one email before we had an interview date and time set. In her last text she said she was looking forward to sharing her story, asking for reassurance that the interview will be conducted in her mother tongue, Farsi.

Sara is in her early forties. She first moved to Canada in 2005, but it took her close to four years before she permanently settled in Canada. As her online biography describes, she is an Iranian-Canadian contemporary abstract painter living in Toronto. She was born in Tehran and graduated with a degree in General Painting in Fine Arts from her hometown. She recalls her first trip to Canada:

My first trip to Canada was in 2001, around the time that we applied for migration. I came to exhibit my art here, and of course see what my potential future home looks like with my own eyes. I remember it was the month of February, an extremely cold one, there was snow everywhere, and lots of traffic because of the weather. I clearly remember thinking to myself: how can people live in this harsh weather?

She laughed as she recalled her conversation with her ex-husband (whom she was still married to at that time) upon returning home: “I remember I told him we won’t be able to survive the cold there.” She smiles at her thoughts, knowing that not only she survived Canadian winters but she claims that she has started enjoying them!

Several aspects of Sara’s life had already gone through dramatic change between the time she and her husband applied for migration and when they were granted permission to move to Canada as a family in 2005. The most important incident, as Sara highlighted, was her separation from her husband.

We landed in Canada together with our daughter, but we were emotionally far from each other. I didn’t want to live in Canada anymore. I think I was never ready to do so. There was always this conversation of migration in our home. My husband always insisted on us moving and starting a new life here, for our daughter, and ourselves, but I was very close and attached to my parents and relatives. I couldn’t leave them all behind. I was getting torn between the two. When we landed here [in Canada] I think I had gone through so much emotional hardship, and I wasn’t mentally and emotionally ready to cut all my bonds with home and go through yet another dramatic change. That’s why after a few months I flew back home leaving my daughter and her dad behind in Canada.

Back home, Sara had faced several challenges and fought to develop a career as a female artist. Despite facing the challenge of being a young woman who owned a gallery license,

Sara was also the youngest gallery owner in Tehran (at the age of 27) at that time. “I wanted to have a space so that I can support other emerging and young artists by setting up exhibitions of their work for very cheap rates.” Sara was not willing to get into the details as to why she ended up closing the gallery, but she mentioned that being a young woman made her face several obstacles and it was impossible to keep the gallery open.

Sara also briefly talked about her journey in arts:

I have always loved painting since I was a child, very much. Some of my relatives are also professional artists, much better than I am. However, my dad never agreed on art to be my profession. He always wanted me to be an engineer, like him! But I fought for it. I first started studying computer engineering in university but in my third year I wrote the entrance exams for arts school without my parents approval [in Iran there are annual national exams held once a year for university admissions], and finally found my way into the Fine Arts program...with humiliation from my family of course!

Sara had tried hard to form her artistic network and career back home. Even after closing her art gallery, she was still connected to the art community and continued to paint and exhibit her work.

In 2009, after returning to Canada and deciding to permanently settle in her new home, Sara claims that she had to start many aspects of her life from scratch: “I had no friends here, I wasn’t interacting with anyone, I was so alone, so alone.” Sara recalls the very first months of her settlement as the hardest days she has experienced in her life:

It was hard and still is so, I still feel the hardship...Loneliness and cold are the boldest and of course the saddest memories of my migration...I have embodied the fear I went through; that feeling of coldness, having no one, not belonging to anywhere, having no roots. It has travelled into my bones, it’s still there, deep inside me.

Sara states that she started to doubt her identity and her capabilities post migration. She was very confused as all she had learned, her language, her cultural values, and even her university degree were impractical and unserviceable in her new home:

I didn't know what to do here, I didn't know where to go, I hadn't really planned for it, the scope of this uprooting was bigger than I had thought, I had never really had the experience of starting life from scratch...I was financially going through a very hard time here...[as requested by the participant, reasons for financial struggle will not be disclosed]...and you know as an artist you can't get enough money from art, even if you start working immediately as an artist, which wasn't my case...Although I had visited Canada as a tourist several times before immigrating; but to live here, to set roots and create a life, was a different story.

Sara knew she wouldn't last long on her small savings from home so she started applying for jobs, "any job", after a few months of arrival in Canada.

I was struggling financially, and you know, I wanted to get out of the home, go out, see other humans, talk to them, merge into the society. I was becoming very isolated, so I started applying for jobs. First it was hard for me to convince myself to work in, you know, kind of irrelevant jobs! But I didn't have much options, I didn't even know what I wanted, and could do, at that point. I was somehow clueless. I first started working in a clothing store, not as a retailer though, but as housekeeping workers. I was that store's Cosette (a character from the Les Miserable novel that is mistreated and exposed to cruelty). They paid me so little. Back home I was a professional artist, with a decent life style, I mean I was financially doing well. But here, I had to go all the way back and start from zero. I had to do it. It was becoming scary; I couldn't rely on family and relatives sending money to me from home. There were days that I thought to myself what if I couldn't get any money from home, what will happen to me here so far away?

Despite her utmost efforts to adapt to the career change, Sara was unable to last long in that job:

One day one of my colleagues asked me to go to the warehouse and move stuff and clean the floor. I told them that I have severe back and arm issues and should not move very heavy items. They said go ask the boss. I told her that I can clean the floor but can't move the boxes. She started shouting at me and threw a stool in front of me and aggressively asked me to sit on it. I started shaking. I never ever had mistreated anyone in my life and I started wondering where this karma is coming from. Then she asked me to organize the earrings. This lady started shouting at me asking me to do whatever she ordered me to do! All I could think of then was what was I doing there? I remembered home, my gallery, who I was, and started missing them even more. There was another immigrant worker there who tried to calm me down and asked me to hold on so I won't lose the job. She told me that I'm new and will get used to the change after a little while.

Sara quit her job shortly after that incident and started working in another retail venue where she experienced yet another obstacle in her financial settlement:

Through someone I knew from back home, I found a job in a shopping mall as a retailor for cosmetics and perfumes. Coming from a culture where to show respect you would stand with hands crossed that was my way of showing respect, however this gesture was misinterpreted in my work space. My colleagues, because of the cultural miscommunications and misunderstandings, reported to the manager that I am an impolite person, and disrespect customers by the way I stand and talk to them. All the time I felt like some of my colleagues didn't really like me there. They kept asking me why I immigrated to Canada. I remember one of them asked me once if I came to steal their jobs? Someone else asked if I'm here to make money and send to my family back home? The fact that they didn't know my story and kept insulting me with such slanders hurt badly.

Sara ended up quitting that job too when she found an opportunity to work in a company using the computer skills she knew from back home.

My life was getting a little better, I was kind of settling. My last job was a great experience. While I was working I also took some courses in graphic design. Since I had some experience with computers, I also started designing that company's website. You know, at least what I was doing had some artistic aspect to it, the courses I was taking, and the software I was using all that made me much happier.

Sara claims that she started painting after a few months in Canada, but her first experience of painting in her new home was not what she was expecting:

In those first years, art was a tool for me to release my anger and sadness. I don't think I was creating art for the sake of creating art at that time, but rather just a tool for inner peace. I started painting after four to five months post-migration. It was so hard for me to pull myself back together to paint. I wasn't able to find myself in order to create.

It was only after an encounter with one of her art professors who was visiting an art exhibition in Toronto that she decided to pursue art as her career.

He asked me what I do here, and I said I do this (highlighting the previous mentioned job), and then he looked into my eyes and said, you are a painter Sara. You are made to create art. This is what you should be doing every minute of your life.

Today, Sara is a full-time independent artist residing in Toronto.

## **Meeting Mike - April 2014 – Mike’s Residence – Toronto**

We decided to meet at Mike’s home where he has his personal art studio, the place where he makes art. His wife greeted me and led me to their living room, which was covered with Mike’s paintings and random pieces of Persian art. The decorations were overwhelmingly beautiful. For a second I forgot where I was and why I was there. I felt like I had been to this place before; in every corner of the living room was a piece that reminded me of home, everything was familiar to me.

Mike is in his mid-forties. He received his bachelor of art in graphic design in Iran and continued to study traditional Persian painting, illumination, and restoration of historical paintings under the guidance of a very few remaining traditional art masters such as Aydin Aghdashloo and Biuk Ahmari. He also has a Calligraphy Diploma from the Academy of Traditional Persian Calligraphy in Tehran where he learned about the artistic function of writing systems beside their primary purpose. He explained:

In the course of my joyful indulgence in Iranian-Islamic arts over the past decade and my fascination with the mystery surrounding Kufic script (earliest extant Islamic style of handwriting), I soon found myself manipulating the proportions to fit my taste of writing the hidden and saying the silence; the fruit of this endeavor was the creation of a specific style of Kufic script, Mehr.

As the inventor of this script, he claims that Mehr is not primarily designed in a way to be easily read:

It is not primarily designed to be easily read, because it is not too much concerned with the reflection of the linguistic message of the words as it is with providing the viewer with an individually new understanding of what lies within them, so that the writer’s own emotions about the glory of the thing said are properly manifested therein.

Mike landed in Canada in 2002 under the Skilled Worker Immigration Program as a visual artist. He recalls not only the first days but also the first few years of his arrival in Canada as days of hardship and struggle: “I was very lucky that there was a company I

started working at after a year or so of coming to Canada. I worked on a few murals at their own properties.” After that experience Mike entered the world of graphics in Canada, “because I had studied and had some experience in graphic design from home I was offered a few graphic design projects.” Mike started working as an art director in an art publishing company along with a few other immigrant artists.

They were developing a department where art was reproduced. We started creating image banks there, we worked hard there, we created everything from scratch. We used to paint for them, of course the styles the market desired, then they used to re-print our work and then frame it, in picture frames, and sell them to department stores such as HomeSense, Winners, and some stores in the US.

Throughout all the years he worked for that company, he also felt the need to continue painting his own art style and for his heart. In his own words; “to stay sane!” Mike remembers those days as the most challenging ones:

I was facing several challenges those days. I remember when I started working at that corporation, as any other newcomer, even though my expertise were high and well demanded but I started from a very low position with minimum wage. I mean of course I learned a lot from every day of my work there. But I always had serious issues with the definition of my career and positions in market and it was hard for me to accept to be brought down so many steps that I had worked for so many years of my life to build them up and to re-work my way up again in this age.

Mike calls that job and those days his “survival plan”;

I survived, financially, by that work but after a while I was losing my confidence and self-esteem and if they hadn’t laid me off, I would have developed mental issues for sure. I was feeling that my creativity as an artist was going to waste. I was so happy to be laid off even though my wife and I were extremely scared and worried about our financial situation.

Painting always had the highest priority in Mike’s life. He remembers, upon their arrival to Canada, they could only afford to rent a very small apartment and how this had brought some concerns for creating art;

When we first arrived we only could afford to rent a small, very small, apartment. Space was very crucial to my work, and I was used to working in spacious

studios. If I had space I could work if not I wouldn't work [paint]. My work needed space. So my art was limited. I started working on very small pieces, just to stay connected to art. The first few years were very hard; it took me a while to realize where I was standing and what was going on with me.

When Mike worked in a full-time job, he used to come home and paint after a long day at work, to stay connected to his art, but mainly to relax his mind. For the past few years, Mike has been able to refocus on his art and painting and has exhibited his work around the world. However, he is disappointed for not being able to exhibit or sell his art in the city where he has lived for more than a decade of his life.

I haven't been able to sell many paintings in Toronto, but I painted many pieces here, in the past 10 years that we have been here, I worked here, and I didn't work anywhere else, my studio is in this house, in the basement, I have created a space and I worked there. From all these work that I have produced here, the only thing that makes me feel sad and misfortunate is that I haven't had the chance to show my work in the city I live in, and for my work to find its way to people's homes. This opportunity, unfortunately, has been very weak and low, and the occasion has never been provided for me. For example, I had a few group exhibitions, I never had a solo exhibition in Toronto, and I only had one in Montreal.

Looking back at all those years, Mike feels settled now. However, as an artist Mike believes there is no potential venue for his art and he may need to, despite his will, move to the United States or back to the Middle East for his art to be appreciated, and to find a space where he can sell some of his work. Mike is considering another migration now.

### **Meeting Julio - April 2014 – Julio's Residence – Burlington**

I met Julio in his wooden-style house located by a river in Burlington. We sat in the living room, which felt like a cabin; the floor, walls, and the furniture were all made of wood. It was quite chilly, and made me keep rubbing my hands together. "We don't have a heating furnace in our home. It's an old house and we only use wood for heat, except for our baby we have a heater in his bedroom now."

Julio is in his late thirties and originates from Cuba. He started by sharing his childhood stories:

Since I was a kid I used to do art and create paintings. When I was in grade 6, I went to my first art school. It was once a week. At the end of that year I entered an actual art school for the rest of my high school. It was drawing, printmaking, sculpture, design and that stuff. In Cuba you have to decide on your career at early stages of your life, so at grade 10 students decide what they want to be and pursue programs that lead them towards that career. I was lucky to go straight to Havana Art University and that was one of the best art schools in Cuba. So in the mornings I went to high school and in the afternoons I went to art school. Then I got into Havana Art School for my Bachelor of Art. I got selected and it was very difficult to get into that art school. Each province only had the capacity of two to three students and it was very competitive. That was my first migration I guess, moving from my city to the capital to go to art school.

Julio continues:

I graduated in 1992 and that was the time when Cuba started to become chaotic. After I graduated, in order to pay back to the government, we had to teach art for two years. But because of the changes happening in Cuba, and Russia wasn't supporting Cuba anymore, I didn't go teach and I became an independent artist, kind of like what I am today. But that is what I wanted to do. In Cuba there are not many galleries and those existing belong and are curated by the government. That means that galleries are not commercialized, which was to some extent good, because the art that made its way to those galleries were really good, and they were not for sale but just for exhibition. In 1995 Castro brought tourism to Cuba to bring money to the island. On the island, some galleries and places started becoming more commercial to sell art to tourists and you had to have a diploma in order to sell your work or have galleries set in the island. Art was very limited and controlled in Cuba. You could show your art at the galleries but couldn't sell it. Imagine if there were a tourist who would be interested to purchase the piece, the gallery owner, who was the government, wouldn't tell the artists that there is a buyer for your work or someone is interested. That was very sad. I think it was because of the information that could have been transmitted between the local people and the tourists that scared the government. The topics and the interactions could have been dangerous. It was only a year and a half ago that there were private galleries started to open and pop up in Cuba. I used to make art for hotels and interior decoration. The other way that I would make some money was to paint and then give it to someone in the island where tourists were gathered, and then that guy, the seller, would pretend that they are the artist, of course because I wasn't living on the island, and this guy would sell it and give me some money and he would make money too. But the issue was that I couldn't sign the work under my name 'cause he was selling it and he signed it. There were so many young artists from my generation who did the same.

At one point I really got interested in painting boats and that's because so many Cuban people wanted to cross the sea to get to US in hopes of better life. It is 90 miles to cross the ocean and I did large murals and paintings around the tragedy of losing Cuban people in the ocean who want to cross the water to get to the States. Some of them use truck tires and get into water and their chances of survival are very low but still they risk their families and their own lives in hope of a better tomorrow. I painted it in 2000.

Julio stood up and walked outside the living room, but continued; “and then some gallery owner from Canada got interested in exhibiting it here but never sold it, and when I moved to Canada I recollect it from him.” Now he was back with a magazine in his hand that had an entire page with a picture of a red wave (see Figure 1).



Figure 1 - Red Wave - By: Julio F - n.d.

He continued while he stared at the picture of his painting:

I was kind of exposed to the hardships of migration from back home. I lost my uncle in the process of illegal migration. I believe if you talk to Cuban families

most of them have lost someone in the illegal migratory process. So I was painting the story of my people.

He pauses for a moment, and continues:

Then there was this opportunity to come to Canada. I was living with an art curator; he had money and was looking to have a gallery here in Toronto. He was Canadian. He was buying my art and bringing my art here. He asked me once if I could buy art from artists in Cuba for him and he would pay me. It was the time that I was working in my own province and knew so many artists in Havana. I travelled a few times and bought several artworks and send it to him. After a while there were complications between this Canadian colleague and me! And that was the time that we broke that relationship. He still had some of my work and he even set up a solo exhibition with my art without my consent and me being there. Anyways through him I met a Canadian actor and he knew that I was interested in living in Canada. His family had bought a church that they had turned it into filming space. They wanted to have a gallery in that place and offered to bring me to Canada as an artist and then have a show of my work there.

Julio came to Canada in the late 1998. He shared some aspects of his first encounters with Canada that demonstrates the hardship he has gone through to find himself and settle in his new home.

He claimed that doing portraits was the first type of change that happened in his artwork. To survive, Julio has worked in a few non-artistic jobs before he started receiving orders from friends and neighbours to paint portraits. Julio recalls one of his hardest nights, in his first year of settlement, as a cold November night. “It was my first winter, and I was living in a basement and I remember one time I felt like I was having a heart attack because of cold and because of the smallness of the space. I had to step out and breathe ‘cause I was panicking.” One year later, he started working at a print studio in Hamilton, where he learned about print making in Canada. “It was the best opportunity for me to learn. I learned it from the director, she trained me for a week and I made some work during that time. A few days later I had a show from my work, which received attention.” Even though working at a print shop provided Julio with a turning point in his

art style, he ended up quitting his job because of personal issues with some of his colleagues.

I worked there for almost a year. I had some issues at work with my colleagues; I guess they have issues with me. I never found out if they had problem with me, or was it because I was an immigrant and didn't know English well and that frustrated them, or just simply not knowing each other's culture. I still don't know

Today, Julio is an independent artist and print maker focusing on creating pop-art prints that entail a fusion of Cuban and Canadian cultural elements and myths.

### **Meeting Shinya - May 2014 – Personal Residence – Toronto**

It's a beautiful spring evening, the leaves are getting dense, and the scenery is painted in fresh light green. I can smell the change of seasons in the air. Shaniya is my fourth participant. I briefly read his bibliography online:

Born and raised in an artistic environment, Shinya left his native Japan to study astronomy, philosophy and art at the University of Arizona. Shinya's passion for and interest in art have brought him to New York, India, Spain and Italy. In 2000, he moved to Toronto, Canada and has been painting professionally ever since. The source of Shinya's paintings all stem from his fascination of nature. The colours, the temperament and unpredictability of the natural and cultivated environment inspire the artist to put brush to canvas and capture an experience.

Shaniya started his story as:

The reason I came to Canada is because I met my ex-wife [laughter]. She is Canadian, but we met in Japan, in 1998, and we decided to leave Japan, like travelling. In 1999, we travelled to India, Europe; Spain and Italy, and just like travelling, and then we realized after traveling that we either have to go back to Japan, or come to Canada, so we decided to come to Canada, and ended up staying here. We got married in 2000, so I came here that year and have been living here since then. When I was in Japan I was working for my parents, they have a wedding business, so I wasn't an artist. I loved painting, so I painted as a side job but wasn't really doing anything serious about it. But the reason I became an artist is, when I was travelling, we stayed in India for six months, we did quite a few watercolour paintings. However, I liked oil painting, but I couldn't find oil paint in India, and we had to stay in one spot because oil colour takes long time to dry. So, we decided to go to Spain, Barcelona, for four months. I wanted to study,

I found this private art school in one apartment. They said I could go everyday; stay there and paint. I started going there every day and painted. I was painting the interior of the school. And then they liked the painting, and they wanted to buy the painting, and then they offered I could stay for extra two months in exchange of the painting I was doing. So I thought it was kind of nice. And I sold some pieces to other students. My wife, ex, flew back from Spain to Canada cause she ran out of money. I wanted to visit my sister in Tuscany. The city was beautiful, it was in July and the hills were covered in sunflower. Perfect picture. So, I decided to stay and paint there every day for three months. Also, there some people bought my paintings and I also stayed in dormitory in exchange of my paintings. I also got leather jackets in exchange of my art. So, I thought there is a possibility of living through art.

Shinya takes a brief break and continues:

So, then I came here, I decided to live near High Park; I've always lived around here. I wanted to continue my paintings from Italy, just wanted to go somewhere and paint. I went to High Park. So I started painting in High Park and started displaying in my neighborhood restaurants. I started displaying my works in cafes and stuff and was able to sell some pieces at times. So that's kinda how I started. Year by year I started participating in shows, outdoor shows. That's how I lived. We have two girls, so raising family was getting more difficult. Around year 2007-2008 my neighbor was asking me, he has planter business. He asked me if I could help him with the design. So I thought it can be a good side job. I started doing it on the side. 'Cause it was a once in a month kind of a job to do. You know! The business picked up really quickly and it almost became my full time job. It was last year or the year before that almost took 100% of my time, which is not bad when you need money. This year I'm trying to come back, trying to make a balance, make time to create and to paint. So, it's more like trying to control my time. It's a process. In ways, financially it's easier now that I have a full time job. Compared to trying to live out of selling paintings. You know like it's, even though you may paint several pieces but you can't make money cause you have to sell to make money. It was quite stressful trying to make money, every month."

My interview with Shaniya was fairly short in comparison to other participants. He showed me his paintings, talked about the dominant elements and colours in his pieces, which, interestingly, were focused on a nature that reminded him of Japan. His recent artwork is mainly based on cherry blossoms, but as he claimed, "they are modified in a way that has more of Japanese colors and themes to it." Shaniya still lives in the same neighbourhood and continues to paint unique pieces reflecting images of High Park (See Figure 2).



**Figure 2- Spring Forward - Oil on Masonite – By: Shinya – 2014**

### **Meeting Tara - August 2014 – Tara’s Residence – Toronto**

It took me close to three months to hear back from another potential participant, so when Tara replied to my Facebook message demonstrating her interest in the study, I met her the day after. Tara is in her mid to late forties. Her house looks like an art gallery—stylish furniture, dark brown leather sofas, fine Persian rugs, antique statues. Her paintings are perfectly framed and can be found in every corner of her living and dining rooms. She starts our conversation with:

I'm a very shy person, I'm the type of person that can't really put in words my feelings, can't express my thoughts and emotions through words, I have to draw it and paint it. When I came here, I had so much hardship, it was very painful, because I was known and I was seen in my own society and circle, people recognized my work, I used to have people from Embassies buy my work back home, but I came here and I was shocked. I sold 6 of my works at once to an Embassy. But here, I have such a hard time to sell any of my pieces.

She notices my glance moving around the room in search of the stories behind the art pieces:

Most of these are my work, and I should mention that these are the paintings that survived both a fire and a flood. I should tell you about how unlucky I've been since I came here. Our house burned down once, in those first few years, and then two years ago there was a flood in my basement that ruined most of my art. I didn't give up though, I continued painting and you can see some of them here. Others ones are in the dining room and upstairs in the bedrooms. At least they are safe here.

I know so many artists here that are such pure people, and they are trying really hard to stay pure and don't make their work commercial. They are financially struggling. We all do, but some of us have stronger backbone from home. Poor immigrant artists don't have any connections here. They have no one, don't know anyone and have no way to get attached to a community of artists. They have to go beg people to recognize their art and sometimes beg them to buy their art. Artists want a dialogue to be created around their work. They want people to talk about it.

She continues after a brief pause:

You know artists don't want money as much as they want their stories to be heard and their creativity to be seen. I used to be a big supporter of art back home, my husband was wealthy and I used to ask him to buy several pieces just to support the artists. But here I don't have those resources anymore. I'm struggling myself and the only way I could help was to create a space in my home for artists who can't afford renting a gallery to leave their art here. Of course I can't have random people come into my house to see their artwork, but at least my friends and whoever visits me would see their artwork, and hopefully someone might buy them.

I was about to ask which ones are hers when she continued:

As an immigrant I can say I have lost a life to gain another one. My life dramatically changed, changed so much. I gave so much to gain a little. I give my soul, my time, my money, my mind, and my emotions on a piece of art. You know, not knowing anyone here really is painful.

Tara moved to Canada with her husband and two young children in 2005. She recalls her first months as being a fight to keep her family together and to help her children, who were in elementary school, adapt to their new school and home.

When I first came here I didn't paint for a while. I was so occupied with finding my way. We were doing well financially back home so we weren't struggling much financially at the beginning, but I still needed to find my way and myself. I started first just looking for activities that would help us as a family not to get depressed and last longer! At the beginning I was very focused on making sure my children and husband are settling.

Tara started painting after a year or so, but her family life was prey to change, as her husband was unable to settle in his career and moved back to Iran while Tara lived a separate life raising her children. "It was the first time in my life that I needed to stand on my own two feet, pull myself together and find who I was after so many years." She slowly wipes her tears and looks the other way to steal her tears from me. "The eyes in your paintings talk to me, as if they have a secret, or want to share a story, by looking at me. They are very powerful." I said, wanting her to talk more about the paintings of the female figures surrounding us. She explained, "I have a series of work named 'Woman'." I have tried to duplicate women's sight in my work. I believe women transfer their emotions through their eyes."

Tara, as she has written in her online bibliography, embodies the complex social, emotional and spiritual challenges women from traditional cultures face while living in a modern world. Born and raised in Iran, she is now living in Toronto, Canada. On her website, Tara explains that her newest series of paintings focus on the female figure, both covered and uncovered, symbolizing her ability to synthesize traditional values with modern expectations. Her vision of the female figure is delicate and strong, graceful and powerful. Her paintings reflect the rich ancient traditions of Persian culture and a post-

modern awareness that come together to create a new feminine vision of the Persian spirit. Tara has exhibited her painting in both Canada and Iran, where she worked with several senior artists including Aydin Aghdashloo (one of the contemporary art masters of Iran). She completed her Fine Art degree from George Brown College in Toronto.

### **Meeting Shannon – September 2014 – Shannon’s Residence/Studio – Richmond Hill**

Shannon is in her late fifties or early sixties. As I enter into her studio located in the basement of her house, artwork (See Figure 3) hanging behind her office desk, attracts my attention. I asked her about the painting: “I’ve never seen anything like that piece before. It’s very interesting. Is this your self-portrait?” and she replied: “Yes, I will tell you how I came up with this style myself. Those are pieces of subway transit paper that I have burnt to resemble my face and then painted it. The top coating is wax.” I’m still staring at the art imagining the layers of paint and burnt paper.



**Figure 3 - Artist's Portrait – By: Shannon - Acrylic & Heat on TTC Subway Transfer- 24"x24"-2009**

She starts her story as:

I've been painting since my childhood; I was self-taught and practiced whatever I learned in school. In general I was very artistic, I used to compose poems and make drawings for it on the margins of my work.

You know how hard it is to make a living out of art, that's why when I was young, and trying to define my career, I decided to learn computer sciences, and found a job as a programmer. I worked in electrical industry but it was not aligned with my spirit, and personality. It was a torture for me. My last job in that field was as a system analyst. I wrote a system for a library, but it was a torture for me. It didn't really go well with my personality. One day I decided to resign and go after art and painting. I had a few art masters, teachers. I attended so many classes and workshops. Art was always in my life.

Shannon migrated to Canada first in 1991, but it took her three years to settle in Canada permanently.

I loved, love Iran so much. At first, between 1991 and 1994, I was unable to live in Canada for more than a few months at once; I was still both financially and emotionally extremely attached to my hometown. My kids were very young; they were not in school, that's why I could go back and forth. Hence, I didn't really feel the hardship of settlement and migration, until 1994, when my husband insisted on us settling permanently in Canada. Those were the worst, hardest days of my life. When we used to come knowing that we can and will go back and

forth it was fun. But when you make the decision to permanently live and settle, then the hardship starts.

Shannon recalls the first year of her settlement as the most challenging days of her life.

I used to cry a lot, back in 1994 there weren't that many Persian here, I remember I was so sick and went to see the doctor, he was Canadian, and he told me that I was homesick, advising me to connect with my own community.

Shannon remembers how devastated she was in her first years of settlement. Her constant worry was making sure her family, especially her three young children, were adapting to their new home; "All I was worried about at the beginning was to survive and take care of my family to survive." Once her family was settled, Shannon decided to enroll in the art program at the Ontario College of Art and Design (OCAD) to be able to reconnect to the art world in her new home. As a mature student, she recalls the challenges she faced to adapt to the new educational system and language. However, she was not only able to complete her degree, but has won several awards such as OCAD's Dorothy Hoover Award, 1st prize of 6th National Biennial Competition of Art and Paper and the Blueman Group's First Annual Vortex Art Competition, and 2nd prize of Latham Gallery's 2007 Annual Juried Exhibition, just to name a few of her awards and achievements. Shannon has pioneered an award winning technique called "Heat Drawing", where she creates images and shapes on heat sensitive papers without using conventional materials, but by applying heat to their surfaces. She has received several awards for the art created with this technique, and has exhibited several times in venues throughout Canada and Iran. One of her pieces titled "Distinguished Women" was illustrated on the cover of the Spring 2007 issue of the Ontario's Community Arts Matters (CAM) magazine; one of the well-known publishers in the arts field. She also performed a live demonstration of heat drawing on Toronto's City TV's Breakfast Television on May

7, 2003. In 2011 and 2013 the Royal Bank of Canada Sponsored Shannon as an Iranian Art Community Representative at the Tirgan Festival and the Cultura Festival, where her works titled 'Images of Iran' and 'Miniature Horses' were used in the RBC promotional Material. Shannon lives in Toronto as a full time independent artist and holds private painting classes at her home studio.

### **Meeting Alijan – September 2014 – Irena Art Studio – North York**

Alijan's art studio is covered with beautiful Persian paintings and miniatures. I've always been impressed by the sophistication of this painting style. This style of Persian painting requires tremendous devotion and effort to create one piece at a time; and here I was standing in front of the master of this art. Alijan is the holder of the prestigious Rank 1 Certificate in Art (equivalent to a Doctoral Degree in the Arts) from the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance of Iran. He is also the winner of the first prize in two of the Biennale Exhibitions of Painting in Tehran Contemporary Arts Museum, one in 1993 and the other in 1995.

One of the pieces that I created post migration that I'm very proud of is the painting of the Ontario Legislative Building at Queen's park. My painting was unveiled on March 28, 2011. This is the first painting of an Iranian-Canadian artist to become a permanent exhibit on the walls of the Ontario Legislative Building, and to be among the historic works of other great artists.

Says Alijan as he pulls a picture of the painting from Google's image streams  
(See Figure 4).



**Figure 4 - The Queen's Park Parliament Building - By: Alijan A - 2012**

When I was in Iran, I was part of the Modern Art Museum Jury group and my art pieces have been exhibited across Iran, and in the Tehran's Modern Art Museum. My main branch and style is Persian Miniature. I have exhibited my work internationally. I have won several awards. When you live in Iran you are in your own artistic atmosphere, but when you migrate you become international, and need to know what to do to be accepted in the international art community.

Alijan landed in Canada in 2000 and has worked on part-time interior design projects. After a few years, with the support of his wife, he set up his art studio where he spends most of his time creating art and teaching it. Alijan has introduced a new painting style titled “united couples”, which is registered globally under his name. He is currently residing and practicing his new painting style in Toronto and earns his living through teaching art and Persian calligraphy.

In the following chapter, the main themes derived from participants' lived migratory experiences are described to provide an in-depth understanding of how *being* is experienced by them. The following chapter also includes images of art provided by participants to provide an understanding of how the main themes emerged.

## REFLECTIVE PASSAGE FOUR

I am staring at the whiteness of the canvas, and a blank world stares back at me directly into my eyes and heart. It's a world, yet a blank realm, waiting to be created and unfolded by my story, my thoughts, my meanings, my experiences; only mine. The bareness of this world would transform in matters of seconds with the first trace of colour, with the first stroke of the brush. It is becoming alive, real, and present. This world, this piece of art, is coming into existence, and embeds dimensions of my life, my "being" in each stroke and layer of colour. It becomes an entity that is created by me, by an interaction of my mind and body; a world that is now out there, a piece of my being and presence.

I am feeling the tiny rough nodes under the palm of my right hand, as I touch the surface of the white 100 cm x 70 cm canvas sitting in front of me. I am imagining lines and shapes scattered, then becoming together, creating meaningless shapes and patterns. Colours are appearing and vanishing subconsciously.

I am starting to travel into myself, in the nodes and ties of my brain and my heart. A thousand frames of memories, voices, and emotions are running in front of my eyes rapidly. I am trying to focus on one of the many senses, and freeze it on the canvas; to capture, picture, and paint one instant out of my memories. There is so much to say, so much to paint, numerous instances begging to be visualized, and I am standing in front of my canvas paralyzed and confused.

I am shifting my gaze from the canvas to a few tubes of acrylic paint sitting next to me. I remember buying them a few days back, when I finally convinced myself to paint again. Cadmium light red, light metal pink, titanium white, mars black, burnt umber, and Van Dyke brown. On the other side sits two paintbrushes: a round one and a

flat one. I am turning my attention back to the canvas wondering “what was I thinking when I choose these colours?” I have never used pink in any of my paintings before. Such combination of colours is very new and unfamiliar to me. I have no plan; no sketch for this piece, random colors and no idea what to paint with them (See Figure 5).

I am holding the clean brush in my right hand and landing it on the canvas. I am drawing an imaginary line, from one side of the canvas to the other, as if I’m dividing the canvas into two areas. I look at the top part; I’m thinking of home, my old paintings, their stories, and how I used to feel when I was painting them. I’m shifting my gaze to the bottom half, a new home and life, unknown and unexplored, waiting to be unfolded. I see myself cut in half, separated and dislocated. “Who am I?”



**Figure 5 - Burlington, Planet Earth, 2009 - Acrylic on Canvas - By Mahsa R.**

## CHAPTER FIVE: DELVING IN TO THE EXPERIENCE OF MIGRATION

Perception is the background from which all acts stand out, and is presupposed by them...the world is the natural setting of, and [the] field for, all my thoughts and all my explicit perceptions...man is in the world, and only in the world does he know himself. (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; 2002, p.ix).

To provide phenomenological insights into the experience of migration for immigrant artists, this study explores the meaning of *being* as lived and understood by the seven participants introduced in the previous section. In this chapter, the three overarching themes of *self*, *others*, and *space*, are explored. Each of these overarching themes, titled “embracing themes” is represented by sub-themes to convey meaningful insights into the migratory lives of the participants. The insights developed are based on the participants’ lived experiences of migration, and are reflected through their narratives and artwork.

### **Embracing Theme 1: *Space***

Truth does not inhabit only the inner man, or more accurately, there is no inner man, man is in the world, and only in the world does he know himself. When I return to myself from an excursion into the realm of dogmatic common sense or of science, I find, not a source of intrinsic truth, but a subject destined to the world. (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. xii)

As noted in the literature review, migration is generally known as the process of uprooting from one’s homeland and resettling in a potentially new setting of environmental, social and cultural values (Berry, 2001; Bissoondath, 2002; Kim, 2001; Kwak, 2010; Li, 2003; Naficy, 1993; Vineberg, 2012). As part of the migratory process, a transition between worlds takes place. Depending on the origin of individuals, multiple worlds might collide, or might be dramatically different in many aspects. As was noted earlier, the differences between the original setting and the host setting can range from climate, nature, food, language, to demographics and more. To successfully settle in their

new homes, people who immigrate, in most cases, need to learn different life styles including new cultural values, languages, diets, and in some cases, systems of education (Crawford & Campbell, 2012). These novel encounters with new settings and values compel people who are immigrants to develop new ways of understanding, make meaning, adapting, and living—all of which shape the way they experience their *being* in their new homes.

### **The Location of Being**

The space and physical surroundings have both played an enabling and disabling role for the participants. Sara claims that at first, the new space made her feel paralyzed:

When I came here, those first months, or I can say even the first year, I was lost, confused, I didn't know what to do here, I didn't know where to go, I didn't know anything about my surrounding. The scope of change was bigger than I anticipated! I hadn't really planned for such a huge change. I wasn't really ready for it! The scope of this migration was bigger than I had thought. I felt paralyzed. Useless, mute, unseen! I used to get lost, like literally lost when I wanted to go from one place to the other. And it was so scary! I used to shiver when I wanted to go around! It felt so far, everywhere I wanted to go was so far! Like physically far! I had to walk so long to get to a grocery store! I had never really had the experience of starting life from below start line! Like to learn everything from zero! The roads, names, words. Everything!

Sara also explained that the new physical surrounding acted as a disabling factor as it brought boredom, low self-esteem, and a lack of confidence in her daily skills:

I used to move around a lot back home, used to go out of home, travel around the country. Any little free time I had, I used to go to nature. I'm unable to live the same life style here. I get scared. I'm worried of getting lost, of having no one to find me. These are the fears I have, fear of unknown. I feel my steps were more solid back home. I was confident with the steps I took, but here I feel like I'm walking on the clouds. I'm always scared of unknown-ness. I think I've lost my confidence, totally, after migration. I mean I've lost confidence in finding my way around. I feel like I don't have that backbone I had back in Iran. I'm someone else. I'm not the same person! I can't say I'm unhappy with the change, I guess I'm more mature in other ways. But I think the variety in my surrounding here confuses me and is disabling me to move around!

Sara reflected on her feelings towards her surroundings and the city of Toronto in a painting she created a few years after her arrival, in 2010. She claims that while experiencing the up-rootedness, floating, and confusion about her surrounding, she tried to picture and visualize her navigation through and understanding of Toronto:

I always perceived Toronto as a very clean city full of straight lines, very organized. This painting shows movement, snow, roads, business, even darkness, dark and grey is the areas of unknown-ness for me, I guess it was a way for me to picture my days in Toronto. (See Figure 6)



Figure 6 - The city - Acrylic on canvas – By: Sara (F.K) - 2010

Mike's first encounter with the new physical surroundings was related to the changes in the size of his living space. He claims the significant decrease in their living space post-migration affected their life style and his art:

when we first arrived we only could afford to rent a small, very small, apartment. Space was very crucial to my work, and I was used to working in spacious studios. If I had space I could work if not I wouldn't work [paint]. So my art was limited by the space we had. I started working on very small pieces, just to stay connected to my art. The first few years were very hard in all ways!

Another unique aspect that surfaced in Mike's interview was about the laws and policies in his new surroundings. He believes he needed to learn about the roads, neighbourhoods, and areas surrounding him, and also about the area's laws, rules, and policies:

One of the things that caused a lot of confusion and worry for me was learning about taxes here and how to fill the tax forms. To be able to live a daily life, normal life here, there was so much to learn. I felt like I'm a newborn and need to learn life from new!

Shinya claims that his surrounding space is crucial because his art is inspired by nature and his life is his art. He stated that upon his arrival in Canada, he searched the best spot in the city in terms of nature and green variety. He was advised to visit High Park, a municipal park in Toronto. Once he visited High Park, he chose the High Park neighbourhood to live in, and he has lived there ever since.

Alijan recalls an experience of spatial disorientation during his early months in Canada:

when I came here I felt rootless, uprooted... and I don't want to say that I felt uproot as if I had taking all the roots brutally out of soil, as if I had burned all the bridges down and had disconnected myself from home [Iran], but I had moved from my home, from that space to somewhere that had not much similarity. I had moved to a space that was unfamiliar and unknown to me; nothing was familiar, the weather was different, roads, colors, food, cultures, nothing reminded me of anything I knew! It was totally different, it felt like stepping outside a boxing ring for me, like I was bitten and then needed to walk, I was dizzy, lost orientation, I felt misaligned, confused, when I migrated for the first 4-5 months I was just clueless, didn't know where is where!

Shannon also remembers the way she experienced space post-migration, feelings that resulted in confusion, disorientation, cluelessness, and up-rootedness. She shares her experience with the unfamiliar spaces:

First shock to me post migration was that I was not able to live the same quality and life style here. We had to live in a much smaller size of apartment, less furniture and of course nothing like what we had back home. We had to start a life again and just ignore what we had and the way we used to live. Next thing that caught me by surprise was the fact that learning my surrounding took a lot longer

than I thought. Well back then there was no GPS (Navigator) or smart phones and as such and I had to ask people and sometimes look at maps, paper maps, to find my way around the city. I remember one day I got on bus to go pick up my daughter from school, I remember I pressed the stop request button or pulled the yellow thing for the bus to stop at my station, and the bus stopped at the station, I waited for the driver to open the door, he didn't, and stood there waiting, and the bus started moving, and I panicked, why didn't he open the door for me? Of course 'cause back home the driver used to open the bus door. So yes I was panicked and started wondering whether he didn't he see me waiting to get off the bus? Did he ignore me because I'm an immigrant? You know all stupid thoughts came to me and of course worrying what if I don't get to my daughter on time, what will happen to her. And the funny thing is that the same happened for the next couple stations until someone got off and I got off after!

*Space*, or the physical environment, has a significant influence on how immigrants experience their *being* post-migration. The characteristics of *space* can range from the size of their living environment, to finding their way around or creating a map of their surroundings; to looking for nodes and elements in their surroundings to create a bond and a sense of belonging, and even to create a spatial positioning of themselves in the city. These are a few of the spatial factors that influence the way immigrants make sense of their evolving *being*. Notions such as up-rootedness, confusion, disorientation, displacement, floating in the air, comparison of the two spaces (pre- and post-migration spaces) are a few of the many feelings associated with living in a new environment; feelings that influenced the participants understanding of their *being* while settling in their new homes. Even though the participants claimed that they feel more settled and rooted in their new homes in the present time, the feelings of displacement and the need to learn about their surrounding seem to be an everlasting process for them.

Sara points out to a painting she created in 2012 and emphasizes that she is still going through the transition stage of migration (See Figure 7):

In this painting I wanted to picture the limitations and struggles I had here in my settlement. For me migration meant fear, fear of unknown-ness, I'm afraid of doing everyday ordinary activities, anything that I might have done automatically

without really being conscious about it makes me freak out here. I need to think twice and reflect on everything, even the simplest act of talking is the hardest act for me now. I always think every step I take might be misinterpreted. I've lost my confidence and bravery, and that is a different identity for me. I feel like I'm a newborn in a mature body. I was 35 when I migrated here and I feel like I have to build everything from zero. I feel like I'm stuck in an in between world. I haven't been able to build what I had before, what I was, and yet I haven't turned into a complete new person either! It's a new world with so much unknowingness and directness-less. I'm always worried of losing, of being lost. I don't know the norms, the rules here. And I was trying to picture all these feelings in my work.



Figure 7 – Obstacles - By Sara (F.K) - 2012

One of the factors that significantly influence the meaning of *being* for an immigrant is language. For the participants, language had a substantial impact on the way they made sense of their *being* in Canada and continues to influence their meaning making process. For example, Sara believes that her limited vocabulary has affected the most parts of her life, even her art:

One of my struggles with painting here in Canada was titling my work. Sometime, or I should say most of the times, the English translation of my titles loses the meanings and essences that I want to transfer to the audience. When I used the translated title name, the painting becomes of a stranger to me, it feels like it doesn't relate to me anymore; to the stories and feelings behind that piece. I think with translating the title from Farsi to English some of the stories and feelings are lost...

Understanding the *self* through reflections, and in relation to *other* humans and the surrounding *space*, creates the foundation of meanings of being in the new home in this study. Art played a significant role in this meaning-making process. The participants of this study have learned about their selves in the new home, and have developed meanings through creating art, choosing colours and themes, forms and shapes. Their art represents their understanding and experience of *being* and interacting with their new world.

## **Embracing Theme 2: Others**

You yourself are your act...you have exchanged yourself for your act...your meaning is what shows itself for all to see. Your meaning is your deed, your hatred, your love, your fidelity, [and] your discoveries. A man (L'homme) is nothing but a web of relations; with regard to man, only relationships count. (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p.520).

According to Merleau-Ponty (1962), our *being* heavily relies on the *being* of *others*, and the way we make sense of our *being* is a reflection of what we see, hear, touch, discuss and comprehend in our relationship with other humans around us. These relationships include our interactions with parents, siblings, spouse, children, friends, peers, mentors, neighbours, and others. Once migration to a new place occurs, with the change, the movement, and the new setting, several of these existing others disappear, or they fade their influence on the individual's understanding of their *being*. In the following

discussion, the role of others in the migratory experiences and meaning making of being in a new home is described.

All seven participants highlighted the role *others* had in their process of making meaning of *being* in their new homes. In this study, *others* emerged as family members or friends left behind, those who had migrated with the participants, and also strangers and new people encountered in Canada.

### **The Other Beings: The Sorrow of Separation**

One of the major aspects of migration experienced and expressed by the participants was the feeling separated. All seven participants of this study, at some point of sharing their stories, highlighted their sadness, sorrow, and grief of leaving family and friend behind. Feelings such as being separated from those who loved them and they cared for, leaving parents and siblings behind, and not being next to them in moments of need, came up several times during the conversations. Even though all of the participants highlighted an experience of separation from their loved ones, but for some of them the post migration feeling of separation seemed to be more momentous, such as Mike who lost his father and still mourns for not being able to go back to see him one last time, or Sara who lives her days with the worry that she may not see her father again because of distance and the expensive tickets. With deciding to leave and being distant from the family members, there seems to be an everlasting risking of saying the last words of farewell, the last hugs and kisses of goodbye to those most loved ones. Shannon mentioned that every time she hears about a loss back home, even if its related to family members or friends, something breaks down in her heart. The feeling of separation is a nightmare that lives with immigrants, and as they age it becomes bolder and no

distraction can take away the fact that it's a destiny waiting for them. One day, they may lose their loved ones without having the chance to see them for one last time.

Sara claimed part of the reason she felt sad, miserable, and lonely during the first days of her arrival was because she was away from her father and relatives to whom she was much attached:

I was very attached to my father, being away from him created the most painful days of my life. I didn't sleep for several nights, and all I remember was me sitting in front of the internet for hours and hours looking at pictures of him and people I had left behind. I was and am very attached to my family and relatives, and I lost some of the loved ones when I was here and far from everyone and it hurt me so much not to be able to be next to them to say goodbye and have a closure; I was hurt... I was broken. I still have this fear that something bad may happen to someone I care for and I won't be able to do anything for them. It was hard and still hard, I still feel the hardship, my dad left the country as well and then I felt even worse. Felt like I'm losing him even more, he is becoming even further from me. None of us ever thought we may leave our homes one day, we had a good life there, we were happy, and we loved our home. None of my family really thought of leaving the country, but things changed suddenly and kind of forced us to do so [for confidentiality purposes, Sara asked me not to mention the reason behind fleeing her hometown].

Sara remembers her first days of arrival as the loneliest days of her life:

I had no friends here, I wasn't interacting with anyone, and I wasn't able to do so. I was very cautious of meeting new people and creating new relationships. Very limited people I could trust and hang out with. Those were the hardest days of my life. It was so dark and I was trapped in that darkness.

Sara also claimed that being apart from her family and father particularly, has given her a chance to reflect on their relationship and arrive at peace with some of the thoughts that used to concern her for such long time in her adulthood life: "For example, I was so much stuck with the fact that I didn't become who my parents wanted me to be, but I don't seem to be bothered about it much anymore! I mean I still think about it but sometimes."

Mike also explained that being away from his family, especially when his dad passed away and not being able to be with him in his last moment, has left a deep wound in his soul:

I was here when my dad got sick and passed away. And I wasn't able to go see him because I was involved in a project that I couldn't leave; it was the matter of my survival here. It was a financial and legal situation that at that time seemed to be very important to me but I regret not going back and it still hurts me deeply. Being away from my parents and the people I grew up with, those I have memories with and them not being in my life story anymore are of the most painful experiences of my migration.

The changing roles and relationships of the friends and family members who are left behind influence the way immigrants make sense of their *being* after migration. Due to reasons such as long distances, mobility issues, and financial limitations, most of the immigrants cannot see their family and relatives often, many for years, and in between these times sorrow of separation and the feeling of being separated from the people who know them well, whom they grew up with, and those who share history and memories with the immigrants grows deeper influencing their *being* in their new homes.

### **The Other Beings: New Encounters**

The participants' descriptions of their migratory experiences include several accounts of new encounters with *other* beings, those whom they met in their new homes. Either from similar backgrounds, or other parts of the world, these new encounters have shaped their migratory lives and the way these individuals made sense of their stories. Through these new encounters, the immigrant artists learned novel details about their selves, their lives, and their new homes. Some of these encounters were perceived as a negative experience, some constructive and helpful in settlement. In most cases, the new encounters seem to have influenced decision-makings post migration. For example, in three cases the neighbourhood the participants chose to live in was influenced by others,

or in few other cases their career paths was impacted by job recommendations or offering through friends of friends.

Julio associated his first encounter with people in Canada as one of the most shocking and dreadful experiences of his migration. He believed his vulnerability post-migration, as well as low self-confidence, influenced the way others interacted with him and also the way he reacted to new relationships he made in the first months of his arrival. These interactions and encounters made him consider moving back to Cuba on a number of occasions:

For example, in those early days when I was living with this Canadian family who also was my art recruiter and was using my art for exhibitions, this woman came in and started yelling at me and accusing me of nonsense (for confidentiality I was asked not to share the details of the accusation) and then that was the first time I felt I was brought so down and that I thought to myself that this is not my place and what am I doing here and why do people let themselves talk to me like that and that I should just pack right now and go back to where I am respected and where I belong to. But then I also met this wonderful family who received me and I lived with them for almost a year. They were very welcoming and supportive of me and helped me settle and stay here. If it weren't for their nice and respectful behavior I would have never lasted here!

Julio also stated that one of the things he deeply missed in the first years of his settlement was the lack of a sense of belonging to a community or a group of people. He precisely pointed out the impact of not belonging to the art community here in Canada and the influence this has on him knowing himself as an artist. He still experiences this lack of a sense of belonging today:

I used to belong to different art clubs and institutions [back in Cuba], [but] here I don't. I means that I used to get together with artists and meet with them and have a productive interaction with the art community and artists, working in groups, looking at each other's work and criticizing and commenting on it, we used to discuss art as a community and artists. I think I've lost sense of being part of an art community. Not belonging to anywhere, any group makes me feel even more isolated.

Julio also brought up an interesting barrier he faced in making art, which was directly connected to his unfamiliarity with the people around him:

It was hard at the beginning to know what people like, what art can I make so I can sell and make a life. People may not be interested in my identity, in where I'm coming from, but then I realized it's me and I can't change it and I can't be someone else and paint something else. That's me, and it doesn't matter and I will continue painting maybe someone someday will like it. I'm exploring and evolving. Even the nature here, I feel its gradually coming into my work. In this painting, you see the trilliums, I was inspired by the nature here and you see it in my work. The dominant colors are for my flag, which is my identity, but we don't have this type of flower back home. There is nothing political about the trilliums but it is what I'm living now.

Tara had a similar experience:

I didn't have any friends or people I knew from home here. I mean the only few that I knew from friends of friends had so much of issues and challenges in their own lives that had so much time to worry about my settlement and wellbeing here! I felt so alone, I had no one until I made new friends here, it's a strange feeling to live in a city knowing that you don't know anyone and have no connections to any community, let alone the artists' community. Artists want people to look at their art and talk about it, they want to hear a dialogue to be created around their work, and having no one and not being part of any art community of course you will be left alone and on your own and your art will collect dust!

Shannon also highlighted the impact of being unable to connect to the art community as one of the most challenging aspects of settling in Canada as an immigrant artist:

I needed to know a Canadian artist, needed to know where to start, where the galleries were, and how I can connect with them. Also I needed to know how I could present my work to art communities here. So, I started learning about it. I learned about city galleries, and a friend whom I knew from home encouraged me to apply...I first was able to connect to the Persian community and was able to have my art exhibited in the North York library, but then I realized that even though I've made some connection to my own community but I was still isolated and not connected to the Canadian art community which was the pathway to success for me. I thought to myself that if I have chosen to migrate to this country and decided to live and settle here then I need to connect the Canadian community and integrate into the Canadian art. And truly it's very hard for an artist coming from such a different background and language and all, especially here there is a lot of competition. Here without connections and being known you will have low chances to exhibit your work, anywhere. So I decided to apply to OCAD [Ontario College of Art and Design]...and that was the beginning of challenge for

me. In school one of the hardest parts was of course language, and then trying to connect with students who were a lot younger with so much difference in. I felt disabled those days! It was hard to follow the teachers' discussion in class, students barely shared notes with me, I had to spend hours translating the course material, and the hardest was team projects!

Through novel encounters in a new home, the participants of this study saw and experienced their selves and *being* in new dimensions. Language barriers, unfamiliarity with different cultural patterns and norms, low self- confidence and self-esteem post migration can be highlighted as a few of the main factors that resulted in the participants seeing and experiencing new facts about their being in and through making sense of other beings in an unfamiliar setting.

### **The Other Beings: Migrated Family Members**

One of the interesting themes about the role of others that surfaced from the interviews was the powerful role family members had played on how immigrants experienced and understood their *being* in their new homes. Tara claimed that the presence of her children has played a significant role in her survival and settlement in Canada:

Whenever I felt alone I thought to myself that I'm going through all this because of my children and their future and that would give me energy and reason to continue.

Alijan also emphasized the role of his family, specifically his spouse, in their settlement:

I can strongly say if it wasn't for my wife, I would have left this country and moved back years ago. I would have either gone back to home or moved to US. My wife played a significant role in our settlement here in Canada, she had my back and supported me, and she helped me fight to settle here. She helped me establish this studio gallery and have classes held here. Even though I wasn't making a livelihood from the classes but it brought hope and reconstructed hopeful environment and connected my art and myself to the society and the community. I think this was how I was able to survive and settle in Canada.

Shannon also touched on the role of her children in the way she convinced herself to build a new life from scratch and to keep on trying to settle in their new home:

All I was worried about at the beginning was to survive and take care of my family to survive. Thinking about the future of my children kept me moving. It was all the reason I was learning everything like a child, a mature child!

Tara also pointed out that, at the beginning of her migration, her focus was to accelerate her family's settlement in Canada:

When I first came here I didn't paint for a while. I was so preoccupied with finding my way around and learning about my surrounding. We were doing well, financially, back home so when we first arrived we brought with us enough money not to struggle much financially. But it's not all about financial settlement, you lose yourself and need to find meanings back. I first started just looking for activities that would help us as a family to spent time together and strengthen the already weakened bond! At the beginning I was very focused on making sure my children and family are settling. After a year or so I realized I was the one who needed the most help. I felt I was left behind and isolated. But then my children started helping me to settle. Unfortunately, my marriage didn't handle the pressure of migration.

Tara shed light on the role her daughter has played in helping her connect with her surroundings and new home. This connection took place through poetry read and translated by her daughter, which became the source of artistic inspiration for Tara:

My daughter used to read poems in English for me and translate them for me, even though I never really understood the depth of their meanings, I used to take notes, and then the meaning of it was playing in my mind, and then I painted how I felt about it in my painting.

The above themes reveal the role *others* played in the way immigrant artists made sense of their *being* in their new homes. In addition to *space* and *others*, the changed understanding of, and the new meanings about *self* results in experiencing novel ways of *being* in the new home, Canada.

### **Embracing Theme 3: *Changing Perceptions of Self Following Migration***

One of the key themes that emerged from the interviews was making sense of *self* post migration. For the participants of this research, a morphing *self* was an inevitable component of migration, and the major means for understanding and making sense of the changes occurring. *Self*, appeared to be approached as the evidence of the migratory transitions resulting in a new way of *being*. For the participants of this research, *self* is experienced on a spectrum of time; a now and then *self*, with art helping them find a way to reconnect to the metamorphosed *being*. In other words, their *being*, or the perception of their *self* changed post migration, and through art, they accepted this shift and made sense of it. In the following discussions, the *changing perceptions of self following migration*, and the ways participants have made sense of them are described. Throughout these parts and wholes we gain a sense of how art figures into the meaning-making processes post migration.

#### **The Division: Movement in Relation to *Self***

The concept of a transitioned *self* emerged in all seven interviews. The participants of this study frequently reflected on their *self* and the way they experienced their *being* prior to, and post, migration. It appeared that by reflecting on their migratory experiences, the participating immigrant artists were constantly traveling back and forth in time to understand their *being*. In other words, to make sense of their *being*, they had to create a split *self*, the original and the transformed one, and move between the two.

This evaluation, or comparison of *self* in two realms, home and Canada, took place without any direct or leading interview questions. Inevitably, for the participants, to be able to reflect, make sense, and define their experiences of migration, they recalled

their *being* in relation to time and lay their experiences on a spectrum of before and after immigration. Their reflections seem to be based on an experience of travelling in and out of the two realms; a changing relationship to self over two time periods. The endeavour between the two realms suggests that the participants of this study had created two perceptions of themselves as if they were two separate entities; the pre-migration person and the post-migration one. A split *self* seems to assist the participants move between their pre, and post, migration self to make sense of their *being* in Canada. This statement became vivid in Sara, Shannon, and Mike's claims:

"I'm someone else" (Sara)

"I've changed, I'm not that old me from back home anymore" (Shannon)

"Everything in my migration made me a different person" (Mike)

Even though the participants of this study frequently noted experiencing a transformed and transitioned *self*, they also insisted on describing the old *self* they knew from home with as many details as possible. In this regard, they sought reassurance from me that I'm wholly informed about "who they were" before moving to Canada. As a consequence, a significant portion of the narrations and interviews were dedicated to the "pre-migration" lives of the participants (parts of the conversations are highlighted in Chapter Four).

For example, when I asked Sara to tell me about her migration experience, she started her story with her childhood memories:

Since childhood, I've always loved painting... My dad never liked me to be an artist and always wanted me to be an engineer. I used to paint whenever I had a chance... I always faced issues being a woman... Even when I opened my own gallery I ended up closing it because of being female. I have always been forced to let go and give up because of my gender! Being a woman had made a lot of limitations for me back home... I grew up in a relatively conservative and religious family, they weren't like extremists or anything, but my relatives had rigid beliefs, so pretty much everything that a normal girl does was taboo for me. And you know what? Some of those thoughts are still with me. They hunt me. But

now I know they hunt me, and now I fight them, but before they were the truth and the only way of life I knew! I know I might look modern, but I know my thoughts and values are still very traditional. But this is changing! It's still creating several barriers though. I'm still stuck in my glass box. I think I have, to some extent, broken some barriers, like thought barriers, but I still have so many strings attached... I have several limitations and boxes that are self-defined and now I have to break myself free from them!

Sara sets the stage of her story by stressing the obstacles she faced back in her hometown in the way she was experiencing her *being*. For her, the meaning of *being* was associated with constant struggles with the gendered limitations. Sara stated that before migration she had a set of definitions and life values that used to assist her in perceiving her *being*. Post migration, Sara names those life values as "boxes" that now she believes were limiting and pathetic. Even though she is in a new home, these limiting perceptions seem to have travelled with Sara, and are affecting the way she is making sense of her *being* in Canada. However, she claims that, not being located in the same setting, and having a chance to reflect on these values from distance, has resulted in a deconstruction phase.

She believes it is for this distance that she has noticed the gendered obstacles she was facing at home:

I still have days when the old thoughts come back and they start hunting me. I think what if everything was different. I have days where I kind of miss myself. Then all these old thoughts come back but this time they just surface and go. They feel separate from me. As if I was someone else. As if I'm thinking about someone else. It's a strange feeling. I know it was I, I know I have lived that life, its not a movie, or a novel story, or so, but it feels like a dream, years ago, an old dream. There are parts that I truly miss about the other, previous Sara. But, but I think I like the new Sara better. She is happier. I mean, honestly, I don't know which one was, is, happier. It feels weird; I'm weird, right? [Laughter]

Sara is not the only one creating perceptions of the old *self* and of an emerging one in order to make sense and understand their *being* in the new setting and home. Mike, one of the male participants, stated that in his first year of arrival in Canada, he was

experiencing a change in his *self* where he became very open to exploring new paths and starting life afresh. He claims that after migration, he experienced a new perception of himself. The fact that he could explore new opportunities and try different and novel career paths felt like he was born again:

When we first arrived here, those first years, I was thinking how many opportunities exist for me; I could become a chef, or literally just be anything I want to be. I felt like I was paying attention to my likes and dislikes for the first time in my life, my skills, capabilities and incapability... I was learning about myself! Even though I didn't go after anything dramatically different from what I was doing back home, but I had those moments, thoughts, and the sense of freedom from some of the old boundaries to think of change, fundamentally! I felt brave enough to think of breaking everything down and re-building life from scratch! I think it's the environment here that doesn't have expectations from the individuals. You can be whom you want to be and still be accepted and respected! Just be what you want to be and be! You know! These are the worldviews that I gain here after leaving home.

Mike claimed that he experienced a deconstruction process, a feeling where he started to understand his *being* in a different way:

I could be whoever I wanted to be, whatever I wanted to be, I could change, be new, and I was actually changing! I was feeling the difference. I was separating from all that I knew about myself. As if I was shedding skins, or peeling back my skin and undressing myself of the old thoughts and understandings. I felt like a newborn. I wanted to experience new things. I felt like I don't need to be who I was for the all these years. At times, it was scary to feel the change within you. I was becoming a stranger to myself. But I was embracing the change and I was enjoying it. I liked it.

Julio also stated that after moving to Canada, for the first time in his life, he was able to look at how he was experiencing his life in Cuba (his hometown) through a new lens and perspective. Julio defined his changed understanding of his original home and his *being* as:

I had a chance to look at Cuba from far and think about what was going on there from Canada. At that time there were a lot of tourists going to Cuba from Canada, then I wanted to understand how Canadians see Cuba. That was the time that I started getting interested in the picture of Fidel Castro. Cuba is also very, like, you have to be careful with working with image of Castro. I mean if I was in

Cuba I would have not been able to use his picture. I gained the freedom here. I mean I hated his picture when I was in Cuba 'cause I blamed him for all the hardship happening at home. But here I got this fascination with his image; his profile is perfect for pictures and drawing. His facial proportions are beautiful. Based on my first experiences in Canada. Of course I missed home, but I started comparing things here to home, and the fact that I was doing relatively well in Cuba as an artist but here I was extremely struggling, I don't know, I have reflected on several things, I watched several documentaries on him here in Canada, learned a lot about him and his ideologies, and even at some point compared his life with my own experiences, and it was quite interesting that I was learning about my country outside of it, not when I was living there. I felt like a Cuban, like more Cuban here in Canada. I could think, freely, about who I was there. It was like Cuban Julio in Canada looking at Cuban Julio in Cuba.

Julio stated that in Cuba he never had the chance to deeply reflect on the social and political issues. He claimed that living far from Cuba, he started reading more and following news about Cuba. Julio argues that only in Canada did he get really interested in knowing more about the history and politics of his homeland.

Alijan similarly experienced a separation from his known *self* and was able to reflect on his perspective from a distance. This split and endeavours between the pre-migrated *self* and the morphing one enabled him to arrive at novel realizations about his *self* and *being*:

The first two years of my migration made me look at myself, who I was, and the world I had defined for myself from far. I was looking at my life and myself from a distance, as if I was apart from myself yet looking back at myself. It gave me such a different and unique perspective. I could look at everything from a distance. Everything was new and fresh and I could extract a lot of new definitions from it. Migration also made me realize how many different ways of looking at life and existence is out there. Migration was a great experience for me. It made a different person of me. The main reason behind it was that it made it possible for me to look at myself from distance, and explore new dimensions of myself. It was a great opportunity, a lifetime chance, to look at everything from a different perspective.

Shinya also experienced a sense of travelling back and forth between his old and new *self*. He had moments when he felt he is "living in a foreign country" after more than 10 years of living in Canada:

I have my job and have my family here. I don't feel like an immigrant here anymore, but here and there I still have these feelings of attachment to home. Maybe it's because I still own a house in Japan and sometimes I go visit. I have days that I feel totally Canadian, and then days that I feel more Japanese. I often feel still attached. I have days that I wonder which one is true me? Which place is my real home?

The immigrant artists claim that in the early stages of migration and their settlement in Canada, they experienced a sense of departure from the old *self*. Feelings associated with reflection and thoughts about a changing relationship to *self* over two time periods. Julio notes that in Canada he was able to think freely about who he was in Cuba. Alijin talks about being able to view himself from a distance. Sara describes her being as feeling “hunted”, and that she is still in a process of breaking out of a glass box that previously gendered and restricted by rigid rules, and in Canada comes with other challenges. Mike talks about a breaking down and rebuilding, and “feeling the difference”, peeling back his skin, and undressing his *being*.

In another portion of the interviews, when participants were asked to reflect on their art making experiences post migration, the issue of a fragmented *self*, or the shifts in their understanding of themselves surfaced. They claimed that the transitions in the *self* and the shifting perceptions of *being* were repeatedly mirrored in their art created after migration. In the following theme the movements in relationship to *self* is described as reflected in the participants' artwork. Also, the role art played in bringing this morphing into their consciousness is explored.

### **Painting the Change: Movement Embodied in Lines and Colours**

The first change all seven participants experienced was the need to simply arrive at peace, after the movement had settled, with their selves to be able to paint again in the

new setting. Sara states that it took her four to five months before she was able to start painting in Canada:

I spent the worse days of my life in that period of time. I couldn't paint due to the pain and confusion I was experiencing because of being away from all the knowns, all that was familiar, and all that I had built. First paintings I did here had extreme political essence and themes, dark, black, prison, hostility. It was all a way to let out my anger and my frustration... My paintings here started with political themes and stories; dark and dirty pieces that was evolved from within myself. It was based on my sadness, my problems and issues, my anger, my loneliness. I was very hurt because of what was going on in my home. You know environment and space is highly influential on art, on my mood, and also the colors are chosen based on our emotional status. The texture also is related, the colours were dull, dead, and even the way I was mixing the colors with each other was different. Art was a tool for me to release my anger and sadness. I don't think I was creating art for the sake of creating art at that time, but rather just a tool for inner peace. I started painting after 4-5 months post-migration. It was so hard for me to pull myself back together to paint. I wasn't able to find myself to create. The tools that we use in Iran were way basic and that resulted in [the artists] being more creative. Although it wasn't my first time traveling to Canada, but I wasn't very familiar with tools and art supplies here. Here there is so much variety and numerous tools that can affect the creativity. If I want to paint a rainy day, they have special paper, paint, and brush for it. It gets boring! Seriously. I was lost, I wasn't sure how to use these tools, like spoiled kids, I was lost, like giving a child a thousand toys and then they don't know what to start with. I was confused what to start with, but at the same time I wasn't able to find those basic tools that I used to work with! It's funny that I have so many ideas yet I didn't know where to find the material. For example, I didn't know where to find, let's say bended metal? I didn't know where to start! I feel like painting was easier back home with basic tools and there was so much creativity in it.

Sara recalls her first days of arrival while sifting through pictures of her paintings. I noticed a long pause and a sorrow weighting down her sight as she was looking at the pictures of her paintings:

I was very lost those days. In this painting (see Figure 8)...I remember how lost and confused I was when I was painting it. I was mad; I was disoriented. I felt like I was just a little feather floating in the air aimlessly. Do you see the olive green here? The little touches of green? (Pointing at parts of the picture). This used to be my favourite colour back home but here... here I was emotionally unable to use it in my work anymore but in this painting I forced myself, as if I had to use the very last drops of olive green I had in me, as if I had saved a drop from back home and I just wanted to let go of it and set it free. I was very unstable those

days. I think it's obvious in my work too. Do you see how much movement there is in it? You won't be able to keep your eyes on one spot!



Figure 8 - Confused – By: Sara (F.K.) - 2011

Sara claims that, post-migration, she was not able to use the same shade of olive green, which was a dominant colour in the majority of paintings she created in Iran. She believes her first few pieces were only a way for her to explore, understand and sometimes record her *being* and existence in the new setting.

I don't want to say anything about my paintings, and each of these pieces is one of my stories, an experiences, and when I share the feelings and stories behind a piece of my painting, it's like sharing myself, and my feelings with others, and I can't trust everyone to share all my stories. You may think I'm sensitive and emotional. Some of my pieces which were quite troubling, and I've never showed them to anyone, nor have I put any pictures of them anywhere on the web. Those are just for me, I painted them just to let things out, just to pull them out of my

heart and mind. I will destroy them someday. They are just there but not for anyone to see them! I just wanted to paint them to talk to them, for them to talk to me. I wanted to share my feeling with the canvas. It's like one of those secret journals that you write in codes 'cause you don't want anyone to read them! I have a few works that I just did and over painted them 'cause I wanted to bury them!

She explains her experience of creating art in her first year of settlement as being very tense:

Sometimes I only spread the colours on the canvas, rapidly moved my brush, and then it was chaos. And I was never happy with the paints and brush strokes. I should have just left it the way it was but I was always unsatisfied with the paintings and then I used to cover it with yet another layers! It is one the most ugly paintings I've ever made. And it's untitled. I couldn't name it, didn't know what to name it. It was madness, chaos. Just a chaos of my feelings and thoughts! In this first painting, I felt I was trapped, imprisoned. I wanted to leave here and run away and run back to my home. It took me a little while before I got where I am now. (See Figure 9)



Figure 9 - Untitled – By: Sara (F.K) - 2008

Sara remembers all the layers of colour she used in creating a particular piece; one layer over another, as if she wanted to cover one piece of her *being* while trying to explore a new dimension.

I think this painting has a thousand layers on it! This “nardeboon” [Ladder in Farsi –pointing at the center of the piece] is something that I have brought with me from home. When I was painting this I felt lonely and trapped. Many layers, the wounds, what I experienced those days. I hate this painting; I don’t like to look at it. It takes me back to my feelings, my body will remember those feelings and I will get trapped in those dark sad feelings again. That scares me. Black and yellow is sadness. Darkness. I’ve just hid it in my closet. Just don’t want to see it at all.

Sara claims that after migrating to Canada, art became the only world she was connected to; “Painting helped me discharge mentally.”

Interestingly, she claims that the way she is experiencing her evolving *self* in her new home is reflected in the themes of most of her paintings post migration: “I have a few paintings that demonstrate my objections against my woman-ness.” As we look over other samples of her paintings, I witness pieces that seem structure-less, colours meshed into each other, layers over layers. Sara claims that she had experienced several incidents where, after completing a painting, she felt the need to cover it with another layer as if starting from scratch.

I have so many paintings that if you pay attention you will notice that there are layers over layers. There were some times when I used to finish one piece, then look at it and wasn't really able to connect to it anymore, as if it wasn't me who had painted it, it wasn't my painting! Then I had to put a base colour on it, and hide all the layers, bury everything, and then paint something else on the same canvas! For instance, this one (showing me the image of one of her paintings), I called it hidden, cause there is so much, so many layers, hidden under what you see! (See Figure 10)



**Figure 10 - Hidden - Acrylic on Canvas – By: Sara (F.K) – n.d.**

When she showed and shared stories of the pieces painted post-migration, Sara said her migration influenced her art significantly. She claimed that post migration, and

as she lives her life in her new home, she is experiencing a growing courage to look back, this time deeper, into her being in her original home. She claimed that she is experiencing a peace with her previous *being* by trying to look at the elements used in her art pre-migration, but this time from a new perspective. Another interesting point that Sara highlighted was the fact that she became more interested in using “Iranian” elements in her art. For example, she mentions that back home she was not listening to Persian music as much as she does here in Canada, but here she plays traditional or pop Persian music when painting:

back home I used to listen to more western music, Italian per se, but here I only listen to Persian music when I paint! Even those that I thought were crappy, I love them now. I get inspired to paint when I listen to Persian music here. Even in my paintings, I’m starting to go back to Old Persian miniature. Colour themes that are more Persian, like turquoise. In Iran I used more cold colours like greyish colors.

While we were talking, Sara pulled out a picture of one of her paintings created post-migration in 2013. She commented on her artwork:

This painting I guess shows my roots, my origin. Show my Iranian-ness! I really love this piece, but my friend always asks me to remove this from her sight. She feels as if she is buried under tons of dirt, she says she experiences feeling of suffocation by looking at this piece. I remember my thought were around my roots at that time, I felt like I had rooted in my home for 35 years and then I was dislocated with all the roots and everything, like a tree that is just uprooted, and my roots were drying out and dying in the new soil and won’t survive and root back. This is my surface that may feel like I’ve healed and am alive (pointing at the upper parts of the painting), yet my roots are dry and dead as if this tree won’t be a live tree again. When I touch this work I just feel a strong relationship with it. It reminds me of the long way I’ve come! (See Figure 11)



**Figure 11 - The Roots - 24" x 24" – By: Sara (F.K) - 2013**

Mike also discussed the changes in *self* he experienced post-migration and the way these were reflected in his artwork. He claimed that, after he left home, art played more of a personal role to him rather than a career or a source of income. He believed that, because of losing his work studio and also not being connected to his new surroundings, art creation became more of a tool to pass time and to preoccupy himself:

Post-migration, the role of art became more personal because here I didn't have space to work, neither a space to exhibit my work like before. The nature of my work also changed all of a sudden. They became small in size and the stories were simplified. I have always worked, even those very first days of arrival, but small ones; I have several works that I have only done for myself and no one has ever seen it and I've never mentioned them to anyone. They are my notes from those first days. I tried hard to make the most of any chance I had to create art and stay sane.

Mike believes that he feels the changes in himself, and consequently his art, but because his art comes from his within, he can't avoid adding traces of his old *self* into it. He claims that he travels in his works and plays around with, and experiments, different emotions in and through his art making:

Here in Canada I'm mainly using my art to examine my emotions and feelings sourcing from my changed life and everyday encounters in the new home. I record these feelings in these pieces. Parts of me stay in the work forever. So I want my audience to experience the space and feelings I have embedded in my work too. I want to be able take them in into my world through my works.

Mike claims that the most significant influence the migratory transition had on his art was the way space and feelings were embedded:

Circular spaces becoming dominant in my work here; Spiral spaces, shapes that trap you, objects that deliver the feeling of loops and your sights and thoughts get stuck on it.

While pointing at one of his paintings hanging on the wall of his living room, Mike explains that in the paintings created post-migration he is experiencing a clash between his old self and the evolving one. He perceives the Persian calligraphies as parts he has brought with him from home, and the geometric shapes as symbols of the emerging perceptions of his changed self in Canada. (See Figures 12-15)



**Figure 12 - Untitled - Multimedia on Canvas – By: Mike (M.Sh) - n.d.**



**Figure 13 - Untitled – By: Mike (M.Sh) - n.d.**



Figure 14 - Untitled - By: Mike (M.Sh) - n.d.



Figure 15 – Untitled – By: Mike (M. Sh) - n.d.

Julio claimed that, even after years of residing in Canada, his art is still enmeshed by the elements of his Cuban *self*:

I'm still painting based on the commonalities between Cuban people, those shared feelings and experiences. My paintings are based on parts of my feelings and parts of our [Cuban] lifestyles. For example, because of communism, everyone, every household have the same TV, same washing machine, so I have these concepts pictured in my art. It is still with me. It's part of me that will never disappear.

In his pop art pieces, Julio takes icons from the North American everyday life, or culture, such as MacDonal'd's restaurants, and adds Cuban elements to it. Julio believes that the

two *selves* or realms have collided in Canada, resulting in an evolution of art; a mash up of the two selves:

After living in Canada for a little while and learning about the Canadian world, I started merging my Cuban identity with my newly emerging Canadian one and made these print works. (See Figures 16-19)



Figure 16 – Untitled – By: Julio F. - 2012



Figure 17 - I'm Lovin' it – By: Julio F. - 2013



Figure 18 - Iced Coffee – By: Julio F. - 2013



Figure 19 - Don't Think, Drink! – By: Julio F. - 2008

Julio, similarly to other participants, is transitioning from how he knew and made sense of his *being* as a well-known artist in his home, to the way he is making sense of his new artist *self* in Canada. Julio talks about his emerging self in his art. As seen in his artwork, there are elements of politics, contradiction, and icons contrasted with landscapes, having a political irony within them. Pieces created post-migration have both

elements of old and emerged *being*, helping him make meaning and sense of whom he was and who he is becoming as a Cuban artist in Canada. Julio talks about merging and his emerging self; in his art there is an element of politics, icons contrasted with landscapes, there is a political irony within them, icons of fast food contrasted with icons of natural or cultural landscapes etc.:

Those types of thoughts, memories and you know realities are always there. I sometimes just forget about them, that I was a well-known artist back home, magazines interviewed me and you know talked about my work. and then I came here and now a very few people know me here. See, I have days that I just feel so isolated. I feel like I am nothing here. I had always been respected by people around me and been recognized and respected as an artist and all of a sudden I became no body, being really no one was heavy for me at first, it was very awful, but I'm getting used to it and accepting it now. I have started to kinda like working in isolation. See days like today, and talking about my past, I traveled to those days and again felt and remembered how I felt. I think I'm much better now.

Tara claims that migration dramatically changed her *being* in many ways:

When I was back home, I used to look more, and see more, to get inspired for the stories of my paintings, than read. You know people had more pain there and you could see more pain in their eyes, and their faces. But here I read [books and print media] more to get inspired! I can't see much, it feels like I can't see inside the society, I can't understand what's happening inside people here. I'm scared of looking into people's eyes. I'm afraid of breaking laws, or of making people uncomfortable! I just feel blind here. I don't know if there is not much to see, or there is, and I'm unable of seeing them.

Here, Tara points out at an image of a painting and continues (see figure 20):

I figured out that I needed to help myself to find meaning about who I was and what I was doing here. About what was going on in my life. So, I started painting again. When I first wanted to paint I realized that I couldn't go back and use the old colors anymore. I realized that those colours are strange to me, so I started using other colours, totally different. Here I started painting more abstract art, and here I realized that I don't like frames, and I realized that I really am attracted to abstract art. Both colours and themes changed totally! I became an abstract painter! And I accepted it and really liked it.



Figure 20 – Women – By: Tara - n.d.

Shinya believes that using elements of his Japanese identity in his art pieces has helped him cherish his old *self* and arrive at peace and at a new understanding of his *being*. He also claims that, not only he enjoys adding Japanese “flavor” to his art, but he thinks having a different background is beneficial to him:

Since I have a different background that would be my advantage compared to [other] artists. For all artists it is so challenging to survive, but I think for an immigrant artist, I think they have, in a way, something new and different to offer. You know a new story and something unique and authentic. I’ve been trained in another country and in different cultures. I can easily just add basic essences of my own culture in to my art and then all of a sudden it turns into a new style of art.

The discussions around the artwork created post migration made evident the traces of shifting meanings and perceptions of *self* and *being*. These movements of change were hidden in the lines and colours of each piece of artwork. The immigrant artists claimed that, when attempting to reconnect to art in their new homes, they realized

they had changed. This change, according to the participants, made it almost impossible for them to continue using the same themes and colours as they used in their homelands.

Sara stated that she experienced a confrontation of the pre-migration and emerging perception of *self* through feeling the need to paint over and over the existing layers. Mike's experience was similar and revealed through combining traditional Persian calligraphy he was using in his art back home with geometric shapes (a new element introduced to his work after migration).

For the immigrant artists in this study, one of the ways in which they found meaning and made sense of their emerging *self* was by reconnecting to the art community, but this time in their new homes. As artists, they had been affiliated with an art community in their homes, which played a significant role in defining who they were and how they understood their *being*. However, one of the main challenges they faced in Canada was becoming part of an art community and reconnecting to the world of art; a process, which may take several months, or even years, if ever ensued.

As the project unfolded, it became evident that the migration has not only influenced the art making process post migration, but it also played a remedy role for them. Art making helped participants redefine their understanding of their emerging *self* and helped them create new meanings around the shifting meaning of their *being*. In other words, through art, the seven participants of this study were able to connect to the emerging perceptions of their *being* in their new homes, and make sense of it. In the following discussion the role art played in the meaning-making process of *self* and *being* is discussed.

The participants of this study claimed that in and through art, they were able to make sense of their evolving *self* and reconnect to their *being* in their new homes. Mike

believes that art created a “space” and a “sanctuary” for him to reflect on and make sense of the changes happening in his life post-migration:

Art created a space for me, a sanctuary, a moment where I could just focus on myself without any distractions. When we first migrated to Canada, all of a sudden we became very alone and there was no one around us. It was both good and bad I guess. It was beneficial, I think, because then all of a sudden you become yourself, we had time to think and experience real life. Painting was an escape for me, to create something; this feeling of creation is a unique feeling. I had this chance to escape from the hardship of migration every now and then. Art played a very personal role in my settlement. It was my way to meditate. Art made me accept and adopt to changes easier.

Julio claims his work changed dramatically post-migration:

In the very beginning I was so confused, really, with what I was going to paint, the first thing was colour, I used to employ and use a lot of colours in my work, but I had no idea. It felt like I was training for so many years, my brain, to come up with brilliant ideas, and I just keep it in my head and then make a doodle and then bang it was there in the right moment. But here at that point there was nothing, no idea. Then the portrait projects came and helped me in terms of the formal aspects of the work, but there weren't any new ideas involved. Then I had a proposal for a show in Toronto, and I decided to bring some of my work from Cuba, recreate them with using my new colours I was using here. So that's what I thought, I decided to take my old ideas, which weren't much exciting for me, but it was new audience so it was okay, and then use the explosion of the colours. So that was the first thing, and then came my connection with Cuba, and the image of Castro.

Julio recalls the first days of migration as some of the hardest moments of his life, moments reflected in his artwork as dark and formless pieces:

I remember making a few small sketches, and they were very dark, like things that were in my head, like installation, they were banners, all words of grief, and all those things that kept reminding me of how hard and awful everything was. So they were really very dark images of how I used to live. But thankfully things are a lot better and I can put those thoughts away, and I started to do all the creative things again. But I feel they have impacted my thoughts somehow forever. I think the hardship is part of me, of who I am and what my life was and is. It comes up in my art too at points.

Julio believes that, post-migration, many of his art pieces created in the early months of settlement, reflected aspects of his *self* and *being*:

My work at that time was more focused on my emotions. You know, for instant I love the artwork of Frida Kahlo, you know she represents her life and all that in her work, I had never represented my life and myself in my work. I had never talked about my life in my work before, I always found interest in social problems, but at that point, it was just I, my life, and then I moved on after a year or so.

Shinya believes that being an artist will inevitably result in expressing something about *self* in the artwork.

I can only be true to myself and try what I can to create something special. So whatever influences me will be expressed in my work, also my background inevitably. I don't know if I can explain it but if you can feel it. My painting process is like bringing Japan to here rather than merely painting my surrounding. There is always something new here that I want to express but it inevitably goes through my filter, which adds parts of my Japanese identity to it.

Alijan, the participant who is also a famous Iranian painter, pointed out that post-migration, he realized he was only famous and known in his country and his only way to reconnect with art in his new home was to understand the art here and become familiar with Canadian art and artists:

I think when I moved to Canada, my sight changed, perhaps became broader. When I was in Iran, I was an artist who had my own style and there it was a more narrow art world. Now my name is becoming known internationally. Even though there are still lots of room for me here to create and educate artists. I think Canada is not aware of the human capital that exists here.

Alijan recalls his first paintings post-migration as a tool to “release” his “self.” Alijan shows a sophisticated piece of art reflecting his old style of painting in his early days of settlement in Canada:

My artistic name was Rumi Landers when I first arrived. I don't have my signature under it, but this is the work that helped me release my emotions, and all the details were the feelings of sophistication and complication I had when I was settling in Canada.” (See Figure 21)



**Figure 21 - Choga (Polo) – By: Alija A. - n.d.**

Shannon recalls her first attempts to paint in her first days of living in Canada:

I wanted to paint, and I used to go to my canvas and prepare to draw something, but because of the sadness and sorrow that I was experiencing, I couldn't concentrate. Didn't know what to paint. Sometimes you can transfer your feelings, in my case sadness, to the paper, but there are times when your brain is locked. Hands don't work. Memories would hold me back. After the first 10 months, when I couldn't even paint a single piece, when I went back to visit home that summer, I immediately started painting. That environment brought essences that enabled me to paint. I used to paint in a way as if I wanted to embrace each and every second of the time and embody it in my paintings. I wanted to freeze everything and keep in forever...I remember my last water colour work I did before migrating permanently in 1994, when we were packing and getting ready to move, a month before our move, and I showed it to my art maestro, and he asked what this sense and emotion was that was embedded in my work (See Figure 22)



Figure 22 - The Persian Ice Tree – By: Shannon (Sh.Sh) - n.d.

Shannon explains her painting:

This is the traditional Iran's walls, and this the ice tree, which you can't find here in Canada, and it was in our backyard back home, and this is my symbol, feeling lonely in cold weather. When I worked this and I was showing this to him I was crying. This is the feeling of diaspora I tried to draw. I wanted to freeze all my memories from my life from back home, my attachments and values, my self from home. This wall is of course an imagination, a symbol of my identity from home. The flower is ice flower, it's a sad flower, embraces a feeling of loneliness... after the second time visiting home I was able to paint when I returned to Canada. I think I gained a bit of peace with my self and migration and was able to go back to painting.

After migration everything changed for me. My workspace changed. The influence of migration and living here, the quiet I found here, here actually was like a space of sanctuary. I had much time to review many things, my life, where I am and where I want to go. I left home in conditions that my work was getting known and people were getting interested in my art. I showed my work in several exhibitions and I was making good money. I was doing modern Islamic art and calligraphy and it was very cherished. We left everything behind and moved because of some incidents we decided to move. We didn't resist and moved.

Julio also experienced a phase of self-reflection in his new home through art:

Back home I didn't want to work on any art that had Che Guevara picture in it. I was so saturated with him, my school was named after him, every morning before going to class, we all gathered and we would say we would be like Che! You know it was always there. But when I came here, I learned a lot about him, all the good and bad things about him, but it was here that I started getting interested in working on his picture.”

For the immigrant artists, art has played a role of remedy, of peacemaker, and a tool to re-discover their self in a new home.

The above discussions demonstrate and describe the changes individuals face as they uproot from their homes and try to settle in an often dramatically different setting. Shifting relationships to *self* is the most significant change post-migration. The ways in which individuals understand how their *self*, their *being*, and existence, have changed becomes of wonder. Not only one's altered perception of *self* results in a new understanding of *being*, but the changes in the existence of other humans, encounters, relationships, and the physical spaces, also influence how individuals make sense of their *being* in their new homes. The following theme describes how immigrant artists make sense of their *being* in relation to perceptions of *others* and *space*.

### **The Embracing Essence of Immigration and Art: Exploring New Being in New Art Styles**

The shifts in the immigrant artists' lives post-migration have resulted in discovering and learning novel realities about the *self*, *others*, *space*, and ultimately *being* for participants in this study. As a result of a different way of experiencing *being* and the fresh sets of meanings, the participants experienced novelty in their art styles and painting techniques post-migration.

Julio claims his new home provided him with several opportunities that impacted not only his lifestyle but also his art:

I'm having possibilities of doing new things and experimenting as an artist with my work that I was unable to do in Cuba, either with opportunities of buying different art supplies or in my case making print screens which was impossible in Cuba, and that's very exciting for me. The fact of being an immigrant has brought so many new ideas to my head and to my work and I think my art has become more mature. Also the information, of like going online and doing research and learning about artists, in Cuba it would have been impossible. We are so behind; it really helps with your creativity and your approach in your work.

It was not only Julio who claimed his migration helped create new styles of art and pieces, but also Tara, Shannon, and Alijan who also explored different ways of art making. All seven participants have developed new ways of art creation and introduced new art styles to the Canadian art community post-migration.

Tara claims that, in her new home, she found a way to make colour out of organic ingredients:

I have created organic colour myself. I've been able to make cracks using organic ingredients. I've always wanted to be able to mimic desert look into my art. You know Kavir (central parts of Iran) and Bam (ancient city in dry parts of central Iran) has always brought so much peace to me, and the way earth and soil is cracked there is a symbol of that type of environment and brings back peace to me... now I have innovated this new method using old colours, by time the colours naturally will crack over time. You know we've lived in a country (home) where we have always used natural colors, in our rugs, in our paintings. I've always wanted to follow our ancestors' path and make natural colors and mediums.

Shannon also invented a new art style once she was able to dig deeper into her *self* and accept her *being* in her new home:

Acrylic was the medium that I started using here in Canada, and I really liked it...back home it was more oil and watercolour. Themes were also dramatically different but here it was as if I was someone else, another artist, all of a sudden new parts of my art skills flourished. I came up with a new art style! I call my style heat drawing. It's been registered under my name and won so many awards for it! No one has done that before and it's all because I became someone else and was able to explore new things about myself here. My thesis in OCAD, where I officially introduced my technique for the first time, was influenced by Chaharshanbe Suri [a festival taking place at the last Tuesday night before the Persian new year where Persians sing, dance and jump over fire] and of course I

was embedding fire and smoke and all in my work by using heat to draw all the aspects of this ceremony! This is how everything started.

She believes the reason she has received several art awards is that one of her art pieces employing heat drawing attracted media attention. This piece is based on her daily life in Canada and her understandings of her new being:

Whenever I used to travel with the train (subway) I used to sit at the very end of the train and look at people. I usually sketch faces in my little sketchbook. They gradually became my stories, my sources of knowing Canada and my being here started to become more real to me. I used to observe how individuals from different backgrounds and cultures sit next to each other, all united and equal; no one is above the other. I then used the streetcar and transfer tickets instead of paper and canvas for my art. This was because I believe that those tickets had dates and reminded me of the season, or the time of the day, that my encounters or observations with others took place. (See Figures 23-25)



**Figure 23 - About Facec - Heat on TTC Subway Transfers – 19 x 27 – By: Shannon (Sh.Sh) - 2007**



Figure 24 – Subway – Heat on TTC Subway Transfers – 28 x 20 – By: Shannon (Sh.Sh) - 2005



Figure 25 - Rendezvous - Heat on TTC Transfers - 40 x 40 – By: Shannon (Sh.Sh) - 2005

Alijan claims that, after migration, and due to exploring his *being* in a new home, he was able to create a series of work registered globally under his name and labeled “united couples”. Each of these series of works employs a new style of figure painting, which is dramatically different from his previous style of art. (see figures 26-28)



**Figure 26 - The United Couples – By: Alijan A. - 2014**



Figure 27 - The United Couples – By: Alijan A. - 2014



Figure 28 - The United Couples- By: Alijan A. - 2014

## Summary

A morphing self, a changed environment, and reformed relations and encounters, have resulted in new meanings and ways of *being* for the immigrant artists who participated in this study. Alongside the transformed *being*, an exploration and creation of new art styles and themes emerged. In the following chapter, findings of this study are discussed in regards to its contribution to existing literature as well as potential implications for both research and practice.

## CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

The moment we look at an artwork and try to envision the dimensions of life embedded in its layers, colours, lines, and forms, whenever we think of an artist as a physical individual as well as a presence in his or her work, whenever we conceive of artistic phenomena as manifesting a sense of *being* and unfolding a sense of identity in the making, we enter into a phenomenological moment. This is a moment in which art becomes an evidence of existence, a representation of the artists' *being* and of the interaction between their *self* and their *being*.

This research emphasizes the power of phenomenological inquiry, and art-based research, as a platform for qualitative exploration in understanding the social phenomenon of migration. Art, in this phenomenological inquiry, was used as a pre-reflective, non-discursive mode of knowing, symbolizing, and *being-in-the-world* for individuals. The participants' paintings created after migration embodied their experiences and understandings of the new world, and by re-visiting, recalling, and sharing stories and memories behind those pieces, phenomenological insights into their migratory lives were co-constructed.

The phenomenological approach of this research brought me closer to putting into words the *being* of immigrants following migration. An interesting point I realized through conducting this study was that the main body of literature developed around the phenomenon of immigration is focused on the ways the host society experiences its *being* in relation to the presence of immigrants. Hence, I felt the urge to delve a step closer to the core essence of this phenomenon by exploring how immigrants experience their *being* (which itself was unfolded through implementing a phenomenological lens). The way the participants perceived, believed, evaluated, communicated, and acted, emanated from

the way they made sense of their *being* was shaped by interactions of *self* with *others*, and *space*.

The changes occurring in the meaning of *being* post migration can provide invaluable insights into the way this phenomenon is approached and acted on. In the case of this study, being an immigrant artist is shaped through movements, separations and distancing, embodied expressions, and landing in a new expression of *being*, all of which was mirrored in people's transformed art styles. Parts of the changed perception of *self*, or dis-functionality of the innate structure in preserving the pre-migration perception, can be associated with a partial loss of identity. The insignificance of professional backgrounds, degrees, work experience, and lost connections with artist communities all contributed to changes in the innate structure of *being*, which influenced the immigrants' perception of their *being*. Parts of the general meanings of *being* created in their home country became ineffectual post-migration, and several cultural values, as noted by Sara and other participants, now act as boxes needing to be deconstructed; a changing relationship to self over two time periods. Julio notes that in Canada he was able to think freely about who he was in Cuba. Alijin talks about being able to view himself from a distance. In the lived experiences of the participants there is a travelling and a distancing from the old *self* due to changes occurring in the *being* of these individuals. Sara describes her *being* as feeling "hunted", and that she is still in a process of breaking out of a glass box that was previously gendered and restricted by rigid rules, and in Canada, comes with other challenges. Mike talks about a breaking down and rebuilding, and "feeling the difference", peeling back his skin, and undressing,

For the participants, the already formed perceptions of *being* faced a sudden change due to the new surroundings and changed perceptions of other *beings*. The

interaction of body and mind to make sense of *being* was interrupted. The existing meanings became impractical. The already defined pathways for perceiving, believing, evaluating, communicating, and acting became unserviceable. Several aspects of identity started shifting, transforming and morphing, resulting in the formation of feelings such as floated-ness, loss, hopeless, as the individuals started losing their confidence in themselves. A third world started emerging, and the immigrant artists created in-between meanings, partially using memories from home for comparison and selection, and using new connections and adaptations to the new surroundings.

*Being*, in relation to the diaspora and displacement discourse, becomes relevant to the concept of *space* when an individual encounters the question of ‘where they are from’ in their new homes. This feeling and urge of needing to belong to a geographical area, once brought into consciousness, becomes important for immigrants when trying to make sense of their *being* post-migration. The diaspora and displacement discourse is mainly concerned with the issue of separation from homeland and exposure to a new space, or as Lavie and Swedenburg (1996) term it, the issue of the “third time-space”. According to Lavie and Swedenburg, diaspora refers to a doubled relationship or dual loyalty that migrants have to places, characterized by their connection to the space they currently occupy and their continuing involvement with “back home.” The displaced population seems to be occupying a third space, a non-singular space cohabited by both the host and the original space where circuits of both spaces’ social, economic, and cultural ties are webbed (Rouse, 1991).

The diaspora discourse often characterizes immigrants and refugees as marginalized, often discriminated individuals, and authors discuss issues of bordering and separation of these groups from the rest of the population (Gilroy, 1992). In addition, the

literature focusing on immigration-related social phenomena such as acculturation and integration, generalizes the experience of migration, labeling it as a separation process from one's homeland, characterized by struggles to settle in the new home.

For the immigrant artists in this study, when deciding on the art themes and colours, the embedded phenomenological moments in their artwork were reflected by the struggle between their pre and post migration *beings*. As claimed by the participants, when composing their art in their new homes, they felt disconnected and uncertain in continuing to draw similar themes and using the same colour patterns as they did at home; a sense of movement in the relationship to *self* (breaking, peeling, undressing, viewing self from a distance) is experienced by the participants. Sara ended up painting layers over layers without really arriving at any particular form or colour in her work. Shanya, Mike, Shannon, Tara, and Alijan arrived at artwork that represented fusions of pre- and post-migration life experiences. Themes, stories, colours, and mediums changed once their *being* took a new meaning in Canada. Not only did art become the dais for exploring the shifts in *being*, it acted as a remedy, a means for reaching peace and adaptation in the participants' settlement process.

### **Implications and Future Research**

Immigration rates have increased and intensified over the last half century. In 2014, Canada received slightly over 250, 000 permanent residents, a trend that is projected to grow (CIC, 2015). As claimed by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM), Canada's future hinges on the ability to successfully attract and integrate new immigrants. As more of today's workers retire, Canada will need newcomers to keep its economy growing. Skilled immigrants are becoming even more essential to building Canadian businesses and driving innovation (FCM, 2011). Moreover, with the current

refugee and immigration crisis happening in Europe, Canada has agreed to resettle 25,000 Syrian refugees by the end of 2016. Canada has also committed to resettle 5,000 refugees who are now in Turkey by 2018. As of September 1, 2015, more than 3,500 refugees from Syria and the region have been admitted to Canada (Government of Canada, 2015). The successful integration of newcomers and immigrants, in ways that help them flourish and contribute both socially and economically to Canadian society, is challenging yet vital. The Toronto Board of Trade estimates that it costs Canada \$2.25 billion in lost economic activity when the settlement services fail to integrate immigrants socially and economically (as cited in FCM, 2011).

The definitions and factors that characterize successful and unsuccessful immigrant integration differ based on the reporting bodies. However, Li (2003) believes that, in reality, the assessment of integration is often based on a “narrow understanding and a rigid expectation”, which treat integration solely in terms of the “degree to which immigrants converge to the average performance of native-born Canadians and their normative and behavioural standards” (p. 1). Thus, economic integration of immigrants is measured by how much they earn in comparison to native-born Canadians. Similarly, successful social integration implies immigrants adopting English or French languages, moving away from ethnically-concentrated immigrant ‘enclaves’, and participating in social and political activities of mainstream society. To facilitate the settlement and integration of immigrants, settlement services and agencies in Canada provide assessment, general, referral, or orientation settlement services (Sadiq, 2004). Assessment services are used to identify newcomer needs and to determine an appropriate response or recommendation such as filling forms for them or providing information about housing. Information and orientation services provide assistance to newcomers to establish

themselves in their communities, including help with securing essential documents and assistance with housing, education, transportation, health, and legal services (Sadiq, 2004).

However, as Canada receives a more diverse immigrant population, it is imperative to support new immigrants by offering services beyond orientation, language training and employment workshops that are offered federally or provincially. A successful settlement and integration of immigrants, both in near and long terms, is vital for social and economic prosperity of Canada (FCM, 2011). Thus, this study aimed to facilitate knowledge translation by striving to develop insightful understandings of the experience of migration valuable to individuals involved in planning settlement programs. What has been learned from this study about the changes that affect the *being* of immigrant artists in the first years of arrival in Canada can be applied more broadly to understand and support the immigrant experience. In particular, by creating awareness about the roles that *others* and *space* play in the settlement of the immigrants and their understanding of their *being*, future plans, programs and policies about the physical settlement of the immigrants can bring into consideration factors such as: the relation between the urban planning and landscape design and immigrants' settlement, accessibility and readability of public transportation, signage and the movement patterns of the immigrants or spaces of human interaction in immigrant enclaves and neighborhoods. In addition, by understanding the significant impact *others* have in the settlement of immigrants, policy makers can emphasize the role of family, and make it easier and faster for family and relatives to come to Canada.

One of the recommendations this study offers is to revisit the notions used in the literature when defining and explaining the phenomenon of migration. As noted in the

literature review discussion, the main terminologies attempting to define migration are rooted in cultural shifts (acculturation, assimilation), diaspora and displacement, identity loss and reformation, and financial and social integration and settlement. Even though most of the migrants face these cultural shifts, settlement challenges and their identities (their understanding of who they are) changes in a new setting, but simple issues such as a changed meaning of self, learning and navigating through new space, and the impacts their separations from their families and relatives have on their settlement and life in their new homes should not be overlooked. Especially, with the new skilled immigration system (the Express Entry), sophisticated technology, and social media, the future waves of newcomers have already started their social and financial settlement before they set step on to Canada. Hence, notions such as acculturation, the degree to which the individuals are willing to be exposed to the host culture and their willingness to live the receiving society's life style, will hold different meanings for individuals who are connected to their counterparts and peers in different parts of the world through Facebook, Instagram and other social platforms. In the future research on immigration, there will be more need to take steps back to the core essence of migration, to the way individuals experience their being, and act upon their understanding in their new homes regardless of their degree of acculturation, or integration in their new homes.

This study demonstrated the power of art creation in meaning making and making sense of a metamorphosed *self* and *being*. In Dissanayake's (1999) view, art related activities, such as ceremonies that involve dancing and singing, for instance, tend to inculcate group values and also promote cooperation, cohesiveness, and confidence. This, in turn, will enhance a group's chances of survival. By their ability to promote cooperation and solidarity, the arts can contribute to a general sense of belonging and to

the important task of community building. It is these kind of benefits for individual and social well-being which, in their particular and unique way, only the arts can bring about. In this regard, this study highlights the power of art and its therapeutic role in the identity reformation during dramatic transitions, the struggles and challenges for financial and social integration of immigrants, and proposes implementing further arts-based activities as part of the settlement plans and services offered to newcomers. Through engaging in art-making activities, the immigrants are given the sanctuary, space and the opportunity to reflect on and make sense of their being in their new homes. Adding art-based activities to the settlement packages offered by Settlement Organizations (mainly funded by Citizenship and Immigration Canada) will provide the platform for self-reflection and self-discovery post migration.

## REFLECTIVE PASSAGE FIVE

I am sitting in the corner of my living room, behind my work desk, which I deliberately moved a week ago out from my bee-hive-sized, solid-walled den to face the window and see the outside world. I have a panoramic view of the eastern parts of downtown Toronto; on my right are Lake Ontario, a broken view of Toronto Islands, and the Toronto Star building. To my left is Yonge Street with a slender view of an under-construction residential tower. I'm transcribing and translating my interviews. My gaze is glued to the farthest point in the distance, and my mind is running around my skull as I play, re-play, and re-listen to my interviews. I travel with the voices of my participants to each and every second of our meetings. As I listen to their stories over and over again, I feel a sensation of blockage, a ball, in my throat. I feel tired, a fatigue that is traveling to my bones. I feel heavy; gravity is pulling me harder and harder down into my chair. I feel I'm drowning in their voices, in their sorrow, in the pauses, and in their stories. I am experiencing their lived stories, I am living their lives, I am becoming them...

## Being a Phenomenological Researcher: Author's Post Study Reflections

“Phenomenological writing is not just the process of writing up or writing down the results of a research project. To write is to reflect; to write is to research. And in writing we may deepen and change ourselves in ways we cannot predict” (van Manen, 2014, p. 20).

Phenomenology claims to be a reflective research paradigm, hopeful to create insights into how things appear to our conscious awareness and ultimately to show how the worldly experiences appear to our subjective experience. This philosophical and research paradigm assists the researcher to understand the underlying orders and coherence structure of a lived experience. Thus, I stepped into this research not only to understand what the meaning and feeling of immigration is for those whom I talk to, but also to make more sense of the changes I experienced in my life post migration. Thus, the phenomenological interpretive process in this research created space for me to use my personal experience of migration to deepen inquiry into the participants' words and works of art. As I was analyzing and writing, I was reflecting on my own experiences and evolving my understanding of the phenomenon of immigration as an immigrant and an artist. At times, I was debating whether I was hearing the participants' stories or it was my stories being told by them? As van Manen (2014) notes, the “vocative expressivity of writing a phenomenological piece does not only involve our head and hand, but our whole sensual and sentient embodied being” (p.20). Hence, conducting this research unconsciously acted as a reflective process, an attempt to recover my own life experience of migration, meanings and *being* in and through the participant's stories. In this process, my *being* and my understanding of my migratory experience changed after exposure to the lived experiences of my participants.

Being aware that bracketing is a core component of phenomenology, one of the main challenges in this inquiry was to keep the interpretations as least as possible. This means that I had to lead the interviews in a way that encouraged participants to share their life stories of migration without interpreting the feelings and incidents. Moreover, through the practice and implementation of bracketing, I had to make sure that I wasn't interpreting their experiences and allow the essences and the meanings reveal themselves to me. This may be easy to read and to write about, but avoiding interpretations both by the participants and myself become almost impossible in action. From the first round of interviews, and the recalling memories, reflections, and sharing the feelings and meanings of migration by the participants, there seemed to be infinite hermeneutical loops created, one after another. Despite my utmost effort to keep the interviews away from interpreting feelings and incidents, it felt almost impossible for the participants to recall and reflect on their feelings without analyzing those memories. The analysis would range from a simple comparison between the past and the present, and all the way to interpreting why they felt specific way in a particular time during their settlement. Hence, these interpretations created hermeneutical loops, which then influenced the way the participants recalled, saw, and made sense of those early experiences of settling in Canada. Moreover, the way the memories were recalled and remembered then influenced their interpretation of their experience of migration. On top of the hermeneutical circles my participants were spinning in, I was dragged into each of these loops, trying to make sense of their stories, and also at the same time willing to liberate myself of these loops so that I was able to stay away from interpretations, because I was aware that my interpretations would influence what I was deriving from the data rather what data was supposed to unveil to me. Through retrospections, the participants seemed to be travelling

in and out of time, their experiences of migration, themselves as migrants, and be able look at their migratory life from a further perspective. I wasn't aware of the impact these travelling back and forth in memories had on them until they informed me that they had never though and talked about their migration experiences the way they did during the interviews. For example Sara told me that "it had been a while since I had went back to my old paintings and had talked about them to anyone" and Tara, in my recent meeting with her in early 2016, mentioned that she wants to listen again to her interview with me, because she is curious to know how she felt about her migratory life in the time of our chat. These statements, along with the descriptive comments observed and gathered throughout the interviews, are valid evidences to claim that participating in phenomenological inquiry itself influences the way an experience is understood and made sense of, or in other words, the being of participants and the researcher will be impacted.

This research opened new doors in the way I made sense and understood migration. For me, immigration is a phenomenology in nature and the least I took from this research is that immigration is not about marginalization, limitation, constraint, and mere loss. Rather, it is about growth, transformation, self-discovery, new relationships, and novice encounters. It is about the *being's* metamorphosis!

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## APPENDECIS

### Appendix 1 – Recruitment Poster



- *How does it feel to be an immigrant artist?*
- *Can you tell us about your transition to Canada?*
- *What was the role of art in this transition?*

Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies  
University of Waterloo

#### PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR

#### RESEARCH IN **Immigration and Art**

We are looking for volunteers to take part in a PhD study titled  
*Arts-informed Phenomenological Insights into the Experiences of  
Migration and Art for Immigrant Artists*

This post is to inform you about a study I am conducting as my PhD thesis in the Department of **Recreation and Leisure Studies** at the **University of Waterloo** under the supervision of Professor **Heather Mair**.

The purpose of this phenomenological study (an in depth study for understanding lived experiences) is to create insights into the lived experiences of migration and art for immigrant artists living in Greater Toronto Area. Participants who are painters and have immigrated to Canada at least three years ago are invited to take part in the study and to recall and reflect on their experiences of immigration, and on the possible influences their lived-experiences had on their painting themes, styles and techniques.

Participation in this study is voluntary. It will involve one interview of approximately **90 minutes** in length to take place in a mutually agreed upon location. Interviews will be done in English or Farsi. Pseudonyms will be used to protect participant's identity. To keep the confidentiality of all the informations shared, your artistic signature and name on the artwork will be blurred in any form of written report or presentation.

For more information about this study, or to volunteer for this study,  
please contact:

*Mahsa Rouzrok* at [mrouzrok@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:mrouzrok@uwaterloo.ca)

**This study has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance  
through a University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee.**

## Appendix 2 – Invitation Letter and Consent Form

Date

Dear

This letter is an invitation to consider participating in a study I am conducting as part of my PhD degree in the Department of *Recreation and Leisure Studies* at the University of Waterloo under the supervision of Professor *Heather Mair*. I would like to provide you with more information about this project and what your involvement would entail if you decide to take part.

The purpose of this phenomenological study (an in depth study for understanding lived experiences) is to create insights into the lived experiences of migration and art for immigrant artists living in Greater Toronto Area. The conceptualization, interviews, and data analysis of this research will be guided by previous literature, research methods and by the researcher's personal experiences with migration and art. Participants who are painters and have immigrated to Canada at least three years ago will recall and reflect on their experiences of immigration, and on the possible influences their lived-experiences had on their painting themes, styles and techniques.

This study contributes to the understanding of the expression of the experience of immigration through art. Moreover, this study provides a glimpse into how art can potentially be used to understand the phenomenon of immigration. One of the objectives of this study is moving towards a profound understanding of the lived experience of immigration, which can result in enhanced interaction among immigrants and the host society and can facilitate a better integration of immigrants into the Canadian society.

Participation in this study is voluntary. It will involve an interview of approximately **90 minutes** in length to take place in a mutually agreed upon location. You may decline to answer any of the interview questions if you so wish. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences by advising the researcher. Interviews will be done in English or Farsi. Pseudonyms will be used to protect participant's identity. With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded to facilitate collection of information, and later transcribed for analysis. Shortly after the interview has been completed, if you like, I will send you a copy of the transcript to give you an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of our conversation and to add or clarify any points that you wish. I would like to show a few samples of your paintings in my final paper but I will only do so with written permission from you. To keep the confidentiality of all the informations shared, your artistic signature and name on the artwork will be blurred in any form of written report or presentation. In this regard, all information you provide is considered completely confidential. Your name will not appear in any thesis or report resulting from this study, however, with your permission anonymous quotations may be used. Data collected during this study will be retained for **five years** in Dr. Heather Mair's locked office located at the University of Waterloo. There are no known or anticipated risks to you as a participant in this study. Some samples of interview questions are as follows:

- How does it feel to be an immigrant artist?
- Can you tell me about your transition to Canada?
- What was the role of art in this transition?

If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me at **647.894.0448** or by email at [mrouzrok@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:mrouzrok@uwaterloo.ca). You can also contact my supervisor, Professor **Heather Mair** at 519-888-4567 ext. **35917** or email [hmair@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:hmair@uwaterloo.ca)

I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through a University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee. However, the final decision about participation is yours. If you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please contact Dr. Maureen Nummelin in the Office of Research Ethics at 1-519-888-4567, Ext. 36005 or [maureen.nummelin@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:maureen.nummelin@uwaterloo.ca).

I hope that the results of my study will be of benefit to those organizations directly involved in the study, other voluntary recreation organizations not directly involved in the study, as well as to the broader research community.

I very much look forward to speaking with you and thank you in advance for your assistance in this project.

Yours Sincerely,

Mahsa Rouzrokh

### **CONSENT FORM**

By signing this consent form, you are not waiving your legal rights or releasing the investigator(s) or involved institution(s) from their legal and professional responsibilities.

I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Mahsa Rouzrokh of the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at the University of Waterloo. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted.

I am aware that I have the option of allowing my interview to be audio recorded to ensure an accurate recording of my responses.

I am also aware that excerpts from the interview may be included in the thesis and/or publications to come from this research, with the understanding that the quotations will be anonymous.

I was informed that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty by advising the researcher.

This project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through a University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee. I was informed that if I have any comments or concerns resulting from my participation in this study, I may contact the Director, Office of Research Ethics at 519-888-4567 ext. 36005.

With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

YES  NO

I agree to have my interview audio recorded.

YES  NO

I agree to the use of anonymous quotations in any thesis or publication that comes of this research.

YES  NO

Participant Name: \_\_\_\_\_ (Please print)

Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Witness Name: \_\_\_\_\_ (Please print)

Witness Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### Appendix 3 – Consent of Participation

#### Consent of Participant

By signing this consent form, you are not waiving your legal rights or releasing the investigator(s) or involved institution(s) from their legal and professional responsibilities.

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I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by *Mahsa Rouzrokh* of the Department of *Recreation and Leisure Studies* at the University of Waterloo under the supervision of Dr. Heather Mair. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted. I am aware that I may withdraw from the study without penalty at any time by advising the researchers of this decision.

This project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through a University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee. I was informed that if I have any comments or concerns resulting from my participation in this study, I may contact the Director, Office of Research Ethics at 519-888-4567 ext. 36005.

With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

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Print Name

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Signature of Participant

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Dated at Waterloo, Ontario

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Witnessed